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Perspectivas culturales e históricas: civilizaciones
antiguas y cosmogonías animistas en el anime y los
medios de entretenimiento japoneses

Cultural and historical perspectives: ancient
civilizations and diverse cosmogonies in japanese anime
and entertainment media

Perspectives culturelles et historiques: civilisations
anciennes et cosmogonies animistes dans l'anime et
les médias de divertissement japonais

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**PERSPECTIVAS CULTURALES E HISTÓRICAS:
CIVILIZACIONES ANTIGUAS Y COSMOGONÍAS
ANIMISTAS EN EL ANIME Y LOS MEDIOS DE
ENTRETENIMIENTO JAPONESES**

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CIVILIZATIONS AND DIVERSE COSMOGONIES IN JAPANESE
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DANS L'ANIME ET LES MÉDIAS DE DIVERTISSEMENT
JAPONAIS**

Luis Carlos Garza Valero¹

Resumen: Este artículo explora cómo las civilizaciones antiguas y las cosmogonías animistas han influido en el anime japonés y los medios de entretenimiento. A lo largo de los años, estas producciones han trascendido sus orígenes locales para convertirse en fenómenos globales, combinando elementos tradicionales con narrativas experimentales. Títulos de anime como “Sailor Moon”, “Magic Knight Rayearth” y “Demon Slayer”, videojuegos como “Final Fantasy” y “Zelda: Breath of

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the Wild”, y películas animadas como “La Princesa Mononoke” de Studio Ghibli, entre otros, no solo presentan temas universales, sino que también están profundamente arraigados en las tradiciones culturales de Japón, incluyendo el Animismo, el Sintoísmo, el Budismo y el Confucianismo. Estas filosofías y creencias continúan moldeando las narrativas modernas en el anime y los videojuegos. Además, el artículo examina las conexiones entre las cosmogonías de los Ainu, los Emishi y los yamato, todos los cuales comparten una visión animista y espiritual de la naturaleza. Al relacionar estos elementos con las narrativas contemporáneas, el artículo destaca la influencia perdurable de las tradiciones ancestrales de Japón en la cultura global y el papel de los medios de entretenimiento japoneses en la preservación y perpetuación de estos legados cosmogónicos antiguos.

Palabras clave: Animación Japonesa, Medios de Entretenimiento Japoneses, Medios de Entretenimiento Occidentales, Mitología, Historia, Transculturación, Religión, Hipernmodernidad, Transmodernidad, Cultura Pop, Antropología visual, Sintoísmo, Budismo, Confucianismo, Cosmogonías.

Abstract: This article explores how ancient civilizations and animistic cosmogonies have influenced Japanese anime and entertainment media. Over the years, these productions have transcended their local origins to become global phenomena, blending traditional elements with experimental narratives. Anime titles like “Sailor Moon”, “Magic Knight Rayearth”, and “Demon Slayer”, video games such as “Final Fantasy” and “Zelda: Breath of the Wild”, and animated films like “Princess Mononoke” by Studio Ghibli, among others, not only present universal themes but are also deeply rooted in Japan’s cultural traditions, including Animism, Shintoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. These philosophies and beliefs continue shaping modern storytelling in anime and video games. Additionally, the article examines the connections between the cosmogonies of the Ainu, the Emishi and the Yamato, all of which share an animistic and spiritual view of nature. By linking these elements

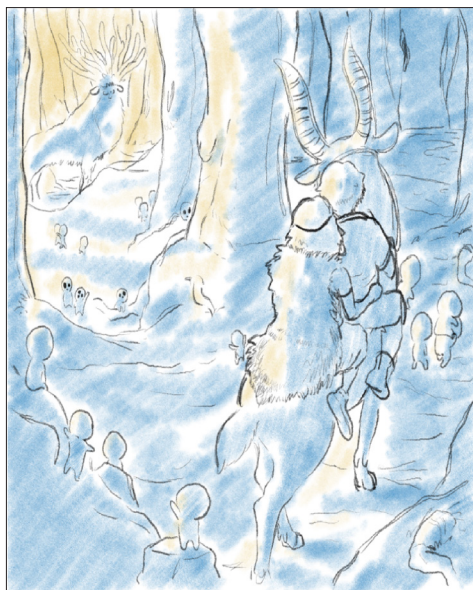
to contemporary narratives, the article highlights the enduring influence of Japan's ancestral traditions on global culture and the role of Japanese entertainment in preserving and perpetuating these ancient cosmogonic legacies.

Key words: Japanese Animation, Japanese Entertainment Media, Western Entertainment Media, Mythology, History, Transculturality, Religion, Hypermodernity, Transmodernity, Pop Culture, Visual Anthropology, Shintoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Cosmogonies.

Résumé: Cet article étudie l'influence des civilisations anciennes et des cosmogonies animistes sur l'anime japonais et les médias de divertissement. Ces productions, tout en conservant leurs racines culturelles, sont devenues des phénomènes mondiaux grâce à leur fusion unique de traditions et de narrations expérimentales. Des œuvres comme "Sailor Moon", "Magic Knight Rayearth" et "Demon Slayer", des jeux vidéo comme "Final Fantasy" et "Zelda: Breath of the Wild", ainsi que des films d'animation tels que "Princesse Mononoké" du Studio Ghibli, reflètent non seulement des thèmes universels mais s'ancrent aussi profondément dans les traditions japonaises incluant l'animisme, le shintoïsme, le bouddhisme et le confucianisme. L'analyse explore également les liens entre les cosmogonies des Aïnous, des Emishi et des Yamato, qui partagent une vision animiste et spirituelle de la nature. En reliant ces éléments aux récits contemporains, l'article met en lumière l'influence durable des traditions japonaises sur la culture globale et le rôle des médias de divertissement dans la préservation de ces héritages cosmogoniques.

Mots-clés: Animation Japonaise, Médias de Divertissement Japonais, Médias de Divertissement Occidentaux, Mythologie, Histoire, Transculturalité, Religion, Hypermodernité, Transmodernité, Culture Pop, Anthropologie Visuelle, Shintoïsme, Bouddhisme, Confucianisme, cosmogonies.

Imagen 1. “Fan Art” representation referring to Studio Ghibli’s Princess Mononoke characters Ashitaka and San in the Realm of the Forest Spirit



Fuente: Fan art, Octavio Luna.

Introduction

“...I am Sailor Moon, and in the name of the moon,
I’ll punish you!”²

“...Give me your strength, Pegasus!”³

“...Kame hame haaaaaaa!”⁴

“...Pokémon, I choose you!”⁵

2 Iconic phrase from the animation Sailor Moon (Sailor Moon, Toei Animation, 1992).

3 Iconic phrase from the animation Saint Seiya (Saint Seiya, Toei Animation, 1986).

4 Iconic phrase from the animation Dragon Ball Z (Dragon Ball Z, Toei Animation, 1989).

5 Iconic phrase from the animation Pokémon (Pokémon, OLM, 1997).

These iconic phrases resonate with audiences worldwide, spanning generations from those in their forties to young members of Generation Z. They evoke vivid memories: “Serena Tsukino’s”⁶ transformation, “Goku”⁷ mastering a chi energy blast under “Master Roshi’s”⁸ guidance, Seiya’s⁹ flurry of punches against a golden knight, or “Ash Ketchum”¹⁰ releasing “Pikachu”¹¹ from a “Pokéball”¹² with its electrifying “Thunder Bolt”¹³. These expressions have transcended their origins to become cultural touchstones embedded in memes, everyday conversations, and global visual culture. For those unfamiliar with them, it indicates disconnection from the status quo, as these elements have become integral to the hypermodern world’s cultural imagination.

Initially for a niche domestic audience, Japanese Anime has evolved into a global phenomenon, influencing personal and cultural identities across borders. This transformation

6 “Serena Tsukino” is the main character of the animation *Sailor Moon* (*Sailor Moon*, Toei Animation, 1992).

7 “Goku” is the main character of the animation *Dragon Ball Z* (*Dragon Ball Z*, Toei Animation, 1989).

8 “Master Roshi” is a character from the animation *Dragon Ball Z* (*Dragon Ball Z*, Toei Animation, 1989).

9 “Seiya” is the main character of the animation *Saint Seiya* (*Saint Seiya*, Toei Animation, 1986).

10 “Ash Ketchum” is the main character of the animation *Pokémon* (*Pokémon*, OLM, 1997).

11 “Pikachu” is one of the main characters of the animation *Pokémon* (*Pokémon*, OLM, 1997).

12 “Poké Balls” are spherical devices used by Pokémon Trainers to catch wild Pokémon or store their own Pokémon.”Poké Ball,” Pokémon Fandom, accessed August 27, 2024, https://pokemon.fandom.com/wiki/Pok%C3%A9_Ball.

13 “Thunderbolt”: Pikachu’s power comes from the electrical energy stored in its red cheek pouches, which spark when it’s about to use an Electric attack like Thunderbolt. It can also generate small electrical surges when angry or for protection.”Pikachu,” Pokémon Fandom, accessed August 27, 2024, <https://pokemon.fandom.com/wiki/Pikachu>.

highlights modern reality's hybrid, multicultural, and dynamic nature. The boundaries of traditional cultural blocs, such as "Western" and "Asian," have blurred, with countries like China, Korea, and Japan showcasing distinct socio-economic and political identities. Japan's culture, in particular, reflects a fusion of Western influences and traditional practices, resulting in a uniquely hybrid identity.

Audiences today engage with artistic works—including Anime—through a lens often detached from historical or cultural context. This approach aligns with Ernst Gombrich's "innocent eye" concept, introduced in "Art and Illusion" (1959)¹⁴, which advocates for observing art without preconceived notions. Such a perspective allows viewers to experience media in a raw, immediate way, though it is often disconnected from its more profound historical and cultural roots.

Modern animations, video games, and fantasy media exemplify this reformulated essence. While deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual traditions, their narratives have been reshaped to fit contemporary sensibilities. For generations raised in the digital age, these works resonate not because of their historical origins but due to their universal themes and visual appeal. However, exploring the origins of these works provides an opportunity to understand their evolution—from sacred art forms to cherished modern narratives.

Reflecting on ancient myths and fables embedded in Anime, video games, animations, and other fantasy-related media, recurring themes such as good versus evil, magical artifacts, epic battles, and otherworldly adventures emerge. These elements, rooted in the cosmogonies of ancient

14 Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959).

civilizations, draw deeply from Japan's spiritual and cultural heritage, shaped in part by animistic beliefs, Shinto rituals, Confucian values, and Buddhist philosophies. By immersing ourselves in these narratives, we uncover the enduring presence of ancient motifs in modern storytelling, showcasing their profound influence on contemporary media and their enduring appeal to global audiences.

Responding to these themes, Samuel Sattin¹⁵, writer of "Unico: Awakening and co-author of *The Essential Anime Guide*"¹⁶, alongside Patrick Macias¹⁷, editor of Otaku USA and a renowned anime historian, emphasizes anime's ability to transcend narrative boundaries. Sattin states:

Anime has historically pushed the boundaries of narrative, taking what we might consider traditional and marketable stories and exploring their possibilities. Even if things fall apart—which they sometimes do—the ambition alone is remarkable, which I respect deeply. The first time I saw Neon Genesis Evangelion, I had never seen a story told

15 Samuel Sattin, co-author of "The Essential Anime Guide: 50 Iconic Films, Standout Series, and Cult Masterpieces" (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2023); *Wolfwalkers*, directed by Tomm Moore and Ross Stewart (Cartoon Saloon, 2020); *Song of the Sea*, directed by Tomm Moore (Cartoon Saloon, 2014); *The Secret of Kells*, directed by Tomm Moore and Nora Twomey (Cartoon Saloon, 2009); and author of the graphic novel *Buzzing* in 2019.

16 "Unico: Awakening" is a modern reinterpretation of the classic manga *Unico* by Osamu Tezuka, developed by Gurihiru and Samuel Sattin. Published by Scholastic in August 2024, the series follows Unico, a unicorn exiled by Venus. On Earth, Unico and Chloe, a cat who wants to become human, face dangers as they use their powers, which alerts Venus to their location (MyUnicoFans 2023; Kickstarter 2022; Anime News Network 2023; Comics Beat 2023).

17 Patrick Macias is co-author of "The Essential Anime Guide: 50 Iconic Films, Standout Series, and Cult Masterpieces", editor-in-chief of Otaku USA, and founder of Crunchyroll News. He is the author of numerous books on Japanese pop culture, including *TokyoScope: The Japanese Cult Film Companion*, and has worked as a scriptwriter for the anime *URAHARA* (Hachette Book Group, 2023).

in that way. Here we had a giant science fiction monster story taken into the realm of psychodrama and intense metaphysics... Anime shows us that you don't always have to stay within the usual confines of the genre. At its best, anime mixes a little bit of everything to create something new.¹⁸

This article seeks to explore these layers, offering a deeper appreciation of how the cultural influences of diverse civilizations, including the Yamato culture that unified Japan, the rich oral cosmogonies of the Ainu, and animistic traditions like those professed by Indigenous Native American tribes, shape and inspire these hypermodern forms of expression. Claude Lévi-Strauss¹⁹ observed that animistic thought spans societies from Asia to the Americas, revealing a universal human tendency to attribute spiritual significance to nature and existence.

In the “Hypermodern world”²⁰, Amine and Japanese entertainment media reimagine these traditions, weaving them into stories that blend fantasy, magic, and extra-human connections. Although these spiritual elements were once integral to life and belief systems, today, they are often commodified exploited as experiences within media and products. Nevertheless, their enduring presence underlines the persistence of ancient cultural frameworks, offering modern audiences a way to engage with universal human themes.

