

Nightmares from the Past:
Kaiki eiga and the Dawn of Japanese Horror Cinema

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Dedication

For my parents, Donald and Jan Crandol. This is your work as much as it is mine.

Abstract

While the global popularity of Japanese horror movies of the past twenty years such as *Ring* (*Ringu*, 1998) and *Ju-on: The Grudge* (*Ju-on*, 2002) has made these films the subject of much academic attention, the previous nine decades of popular Japanese horror cinema remain an understudied area of film history. Known as *kaiki eiga* or “strange films,” domestic horror movies based on classic Edo period (1603-1868) ghost stories, as well as imported pictures like *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931), were a mainstay of commercial genre cinema in Japan from the silent era through the 1960s, and wielded an influence on the so-called “J-horror” pictures that achieved worldwide success at the turn of the millennium. This dissertation examines the history of *kaiki* as a category of popular film, the similarities and differences between *kaiki* and the English-language concept of “horror film,” and the large body of *kaiki* cinema produced in Japan during the prewar and postwar era that has, until now, remained virtually unknown to Western scholarship. I trace the development of the *kaiki* aesthetic and the discourse of *kaiki eiga* in Japan and its relationship to American and European horror cinema as well as native traditions of the fantastic and grotesque. Attention is given to the role of actress Suzuki Sumiko, the nation’s first horror movie star, in establishing the visual portrayal of *kaiki* monsters onscreen, and the work of the Shintōhō studio and director Nakagawa Nobuo, who brought the domestic *kaiki* film to the pinnacle of its critical respect and anticipated much of the style of the later J-horror pictures. The dissertation concludes with a brief look at the ways in which the *kaiki* genre influenced the J-horror movement, and the ways contemporary filmmakers like Kurosawa Kiyoshi retain *kaiki* elements like the vengeful

spirit in the creation of the unique aesthetic known as J-horror.

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Glossary of Japanese Terms

Bakeneko (化け猫) : Ghost cat.

Eiga (映画) : Film; movie; cinema.

Gendai geki (現代劇) : Pictures set in modern times, after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Most *gendai geki* are contemporarily set.

Horā (ホラー) : Transliteration of the English “horror.” From the 1980s onward *horā eiga* replaces *kaiki eiga* as the most commonly used term for “horror movie” in Japan.

Jidai geki (時代劇) : Period pictures, set before the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Kaibyō (怪猫) : An antiquated term for a *bakeneko* or ghost cat. *Bakeneko* films were often called *kaibyō eiga*.

Kaidan (怪談) : Ghost story. Usually refers to classic, domestic ghost stories popular during the Edo Period (1603-1868) such as *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (*Yotsuya kaidan*) and *The Peony Lantern* (*Botandōrō*).

Kaiki (怪奇) : “Strange” or “Bizarre.” *Kaiki eiga* was the overreaching generic classification in Japan for domestic and foreign horror movies through the 1960s.

Katsudō shashin (活動写真) : Literally “moving pictures;” an early term for *eiga*.

Kyōfu (恐怖) : Horror. The term *kyōfu eiga* has some slippage with *kaiki eiga* but usually refers to films like *Psycho* (1960) which lack supernatural antagonists.

Kyūgeki (旧劇) : An early term for period pictures; replaced in the 1920s by *jidai geki*.

Obake; bakemono (お化け ; 化け物) : Ghost or monster. “*Bakemono*” literally means “changing thing.”

Obake yashiki (お化け屋敷) : Amusement park spook-house rides.

Onryō (怨霊) : An angry, vengeful ghost.

Osore (恐れ) : Terror. My own usage of the word is similar to H.P. Lovecraft’s “cosmic fear” and infers an element of the sublime.

Shinpi (神秘) : Mystery; Detective fiction.

Introduction

You are interested in the unknown, the mysterious, the unexplainable. That is why you are here. And now, for the first time, we are bringing to you the full story of what happened... We are giving you all the evidence, based only on the secret testimony of the miserable souls who survived this terrifying ordeal. The incidents, the places... my friend we cannot keep this a secret any longer!

- *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959)

Horror is one of the most enduring and easily identifiable film genres in the English-speaking world. Although film scholars occasionally debate the boundaries of the genre, any casual movie buff likely will tell you that *Dracula* (1931), *Cat People* (1942), *Psycho* (1960), *The Exorcist* (1973), *Friday the 13th Part VI* (1986), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), and *Saw 3D* (2010) are – for all their vast differences in style and mode of production – unquestionably horror movies. The not unreasonable assumption that a film which features some horrific elements designed to elicit scares or dread from its audience is, in effect, a “horror movie” has led some film scholars and critics to apply the same breadth of generic classification when writing in English about Japanese cinema. Essays collected in the 2005 volume *Japanese Horror Cinema*, for example, include art house films such as Mizoguchi Kenji’s *Ugetsu* (*Ugetsu monogatari*, 1953) and Shindō Kaneto’s *Onibaba* (1964), along with Fukusaku Kinji’s *Battle Royale* (*Batoru rowaiaru*, 2000) and the rape-revenge film *Freeze Me* (*Furiizu mii*, 2000), all under the generic umbrella of horror.¹ However, as Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano cautions in her essay, “J-horror: New Media’s Impact on Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema,” none of these pictures were conceived of as horror movies in Japan, and such labeling divorces them from the

¹ See *Japanese Horror Cinema*, ed. Jay McRoy (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

cultural-historical context of their production, distribution, and reception in their home country.² Few if any Japanese film fans would imagine these pictures as belonging to the same generic category as *The Wolf Man* (1941) or *Night of the Living Dead* (1968).

