PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY OLOMOUC

Faculty of Arts

Department of Asian Studies

MASTER THESIS

Analysis of *Onryō* and Its Adaptation to Modern Japanese Ghost Stories with Focus on Yamamura Sadako in the *Ring* Series by Suzuki Kōji

OLOMOUC 2024 Cordine Schmidt

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I hereby declare that I have written this master thesis independently under the supervision of Mgr. Sylva Martinásková PhD and that all the sources have been cited and acknowledged in the bibliography section of this paper.

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci zpracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem Mgr. Sylvy Martináskové, Ph.D., a použila jen prameny uvedené v seznamu bibliografických citací.

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Anotace

Tématem této diplomové práce je analýza japonských duchů (*júrei*/*onrjó*) vyskytujících se v japonském folklóru a jejich přizpůsobení japonským ducharským příběhům (*kaidan*) se zaměřením na Yamamuru Sadako z knižní trilogie *Kruh* napsané Suzukim Kódžim. Na základě mé specializace na japonskou literaturu a fascinace nadpřirozeným folklórem jsem se rozhodla analyzovat vývoj *kaidanu* a *júrei*/*onrjó* napříč japonskou historií, a jak se na konci 20. století objevili ve formě nového podžánru japonského hororu. Teoretická část této práce se zabývá jejich vznikem a vlivy a uvedenými příklady nejslavnějších ducharských příběhů, zatímco analytická část se zaměřuje na charakteristiku Yamamury Sadako—její fyzické, psychické a nadpřirozené charakteristiky. Tato práce neuvádí pouze komparaci modernizovaného ducha Sadako s tradiční představou japonských duchů, ale také analýzu toho, jak a proč se stala celosvětovým fenoménem nejen japonského hororu.

Klíčová slova: Yamamura Sadako, *júrei*, *onrjó*, duch, *Kruh*, *kaidan*, ducharský příběh, videokazeta, technologie, virus, adaptace

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Tímto bych ráda poděkovala vedoucí své diplomové práce Mgr. Sylvě Martináskové, Ph.D., za její cenné rady, podporu a trpělivost. Také bych chtěla poděkovat své rodině, partnerovi a přátelům za nesmírnou podporu během mého studia.

Děkuji.

Editorial's note

All Japanese words and names are written in the English transliteration using the modified Hepburn romanisation system as it is the most widely used form of transliteration in the world, including Japan. This includes the use of special characters, such as ā, ū, ō, indicating prolonged pronunciation of the vowel. The Czech transliteration is used only in the bibliography and in the footnotes for the Czech sources. Japanese names are written in the order of family name and given name (including footnotes and bibliography) as it is common in Japan; they are not written in cursive. Foreign words, with the exception of Japanese placenames that appear in standard English-language dictionaries, are written in cursive for better text clarity. First mentions of Japanese words in English transliteration are followed by their equivalent in Japanese in parentheses (in cases of titles also by their English translation) and then explained in the text or in the footnotes. Japanese words are not pluralised—their singular or plural meaning is determined by context.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The concept of afterlife is woven throughout cultures around the world regardless of religion and time period. As humans, we are capable of grasping the idea of our own mortality, which naturally raises the question of what follows next. But nobody knows what happens to the human soul (on the presumption that there is a soul to begin with) after death. In order to cope with such a premise, several different beliefs with various nuances appeared around the globe. Some religions, such as those of the Abrahamic tradition, believe that the souls of the dead rest in a specific place—heaven, hell, paradise, underworld, and so forth—which is determined by the corresponding god. Other religions, such as those of Dharmic tradition, believe that the soul goes through the system of reincarnation. Nonetheless, these are coping mechanisms that allow to lessen the grief from losing a loved one and also to alleviate the mental and emotional strain stemming from the awareness of one's mortality. But it also allows for the idea of the deceased returning in the form of a ghost. These beliefs are an inherent part of cultures worldwide; they have been debated in philosophical discourses and commonly used as themes in art and literature throughout centuries.

Japan has got a long tradition of ghosts and other supernatural entities. This thesis is primarily concerned with their incorporation into classic ghost stories—*kaidan* (怪談) and their adaptation for contemporary Japanese horror and modern audiences. There are several iconic Japanese ghosts and one of them aroused my curiosity because of how it managed to not only revive the "old-fashioned" *kaidan* but also create an entirely new subgenre and become a worldwide known phenomenon. It is the ghost of Yamamura Sadako from the novel trilogy *Ring* written by Suzuki Kōji (鈴木光司, born 1957). Outside of Japan, Suzuki is mostly known for his work within the ghost-story subgenre of Japanese horror, but in Japan, he is also known for his books concerning parenting. What I intend to research is what techniques he uses to achieve the evocation of such primordial fear of the supernatural in modern readers despite the story being set in the modern age of technology, science, and reason.

Following this introductory chapter that familiarises the reader with the contents and intentions, this thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter focuses on deeper analysis of *kaidan* and its development and popularisation in premodern Japan, providing examples of famous ghost stories and describing the literary-historical context. Then it analyses what impact the Western influences, such as literary styles and ideology, had on *kaidan* in the contemporary Japan and how *kaidan* gradually shifted into a new subgenre of Japanese horror.

The second chapter is concerned with supernatural entities in Japanese folklore—*yōkai* (妖怪)—but primarily Japanese ghosts—*yūrei* (幽霊, ghost) and *onryō* (怨霊, vengeful spirit). First, it briefly establishes the various terminology and the changing concept of *yōkai* over centuries, and then delves deeper into analysis of *yūrei*. This includes their mentality, beliefs why these spirits wish to return into the world of the living, their appearance such as clothes and hairstyles depicted in art, literature and theatre, exploring the symbolism of hair and combs, influences by Western ideologies, and the categories of *yūrei* whilst also presenting various examples throughout centuries.

The third chapter is the main analysis of this thesis. Whilst the previous two chapters encompass the general ideas of Japanese supernatural matters, this one narrows the focus on a specific *onryō* and her circumstances. First, it concisely introduces the plot of the three novels— *Ring*, *Spiral*, *Loop*—to the reader. This is important for understanding the context since the plot and characters of the better-known film adaptations differ from the original novels.

The analysis of Yamamura Sadako in greater detail follows next. The intention is to explore not only her characteristics—physical, mental, and psychic, and how she differs from traditional *onryō*, but also the possible inspirations behind her character creation by both fictional and non-fictional people. The former is a female servant called Okiku represented in many versions of the legend of *Sarayashiki* (皿屋敷, *The Dish Mansion*) and the latter is Takahashi Sadako (高橋貞子, 1886-unknown), a woman who claimed to have possessed psychic powers. A few other *Ring* characters and their backstories inspired by real people who lived at the same time as Takahashi are examined as well. Furthermore, this chapter delves into the usage of traditional ideas and their subversion by twisting them in shocking and unprecedented ways and thus creating a perfect blend of ancient traditions and modern technology represented by Sadako.

Finally, it concludes with the exploration of Suzuki's choice of media for the *Ring* novel's modern take of a ghost story—the VHS—and how he uses modern science and technology to modernise the genre of ghost stories to be able to evoke fear in superstitious and sceptical minds alike, even questioning their own reality.

1 *Kaidan*

Kaidan is a general term in contemporary Japan that refers to folk stories about death, *yōkai*,[1] especially *onryō*,[2] and other supernatural phenomena in Japanese myths and legends. Etymologically, this word consists of two *kanji*—怪 (*kai*) meaning "strange, mysterious, suspicious, bewitching apparition" and 談 (*dan*) meaning "discuss, talk". Therefore, *kaidan* could be loosely translated as "stories of strange things" or "ghost stories", the latter being preferred. These stories were traditionally shared via oral means, as the *kanji* suggests, before the introduction of advanced printing technologies in the 16th century. *Kaidan* reached its peak in popularity during the Edo period (江戸時代, 1600/1603-1868, also known as the Tokugawa period) in Japan and was later popularised in the West by Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) in his work *Kwaidan[3]: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*. Nowadays *kaidan* has merged into the Japanese horror genre but they are not synonymous. *Kaidan* does not necessarily need to evoke fear within its audience, it can simply deal with supernatural matters.

However, before we dive deep into the analysis of *kaidan*, otherworldly phenomena and their kinds, I would like to establish the definition of the word "supernatural" within the context of Japanese folklore. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "supernatural" as follows: "Belonging to a realm or system that transcends nature, as that of divine, magical or ghostly beings; attributed to or thought to reveal some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature; occult, paranormal."[4] This is a modern Western definition that has got its literal equivalent in modern Japanese language as well—*chōshizenteki* (超自然的).[5] However, the concept of supernatural (as opposed to the natural real world abiding by laws of physics and logic) is a relatively recent idea first appearing in Japan in the second half of the 19th century, brought in with other modern Western concepts and research. To Japanese society, supernatural beings were as real as any other creature, object, or event in premodern Japan (to an extent they still are). At the time, they were certainly not common nor were they a part of the everyday, normal, or mundane, but they were always considered possible and real. Currently, it is not

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[1] *Yōkai* include ghosts, spirits, apparitions, phantoms, spectres, monsters, demons, goblins, shapeshifters etc.
[2] More on *yōkai*, *yūrei*, and *onryō* in chapter two of this thesis.
[3] *Kwaidan* (くわいだん) is an archaic spelling of the word *kaidan* in *kana*.
[4] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "supernatural (*adj.*), sense 1.a," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6162916050.
[5] The word *chōshizen* with this literary meaning first appears in Japanese texts in a posthumous literary criticism titled "Manfurenddo oyobi Fōsuto" (マンフレンドおよびフォースト) written by Kitamura Tōkoku (北村透谷, 1868-1894). Hirota Ryūhei, "Traversing the Natural, Supernatural, and Paranormal: Yōkai in Postwar Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 48, no. 2 (2021): 327. Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. dx.doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.48.2.2021.321–339.

unheard of but not common to use the word *chōshizenteki* in the contemporary Japanese discourse on *yōkai*. There are plentiful other terms used more frequently to describe the unexplainable, for instance *shinpiteki* (神秘的, mysterious, mystical), *kikai* (奇怪, strange, weird), *ijō* (異常, strange, abnormal), and *fukashigi* (不可思議, mystery, something inexplicable). It is, however, a common practice to use the English equivalents "supernatural" and "paranormal" in the English discourse on this topic and thus we are going to use these terms in accordance with the Oxford English Dictionary definition in this thesis.

1.1 *Kaidan* in Premodern Japan

Kaidan stories are based on *setsuwa* (説話), a vague literary genre that contains short prosaic folktales from the lives of ordinary people—legends, folktales, myth, and also anecdotes. *Setsuwa* translates to "spoken narrative" indicating the stories were shared foremost by oral tradition and existed long before being recorded in written form. There is an inexhaustible number of types of people and supernatural entities whose emotions, motivations, and actions are emphasised in these tales[6] but they could be roughly sorted into two categories—Buddhist and general. The former one often involves the element of karma, miracles, and didactic elements, whilst the latter is rather secular, focusing on spirituality, although they are not mutually exclusive.

Supernatural tales in written form can be found as early as the Nara (奈良時代, 710-794) and Heian (平安時代, 794-1185) periods. For instance, there was a popular belief that a scholar-monk Genbō (玄昉) was killed by a vengeful spirit of Fujiwara no Hirotsugu (藤原広嗣) in 746,[7] and supernatural matters also occur in some chapters of *Genji monogatari* (源氏物語, *The Tale of Genji*), the most notable ones in chapter four titled "*Yūgao*" (夕顔, Evening Face) and chapter nine titled "*Aoi*" (葵, Hollylock).[8]

Many collections of *setsuwa* tales were assembled between the 9th and the 13th century, usually by Buddhist monks in temples. There was a moral or religious teaching included at the end of these tales (since Buddhist monks were morally compelled to avoid telling *kyōgen kigo* (狂言綺語, fictional foolish words)) and were thus used not only as cautionary stories but also

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[6] Zdenka Švarcová, *Japonská literatura 712-1868* (Praha: Karolinum, 2005), 233-235.
[7] Herman Ooms, *Imperial Politics and Symbolics in Ancient Japan: The Tenmu Dynasty, 650-800* (University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 230. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wr02x.
[8] Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, trans. Arthur Waley (Oxford: Alden Press, 1935), 54-80, 154-183.

as a path to lead to Buddhism.[9] The oldest known collection is *Nihonkoku genpō zen'aku ryōiki* (日本国現報善悪霊異記, *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition*), commonly abbreviated as *Nihon ryōiki* (日本霊異記, *Records of Miraculous Events in Japan*), believed to be the first anthology compiled between 787 and 824. Another example from a later period would be a five-volume collection *Shasekishū* (沙石集, *Sand and Pebbles*) compiled by a Buddhist monk Mujū Ichien (無住一円) in 1283.

Despite fitting the contemporary definition of *kaidan*, at the time, these supernatural elements were only a small part present in the overall work. Outside of anthologies, however, they were easily overlooked in the larger scale of *nikki bungaku* (日記文学, poetic diary literature), *monogatari* (物語, tales about people and things), and *otogi-zōshi* (御伽草子, illustrated short stories).

After centuries of near-constant civil wars and rebellions, the Edo period brought over 250 years of stability to Japan due to which people could focus more on trade, education, and art. The economic development of the reunified Japan ensured a national infrastructure of roads, allowing for travel[10] and thus the urban and rural cultures' gradual integration. There were many inventions that made producing literature much easier—better quality book print, as well as better and cheaper paper. Additionally, more and more people were becoming literate, creating an increasing demand for literature, and new literary genres emerged.

Kaidan began to be perceived as a separate genre form during the 17th century. Because the terrors and death of wars were in the past, authors and readers could enjoy supernatural and sometimes frightening folktales filled with strange and unexplainable phenomena as a form of entertainment. The aforementioned development in economic and communication network immensely contributed to the sharing of stories by travelling performers, artists, merchants, and priests. These stories were of all sorts—entertaining, religious, strange, moral, scary, silly, exotic, and their sources varied as well—from classical Chinese texts to local events, legends and folktales passed down throughout generations. Professional storytellers[11] were in high demand during this period, and they significantly influenced the shaping of *kaidan*. Some storytellers served *daimyō* (大名, feudal lords) and were known as *otogishū* (御伽衆) or

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[9] Dalia Švambarytė, "On the Chinese Concept of 'Wild Words and Fancy Language' and its Interpretation in Japan," *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia* 5, (Decembre 2004): 68. doi: 10.15388/AOV.2004.18234.

[10] Travelling was possible but the Tokugawa shogunate (徳川幕府, the military government of Japan in the Edo period) established tight restrictions on it. Travel abroad was prohibited, all non-essential travel within the country was banned, and essential travel was strictly controlled.

[11] *Rakugo* (落語, falling words) is an art of professional Japanese storytelling, the origin of which dates back to the Nara period, and it is a prominent form of entertainment to this day.

hanashishū (話集). The popularity of *kaidan* was further accelerated and reached its peak in this period due to the advance in printing technology[12] brought back from Korea to Japan at the end of the 16th century.[13]

There were plenty of *kaidan* plays, stories, and *kaidan-shū* (怪談集, collections of *kaidan*) published in this era. There was a noticeable shift regarding the purpose of retelling supernatural stories. These stories in previous eras contained strong elements of religious (especially Buddhist) didactic teaching. During the Edo period, however, the primary concern of early modern *kaidan* became overtly secular entertainment, sometimes even to a parodic degree (whilst still enclosing the religious elements). They were also used for cleverly hidden social commentary due to the strict governmental censorship.

One can see the didactic shift, for instance, in the works of the writer and Shin Buddhist priest Asai Ryōi (浅井了意) who lived in the 17th century. His collection *Otogi bōko* (御伽婢子, *Hand Puppets*), published in 1666, consists of over 60 mysterious and spectacular stories adapted from classical Chinese tales. *Otogi bōko* contains one of the three most famous Japanese ghost stories[14]—*Botan dōrō* (牡丹灯籠, *The Peony Lantern*)[15]. Asai adjusted the original Chinese tale[16] both in setting and tone, reflecting Japanese urban life, thus making it more familiar to Japanese readers. It is believed to have taken place in the *Nezu* district of Tokyo near which the Zenshōan Temple is located[17] and the priest's religion was changed from Taoism to Buddhism (Taoism was present in Japanese culture but not as prominently as Buddhism).

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[12] A metal printing press brought in from Korea, then a Japanese version of this printing press made with a wooden type instead of a metal one.

[13] Munemura Izumi 宗村泉, "Wagakuni no insatsu no kako, genzai, mirai – katsuji kara dejitaru he no henkakuki wo mukaete" わが国の印刷の過去、現在、未来―活字からデジタルへの変革期を迎えて― (Tokyo: Printing Museum 印刷博物館, 2010): 3, https://web.archive.org/web/20200323171515/https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/sfj/61/12/61_12_790/_pdf/-char/ja.

