



How Japanese Culture and Mythology Are Connected to **Nature**

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Even if you hide yourself from the world, don't lose sight of your real **nature**.

-Japanese Proverb

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Introduction

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A large part of Japanese culture and folklore revolves around nature because a substantial number of Japanese gods (kami) were created from objects of nature. This highlights that the significance of the natural world in the Japanese mind and beliefs has a sizable influence in the past and modern day of Japan. In Japanese myths, it is said that nature descended from the gods, which is evident in the creation myth. These connections cause Japanese people to regard nature highly and treat it with harmony, as they also feel a spiritual connection with it. This, along with other factors, largely influences how it impacts everyday life and culture spread throughout Japan.



Sakura Cherry Blossoms

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Cherry blossoms are an emblematic flower representing spring, expressing a time of restoration and improvement, and how life is quite short. This is because after around two weeks, the blossoms start to fall. Since the cherry blossoms can be portrayed as a cheerful and beautiful flower, it brings joy to that time of the season. In the midst of this special season in Japan, people enjoy having cherry blossom festivities and parties, called *Hanami*. This is a tradition dating back over many hundreds of years, and is enjoyed with snacks, drinks, and is a chance to bond and make new friends.



Clipped Bonsai Tree

Bonsai Trees

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The clipping of bonsai trees can be considered an art, and has been practiced over many centuries. Taking care of bonsai trees requires a lot of attention to be paid to everything relating to the tree itself. Certain care must be provided for it to survive and thrive. There are many symbolic representations of the bonsai tree, all having their own meaning, however some of the most common include harmony and balance. The bonsai tree exemplifies the relationship that exists between man and nature, which is something extremely important not only in Japanese culture, but also the mythology that is represented alongside it. The bonsai tree can further showcase this harmony due to the fact that a bonsai tree is like a tree out in the natural world.



Koi Fish

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In the country of Japan and in Japanese culture, koi can represent many good qualities. One of the things they are known for is swimming against currents and conquering challenging obstacles, symbolizing many things, such as patience, strength, motivation, and triumphing through persistence. Koi can also embody the characteristics of good luck and longevity, due to their lifespan, as well as peace because of the elegant way they move in the water. Koi can be found in many Japanese gardens, and koi ponds, as well as temples and shrines to ensure success and health for those who visit these sacred places. The concept of koi ties into mythology through the use of shrines and can act as a link to give people hope and positive karma, linking to different deities from Japanese myths.



Kumano Nachi Taisha Shrine

Shrines

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Some Shinto shrines are enclosed within the confines of nature, and provide a profound sense of a calm state of mind. These sacred places revere the spirits of the natural world. When about to enter a Shinto shrine, the guests are asked to wash themselves. This is a ritual done with nearly all shrines and is an act of purification out of a show of respect for the deities the shrine is dedicated to. People that go to the shrine to pay respects offer simple gifts of food, water and incense at the altar. Shinto can be seen as a spiritual way of life, not just a religion. The shrines can act as a link to those deities, which is only strengthened through the nature surrounding them and the natural world all around it. It is believed that some Japanese gods were born from certain aspects of nature, and the tradition of paying deep respects at shrines keeps those beliefs alive for many centuries.



Lotus Flower

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The lotus flower is a symbolic representation of many important values within Japan, spanning back centuries, relating to many gods and tales of creation. Buddhism is also a major religion within Japan, and the lotus flower is a big part of some of the beliefs the religion houses. The flower grows through mud under water then emerges above the surface and begins to float. Gods from Buddhist myths are enlightened beings who grew out of the mud of the natural world. Like the lotus, they can be considered pure, and above the beauty of mortals although they grew up in the midst of the “muddy” natural world just like the flower. The lotus is an eye catching, aromatic flower which embodies purity and enlightenment. Usually it can be located in ponds, shrines and temples in Japan during the summer, and is in close conjecture while helping with the purification process one needs to go through before entering one of the sacred shrines.



Sasakia Charonda (Great Purple Emperor)

Butterflies

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In Japanese culture, butterflies carry many symbolic meanings but are usually associated with the concepts of change and transformation for the better. They are also symbolic links to eternity, and the belief that a butterfly is the form that spirits of the dead adopt on their journey to the eternal afterlife. Another belief that is similar is that spirits of the dead are guided by butterflies to the afterlife along with taking the form of one. The meaning of butterflies run quite deep, and are considered to be powerful representations of life. Many cultures associate the butterfly with souls, connecting them to the cycles of death and rebirth. They are also thought of as a lucky charm in the midst of the cycles of change within one's life, as well as their personality.



Conclusion

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Japanese culture and their main values have a large relation to their deep, harmonious relationship with nature, and it would not be considered an exaggeration to say that it was one of the most important factors in establishing Japanese ideals, myths, and the foundation for many different areas of culture within the country. This can be shown through the connections with animals, plants, material objects, and other wildlife found through Japan, along with the mythological ties that are prevalent throughout all of their culture and beliefs. In Shinto beliefs, gods and deities exist everywhere, whether it be the land, sea, mountains, trees, birds, animals, people, etc. This alone proves that in Japan, culture and mythology are directly intertwined and linked with nature, wherever one decides to travel to in the beautiful country.

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