The transnational popularity of the J-horror phenomenon at the turn of the millennium inspired much of this categorical confusion. “J-horror” became part of global vernacular in the wake of director Nakata Hideo’s *Ring* (*Ringu*, 1998), which spawned numerous sequels, a big-budget Hollywood remake, and countless imitations both in Japan and abroad. The worldwide success of the *Ring* franchise and subsequent J-horror pictures like Kurosawa Kiyoshi’s *Pulse* (*Kairo*, 2001) and the various incarnations of Shimizu Takashi’s still-ongoing *Ju-on* series make the contemporary Japanese horror movie one of its nation’s most successful cultural exports. This spurred a wave of interest in the English-speaking world among both film studies academics and the general public in the earlier history of Japanese horror. Yet discussions in English-language scholarship of Japanese horror cinema prior to the J-horror phenomenon remain largely confined to what has been commercially released in the West, resulting in a skewed view of Japanese horror movie history weighted towards the art house cinema of auteurs like Mizoguchi and Shindō, direct-to-video slasher films and sadomasochistic pornography. Such studies overlook the massive amount of popular B-cinema genre pictures produced in Japan during the prewar and early postwar decades that never received international distribution, instead identifying films like *Ugetsu*, *Onibaba* and Kinugasa Teinosuke’s *A*

² Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, “J-horror: New Media’s Impact on Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema,” in *Horror to the Extreme: Changing Boundaries in Asian Cinema*, ed. Jinhee Choi and Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 16.

Page of Madness (*Kurutta ippaigi*, 1926) as the ancestors of the contemporary Japanese horror movie.³

The J-horror creators seldom if ever cite *Ugetsu* or *A Page of Madness* as predecessors to their own work. They do, however, frequently point to the B-pictures produced at the Shintōhō studio in the latter half of the 1950s as a major source of inspiration. In particular, contemporary Japanese horror filmmakers name the work of Nakagawa Nobuo, a contract director at Shintōhō who directed several seminal horror films for the studio between 1957 and 1960, as a significant precursor to their own style.⁴ Best known abroad for his avant-garde evocation of Buddhist hells in *Jigoku* (1960), Nakagawa's adaptations of Edo period (1603-1868) *kaidan* (ghost stories) in *The Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp* (*Kaidan Kasane ga fuchi*, 1957) and *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, 1959), as well as his reworking of another Edo *kaidan* motif, the *bakeneko* or "ghost cat" in *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* (*Bōrei kaibyō yashiki*, 1958), won rare critical praise for domestic horror films from critics of the day and anticipated much of what would come to be associated with the motifs and iconography

³ See for example Jay McRoy's *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema* (Contemporary Cinema Series, no. 4. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), as well as Ruth Goldberg's article "Demons in the Family: Tracking the Japanese 'Uncanny Mother' Film from *A Page of Madness* to *Ringu*" in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* (ed. Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharret, Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2004) 370-385. Goldberg makes, in my opinion, a rather tenuous argument that Kinugasa Teinosuke's experimental silent film *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta ippaigi*, 1926) "is the true predecessor of *Ringu*." (372).

⁴ Kurosawa Kiyoshi, the most critically acclaimed of the J-horror directors, discusses Nakagawa's style at length in the documentary "Building the Inferno: Nobuo Nakagawa and the Making of *Jigoku*," included on the 2006 U.S. DVD release of Nakagawa's *Jigoku* (1960), while *Ring* director Nakata Hideo lovingly remade Nakagawa's *The Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp* (*Kaidan Kasane ga fuchi*, 1957) as 2007's *Kaidan*, complete with a painstaking black-and-white recreation of the original film's opening sequence. As part of my research for this project, I spoke extensively with Kurosawa and *Ring* screenwriter Takahashi Hiroshi about Nakagawa's influence on the J-horror movement, and their comments inform much of the subsequent chapters.

of J-horror.⁵ Nakagawa and his contemporaries at Shintōhō produced what many Japanese fans of the horror genre consider the pinnacle of domestic *kaiki eiga* – a term literally meaning “strange” or “bizarre films” that was the most commonly used generic label for what we would call “horror films” in English until the 1970s, when the term fades from usage for reasons that will be discussed in the following chapters. Despite Nakagawa’s central position in the history of popular Japanese horror cinema, he remains a relatively obscure figure in Japanese film studies. Historical overviews of Japanese cinema such as Isolde Standish’s 2006 volume *A New History of Japanese Cinema* make no mention of Nakagawa and ignore the entirety of the *kaiki* genre. Even publications on popular cinema intended for a more general readership such as Chris D.’s *Outlaw Masters of Japanese Film* – the title of which suggests it offers a counter-history in opposition to the traditional canon of Japanese cinema – neglect to treat Nakagawa or *kaiki eiga* at any length.⁶ In a chapter from the afore-mentioned *Japanese Horror Cinema* on “Traditional Japanese Theater and the Horror Film,” Richard J. Hand briefly mentions Nakagawa’s *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, but despite being based on a famous kabuki play and containing many overt allusions to its theatrical ancestor, Hand only says that the picture is “often acknowledged as a masterpiece of the horror genre,” before moving on to a more detailed discussion of the *Guinea Pig* (*Ginii piggu*) series of direct-to-video,