Understanding these influences could enrich our appreciation of Anime and Hypermodern entertainment

18 Sattin and Gurihiru, “Unico: Awakening”.

19 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*, New York: Schocken Books, 1978

20 The term “hypermodern world” was coined by Gilles Lipovetsky to refer to the ultra-industrialized nations of the 1990s. See Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Hypermodern Condition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

media. It emphasizes how its multifaceted roots continue to resonate in contemporary narratives, linking the past with the present in profound and imaginative ways.

Ainu Culture and Spirituality & Their Influence on Anime and Entertainment Media

Imagen 2. Artistic representation of Ainu traditional clothing and architecture



Fuente: Fan art, Octavio Luna.

The Ainu²¹ are one of Japan's earliest indigenous groups, with origins tracing back to the Jomon period around

21 Ainu: an indigenous people from Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands who were culturally and physically distinct from their Japanese neighbors until the second half of the 20th century. The Ainu may be descendants of an indigenous population that was once widely distributed across northern Asia; many contemporary Ainu claim some connection to Japan's prehistoric Jōmon culture. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ainu>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

14,000 BCE.²² This culture thrived in northern Japan until approximately 300 CE and is linked to the “Okhotsk”²³ cultures from northern Japan and southeastern Russia.²⁴ These populations contributed to forming the Ainu and other indigenous tribes, such as the Emishi.²⁵ While the Ainu primarily inhabited Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands, the Emishi²⁶ resided in northeastern Honshu. Despite being among Japan’s earliest settlers, these groups do not define the country’s central cultural narrative.²⁷

The Ainu were traditionally hunters and gatherers with distinct social and belief systems, differing from the Yamato Japanese. Over centuries, assimilation and repression eroded their cultural and physical identity,

22 Ainu, Encyclopedia Britannica, August 1, 2024.

23 The Okhotsk culture developed around the coastal regions of the southern Sea of Okhotsk, including Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Chishima Archipelago (Kuriles), during the 5th to 13th centuries (Amano 2003a). The most specific characteristic of the Okhotsk culture is its lifestyle—adapted to fishing and hunting—and the restriction of archaeological site locations to coastal regions. Additionally, large polygonal houses and rituals involving animals like brown bears and marine mammals are also specific to the Okhotsk culture. This culture is clearly distinct from the Epi-Jomon culture (3rd century BCE to 7th century CE) and the Satsumon culture (8th to 14th centuries; Amano 2003b), which were contemporaneous with the Okhotsk culture and developed in the southern and interior parts of Hokkaido. <https://www.nature.com/articles/jhg200786>. Accessed August 23, 2024.

24 The Emishi inhabited the northeast of Honshu and resisted the attempts of the Japanese imperial court to bring them under control during the pacification wars between 774 and 811. Although they were eventually declared pacified, they maintained considerable autonomy until the Kamakura period. Friday, Karl. Pushing Beyond the Pale: The Conquest of the Emishi and Northern Japan. *Journal of Japanese Studies* 23, no. 1 (1997): PP. 1-26.

25 Karl Friday, “Pushing Beyond the Pale: The Conquest of the Emishi and Northern Japan,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 23, no. 1 (1997): PP. 1-26.

26 “Ancient Bones Reveal Previously Unknown Japanese Ancestors,” *Live Science*, September 20, 2021.

27 Barbara Aoki Poisson, *First People: The Ainu of Japan* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2002), 12.

particularly during “The Meiji Era”²⁸ (1868–1912). Forced assimilation policies, such as “The 1899 Aborigine Protection Act”²⁹, prohibited Ainu customs, language, and religious practices, while intermarriage further diluted their distinctiveness. Similar fates befell the Emishi, who were entirely assimilated into Japanese society.³⁰

Despite these challenges, the Ainu’s legacy persists through cultural “Anchors”³¹ like textiles, rituals, and mythology, which provide insights into Japan’s diverse historical roots—their spirituality centers on harmonious coexistence with nature and reverence for spirits, or “Kamuy”³². The bear, regarded as the “God of the Mountain,” is essential in their mythology and rituals, echoing a deep spiritual connection to their environment. This mirrors Yamato’s beliefs in divine descent, such as their origin myth tied to the sun goddess Amaterasu.

Modern recognition of the Ainu began in the mid-20th century, culminating in Japan’s official acknowledgment of

28 The Meiji Period refers to the period in Japanese history from 1868 to 1912 during which the Meiji Emperor reigned. Following the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate in the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan’s new leaders embarked on a program of radical reform aimed at strengthening the country so it could resist the threat of European imperialism. World History Encyclopedia, last modified March 27, 2021, https://www.worldhistory.org/Meiji_Period/.

29 Foundation for Ainu Culture Website, accessed August 21, 2024, <https://www.akarenga-h.jp/en/hokkaido/ainu/a-03/>. Accessed August 21, 2024.

30 B. A. Poisson, *First People: The Ainu of Japan* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2002). P. 19.

31 Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), PP. 109–118.

32 In the Ainu language, the word Kamuy is used to refer to spiritual entities that are intertwined with daily life. Although it is often translated as ‘spirits’ or ‘gods,’ kamuy is a particularly nuanced term. University of Oregon, <https://glam.uoregon.edu/s/uo-ainu-collections/page/kamuy>. Accessed August 19, 2024

them as indigenous people in 2008. Although full rights and protections have been granted, efforts to preserve and revitalize Ainu culture continue, highlighting the resilience and significance of their contributions to Japan's multicultural heritage.³³

Initially, the Ainu and Emishi were hunter-gatherers whose cultures were deeply connected to animal hunting. The Ainu constructed traditional houses called "Chise,"³⁴ made from wood and thatch, which bore similarities to the now-extinct Emishi dwellings. Their clothing was crafted from natural materials, and the Ainu wore garments known as "Attus."³⁵ These garments, made from tree bark fibers, featured intricate geometric patterns that reflected their artistic traditions. In contrast, the Emishi opted for more straightforward and functional attire adapted to their hunting lifestyle.

According to Barbara Aoki Poisson in her book, "First People: The Ainu of Japan" the ancestral Ainu worldview held that the world was filled with benevolent and malevolent spirits. These gods inhabited everything surrounding them, from the revered bear god to everyday utensils. The Ainu believed these spirit-gods entered and

33 Foundation for Ainu Culture Website, accessed August 21, 2024, <https://www.akarenga-h.jp/en/hokkaido/ainu/a-03/>.

34 The Ainu traditionally lived in small villages, or kotan, along the rivers of Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands. Each kotan consisted of a few dozen families. They lived in one- or two-room houses known as chise. A standard chise measured approximately 12 feet wide by 18 feet long. A post structure supported woven reed mats up to one foot thick. Ainu Chise Houses, <https://www.tota.world/article/60/>. Accessed August 21, 2024.

35 The "Attus" is a traditional Ainu fabric with a simple weave, made from tree bark fibers. Clothing made from this fabric is also called attus. Nibutani-attus is a traditional craft that has inherited these techniques and materials. Source: "Attus," Biratori Ainu Culture. <https://www.biratori-ainu-culture.com/en/craft/attus/>. Accessed August 21, 2024.

exited the mortal and ethereal planes. Humans depended on these gods for food, protection, and aid, while the spirit gods relied on humans to gain status and wealth in the spiritual world. This interdependent relationship reflects the Ainu's vision of harmonious coexistence with the spirits inhabiting all things.³⁶

The portal for the history and culture of Hokkaido, "Akarenga," corroborates this perspective. According to the portal, the Ainu worldview asserts that spirits or Kamuy inhabit all-natural elements essential for human life, including fauna, flora, daily necessities like water and fire, and uncontrollable natural forces like weather. The portal describes the Ainu religion as follows:

...The Ainu religion is based on the idea that interactions between humans and the Kamuy sustain the world. This belief allowed the early Ainu, who lived closely with nature, to obtain the resources necessary for their lives and develop knowledge and skills to protect themselves from natural disasters and diseases... The word Kamuy in Ainu is often translated into Japanese as Kami (gods) or Hotoke (spirits). While the term Kamui shares some similarities with the Japanese concepts of Kami or Hotoke, it does not fully correspond to these translations...³⁷

As Poisson explains, the Ainu held that the spirits depended on respectful treatment from humans. For example, after hunting an animal for food, the Ainu would perform a special "farewell" ritual to return the animal's spirit to the heavens. Gifts such as rice wine and

36 B. A. Poisson, *First People: The Ainu of Japan* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2002). P. 41.

37 Foundation for Ainu Culture Website accessed August 21, 2024, <https://www.akarenga-h.jp/en/hokkaido/ainu/a-03/>. Accessed August 21, 2024.

millet cakes were offered, and when the spirit returned to the heavens, it would inform other gods of the humans' respectful treatment. This respectful relationship motivated other spirits to visit Earth and offer themselves to humans.³⁸

For the Ainu, there were both benevolent and malevolent Kamuy. Benevolent spirits provided meat, animal skins, plants for food and medicine, tools, and fabrics, while others ensured people's safety. Malevolent spirits, like the Kamuy of smallpox, storms, or lightning, brought calamities. These antagonistic spirits remained until their mission was complete, and humans had to honor and venerate them to ensure their departure.³⁹

The bear was the most significant among all the spirits, called "Chira Mante Kamuy" or "The King of the Mountain Gods." The Ainu believed they descended from the bear Kamuy, who resided in the heavens but visited Earth in bear form. It caused no harm if pleased, but it could attack communities or steal food when angered.⁴⁰

The Ainu's most sacred ritual was the "Iyomante"⁴¹ ceremony, centered on the bear. This long-standing tradition

38 B. A. Poisson, *First People: The Ainu of Japan* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2002). P. 23.

39 Foundation for Ainu Culture Website, accessed August 21, 2024, <https://www.akarenga-h.jp/en/hokkaido/ainu/a-03/>. Accessed August 21, 2024.

40 B. A. Poisson, *First People: The Ainu of Japan* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2002). P. 40.

41 The "Iyomante" is a traditional Ainu ceremony, also known as the "bear festival," celebrated in honor of the Kamuy of the mountains, Kim-un Kamuy. During this ceremony, the Ainu hunt hibernating bears in the winter, and if they capture a female bear, they bring her cubs to the village, where they are adopted by a local family. These cubs are raised as part of the family until they grow, at which point they are transferred to a wooden cage, where they are carefully cared for and fed. The Iyomante is one of the most significant traditions in Ainu communities and has attracted attention from both Japanese and international audiences. <https://glam.uoregon.edu/s/uo-ainu-collections/page/iyomante>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

involved capturing a bear cub at a young age and raising it with care in a special cage. The ceremony, held in January or February, gathered neighboring tribes for a three-day celebration. The host village worked diligently to welcome attendees, offering gifts and preparing millet beer, rice wine, and millet cakes.⁴²

During the festivities, participants crafted “Inaw”⁴³ — carved and decorated wooden sticks, typically made of willow or birch — as ritual offerings to honor the bear’s spirit. The ceremony culminated in the solemn sacrifice of the bear cub, and its meat was shared in a communal feast. This act symbolized returning the bear’s spirit to the Kamuy with wealth and honor. The Ainu believed this ensured the gods’ continued blessings. Today, the ritual is still practiced but without the bear sacrifice.⁴⁴

The Iyomante ritual exemplifies how the Ainu honored their dependency on the bear and their responsibility toward the life surrounding them. Far from being a mere sacrificial act, the ceremony manifests a complex system of preservation and connection, recognizing the interconnectedness of all living beings.

The Ainu’s deep respect for nature and reciprocal relationship with the Kamuy resonate with indigenous practices worldwide. For instance, many North American indigenous groups, such as the Algonquian tribes⁴⁵

42 B. A. Poisson, *First People: The Ainu of Japan* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2002). P. 43.

43 B. A. Poisson, *First People: The Ainu of Japan* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2002), P. 27.

44 B. A. Poisson, *First People: The Ainu of Japan* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2002), P. 43.

45 The “Algonquian” tribes are a group of indigenous peoples of North America who share languages from the Algonquian language family. These

(including the Algonquin⁴⁶, Lenape⁴⁷, Ojibwa⁴⁸, Cree⁴⁹, Abenaki⁵⁰, Mi'kmaq⁵¹, and Powhatan⁵²), also emphasize

tribes occupy a vast region that extends from the northeastern United States to the southeastern part of Canada. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Algonquian-languages>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

46 “Algonquin”: a Native American tribe of related bands that spoke Algonquian and originally lived in the dense forest regions of the Ottawa River valley and its tributaries in what is now Quebec and Ontario, Canada. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Algonquin>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

47 “Lenapes” or “Delaware Indians”: They are a confederation of Algonquian-speaking Native Americans who occupied the Atlantic coast from Cape Henlopen, Delaware, to the west of Long Island. Before colonization, they were especially concentrated in the Delaware River valley, from which the Confederacy took its name. However, the people traditionally refer to themselves as “Lenape” or “Lenni Lenape,” meaning “true people.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Delaware-people>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

48 “Ojibwa”: a Native American tribe of Algonquian language speakers who lived in what are now Ontario and Manitoba, Canada, and Minnesota and North Dakota, USA, from Lake Huron westward into the plains. Their name for themselves means “original people.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ojibwa>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

49 “Cree”: one of the major Algonquian-speaking First Nations peoples, whose territory extended over a vast area from the eastern shores of Hudson and James Bays to the west of Alberta and Great Slave Lake in what is now Canada. They originally inhabited a smaller core area but quickly expanded in the 17th and 18th centuries after participating in the fur trade and acquiring firearms. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cree>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

50 “Abenaki”: a Native American tribe of Algonquian language speakers who joined with other tribes in the 17th century to provide mutual protection against the Iroquois Confederacy. The name refers to their location “toward the sunrise.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Abenaki>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

51 “Mi'kmaq”: the largest Native American (First Nation) people who traditionally occupied what are now the eastern maritime provinces of Canada (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island) and parts of the present-day states of Maine and Massachusetts in the United States. Because their Algonquian dialect differed considerably from that of their neighbors, it is believed that the Mi'kmaq settled in the area later than other tribes in the region. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mikmaq>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

52 “Powhatan”: a confederation of at least 30 Algonquian-speaking Native American tribes that once occupied most of what is now the Tidewater region

a spiritual coexistence with nature. These tribes believe in a symbiotic relationship between humans and spirits, where nature provides sustenance and protection, and humans reciprocate with respect and rituals. Similarly, Northwest Coast Native American tribes, such as the Haida⁵³, Kwakiutl⁵⁴, Nuu-chah-nulth⁵⁵, Tsimshian⁵⁶, and Tlingit⁵⁷, express their animistic beliefs by creating totem

of Virginia, the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, and possibly southern Maryland. The confederation was formed by a powerful chief, Powhatan, and bears his name, shortly before the colonial settlement of Jamestown in 1607. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Powhatan-North-American-Indian-confederacy>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

53 “Haida”: indígenas norteamericanos de habla haida de Haida Gwaii (anteriormente las Islas de la Reina Carlota), Columbia Británica, Canadá, y la parte sur de la isla del Príncipe de Gales, Alaska, EE. UU. Los Haida de Alaska son llamados Kaigani. La cultura Haida está relacionada con las culturas de los vecinos Tlingit y Tsimshian. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Haida>. Consultado el 20 de agosto de 2024.