[14] These three would be *Botan dōrō* (*The Peony Lantern, 1666*), *Banchō sarayashiki* (*The Dish Mansion at Banchō*, 1741), and *Yotsuya kaidan* (*Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, 1825).

[15] *Botan dōrō* (*The Peony Lantern*) is a story of a man falling in love with a spirit of a beautiful young woman. On the first night of *obon*, a samurai called Ogiwara Shinnojō falls in love with a beautiful young woman named Otsuyu passing his house together with her maid who is carrying a peony lantern. Otsuyu keeps visiting Shinnojō's house every night thereafter, always leaving before dawn. An elderly neighbour gets both curious and worried about these mysterious visitors and one night he peeks through the bedroom door only to discover the man in a company of a skeleton. Consulting a Buddhist priest, Shinnojō is informed his life is in danger and is given protective charms. Otsuyu cannot enter Shinnojō's house anymore but keeps visiting and crying about their love in front of his gates. One night, Shinnojō cannot resist anymore, meets Otsuyu, and is found dead in a grave of a temple the next morning, his body entwined with a woman's skeleton.

[16] The original Chinese tale was included in the collection titled *Jiandeng Xinhua* (剪燈新話, *New Tales Told While Trimming the Lamplight Wick*) written by Qu You (瞿佑) in 1378.

[17] Iwasaka Michiko and Barre Toelken, "Japanese Death Legends and Vernacular Culture", in *Ghosts And The Japanese: Cultural Experience in Japanese Death Legends* (University Press of Colorado; Utah State University Press, 1994), 111.

Furthermore, the story's moral lessons on karma and Taoist rituals were completely removed, putting its primary focus on the strange events and overall entertainment rather than the didactic teaching.[18] Currently, many versions of this story exist, as it was retold by folk and adapted into various art forms such as *rakugo* (落語)[19] by a famous storyteller Shodai San'yūtei Enchō (初代三遊亭圓朝, 1839-1900) and *kabuki* (歌舞伎)[20]. At the end of the 19th century, it was introduced to the Western audience via Lafcadio Hearn's translation titled *A Passional Karma*.

Another well-known *kaidan* story is *Sarayashiki*. The earliest theatrical adaptation was a *bunraku* play (文楽, Japanese puppet theatre)[21] by Tamenaga Tarobei (為永太郎兵衛, unknown) and Asada Icchō (浅田一鳥, unknown-1780?) called *Banshū sarayashiki* (播州皿屋敷, *The Dish Mansion at Banshū*), first appearing in 1741 at the Toyotakeza theatre.[22] It was adapted into *kabuki* theatre as well; the most popular interpretation being *Banchō Sarayashiki* (番町皿屋敷, *The Dish Mansion at Banchō*) by Okamoto Kidō (岡本綺堂, 1872-1939) in 1916. Due to *Sarayashiki*'s striking similarities in plot and motifs with *Ring*, the story of Okiku is deeper analysed in chapter three of this thesis.

Arguably the most famous Japanese ghost story would be *Tōkaidō yotsuya kaidan* (東海道四谷怪談, *Ghost Story of Yotsuya in Tōkaidō*)[23] written by Tsuruya Nanboku IV (鶴屋南北) in 1825 as a *kabuki* play commonly known simply as *Yotsuya kaidan*. This play was incredibly successful and became one of the most adapted Japanese ghost stories. *Yotsuya kaidan* has been adapted by various media into numerous stage plays, *rakugo*, *ukiyo-e* (浮世絵,

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images of fleeting life)[24], and later also films, TV dramas, *anime*, novels, and music. The core structure of the story remains the same, many details, however, have been altered over time—plot points have been added or removed, sometimes the supernatural elements were excluded altogether. Many works that are not adaptations per se but are inspired by this ghost story, exist as well.[25] Additionally, there are several shrines and temples dedicated or connected to *Yotsuya kaidan* in Tokyo—Oiwa Inari Tamiya Shrine (於岩稲荷田宮神社) and Oiwa Inari Yōunji Temple (於岩稲荷陽運寺) both located at the same street in Shinjuku City ward of Tokyo and Oiwa Inari Tamiya Shrine (於岩稲荷田宮神社) in Chūō City ward of Tokyo. Although Myōgyōji Temple (妙行寺) in Toshima City ward of Tokyo is not dedicated to *Yotsuya kaidan*, Oiwa was supposedly laid to rest there.

The collection titled *Ugetsu monogatari* (雨月物語, *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*), written in the genre of *yomihon* (読本)[26] by Ueda Akinari (上田秋成) and published in 1776, cannot be omitted from the list of important *kaidan* works. The title itself suggests a supernatural character of the book, as it is believed that supernatural entities in Japanese folklore may appear during a rainy night and a moonlit night or dawn. *Ugetsu monogatari* consists of nine supernatural tales inspired not only by traditional Chinese and Japanese ghost stories but also by their already existing adaptations. Ueda was a scholar of *kokugaku* (国学, national studies)[27] and his ideals are reflected in the way he adapted these stories. In the first story "*Shiramine*" (白峰, White Peak), for instance, Ueda uses the character Saigyō as a mouthpiece for *kokugaku* interpretation of the historical events of 12th century Japan and the legend of Emperor Sutoku (崇徳天皇, 1119-1164).[28] Washburn also explains how Ueda continued the trend of secularisation in his tales by removing certain religious elements while shifting the focus on the narrative processes and characters' perspectives (especially in "*Kibitsu no kama*" (吉備津の釜, The Cauldron of Kibitsu) and "*Jasei no in*" (蛇性の淫, Lust of the White Serpent)).

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[24] For instance, the portrait of Oiwa (1836) by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (歌川国芳) or "The Ghost of Oiwa" (ca. 1831-1832) by Katsushika Hokusai (葛飾北斎).

[25] For contemporary examples of adaptations and inspired work see chapter 1.3 *Kaidan* in Contemporary Japan.

[26] "Reading books" from the Edo period that put emphasis on the text, in comparison to other Japanese books of the period which put emphasis rather on the illustrations.

[27] *Kokugaku* was an academic movement that emerged in the mid-Edo period. It emphasised the study of Japanese culture, history, language, literature, and way of thinking and worked on shifting focus away from the then-dominant ideological, religious, and literary influences (especially Chinese—Confucianism and Buddhism).

[28] Dennis Washburn, "Ghostwriters and Literary Haunts. Subordinating Ethics to Art in Ugetsu Monogatari," *Monumenta Nipponica* 45, no. 1 (1990): 45-46. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2384497.

Other notable *kaidan* stories and collections of the Edo period are *Inga monogatari* (因果物語, *Tales of Cause and Effect*) by Suzuki Shōsan (鈴木正三) published in 1661 and *Otogi monogatari* (御伽物語, *Nursery Tales*) also known as *Tonoigusa* (とのい草) by Ogita Ansei (荻田安静) published in 1660. *Otogi monogatari* has got its roots in *hyaku-monogatari kaidankai* (百物語怪談会, the gathering of one hundred supernatural tales) and even describes a version of this Buddhist-inspired parlour game in one of its stories.[29]

1.2 *Hyaku-monogatari* (百物語, one hundred tales)

One of the reasons *kaidan* gained so much popularity might have also been the aforementioned game *hyaku-monogatari kaidankai*. Although there are currently many versions of this game,[30] according to Asai Ryōi the traditional form is as follows: This game was performed on the night of the new moon by a group of several people (at least one storyteller or as many as one hundred) gathered in a two or three-roomed house, preferably arranged in an L shape to tell short spooky stories. The room where participants would meet was unlit and the room next to it as well. There would be a Japanese pale-coloured *andon*[31] with one hundred wicks, and a single mirror positioned on a small table in the farthest room. Upon the end of each tale, the storyteller would go to the lit room, extinguish one wick, and look at their face in the mirror. It was believed that once all the wicks were snuffed out, some kind of a real supernatural entity or monster would appear. For this reason, oftentimes the final tale was not told for fear of summoning a real spirit, despite the entity not having to be necessarily evil. Attendants might have wanted to listen to scary stories rather than actually experiencing a real apparition. Additionally, summertime was the traditionally preferred season for these gatherings, reasons being both *obon* (お盆), the Japanese festival of the dead occurring in August, and the folk belief that hearing such scary tales would give one chills and shivers in the unbearable humid summer heat.

The origin of this parlour game is unclear, albeit it is largely speculated by literary analysts[32] that it started as a modification of a Buddhist ritual *hyakuza hōdan* (百座法談, one hundred Buddhist stories) at the end of which *hyakki yagyō* (百鬼夜行, night parade of one hundred demons) would occur. It is also possible that it originated as a test of courage performed

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[29] Reider, "Emergence of 'Kaidan-Shū'," 89-90.

[30] For instance, being within a single room with 100 or even fewer lit candles, not occurring on the night of the new moon, having no mirror, etc.

[31] A traditional Japanese lantern consisting of paper stretched over a frame made of bamboo, wood, or metal.

[32] For example, Noriko T. Reider, a Japanese author focusing on Japanese literature, folklore, and art.

by the samurai class, so-called *kimodameshi* (肝試し, idiom "to test one's liver"). There are some other possible theories of its origins.[33]

Despite *hyaku* literally meaning "one hundred" these tales did not necessarily need to amount to exactly one hundred—in fact, most *hyaku-monogatari* collections include much fewer than that.[34] The reason that number one hundred is used in particular is probably due to its mythical symbolism it carries in Japanese culture, similar to number seven or thirteen in many Western cultures. In Japanese folklore, if an inanimate everyday object (household items, musical instruments, etc.) reaches the age of one hundred years, it can be transformed into *tsukumogami* (付喪神, a tool occupied by a *kami* (神, a spirit/a god)). Another example would be *kitsune* (狐, a fox spirit) who becomes a supernatural entity once it turns one hundred years and every next hundred years it lives it gains one more tail and more magical powers. One hundred appears to be significant as a transformative point—a hundred years is beyond the usual life span of most living beings and objects, but it is not completely unachievable. Beyond this point, mundane and casual matters can become unusual, even supernatural.

1.3 *Kaidan* in Contemporary Japan

Entering the Meiji period (明治時代, 1868-1912) marks the end of *sakoku* (鎖国, national isolation, lit. "locked country") that lasted for over 200 years. Being heavily influenced by the West, Japan transitioned from an isolated feudal society to a modern industrialised nation. The rapid modernisation was reflected in all fields—politics, science, medicine, technology, philosophy, legal system, arts, and others. The fascination with the exotic moved from (particularly) China to the West as well.

In regard to *kaidan*, there was a visible shift in beliefs in such stories. There were intellectuals who held their belief of the importance and continuation of supernatural stories, for instance an author and famous *rakugo* performer San'yūtei Enchō who "lamented that 'the teachers of the Age of Enlightenment (i.e., the Meiji period) thought that the supernatural was the product of mind, and *kaidan* an extension of that neuropathy'"[35]. One of such teachers was a philosopher, Shin Buddhist priest, reformer, and royalist Inoue Enryō (井上円了, 1858-1919).

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[33] See *Kiyū shōran* (嬉遊笑覧), an essay on period manners and customs written by Kitamura Nobuyo (喜多村信節, 1783-1856) or theories by Orikuchi Shinobu (折口信夫, 1887-1953).

[34] Michael Dylan Foster, *The Book of Yōkai: Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 43.

[35] Noriko T. Reider, "Appeal of 'Kaidan'," 278.

He conducted critical research[36] on all sorts of superstitions and supernatural phenomena in order to debunk them with science.[37] It appeared, however, to be quite difficult to dispel such old beliefs and customs, especially in people living in rural areas. People living in urban areas, on the other hand, were more prone to laugh at premises such as being bewitched by a fox spirit. Regardless, *kaidan* has remained fairly popular, implying that people in contemporary Japan enjoy this supernatural frightening genre just as much as people in previous periods.

As mentioned earlier, Lafcadio Hearn popularised *kaidan* (or *kwaidan*) in English during the 19th century which inevitably led to many adaptations of *kaidan* stories, books, and films for Western audiences, especially by Western artists. He was intrigued by the quickly modernising Japan and fascinated by disappearing customs, old folktales, and folklore. His collections and writings offered an unprecedented insight into the Japanese culture at the time, especially his translations and retellings of Japanese ghost stories. These include titles such as *In Ghostly Japan* (1899), *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* (1904), and *The Romance of the Milky Way and Other Studies and Stories* (1905).

Western styles such as realism, romanticism, and naturalism became popular at the turn of the century and *kaidan* began to be viewed as old-fashioned and nostalgic. Despite *kaidan* as a whole genre not being as prevalent anymore, its elements seeped into other genres that called for something old-fashioned, frightening, or mystical—into horror, detective fiction, fantasy, and so forth. At this time, original Western tales and myths were also introduced to Japanese audience, both in the original language and in translation. On the other hand, Japan's rapid modernisation and wars followed by American occupation during the first half of the 20th century had a major influence on Japanese literature in the opposite direction of the supernatural. Many authors of the occupation and post-occupation era (after 1952) focused on topics such as coping with defeat, loss of purpose, alienation, nihilism, existentialism, identity, nuclear power, and other political, social, and philosophical issues[38] rather than ghost stories.

In spite of this, there were several adaptations of traditional *kaidan* stories made in the second half of the 20th century. *Yotsuya kaidan*, for example, was adapted into several film instalments—*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* (東海道四谷怪談, *The Ghost of Yotsuya*, 1959) directed by Nakagawa Nobuo (中川信夫, 1905-1984), *Yotsuya kaidan* (四谷怪談, *Illusion of Blood*,

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[36] For these studies, he was sometimes called *Yōkai hakase* (妖怪博, Dr. Spectre) or *Obake hakase* (お化け博士, Dr. Haunted). Miura Setsuo 三浦節夫, "Inoue Enryō to yōkai-gaku no tanjō" 井上円了と妖怪学の誕生, Shoshi jōhō Inoue Enryō senshū 書誌情報井上円了選集 21, (May 2001): 491, https://toyo.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/4816.

[37] Rainer Schulzer, *Inoue Enryō: A philosophical Portrait* (New York: SUNY Press, 2019), kindle.

[38] For instance, Ōe Kenzaburō (大江健三郎, 1935-2023), Mishima Yukio (三島由紀夫, 1925-1970), and Abe Kōbō (安部公房, 1924-1993).

1965) directed by Toyoda Shirō (豊田四郎, 1906-1977), and *Yotsuya kaidan: Oiwa no bōrei* (四谷怪談 お岩の亡霊, *The Ghost of Oiwa*, 1969) directed by Mori Kazuo (森一生, 1911-1989). The film *Kwaidan* (怪談, *Ghost Stories*, 1965) directed by Kobayashi Masaki (小林正樹, 1916-1996) was based on Lafcadio Hearn's collection of ghost stories.

In the 1960s, the *manga* artist Mizuki Shigeru (水木しげる, 1922-2015) became highly popular for his *kaidan*-inspired *manga*. Not only did he incorporate *yōkai* into his work, but he also created plentiful new *yōkai* himself and published encyclopaedias about them. His best-known works within this genre are *Gegege no Kitarō* (ゲゲゲの鬼太郎, *Gegege Kitarō*, 1960-1969) and *Akuma-kun* (悪魔くん, *Demon-boy*, 1963-1964). Other *manga* artists published their *manga* series and one-shots[39] about *yōkai* and ghosts as well. It was, however, the so-called "occult boom" that happened in the 1970s and 1980s[40] that properly rejuvenated the general public interest in supernatural phenomena like *yōkai*, ghosts, mysteries, magic, and psychic powers.[41]

This "occult boom" was reflected across all media up until the turn of the century. Printed publications include novels such as *Bochi wo miorosu ie* (墓地を見おろす家, *The Graveyard Apartment*, 1988) by Koike Mariko (小池真理子, born 1952), *Ubume no natsu* (姑獲鳥の夏, *The Summer of the Ubume*, 1994) by Kyōgoku Natsuhiko (京極夏彦, born 1963), and a children book series *Gakkō no kaidan* (学校の怪談, *School Ghost Stories*, 1990s) by a folklorist Tsunemitsu Tōru (常光徹, born 1948). A prominent *manga* artist has been Itō Junji (伊藤潤二, born 1963) whose work consists of many subgenres of horror (predominantly body horror and Lovecraftian horror[42]) but the supernatural *kaidan*-like subgenre appears as well. Some of his most notable *manga* within this specific subgenre are *Tomie* (富江, *Tomie*, 1987-2000), a collection of seven stand-alone stories *Yami no koe* (闇の声, *Voices in the Dark*, 1998-1999), and *Uzumaki* (うずまき, *Spiral*, 2002-2003).