⁵ Citing Kurosawa Kiyoshi, Wada-Marciano writes that the J-horror filmmakers’ methods were “distinctly different from” the work of Nakagawa. While I agree that the content and style of J-horror often differs drastically from classic *kaidan* film adaptations, in the pages that follow I demonstrate the ways in which J-horror draws upon (and subverts) the conventions of *kaiki eiga*. See Wada-Marciano, 21.

⁶ See Isolde Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema: A Century of Narrative Film* (New York: Continuum, 2006), and Chris D., *Outlaw Masters of Japanese Film* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

ultra-violent gore films.⁷ In the same volume, Ruth Goldberg analyzes Nakagawa's *Jigoku* – along with Masumura Yasuzō's 1969 *ero-guro-nansensu* (“erotic-grotesque nonsense”) picture *Blind Beast (Mōjū)* and Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* – as one of “Three Classic Japanese Horror Films,” but *Jigoku*'s iconoclasm makes it far more atypical of Nakagawa's work than his Edo period ghost story adaptations.⁸

When I began this project, my intention was to rescue Nakagawa Nobuo from obscurity in English-language histories of Japanese cinema via a consideration of his *kaiki* work that would demonstrate both their technical and thematic sophistication, as well as their influence on the later J-horror films, thus offering a fuller account of Japanese horror movie history. I soon realized, however, that Nakagawa's half-dozen or so *kaiki* films were themselves only part of a larger story that needed to be told. If Nakagawa Nobuo's work remains largely ignored by American and European scholarship, the massive amount of *kaiki* films produced in Japan during the prewar and early postwar decades (of which Nakagawa's films are merely the highest-profile examples) constitutes an utter black hole in English-language studies of Japanese cinema. Jasper Sharp gives a brief sketch of the genre's history in his *Historical Dictionary of Japanese Film* as part of the entry on “Horror,” but the nature of his project prohibits him from examining the topic in any great detail.⁹ For many years the most comprehensive primer of Japanese cinema history in any language was Joseph L. Anderson and Donald

⁷ Richard J. Hand, “Aesthetics of Cruelty: Traditional Japanese Theater and the Horror Film,” in *Japanese Horror Cinema*, 22.

⁸ Ruth Goldberg, “The Nightmare of Romantic Passion in Three Classic Japanese Horror Films,” in *Japanese Horror Cinema*, 29-37.

⁹ Jasper Sharp, *Historical Dictionary of Japanese Film*, Historical Dictionaries of Literature and the Arts series (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 84-89.

Richie's *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*, first published in 1959 and again in an expanded and revised edition in 1982. Anderson and Richie's text cements the work of golden age auteurs like Kurosawa Akira, Ozu Yasujiro, and Mizoguchi Kenji at the top of their list of worthwhile pictures, while often dealing out harsh and dismissive value judgments against more popular modes of filmmaking. They predictably make no mention of Nakagawa Nobuo, and of *kaiki* films in general (which they deem the "ghost-film genre"), the authors have only this to say:

The trouble with the ghost-film genre is that the stories are all alike. The audience knows precisely what to expect since they probably saw a different version of the same story a year before. The films are made cheaply and unimaginatively, yet the audience, responding to a well-known stimulus, is apparently thoroughly and delightfully chilled each summer.¹⁰

Anderson and Richie then resume their narrative of the great men of Japanese cinema, yet their dismissive comments suggest much regarding what truly is interesting about these "cheap and unimaginative" pictures. The films are in fact often reworkings or outright remakes of the same story audiences had seen at the movie theater only a year or two prior.¹¹ And they were perennially popular; for as Anderson and Richie admit, the audience kept coming back each summer to see them. But to insist that "the stories are all alike," undervalues genre cinema. As film theorist Stephen Neale writes in *Genre*:

¹⁰ Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry (Expanded Edition)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 262. Here they refer to the practice of remaking classic and well-known ghost stories semi-annually, and releasing the films during the hot summer months, when audiences needed "chills" to cool them down.

¹¹ For example, Nakagawa's *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* was released just three years after fellow Shintōhō director Mōri Masaki's version (*Yotsuya kaidan*, 1956); both were adaptations of a famous 19th-century ghost story that had been filmed more than 20 times by the late 1950s.

The notion that ‘all westerns (or all gangster films, or all war films, or whatever) are the same’ is not just an unwarranted generalisation, it is profoundly wrong: if each text in a genre were, literally, the same, there would simply not be enough difference to generate meaning or pleasure. Hence there would be no audience. Difference is absolutely essential to the economy of genre. . . . Moreover, repetition and difference are themselves not separable . . . they function as a relation. There is hence not repetition *and* difference, but repetition *in* difference.