54 “Kwakiutl”: Native Americans who traditionally lived in what is now British Columbia, Canada, along the coastlines of the waterways between Vancouver Island and the mainland. Their name for themselves means “those who speak Kwakwala.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kwakiutl>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

55 “Nuu-chah-nulth”: Native Americans who live in what is now the southwest coast of Vancouver Island, Canada, and Cape Flattery, the northwestern tip of the state of Washington, USA. The groups in the southeastern part of the island were the Nitinat, and those at Cape Flattery were the Makah. The Nuuchah-nulth are culturally related to the Kwakiutl. Their name means “along the mountains.” They speak a Wakashan language. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nuu-chah-nulth>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

56 “Tsimshian”: Native Americans of the Northwest Coast who traditionally lived on the mainland and the islands around the Skeena and Nass rivers, and in Milbanke Sound, in what is now British Columbia, Canada, and Alaska, USA. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tsimshian>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

57 “Tlingit”: los indígenas más septentrionales de la costa noroeste de América del Norte, que viven en las islas y tierras costeras del sur de Alaska, desde la bahía de Yakutat hasta el cabo Fox. Hablaban el idioma tlingit, que está relacionado con el atabasco. Según sus tradiciones, algunos de sus ancestros vinieron del sur y otros emigraron a la costa desde el interior de Canadá. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tlingit>. Consultado el 20 de agosto del 2024.

poles. These wooden carvings depict spiritual and animal figures that symbolize the interconnectedness of life and the spiritual world.⁵⁸

The Ainu cosmogony and their deep connection to nature have undoubtedly influenced Japanese culture. Through reformulations, cultural exchanges, globalization, colonialism, and the hypermodern landscape shaped by social media and postmodern desensitization, Ainu's beliefs remain embedded in the collective imagination of contemporary society. This influence is evident in anime, video games, board games, and other creative mediums.

Ainu spiritual beliefs and practices have significantly impacted contemporary media, particularly animation and video games. For example, Studio Ghibli's⁵⁹ animation movie "Princess Mononoke" (1997)⁶⁰ is a prime example of how Ainu and Emishi cultural elements are intricately woven into portraying an animistic worldview. In the

58 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979).

59 Studio Ghibli: an acclaimed Japanese animation film studio founded in 1985 by animators and directors Miyazaki Hayao and Takahata Isao, and producer Suzuki Toshio. Studio Ghibli is known for the high quality of its film productions and art. Its feature films have received praise from both critics and audiences and have influenced other animation studios. Its headquarters are located in Tokyo. <https://www.britannica.com/money/Studio-Ghibli>. Accessed August 24, 2024.

60 "Princess Mononoke" is an animated film from Studio Ghibli, directed by Hayao Miyazaki, 1997. "While protecting his village from a rampaging boar-god/demon, a young warrior named Ashitaka is cursed with a fatal disease. To save his life, he must travel to the western forests. Once there, he becomes embroiled in a fierce campaign that humans are waging against the forest. The ambitious Lady Eboshi and her loyal clan use their weapons against the forest gods and a brave young woman, Princess Mononoke, who was raised by a wolf god. Ashitaka sees the good in both sides and tries to stop the bloodshed. This is met with hostility from both sides, as each sees him as an ally of the enemy." —Christopher Taguchi. IMDb, Accessed August 24, 2024, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0119698/>.

film, spirits like the Kodama⁶¹ resemble Ainu's Kamuy. At the same time, characters such as Moro⁶², the wolf goddess, and Shishigami⁶³, the deer god of life and death, embodies key animistic principles. This representation of Emishi culture, including their clothing and architecture, further draws from Ainu influences, blending historical aesthetics with fictionalized narratives. Director Hayao Miyazaki masterfully integrates these cultural elements to create characters like Ashitaka⁶⁴ and San⁶⁵, who symbolically represent Japan's ancestral indigenous animistic cultures.

61 The "Kodama" (コダマ) are tree spirits that appear in Princess Mononoke. They are the children of ancient trees and are a sign that the forest is healthy. The Kodama have white skin with bright eyes in shades of black and gray. Each Kodama has a different head, but all have three black dots on their face, symbolizing their eyes and mouth. <https://ghibli.fandom.com/wiki/Kodama>. Accessed August 22, 2024.

62 "Moro" (モロの君, Moro no Kimi) is a mountain wolf goddess, giant and 300 years old. She is the mother of two unnamed cubs, as well as the adoptive mother of her human daughter, Moro. <https://mononokehime.fandom.com/wiki/Special:Search?query=moro&scope=internal&navigationSearch=true>. Accessed August 25, 2024.

63 The Forest Spirit, also known as "Shishigami" (Deer God) and Night Walker, is a character in the film Princess Mononoke. He is the god of life and death, and his transformation during the night causes massive destruction until his head is returned, restoring peace. Ghibli Fandom. https://ghibli.fandom.com/wiki/Forest_Spirit. Accessed August 25, 2024.

64 "Ashitaka," the protagonist prince of Princess Mononoke, is a determined and curious young man who seeks to cure his curse and prevent violence between humans and the forces of nature. Despite his resolve, he only resorts to fighting as a last resort, preferring peace and showing compassion even toward those who attack him. His curse manifests as a purple and black aura on his right arm, symbolizing his anger and causing him great pain. Ghibli Fandom. <https://ghibli.fandom.com/wiki/Ashitaka>. Accessed August 26, 2024.

65 "San" (サン), also known as Princess Mononoke (もののけ姫, "Mononoke hime") or the "Wolf Girl / Princess," is the main character, along with Ashitaka, in Princess Mononoke. She acts, behaves, and resembles a wolf due to the fact that she was raised by wolves themselves. San is the Princess of the Wolf Gods. Ghibli Fandom, accessed August 26, 2024, <https://ghibli.fandom.com/wiki/San>.

This kind of human-animal spirit relation portrayal extends beyond Japanese media globally. The concept of guardian spirits and companions in Western animation mirrors animistic themes. Disney films, for instance, feature spiritual or animal companions, such as Mushu⁶⁶ in *Mulan* (1998)⁶⁷ or in Disney's *Pocahontas*⁶⁸ with the main characters' animal companions, who act as intermediaries and protectors.

Also, From Disney, we have the case of the North American animation "Brother Bear"⁶⁹ Although based on

66 "Mushu" used to be a guardian spirit of the Fa family, but he had been demoted to the humiliating position of an incense burner and a gong-ringer for the deceased Fa ancestors ever since he failed to protect a family member, a soldier named Fa Deng, resulting in the soldier's demise by decapitation (he is seen carrying his own head as a spirit). Mushu's reputation would suffer dearly from this, with the eldest of the ancestors refusing to even acknowledge Mushu as a "real dragon", evoking a bitter and eager-to-please side to his personality. Disney Fandom, Accessed December 18, 2024, <https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Mushu>.

67 "Mulan" is a 1998 animated musical comedy-adventure drama film produced by Walt Disney Feature Animation and released by Walt Disney Pictures on June 19, 1998. The 36th animated feature in the Disney Animated Canon and the ninth film in the Disney Renaissance, the film is based on the Chinese legend of Hua Mulan, and was the first of three produced primarily at the animation studio at Disney-MGM Studios in Orlando."Mulan," IMDb, Accessed August 26, 2024, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120762/>.

68 "Pocahontas" is a 1995 American animated musical romantic comedy-drama film released by Walt Disney Animation Studios. It is the 33rd full-length animated feature film in the Disney Animated Canon and the sixth film in the Disney Renaissance. The film is the first animated Disney feature to be based on a real historical character, the known history, and the folklore and legend surrounding the Native American woman Pocahontas. It features a fictionalized account of her encounter with the Englishman John Smith and the settlers who arrived from the Virginia Company. "Pocahontas (film)," Disney Fandom, Accessed August 27, 2024, [https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Pocahontas_\(film\)](https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Pocahontas_(film)).

69 "Brother Bear" is a 2003 American animated musical/fantasy/comedy-drama film produced by Walt Disney Feature Animation and released by Walt Disney Pictures. It is the 44th animated feature in the Disney Animated Canon. In the film, an Inuit boy named Kenai pursues a bear in revenge for a battle that he provoked, in which his oldest brother, Sitka, is killed. He tracks

the cosmogony of North American Native peoples, the film presents elements that strongly parallel Ainu spirituality. The story follows “Kenai”⁷⁰, a young Inuit⁷¹ who, after a tragic event involving the death of his brother and a quest for vengeance, is transformed into a bear by the spirits. Through his journey, Kenai learns the true meaning of his “Totem”⁷², the bear, which symbolizes love and a deep spiritual connection to nature.

In this context, the bear is more than an animal: it is a protective spirit and an agent of change. It represents a primordial force of nature that can take and give life while preserving balance. This concept profoundly resonates

down the bear and kills it, but the Spirits, angered by this needless death, change Kenai into a bear himself as punishment. To be human again, Kenai must travel to a mountain where the Northern lights touch the earth, and learn how to see through another’s eyes, feel through another’s heart, and discover the true meaning of brotherhood. “Brother Bear,” Disney Fandom, Accessed August 27, 2024, https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Brother_Bear.

70 “Kenai” is a male bear and the younger brother of Sitka and Denahi. Originally human, he is transformed into a bear by the Great Spirits as punishment for killing a bear and dishonoring his ancestors. During his journey, he befriends Koda, a bear cub, and learns that the bear he killed was Koda’s mother. Kenai later seeks to be transformed back into a bear to care for Koda. Eventually, he marries Nita, a childhood friend, who also transforms into a bear to be with him. “Kenai,” Brother Bear Fandom, Accessed August 27, 2024, <https://brother-bear.fandom.com/wiki/Kenai>.

71 “Inuit,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed August 27, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Inuit-people>.

72 “Totem poles” are monuments created by First Nations of the Pacific Northwest to represent and commemorate ancestry, histories, people, or events. Totem poles are typically created out of red cedar, a malleable wood relatively abundant in the Pacific Northwest, and would be erected to be visible within a community. Most totem poles display beings, or crest animals, marking a family’s lineage and validating the powerful rights and privileges that the family held. Totem poles would not necessarily tell a story so much as they would serve to document stories and histories familiar to community members or particular family or clan members. “Totem Poles,” Indigenous Foundations, Accessed August 27, 2024, https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/totem_poles/.

with Ainu cosmogony, where the bear is revered as a Kamuy (divine spirit) and considered a spiritual ancestor of the Ainu. For this culture, the bear embodies a sacred connection to the gods and nature, reaffirming its role as a protection and spiritual guidance symbol.⁷³

Inspired by Alaska's Kenai Fjords National Park, the film's visual setting amplifies this connection to nature. The majestic mountains, glaciers, and wildlife reflect a landscape that is as awe-inspiring as it is spiritual, echoing the animistic beliefs shared by Indigenous cultures of North America and Asia.

The essential narrative of "Brother Bear" and its symbolism demonstrates how fantasy and ancestral spirituality remain central to contemporary animation. By highlighting themes such as the human relationship with nature and guardian spirits, the film reinforces the presence of animistic cosmogonies in modern entertainment media. This connection between fantasy and nature, an essential ingredient in hypermodern animation, shows that indigenous religiosities, both Asian and American, continue to be an integral part of humanity and its creative expression.

Other examples that exploit the animist spiritual concept between humans and their environment include the Anime Dragon Ball Z⁷⁴ (1989), where Goku⁷⁵ forms the

73 B. A. Poisson, *First People: The Ainu of Japan* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2002). P. 40.

74 "Dragon Ball Z" (ドラゴンボールZゼット, Doragon Bōru Zetto), commonly abbreviated as DBZ, is the long-running sequel to the anime Dragon Ball. The series is a close adaptation of the second (and much longer) part of the Dragon Ball manga written and illustrated by Akira Toriyama. In the United States, the second part of the manga is also titled Dragon Ball Z to avoid confusion among younger readers. https://dragonball.fandom.com/wiki/Dragon_Ball_Z. Accessed August 26, 2024.

75 "Son Goku" (孫そん悟ご空くう, Son Gokū), the main character of the

“Genkidama”⁷⁶ by gathering life spiritual energy from all living beings, or in the video game “Final Fantasy VII” (1997)⁷⁷, where Aerith⁷⁸, the last Cetra⁷⁹, channels the “Lifestream,”⁸⁰ a flow of souls that sustains the planet. Simi-

Dragon Ball animated series produced by Toei Animation, was born as Kakarot (カカロット, Kakarotto), a Saiyan raised on Earth. The original Dragon Ball series first aired in Japan on February 26, 1986. <https://dragonball.fandom.com/wiki/Goku?so=search>. Accessed August 26, 2024.

