



Folk Legends from Tono: Japan's Spirits, Deities, and Phantastic Creatures

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Boldly illustrated and superbly translated, *Folk Legends from Tono* captures the spirit of Japanese peasant culture undergoing rapid transformation into the modern era. This is the first time these 299 tales have been published in English. Morse's insightful interpretation of the tales, his rich cultural annotations, and the evocative original illustrations make this book unforgettable.

In 2008, a companion volume of 118 tales was published by Rowman & Littlefield as the *The Legends of Tono*. Taken together, these two books have the same content (417 tales) as the Japanese language book *Tono monogatari*.

Reminiscent of Japanese woodblocks, the ink illustrations commissioned for the *Folk Legends from Tono*, mirror the imagery that Japanese villagers envisioned as they listened to a storyteller recite the tales. The stories capture the extraordinary experiences of real people in a singular folk community. The tales read like fiction but touch the core of human emotion and social psychology. Thus, the reader is taken on a magical tour through the psychic landscape of the Japanese “spirit world” that was a part of its oral folk tradition for hundreds of years.

All of this is made possible by the translator's insightful interpretation of the tales, his sensitive cultural annotations, and the visual charm of the book's illustrations. The cast of characters is rich and varied, as we encounter *yokai* monsters, shape-shifting foxes, witches, grave robbers, ghosts, heavenly princesses, roaming priests, shamans, quasi-human mountain spirits, murderers, and much more.

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Folk Legends from Tono: Japan's Spirits, Deities, and Phantastic Creatures From imusti Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #962735 in Books
- Brand: imusti
- Published on: 2015-06-11
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.96" h x .49" w x 6.05" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 170 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

The translation captures the tone of how Japanese tales are told beautifully, following in the tradition of Lafcadio Hearn. The tales aren't changed to suit an accepted Western narrative, which would detract from them. They are highly evocative, bringing to mind a vivid picture of the people, villages, and otherworldly beings, the Yokai, featured in the tales. . . . *Folk Legends of Tono* is enjoyable, and should be in the collection of any serious folklore aficionado. (*Fortean Times*)

Folk Legends from Tono takes the reader inside a land of superstition and pragmatism, farming and faith. The tales unravel in short vignettes, loosely grouped by myriad topics ranging from "Biology and Human Emotion" to "Survival on the Edge" . . . Although populated with fantastic creatures, the tales reveal many down-to-earth details about the values and priorities of rural life, and authentically illuminate a culture of the recent-past with simple but eloquent charm. . . . You don't have to be a *yokai* (mythical creature) fan to enjoy these tales of quiet humor and disquieting suspense; steep yourself in their simplicity and wisdom, and step into the ever-present past. (*Japan Times*)

Bound to please. . . . Read at a cafe or other brightly lit, crowded place so that you won't be spirited away. (*The Japan News*)

For folklorists, especially those interested in Japanese culture, this book is a delight to read. (*Journal of Folklore Research*)

Ron Morse has breathed fresh life into this remarkable collection of folk legends compiled some eighty years ago. Now, by re-envisioning the sequencing of the tales and intertwining insightful annotations into the text, Morse has restored the original mystical charm of the tales. The result is an inspiring journey through a Japanese spirit world that readers can use as a mirror for reflecting upon their own cultural universe of imagination. Thus, Morse as an 'interpreter of Japan' follows in the footsteps of not only Yanagita Kunio and Sasaki Kizen but also those of William Griffis and Lafcadio Hearn in his love and amazing comprehension of Japanese folklore.

(Makino Yoko, Seijo University, Tokyo)

The short tales assembled here are chock-full of ghosts, mountain deities, trickster foxes, master thieves, hunters, shamans, and all sorts of strange occurrences. But even as they overflow with the mysteries of rural life in early-twentieth-century Japan, they also provide a window into the everyday experiences of real people living through times of rapid change in the harsh but rich environment of northeastern Japan. These folk narratives are a vital record of a particular place and time, and this impeccable translation will become a vital resource for scholars of Japanese history, folklore, rural life, and for anybody interested in good stories. (Michael Dylan Foster, Indiana University)

At last, the world has complete access to these fascinating stories that have been passed down from generation to generation by the people of Tono. Morse is uniquely qualified to translate these stories because of his fine command of Japanese, his knowledge of Japanese folklore studies, and his personal familiarity with the Tono area. We need many more translations of this quality. (Minami Yaeko, granddaughter of Yanagita Kunio)

Dr. Morse has produced a beautiful book that captures the true spirit of Tono's traditional culture. The residents of Tono are very proud of their long tradition of folktale storytellers and equally proud of their local scholar Sasaki Kizen, who collected the tales in this book. We are delighted that readers outside of Japan can now enjoy these tales in English. (Honda Toshiaki, mayor of Tono City)

About the Author

Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962) was the founder of Japanese folklore studies. **Sasaki Kizen** (1886–1933) was a native of Tono and an avid collector of folk legends. Together they compiled and published *The Legends of Tono* in Japanese. **Ronald A. Morse** was Terasaki Professor of Japanese Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is currently a director of the Sangikyo Corporation.

Users Review

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