Neale then tweaks his statement slightly, adding that it would be more accurate to say that genres are about “difference *in* repetition.”¹² So too with *kaiki* films, which like their stage precursors in the Edo period drew in audiences who were not there for the stories (which, as Anderson and Richie note, they already knew), but to see what a particular rendition of them did with the material. Part of what made Nakagawa’s films successful with both audiences and critics was their “difference in repetition”: what they did differently with the old formulas – or in some instances, returning to the old formulas which had become diluted or discarded over time. Therefore, a consideration of Nakagawa’s work in the *kaiki* genre must be grounded in a history of the genre as a whole.

What little that has been written to date on Japanese *kaiki* cinema in English approaches the topic from a cultural studies standpoint, investigating and hypothesizing why these genre films were popular with audiences in a postwar Japanese social context. Film scholar Colette Balmain largely adopts this methodology in her *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film*, published in 2008; it is to date the only academic study of Japanese cinema in English to treat the Shintōhō studio’s period horror films at any

¹² Stephen Neale, *Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), 50.

length.¹³ The text mainly concerns itself with the usual suspects: *Godzilla*; *Ugetsu*; New Wave “horror” films such as *Onibaba* and *Kuroneko (Yabu no naka no kuroneko, 1968)*; violent pornography; and of course, contemporary J-horror. Balmain devotes about twenty (noncontiguous) pages to a discussion of two Shintōhō *kaiki* pictures – Nakagawa Nobuo’s *Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, and *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond (Kaibyō Otama ga ike, 1960)*, directed by Nakagawa’s former assistant Ishikawa Yoshihiro. Balmain discusses Nakagawa’s and Ishikawa’s films mainly as products of the postwar culture they were produced in, works by and for the generation of Japanese struggling to come to grips with the defeat and devastation that followed in the wake of World War II.¹⁴ Her reading of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* suggests an of-the-moment interpretation of the film’s narrative without more fully considering that the film’s archetypal Edo ghost story narrative incorporates the same elements that had been popular in prewar *kaiki* pictures, as well as the Edo period literature and drama from which it derives.¹⁵ A full accounting of Edo ghost story adaptations’ perennial onscreen popularity must take into account the genre’s enduring presence over the course of several paradigm shifts in Japanese culture and society, as well as the various (and variable) points of appeal for audiences in multiple eras. Again, we must look for the “differences in repetition,” and to do so we must widen our scope beyond the work of Nakagawa and his pupil Ishikawa.

¹³ Gregory Barrett gives a brief but insightful reading of the figure of Oiwa’s ghost in Nakagawa’s *Ghost Story of Yotsuya* in *Archetypes in Japanese Film: The Sociopolitical and Religious Significance of the Principal Heroes and Heroines* (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1989. pp. 100-104). The text is mainly concerned with a structural definition of the “vengeful spirit” motif in Japanese cinema.

¹⁴ See Colette Balmain, *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 50-69.

¹⁵ I discuss this issue in more detail in Chapter 5.

In defense of past film studies scholars who have tackled the topic, it must be admitted that any attempt to uncover the history of Japanese horror film prior to the heyday of Nakagawa Nobuo faces barriers other than those of language and international distribution. The commercial Japanese film industry produced well over a hundred specimens of the genre before 1945, of which less than a dozen are known to have survived the devastation of World War II. Of these, only four exist in anything close to a complete print, and even these have suffered the effects of deterioration over the decades. They also remain haunted by the old critical hostilities toward the genre, as limited funds for restoration invariably go toward more “worthy,” A-list productions. To write the prewar history of the Japanese horror film, one must rely primarily upon secondary materials: magazine reviews, advertisements, and theater pamphlets. Even these can be difficult to come by, as the genre’s low critical standing meant that publications such as *Kinema junpō*, Japan’s longest-running and most prestigious film journal, typically gave B-grade horror films short shrift. To assemble the prewar history of Japanese horror cinema requires more than a little guesswork, and the puzzle will always contain missing pieces.

Japanese scholarship on the history of the horror film genre has demonstrated greater awareness of the breadth of popular films that the domestic film industry produced in the prewar and early postwar eras, although published academic scholarship on the topic remains limited. Izumi Toshiyuki’s *100 Horrors of the Silver Screen: A Survey of Japanese Kaiki Films (Ginnmaku no hyakkai: honchō kaiki eiga taigai)* represents the only book-length scholarly treatise on the history of domestic *kaiki eiga*

available and contains a wealth of historical facts. Izumi, however, frames his historical presentation within an occasionally restrictive conceptualization of the genre built around the modern word “supernatural” (*chōshizen*), at odds with the fact that most domestic *kaiki* films derive from Edo-period literature that adopts a naturalistic attitude towards ghosts and monsters.¹⁶ Shimura Miyoko has published numerous short articles about the *bakeneko* or “ghost cat” subgenre of *kaiki* which have helped to maintain awareness of a once prolific but now-defunct mode of horror filmmaking traditions, and her analysis of the star actresses who portrayed *bakeneko* onscreen has implications for the whole of the *kaiki* genre’s appeal in the prewar era. Shimura also contributed articles to *The Corridor of the Strange and Fantastic: From ‘Kaidan’ to ‘J-horror’* (*Kaiki to gensō e no kairō: kaidan kara J-horā e*), to date the only collection of academic essays in Japanese to cover the spectrum of the horror film genre in Japan from the dawn of cinema to the J-horror phenomenon.¹⁷ In addition to chapters on more internationally known works like Kurosawa Akira’s *Throne of Blood* (*Kumo no su jō*, 1957), the films of director Suzuki Seijun, and *Ring*, the volume includes a discussion of the earliest *kaiki* trick films produced in the 1910s as well as three chapters that deal with the *kaiki* work of Nakagawa Nobuo. Still, there is much more to be said on the topic of *kaiki eiga*.

