

*Center for Japanese Studies Seminar Series*  
*Co-sponsored by the Department of East Asian Languages & Literatures*

## **From Snakes to Dolls: Hidden Signifiers of Mythology in Japanese Movies and Anime**



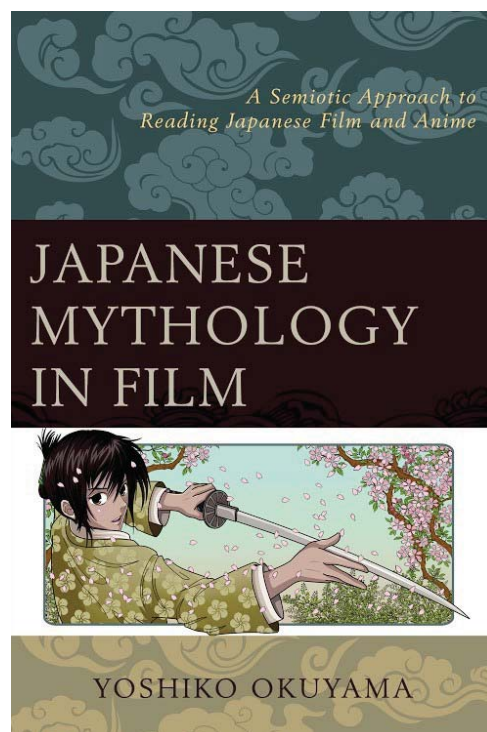
**Yoshiko Okuyama**

Associate Professor of Japanese Studies and Linguistics  
University of Hawai'i at Hilo

Many of us living in Hawai'i probably know what a ceramic figurine of *maneki-neko* (beckoning cat) or a drawing of the boat-riding *shichi-fukujin* (Seven Lucky Deities) symbolizes. But what about the pair of *komainu* stone statues typically seen at shrine entrances? Do you know what each statue, shaped slightly differently, signifies mythologically?

In watching Japanese movies and anime, we tend to miss ancient visual metaphors and narrative motifs hidden in the stories of heroes and heroines. Beyond the modern-day plotline, however, the cinematic fantasy world often presents the recurring ancient motifs of Japanese mythology. For instance, the snake is a Jōmon-era mythological signifier that appears in anime and manga. Myths and legends derived from century-old doll mythology are recycled in popular anime and film titles such as *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* and *Onmyoji*. In addition, *Dororo*, *Onmyoji II*, and other contemporary Japanese films are imbued with narrative motifs drawn from religious folktales of Jizo, Amaterasu, and *oni*. Using film clips, I will demonstrate such cases discussed in my book, *Japanese Mythology in Film: A Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime*. At the end of the presentation, I will show how the signifiers of the paired shrine statues are embedded in the narrative of anime using a *Mushi-shi* television episode.

*Japanese Mythology in Film: A Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime* is available in both hardcover and digital format on Amazon.



**Friday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015**  
**3:00 - 4:30 pm**  
**Moore Hall, Room 258**