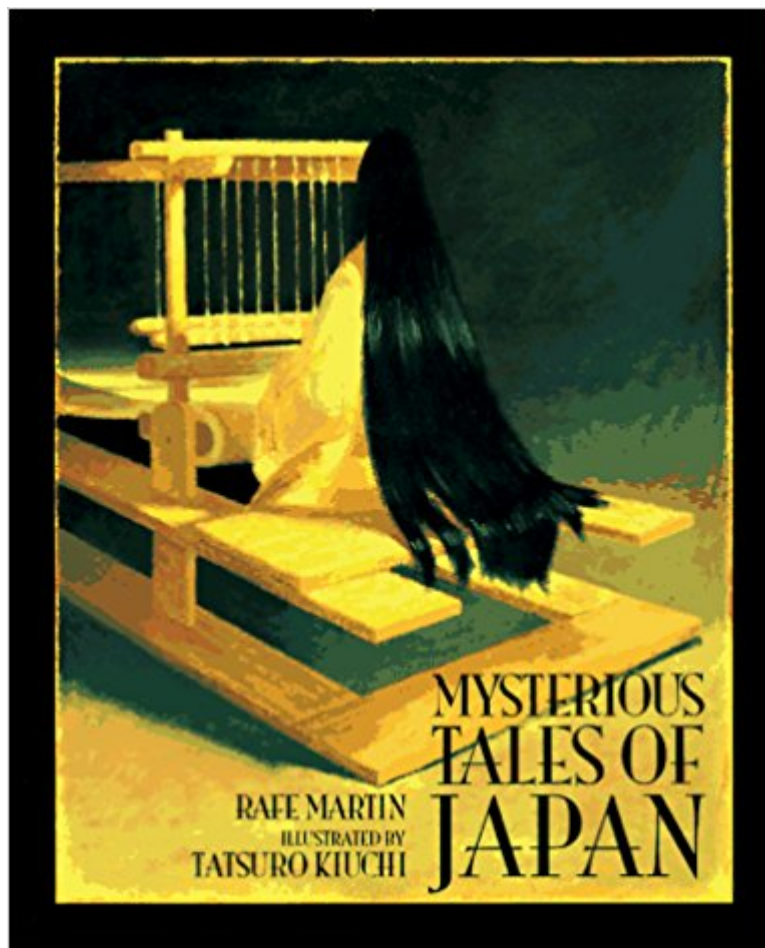


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Mysterious Tales Of Japan



Synopsis

A collection of favorite Japanese folktales draws readers into an eerie, beautiful world that is not so different from our own with such stories as the romantic "Green Willow" and the suspenseful "Ho-ichi the Earless."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Compared to their horror-laced Western cousins, these Japanese ghost tales "distill the essence of what is mysterious in life in order to remind us of the dreamlike-'ghostly,' if you will-reality of all things," writes Martin in his apt introduction. The 10 wonderfully, eerily told tales he shares here rely not on terror for impact, but on enigma, subtlety, moral implication and taut storytelling. For example, "Urashima Taro," identified in the source notes as perhaps the most popular Japanese folktale, takes as its hero a kind fisherman who stops boys from killing a sea turtle that is actually the Dragon King. Taro is rewarded with marriage to the King's beautiful daughter, on the Island Where Summer Never Dies; he thinks he has spent three years there, but in fact three centuries have elapsed before he tries to visit his home. Each story has a shivery ending, its resonance enhanced by Kiuchi's subtle oil paintings. Supplying one full-page illustration for each tale, Kiuchi eschews the supernatural elements in favor of depicting a seemingly ordinary moment in the narrative, in this way preserving its powerful ambiguities. Ages 8-up. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Grade 3-8?A collection of traditional stories, many of which were first introduced to the West by Lafcadio Hearn. Martin, who acknowledges his debt to Hearn in his introduction, excellent source notes, and bibliography, has retold "Urashima Taro," "Ho-ichi the Earless," "The Boy Who Drew Cats, " and seven other well-chosen tales in the lively voice of a talented storyteller. In a style honed and polished by years of telling, he introduces salient incidents and descriptions to reveal character and drive the narratives. The verbal imagery is even more compelling than the evocative paintings. One story in this collection appears in Eric Quayle's *The Shining Princess and other Japanese Legends* (Arcade, 1989), and none repeat selections in Yoko Kawashima Watkins's *Tales from the Bamboo Grove* (Bradbury, 1992). Shivery, mysterious, and cool as moonlight, these retellings respect both their sources and their audience, while doing what stories do best?entertain.?Margaret A. Chang, North Adams State College, MA Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

My daughter loves these stories. She's 11 and really enjoys the Japanese culture. She also loves short stories with a good moral. She said these are really sad.

Mysterious Tales of Japan is an excellent read-aloud. In the first tale, a poor kindhearted fisherman saves the life of a sea turtle, is whisked away to an enchanted island, and marries a beautiful princess. It is only when the hero realizes he never said goodbye to his parents, that we discover this happy tale is now a ghost story. The humble fisherman has been away 300 years. Clinching the deal is the beautiful lacquered box his bride gives him and tells him never to open. Ghosts and goblins also haunt the tales of "Hi-ichi the Earless," and "The Boy Who Drew Cats." And the mournful wife of the coldhearted samurai is "Black Hair" gets one last night of joy among the living and sad revenge. This books is like the lacquered box that the fisherman receives--you're afraid to open it--afraid what will happen--but you have to! The spirits you let out will leave you breathless as if you, yourself, have been whisked away to an enchanted isle in the middle of Japan. Great book, and by the way, the real lacquered box that belonged to the fisherman Urashima Taro is on display in a folk museum in Japan--but don't open it!

Most of the stories in *Mysterious Tales of Japan* were first recorded for Western readers by Lafcadio Hearn over a hundred years ago. Only Crane Maiden and Pine of Akoya are not based on Hearn's telling of the tales. Rafe Martin's collection is an excellent addition to Hearnian literature. Includes story notes detailing each story's origin. In Rafe Martin's introduction, he notes his interest in Japan and some aspects of Japanese culture. He mentions that "Hearn's work was based on old literary

collections, on the writings of Zen, on Buddhist and Shinto sources, and on the versions of the stories told to him by his Japanese wife and friends."There is a table of contents but the stories are not divided or ordered in any perceivable way. The illustrations by Tatsuro Kiuchi are not necessary, but they greatly enhance the stories. Before each tale there is a simple brush and ink illustration that illuminates the heart of the story. Each story also has a one page oil illustration. Some of the stories in this book also appeared in the classic Japanese movie Kwaidan. Those illustrations show a definite influence from the movie. I find Rafe Martin's retelling of the stories to be excellent.

Compared with other collections of Japanese folklore, they are more readable and maybe slightly embellished. My one minor peeve was that he chose to spell the Snow Woman's name Yuke (you-kay) instead of the proper Yuki (you-key) maybe in hopes of avoiding non-Japanese speakers mispronouncing her name as "Yucky."As many of these tales are ghost tales and there is some blood and gore, I think that they are suited for eight or nine years old and older. These stories are excellent read aloud, but are also enjoyable reading. The source notes detail the origin and sometimes wider history of the tales. Rafe Martin also mentions how he has changed the tales and sometimes mentions his experiences of telling the stories.

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