Along with filling in a historical gap in English-language scholarship on Japanese horror cinema, I also seek to broaden the scope of existing Japanese scholarship on *kaiki* films via a positioning of American and European classic horror cinema in the discourse

¹⁶ Izumi Toshiyuki, *Ginmaku no hyakkai: honchō kaiki eiga taigai* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2000).

¹⁷ *Kaiki to gensō e no kairō: kaidan kara J-horā e*, ed. Uchiyama Kazuki (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 2008).

of *kaiki*. I approach my topic, therefore, not so much as “the history of Japanese horror films,” but as “the history of horror films in Japan.” While I reserve the bulk of attention for domestic examples of *kaiki* cinema, I ground my discussion in the genre’s international identity in Japan, which encompassed not just traditional ghost story adaptations but Hollywood horror franchises like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* and their progeny in both America and Europe. As I say above, a history of *kaiki eiga* must also take into account shifting reasons for the genre’s popularity through the decades, while at the same time attempting to get at the enduring essence of centuries-old tales. Was what drew audiences to the earliest film versions of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* in the 1910s the same thing that people were paying to see in 1927, 1937, 1949, and 1959? In the following chapters I endeavor on the one hand to chart the changing sites of onscreen appeal in the *kaiki* genre, from the spectacle of early cinematic trick photography to the ambiguously sexy portrayals of female monsters in the 1920s and 1930s, to the use of color and montage in the postwar work of Nakagawa. At the same time, I attempt via a consideration of both formal and thematic content to identify the connecting threads which brought prewar and postwar horror films together under the generic label of *kaiki*.

Chapter Outline and Methodology

The horror genre occupies a unique place in the history of film criticism and study. For many decades “serious” devotees of cinema generally held horror movies in ill regard. In her groundbreaking essay on horror, melodrama, and pornography, Linda Williams argues that a “lack of proper esthetic distance” and “a sense of over-involvement in sensation and emotion” makes critics uncomfortable with a genre that so blatantly seeks

to manipulate the audience on a physical, scream-inducing level.¹⁸ Horror's ambivalent appeal as a genre has a long history of theorization when considered as part of the philosophical debate around the pleasurable experience of negative emotions in works of fiction. Aristotle's *Poetics* – arguably the first theoretical consideration of genre ever written – famously suggests a catharsis of negative emotions like fear in viewing tragedy. In the eighteenth century John and Anna Laetitia Aikin produced the essay “On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror,” finding such a “paradox of the heart . . . difficult of solution,” while Edmund Burke contemporaneously theorized all experiences of fear as tinged with an element of the sublime.¹⁹ Much horror film theory grapples with the same fundamental question posed by the Aikins: Why would people want to be scared? The quest to pinpoint horror's source(s) of appeal has engendered a richer body of critical inquiry than perhaps any other genre of mainstream commercial cinema. However, such debates often fail to adequately address the consequences of crossing cultural-linguistic borders in discussions of genre. As we have seen, what one culture deems a horror film (Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu*, Kinugasa's *A Page of Madness*) might not be thought of as such by the culture that produced it.

With all this in mind, the first two chapters of the dissertation focus not on particular films, studios, or directors, but a history of the discourse of *kaiki* as it applied

¹⁸ Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 5th edition, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 705.

¹⁹ See Aristotle's *Poetics*, trans. Malcom Heath (New York: Penguin, 1997). Noel Carroll discusses the Aikins' essay on page 161 of *The Philosophy of Horror: or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990). The pertinent passage from Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* appears in *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Readers and Students*, ed. Clive Bloom (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 25.

to both domestic and international films, followed by a consideration of *kaiki*'s defining features as a genre of popular cinema, and how such features conform to or deviate from theories of horror (film). I look not only at the term *kaiki eiga* but competing and complimentary terminology for films featuring ghosts, monsters, and other motifs typically identified with the horror genre in English, such as *kaidan eiga* ("ghost story movie"), *obake eiga* ("monster movie"), and *kyōfu eiga* (literally, "horror movie"). After establishing some of the formal markers of *kaiki eiga*, I turn to the major academic theories of the horror genre, highlighting the thematic differences between a Euro-American conceptualization of "horror film" and a Japanese conceptualization of *kaiki eiga*. Film theory since 1990 has taken a turn towards more cognitive based frameworks for understanding cinema, as in the work of David Bordwell, Noel Carroll, and Carl Plantinga, but the great flowering of horror film theory occurred largely in psychoanalytic studies like Robin Wood's seminal horror film essay "The American Nightmare" and Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*.²⁰ While Wood and Clover provide nuanced and convincing arguments for such an approach to Anglophone horror cinema, the limits of psychoanalysis become apparent when discussing genre across the cultural-linguistic divide of horror and *kaiki*. My work seeks to move the discussion of international horror theory beyond psychoanalysis, in the direction indicated by Noel Carroll's cognitive theory of horror, which he details in *The Philosophy of Horror*, although Carroll's definition of horror requires some adjustments to accommodate the parameters of *kaiki*. I conclude by offering an attempted reconciliation between Western

