



CONFÉRENCE

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With their roots in animism and Shintōism, Japan's mythical creatures known as 'yōkai' have been feared, revered, and used to explain calamities or inexplicable phenomena. Needless to say, in the early stages of the Covid-19 outbreak, very little was known about the origins of the virus, its potency, and how it could be prevented or treated effectively. Naturally, this threw most countries in the world into a state of confusion, and Japan was no exception. However, as opposed to seeking answers from conspiracy theories, Japan turned to Amabié(アマビエ)—a mermaid-like yōkai known for prophesizing either an impending epidemic or abundant harvest. While Amabié offers no explanation, advice or immediate help, it is believed that by recreating Amabié's image, people can defend themselves against illness. Whether it was simply a trend or inspired by hope is debatable, but countless artists, city councils, product manufacturers, and shrines around Japan took advantage of the myth and produced and promoted products with images of Amabié from early 2020. In this presentation I argue that the profit factor was a major incentive for shrines and businesses who invested in the trend. I will demonstrate this by drawing upon previous research on the commodification of religion while providing examples of the commodification of Amabié by local, corporate and religious organisations.

-- *Conférence tout public – en anglais*--

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Maison Universitaire France-Japon

42a, Avenue de la Forêt Noire à Strasbourg