76 “The Spirit Bomb” (元げん気き玉だま, Genki-dama, lit. “Energy Sphere”), also known as Spirit Explosion in some censored English versions, is a powerful attack invented by the North Kaio. It is potentially one of the strongest attacks in the Dragon Ball series, but its strength depends on the number of organisms that support its use. [https://dragonball.fandom.com/wiki/Spirit Bomb](https://dragonball.fandom.com/wiki/Spirit_Bomb). Accessed August 26, 2024.

77 “Final Fantasy VII” (ファイナルファンタジーVII, Fainaru Fantaji VII) is a role-playing game (RPG) released for the PlayStation platform, developed by Square Enix and originally published in 1997. Final Fantasy VII is one of the most iconic universes in video game history. Its stunning environments and a cast of deeply developed and charismatic characters contribute to the fact that even the original version of Final Fantasy VII feels vibrant and full of life, despite its visual limitations from a modern perspective. Few RPGs have created a world that players feel is as important to save as Gaia in Final Fantasy VII, which is a testament to the power of its narrative and its ability to build an immersive universe. <https://www.cbr.com/ff7-lore-to-know-before-rebirth/#:~:text=Summary,ability%20to%20interact%20with%20it>. Accessed August 27, 2024.

78 “Aerith Gainsborough,” also known as Aeris, is an important recurring character in the Final Fantasy VII series. She is a playable character in Final Fantasy VII and Final Fantasy VII Remake, one of the main protagonists of the novel Final Fantasy VII Remake: Trace of Two Past, and has supporting roles in Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children, Crisis Core -Final Fantasy VII-, and Before Crisis -Final Fantasy VII. https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/Aerith_Gainsborough. Accessed August 26, 2024.

79 “The Cetra,” also known as the Ancients (古代種, Kodai-shu), are a race of people from an ancient civilization frequently mentioned in Final Fantasy VII, though few Ancients are actually represented in the game. The Cetra appear identical to normal humans but are deeply spiritual by nature. According to Sephiroth, ordinary humans are ancient Cetra who abandoned their migratory nature to form permanent settlements millennia ago. The special trait of the Cetra, which seems to be genetically passed down through their family line, is the ability to interact with the Lifestream and the planet, in what some call “talking to the planet.” <https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/Cetra>. Accessed August 26, 2024.

80 “Lifestream” (ライフストリーム, Raifusutorīmu), also known as spī-

larly, in the video game, “The Legend of Zelda”⁸¹ series, guardian spirits and sacred creatures assist the protagonist, echoing the interconnected relationship between humans and the spiritual world.

Also, From the creators of Final Fantasy, a film that takes as its narrative a cosmogony centered around Animism and the connection to the soul and the planet’s vital force is “Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within” (2001, Square Pictures)⁸². This film explores Animism in a dystopian setting, where extraterrestrial “Ghosts” arrive on Earth to feed on souls. The story focuses on the interaction of “Spiritual

ritual energy and mana[*note 1*], is an ethereal substance that flows beneath the surface of the planet Gaia, introduced in Final Fantasy VII. Within the planet, it appears as multiple separate currents of green-white fluid flowing as one. In various locations, such as Mount Nibel and Mideel, mako springs erupt from the ground, creating a local spectacle. <https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/Lifestream?so=search>. Accessed August 27, 2024.

81 “The Legend of Zelda” is a long-running action-adventure video game series by Nintendo, set in the fictional Kingdom of Hyrule. The main protagonist, Link, is a Hylian swordsman who often must save Hyrule from the evil Demon King Ganon or his alter-ego Ganondorf. Princess Zelda, depending on the game, is either a damsel-in-distress or a secondary protagonist. Some games feature additional protagonists or different antagonists, such as Navi, Ezlo, Midna, Vaati, or Zant. “The Legend of Zelda (series),” Zelda Fandom, Accessed August 26, 2024, [https://zelda.fandom.com/wiki/The_Legend_of_Zelda_\(series\)](https://zelda.fandom.com/wiki/The_Legend_of_Zelda_(series)).

82 “Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within” is the first film bearing the Final Fantasy name and the first attempt to create a 3D feature film with photorealistic rendering. Released on July 11, 2001, by Columbia Pictures, it had a budget of \$137 million but only grossed \$85 million worldwide, making it one of the biggest box office failures of all time, which delayed the merger between Square Co., Ltd. and Enix. Despite this, the film received nominations for five different awards, and the main character received considerable media coverage in its debut year. The story follows scientists Aki Ross and Dr. Sid in their efforts to free Earth from a deadly alien race known as the Phantoms, who have forced the surviving humans to seek refuge in barrier cities. They must face General Douglas Hein, who wishes to attack the aliens with the Zeus Space Cannon to end the conflict. https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/Final_Fantasy:_The_Spirits_Within. Accessed August 27, 2024.

Waves”⁸³ as a vital force that connects all living beings to the planet. Through the characters of “Dr. Aki Ross”⁸⁴ and “Captain Gray Edwards”⁸⁵ who fights to save the planet using this spiritual energy, the film presents the idea that life is interconnected through a cosmic force and that death is not the end but part of a larger cycle of renewal and re-incarnation.⁸⁶

Through the analysis of these examples, which are akin to the Ainu cosmogony, it becomes clear that, despite industrialization and cultural assimilation, the Ainu’s spiritual worldview endures. It offers profound insights into ecological balance and humanity’s deep interconnectedness with nature. The Ainu principles of reciprocity and harmony with the environment subtly permeate global media narratives, promoting values that resonate universally, transcending cultural boundaries and fostering a broader understanding of our collective relationship with the natural world.

In contemporary fantasy and entertainment, cosmogonies hold a central role in shaping the imaginative

83 “Spiritual Waves” are a biotic energy similar to a “soul” or “spirit.” https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/Bio_Etherium. Accessed August 27, 2024.

84 “Dr. Aki Ross” is the main protagonist of Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within. A scientific prodigy, she was one of the first human characters with photo realistic computer-generated imagery created and used in film, and she was intended to be the first “virtual actress” generated by computer in the world. https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/Aki_Ross. Accessed August 27, 2024.

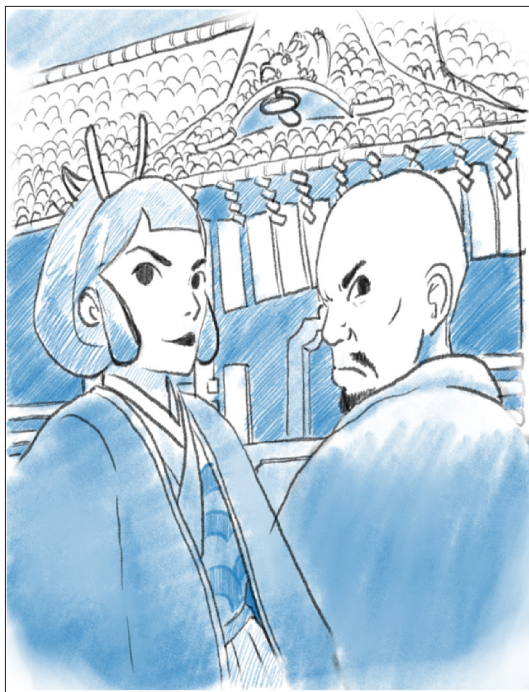
85 “Captain Gray Edwards” is a character from Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within. He is a military captain and leader of the elite squadron Deep Eyes, which patrols the vast restricted wasteland invaded by the Phantoms. He was one of the first human characters with photo realistic computer-generated imagery created and used in film. Gray is portrayed by Alec Baldwin. https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/Gray_Edwards. Accessed August 27, 2024.

86 “Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within,” Final Fantasy Fandom, accessed August 27, 2024, https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/Final_Fantasy:_The_Spirits_Within.

experiences sought by audiences. Japan, with its rich cultural heritage, has seamlessly woven these elements into its visual storytelling. The ancestral traditions of the Ainu, deeply rooted in animism and a profound reverence for nature, have significantly influenced Japan's cultural imagination, leaving an indelible mark on mediums such as anime and other entertainment formats. This enduring, though often implicit, influence highlights the continued relevance of indigenous perspectives in enriching modern narratives, bridging ancestral wisdom with contemporary creativity.

Yamato and Shintoism Presence in Japanese Anime & Worldwide Entertainment Media

Imagen 3.Artistic representation of the Yamato folk



Fuente: Fan art, Octavio Luna.

The Ainu were the first known inhabitants of what is now Japan, with a cosmology and culture that echoed with other animistic traditions. These expressions of worship and animism continue to influence Japanese entertainment media. However, it is essential to note that the folkloric, cultural, and religious influences primarily stem from the “Yamato”⁸⁷, a culture formed through migrations from China and Korea. This group constitutes much of the modern Japanese population. The Yamato people practiced “Shinto”⁸⁸, a religion that has profoundly shaped Japanese entertainment media and remains evident in anime and video games.

87 The Yamato kingdom appeared in the Nara plain, in central Japan, between approximately 250 and 300 A.D., and during the following three centuries, it went through successive stages of vigor, expansion, and disruption. Because it’s “great kings” (ōkimi) were buried in large mounds, these years are commonly designated as the period of the Burial Mounds (kofun). It was then that farmers transformed vast stretches of virgin land into rice fields; immigrants from northeast Asia introduced advanced production techniques from the continent; soldiers rode horses and fought with iron weapons; armies subdued much of Japan and extended their control to neighboring regions of the Korean Peninsula; and the kings sent diplomatic missions to distant courts in Korea and China. However, because no written Japanese records from that time have been preserved, and the Korean and Chinese accounts tell us little about contemporary life on the Japanese islands, the Yamato period has long been considered a dark and puzzling stretch of prehistory. Until the end of World War II, Japanese historians tended to think of this period as a time when the ‘unbroken’ imperial line was mysteriously and wonderfully formed. But postwar scholars have discovered new written evidence, seen the historical importance of massive archaeological findings, and examined ancient Japanese life from different angles. The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 1, edited by Delmer M. Brown, 109-144. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Accessed August 27, 2024.

88 “Shinto” refers to the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of Japan. The word Shinto, which literally means “the way of the kami” (usually understood as sacred or divine power, specifically the various gods or deities), began to be used to distinguish Japanese indigenous beliefs from Buddhism, which had been introduced to Japan in the 6th century A.D. Shinto has no founder, no official sacred scriptures in the strict sense, and no fixed dogmas, but it has preserved its guiding beliefs throughout the centuries. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shinto>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

Until recently, it was believed that most of the Japanese population descended from a small percentage of the Jomon (an earlier civilization from which the Ainu and Emishi cultures derive) and primarily the “Yayoi”⁸⁹ (a culture from which the Yamato originated). However, a genetic study published in 2021 in “Live Science” by Tom Metcalfe, titled “Ancient Bones Reveal Previously Unknown Japanese Ancestors,” revealed a more complex story. In addition to the “Jomon”⁹⁰ and “Yayoi”, modern Japanese descend from a third population from the “Kofun period”⁹¹, which arrived around 300 CE. This last group significantly contributed to the genetic makeup of contemporary Japanese people.⁹²

89 The “Yayoi culture” (c. 300 B.C.–c. 250 A.D.) is a prehistoric culture of Japan that succeeded the Jōmon culture. Named after the district in Tokyo where its artifacts were first discovered in 1884, the Yayoi culture emerged on the southern Japanese island of Kyushu and spread northeastward toward the Kanto plain. The Yayoi people dominated bronze and iron casting. They wove hemp and lived in village communities with raised, thatched-roof houses. They employed a rice cultivation method in flooded fields, originating from China, and continued the hunting and shellfish gathering economy of the Jōmon culture. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Yayoi-culture>. Accessed August 27, 2024.

90 The “Jōmon culture,” the first major prehistoric culture of Japan, is characterized by its pottery decorated with impressions or reliefs of cord patterns (jōmon). For some time, there has been uncertainty regarding the dating of the Jōmon period, especially regarding its start. The earliest date proposed is around 10,500 B.C., which scholars who support it describe as the beginning of the Early Jōmon period, which lasted until approximately 8000 B.C. Others prefer a later start date, which can range between 7500 and 4500 B.C., depending on the interpretation of archaeological evidence. Most agree that the period ended around 300 B.C., roughly coinciding with the rise of the Yayoi culture. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jomon-culture>. Accessed August 27, 2024.

91 After the Yayoi Period in Japan, when agricultural and metallurgical techniques were introduced from the Asian continent, the “Kofun Period” (c. 250 A.D. - 538 A.D.) followed. During this time, the Shinto religion emerged from the beliefs of earlier eras, and the Yamato Clan rose to power, eventually becoming the imperial family. The period is named after the style of burial mounds used during this time. https://www.worldhistory.org/Kofun_Period/. Accessed August 27, 2024.

92 “Ancient Bones Reveal Complex Ancestry of Japanese People.” Live Aitías.Revista de Estudios Filosóficos.
Vol. V, N° 10, Julio-Diciembre 2025, pp. 81-148

This finding contrasts Japan's traditional belief that the population is a unified single race with a mythical religious lineage descending from the deity "Amaterasu"⁹³. If you ask a Japanese person today, they generally do not consider themselves of mixed ancestry, making this a controversial topic.

According to "The Cambridge History of Japan" by Cambridge University, the "Yamato Kingdom" emerged around 250 to 300 CE in the plains of what is now the city of Nara. This kingdom consolidated power by converting lands into rice paddies, introducing advanced agricultural techniques, and militarizing its society, extending its influence on the Korean peninsula. This period is known as the "Kofun Period,"⁹⁴ and it was named after the burial mounds of the era.⁹⁵

However, doubts remain about the specific origin of the Yamato, as there are few records about the Japanese Yamato populations of the time and scant mentions of the Yamato in Korean or Chinese sources. Adding to this lack

Science, last modified July 25, 2023. <https://www.livescience.com/ancient-bones-reveal-japanese-ancestry.html>. Accessed August 19, 2024.