²⁰ See Robin Wood, "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s" and Noel Carroll, "Why Horror?" in *Horror: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 25-32; and Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

theories of horror and the Japanese concept of *kaiki* via a liberal use of Carroll combined with H.P. Lovecraft's concept of "cosmic fear" from his *Supernatural Horror in Literature*.²¹ I ultimately choose the word *osore* ("terror") as the best Japanese term to describe the particular brand of fear ideally evoked by *kaiki* films, and subsequent chapters seek to employ this criterion in a historical discussion of the genre from its inception in the earliest days of commercial cinema through the 1960s, after which the term *kaiki* fades from usage as a category of popular film.

Carroll's theory of horror relies partly on Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, and I find Todorov's categories of fantastic literature particularly useful for a discussion of the *kaiki* genre. Todorov conceives three modes of the fantastic narrative: the "marvelous," in which entities like the ghosts and monsters associated with the horror genre are presented as a natural and known feature in the world of the narrative; the "uncanny," in which seemingly supernatural entities or occurrences ultimately receive a rational, mundane explanation, and the "pure fantastic," which hesitates between natural and supernatural explanations and remains ambiguous as to the existence of the supernatural.²² Carroll rules out marvelous narratives from the horror genre for reasons I discuss in the following chapters, but as we will see, most domestic *kaiki* films fall within Todorov's category of the marvelous. I invoke Todorov's distinctions throughout my discussion to highlight the ways in which crossing cultural-

²¹ Carroll deals with Lovecraft's theory in the pages of *The Philosophy of Horror*, 161-165.

²² Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 41-57.

linguistic borders upsets the boundaries of genre and causes us to rethink assumptions about categories of narrative often taken for granted.

Since the *kaiki* genre has always been an international category of cinema comprised not only of domestic ghost stories but Hollywood and European horror film, I also apply Miriam Hansen's theory of the "vernacular modernism" of cinema at intervals throughout my look at the history of the genre. Hansen argues against the notion that Hollywood's dominance of the global movie market in the 1930s wielded a top-down, hegemonic influence on local cinemas, but rather represented a more horizontal, adaptable model onto which native traditions could be grafted and reinterpreted in a contemporary, transnational medium.²³ Employing Hansen's theory, I consider the earliest Japanese ghost story films and their privileging of trick photography as being in dialogue with the pioneering special effects films of French filmmaker Georges Méliès. The great prewar boom of domestic *kaiki* films in the late 1930s, which saw the creation of the nation's first *kaiki* movie star, Suzuki Sumiko, demonstrates an elaborate vernacular modernism in its combination of conventions for portraying Japanese monsters on stage and screen with the techniques of Hollywood horror films from the Universal studio. This trend continues into the postwar work of Nakagawa Nobuo and reaches new levels of complexity in the J-horror phenomenon, which draws greater inspiration from American and British horror film but combines it with the motifs and

²³ See Miriam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 332-50.

inconography of domestic *kaiki* cinema, which in turn gets re-interpreted in American remakes of J-horror, a total reversal of Hollywood's role in Hansen's original model.

The second half of the dissertation traces the history of *kaiki* cinema from its beginnings in early trick films of the first decades of the twentieth century through the death of the genre in the early 1970s. Historical, industrial, and political factors, as well as the works of several particularly influential filmmakers, all contributed to a shifting, ever-evolving landscape of the *kaiki* film genre. Almost from its moment of inception the commercial Japanese film industry was busy making ghost and monster-filled adaptations of Edo period ghost stories. These now-lost, primordial *kaiki* pictures, like much early cinema, likely exemplified Tom Gunning's "cinema of attractions," which privileged the spectacle of the new medium of cinema over narrative continuity.²⁴ Evidence suggests scenes of spectacle like double-exposure, see-through ghosts and stop-motion photography trumped narrative integration or any attempt to convey a sense of *osore* to the audience in the primordial *kaiki* film. However, by the mid-1920s changes in the mode of production of Japanese cinema largely supplant the cinema of attractions with a more narratively oriented mode of film. Themes of karmic retribution which lent the traditional Japanese ghost story its sense of *osore* now became part of the *kaiki* film equation. Spectacle remained important, however, and from the 1920s onward we see two complementary but distinct modes of cinema at work in the genre. The site of spectacle shifts from trick photography to the body of the actresses who portrayed the

²⁴ Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectators, and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Baker (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 56-62.