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[39] A one-shot, or *yomikiri* (読み切り) in Japanese, in the context of *manga*/comics is a standalone issue or a chapter without any continuation. It can be written as a standalone *manga* with original characters, storyline, and setting; it can be a side-story to already existing serialised *manga*; or it can be turned into a serialised *manga* if the standalone is popular and there is demand for continuation.

[40] This "occult boom" is also mentioned in the first book of the *Ring* trilogy as means of rationalising the suspicious circumstances of the videotape.

[41] Ioannis Gaitanidis and Justin Stein, "Japanese Religions and the Global Occult: An Introduction and Literature Review," *Japanese Religions* 44, nos. 1 & 2 (Spring & Fall 2019): 20-21, https://eanase.com/japanese-religions-and-the-global-occult/.

[42] It is also known as cosmic horror or eldritch horror.

Although rather fitting the fantasy genre than *kaidan*, it is worth mentioning Studio Ghibli that was founded in 1985 in Tokyo. Many of their films have incorporated *kaidan* features and heavily implemented various *yōkai*, their interactions with humans and often also their reactions, be it positive or negative ones, to the quick modernisation of Japan. These would be *Tonari no totoro* (となりのトトロ, *My Neighbour Totoro*, 1988) directed by the studio's founder Miyazaki Hayao (宮崎駿, born 1941), *Heisei tanuki gassen ponpoko* (平成狸合戦ぽんぽこ, *Pom Poko*, 1994) directed by the studio's co-founder Takahata Isao (高畑勲, 1935-1918), *Mononoke-hime* (もののけ姫, *Princess Mononoke*, 1997), and *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (千と千尋の神隠し, *Spirited Away*, 2001) both directed by Miyazaki Hayao.

At this point, *kaidan* as a whole no longer stands as a separate genre. The term *kaidan* is not as widely used as it was in the past. The preferred "labels" would be *horā* (ホラー, horror), *chōshizenteki horā/sūpānachuraru horā* (超自然的ホラー／スーパーナチュラルホラー, supernatural horror) or even *misuteri horā* (ミステリーホラー, mystery horror) for Japanese ghost stories in all contemporary and future media—books, films, *manga*, and video games. Japanese horror, in comparison to Western horror, tends to focus on psychological aspects, building suspense and tension throughout the story, and often involves supernatural elements. In visual media such as film and video games, this is contrasted with particularly American horror which, in general, puts emphasis rather on jump-scaring the audience with sudden movements accompanied by loud noises.

During the 1990s, two of the most notable authors of modern *kaidan/horā* in contemporary Japan made their debut which was met with commercial success not only in Japan but abroad as well. One of them is Suzuki Kōji, an author who published his three-part novel series *Ringu* (リング, *Ring*, 1991-1998) and the other is Shimizu Takashi (清水隆, born 1972), a filmmaker who began his film franchise *Ju-on* (呪怨, *The Grudge*) releasing between 1998-2006.[43]

Suzuki Kōji is a full-time writer and received the Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for New Writers: *Spiral* in 1996. His series *Ring* was described by *The Independent* as an interesting blend of Murakami Haruki and Stephen King (born 1947).[44] It was very positively received and became a media franchise. This franchise includes eight Japanese films, three English (American-

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[43] There are later-released adaptations of his work but those were no longer directed by him nor was he involved in any other way.

[44] Suzuki Kōji, *Ring*, trans. Robert B. Rohmer and Glynne Walley (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), book cover.

produced) film remakes, one Korean film remake, two television series, eight *manga* adaptations, and two video games. Suzuki does not settle within a single literary genre like *kaidan*, *horā*, science-fiction, or mystery, opting to create a genre of his own by combining elements of the aforementioned and focusing on logic-driven plots.

Shimizu Takashi is said by the American film scholar W. W. Dixon to be "the new breed of Japanese horror directors" [45] since he prefers suggesting the violence and menace rather than directly portraying it on screen. His ghost story franchise *Ju-on* is a great example of that together with the third instalment of the *Tomie* live action film series *Tomie re-birth* (富江 *re-birth*, 2001).

There are numerous other *kaidan*-inspired works being created after the turn of the millennium to this day. Some of them attempted to mimic the success of the *Ring* series with its merging of supernatural and modern technology—films *Kairo* (回路, *Pulse*, 2001) directed by Kurosawa Kiyoshi (黒沢清, born 1955) and *Chakushin ari* (着信アリ, *One Missed Call*, 2003) directed by Miike Takashi (三池崇史, born 1960)—though they were met with only an average reception. Others circled back to the more traditional form of *kaidan* such as the children's storybook series *Kaidan Resutoran* (怪談レストラン, *Kaidan Restaurant*, 2009-2010) and the anime stylised to mimic *kamishibai* (紙芝居, paper play) called *Yamishibai* (闇芝居, *Theatre of Darkness*, 2013-2022). New film adaptations of *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* also appeared such as *Kaidan* (怪談, *Ghost Story*, 2007) directed by Nakata Hideo (中田秀夫, born 1961) and *Kuime* (クイメ, *Over Your Dead Body*, 2014) directed by Miike Takashi. Last but not least, there are creators like Shiraishi Kōji (白石晃士, born 1973) who explore contemporary Japanese urban legends. Shiraishi depicts a vengeful ghost of the same name in films like *Kuchisake-onna* (口裂け女, *Carved: The Slit-Mouthed Woman*, 2007) and *Teketeke* (テケテケ, *Teketeke*[46], 2009).

As we can see, the genre of *kaidan* has evolved significantly over the centuries. It began as simple spooky tales shared via oral tradition with lessons on karma and religion. These tales were then incorporated into larger stories as their small parts. They kept gaining on popularity, gradually losing some (or all) of their didactic and religious teachings in exchange for an entertaining value, and eventually became a literary narrative fiction genre with the "boom" of

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[45] Wheeler Winston Dixon, introduction to *Film Talk: Directors at Work* (Rutgers University Press, 2007), xi, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hhz41.

[46] "*Teketeke*" is quite difficult to translate—it is named after the *teketeke*-like sound of the hands and nails scratching on the ground as the *onryō* of the young woman quickly crawls towards her victims.

kaidan-shū in the Edo period. Entering the contemporary history of Japan, *kaidan* was adapted and morphed in many various ways, emerging as a subgenre of modern Japanese horror. It is still used for frightening entertainment as well as for addressing social issues and changes. Regardless of the modifications, it is clear that *kaidan* and its elements are as popular nowadays as they were in the past.

2 Supernatural Entities in Japanese Folklore: *Yōkai*, *Yūrei*, and *Onryō*

There is no shortage of inexplicable occurrences, phenomena, mysterious sounds, visions, and feelings in Japan as long as the recorded history goes. These are, as in any other culture, attributed to the many spiritual and supernatural entities created by cultural imagination in order to provide an explanation and calm down the frightened mind. These entities of Japanese folklore are generally referred to as *yōkai* in contemporary Japanese discourse. The word consists of two *kanji*—妖 (*yō*) meaning "attractive, bewitching, calamity" and 怪 (*kai*) meaning "suspicious, mystery, apparition". Semantically this word has got its roots in the Chinese word *yāoguài* (妖怪, monster, strange creatures). *Yōkai* has become an umbrella term for an entire class of weird creatures and mysterious unexplainable phenomena. It could be translated with a whole range of words—nowadays most commonly as monsters, but also ghosts, goblins, spectres, sprites, apparitions, demons, shapeshifters, and spirits.

The term *yōkai* has begun to be commonly used relatively recently. It was coined by Inoue Enryō during his critical studies of mysterious things and phenomena (*yōkaigaku*, 妖怪学) during the late 19th and early 20th century but it "can be found in Japan as early as the mid-Edo-period work of Toriyama Sekien"[47] (鳥山石燕, 1712-1788). Inoue was, however, at first using the term *fushigi* (不思議, strange, mystery) which he felt had slightly narrower meaning than *yōkai*.[48]

2.1 The Changing Concept of *Yōkai*

As implied above, the concept of *yōkai* is not a constant, it changes with time and Japanese society. It is far easier to answer the question "What are *yōkai*?" with a list of examples rather than with a definition since those can be vague and inaccurate. There are also the questions of their categorisation and origin. To answer these, one must first understand how *yōkai* were viewed and thought of throughout Japanese history.

There are plenty of terms to describe the supernatural beside *yōkai*, some used to encompass the broad meaning of the supernatural, some used to refer to only a certain kind of creatures/spirits. In the Heian period, *mono-no-ke* (物の怪) can be predominantly seen in contemporary literature. *Mono* in modern Japanese most often refers to "tangible things" but in the language of the Heian period it was used to refer to something without a clear form, unstable,

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[47] Michael Dylan Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yōkai*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 5.
[48] Miura 三浦, "Inoue Enryō to yōkai-gaku no tanjō" 井上円了と妖怪学の誕生, 478-479.

unpredictable, and otherworldly.[49] *Ke* is written with the same character as *kai* in *yōkai* with the same meaning (suspicious, mysterious). A famous example is the *mono-no-ke* of Lady Rokujō in the 9th volume of *Genji monogatari*.[50] From Kamakura period (鎌倉時代, 1185-1333) onward, *tsukumogami* (付喪神, tools and other things that acquired a kami or a spirit)[51] also became one of the prevalent images of *mono-no-ke*.[52] Although there are commonalities between the terms *yōkai* and *mono-no-ke* and their meanings, they are not synonymous. It could be summarised as all *mono-no-ke* are *yōkai*, but not all *yōkai* are *mono-no-ke*. *Yōkai* nowadays can possess any "moral alignment"—benevolent, neutral, or evil towards humans by their nature, whilst *mono-no-ke* is used as an umbrella term for spirits that are inherently evil and vengeful by their nature; possessing individuals to make them suffer, cause an illness, disease, or even death.

Earlier in the Edo period, the primary interest of scholars in regard to *yōkai* was their collection, classification, and organisation without explicit efforts to sort out the fictitious from the real.[53] They were categorised (and characterised) in various *setsuyōshū* (節用集, concise dictionaries) and encyclopaedias as *shōrui* (生類, living things) with other ordinary living creatures as many scholars and intellectuals[54] refused to rank them alongside *kami* (神, Shinto deities).[55] Later in the period, however, an opposing view was suggested by early modern intellectuals,[56] which was to include *yōkai* into the realm of *kami* for their supernatural aspects. This supernatural realm was called *yūmei* (幽冥, the otherworld). Commonly used terms (approximating the general meaning of *yōkai*) in this period were *bakemono* (化け物) or the more childish *obake* (お化け). The literal translation would be "changing things" but they are usually translated rather vaguely as "monsters" and "ghosts", although they do not refer to spirits of the dead but to living things and supernatural beings that have taken on a temporary transformation. A more accurate translation would be "shapeshifters". These include *kitsune*, *tanuki* (狸, Japanese raccoon dog), *mujina* (貉, Japanese badger), *kodama* (木霊, spirits

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[49] Foster, *Book of Yōkai*, 15.

[50] Other instances of *mono-no-ke* can be seen in *Ōkagami* (大鏡, The Great Mirror) written in ca. 1119.

[51] It is believed that if an object reaches 100 years, it transforms and becomes alive due to a kami or a spirit taking residence within the object.

[52] Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade*, 7.

[53] Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade*, 77.

[54] For example, Deguchi (Watarai) Nobuyoshi (出口「度会」延佳, 1615-1690), Arai Hakuseki (新井白石, 1657-1725), and Kamo no Mabuchi (賀茂真淵, 1697-1769).

[55] Hirota, "Traversing Natural, Supernatural, and Paranormal," 325.

[56] For example, Motoori Norinaga (本居宣長, 1730-1801) and Hirata Atsutane (平田篤胤, 1776-1843).

inhabiting trees), and more. Again, the meanings of these terms share commonalities with *yōkai*, they are, however, not synonymous.

The concept of *yōkai* underwent a radical re-evaluation during the Meiji period. This was due to the inflow of modern scientific knowledge and intellectual movements from the West and the establishment of *yōkaigaku* by Inoue Enryō. *Yōkai* were still being collected and categorised in multiple ways—by their "true form", source of mutation/changing, external appearance, location, etc. There were plentiful attempts to explain them with rationalism and science, as many intellectuals deemed them unrealistic and/or unenlightening. Common folk, however, oftentimes continued to believe in such supernatural occurrences (and some still do to this day), proving how deeply rooted old beliefs and customs are and how difficult they are to dispel.

As mentioned previously, the rapid modernisation and Westernisation of the first half of the 20th century made an impact not only on literature (*kaidan*) but folklore (*yōkai*) as well. During the wars, the general interest in *yōkai*-caused confusion and horror appears to slightly weaken as there was enough of it in everyday life caused by military conflicts. That said, many rural Japanese (especially older generations) kept firm in their beliefs and occasionally a case of being bewitched by a *kitsune* or other encounters with *yōkai* were reported.[57] Some folklore scholars[58] of the 20th century expanded on the aforementioned views of the supernatural *yūmei* otherworld and the *reirakuron* (零落論, theory of degrading gods) was introduced. This theory presents the idea that *yōkai* had once been *kami* who gradually lost worshippers. Currently it is also theorised that *yōkai* and *kami* are both on the opposite sides of the same spectrum where one can become the other and vice versa. [59]

Post-war Japan experienced an unparalleled economic growth, and it expeditiously became the world's second-largest economy (after the USA) in the period from mid-1950s to 1980s. The significance of this economic miracle is the popularisation of television, weekly magazines, and *manga*. It was in the 1960s when *yōkai* gradually gained unprecedented popularity as a theme in the growing mass media and the term *yōkai* (and *yūrei*) started to be widely used in comparison to earlier decades when the term *obake* was used more frequently.[60] Plenty of new *yōkai* were created during this time and have been created since. As mentioned

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[57] In 1922, the newspaper *Iwate Mainichi Shinbun* (岩手毎日新聞) in the Iwate prefecture reported a case of *kitsune* possession. Reider, "Appeal of 'Kaidan'," 278.

[58] For instance, Yanagita Kunio (柳田國男, 1875-1962) who came up with this hypotheses and Komatsu Kazuhito (小松和彦, 1946-present).

[59] Hirota, "Traversing Natural, Supernatural, and Paranormal," 322-328.

[60] Hirota, "Traversing Natural, Supernatural, and Paranormal," 331.

earlier, Mizuki Shigeru was one of the most prevalent contributors to the world of *yōkai* with his renowned character of *Gegege no Kitarō* and more. Mizuki not only created new *yōkai* for his *manga*, some of which have been made into *anime* series, but he, following the example of Toriyama Sekien, also wrote and illustrated numerous books and encyclopaedias in which he described his extensive research on *yōkai*.[61] Those are for instance *Mizuki Shigeru no Nihon Yōkai Meguri* (水木しげるの日本妖怪めぐり, *Shigeru Mizuki's Tour of Japanese Yōkai*, 1977) and *Karā Yōkai Gadan* (カラー妖怪画談, lit. "*Colourised Discussions on Art and Paintings of Yōkai*", 1992). Mizuki and other intellectuals and enthusiasts of this time were the reason "*yōkai* shifted from the distant past and the remote countryside to the neighbourhood of consumers of mass media."[62]

The growing interest in *yōkai*, also known as the "*yōkai* boom", arguably contributed to or morphed into the "occult boom" that occurred in Japan in the 1970s and 1980s. The difference between these two "booms" is that in spite of both of them being focused on supernatural occurrences and beings, the latter one was mostly concerned with the mysteries of *yūrei* (幽霊, ghosts) (their sightings, photographs, and video recordings), psychic powers, clairvoyance, and the afterlife (all of which are present in some shape or form in the *Ring* series). Furthermore, a computer database for supernatural creatures was established and "opened to the public online in 2002, [it] received 180,000 hits in its first month of operation".[63]

New *yōkai* have also been created via the means of the genre of urban legends. Urban legends, also called contemporary or modern legends, are folklore concerning stories of an unusual (oftentimes frightening or humorous) character that many people believe to be true but largely are not. They typically combine second-hand narratives with local history and popular culture, creating a highly shareable story with great shock value. Similarly to traditional folk tales in the past, they are mainly spread through oral tradition, although in the 21st century, sharing via printed, digital, and social media has increasingly become common as well. The setting of modern Japanese urban legends tends to be schools, bathrooms, means of transport, parks, railway stations, and other public areas and internet domains. These contemporary legends are rarely concerned with the more traditionally folkloric *yōkai* based on objects or animals such as *tsukumogami*, *kitsune*, *tanuki*, or *kappa* (河童, a small humanoid water-dwelling creature). Instead, they primarily focus on various kinds of spirits and *yūrei*. The most

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[61] Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade*, 164-169.
[62] Hirota, "Traversing Natural, Supernatural, and Paranormal," 331.
[63] It was established by a group of interdisciplinary scholars at Internation Research Centre for Japanese Studies in Kyoto. It is accessible at: www.nichibun.ac.jp/YoukaiDB/. Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade*, 1-2.

famous examples are *kuchisake-onna* (口裂け女, the slit-mouthed woman),[64] *aka manto* (赤マント, red cloak),[65] *toire no Hanako-san* (トイレの花子さん, Miss Hanako of the Toilet),[66] and *teketeke* (テケテケ, teketeke).[67]

As we can see, the concept of *yōkai* and their discourse are ever-evolving matters. Hirota Ryūhei (廣田龍平) presents two different points of view on the construction of the *yōkai* discourse in his study from 2021: "the boom that supernaturalised *yōkai* and linked them to the realm of ghostly paranormal activities but not to kami; and folklore studies, which did not explicitly conceptualise *yōkai* ontologically but still linked them to kami."[68] It is also my opinion that the discourse on *yōkai* reflects the aspects of Japanese cultural identity and its ambivalence towards modernisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation—the struggle with what to leave in the past and what to preserve and/or create for the future. The previously described terms *mono-no-ke*, *bakemono*, *obake*, *fushigi*, and others like *henge* (変化, lit. "changed things"), *ayakashi* (あやかし, ghosts appearing at sea during a shipwreck), or *mamono* (魔物, evil spirit) are nowadays considered "subcategories" or individual "kinds" of *yōkai*, and there are many more.