93 "Amaterasu" (in Japanese: "Great Deity Who Illuminates the Heavens") is the celestial sun goddess from whom the Japanese imperial family claims descent, and an important deity in Shinto. Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Amaterasu>. Accessed August 23, 2024.

94 In general, the "Kofun period" (mound period) refers to the period from the mid-3rd century to the late 7th century, approximately 400 years. However, especially between the mid-3rd century and the late 6th century, it was during the "Kofun period" that the Japanese people built many keyhole-shaped mounds throughout the northern "Tohoku region" and the southern "Kyushu region"; therefore, this period is sometimes referred to as the "keyhole-shaped mound period." After the construction of keyhole-shaped mounds ceased, mound construction continued from the 7th century, but with different mound shapes: the square mound [(方墳) "hofun" in Japanese], the circular mound [(円墳) "empun" in Japanese], and the octagonal mound [(八角墳) "hakkakufun" in Japanese]. This period is occasionally referred to as the "final Kofun period." Japón Manía. <https://japonmania.es/blog/periodo-kofun/>. Accessed August 26, 2024.

95 Delmer M. Brown, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 1: Ancient Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 10-110.

of documentation is the deeply rooted belief among the Japanese that their people descend directly from the deity Amaterasu and that their history has been uninterrupted since this divine origin.

According to Shinto or “Shintoism”, the first Japanese came from primordial gods who shaped and created the world. In Japanese Shinto tradition, it is still believed that the “Nihonjin”⁹⁶ are direct descendants of the Sun Kami (Amaterasu) and that the Japanese royal family is her direct representative.⁹⁷

Whatever the scientific, historical, or religious reasons, contemporary Japanese people today predominantly consider themselves as one race and one people who profess above all religions, primarily Shinto. Despite differences with the indigenous cultures of Japan, this belief that everything has a soul, and the worship of nature spirits is something they share and still profess to this day.

The Shinto religion, possibly rooted in Animism, became closely intertwined with the Yamato identity. According to Shinto tradition, the Japanese are descendants of primordial deities who shaped and created the world. The Yamato rulers traced their lineage directly to Amaterasu, the sun goddess, solidifying their divine authority. Shintoism’s focus on “Kami”⁹⁸, or spirits of

96 “Nihon” (日本) is the native Japanese term for Japan, and “Nihonjin” refers to the Japanese people.

97 Joshua Frydman, *The Japanese Myths: A Guide to Gods, Heroes, and Spirits* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2022), 27

98 The term “Kami” is often translated as “god,” “lord,” or “deity,” but it also includes other forces of nature, both good and bad, which, due to their superiority or divinity, become objects of reverence and respect. The sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami and other creator spirits, illustrious ancestors, as well as both living and non-living things, such as plants, rocks, birds, beasts, and fish, can be treated as kami. In primitive Shinto, celestial kami (amatsukami) were

nature, reflects an animistic worldview that resonates deeply within Japanese culture.⁹⁹

Shinto, meaning “The Way of The Gods,” lacks sacred texts akin to Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Instead, its practices and beliefs were historically overseen by aristocratic classes and the imperial court. As Joshua Fryman explains in “The Japanese Myths”:

...Shinto (properly Shintō 神道, ‘the way of the gods’) is Japan’s native belief system; in some respects, it hardly resembles a formal religion. Shinto lacks a sacred scripture, and much of its structure was shaped under the imperial court from the medieval period onward...¹⁰⁰

Shinto rituals emphasize purity over moral dualities of good and evil, reflecting the importance of honor and purity in Japanese society. The Kami, which includes spirits of animals, objects, and natural elements, are venerated at Shinto shrines and maintained by Kannushi (priests). These shrines serve as sites for spiritual purification and communion with the Kami.¹⁰¹

Central figures in Shinto mythology, such as Amaterasu, the sun goddess; “Susanoo”¹⁰², the deity of storms and

considered more noble than earthly Kami (kunitsukami), but in modern Shinto, this distinction is no longer made. Kami manifest in, or reside in, symbolic objects such as a mirror (see shintai), in which form they are often worshiped at Shinto shrines. Shinto myths speak of the “8 million kami” to express the infinite number of possible kami, and new ones continue to be recognized. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/kami>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

99 Joshua Frydman, *The Japanese Myths: A Guide to Gods, Heroes, and Spirits* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2022), 199

100 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*, 12.

101 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

102 “Susanoo” (in Japanese: Impetuous Male), in Japanese mythology, is the Aitías.Revista de Estudios Filosóficos.

seas; “Inari”¹⁰³, the fox goddess associated with agriculture and rice; and “Hachiman”¹⁰⁴, the god of war and protection, have profoundly shaped Japanese culture.¹⁰⁵

Their influence extends beyond traditional mythology, permeating Japanese literature, art, and contemporary entertainment. The rich diversity of Shinto beliefs and Japanese folklore surrounding the Kami has significantly impacted Japanese storytelling and global fantasy narratives. The vision of a world inhabited by magical beings with extraordinary powers and traits resonates strongly with modern audiences’ appetite for consuming fantastical content.

god of storms and the younger brother of the sun goddess Amaterasu. He was born when his father Izanagi washed his nose. Although Susanoo was granted dominion over the sea plains, he was expelled from heaven due to his unruly behavior at his sister’s court. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Susanoo>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

103 “Inari,” in Japanese mythology, is a deity primarily known as the protector of rice cultivation. The god also promotes prosperity and is particularly worshipped by merchants and artisans, serving as the patron deity of swordsmiths and being associated with brothels and artists. In Shintō legends, Inari is identified with Uka no Mitama no Kami (“Venerable Spirit of Food”), the child of the impetuous storm god Susanoo. The rice god is also associated in some Shintō shrines with the goddess of food, Ukemochi no Kami, and there is considerable variation in how Inari is depicted, whether as a bearded man riding a white fox or as a woman with long, flowing hair carrying sheaves of rice. The fox, symbolizing both benevolence and malevolence, is sometimes identified as Inari’s messenger, and numerous fox statues can be found both inside and outside the shrines dedicated to the rice god. Other features of Inari shrines include their vivid red buildings, long rows of votive torii (gates), and the hōshu-no-tama (a pear-shaped emblem topped with flame-like symbols). Among the many Inari shrines across Japan, the most famous is the Fushimi Inari Shrine near Kyoto.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Inari>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

104 “Hachiman” (in Japanese: Eight Banners) is one of the most popular Shintō deities in Japan; the patron god of the Minamoto clan and warriors in general, often referred to as the god of war. Hachiman is commonly regarded as the deification of Ōjin, the 15th emperor of Japan. However, he is rarely worshipped alone, and Hachiman shrines are typically dedicated to three deities: Hachiman as Ōjin, his mother Empress Jingō, and the goddess Hime-gami. <https://school.eb.com/levels/high/article/Hachiman/38709>. Accessed August 20, 2024.

105 Frydman, The Japanese Myths.

For instance, we find characters like Inuyasha, who aesthetically embodies and references the Kami Inari Ōkami. Similarly, many anime characters communicate with spirits and animals, such as Serena from “Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon”¹⁰⁶, who speaks to “Luna,”¹⁰⁷ her guardian cat, or “Sakura Kinomoto”¹⁰⁸ from “Cardcaptor Sakura”¹⁰⁹, who interacts with “Cerberus,”¹¹⁰ a guardian in the form of a mini sphinx.

106 “Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon” is the first season of the 1990s anime series Sailor Moon. The season was produced simultaneously with the first story arc of the manga by Naoko Takeuchi. [https://sailormoon.fandom.com/wiki/Sailor_Moon_\(Season_1\)](https://sailormoon.fandom.com/wiki/Sailor_Moon_(Season_1)), Accessed on August 29, 2024.

107 “Luna” is a black-purple talking cat who advises and guides Usagi Tsukino (Sailor Moon) and the rest of the Sailor Senshi throughout the anime series. This is the first anime depiction of the original character from the manga. Her counterpart is “Artemis,” who assists Sailor Venus [https://sailormoon.fandom.com/wiki/Luna_\(anime\)?so=search](https://sailormoon.fandom.com/wiki/Luna_(anime)?so=search), Accessed on August 29, 2024.

108 “Sakura Kinomoto” (木之本 桜, Kinomoto Sakura) is the titular heroine and protagonist of CLAMP’s anime and manga series Cardcaptor Sakura. Sakura is introduced as a 10-year-old girl living in the city of Tomoeda, Japan, where she attends Tomoeda Elementary School during the Clow Card and Sakura Card arcs. In the Clear Card story, she is a first-year student at Tomoeda Middle School. https://ccsakura.fandom.com/wiki/Sakura_Kinomoto, Accessed on August 29, 2024.

109 “Cardcaptor Sakura” (カードキャプターさくら, Kādokyaputā Sakura), also known as Sakura Card Captor (with the space) and often abbreviated as “CCS,” is a magical girl manga series by the renowned all-female artist team CLAMP. Sakura Card Captor is published in Japan by Kodansha and was serialized in Nakayoshi. The series consists of twelve volumes. The manga is notable for its emphasis on the shoujo genre, with nearly every page adorned with detailed flowers, bubbles, or sparkles around the main characters. It won the prestigious Seiun Award for Best Manga in 2001. The television anime series (1998–2000) based on the manga comprises 70 half-hour episodes (spanning three seasons), two theatrical films, and several specials. https://ccsakura.fandom.com/wiki/Cardcaptor_Sakura, Accessed on August 29, 2024.

110 “Cerberus” (ケルベロス, Keruberosu) is a main character in CLAMP’s manga and anime series Cardcaptor Sakura. His name is more commonly recognized in its Greek form, Kerberos, which is often shortened to Kero-chan (ケロちゃん) or simply “Kero.” Accessed at: <https://ccsakura.fandom.com/wiki/Cerberus>. Accessed on August 29, 2024.

In Japanese fantasy, humans and fantastical creatures coexist in an eternal symbiosis, where these beings can both assist and hinder heroes, as seen in Shinto mythological legends. This concept is evident in animations like Pokémon, where humans interact with creatures with elemental powers, such as “Pikachu” (electric)¹¹¹, “Charmander” (fire)¹¹², “Squirtle” (water)¹¹³, and “Bulbasaur” (plant)¹¹⁴.

This tradition of heroes and heroines interacting with an elemental spirit has become part of the narrative “status quo” of anime and is even reflected in American films like those of Disney. For example, Ariel’s relationship with “Flounder”¹¹⁵ and “Sebastian,”¹¹⁶ Pocahontas with her

111 “Pikachu” (in Japanese: ピカチュウ, Hepburn: Pikachuu) (PEE-ka-choo) is an Electric-type Pokémon introduced in Generation I. Pikachu is known as the most famous and recognizable Pokémon. Over the years, Pikachu has become so popular that it serves as the mascot of the Pokémon franchise. It is the mascot of the version and the first partner Pokémon in the game Pokémon Yellow and its remake, Pokémon: Let’s Go, Pikachu! Pikachu is also widely recognized from the anime, where Ash Ketchum, the former protagonist, has a Pikachu. Accessed at: <https://pokemon.fandom.com/wiki/Pikachu>. Accessed on August 29, 2024.

112 “Charmander” is one of the most iconic characters in the Pokémon franchise (Nintendo, 1996).

113 “Squirtle” is one of the most iconic characters in the Pokémon franchise (Nintendo, 1996).

114 “Bulbasaur” is one of the most iconic characters in the Pokémon franchise (Nintendo, 1996).

115 “Flounder” is a main character in Disney’s 1989 animated film *The Little Mermaid*. He is Ariel’s best friend, regularly accompanying her on her adventures despite his timid nature. Although his name suggests otherwise, he is not a flounder but a tropical fish. Accessed at: <https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Flounder>. Accessed on August 29, 2029.

116 “Sebastian” is a main character in Disney’s 1989 animated film *The Little Mermaid*. He is a red crab with a Jamaican accent who serves as King Triton’s advisor and the court’s “distinguished” composer. Despite his prestigious position, he is often tasked with keeping an eye on Triton’s youngest daughter, Princess Ariel. Accessed at: <https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Sebastian>. Accessed on August 29, 2024.

raccoon “Meeko,”¹¹⁷ and Mulan with her dragon familiar “Mushu,” among many others.

The influence of Shinto, such as Kami-creatures, can also be seen in American television animations, particularly in “Avatar: The Last Airbender” (Nickelodeon, 2005-2008)¹¹⁸. In this series, “Aang,”¹¹⁹ a young monk, can communicate with spirits like the Kami and acts as a bridge between the spiritual and human worlds. Aang can manipulate the elements of water, earth, fire, and air, and the series deeply explores the animistic concept that everything has a soul and energy that can be manipulated. This idea is

117 “Meeko” is a main character in Disney’s 1995 animated film *Pocahontas*. He is Pocahontas’s pet raccoon, with a love for food, especially John Smith’s biscuits.

Accessed at: <https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Meeko>. Accessed on August 29, 2024.

118 “Avatar: The Last Airbender,” also known as “Avatar: The Legend of Aang” in some PAL regions, is an Emmy award-winning American animated television series that aired for three seasons on Nickelodeon and Nicktoons Network. The series was created and produced by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko, who served as executive producers alongside Aaron Ehasz. Avatar is set in a world influenced by Asian culture, where martial arts and elemental manipulation exist. The show drew elements from East Asian, South Asian, and Western Asian cultures, blending what were traditionally separate categories of Japanese anime and Western cartoons. The series follows the adventures of the main protagonist, Aang, and his friends, who must save the world by defeating Fire Lord Ozai and ending the destructive war with the Fire Nation. The show first aired on February 21, 2005, and concluded with a highly acclaimed two-hour television movie on July 19, 2008. Accessed at: <https://avatar.fandom.com/wiki/Avatar: The Last Airbender>. Accessed on August 29, 2024.