vengeful spirits and monsters of Edo ghost stories on film, and the ambiguously sexualized and threatening sight of silver screen vamps (*vampu*) transformed into fearsome monsters before the audience's eyes. The themes of karmic retribution that the female monster represents, meanwhile, relied on narrative integration to imbue the spectacle with the weight of *osore*. For much of their history domestic *kaiki* films were held in critical ill-repute, most often due to complaints that the films failed to properly integrate the themes of *osore*, leaving only the hollow spectacle of the actress's monstrous transformation. Reasons for the relative inattention to narrative themes of karmic retribution vary over time, including wartime and occupation era censorship policies, the films' status as hastily produced, B-grade program pictures, and attempts to blend the genre with comedy and romance. Early postwar *kaiki* films also came to be dominated by what might be termed an *obake yashiki* or "spook house" mentality towards the presentation of the horrific, relying on simply achieved startle effects of a fleeting, momentary nature in the film's diegesis. At the same time, the blurring of science fiction and horror in American popular cinema and Japanese derivatives like *Godzilla* (*Gojira*, 1954) created a moment of existential crisis for the *kaiki* genre, resolved by the arrival of the British Hammer Films' color remakes of gothic horror classics like *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, which reasserted the conventional markers of the genre.

The final chapters consider the work and legacy of the Shintōhō studio and Nakagawa Nobuo, who brought the domestic *kaiki* film to its pinnacle of critical respect even as they laid the groundwork for new styles of horror filmmaking that would

eventually see the *kaiki* label retired from usage. While I devote the bulk of the chapter to extended analyses of Nakagawa's three key *kaiki* works – *The Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp*, *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, and *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* – I also consider the ways in which Shintōhō films by other directors such as Mōri Masaki's version of *The Ghost Story of Yotusya* (*Yotsuya kaidan*, 1956) and Namiki Kyōtarō's *Vampire Bride* (*Hanayome kyūketsuma*, 1960) further contributed to this pivotal moment in the development of the *kaiki* genre. Most of the Shintōhō *kaiki* films draw much of their effectiveness from a sophisticated use of the Freudian uncanny, and the most radically progressive of them do this via a shattering of the old generic demarcations between period pictures and films set in the modern day, drawing monsters like the vengeful spirit and the ghost cat out of the Edo period ghost story adaptations to which they had previously been confined and unleashing them on modern Japanese society. And yet the film most widely held to be Nakagawa's masterpiece, *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, finds its "difference in repetition" via a fusion of innovative formal techniques with a return to the themes of classic Edo ghost story narratives and the evocation of *osore* as an omnipotent arbiter of cosmic, karmic retribution. My overview of *kaiki* film concludes with a short discussion of the genre's partial resurrection in the motifs and iconography of J-horror. While much has been written about the themes of technophobia and viral infection that characterize the vast majority of J-horror films, I offer a consideration of the previously neglected *onryō* or "vengeful ghost" motif which is just as central to J-horror and owes both formal and thematic debts to the legacy of *kaiki* cinema.

Due to restraints of time and considerations of length, I have left much interesting material aside. In particular, much more could be said about the prolific *kaiki* output of the Japanese studios in the 1960s and the genre's move to television in the early 1970s. The concept of *osore* and the ways in which narrative functions to convey its essence might also prove to be worthy topics of more theoretically based inquiries into *kaiki* cinema. But first the social history of *kaiki* as a genre of popular film needs to be established. With this in mind, the following work seeks to chart the weird, shifting topology of the *kaiki* genre and provide a map for those who would explore its shadowy corners in more detail.

Chapter 1: Naming the Classic Japanese Horror Movie – A Brief History of *Kaiki* as Film Genre

On February 12, 1931, Universal's *Dracula* premiered in New York, and no one knew quite what to call it. Today the Bela Lugosi classic is often identified as the first full-fledged specimen of the horror genre,²⁵ but distributors, exhibitors, and critics at the time of its release struggled to label the picture in generic terms for potential audiences. The nascent horror movie genre that *Dracula* birthed had several important precursors in both America and Europe, notably the German Expressionist masterpieces *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, 1920) and *Nosferatu* (1922), John Barrymore's turn as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1920), and Universal's own releases of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) and *The Cat and the Canary* (1927). The German Expressionist films were presented and discussed as art films at the time of their release,²⁶ and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was received as a filmographic record of the talents of a great stage actor preserved for posterity,²⁷ while the Universal pictures leading up to *Dracula* could be pegged into other already established genres by the invested parties. *The Phantom of the Opera* contained enough love-story elements to be labeled a romance, and the haunted house whodunit *The Cat and the Canary* was easily marketed as a mystery.²⁸ *Dracula*,

²⁵ Andrew Tudor, for example, begins his history of the horror movie with the year 1931 and the release of *Dracula*. See *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

²⁶ Peter Hutchings, *The Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Pearson, 2004), 3.

²⁷ The *New York Times* review of the film from March 29, 1920 calls Barrymore a great stage actor but says "anything he does in 'the movies' must be totally unimportant to many...but [coming generations] may see *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and, in addition to enjoying something of Mr. Barrymore's art, they will receive a personal impression of the actor that will enable them to know and appreciate him."