2.2 Yūrei

The term *yūrei* is generally translated as a "ghost, spirit, apparition" and is analogous to the Western idea of ghosts. It consists of two *kanji*—幽 (*yū*) meaning "faint, dim, seclude" and 霊 (*rei*) meaning "spirit, soul". There are many other names for ghosts in Japanese language such as *bōrei* (亡霊), *shiryō* (死霊), *ikiryō* (生き霊), *yūkai* (幽怪), *yōma* (妖魔) and previously discussed *mono-no-ke* and *bakemono* as well.

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[64] *Kuchisake-onna* is a woman with a mutilated mouth covered by a mask, carrying around a sharp tool of some kind (knife, scissors). She asks potential victims whether they find her beautiful. If they answer "no", she kills them with her weapon. In case of an affirmative answer, she reveals her mouth cut from ear to ear and asks again. If the answer is "no", she kills them. If the answer is "yes", she cuts the corners of their mouth in a way to resemble her own disfigurement. To escape her, one is said to describe her as "average looking".

[65] *Aka manto* is a male spirit wearing a red cloak haunting lavatories at night. He offers his victims blue or red toilet paper. Picking the red one results in fatal lacerations, picking the blue one results in strangulation (there are other variations as well). Picking any other colour results in being dragged into the underworld. One can escape their fate by rejecting both options, ignoring the spirit, quickly exiting the bathroom, or a combination of these.

[66] *Toire no Hanako-san* is a spirit of a young girl haunting school lavatories. Some say Hanako is a ghost of a girl who died in an air raid in War World II, some say she committed suicide as a result of being bullied by other students.

[67] *Teketeke* is a ghost of a young woman/schoolgirl who fell on a railway line and was cut in half by an ongoing train. She haunts urban areas and especially train stations at night. She crawls around on her hands, dragging her torso along and making a scratching *teketeke*-like sound with her arms. She chases her victims and slices them in half at the torso.

[68] Hirota, "Traversing Natural, Supernatural, and Paranormal," 333.

Yūrei, similarly to *yōkai*, can be benevolent or malevolent in their temperament. How exactly do they then differ from *yōkai*? The scholar and folklorist Yanagita Kunio (柳田國男, 1875-1962) argued in his writings that there are distinctions in place, victim, and time. He points out that *yōkai* generally appear at set locations whilst *yūrei* haunt a person wherever they go. If true, one could simply avoid those set locations and never encounter *yōkai*, but once one is haunted by a *yūrei*, they cannot escape. That said, *yūrei* target only the person or persons they are concerned with. *Yōkai*, on the other hand, do not choose specific victims but tend to target the ordinary masses. As for the time, Yanagita explains that *yōkai* tend to appear most often during dim light such as dusk and dawn. In contrast, *yūrei* appear at the hour of the ox (at around two o'clock in the morning) when the night is at its darkest.[69]

These views were challenged many times since as there are many exceptions not fitting Yanagita's distinctions. Komatsu Kazuhiko (小松和彦, born 1947) suggests thinking of *yūrei* "as a special subcategory of *yōkai* just as we think of human beings as a special subcategory of animals."[70] It is true that *yūrei* appear to have got a particular connection to humans (alive or dead) and since the term *yōkai* has got such a broad and vague definition, many consider *yūrei* to be a subset of *yōkai*.

According to traditional Japanese beliefs, all human beings possess a *reikon* (霊魂, soul). When a person dies, their *reikon* leaves the body and lives as a separate entity waiting to join their ancestors.[71] This transition is accomplished through performing proper Buddhist burial rituals and reciting prayers. After a successful transition, they become a protector of the family, returning to visit annually during the *obon* (お盆, festival of the dead)[72] festival in August.[73] If the burial rituals, however, are not performed properly or not at all, the *reikon* of the deceased person cannot join their ancestors and stays stuck in a purgatory—partially in the material plane, partially in the ethereal one. This is also believed to happen in cases of untimely, sudden, or violent death (murder, suicide), or if the person died feeling powerful emotions such as love, hatred, jealousy, sorrow, desire for revenge, grudge. Once they become *yūrei*, they linger in this world. They do not (usually) roam about aimlessly, but they continue haunting a person or a place in particular until they can rest—by either resolving their emotional conflict tying them to the material plane, or by the proper burial rituals being performed.

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[69] Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男, "Yōkai dangi" 妖怪談義 in *Teihon Yanagita Kunio shū* 定本柳田國男集, Chikuma shobō 筑摩書房 (1970) translated and cited in Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade*, 153.
[70] Foster, *Book of Yōkai*, 23-24.
[71] It is also possible for the person to be reincarnated.
[72] Similar to traditional Halloween in Western countries.
[73] The date of the festival may differ depending on region.

This is the Buddhist perspective on spirits and ghosts. The concept of ghosts, however, existed in Japan long before the arrival of Buddhism to Japan in the 6th century AD. The indigenous religion Shintoism does acknowledge ghosts but does not see them as vengeful or malevolent. After death the spirits of the deceased are said to join the ancestors and may become enshrined, celebrated through ceremonies and rituals. These views seem to be based on gratitude and respect whilst the Buddhist rituals seem to be based on apprehension and respect.

2.2.1 The Appearance of *Yūrei*

Up until the early Edo period, *yūrei* tended to be described as appearing in the form of a deceased person[74] dressed in burial clothes—white[75] *kimono* called *kyōkatabira* (経帷子)— and wearing a white triangular headwear on their forehead, wrapped around the back. This symbolical headwear has got several names depending on its grandioseness and region: *tenkan* (天冠, lit. "heavenly crown"), commonplace *zukin* (頭巾, hood, kerchief), or simple *hitaieboshi* (額烏帽子, forehead hat) for example.[76] (see fig. 1) In cases where proper burial was not done or possible, the ghost would be wearing the clothes they had on at the time of their death, for instance fallen warriors would wear their armour or sailors dying in a shipwreck on the sea would wear their sailing clothes. *Yūrei* are commonly accompanied by *hitodama* (人魂, supernatural flames as a part of one's soul) of eerie colours (blue, purple, or green).[77]

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[74] Asian ghosts, in general, are anthropomorphised and most often are not immediately distinguishable from the living, in contrast with the Western media (and beliefs) where ghosts are depicted levitating, dressed in torn clothes, having a zombie-like visage, being see-through, and so forth.

[75] The colour white is often incorrectly assumed to be the colour of death in Japan. This is not true, the opposite in fact. In Shinto beliefs, it is the colour representing spiritual and physical purity; it is also the colour of the *kami* and celebration. Thus, the colour white is "reserved" first and foremost for three cases of people—Shinto priests, brides, and the deceased. The Emperor of Japan, too, used to dress in white robes for the main Shinto ceremonies and rituals. Zack Davisson, *Yūrei The Japanese Ghost*, (Seattle: Chin Music Press, 2015), 49-52.

[76] Davisson, *Yūrei*, 51.

[77] Davisson, *Yūrei*, 215.

Figure 1. Toriyama Sekien, *Yūrei*, 1781, woodblock print, in the second volume "Yang" of *Gazu hyakki yagyō* (画図百鬼夜行, *The Illustrated Night Parade of a Hundred Demons*) by Toriyama Sekien. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gazu_Hyakki_Yagyō#/media/File:SekienYurei.jpg.

In the Genroku era (元禄時代, 1688-1704) *yūrei* were widely depicted distinctly outlined, roaming about appearing as they did when they were still alive. In the Kyōhō era (享保年間, 1716-1736), however, the lower part of the *yūrei*'s body began to be depicted blurry and fuzzy in appearance, fading utterly away and floating in the air. Their wrists began to be portrayed lifelessly dangling, held outstretched with elbows near their body. Later in the century a collection of *haibun* (俳文, literary form combing prose and *haiku*) called *Uzuragoromo* (鶉衣, 1787-1788)[78] describes some *yūrei* with their lower body clearly outlined and some fading away.[79]

Thus, we can see that the modern-day stereotype of Japanese ghosts started to form during the early to mid-Edo period. What also contributed to the establishment of this visualisation was the widely spreading popularity of the *hyaku-monogatari kaidankai* game in the first half of the 18th century and *kaidan* increasingly becoming incorporated as a genre in literature, theatre (especially *kabuki*), *ukiyo-e* and other forms of art. One specific *ukiyo-e* print, which was gifted to a *kabuki* theatre by its creator, was one of the most influential templates and from which the *yūrei*'s appearance was gradually translated over to the *kabuki* theatre—it was *Oyuki no maboroshi* (お雪の幻, *The Ghost of Oyuki*) (see fig. 2) created by Maruyama Ōkyo (丸山

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[78] This *haibun* collection was written by *samurai* Yokoi Yayu (横井也有, 1702-1783) and compiled and published by poet Ōta Nanpo (太田南畝, 1749-1823).

[79] Iijima Yoshiharu and Senoo Miki 飯島吉晴、妹尾幹, *Sekaidai hyakkajiten "yūrei" no kō* 世界大百科事典【幽霊】の項 （初版） (Tokyo: Heibonsha 平凡社, 1988), 623.

応挙, 1733-1795).[80] Her hair is hanging freely and she is wearing the traditional white burial *kimono* although she is not wearing the *tenkan*. The *aiguma* (藍隈, indigo blue make-up on a white base) make-up, white robes, and messed-up wig created a powerful contrast against the otherwise ostentatious and colourful costumes worn by other characters of the *kaidan* plays. The director of *Ringu* (1998) Nakata Hideo is sometimes credited with the invention of the image of Japanese ghosts with long, loose, dishevelled hair but that is completely untrue. As we can see in fig. 2, *yūrei*'s hair has been depicted in this way in art and literature at least since the Edo period. Hair holds rich symbolism in Japanese culture which is reflected in the appearance of *yūrei*. We shall explore it in the following subchapter.

Figure 2. Maruyama Ōkyo, *Oyuki no maboroshi*, 31 December 1749, woodblock print. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yūrei#/media/File:Oyuki.jpg

2.2.2 Hair Symbolism in Japanese Culture and *Yūrei*

Hair in many cultures is a highly important element of one's visage. Japan is no exception to this. Historically, plentiful information about one's person was communicated non-verbally not just by clothing but via hairstyle as well—gender, age, wealth, marital status, occupation, social status, religious status, and so forth. Japanese people (especially of the feudal Japan) were bound to only wear their hair in a hairstyle corresponding to their own social status.[81] Albeit the preferred hairstyles have changed quite dramatically over the centuries, it was long thick straight black hair that was majorly desired. For woman, their hair is their richest ornament,

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[80] Davisson, *Yūrei*, 49.
[81] Davisson, *Yūrei*, 53-54.

their metaphorical crown usually pinned up in intricate ways (the wealthier the more intricate and decorated) or tied simply in the back.[82] Men of the past traditionally used to wear long hair tied up in various ways, again depending on time period, status, and occasion. Rather than delving into specific hairstyles and their development, let us focus on the general symbolism of hair in Japanese culture, especially in connection to *yūrei*.

Hair has got both positive and negative connotations in Japanese tradition. In the Shinto faith, long healthy hair carries the symbolism of youthfulness and beauty, vitality and continuity as it is a gift from the ancestors. It displays a person's normality and their enculturation from an early age. At the same time, it carries the negative symbolism of abnormality, wildness, untamed energy, and even danger. The reason for this is the belief that hair, especially women's hair, possesses supernatural qualities. These could be as tame as the long hair having "the power to attract *kami* or divinities, who would descend into it and temporarily reside there"[83] or as extreme as the hair changing "into serpents. For instance: under the influence of long-repressed jealousy."[84] Additionally, the power of attracting *kami* is not seen as an exclusively positive one since it could attract malevolent spirits as well. Hair is also viewed as a symbol of change and/or shame if cut.[85]

It is not farfetched to assume that, similarly to the West, Japanese observed that the hair (and nails) of the dead appeared to be growing post-mortem, that is, without any sustenance that is required for growth while alive. Albeit untrue,[86] it contributed to the idea of an untamed power dwelling in there. Long hair was simultaneously frightening and attractive, potentially dangerous yet desirable.[87] Nonetheless, there has been a strong desire to control these supposed powers. And the best tool to attempt to tame it is, of course, a comb.

Hair combs are surrounded by beliefs and superstitions of their own too, both as a tool and as a decoration. The Japanese word for a comb is *kushi* (櫛) which is homophonous with

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[82] The ways one wore their hair depended on the time period and social standards. For instance, women of higher societal ranks typically wore their hair long and unbound in the Heian period.

[83] Gary L. Ebersole, "'Long Black Hair Like a Seat Cushion': Hair Symbolism in Japanese Popular Religion," in *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel and Barbara D. Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 77.

[84] Patrick Lafcadio Hearn, *Complete Japanese Ghost Stories* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 303.

[85] For example, in feudal Japan, *samurai* would cut of their *chonmage* (丁髷, topknot) once they denounced (or were forced to denounce) their *samurai* class title. This practice is done even nowadays amongst *sumo* wrestlers who cut off their *chonmage* in a public ceremony when retiring from their career. Contemporary Japanese women also tend to shorten their hair after marriage and having children.

[86] It is only an illusion created when the skin retreats and exposes the subcutaneous parts of hair and nails. Rachel C. Vreeman and Aaron E. Carroll, "Medical Myths," *BMJ*. 2007; 335:1288, published December 20, 2007, doi: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.39420.420370.25.

[87] Ebersole, "'Long Black Hair Like Seat Cushion'," 78.

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the word for "strange, mysterious" (奇, *kushi/kushiki*). This could have been one of the reasons hair combs were regarded as something infused with mysterious powers. Additionally, they were believed they can become, through combing, a repository of one's life energy and even one's *tama* (魂, soul, spirit) after death.[88] *Kushi* has got another, more sinister, homophone— *kushi* (九死) meaning "suffering" and "death". Due to all these reasons, it was considered unwise to utilise someone else's comb or a discarded one, as it would bring the new user bad luck in the form of taking on another person's burdens and suffering. Some Japanese even today do not like the idea of sharing a comb or giving/receiving one as a present. There is even a festival called *Kushi matsuri* (櫛祭り, lit. "comb festival") annually held in Kyoto to express gratitude to combs for their service. This further highlights the importance of combs in Japanese culture as their primary function is to tame and control otherwise wild and disorderly hair. Well-groomed or coiffured hair suggests a generally self-controlled person whilst unruly dishevelled hair signifies lack of control, powerful emotions, frustration, or great physical or mental distress.[89]

We briefly mentioned the hair of *yūrei* in *kabuki* theatre in the previous subchapter. *Kabuki* theatre uses heavily stylised wigs for each role in accordance with the social status of said role, so the audience is able to immediately tell what types of characters interact on the stage. *Yūrei* did not have a specific hairstyle to showcase their "dead status", it was stylised in the way the character would wear their hair while alive.[90] The wig would, however, be "messed up, with shocks of hair sticking out from all sides and hanging straight and loose down the shoulders and back."[91] They even used practical effects to make the hair grow longer and wilder once the *yūrei* was on stage as it was a symbol of their supernatural powers.[92] It would seem that the hair of the wig was stylized more and more messed-up until the specific hairstyle was barely recognisable. And long, unbound, wild, and dishevelled hair falling untamed over the face, that is how most contemporary people would imagine a *yūrei*.

The idea of *yūrei*'s hair growing unnaturally long and sometimes even moving on its own accord has remained popular to this day. Whilst *kabuki* creators had to rely solely on practical

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[88] Katarzyna Ancuta, "*Ringu* and the Vortex of Horror: Contemporary Japanese Horror and the Technology of Chaos," *Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society* 1.1, (2007), 36, https://www.academia.edu/265530/RINGU_AND_THE_VORTEX_OF_HORROR_CONTEMPORARY_JAPA NESE_HORROR_AND_THE_TECHNOLOGY_OF_CHAOS.
[89] Ebersole, "'Long Black Hair Like Seat Cushion'," 92-95.
[90] Davisson, *Yūrei*, 54-55.
[91] Davisson, *Yūrei*, 54.
[92] "One of the special effects developed for kabuki was to have stagehands underneath the stage pushing more and more hair up through special holes when a *yūrei* appeared, giving it an unearthly and terrifying appearance." Davisson, *Yūrei*, 55.

effects, modern filmmakers can take advantage of the ever evolving and improving computer graphics, especially CGI (computer-generated images). Great examples are the films *Ju-on 2* (呪怨２, *Ju-On: The Grudge 2*, 2003) directed by Shimizu Takashi and *Ekusute* (エクステ, *Exte: Hair Extensions*, 2007) directed by Sono Shion (園子温, born 1961). In *Ju-on 2* in one scene, the hair extends over the whole ceiling and strangles the victim in a form of a noose. In *Ekusute*, the hair which is harvested from a murdered woman (whose hair keeps growing) and sold as hair extensions, comes alive killing or driving its users insane until the woman fulfils her revenge, making it almost ridiculous and perhaps the most extreme example so far.

2.3 Classifications of *Yūrei*

As it is with *yōkai*, *yūrei* can be sorted into categories as well. In general, we think of ghosts as of souls of the dead who, instead of continuing to the afterlife, linger here in this world and are able to materialise themselves to the eyes of the living. In Japanese folklore, however, any living creature that is overcome with extraordinary passion, hatred, rage, and/or jealousy is capable of separating their *reikon* (soul) from their body (and still be alive). Subsequently they haunt and even hurt people that are the cause of their suffering. These are commonly called *ikiryō* (生霊, lit. "living ghost") or alternatively read as *shōryō*, *seirei*, or *ikisudama*. Interestingly enough, the still-living person is almost never aware of their *ikiryō*'s existence. Probably the most famous *ikiryō* is of the lady Rokujō from the novel *Genji monogatari* mentioned in chapter one.

The opposite of *ikiryō* are, of course, the ghosts of dead people called *shiryō* (死霊) also known as *bōrei* (亡霊). The following terms all fall under *shiryō* but are used differently depending on the circumstances of said ghost. *Ubume* (産女, lit. "pregnant woman"; can also be written as 姑獲鳥) is most commonly thought of as a ghost of a woman who died at childbirth. The appearance of *ubume* varies but Foster describes them with their lower body covered in blood, crying, and cradling their newborn baby in her arms.[93] *Ubume* will typically ask a passerby to carry her baby and then disappear. The baby becomes increasingly heavy until almost impossible to hold; sometimes it even turns into a stone. Some folk stories say that if the child survives the birth, the ghost of the mother will come back to take care of her baby.

Fuyūrei (浮遊霊, lit. "floating ghost") are said to be the ghosts wandering this world without any specific purpose due to the person's inability to understand or accept their own

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[93] Foster, *Book of Yōkai*, 205.

death, especially in cases of sudden death. *Fuyūrei* who are bound to a particular place, building, or flat are sometimes called *jibakurei* (地縛霊, lit. "earthbound spirit"). Most frequently the place where they dwell is where their death occurred. *Jibakurei* who died by committing suicide might not realise they are already dead and attempt suicide again and again. These ghosts can take a long time (months, years, centuries) before they become aware of their death or come to terms with it. Till then, they stay bound to their place of rest. Both terms, *fuyūrei* and *jibakurei* were coined by Nakaoka Toshiya (中岡俊哉).[94]

Having a look at the chart below where the different types of *yūrei* are sorted in relation to one another, one can see that there is one subcategory of *shiryō* left. It is perhaps the most famous kind of *yūrei*—*onryō*. And since Yamamura Sadako, the antagonist of the *Ring* series this thesis is concerned with, belongs in this category, it is going to be analysed deeper in the following subchapter.
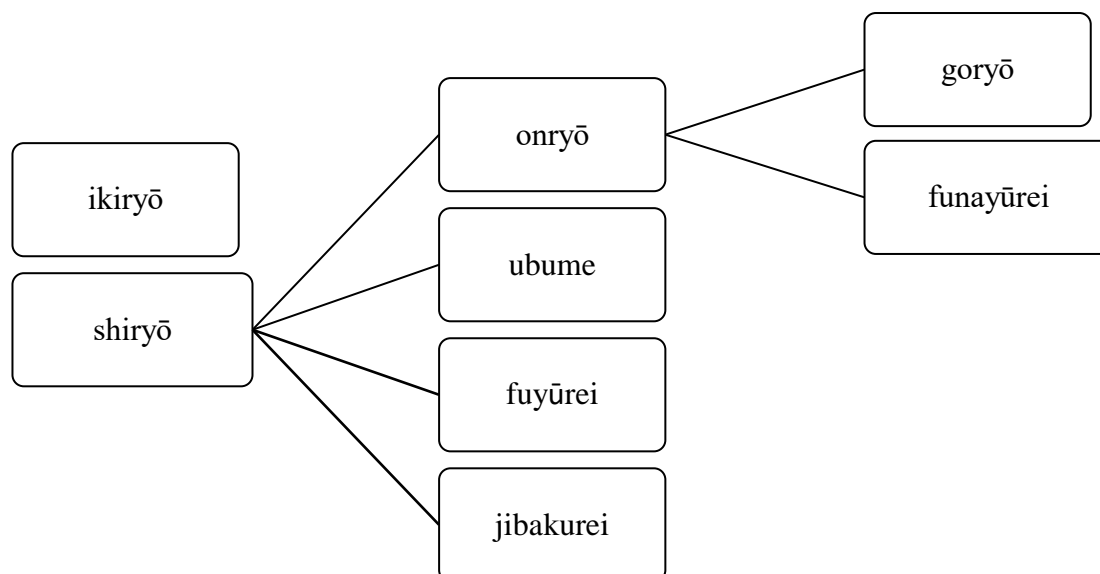
2.4 *Onryō*, the vengeful spirit

The term *onryō* consists of two *kanji*—怨 (*on*) meaning "grudge, resentment, be jealous" and 霊 (*ryō*) meaning "spirit, soul"—and is typically translated as a "vengeful ghost". These *kanji* more than suggest that o*nryō* are the ghosts of those who die feeling powerful emotions such as hatred, resentment, grudge, jealousy, etc. and consequently torment, harm, and kill people for the mistreatment they have received while alive. The extreme emotions most frequently stem from an unfulfilled obligation(s) or betrayal. Hence, they are bound to this

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[94] Togakkai と学会, "Tondemo bon no daisekai" トンデモ本の大世界 (Aspect アスペクト, 2011), 252-253.

world, prevented from transcending to the afterlife. *Onryō* are believed to be extremely ruthless, brutal, vengeful, selfish, and bloodthirsty.

Currently, they are most often portrayed as wronged women who have "been murdered, or subjected to a traumatising event during life that has instigated [their] demise."[95] This image has risen especially since the popularisation of *onryō* as a theme in literature and theatre (not only *kabuki* but also *rakugo* and *nō*[96]). The most widely known female *onryō* of premodern Japan are the aforementioned Otsuyu from the *kaidan Botan dōrō*, Oiwa from *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, and Okiku from *Sarayashiki*.

That said, there are many male *onryō* in Japanese history as well, the three most notable are being addressed as *Nihon sandai onryō* (日本三大怨霊), the Three Great Vengeful Ghosts of Japan. These are Sugawara no Michizane (菅原道真, 845-903),[97] Taira no Masakado (平将門, unknown-940),[98] and Emperor Sutoku.[99] They could also be called *goryō* (御霊, lit. "an honorific ghost") which is a subcategory of *onryō*. It specifically refers to someone who was a noble or was an accomplished person during their life but lost their political power and influence and became an *onryō* after their death, causing all sorts of misfortune and later being deified in an attempt to calm the spirit. There is a significant difference from the trio of the famous female *onryō* and that is that the *Nihon sandai onryō* were real, historically documented figures whilst Otsuyu, Oiwa, and Okiku may or may not have actually existed.

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[95] Ada Lovelace, "Ghostly and Monstrous Manifestations of Women: Edo to Contemporary," *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, no. 5 (December 2008): 30.

[96] *Nō* (能, lit. "skill, talent") is a form of classical Japanese dance-drama theatre performed since the 14th century.

[97] Sugawara no Michizane was a scholar, poet, and politician in the Heian period. He was accused by his rival Fujiwara no Tokihira (藤原時平, 871-909) of favouring prince Tokiyo (?) over the crown prince and consequently banished. After his death in exile, a series of droughts, epidemics, earthquakes, thunderstorms, and floods struck Japan, followed by the deaths of sons of Emperor Daigo (醍醐天皇, 897-930). Attributing these events to the *onryō* of Michizane, his rank was posthumously restored, and his spirit deified to appease him. Herbert Plutschow, "Ideology and Historiography: The Case of Sugawara no Michizane in the 'Nihongiryaku, Fuso Ryakki' and the 'Gukansho,'" *Historiography and Japanese Consciousness of Values and Norms* (conference paper), (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2003), 136-140.

[98] Taira no Masakado was a provincial magnate and samurai in the Heian period. Masakado led a rebellion in 939 known as *Tengyō no ran* (天慶の乱), to which the government responded by putting a bounty on his head. He was killed in 940 and his head was taken to the capital of Kyoto. Supposedly, strange things occurred such as the head making tooth grinding noises at night and even flying all the way back to (nowadays) Tokyo. It was buried there, and a head burial mound was erected. Each time the head mound was moved (or attempted to), something ominous happened, including deaths. Masakado was deified over the centuries.

[99] Emperor Sutoku was forced to abdicate his throne to his father's benefit (who actually held the power) in 1141. Sutoku then devoted himself to monastic life, writing numerous manuscripts and offering them to the court, which refused them for fear of being impure and thus cursed. Sutoku started resenting the court all the more and became an *onryō* after his death. The subsequent events such as decline in fortune of the Imperial court, the rise of the *samurai* class, the Great Fire in 1177, and the deaths of his enemies were blamed on the grudge of Sutoku. To appease him, a memorial Shinto shrine and a mausoleum were built in his honour and his status as a criminal was withdrawn. Today, he is worshipped at Shiramine shrine (白峰神宮) in Kyoto.

Another type of *onryō* are spirits who become vengeful ghosts at sea. They are called *funayūrei* (船幽霊, lit. "boat spirit") and were believed to attempt to sink ships to cause other people to join them.[100] They use different means to achieve this depending on the area. In some they fill boats with water using *hishaku* (柄杓, wooden ladle), in others they cause the compass to malfunction, and there are also those that light a fire on open sea to mislead the ships in bad weather.

Water in general can be looked at as a somewhat polarising element in regard to the supernatural, especially evil spirits. On one hand, in the Shinto belief water holds a particularly important (in a positive way) place as it is seen as means of purification. Shrines have got an ablution pavilion with a basin filled with running water for ritual cleansing before entering the shrine itself. Bodies of flowing water (rivers, seas, oceans) are also believed to be visual representations of fluid boundaries between our world and the world of the dead.[101] Stagnant water, on the other hand, is negatively connected to the supernatural and evil spirits as it often becomes polluted, both physically and spiritually. Moreover, the *yin* (陰, negative) element in the philosophy of *onmyōdō* (陰陽道, the way of yin and yang) is the negative principle of the two, associated not only with femininity and passivity but also wetness, darkness, and cold.

Nowadays, *onryō* are associated with water in the genre of Japanese horror more than ever before. This is due to the two most infamous *onryō* created in the 1990s and 2000s—Yamamura Sadako (also known as Samara Morgan in the American film adaptations) and Saeki Kayako. Although Kayako's death is not directly connected with water, water is significant to her character, nonetheless—Kayako's son Toshio is drowned in a bathtub by her husband (and Toshio's father) Takeo together with his pet cat, and one of the memorable haunting scenes is when her victim is having a shower. Suddenly either Kayako's hair is hanging from the ceiling or alternatively the victim momentarily finds Kayako's hand gripping the back of their head when washing their hair. It is true that Kayako is an *onryō* by definition, but she also possesses traits of *jibakurei* as she is tied to the house where she was brutally murdered, and her curse afflicts anybody who occupies the house. This might as well be due to the influence of Western media, particularly the trope of a haunted house in the horror genre.

Having a look at the portrayals of evil spirits in general, be it ancient stories, literature, urban legends, or cinema, it highlights the ever-enduring fascination with the supernatural.

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[100] Murakami Kenji 村上健司, *Yōkai jiten* 妖怪事典 (Japan: Mainichi Shimbunsha 毎日新聞出版, 2000), 298.
[101] Jennifer M. Yoo, "Dead Wet Girls versus Monstrous Mothers: The Female 'Monster' in Japanese Horror Cinema," *The Newsletter*, no. 94 (2023): 4.

There will always be the innate fear of the unknown and the human mind will constantly try to rationalise, at the moment, inexplicable events. This is the reason why scholars have been perpetually attempting to accurately categorise real existing creatures but also the supernatural ones. And not only scholars but common folk, too, have been searching for solutions to overcome *yōkai*. It is in order to overcome the fear of the unknown and be better prepared for what might come next. And as human imagination is endless, finding ways to beat the unknown dangers shall be as well.

3 Analysis of Yamamura Sadako, Inspirations, Influences, and Adaptation

The *onryō* of Yamamura Sadako is a worldwide known character who even gained a large cult following. Through her, Suzuki Kōji not only deconstructed the traditional idea of ghosts but also updated it for modern times and consequently reignited the interest of the general public in such matters. In order to discover the means by which he was capable of doing so, we must analyse the core itself—Sadako and the lethal curse of the videotape. This chapter introduces brief plot overviews, possible inspirations (real and fictional) behind Sadako's character creation and, of course, her characteristics—physical, mental, and psychic. Furthermore, it examines the videotape as a medium, why it works so well as a tool for spreading terror, and how *Ring* changed the genre of *kaidan* and Japanese horror.

3.1 Plot Overview of the *Ring* Series

Even those who have never seen the Japanese *Ring* films or their remakes abroad recognise the image of the infamous *onryō* Yamamura Sadako (or Samara Morgan). The original novels, however, portray a slightly different story in comparison to those adaptations. Characters and their backgrounds are changed, nuanced details are removed or added, the genre itself shifted from a psychological mystery horror with supernatural elements and detailed science to only a psychological horror focusing primarily on a ghost story, and so forth. In order to understand Suzuki Kōji's adaptation of *kaidan* and *onryō* for modern audiences which started with the novels, it is important to know the events of said novels, not the films.

3.1.1 *Ring*

The first novel in the series is set in present-day Tokyo, following a journalist Asakawa Kazuyuki who investigates mysterious deaths of four teenage students (one of which was his niece) that happened during one night at the same time from the same cause—a sudden heart failure. His investigation leads him to a holiday resort called Villa Log Cabin at Pacific Land in South Hakone where the group of students stayed one week prior to their deaths. There he finds a left-behind VHS videotape containing a collection of disturbing abstract and realistic images concluded with a warning: *"Those who have viewed these images are fated to die at this exact hour one week from now. If you do not wish to die, you must follow these instructions exactly…"*[102], then the tape cuts to a commercial.[103]

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[102] Suzuki Kōji, *Ring*, 106.
[103] The original instructions are never revealed in any of the three novels.

Asakawa believes the tape's warning and enlists the help of his friend Takayama Ryūji who, after hearing Asakawa's story, insists on watching the tape himself and asking for a copy of it to study at home. Unfortunately, Asakawa's wife and child also watch the tape, making Asakawa further motivated to figure out the "charm"[104] to prevent not only his death but also the deaths of his family and his friend.

Their investigation leads them to a person named Yamamura Sadako, daughter of Yamamura Shizuko who was famous for her exceptional ESP (extrasensory perception) abilities but later labelled a fraud by the press. Depressed, Shizuko committed suicide by jumping into Mount Mihara's crater, leaving behind her husband and their daughter who is still missing. They track Sadako's remains to the well situated under the cabin at the Villa Log Cabin resort. They conclude she must have inherited ESP from her mother and contracted smallpox shortly before her death, thus giving birth to the cursed tape. Believing they performed the charm by giving her a proper burial, they return to their homes. Ryūji, however, dies at his deadline. Upon learning this, Asakawa realises that the charm was probably copying the tape and showing it to somebody else, and rushes to his family in an attempt to save them.

3.1.2 *Spiral*

The sequel's story begins a day after Ryūji's death. Andō Mitsuo, Ryūji's former university classmate, is assigned to conduct his autopsy during which a benign tumour was found in Ryūji's throat which is believed to be the cause of death. Andō and his colleague are puzzled since the tumour resembles a tumour of smallpox that was eradicated 30 years prior. They name the virus the "ring virus" due to its shape.

