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Japanese Mythology in Film: A Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime

Yoshiko Okuyama
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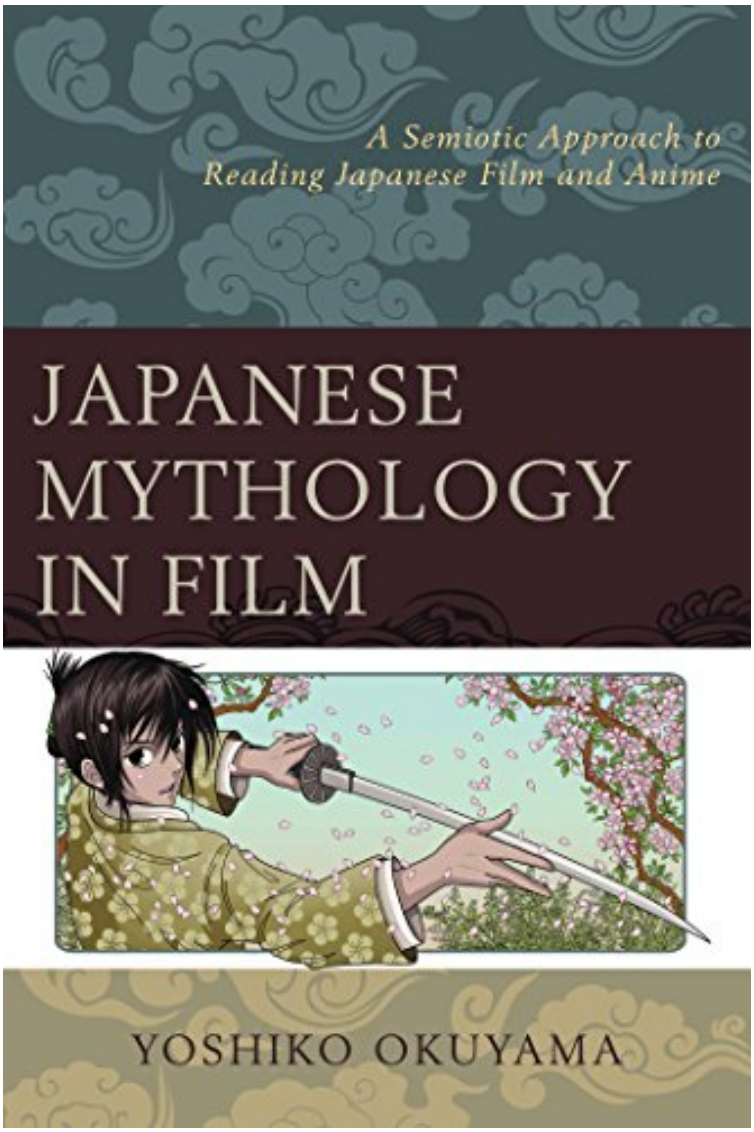

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Yoshiko Okuyama : Japanese Mythology in Film: A Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Japanese Mythology in Film: A Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime:

A cyborg detective hunts for a malfunctioning sex doll that turns itself into a killing machine. A Heian-era Taoist slays

evil spirits with magic spells from yin-yang philosophy. A young mortician carefully prepares bodies for their journey to the afterlife. A teenage girl drinks a cup of life-giving sake, not knowing its irreversible transformative power. These are scenes from the visually enticing, spiritually eclectic media of Japanese movies and anime. The narratives of courageous heroes and heroines and the myths and legends of deities and their abodes are not just recurring motifs of the cinematic fantasy world. They are pop culturersquo;s representations of sacred subtexts in Japan. Japanese Mythology in Film takes a semiotic approach to uncovering such religious and folkloric tropes and subtexts embedded in popular Japanese movies and anime.Part I introduces film semiotics with plain definitions of terminology. Through familiar cinematic examples, it emphasizes the myth-making nature of modern-day film and argues that semiotics can be used as a theoretical tool for reading film. Part II presents case studies of eight popular Japanese films as models of semiotic analysis. While discussing each filmrsquo;s use of common mythological motifs such as death and rebirth, its case study also unveils more covert cultural signifiers and folktale motifs, including jizo (a savior of sentient beings) and kori (bewitching foxes and raccoon dogs), hidden in the Japanese filmic text.

Okuyama's work...will be more accessible to readers unfamiliar with Japanese culture.... This guide is intended to provide basic teaching material for undergraduates, but it is also helpful for scholars approaching film and anime from a social science or folkloristic perspective. (Journal of American Folklore)A superb analysis of the relations between Japanese mythology, religion and folklore that will be of great value to anyone interested in Japanese culture and society. Using semiotic analysis, Okuyama offers readers a scholarly, yet accessibly written, study of Japanese films and anime such as Spirited Away, Princess Mononoke, and Departures. Highly recommended. (Arthur Asa Berger, San Francisco State University)Popular all over the world, anime are too often viewed only as part of globalized popular culture. Japanese Mythology in Film offers a much-needed interpretive method foregrounding these filmsrsquo; adaptation of culturally specific tropes from Japanese folktales, legends, and folk religious beliefs. Pedagogically suited to courses on fairy tales, myth, popular culture, and film as well as to Japanese language and culture courses, Okuyamarsquo;s book shows how film and anime make Japanese traditional values relevant to reimagining the relationship of humans and nature. (Cristina Bacchilega, University of Hawai'i at M?noa)In Japanese Mythology in Film: A Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime, Yoshiko Okuyama does a wonderful job of making theories of semiotics simple and easy to understand. Incorporating various current societal phenomena, Japanese Mythology in Film is an informative book for Japanese film and culture. (Noriko Reider, Miami University)This book introduces film semiotics and demonstrates its use as a theoretical tool for reading Japanese popular movies and anime. Using eight case studies, including well-known films by Miyazaki and Oshii, the author showcases each filmrsquo;s use of common mythological motifs such as death and rebirth while unveiling more covert cultural signifiers and folktale motifs encoded in the Japanese filmic text.About the AuthorYoshiko Okuyama is associate professor of Japanese studies at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo.