

The ethnographic theme our group chose to explore was whether Japanese people believe in urban legends. Our group, consisting of Abigail, Amian, Andres, and Tristan, decided to collect data by researching Japanese residents in Nagoya. We began with a series of interviews at Mirai Tower in the Sakae district. While the interviews provided valuable perspectives, we felt that a survey would enable us to gather more comprehensive data for a compelling documentary. We collected responses from 14 Japanese individuals, deepening our understanding of the topic. Our findings revealed an even split between those who believe in urban legends and those who do not. However, even among those who claimed not to believe, a majority expressed reluctance to visit areas associated with urban legends or live in houses where people had previously died. This suggests that while explicit belief in urban legends may be divided, the cultural and psychological impact of these stories remains strong. People, regardless of their stated beliefs, tend to avoid potential interactions with the supernatural, reflecting a deep-seated respect for and fear of the unknown. These insights underline how urban legends and traditional beliefs continue to influence behavior and attitudes in contemporary Japan.

The documentary explores how urban legends function as a form of cultural expression, reflecting societal fears, values, and norms. It suggests that these legends serve as a means of coping with the unknown and the inexplicable, thus maintaining a cultural continuity. The findings indicate that belief in urban legends is not just a matter of superstition but is deeply embedded in the social fabric. The reluctance to engage with places associated with urban legends, despite a lack of explicit belief, underscores the power of societal norms and the influence of collective belief on individual actions. The study suggests a psychological dimension where fear of the unknown or the supernatural influences behavior. This aligns with theories of cognitive dissonance, where individuals might act contrary to their stated beliefs due to underlying psychological influences. Developing a survey that effectively captures nuanced beliefs about urban legends involved learning how to design questions that are both clear and unbiased. Capturing high-quality footage required mastering the use of cameras, understanding lighting, and framing shots. This skill is crucial for ensuring that the visual elements of the documentary are engaging and professional. Post-production skills such as video editing were essential for assembling the footage into a coherent narrative. Crafting a compelling narrative from the collected data and interviews required understanding the principles of storytelling.

## **Documentary Components**

### **Introduction**

From ancient myths to modern tales, the fascination with the supernatural is deeply embedded in Japanese society. From manga and anime to movies and literature, the common theme of the supernatural would lead many people to believe that these figures are integral to Japanese society. Japanese mythology is replete with supernatural beings known as yokai, kami and oni. Iconography of each can be seen represented around various temples and shrines all over Japan. The prevalence of supernatural themes in Japanese media reflects a broader societal integration of these concepts. Festivals such as Obon honor the spirits of ancestors, while local legends and ghost stories are passed down through generations. The supernatural is not just a source of fear but also a way to understand the world and convey cultural values.

### **Manga**

From an outside perspective urban legends and myths seem to have more relevance in modern Japanese society than they did in the past. Imagery of Ayakashi and stories of legends are pervasive in modern Japanese media. Manga, the unique Japanese comic book art form, is a powerful medium for supernatural storytelling. Artists like Junji Ito have mastered the art of unsettling imagery and psychological horror, drawing inspiration from ancient legends and ghost stories. Manga such as 'Uzumaki' and 'Tomie' delve into themes of obsession, transformation, and revenge, echoing traditional tales of vengeful spirits.

### **Anime**

Anime echoes the themes and imagery of manga in regards to urban legends and myths. Jujutsu Kaisen the story of a highschool student who becomes entangled with a curse personified is based off a character in one of the oldest texts of Japanese history the Nihon Shoki. Along with series such as Yu Yu Hakusho and Bleach, supernatural elements drawn from folklore interact with characters in a modern day setting. These stories often depict characters interacting with spirits, gods and demons, highlighting the cultural significance of these entities in modern storytelling.

### **Movies**

Japanese urban legends and horror have moved beyond the boundaries of the island and become mainstream in Hollywood with films like 'The Ring' and 'The Grudge.' The influx of Japanese horror and legends is vastly different from how horror is approached in the West. Both 'The Ring' and 'The Grudge' adapt the concept of Yurei, a type of ghost from Japanese folklore,

infusing their traditional imagery into a modern setting. Another chilling example of Japanese urban legends is the Howling Tunnel, a story deeply embedded in local folklore yet resonant with the same haunting quality found in mainstream Japanese horror. The legend tells of a tunnel where the cries of a young girl, who met a tragic end there, can still be heard echoing through the darkness. This story, like many others, blends the supernatural with real-world locations, creating a tangible sense of dread. The Howling Tunnel legend shares the same thematic elements as other iconic Japanese horror stories. It embodies the cultural significance of spirits bound to specific places due to unresolved grievances or violent deaths. These themes are prevalent in many Japanese ghost stories and underscore the belief in the lingering presence of spirits in the physical world.

## **Video Games**

Video Games in Japan are fraught with characters and stories representing many urban legends and myths. Games such as Resident Evil VIII have a character representing the urban legend of the Hachishakusama or the eight foot lady. Additionally, titles like Fatal Frame and PT incorporate elements of traditional Japanese horror, allowing players to interact with yokai and other supernatural beings in immersive, eerie environments. These games not only entertain but also serve as a medium through which Japanese folklore and urban legends continue to thrive and evolve, reaching a global audience.

## **News Stories**

Urban legends in Japan recently gained global attention in 2022 when the famous "Killing Stone" (Sessho-seki) broke. According to legend, the stone contained the spirit of Tamamo-no-Mae, a beautiful woman who was actually a nine-tailed fox demon in disguise. The stone's breaking was seen by many as an ominous sign, rekindling interest in this ancient legend and reminding the world of the pervasive influence of supernatural stories in Japan. This event underscored how deeply ingrained these myths are in Japanese culture and how they continue to resonate with people even in modern times, captivating a global audience with their mysterious and eerie allure.

## **Conclusion and Question**

Many of the vengeful spirits and ghosts come from legends of the past but still have relevance and influence on modern-day society. So, we ask the question: do modern Japanese people still believe in myths and legends of the past, and do they influence the urban legends of today?

## **Interview/ Survey Findings**

While surveying residents in the Aichi prefecture, it was found that belief in urban legends is

evenly split, with half the people interviewed believing in them and the other half not. However, when asked if they would visit areas associated with urban legends or live in a house where people had previously died, the majority indicated they would avoid these places.

We also asked about how urban legends reflect or influence traditional Japanese beliefs and values, and here were some of the responses:

- Japan is a polytheistic country so I feel like urban legends helps people to believe more in their different Gods. We could also say that those urban legends are some kind of reflection of traditional Japanese polytheism.
- Urban legends often incorporate elements of Shinto and Buddhism, featuring spirits, yokai and sacred place.
- They promote the value of not doing bad things.
- I think Japanese urban legends such as ghosts reflect Japanese culture and traditions.  
Examples: Zashiki Warashiya, Okiku-san

## **Conclusion**

The survey results from Aichi prefecture highlight a fascinating aspect of Japanese culture: the persistent influence of urban legends and supernatural beliefs, even in modern society. Despite an even split in belief in these legends, a significant majority of people still choose to avoid locations associated with such stories. This indicates that, whether or not individuals explicitly believe in the supernatural, these legends exert a strong cultural and psychological impact. The reluctance to visit or live in these places reflects the religious values of Japan, as well as the deep-seated respect for and fear of the unknown, illustrating how urban legends and traditional beliefs continue to shape behavior and attitudes in contemporary Japan.

## [Survey Responses](#)