Andō also finds a series of cryptic massages that lead him to meet Ryūji's assistant Takano Mai. Mai tells Andō about the cursed videotape and previous events, but he does not believe her. She is soon found to be missing. He investigates Asakawa's case only to find out about the car accident—wife and daughter dead before the collision, Asakawa admitted to a hospital in a catatonic state. In search for further information, Andō reads Asakawa's report titled THE RING, unsure of what to think as it contains supernatural explanations contradicting the scientific ones.

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[104] In the original Japanese novel, Suzuki uses the word *omajinai* (オマジナイ). The word is usually used and translated in the meaning of a "good luck charm" though the *kanji* itself holds several meanings such as "spell, curse, charm, malediction".

Andō solves the cryptic messages and discovers the true charm of the videotape. The videotape carries a virus created by Sadako and the virus uses the report as a new medium to spread—it mutated as viruses do to survive.

Weeks after Mai's disappearance, Andō meets a beautiful woman who claims to be Mai's older sister Masako. He falls in love with her, and they make love. Later he finds out that Masako is Sadako rebirthed in an exhaust shaft from Mai's body after watching the videotape. Sadako reveals she was using Andō for her own gains and gives him an ultimatum—death, or not interfering with the publishing of the Ring report as a book (in order to dominate the world). And as an incentive she offers to birth a "clone" of his deceased son Takanori. He chooses the latter, out of fear and out of selfishness.

3.1.3 *Loop*

The final book of this trilogy reveals that the events taking place in the first two books were happening inside of a massive supercomputer life-simulating project called Loop. A medical student named Futami Kaoru has got a father who has contracted a virus which causes a deadly disease called Metastatic Human Cancer (MHC). It is known that everyone involved in the failed Loop project has died by MHC. Kaoru searches for a cure to this type of cancer.

In the course of events, Kaoru falls in love with a woman named Sugiura Reiko. She becomes pregnant but also suicidal due to her recent loss of her son to MHC. Kaoru's investigations lead him to the last surviving person involved in the Loop, named Amano Tōru. Amano gives Kaoru details about the project, revealing a laboratory in New Mexico where another scientist involved in the project might still live. Kaoru travels there only to find the scientist dead.

Kaoru discovers he can still use the computers, VR goggles, and gloves to enter the Loop as a spectator. He witnesses the emergence of the ring virus and all the events of the previous novels from different points of view. Amano then informs him that the Loop's creator recreated Ryūji in the real world. The cloned Ryūji, however, carried the ring virus in him. When Ryūji was reborn, the virus escaped and mutated into MHC.

Kaoru, desperate to find the cure, is caught in the wild by an intense storm but is saved on the verge of death by an old man called Cristoph Eliot (the leader of the Loop project) who nurtures him to health. Eliot reveals that Kaoru is Ryūji's clone and thus immune to MHC. In order to accurately scan and understand this immunity, Kaoru would have to be analysed on a molecular level—meaning he would die. Kaoru agrees to this under the condition that Eliot will

prioritise curing Kaoru's family and Reiko. Kaoru is reborn into the Loop as Ryūji through Sadako, determined to rid this world of Sadako and the ring virus.

3.2 Inspirations for the *Ring* Series

The possible inspirations for the character of Sadako are not very difficult to find. The first that comes to mind is the story of Okiku mentioned in chapter one. *Sarayashiki* is the general name for this well-known (and most probably fictional) ghost story. Many versions of *Sarayashiki* exist but we are going to focus only on a handful of them. Suzuki takes inspiration from historically recorded events as well. There was a psychologist and parapsychologist Fukurai Tomokichi (福来友吉, 1869-1952) whose research was centred on (primarily) female psychics, mediums, and clairvoyants. Major background events in the *Ring* novel loosely follow the research of professor Fukurai (with changed names) and Suzuki even borrows two names of Fukurai's volunteer psychics for his characters.

3.2.1 *Sarayashiki Densetsu* (番町皿屋敷伝説, The Legends of The Dish Mansion)

As mentioned in chapter one, *Sarayashiki* is one of the three most famous *kaidan* stories. The tradition of *Sarayashiki* is a corpus of folk tales and legends with astonishing similarities to the *Ring* novel. It was passed down via oral tradition and adapted by many different entertainment media over time, thus plentiful variations of it exist. They all revolve around an unfortunate female servant who suffers an untimely death and comes back to haunt the living. We are, however, going to focus primarily on those that have got the following features in common: a female servant called Okiku, the death of Okiku at the bottom of a well, and of course the *yūrei* Okiku returning to haunt.

In the *bunraku* (*ningyō jōruri*) version of *Banshū Sarayashiki* in 1741, Okiku is a lady in waiting in the household of lord Hosokawa Masamoto. Aoyama Tetsuzan, a member of the Hosokawa family, plots with his accomplice to take the lord's place by poisoning him. Since Okiku overhears their plans, Tetsuzan conceals a precious plate (of a set of ten) and blames the loss on her. He then kills her and throws her body down a well. Okiku returns as an *onryō*, haunting Tetsuzan by counting the plates but is never able to finish since one is missing. Tetsuzan's treason is discovered, he is forced to flee and eventually kills himself as he is not able to endure Okiku's haunting.[105]

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[105] Monnet, "Connaissance Délicieuse," 232.

The most famous *kabuki* version is the aforementioned play by Okamoto Kido *Banchō Sarayashiki* from 1916. *Hatamoto* (旗本, vassal of the *shōgun*) Aoyama Harima and his servant Okiku are in love but the difference in their social status prevents them from being married. When Harima receives a marriage proposal, Okiku breaks one of the ten heirloom plates to test his devotion to her. Thinking it was an accident, Harima forgives her, but he changes his mind once he learns she broke it on purpose. Furious, he smashes the rest of the heirloom plates, cuts Okiku's throat and has her body thrown down a well. It is worth mentioning that this interpretation of the story is more focused on the elements of love and jealousy rather than the *onryō* itself.[106]

A lesser-known version, though still relevant for the purposes of this thesis, is the one recounted in the novel *Kikumushi* (菊虫, *The Chrysanthemum Beetle*) by Tsushima Yūko (津島佑子, 1947-2016). The servant Okiku is accused by the jealous wife of her master of putting a needle into one of his dishes and is then killed by throwing into a well as a punishment. It is said that "Okiku's desire for vengeance lives on in the form of the chrysanthemum beetle, which has a white pattern on its back supposedly representing Okiku."[107]

Many of the folk variations are of a dishwashing servant Okiku whose master Aoyama wanted to make her his lover. After several refusals, the master conceals one of the ten valuable plates she is responsible for and offers to overlook that if she becomes his lover. She rejects him again, making the master furious. Aoyama tortures Okiku, suspended above a well and when she does not change her mind, he then kills her and drops her down into the well. She returns as an *onryō*, haunting the well at nights, counting the plates and once she reaches nine, she lets out a horrifying shriek. Some say that Okiku can be appeased by shouting "ten" after she reaches number nine and others that only a priest can help.

As we can see, it would not be surprising if one recalls the image of Okiku when reading the *Ring* series. A young woman is thrown into a well as a punishment or as the means of getting rid of a witness and further "evidence". She then comes back, tormenting (mainly) her perpetrator by counting the plates and it is not clear exactly how to appease her spirit. There are several graves for Okiku in Tokyo and even a well called "Okiku-ido" (お菊井戸, lit. "The Okiku Well") located at the Himeji castle (姫路城), albeit it used to be called "Tsurubetori no ido" (釣瓶鳥の井戸, lit. "well-bucket-bird well") before the castle was opened to the public in

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[106] Monnet, "Connaissance Délicieuse," 232.
[107] Monnet, "Connaissance Délicieuse," 202.

the early Taisho period (大正時代, 1912-1926).[108] It is clear that the story of Okiku has influenced Japanese culture and inspired many creators of both past and present.

3.2.2 The Parapsychological Experiments

Several characters of the *Ring* series were inspired by real people and historical events of the early 20th century. Fukurai Tomokichi was an assistant professor of psychology at Tokyo Imperial University and later a professor at Kōyasan University. He had an interest in parapsychology[109], mesmerism[110], and extra-sensory perception and was pursuing experiments in said fields in the 1910s; during the period of interest in spiritualism[111] in Japan. These experiments (which began in 1910) were primarily focused on *senrigan* (千里眼, clairvoyance)[112] and *nensha* (念写, thoughtography)[113]. His findings were, at first, met with positive sensation and curiosity. A few years later, however, his theories were not accepted in academic fields anymore due to scepticism and several failed or cancelled experiments. In 1919 he began training to obtain psychic powers as well. This included meditation under waterfalls. He died of pneumonia in 1952.[114] The character of Sadako's father, Ikuma Heihachirō, was inspired by Fukurai. Ikuma was a professor of psychiatry at the Tokyo University, discovered Shizuko's psychic abilities, and performed public tests with her. Additionally, he had an affair with her despite being married. After a failed experiment, they were both accused of being frauds and ridiculed by mass media. He tried to gain his own psychic abilities but died after contracting tuberculosis.

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[108] Hyōgo kenritsu rekishi hakubutsukan 兵庫県立歴史博物館, "Himejijō to jōkamachi" 姫路城と城下町, last modified April 2009. https://rekihaku.pref.hyogo.lg.jp/digital_museum/legend3/story1/journey1/.

[109] Psychology Today defines parapsychology as follows: "Parapsychology is a field of study that investigates paranormal or "psychic" phenomena, including purported mental abilities such as telepathy and telekinesis. Psychology Today, "Parapsychology," accessed June 2024. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/parapsychology#:~:text=Parapsychology%20is%20a%20field%20of,abilities%20in%20the%20paranormal%20realm.

[110] Mesmerism, also known as animal magnetism, is a hypnotic procedure invented and used by the German physician Franz Anton Mesmer in the 18th century. It was introduced to Japan in the early Meiji period. The online Cambridge Dictionary defines mesmerism as follows: "The act of putting someone into a mental state like sleep, in which a person's thoughts can be easily influenced by someone else." Cambridge.org Dictionary, s.v. "mesmerism," accessed June 2024. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mesmerism.

[111] Melton defines spiritualism as follows: "In religion, [it is] a movement based on the belief that departed souls can interact with the living. Spiritualists sought to make contact with the dead, usually through the assistance of a medium, a person believed to have the ability to contact spirits directly." J. Gordon Melton, "spiritualism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified June 2024. https://www.britannica.com/topic/spiritualism-religion.

[112] The ability to perceive information about objects, people, places, and events via extrasensory perception or so-called "sixth sense".

[113] It is also known as psychic photography, and it is the ability to "burn" images from one's mind onto a photosensitive paper.

[114] National Diet Library, Japan, "The Senrigan Affair and Its Time Period," published 2015, https://www.ndl.go.jp/kaleido/e/entry/13/.

Fukurai's best-known subjects were Mifune Chizuko (御船千鶴子, 1886-1911), Nagao Ikuko (長尾郁子, 1871-1911), and Takahashi Sadako. Mifune allegedly gained her supposed powers after being mesmerised by her brother-in-law and performing breathing exercises and meditation. Many of the experiments were successful, albeit some failed, but her inability to perform her psychic abilities in front of public audiences (as opposed to those done in private) increased doubts about the credibility of the whole matter. She committed suicide by ingesting poison not a half year later, probably due to being heavily criticised by Japanese press and accused of being a fraud.[115] She is most likely the inspiration for Sadako's mother, Yamamura Shizuko. Shizuko gained her powers after saving the stone statue of *En no Ozunu* (役小角, a Japanese ascetic, 634-700/707). She was shortly popular due to that but after a failed public experiment of identifying the numbers on a pair of dice inside a container (this was a real experiment for Mifune as well), she was labelled a fraud and several years later committed suicide by jumping into a volcano of Mt. Mihara.

Nagao was less clairvoyant than Mifune but as a result of one of the experiments, thoughtography was "discovered". She died of flu shortly after Mifune.[116] The ability to produce psychic images was used in the novels and despite Nagao herself not being a direct inspiration, her family name was used for Dr Nagao who raped and murdered Sadako in the novel.

Takahashi was allegedly capable of clairvoyance and psychic photography. As a consequence of the prior failed experiments and loss of interest by other scholars, she never got the chance to demonstrate her abilities in public. Her later years, date of death and its cause are unknown.[117] We can see that Suzuki took advantage of this and modelled Sadako's (the character's) experience and her disappearance similarly to Takahashi's. Sadako is also clairvoyant, can produce psychic images, and never had the opportunity to showcase her abilities publicly. If it were not for the lethal videotape, nobody would ever know (nor care) what happened to her.

3.3 Yamamura Sadako

As mentioned previously, the *onryō* of Sadako, the central figure of the *Ring* series, has become a worldwide phenomenon and she represents an intriguing milestone in the evolution

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[115] Fukurai Tomokichi, *Clairvoyance and Thoughtography* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 16.
[116] National Diet Library, Japan, "The Senrigan Affair and Its Time Period," published 2015, https://www.ndl.go.jp/kaleido/e/entry/13/.
[117] Namiki Shin'ichirō 並木伸一郎, *Nihon no kaiki 100* 日本の怪奇 100 (Tokyo: Magajinrando マガジンランド, 2007), 172-173.

of the concept of Japanese ghosts and *kaidan*. The following subchapters analyse the multifaceted nature of Sadako—physical, mental, and psychic—and the lethal curse of the videotape. They reveal the means by which Suzuki deconstructed the traditional idea of ghosts and transformed it to be relevant and relatable to modern audiences, consequently reigniting the interest of the general public in the supernatural genre.

3.3.1 Physical Characteristics

The description of Sadako in the novels is vastly different from the Sadako portrayed in the films that sealed her image around the world. In matter of looks, she is described as "a fine woman"[118] by Ryūji, "far more beautiful than Mai"[119] by Asakawa, and "strikingly feminine. … wonderfully beautiful young woman"[120] by Yoshino. Her infamous *onryō* form is never revealed either, the closest would be the discovery of her bare bones in the well.

Indeed, at first glance she appears to be a very attractive woman but medically speaking, she is not a woman at all.[121] Sadako was born with an extremely rare syndrome—testicular feminisation syndrome. Dr Nagao describes it as follows: "[it is] a type of male pseudohermaphroditism. Externally the person seems completely female, having breasts and a vagina, but usually not a uterus. Chromosomally the person is XY, however—male. And for some reason people with this condition are all beautiful."[122] He tries to rationalise his dreadful actions with excuses such as the early symptoms of smallpox, fever and a headache, robbing him of his usually good judgement and self-control. Additionally, he claims that "it had been a necessary trial if she were to go on living as a woman."[123] This latter rationalisation is deeply rooted in the androcentric gender politics of Japan as Sadako would not be able to fulfil the "duties" of neither gender since she cannot bear a child nor can she father one. Dr Nagao's immediate decision to kill her could have been influenced by several aspects. For instance, Sadako's mental threat of killing him for what he has done to her and/or his pity for Sadako's inability to contribute to society thus being ostracised for her entire life. In his mind, Sadako is better off dead and her threat and influence make it all the easier to murder her.

Little did he know that his actions would actually set off a chain of spiralling events causing exactly what he might have wished to prevent. Sadako is reborn in the second novel

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[118] Suzuki, *Ring*, 251.
[119] Suzuki, *Ring*, 251.
[120] Suzuki, *Ring*, 239.
[121] Though for the purposes of this thesis, Sadako is going to be referred to as a woman since she is treated as such by the characters in the novels.
[122] Suzuki, *Ring*, 289.
[123] Suzuki, *Ring*, 289.

Spiral and after the rebirth, her body is different. She has now got both—a fully developed uterus and testicles. Furthermore, she can ejaculate like a man. Sadako has become a complete hermaphrodite capable of asexual reproduction. With the help of modern medicine, she is also able to bear identical human beings within a single week, if their DNA is available. This is demonstrated by her giving birth to Ryūji and Andō's son Takanori who then in about one more week grow into the age they were at the point of their death.

As Andō says: "Then Sadako isn't human anymore. She's a new species. New species arise due to mutation. This is evolution happening before our eyes!"[124] Her DNA indeed combined with the DNA of the smallpox virus due to her supernatural powers, mutating and consequently creating the ring virus which was forced to stay dormant for decades at the bottom of the well. Besides being the key to her survival, the virus's mutation enabled her to be reborn as a perfect hermaphrodite as well as to kill without having to be in direct contact with her victims and whether or not she is alive.

3.3.2 Mental Characteristics

Despite her testicular feminisation syndrome, Sadako was brought up as any ordinary girl would. She inherited her mother's psychic powers but hid them because she resented the persecution and humiliation that happened to her parents by the mass media which consequently caused her mother to commit suicide and her father to be discredited and ostracised. As a result of her upbringing as an out-of-wedlock child with her parents surrounded by media scandals, she was a quiet girl and always alone, especially after her mother's death.