119 “Aang,” a character from the series “Avatar: The Last Airbender” (also known as “Avatar: The Legend of Aang”), was an Air Nomad born in the year 12 BG and the Avatar during the Hundred Year War, succeeding Avatar Roku and preceding Avatar Korra. As the Avatar of his time, he was the only person capable of mastering all four bending arts: air, water, earth, and fire. Accessed at: <https://avatar.fandom.com/wiki/Aang>. Accessed on August 28, 2024.

further explored in the sequel, “The Legend of Korra”¹²⁰, where the spirit world plays a central role in the narrative.

This symbiotic relationship between humans and magical beings is also seen in video games like the “Final Fantasy” series, where characters can summon gods or “Aeons”. While these figures have names and traits related to other mythologies, they derive from this everyday symbiotic relationship between humans and the Kami. Notable examples include the video game “Ōkami”¹²¹, centered on the goddess “Inari Ōkami”, and “Zelda: Breath of the Wild”¹²². The influence of the Kami on narratives is undeniable, directly derived from Shintoism and Japan’s cultural Animism.

120 “The Legend of Korra,” the sequel to “Avatar: The Last Airbender,” is set 70 years after the events of Avatar and follows Korra, the next Avatar after Aang, who hails from the Southern Water Tribe. Having already mastered the elements of earth, water, and fire, Korra must learn the art of airbending. Her journey takes her to Republic City, a virtual melting pot where benders and non-benders coexist. However, she soon discovers that the city is plagued by crime and a growing anti-bending revolution that threatens to tear it apart. While dealing with these dangers, Korra begins her airbending training under the tutelage of Tenzin, Aang’s son. Accessed at: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/the-legend-of-korra>. Accessed on August 28, 2024.

121 “Ōkami” (「大神」; lit. “Great God”) is an action-adventure video game developed by Clover Studio and published by Capcom. It was released for Sony’s PlayStation 2 gaming console in 2006 in Japan and North America, and in 2007 in Europe and Australia. Set sometime in classical Japanese history, Ōkami combines various Japanese myths and folklore to tell the story of how the land was saved from darkness by the Shintō sun goddess Amaterasu, who took the form of a white wolf. Accessed at: <https://okami.fandom.com/wiki/%C5%8Ckami>. Accessed on August 28, 2024.

122 “The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild” is the nineteenth main installment in The Legend of Zelda series. It was released worldwide simultaneously for the Wii U and Nintendo Switch on March 3, 2017.

Accessed at: https://zelda.fandom.com/wiki/The_Legend_of_Zelda:_Breath_of_the_Wild. Accessed on August 28, 2024.

Today, little is known about the exact origins of the Yamato people and how Shintoism developed in its early days. However, it is undeniable that there is a connection between Japan's indigenous religions, such as the Ainu's, and Shintoism, both of which have a strong animistic foundation. Although Shintoism is considered an emblematic religion of the Yamato Japanese, it incorporates numerous syncretic and archetypal ideas found in other cultures. Despite its origin, Yamato culture and religion have profoundly influenced global narratives, a fact reflected across a wide range of entertainment media.

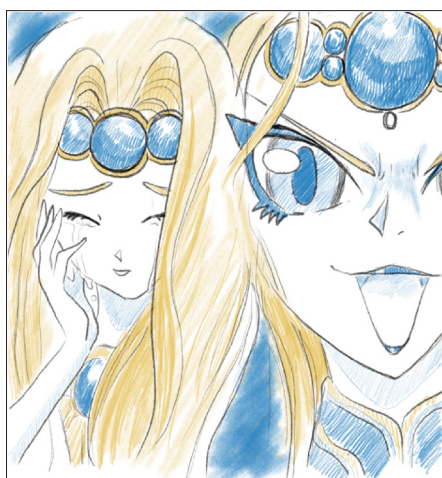
It is important to note that the idea of humans interacting with spirits and elemental beings is not exclusive to Japan. However, what is truly astonishing is that despite numerous historical, religious, and philosophical changes experienced worldwide—and in Japan in particular—the prehistoric conceptions of Animism and medieval ideas of Shintoism remain relevant and adopted by contemporary Japan. This worldview continues to enrich and fuel today's fantasy literary narratives.

Confucianism and Buddhism in Japanese Anime & Worldwide Entertainment Media

Discussing Japanese history and religion entails exploring a syncretism that integrates and accepts influences from other philosophies and religions originating from China, Korea, and India while recognizing Shintoism as the official religion. Beginning in the 5th century, this process of cultural hybridization intensified, driven by migrations, political alliances, and diplomacy. This cultural exchange revolutionized and influenced Japan's socioeconomic and religious aspects, akin to what transpired along the

“Silk Road.”¹²³ Although Japan may seem insular and homogeneous, it is, in reality, the result of continuous cultural hybridization, a process still present today.¹²⁴

Imagen 4. “Fan Art” illustration of “*Princess Emerald*” from “*Magic Knight Rayearth*,” a character who embodies the struggle between the values of good and evil and their physical consequences. Her design and story reflect themes deeply rooted in Confucian philosophy, highlighting the tension between moral duty and personal conflict



Fuente: Fan art, Octavio Luna.

123 “The Silk Road,” an ancient trade route established around the 2nd century BCE, connected China with the West, facilitating the exchange of goods and ideas between the great civilizations of Rome and China. Silk was exported westward, while wool, gold, and silver were sent eastward. China also received Nestorian Christianity and Buddhism (from India) through the Silk Road. Originating in Xi’an (Sian), the 4,000-mile (6,400-km) route, which was essentially a caravan route, followed the Great Wall of China northwest, skirted the Takla Makan Desert, climbed the Pamir Mountains, crossed Afghanistan, and reached the Levant. From there, goods were transported across the Mediterranean Sea. Accessed at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Silk-Road-trade-route>. Accessed on August 12, 2024.

124 Frydman, The Japanese Myths.

One of the principal philosophies that influenced the Japanese was “Confucianism”¹²⁵, which began arriving from China in the 5th century and consolidated in the 6th century. Confucius was a philosopher and adviser to royal courts during the “Warring States Period” in China, before the unification of the Chinese empire.¹²⁶

On the origin and establishment of Confucian philosophy, Joshua Frydman explains:

...Confucius was a scholar and court advisor during the period of multiple kingdoms before the unification of China... His accumulated teachings were written down by his disciples in the decades following his life...These writings circulated during the subsequent centuries, and under the Han Dynasty, they developed into the official philosophy of the Chinese government...¹²⁷

Joshua Frydman, in his book “The Japanese Myths: A Guide to Gods and Spirits,”, explains that after the institutionalization of Confucianism, it was promoted by the Northern and Southern Dynasties in China between 220 and 589 CE, making Confucius a revered figure of transcendent cult.

Confucianism transitioned from being a philosophy to becoming a religious branch, and even 1,500 years after Confucius’ birth during the “Tang Dynasty”¹²⁸, his

125 “Confucianism,” originally a philosophy concerned with the balance between heaven and earth. It emphasizes morality, filial piety, and respect for hierarchies. Joshua Frydman, *The Japanese Myths: A Guide to Gods, Heroes, and Spirits* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2022), 19–20.

126 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

127 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

128 The Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) was a Chinese dynasty that succeeded Aitías. *Revista de Estudios Filosóficos*.

vision, philosophy, and teachings had spread throughout China, institutionalized as the state religion, complete with temples, priests, and a religious structure.¹²⁹

Confucianism from the Tang Dynasty reached Japan, but unlike in China, it did not become institutionalized or displace Shintoism as the official religion. However, it permeated Japanese religion and values, reinforcing and hybridizing its religious system. Confucianism was crucial in conceptualizing relationships between “Heaven” and “Earth,” humanity, and the divine. Heaven is not specifically a physical place where gods dwell but a conceptual plane, a mirror of what Earth should be. It establishes that when individuals fail to protect hierarchies and act righteously and honorably, the essential balance of the world is lost, causing Earth to drift away from heaven.¹³⁰

On Confucian precepts, Joshua Frydman explains:

...The fundamental concern of Confucianism is the relationship between Earth and heaven... As the Earth moves further away from heaven, both the natural world and human society deviate more and more from balance... The way to align Earth with heaven is to act righteously, which means adhering to a universal moral code as well as protecting hierarchies... These hierarchies manifest on Earth

the short-lived Sui dynasty (581–618), developed a successful form of government and administration based on the Sui model, and fostered a cultural and artistic flourishing that constituted a golden age. Like most dynasties, the Tang rose amid duplicity and murder and collapsed into a kind of anarchy. Yet at its height, in the early 8th century, the splendor of its arts and cultural environment made it a model for the world. Accessed at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tang-dynasty>. Accessed on August 23, 2024.

129 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

130 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

through specific relationships: parents to children, older siblings to younger siblings, husbands to wives, lords to vassals, and rulers to subjects.¹³¹

For Confucian practitioners, social imbalance and dishonor can trigger human or social problems, such as rebellions, and resonate and impact the physical world, causing natural catastrophes like earthquakes, tsunamis, fires, and other natural disasters. Correcting this was granted by practicing filial piety, respecting parents and ancestors, upholding political hierarchies, and embracing a sense of duty seriously and strictly.¹³² Those familiar with Japanese culture or interacting with Japanese people may observe this trait. Despite Confucianism being a Chinese philosophy-religion, it undeniably manifests as an archetypal and fundamental characteristic in contemporary Japanese life, visible even in Korean and other Asian cultures.

In Japanese animation, Confucian precepts are evident and commonly form the moral compass of heroes and characters. These Confucian precepts could be seen in the TV animation “Saint Seiya” (Toei Animation, 1986)¹³³,

131 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

132 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

133 “Saint Seiya” (聖闘士星矢(セイントセイヤ), Seinto Seiya), also known as Saint Seiya: Knights of the Zodiac or simply Knights of the Zodiac, is a Japanese manga series written and illustrated by Masami Kurumada, originally serialized in *Weekly Shōnen Jump* from 1986 to 1991. The story follows the orphan Seiya, who is sent to Greece to obtain the Pegasus Bronze Cloth and participate in a tournament called the Galactic Wars, hoping to reunite with his sister on Earth.

The manga was adapted into a television anime series by Toei Animation from 1986 to 1989. Several spin-offs based on the original Saint Seiya concept have also been created, mainly released as manga series, television anime, or OVA formats. https://saintseiya.fandom.com/wiki/Saint_Seiya. Accessed on August 27, 2024.

where the moral chaos among the “Gold Saints,”¹³⁴ under the command of the “Grand Pope,”¹³⁵ leads them to confront their own disciples, the “Bronze Saints.”¹³⁶ The plot focuses on the dilemma of obeying or disobeying a higher power. The Gold Saints train their pupils to defeat the Grand Pope and save the reincarnation of “Athena.”¹³⁷ This portrayal shows how dishonor, betrayal, and corruption bring misfortune, while true heroes restore balance on Earth with their obedience to Athena, purity, honor, and bravery.

Other Confucian religious values can also be seen in “Magic Knight Rayearth” (CLAMP, 1993)¹³⁸, where

134 “The Gold Saints” or “Golden Knights” (黄金聖闘士ゴールドセイント, Gōrudo Seinto) are the group of the twelve most powerful and highest-ranking warriors in Athena’s army. Their main duty in the Sanctuary is to defend the Twelve Houses of the Zodiac. They serve as the ultimate line of defense and the supreme warriors in the service of Athena and the Grand Pope. https://saintseiya.fandom.com/wiki/Gold_Saints. Accessed on August 26, 2024.

135 “The Pope” (教皇, Kyōkō), known in many countries as the “Grand Master” and referred to once in Saint Seiya Omega as the “Great Pope” (大教皇, Daikyōkō), is the human representative of the goddess Athena. <https://saintseiya.fandom.com/wiki/Pope>. Accessed on August 26, 2024.

136 The Bronze Saints are the lowest class in terms of power among Athena’s Saints. The Bronze Saints wear the Bronze Cloth and possess the basic abilities of a Saint. Their mastery of Cosmo is relatively limited, and they exhibit superhuman abilities that are less impressive than those of higher-ranking Saints. They are capable of reaching Mach 1 (the speed of sound) and producing one hundred attacks per second—feats that, while impressive for a human, represent only a fraction of the power of the Gold Saints. Accessed at: https://saintseiya.fandom.com/wiki/Bronze_Saints. Accessed on August 26, 2024.

137 “Athena” (Attic Greek: Ἀθηνά) is the goddess of War and Wisdom. She has protected peace and love on Earth since mythological times, with the help of her many Saints. <https://saintseiya.fandom.com/wiki/Athena>. Accessed on August 26, 2024.

138 “Magic Knight Rayearth” (魔法騎士マジックナイトレイアース, Majikku Naito (Mahō Kishi) Reiāsu) is a Japanese anime series adapted from the manga of the same name.

Three young girls, Hikaru, Umi, and Fuu, are transported to a magical world called Cephro during a school trip to Tokyo Tower. They are soon greeted by Aitías.

the balance of an entire world is threatened by a personal crisis of “Princess Emeraude,”¹³⁹ the central pillar of “Cephiro.”¹⁴⁰ The conflict arises between her duty to maintain the planet’s order, life, and balance through prayer and total sacrifice and the misfortune of falling in love with her vassal, “Zagato”¹⁴¹. This inner turmoil, dividing

the Grand Mage Clef, who explains that they have been summoned to become the Legendary Magic Knights and save Cephiro. The girls are not very enthusiastic about this idea and only want to return home. Clef further explains that they must seek out the three Rune Gods to help them in their mission. He grants each of them armor and magical powers.

