

## Popular beliefs and superstitions versus Buddhist values

What's the purpose of Japanese ghost stories?

- entertainment
- story usually has a moral

What are the characteristics of Japanese ghost stories? How do they differ from Western-style ghost stories?

- ghosts in Japanese tales seem more active in daily life; they seek people out for interactions. In Western stories, it's usually the living person who stumbles upon a ghost
- ghosts watch over the living, often either protecting them, seeking revenge, or requiring appeasement for some reason
- the boundary between the world of the living and world of the dead is less strict in Japanese tales. Ghosts are very much in the popular mindset/consciousness. (Ghosts are almost always related to Shinto beliefs).
- Ghosts usually have their own back-stories and concerns; they may have complicated personalities, and goals they're trying to achieve

In the tale, "How a Pilgrim to Hatuses Acquired Riches Through Kannon's Aid," the moral definitely seems to be learning how to give as well as receive (which the human character does only by the compassion of the bodhisattva, Kannon).

In the tale, "How an Impoverished Man's Deserted Wife Became the Spouse of the Governor of Settsu", the moral is that you should stay with your original spouse, and don't be too ambitious (similar to the moral we saw in *Ugetsu*).

There are also many tales involving monks; how do the tales portray the monks? (Are they ideal?)

- definitely not ideal; often thieves and perverts, in fact

In *Confessions of Lady Nijo*, how is court life portrayed?

- people are very concerned with rituals and societal niceties
- rituals are related to life events; marriage, birth, death
- marriage entails a whole web of social obligations
- artsy/rich social life: wine, music, poetry. In fact, it was considered almost a virtue to be a good poet; they had poetry contests, and it was a skill to be able to say the right poem at the right time (usually at times of deep emotion, or in place of love letters). People would say poems at religious moments, but also at banal ones; maybe they were trying too hard?

What values does Lady Nijo emphasize?

- family is really important
- importance of loss as showing the impermanence of things

Why does she become a nun?

- she wants to get away from the complications, obligations, and sadness of her social, worldly life. The Buddhist idea of freedom from attachment is appealing, as is the idea of focusing on the beauty of nature.

[Film: *Onibaba* by Shindo Kaneta]