She has always been, however, of a determined mind. She has had an ambition to become an actress and joined a theatre troupe. She left after an (alleged) incident with one of her male co-workers Shigemori who died the following day. The possible cause of his death shall be discussed in the following subchapter.

Nonetheless, people in her surroundings described her as "eerie", "strange", and "that creepy girl" in regard to her personality. She had a mesmerising effect on others, almost as if she could influence other people's thoughts and actions, even in her "first" life. An example of this would be the (alleged) incident with Shigemori in *Ring* or Andō's second and third encounter with Sadako after she was reborn in *Spiral*: "… he couldn't. It was as though his every movement had been controlled by that woman. He had acted against his will. … He wasn't imagining it; he could still feel the impact from that moment when their gazes locked.

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[124] Suzuki Kōji, *Spiral*, trans. Glynne Walley (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 430.

… He felt that she'd somehow known he'd pass through Sangubashi Station on that train. She'd been lying in wait for him. But it was no use resisting her charms now that she stood before him."[125] Andō has not got any idea how calculated she truly is until it is forced upon him since she does not reveal anything unnecessary on her own. But then it is too late to stop the unravelling chain of events.

Further proof of Sadako's manipulative skills is the way she learnt to read people. She has always been alone, quiet, invisible in the background, and thus she observed. She knew to make a deal with Ryūji in order to resurrect herself. She knew to offer Andō his deceased son as an incentive to appeal to his human selfish nature as he might have decided to be brave and risk his life in an attempt to stop her since he has not got anything to lose anymore. And not only that, in her explanation letter to him she uses phrases to sound empathetic to make a manipulative connection with Andō: "As I do not wish to startle you any further, I have decided to leave a letter. … Please try to remain calm as you read it. … I have simply told you honestly what happened to me. Why have I? So that you may understand. And now that you do understand, I would like to ask you to do something for me. Why you? Because I believe you, …"[126]

Sadako had a difficult start to her life. She was an illegitimate child, and her mother labelled a marriage wrecker as Ikuma was an already married man with a child borne by his wife. Sadako was additionally born and brought up at a remote location of Japan—the Izu Ōshima island (伊豆大島) as opposed to the metropolis of Tokyo where most of the events take place. Additionally, albeit technically a man, she could not benefit from that social status as a result of her feminine appearances. She could not pursue any relationships either for the fear of exposure and ridicule. She was bound by the gender politics and social expectations to a further degree than others. For all these reasons she became prone to enjoy having control and holding grudges. It is therefore not surprising that Sadako sets on a path to dominate the world after her rebirth, willing to destroy anyone in her way, after all the mistreatment she endured during her former life. To achieve this, she uses all of her traits and talents—natural beauty and charm, supernatural influence, ambition, calculation, manipulation, and more. She plans to infect as many people as possible to take control through fear. For the purposes of this, she has found a way of releasing the ring virus via the mutated carriers of the ring virus—the book *Ring* written by Asakawa's brother and consequently the various adaptations of it.

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[125] Suzuki, *Spiral*, 319-382.
[126] Suzuki, *Spiral*, 425-431.

It is clear Sadako was traumatised, and that the trauma largely impacted her psyche. Ironically, her rebirth occurred at a place similar to where she was murdered. As stated previously, ritual cleansing is a part of Japanese indigenous religion. Sadako realised the coincidence and felt it a necessary trial to cleanse her psyche to adapt to the new world, as she states in her letter: "It was only then when I looked up that I first realized, with a shock, that the exhaust shaft looked quite like the well where I had died. It was like a rite of passage prepared for me by the gods. I thought of it as a divinely appointed trial; I would not be able to adapt to this world … unless I crawled out of that hole on my own."[127] This further accentuates her adaptability, strong will, and ambition.

As one can see, Sadako is a complex character whose mental traits inflict fear on both—the series' characters and the reader—by subverting established structures and beliefs. Suzuki leaves it up to the reader to determine what her innate traits are and to what degree her personality was influenced by society and its standards.

3.3.3 Supernatural (Psychic) Abilities

To explore Sadako's supernatural powers, it is important to explain her mother's powers and their origin first. Shizuko's psychic powers were supposedly a gift for rescuing a stone statue of the ascetic *En no Ozunu* from the sea whom she was deeply devoted to. "[After that] she often experienced searing pains in her head, accompanied by visions of things she'd never seen before flashing across her mind's eye. … these scenes she had glimpsed very soon manifested themselves in reality."[128] That is how Shizuko's childhood friend describes her gained abilities. By the press, her powers are described as mainly ESP-related such as clairvoyance and then psychokinesis[129] such as thoughtography. She did not, however, possess the power of telekinesis, the ability to move things without touching them.

It is obvious that Sadako inherited her powers from her mother, Sadako's were, however, on a vastly emphasized scale. Her abilities are unmatched. Not only is she capable of all of the above, additionally she can send mental messages straight to other people's minds and project her own images onto a cathode-ray tube—in other words, project pictures on TV as if they were a film—which is far more impressive in comparison to a single psychic photo. She was told to hide her powers and she did so as they brought only misfortune and suffering to her parents.

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[127] Suzuki, *Spiral*, 428.
[128] Suzuki, *Spiral*, 249.
[129] Britannica defines psychokinesis as follows: "The action of mind on matter, in which objects are supposedly caused to move or change as a result of mental concentration upon them." Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "psychokinesis," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified January 2024, https://www.britannica.com/topic/psychokinesis.

That was the reason for her sending only an average psychic photo back to Professor Miura who was researching such matter years later. In spite of that, she was curious about the full extent of what she could do. Coincidentally, one of her coworkers at the theatre troupe, called Arima, partially witnessed one of her experiments: "I could see the TV screen flickering. I thought, well, someone's watching TV. … It was Sadako Yamamura. … I crouched down to plug [the desk lamp] in, and that's when I noticed it: the television wasn't plugged in, either. … She didn't meet my gaze, but just kept staring at the screen, with a faint smile on her lips."[130] Arima told this strange experience to the director Uchimura and the actual founder of the acting company—Shigemori.

Shigemori was intrigued by Sadako even before he heard of this occurrence, and it only strengthened his fascination with her. One evening while drinking, he proclaimed he was going to "storm" Sadako's flat, but nobody knows whether he actually did. Nonetheless, the next day he was a changed man—pale and silent—and died sitting in his chair from a sudden heart failure. This is where it invokes the question—was Sadako capable of killing someone with her powers? The answer is obvious when it comes to her abilities after her death but at this point, she has not fused with the smallpox virus yet. She was still able to send mental messages and, perhaps not on purpose and only to a certain degree, influence other people's mental and emotional states. On the premise that he attempted to have his way with her, it is not far-fetched to assume that she could have frightened him with her psychic powers to a point where his heart failed. It is not unheard of in Japan for someone to die due to overworking themselves,[131] hence no one suspected anything else, let alone a supernatural interference. It would also explain Sadako's confidence behind her telepathic message to Dr Nagao after he raped her "I'll kill you."[132] He was instantly certain that she would fulfil that if he did not kill her first.

Just before her death, Sadako contracted the smallpox virus. This virus was eradicated through global vaccination and was considered extinct worldwide since 1977.[133] Viruses are a strange form of life that balances on the border between living and non-living things. It needs cells of another living organism—a host—to reproduce itself. Once a cell is infected, it is forced to produce copies of the original virus. If the host dies, the virus dies with them. That is what would have happened if Sadako did not possess supernatural powers. In the end, Asakawa comes to the understanding that "a woman's resentment toward the masses who had hounded

[130] Suzuki, *Ring*, 235-236.
[131] This phenomenon is known as *karōshi* (過労死, lit. "overwork death") and its most common medical causes are heart attacks and strokes caused by stress, overwork, and malnourishment.
[132] Suzuki, *Ring*, 289.
[133] In the *Ring* novels, Dr Nagao is its last carrier in Japan.

her father and mother to their deaths and the smallpox virus's resentment toward the human ingenuity that had driven it to the brink of extinction had fused together in the body of a singular person named Sadako Yamamura, and had reappeared in the world in an unexpected, unimagined form."[134] This new mutated virus then lied dormant in the well for 25 years until it seized the opportunity to record itself on a forgotten videotape. There is a theory by Professor Miura about the creation of *onryō* in *Ring*: "There are three conditions that have to be met in order for a malevolent will to remain in the world after death. An enclosed space, water, and a slow death. … then usually that person's angry spirit will haunt that place."[135] At first glance, this theory appears to be proven true, at least to Asakawa and Ryūji. With hindsight, one can see that it was only a theory. Sadako would not be able to return to haunt without the prerequisites of her psychic powers and the presence of the smallpox virus in her body.

As is revealed in *Spiral*, the ring virus creates a cancerous tumour in the artery causing a heart failure. After reading the RING files written by Asakawa and examining a sample of the virus, Andō ponders what the means of its transmission are. He comes to the conclusion that it must be a result of "mind over matter". He understands that science acknowledges these occurrences: "It was, of course a common knowledge that the mind, as abstract and immaterial as it was, could influence the body in various ways. … One only had to think of how stress could eat holes in the stomach lining. … First, the video created in the viewer a particular psychological state that somehow influenced the viewer's own DNA to metamorphose until the mystery virus which resembled smallpox was born."[136] This means that Sadako uses her psychic powers to transmit an image of the virus into the victim's/host's mind where it festers and consequently manifests in a form of the cancerous smallpox-like ring virus. Asakawa's impression right after he watches the videotape for the first time supports this theory as he has got the feeling like something intangible crawled into his body.

The first victims of Sadako's grudge via the ring virus are four teenagers—Ōishi Tomoko, Iwata Shūichi, Tsuji Haruko, and Nōmi Takehiko—who dismiss the videotape as silly. The next victim was supposed to be Asakawa but since he, unbeknownst to him, helped the virus to propagate and mutate, he was spared. And since Ryūji did not do so, he is the fifth to succumb to this virus. Asakawa, realising his wrong assumption for overcoming the "evil charm", attempts to save his wife and daughter by making Shizu's parents watch it in their stead. His assumptions were wrong again and Asakawa becomes the only survivor. This anxiousness of

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[134] Suzuki, *Ring*, 356.
[135] Suzuki, *Ring*, 317.
[136] Suzuki, *Spiral*, 230.

not being able to find a solution is passed onto the reader since the true solution overwritten by a commercial at the end of the original videotape is never revealed in *Ring*, nor in the sequels, thus they need to rely solely on assumptions. Nevertheless, the heart is not the only organ the virus can target. Andō observes that the virus found Takano Mai looks differently than in the other victims. It is called the ring virus because the shape of most of the virus specimens resemble a ring with a gem on top (see fig. 3). Yet the rings in the sample from Mai's body were mostly undone and thus rather resembling a sperm (see fig. 4). Sadako's supernatural virus targeted the egg of ovulating Mai, making her into a chrysalis for Sadako to be reborn.
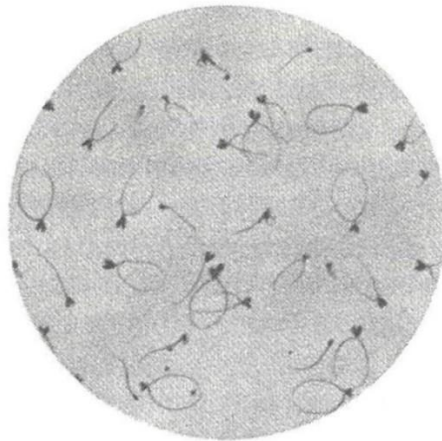

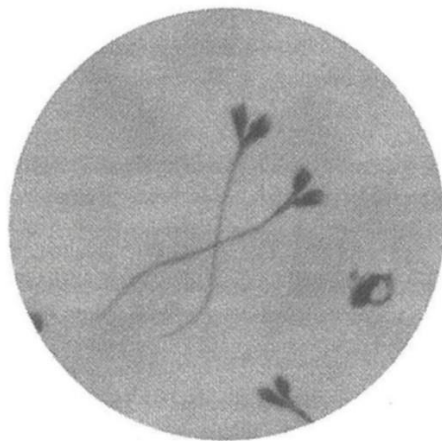Figure 3. The ring virus (21000x), in *Spiral* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 325.

Figure 4. Broken ring virus (100000x), in *Spiral* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 328.

It is necessary for viruses to be able to adapt, mutate, and evolve, otherwise they are going to be eradicated. This also applies to Sadako, her body, and her psychic powers. She is reborn with a fully hermaphroditic body and gains the control to activate the dormant virus in an infected person as she indicates in her letter to Andō. Her mutated supernatural abilities provide her with all the tools to dominate the world and unleash her resentment towards humanity if needed with no remorse.

3.3.4 The Divergence of Sadako

The author Suzuki Kōji has been breaking traditional conventions for a long time. For instance, whilst his wife worked as a schoolteacher, he had been a stay-at-home husband with their children. Currently, Japan is still a highly gender-based society with assigned gender roles and such a role reversal was all the more exceptional in the late 1980s when he began his writing career. Thus, it is not surprising that his tendencies to transgress and subvert set norms are projected in his work as well. He takes something that feels familiar to the reader and twists it in unexpected ways, evoking the feelings of uneasiness, distrust, and the primordial fear of the unknown.

Taking into consideration all of Sadako's characterisation in the previous subchapters, she is not an inherently evil character. She is the victim of traumatic events and simultaneously the perpetrator harming others. The reader is prone to sympathise with her unfortunate situation during her "first" life and cannot blame her for her resentment towards the masses that blindly follow the authorities. So far, these characteristics fit the traditional portrayal of *onryō*.

There are many distinctions that set Sadako apart from her folkloric predecessors. In contrast to the traditional vengeful ghosts, she is targeting people at random in an indiscriminate attack (like a virus), innocent or guilty makes no difference to her since she deems the human species in its entirety universally guilty. Albeit true that the supposed revenge of the Three Great Vengeful Ghosts of Japan had casualties amongst innocent people (due to floods, famine, diseases, and so forth), the revenge itself was still primarily targeting the *onryō*'s enemies and their wellbeing. Sadako seems to be omnipresent, not concerned with whom she strikes, and there seemingly is no place to hide from her curse in this technologically driven world.

Another point is that Sadako does not serve as the moral of the story in comparison to *kaidan* especially of the premodern eras. In those stories, karma is an important element providing a possible explanation for why an individual is targeted by an *onryō* or other *yōkai*. It can be a result of the wrongdoings one has done in their past lives and/or their current one. Sadako is amoral and instead makes other people question their own morality and whether their "duty" to society outweighs their personal motives, fears, and desires. Asakawa's personal motives and desires of the present end up outweighing the looming and uncertain future ahead of them, potentially dooming the world. As he puts it: "*In order to protect my family, I am about to let loose on the world a plague which could destroy all mankind.* Asakawa was frightened by the essence of what he was trying to do. A voice was whispering to him. *If I let my wife and daughter die, it'll end right here. If a virus loses its host, it'll die. I can save the mankind.* But

the voice was too quiet."[137] Neither Andō is able to resist the promise of Sadako to bring back his deceased son (in exchange for Andō not interfering with the release of the *Ring* novel in order to release the virus on a massive scale) whose drowning was caused by Andō's inadvertence, thus alleviating his burning guilt in exchange for a guilt that is easier repressed at the moment. And by doing so, it makes them complicit in the execution of her revenge, passing on the trauma. This massively betrays one of the core Japanese values—community. The only person who does not give into his selfish desires of the present is Kaoru in *Loop*. He is in love with Reiko who is carrying his unborn child in the real world, yet he still voluntarily chooses to be returned into the Loop, never to be able to see Reiko again or meet his child. His selflessness, however, provides the means by which the escaped ring virus (MHCV) could be cured.

Without Kaoru's sacrifice, Sadako and her viral curse would be left undefeated. That is another crucial contrast to the traditional *onryō*. As described in earlier chapters, there are several means by which the vengeful spirit can be calmed, be it as peaceful as reciting sutras or as violent as fulfilling their bloody revenge. But Sadako is unappeasable. The protagonists of the first novel conclude that decoding the origins of the videotape will provide them with the solution to resolve the curse and uplift the grudge. This is a common theme in legends and superstitions, so they assume that they are dealing with the "usual" case of grudge keeping the spirit from ascending. After discovering the origins, they ponder about the ways to resolve Sadako's trauma. Killing Dr Nagao seemed pointless since he was still alive despite Sadako's killing powers. Exposing him would not be plausible either for the lack of time and tangible evidence, and without showing the lethal videotape to a wider audience. Hence, they try to appease her by finding her remains and giving her a proper burial in her homeland which is revealed as false, costing Ryūji his life. Asakawa realises Sadako does not long for reparation or justice and that one cannot defeat the deadly curse, only avoid it by passing it onward, creating a loop of never-ending trauma. This is also symbolised by the titles of the novels—ring as "a vicious circle", spiral as "spiralling events", and loop as "being stuck in a loop".