They learn from Clef that the High Priest Zagato has kidnapped Cephiro’s Pillar, Princess Emeraude. The Pillar of Cephiro is solely responsible for keeping Cephiro alive and in balance through her prayers. Without Princess Emeraude, Cephiro would fall into ruin. Hikaru, Umi, and Fuu must battle Zagato’s minions and find the Rune Gods if they ever wish to return home. They quickly learn that friendship and loyalty are the only things they can rely on in the crumbling world of Cephiro. [https://magicknightrayearth.fandom.com/wiki/Magic_Knight_Rayearth_\(anime\)](https://magicknightrayearth.fandom.com/wiki/Magic_Knight_Rayearth_(anime)). Accessed on August 27, 2024.

139 “Princess Esmeralda” or “Princess Emeraude” is a character in the anime Magic Knight Rayearth. She is the sovereign of Cephiro and a goddess-like figure to whom all inhabitants pray for peace, prosperity, and protection. She was the first to summon Hikaru Shidou, Umi Ryuuzaki, and Fuu Hououji to Cephiro to become the Legendary Magic Knights. https://magicknightrayearth.fandom.com/wiki/Princess_Emeraude. Accessed on August 26, 2024.

140 “Cephiro” (セフィロ, Sefiro) is the primary setting of Magic Knight Rayearth. As revealed in the second season of the anime, it is a planet located somewhere deep in space. Cephiro is a world separate from Earth and, according to the manga, was created by Mokona after witnessing devastation and war on Earth. Cephiro has the ability to turn almost any desire or longing, even subconscious ones, into reality, which is why it is often called “The Land of Will.” Accessed at: <https://magicknightrayearth.fandom.com/wiki/Cephiro>. Accessed on August 26, 2024.

141 “Zagato” (ザガート, Zagato) is the main antagonist of the first season. He is the younger brother of Cail Lantis and a high priest of Cephiro. Zagato is a somber and composed individual with a strategic mind. As a powerful sorcerer, he demonstrates a ruthless attitude in battle, driven by his calculated focus and unwavering determination. When first introduced, he appears as a terrible villain who has kidnapped the beloved Princess Emeraude, cruelly watching as Cephiro crumbles without its Pillar. However, this image is far from the truth. <https://magicknightrayearth.fandom.com/wiki/Zagato>. Accessed on August 26, 2024.

her between duty and personal passions, resonates across the planet, causing storms, earthquakes, and an imminent apocalypse. In response, the Magic Knights, “Hikaru,”¹⁴² “Umi,”¹⁴³ and “Fuu,”¹⁴⁴ are summoned from Earth to restore Cephire’s balance, facing trials that challenge their honor, purity, obedience, and sisterhood.

Another philosophical-religious influence that left a profound mark on ancient Japan was the arrival of “Buddhism”¹⁴⁵, which was introduced around the 5th century CE. According to Joshua Frydman in his book “The Japanese Myths: A Guide to Gods, Heroes, and Spirits” (Thames & Hudson, 2022), Buddhism developed in what is now India for nearly seven centuries before spreading through Central Asia and the Pacific region.

142 “Hikaru Shidou” (獅堂 光, Shidō Hikaru), known as Lucy in some versions, is one of the three main protagonists of the manga and anime series Magic Knight Rayearth. She is the Magic Knight representing the element of fire. https://magicknightrayearth.fandom.com/wiki/Hikaru_Shidou. Accessed on August 26, 2024

143 “Umi Ryuuzaki” (龍咲 海, Ryūzaki Umi), known as Marina in some versions, is one of the three main protagonists of the manga and anime series Magic Knight Rayearth. She is the Magic Knight representing the element of water. https://magicknightrayearth.fandom.com/wiki/Umi_Ryuuzaki. Accessed on August 26, 2024.

144 “Fuu Hououji” (鳳凰寺 風, Hōōji Fū), known as Anaís in some versions, is one of the three main protagonists of the manga and anime series Magic Knight Rayearth. She is the Magic Knight representing the element of wind. https://magicknightrayearth.fandom.com/wiki/Fuu_Hououji. Accessed on August 26, 2024.

145 “Buddhism”, a religion and philosophy developed from the teachings of the Buddha (Sanskrit: “Awakened One”), a teacher who lived in northern India between the mid-6th and mid-4th centuries BCE (before the Common Era). Spreading from India to Central and Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan, Buddhism has played a central role in the spiritual, cultural, and social life of Asia, and, beginning in the 20th century, it spread to the West. Ancient Buddhist scripture and doctrine developed in several closely related literary languages of ancient India, especially in Pali and Sanskrit. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Buddhism>. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

During the “Han Dynasty”¹⁴⁶ in China (206 BCE–220 CE), Buddhism was adopted and began consolidating as one of the main religions in Chinese territories. Later, due to the socio-political influence of Chinese monarchical houses, migrations, and economic and cultural exchanges, Buddhism spread to what we now know as Tibet, Vietnam, Mongolia, and Korea.¹⁴⁷

Joshua Frydman notes that Buddhism arrived in Japan during the 6th century CE, driven by the influence of the Korean kingdom of “Baekje.”¹⁴⁸ Upon reaching China, Buddhism adapted to local realities, integrating with the traditions of Central and Eastern Asia. Despite variations, all Buddhist schools share the doctrines of “Siddhartha Gautama”¹⁴⁹ and the study of the “Sutras,”¹⁵⁰ ancient sacred

146 “The Han dynasty”, the second great imperial dynasty of China (206 BCE–220 CE), after the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE), succeeded the Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE). So thoroughly did the Han dynasty establish what was thereafter considered Chinese culture that “Han” became the Chinese word denoting someone who is ethnically Chinese. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Silk-Road-trade-route>. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

147 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

148 “Baekje”: One of three kingdoms into which ancient Korea was divided before 660. Occupying the southwestern tip of the Korean peninsula, Baekje is traditionally said to have been founded in 18 BCE in the Gwangju area by a legendary leader named Onjo. By the 3rd century CE, during the reign of King Koi (234–286), Baekje emerged as a fully developed kingdom. By the reign of King Geonchogo (346–375), it had established control over a region that included the whole Han River basin in central Korea. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Baekje>. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

149 “Siddhartha Gautama,” or “Buddha” (born c. 6th–4th century BCE, Lumbini, near Kapilavastu, Shakya republic, Kosala kingdom [now in Nepal]—died in Kusinara, Malla republic, Magadha kingdom [now Kasia, India]), was the founder of Buddhism, one of the major religions and philosophical systems of South and East Asia, as well as the world. Buddha is one of many epithets of a teacher who lived in northern India sometime between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Buddha-founder-of-Buddhism>. Accessed on August 28, 2024.

150 “Sutra,” in Hinduism, is a short and aphoristic composition; in Bu-Aitías. *Revista de Estudios Filosóficos*.

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texts of philosophy and religious law. During this adaptation process, new texts such as the “Lotus Sutra”¹⁵¹ emerged, introducing the idea of “Skillful Means,”¹⁵² suggesting that enlightenment could be achieved in a single lifetime rather than through multiple reincarnations. These doctrine adaptations gave rise to what we know today as “Mahayana Buddhism.”¹⁵³

On Mahayana Buddhism, Joshua Frydman comments:

ddhism, it is a more extensive exposition, forming the basic scriptures of the Theravada (Way of the Elders) and Mahayana (Great Vehicle) traditions. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sutra>. Accessed on August 29, 2024.

151 “The Lotus Sutra” (“Sutra of the Lotus of the Good Law [or True Doctrine]”) is one of the earliest Mahāyāna Buddhist texts, revered as the essence of truth by the Japanese Tendai sect (T’ien-t’ai in Chinese) and Nichiren sect. The Lotus Sutra is regarded by many others as a religious classic of great beauty and power, and one of the most important and popular works in the Mahāyāna tradition, the predominant form of Buddhism in East Asia. The title refers to the lotus plant, particularly the sacred lotus, whose large, elevated, widespread, and beautiful flower blooms above the murky waters of its roots. The lotus is sacred in both Hinduism and Buddhism and was used in ancient Egypt to represent rebirth. In China, the text is called Miao-fa lien-hua ching or Fa-hua Ching, and in Japan, Myōhō renga kyō or Hokekyō. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lotus-Sutra>. Accessed on August 29, 2024.

152 “Skillful Means” (upaya-kausalya) refers to the ability of an enlightened person to adapt their message to a specific audience. The concept emerged in Buddhist texts such as the Lotus Sutra, written hundreds of years after the beginning of Buddhism, but it also characterizes the dialogue and teaching style of the historical Buddha. Today, teachers may use skillful means to impart the correct teaching to a student in the most effective way. <https://tricycle.org/beginners/buddhism/skillful-means/>. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

153 “Mahayana Buddhism,” a movement that emerged within Indian Buddhism around the beginning of the Common Era and, by the 9th century, had become the dominant influence in the Buddhist cultures of Central and East Asia. At one point, it also spread to Southeast Asia, including Myanmar (Burma) and Sri Lanka, but it has not survived there. The movement is characterized by a grand cosmology, often complex ritualism, paradoxical metaphysics, and a universal ethic. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mahayana>. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

...Buddhism does not technically present its own gods; instead, the religion teaches that even gods are bound within the ‘world of desire,’ as the universe is termed, and are therefore subject to the cycle of rebirth... The gods of most religions can be absorbed into the Buddhist worldview, as they are limited beings bound by their existence, while Buddhas, figures who have achieved enlightenment, transcend existence itself.¹⁵⁴

This type of Buddhism was adopted in Japan, and worship temples called “Tera” or “Jiin” were constructed. These temples were primarily managed by male priests, though priestesses or nuns, known as “Ama,”¹⁵⁵ were also present. Initially, like Catholic priests, these priests lived devoted to Buddha’s teachings and took vows of chastity. However, after the “Meiji Restoration”¹⁵⁶ In 1872, the government allowed Buddhist clergy to marry, enabling temples to be passed down through family lineage—a practice that continues today.¹⁵⁷

Unlike Shintoism, Buddhism arrived in Japan with a long history, numerous written texts, and complex moral

154 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

155 An “Ama” is an unmarried woman over the age of 20 or a woman who becomes a priestess after the period of Shamini (a Buddhist novice), even if she has been married. She is also called a Bikuni. In some cases, a Christian nun is also referred to as Ama. [https://www.japanesewiki.com/Buddhism/Ama%20\(nun\).html](https://www.japanesewiki.com/Buddhism/Ama%20(nun).html). Accessed on August 30, 2024.

156 The Meiji Restoration, in Japanese history, was the political revolution of 1868 that led to the final fall of the Tokugawa shogunate (military government), ending the Edo (Tokugawa) period (1603–1867) and, at least nominally, restoring the country’s control to direct imperial rule under Mutsuhito (the Meiji Emperor). In a broader context, however, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 came to be identified with the subsequent era of significant political, economic, and social changes: the Meiji period (1868–1912), which ushered in the modernization and Westernization of the country. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Meiji-Restoration>. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

157 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

philosophies. Buddhism also differs from Shintoism in actively addressing deeper philosophical questions, such as the nature of good and evil or humanity's place in the universe. Each Buddhist school, including those that developed in Japan, further refined their philosophies and faith.¹⁵⁸

Buddhism in Japan blended relatively easily with the Shinto Kami within its system. Both religions coexisted without difficulty and eventually merged. Regarding the fusion of Buddhism and Shintoism, Katherine Buljan and Carole M. Cusack note in their book *Anime, Religion, and Spirituality* (McFarland, 2015) that between the 8th and 11th centuries, Shintoism and Buddhism came closer through the concept of “Shinbutsu Shūgō,” an emerging doctrine of coalescence that linked Kami with “Buddhas” and “Bodhisattvas.”¹⁵⁹

From the perspective of Kami in Buddhism, Kuroda Toshio, in his essay “Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion” (*Journal of Japanese Studies*, 1981), describes:

...The kami realize that they themselves are trapped in this world of samsara and transmigration, and also seek liberation through Buddhist teachings... The kami are benevolent deities who protect Buddhism... The kami are manifestations of Buddhas who have revealed themselves in Japan to save all sentient beings (*honji suijaku*)... The kami are the pure spirits of the Buddhas.¹⁶⁰

158 Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

159 Katherine Buljan y Carole M. Cusack, *Anime, Religion and Spirituality: Profane and Sacred Worlds in Contemporary Japan* (Bristol, UK: Equinox Publishing, 2015), 65

160 Kuroda Toshio, “Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 7, no. 1 (1981): 1-21.

Buddhism complemented Japanese morality and imagination, forming, along with Confucianism and Japanese folklore, a hybrid religion (Shinbutsu-Shūgō)¹⁶¹ that promotes harmony with nature, spiritual purity, compassion, and respect for hierarchies. Those individuals or spirits who fail to follow this philosophy are destined to become “Oni”¹⁶², “Yūrei”¹⁶³, or “Yōkai”¹⁶⁴, malevolent entities that cause harm and misfortune. In Buddhist

161 Shinbutsu Shūgō | Shintō-Buddhism, Syncretism, Syncretic Practices. “Encyclopedia Britannica”, July 20, 1998. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shinbutsu-shugo>.

162 “Oni”, in Japanese folklore, are a type of demonic creature often described as being of giant size, possessing great strength, and having a fearsome appearance. They are generally considered to have foreign origins, possibly introduced into Japan from China along with Buddhism. Though cruel and malicious, oni can nevertheless be converted to Buddhism. While oni have been depicted in various forms in Japanese legend and art, including sometimes as women, they are characteristically envisioned as pink, red, or blue-grey in color, with horns, three toes, three fingers, and occasionally three eyes.