Sadako's killing method and the psychology behind it is also updated to modern media. As mentioned in the previous subchapter, she kills by the combination of the supernatural and science. Through her psychic powers, she was able to preserve her genetic information that got recorded on a videotape in a form of extreme emotional and psychic moments of Sadako's life that left the deepest impressions on her. Her powers also allow for the virus to transmit and take

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137 Suzuki, *Ring*, 365-366.

hold within the victim's DNA. This process is manifested via merging of Sadako's and the victim's perspectives, forcing them to identify with her point of view: "This video hadn't been recorded by a machine. A human being's eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin—all five senses had been used to make this video. These chills, this shivering, were from somebody's shadow sneaking into him through his sense organs. Asakawa had been watching the video from the same perspective as this *thing* within him."[138]

Considering her physical traits, Sadako diverts significantly from her antecedents as well. As hinted earlier, there are many misconceptions and negative beliefs in regard to women and femininity stemming from religions of Japan. Sadako transgresses them all by appearing to be a beautiful woman while being genetically a man. Since the testicular feminisation syndrome (and her psychic powers) are extremely rare, one does not know what to expect of her. She not only does not fit into the gendered society, but she also becomes a threat to such societal structures. This could have been a third possible reason for Dr Nagao's decision to kill her—his innate fright of what chaos and disorder, represented by people like her, could do to the orderly hierarchical society.

Additional diversion from the traditional portrayal in *kabuki* and *bunraku* theatre is that Sadako never appears[139] in the conventional ghostly form—that is wearing a white *kimono* (or even white Western clothes popular in Japan nowadays), head adorned by *tenkan*/*zukin* with unkept dishevelled hair or accompanied by *hitodama*. She is merely the sensation of not being alone, the paranoia of being watched by something intangible, the pressure of impending death. The visual terror is not necessary for the primordial fear of the unknown is far more effective as the afflicted characters continue to try and fail in categorising her to find a solution until it is too late.

As we can see, Sadako is purposely written as to remind the reader of the folkloric past yet subvert their expectations of it. She is ambiguous, blurring the line between opposite aspects. She is the victim and the monster. She is male and female. She is powerful and vulnerable. She is dead and alive, similarly to a virus. She can kill with her powers but also give life through them. She is temporary but also everlasting. She bridges the supernatural and scientific aspects in a way that nothing feels logical or safe anymore. The lack of her *onryō* form does not make her any less frightening or dangerous, quite the contrary in my opinion. The vivid characterisation of her personality and supernatural powers lingers in one's mind long after

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[138] Suzuki, *Ring*, 198.

[139] In the novels, that is. In the film adaptations, however, her form of dread is very similar to the traditional folkloric appearance of *onryō*.

finishing reading the books. The question "what did she give birth to" (referring to either Sadako or Mai) is raised numerous times in the story. The answer is, unsurprisingly, breaching the borders between fiction and reality—they gave birth to a cursed character whose traits created the perfect basis for her frightening depiction in the visual adaptations that would popularise this new concept of *onryō* around the world and consequently cementing her image in the minds of everyone, becoming an icon of Japanese horror forever.

3.4 The Re-emergence of *Kaidan* in the Technological World

What sets the *Ring* series apart from its predecessors is that Suzuki fuses traditional *kaidan* with modern technology and science, giving birth to an entire new subgenre. Whilst others rely on the beliefs of the unexplainable as the fear factor, Suzuki leans into detailed explanations of the origins of the cursed videotape. His choice of medium for this story was excellent and this chapter explores the reasons. Suzuki himself has not got a medical background, hence he consulted a medical specialists Nakano Ikuta (中野幾太) which allowed him to bring realism into a preposterous story.[140] Suzuki refuses to settle for any particular genre and one can see their various aspects fusing in his narrative—mystery, horror, *kaidan*, science-fiction, detective fiction, thriller, and more. This gives us insight into his way of adapting the ancient for the modern.

3.4.1 VHS as a Medium

There still are people who believe in such superstitions as mirrors reflecting the human soul or even being the entryways into other worlds. These beliefs extend to photography as well. There have been cultures whose members refuse to be photographed for the fear of a part of their soul being stolen away and captured inside the photograph. The same belief applies to video recordings too. Thus, it cannot be surprising that photography and video recordings became the most frequent form of media to "capture the evidence" of ghosts.

The VHS (Video Home System) was invented in 1976 by the Victor Company of Japan, Limited. It was the dominant medium for the consumer-level home video format since the late 1970s up until the early 2000s. It was affordable to buy, easy to handle, and easy to produce copies of (both legally and illegally). The first novel *Ring* was written at the end of the 1980s and published in 1991 when VHS and VCR (videocassette recorders) were very common in Japanese households. VHS rental shops were quite popular and convenient, too.

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[140] Suzuki Kōji 鈴木光司, Rasen らせん, (Tokyo: Kodokawa Shōten Co., Ltd. 株式会社角川書店, 1995), 402.

Suzuki could not have chosen a better media than VHS for his story about a vengeful ghost at the time. Although rare nowadays, it used to be an ordinary everyday object for storing data in the form of pictures (video) and (usually) sound, which can be duplicated, edited, or overwritten. This is strikingly similar to a living cell storing data in the form of DNA which also can be rewritten. Sadako was perfectly capable of projecting her images onto a television's cathode-ray tube while alive. Which is why it is not unimaginable that her last moments, preserved by her psychic powers and infused with the smallpox virus, waited patiently in the well and took the first chance to store themselves in an empty videotape forgotten in the VCR placed in the cabin above the well.

The modernisation of a ghost story when the chosen medium for the curse is a part of modern technology creates an interesting predicament. Modern people tend to laugh at the people of the past for not knowing or understanding certain facts and concepts. The truth is, however, that most people nowadays do not truly understand everything either. Most of us are familiar with the technology we utilise in our day-to-day life and know how to use it—for instance phones, television, computers, and so forth. On the other hand, usually only those who specialise or have got an interest in said technology know how and why it works; when our phone malfunctions, we have got to visit a professional in the phone-repair store. In the case of a videotape, one logically concludes that the recording was made through a camera lens. Asakawa and Ryūji follow this logic until the shocking realisation that it was recorded with human senses and mind. This revelation is made after Asakawa makes a copy for Ryūji, overwriting a recording on an old VHS he owns, and long after the first victims erase the end of the videotape. It is clearly simple to modify and duplicate this tape and thus hide its contents behind a popular title. It evokes uneasiness in the protagonists and readers alike, blurring the border between the book and reality—with rental shops and homemade copies being popular, does one really know what they could end up watching?

The cursed videotape also reminds the reader of the chain letters sent via various media such as email, SMS, and SNS. For the chain-letters threat or blessing to be fulfilled, the recipient must copy the letter and pass the copies on to a certain number of other people who have not received it yet, like an exponentially growing pyramid. Urban legends are also often distributed via chain letters. It is Asakawa's worry that once the videotape is unleashed upon the world, people, scared of the curse, will start spreading untruthful rumours, accelerating the videotape's reproduction rate.

3.4.2 Adaptation of *Kaidan* to the Technological World

Japan has got a long history of preserving their customs exactly as they were passed down by their ancestors. It is why many religious and cultural traditions, but also trades and arts have survived to this day. However, in certain fields, such as science and technology, development and modernisation exceeded that of the rest of the world, especially in electronics and medicine. And Suzuki uses these advancements to his advantage in his work.

The first novel *Ring* was the closest of the three to the genre of *kaidan*. The themes of supernatural powers, unjust death, and grudge of a vengeful ghost are woven throughout the narrative. The major difference is that Suzuki uses modern technology as the means to initiate the execution. In traditional *kaidan*, it is the spirits themselves who return in their *onryō* form or in disguise to perform the execution to avenge the wrongdoings. Additionally, the cause of death is never questioned in *Ring* since the protagonist conclude that the curse was created by immense psychic powers, it logically falls in the realm of unexplainable matters.

In the sequel *Spiral*, however, Suzuki provides a detailed medical explanation in regard to the virus, its incubation and mutation. By doing so, he brings the supernatural events closer to modern science than ever before; to a point when the reader begins to question whether a curse like this could be possible in the real world since genetic modification has been done for decades and there still are phenomena unexplainable by contemporary science.

The final novel *Loop* makes the border between reality and fiction crumble even further. All the events of the previous novels are revealed to have happened in an artificial life simulation Loop. Yet the supernatural occurrences are still real as Kaoru notices strange warpings of space around objects affected by Sadako's powers. It is also revealed that Ryūji figured out he lives in a simulation and with the aid of the supernatural called the real world via phone. Unfortunately, the ring virus has escaped with him, hidden in his DNA, and mutated into the MHC virus plaguing the world. A computer virus became an organic one. The state of modern medicine already allows for faulty organic parts of a human body to be replaced by mechanical parts. Suzuki makes the reader ponder what dangers might rise from artificial and organic viruses mutating within a live body once people start implementing more computer-like replacements.

Time is rather significant in the *Ring* series. The cursed video was made in late August, the month of *obon*. It is as if it was made in October in Western cultures, when the veil between life and death is the thinnest. Those who see the videotape are subjugated to a strict deadline of seven days. The first novel begins with an exact timestamp and the book constantly reminds

the reader of the ticking time as the plot continues. It represents the weakness of humanity—we are able to grasp the idea of our own mortality but tend to push it out of our consciousness. It is not until we are given a deadline (for example a diagnosis of terminal diseases) when we realise how little time we have got and how valuable it is.

In *kaidan*, time is also an important part of the narrative. *Yōkai* and *yūrei* are often bound by rules or their preferences. For example, *yūrei* tend to appear during the hour of the ox when the night is the darkest. Their victims are often given a time period during which they must perform a certain task such as reciting sutras in order to avoid the incoming wrath. This is quite similar to the seven-day deadline in *Ring*. The difference is that Sadako's curse can appear at any time, depending on when one watched the videotape. This fact makes the videotape all the more frightening because if one does not know what time they finished watching it, they do not know their own deadline. With the inside-the-novels publishing of the *Ring* book and its adaptations, it becomes even more unpredictable because the infected most probably will not know the exact time they read/saw the cursed part.

Even though Suzuki did not have a clear plan in mind for the overarching story of the trilogy before he started writing it,[141] he managed to implement different genres and modern technology flawlessly into the narrative, subverting the readers expectations of a ghost story and mutating the story into a new form with each novel. It starts as a mystery ghost story evoking elements of *kaidan*, then morphs into a horror science-fiction with supernatural elements based on *kaidan* until it reaches its climax where a single viral grudge threatens an entire universe. Suzuki initiated a technological transformation of the supernatural. In the past, people often could not explain some natural phenomena and in order to be less frightened, they created superstitions and tales of *yōkai*. Nowadays, people tend to be rather sceptical regarding such matters, believing that the advanced science will present an answer and thus protect. And although *Ring* provides explanations, it does not offer protection. Ghosts that have been dismissed by technology are now capable of utilising it against people. Suzuki draws a parallel between a scientific virus and supernatural powers—both invisible to the naked eye yet the former observable via microscope and the latter by Loop's VR. He does not mythicise the supernatural, he analyses it and nudges the reader to do the same. His blend of the modern and the ancient, the scientific and the occult, reality and fiction helped *kaidan* to re-emerge by transforming it into a subgenre of Japanese horror that is capable of evoking fear in modern audiences.

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[141] Suzuki Kōji 鈴木光司, Rūpu ループ, (Tokyo: Kodokawa Shōten Co., Ltd. 株式会社角川書店, 1998), 420.

Conclusion

History and its preservation are important for humankind. Evolution, development, and new discoveries, however, are as well. People tend to primarily focus on the present and future, forgetting that it is the past with all its achievements and failures that got us to this point. It is exciting to research the origins of what one finds fascinating and how it developed over the centuries. It is for these reasons I decided to explore the supernatural aspects of Japanese folklore, specifically ghosts, *kaidan*, and discover in what way they were adapted to modern media so they would re-emerge as a subgenre of Japanese horror popular around the world.

After analysing the origins and development of *kaidan* in greater detail, it is clear that, despite societal and technological modernisation, it has persisted as a significant part of Japanese cultural beliefs. Even after its prime has ended, *kaidan* did not remain only in already established art forms such as literature and theatre. Albeit deemed old-fashioned, its elements have been successfully integrated into various new forms of entertainment such as film, *manga*, and video games; creating up-to-date stories to resonate with modern audiences. Additionally, it serves as a cultural mirror nowadays as much as it did in the past, reflecting social issues and offering commentary. The worldwide commercial success of this transformed subgenre of modern horror, with Suzuki's *Ring* series as the catalyst, is a testament to its lasting relevancy, universal appeal, and adaptability.

The analysis of *yōkai*, specifically ghosts *yūrei* and *onryō*, in Japanese folklore reveals that their concept changed significantly over time. Before the inflow of Western intellectual movements and other influences, ghosts were perceived as natural as rain which was then substituted by scepticism and their eventual supernaturalisation. It is evident that the discourse on ghosts (and *yōkai* in general) reflects Japan's cultural identity and the ambivalence of Japanese people towards rapid modernisation, urbanisation, and changing social dynamics. It can also be deduced that urban legends have emerged as a modern urban equivalent of traditional rural folktales. The ideological concept of Japanese ghosts itself has not changed as much (besides a few minor alterations in appearance) since it reflects Japanese religions' beliefs in the afterlife. There is no denying, however, that the abilities of ghosts (and other supernatural phenomena) and their realm have been technologically updated to modern standards.

Suzuki drew his inspiration for Sadako from both fictional and historical sources. She was inspired by the fictional ghost story of Okiku and by the parapsychological experiments of the early 20th century. In a very fundamental way, Sadako is a traditional *onryō*. She was wronged during her life and died in a violent manner, feeling powerful emotions of hatred and

grudge. But after a careful examination, it is clear that Sadako embodies a revolutionary divergence from the traditional portrayal of ghosts, transforming the *onryō* archetype for modern audiences. By fusing traditional elements with modern technology, Suzuki creates a character that is familiar and somewhat relatable but simultaneously deeply unsettling. Sadako with her unique traits—gender ambiguity, psychic powers, and virality—challenges and transgresses set societal norms and expectations simply by existing. Her omnipresence along with her way of invading the human psyche and physique represent the pervasive influence of modern media and reflect anxieties about one's privacy in a technologically driven world. She transcends the need for visual terror since her enduring impact lies in her ability to instil psychological dread. She is the bridge between ancient superstitions and modern science—utilising technology to evoke primordial fear in modern audiences, creating a new subgenre of horror and becoming its icon worldwide.

This subgenre is an extension of Suzuki's genius in modernisation of ghost stories. By choosing VHS as the transmitter for the curse, he taps into existing superstitions about photography and video recordings, grounding the supernatural in a familiar context. The scientific details he provides are just enough to enhance the plausibility of the events without hindering the occult elements. It is essential for the technology to be highly incorporated into the story since that makes it relatable and frightening for today's technologically reliant audience. It blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. Ultimately, Suzuki's *Ring* series revitalised *kaidan* by skilfully implementing traditional and modern themes, ensuring its relevance in the genre of horror, from which many subsequent creators draw inspiration.

In conclusion, the analysis of *kaidan* and supernatural entities with focus on ghosts in Japanese folklore in this thesis presents how these concepts have been shaped by historical, religious, intellectual, and social influences and how the continuous adaptations and interpretations of such matters reflect their significance in Japanese cultural identity and Japan's overall complex relationship with its present, and future. The analysis of Sadako and Suzuki's usage of science and technology demonstrates how cleverly combining the ancient with the modern can actually preserve, even immortalise, the traditional elements in popular culture and remain both relatable and terrifying for modern audiences.

Resumé

This master thesis aims to analyse Japanese ghosts (*yūrei*/*onryō*) and their adaptation to modern Japanese ghost stories (*kaidan*) with focus on Yamamura Sadako in the *Ring* trilogy written by Suzuki Kōji. Based on my specialisation in study of Japanese literature and my fascination with supernatural folklore, I decided to analyse the development of *kaidan* and *yūrei*/*onryō* throughout Japanese history, and how they resurfaced as a new subgenre of Japanese horror at the end of the 20th century. The theoretical part of this thesis explores their emergence and influences with famous examples and the analytical part delves into characteristics of Sadako—her physical, mental, and psychic depiction. This thesis provides not only the comparison of the modernised ghost of Sadako with the traditional idea of Japanese ghosts but also the analysis of how and why she became such an iconic character around the world.

Key words: Yamamura Sadako, *yūrei*, *onryō*, ghost, *Ring*, *kaidan*, ghost story, videotape, technology, virus, adaptation

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