163 Ghosts (Obake or Yurei) appear in ancient Japanese folklore and literature, usually in moral tales designed to both warn and entertain, but they were also an important element of ancestor worship. If the deceased members of a family were not honoured, they could bring havoc to the daily lives of those who had forgotten them. There was not much one could do to avoid ghosts, demons, and goblins, and the only safeguard against harm was prayer or relying on the protection of the Shinto gods or Buddha. Still, these spirits are not always evil, and their powers can be negated; sometimes they can even be converted to do good if subjected to the proper spells and rituals. <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1059/ghosts-in-ancient-japan/>. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

164 Yōkai (妖怪) are creatures and phenomena of Japanese folklore, including spirits, monsters, and just about all things supernatural. The word is derived from the kanji 妖 (yō in this context) meaning attractive, bewitching, or calamity, and 怪 (kai in this context) meaning mystery or wonder. There is much debate as to what constitutes yōkai in Japanese tradition, as it is a broad and vague term with no real English translation, but most creatures and phenomena in the supernatural realm constitute yōkai in Japanese folklore. This includes ghosts, deities, demons, transformed animal spirits, spirit possession (as in *The Tale of Genji*), and general strange phenomena. Some yōkai even supernaturally appear to forewarn of doom or impending events. The yōkai Amabie (アマビエ) is one example of such a creature. <https://japanhouse.illinois.edu/education/insights/amabie>. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

adaptations, both humans and Kami, who fail to escape the cycle of reincarnation due to impurity, may degenerate into demons or impure spirits.

Since then, much Japanese art, architecture, literature, design, and philosophy has drawn content and inspiration from these two religions' philosophical, moral, and aesthetic fusion. In the case of anime, this is evident in countless representations where narratives and stories commonly depict the search for enlightenment, the struggle between good and evil, or the dichotomy between pure beings and the impure.

An example of this is observed in character transformations, where, through prayer-like positions, they invoke a spirit, planet, or deity. Often, heroines undergo a metamorphosis driven by "Enlightenment,"¹⁶⁵ granting them powers that transform their bodies, features, attire, and aura. This transformation enables them to acquire special abilities, achieved upon reaching a state of enlightenment, allowing them to purify or "De-demonize" their opponents, who are often humans or spirits deviating from the path of good.

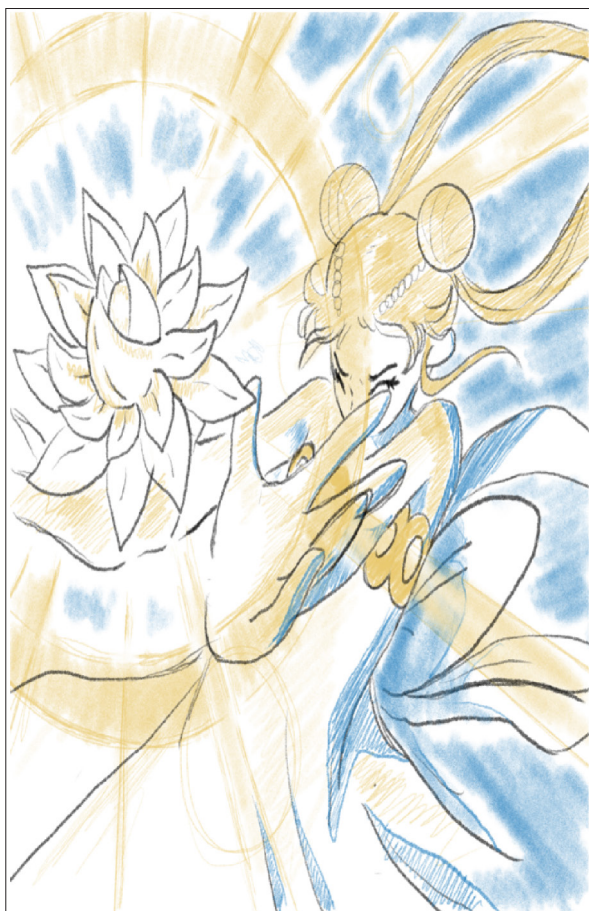
In "Sailor Moon", Serena, a reincarnation of the moon goddess, not only purifies malevolent or impure spirits with her powers but frequently delivers speeches such as "I am a warrior who fights for love and justice!" or phrases like "...We must always fight for what is right, no matter how hard it is..."¹⁶⁶ These statements reflect values deeply

165 Bodhi (Sanskrit and Pali: "awakening," "enlightenment") in Buddhism refers to the ultimate Enlightenment, which ends the cycle of transmigration and leads to Nirvāṇa, or spiritual liberation. This experience is comparable to Satori in Zen Buddhism in Japan. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/bodhi-Buddhism>. Accessed on August 30, 2024

166 Sailor Moon. Toei Animation, 1992. "We must always fight for what is
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rooted in Shinto and Buddhist beliefs. Ultimately, the heroine, though not explicitly, acts as a Kami under Shinto-Buddhist precepts, striving for personal enlightenment and the world's balance and prosperity.

Imagen 5. “Fan Art” illustration of a scene from “*Sailor Moon*” where “*Usagi*,” using her powers, performs a ritual resembling a Shinto-Buddhist exorcism to purify an opponent



Fuente: Fan art, Octavio Luna.

right, no matter how difficult it is.”

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Another anime that Shows the influence of Shinto-Buddhist is “Demon Slayer” (Kimetsu no Yaiba, Ufotable, 2019)¹⁶⁷. The plot details the struggle between humanity and demons (Oni), which have plagued Japanese society for centuries. The characters known as the “Hashira”¹⁶⁸ or “Pillars” — characters often embodying virtues such as sacrifice, obedience, discipline, harmony, and the pursuit of spiritual purity. The protagonist, “Tanjiro Kamado”¹⁶⁹, endures the loss of his mother and most of his siblings, with his sister “Nezuko Kamado”¹⁷⁰ transformed into a demon.

Throughout the series, Tanjiro and his companions — “Zenitsu Agatsuma”¹⁷¹, whose immense electrifying

167 The “Demon Slayer” franchise revolves around the story of Tanjiro Kamado, a young man in 1910s Japan. One day, upon returning home, he discovers that his family has been massacred by demons. The only survivor is his sister Nezuko, who has been transformed into a demon, similar to how vampires turn their victims. The animated series, produced by Ufotable, premiered in 2019. Bruce Winkelman, “Demon Slayer: Pop Religion and Japanese Anime,” <https://martycenter.org/sightings/demon-slayer-pop-religion-and-japanese-anime>. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

168 The “Hashira” or “Pillars” is the highest rank that Demon Slayers can achieve within the Demon Slayer Corps. Those who hold this position are considered the most powerful and skilled fighters, responsible for confronting the most dangerous threats that cannot be handled by other slayers. <https://kimetsu-no-yaiba.fandom.com/wiki/Hashira>. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

169 “Tanjiro Kamado” (竈門 炭治郎, Kamado Tanjirō) is the main protagonist of Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba. He is a Demon Slayer in the Demon Slayer Corps, having joined with the goal of finding a cure to turn his sister, Nezuko, back into a human and to hunt and kill demons. He later vowed to defeat Muzan Kibutsuji, the Demon King, to prevent others from suffering the same fate as his family. https://kimetsu-no-yaiba.fandom.com/wiki/Tanjiro_Kamado?so=search. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

170 “Nezuko Kamado” (竈門 禰豆子, Kamado Nezuko) is the deuteragonist of Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba. She is a demon and the younger sister of Tanjiro Kamado, being one of the two sole survivors of the Kamado family. Formerly human, she was attacked and transformed into a demon by Muzan Kibutsuji. https://kimetsu-no-yaiba.fandom.com/wiki/Nezuko_Kamado. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

171 “Zenitsu Agatsuma” (我妻 善逸, Agatsuma Zen'itsu) is one of the main

power manifests when asleep, and “Inosuke Hashibira”¹⁷², a fierce warrior wearing a boar’s head— learn combat techniques, meditation, breathing, and elemental movements. These are comparable to Siddhartha Buddha’s path, who, through learning, pain, and sacrifice, achieves enlightenment of the soul.

The Anime incorporates Shinto and Buddhist references, such as “Kagaya Ubuyashiki”¹⁷³, evoking the figure of a Shinto-Buddhist priest and demons called “Oni,” inspired by Japanese Buddhist mythology. “Muzan Kibutsuji”¹⁷⁴, the main villain is comparable to a “Mara.” Muzan represents a human who has betrayed the rules of harmony and goodness, becoming the first demon and embodying desire, power, and death, akin to Mara, who attempted to divert Buddha from enlightenment.

characters in Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba and, along with Inosuke Hashibira, is a traveling companion of Tanjiro and Nezuko Kamado. He is also a Demon Slayer in the Demon Slayer Corps. https://kimetsu-no-yaiba.fandom.com/wiki/Zenitsu_Agatsuma. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

172 “Inosuke Hashibira” is one of the main characters in Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba and, along with Zenitsu Agatsuma, is a traveling companion of Tanjiro and Nezuko Kamado. He is also a Demon Slayer in the Demon Slayer Corps. https://kimetsu-no-yaiba.fandom.com/wiki/Inosuke_Hashibira. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

173 Kagaya Ubuyashiki (産屋敷 耀哉, Ubuyashiki Kagaya) was a major supporting character in Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba. He was the 97th leader of the Demon Slayer Corps, known mainly as Oyakata-sama (お館様, lit. “Master”) by his subordinates and peers, and was also the head of the Ubuyashiki Family. https://kimetsu-no-yaiba.fandom.com/wiki/Kagaya_Ubuyashiki. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

174 “Muzan Kibutsuji” (鬼舞辻 無惨, Kibutsuji Muzan) is the main antagonist of Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba. He is the Demon King, the progenitor of all other demons, and the leader of the Twelve Kizuki, an organization composed of the twelve most powerful demons under his command. A thousand years ago, during the Heian era, Muzan was transformed into a demon due to an experimental treatment for his terminal illness, and since then, he has sought immortality. https://kimetsu-no-yaiba.fandom.com/wiki/Muzan_Kibutsuji. Accessed on August 30, 2024.

Conclusion

Japanese anime, video games, and entertainment media, often misconceived as mere recreations, transcend simplistic categorizations to emerge as profound narrative art forms meshed with layers of history, philosophy, folklore, and cultural hybridity. Experts like Patrick Macias and Samuel Sattin emphasize the unique ability of these mediums to blend traditional elements with experimental storytelling, crafting narratives that are universally relatable and deeply rooted in cultural specificity. These creative expressions entertain and bridge the past and present, offering audiences worldwide a window into Japan's rich heritage and moral frameworks.

In a hypermodern world increasingly detached from its cultural roots, the global appeal of Japanese entertainment highlights its dual role as a source of visual spectacle and a preserver of ancestral knowledge. Transformations, elemental powers, and mythical creatures in stories like *Sailor Moon*, *Dragon Ball Z*, and *Demon Slayer* resonate with universal themes while drawing deeply from ancient traditions. Serena Tsukino's transformation mirrors the Shinto-Buddhist pursuit of purity and harmony, while the loyalty and honor of Saint Seiya's Bronze Saints embody Confucian ideals. Similarly, *Demon Slayer* reflects Buddhist and Shinto philosophies, with Tanjiro Kamado's spiritual journey symbolizing enlightenment and balance, while the Hashira embodies virtues tied to elemental and spiritual forces.

Studio Ghibli's films, such as "*Princess Mononoke*" and "*Spirited Away*", further illustrate the integration of Japanese animism and Shinto beliefs. The Kodama (tree spirits) in "*Princess Mononoke*" symbolize harmony with nature. At the same time, Chihiro's transformation in

Spirited Away encapsulates a spiritual journey of growth and purification, emphasizing the interconnectedness of humanity and the environment. The bear worship of the Ainu, embodying their reverence for Kamuy, parallels these representations, highlighting the universality of spiritual connection in Japanese narratives.

These narratives incorporate Japanese Animism, Shinto rituals, Confucian ethics, and Buddhist philosophies into Hypermodern storytelling. Video games like “The Legend of Zelda”, *Ōkami*, and *Final Fantasy* expand these traditions into interactive experiences. In *Final Fantasy VII*, Aerith’s connection to the “Lifestream,” a flow of life energy sustaining the planet, echoes animistic beliefs about humanity’s connection to nature and the spiritual world. The series frequently integrates summonable entities resembling kami or gods, such as Ifrit and Shiva, symbolizing elemental forces and spiritual guardianship, reinforcing the symbiosis between humans and the spiritual realm.

Understanding these cultural influences deepens our appreciation of anime, video games, and their characters. The persistent presence of Ainu animistic spirituality, Shinto values, and Confucian moral codes shapes the struggles and triumphs of these characters. For example, Goku’s Genkidama in *Dragon Ball Z*, which channels energy from all living beings, or Ash Ketchum’s partnership with Pikachu in *Pokemon* reflect humanity’s symbiotic relationship with nature and the spiritual world—concepts central to Japanese cosmogony.

Even as these traditions adapt to contemporary sensibilities, they serve as vessels for transmitting ancient wisdom. By engaging with these narratives, audiences worldwide connect with enduring values such as honor, harmony, and the interplay of good and evil. This

continuity displays how these narratives, rooted in Japan's diverse cosmogonies, enhance Japanese culture and global storytelling.

Japanese anime, video games, and other entertainment media are not just products of creative imagination but cultural artifacts that bridge ancient and modern worlds. By preserving and transmitting these ancestral traditions, they ensure that the spiritual and philosophical DNA of one of the world's oldest civilizations remains alive and relevant. As we delve into these stories, we resist superficial interpretations, appreciating their depth and avoiding the erasure of vital cultural memory.

This enduring legacy reveals the profound significance of cultural heritage in shaping visual and narrative language worldwide. Understanding these timeless narratives unlocks deeper connections to the characters and the cultures they represent. The choices and dilemmas of these characters, shaped by ancient moral and spiritual codes, echo through globalized media, influencing even our perceptions and values. Recognizing this, we honor the profound impact of Japanese cosmogonies and traditions, which continue to enrich and redefine our shared visual and moral landscapes.

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