²⁸ The film was directed for Universal by the German Expressionist filmmaker Paul Leni. Robert Spadoni discusses the film's large influence on *Dracula* (and, consequently, every subsequent film in the

however, seemed to be an entirely new beast. Exhibition campaigns tried to sell the film as a mystery, while much of the advertising material portrayed Bela Lugosi as something approaching a romantic lead. Several critics followed suit, calling the film a mystery or a romance in their reviews. But as Robert Spadoni notes in *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre*, there is no mystery for the audience, who knows Dracula is the killer from the start, and Lugosi's portrayal of the Count lacks the romantic overtures that later Draculas would bring to the role.²⁹

The reviews from 1931 are invariably aware that the emotional affect of horror is a thematically unifying presence in *Dracula*, and most of them use the word "horror" at least once. *Variety* called it "a sublimated ghost story related with all surface seriousness and above all with a remarkably effective background of creepy atmosphere. So that its kick is the real emotional horror kick," while *Film Spectator* noted, "The dominant note of the production is eeriness, a creepy horror that should give an audience goose-flesh and make it shudder."³⁰ Still, they stop short of calling the film a "horror movie." In late 1931, Universal followed up the success of *Dracula* with *Frankenstein*, by which time there seems to have been a consensus that a new film genre was emerging from a ghastly womb, and one can see the ongoing struggle to christen it in *Variety's* prediction that *Frankenstein* would prove "whether nightmare pictures have a box office pull, or whether

horror genre) in *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

²⁹ Spadoni, 49-51.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

Dracula is just a freak.”³¹ The term “horror movie” does not appear to have been settled upon until Universal had fleshed out their cycle of “nightmare pictures” with such entries as *The Mummy* (1932), *The Invisible Man* (1933), and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), and rival studio Paramount threw their hats into the ring with *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931) and *Island of Lost Souls* (1932).³²

Roughly two months before *Frankenstein* proved that “nightmare pictures” were here to stay, *Dracula* opened in Japan. Unlike their American counterparts, the Japanese critics knew exactly what to call it. In his review for *Kinema junpō*, Japan’s longest running and most prestigious film magazine, Murakami Hisao acknowledges the picture’s novelty (as well as Universal’s attempts to sell it as a mystery), but appears to be quite familiar with its generic species, opening with the line, “Now this is something rare these days, a mysterious *kaiki eiga* that deals with vampires.”³³ The term *kaiki eiga* (怪奇映画) is most commonly translated into English as “horror movie,” but as we have just seen, in 1931 the phrase had yet to take root in the English-speaking world. What had defied generic classification in its native country seemed to fit neatly into a preexisting category in Japan. The term *kaiki* reappears throughout Murakami’s review: he praises director Tod Browning for “successfully brewing a *kaiki* atmosphere that catches hold of the audience’s heart” and suggests cinematographer Karl Freund’s

³¹ Ibid., 97.

³² Hutchings, 3.

³³ “近頃には珍しい、之は吸血鬼を取扱つた神秘怪奇映画である。” Murakami Hisao, “*Majin Dorakyura*,” *Kinema junpō*, October 21, 1931, 28.

camerawork is the likely source for much of the “*kaiki*-esque atmosphere” of the production.³⁴

The word *kaiki* is composed of two characters, 怪 (‘kai’) and 奇 (‘ki’), both of which mean “strange,” “weird,” or “bizarre.” Variations on the word, all beginning with the character “kai” (怪), recur throughout Japanese history to describe “weird” literature and drama.³⁵ In his introduction to an academic collection of essays on *kaiki eiga*, Uchiyama Kazuki argues that *kaiki to gensō* (怪奇と幻想), or “the weird and the fantastic” was an established literary subgenre by the Heian period (794-1185), as one classification of the short prose tales in such collections as the 12th-century text *Konjaku monogatari-shū* (“Collection of Tales New and Old”),³⁶ although the Heian word used to describe prose tales with weird or fantastic themes is *kai-i* (怪異), another synonym for “strange” or “bizarre.” During the Edo period (1600-1868), the advent of cheap printing processes and an affluent urban merchant class with time and money to spare sees an explosion of another type of “kai” literature, *kaidan* (怪談). Literally meaning “strange tales” but frequently translated as “ghost stories,” *kaidan* are narratives more often than not dealing with themes of revenge from beyond the grave or encounters with

³⁴“トッド・ブローニングは怪奇な雰囲気醸成に先づ成功して観客の心を捕へ得た...カール・フロイドのカメラを相俟って怪奇さ、神秘さを多分に味は々した。” Ibid.

³⁵ Here and elsewhere I use the term “weird” in an approximation of its meaning as defined by H.P. Lovecraft in his discussions of “Weird Literature.” See his *Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2012).

³⁶日本では、平安時代初期の「日本霊異記」や同時代後期「今昔物語集」にも多くの怪異談が収録されているように、怪奇と幻想は、早くから伝承説話の一ジャンルとして確立されていた。’ Uchiyama Kazuki, “Nihon eiga no kaiki to gensō,” in *Kaiki to gensō e no kairō*, 9.

bizarre spooks and goblins, called *yōkai*. *Kaidan* frequently were read aloud at social gatherings as part of the parlor game *hyaku monogatari kaidankai* (“gathering of one hundred ghost stories”), during which the recitation of ghost stories was playfully believed to summon a real spirit. As Michael Dylan Foster suggests in his study of *yōkai* culture, *Pandemonium and Parade*, this intersection of the horrific and the ludic anticipates the same ambiguous enjoyment that horror movies or *kaiki eiga* offer in the modern era.³⁷ In addition to written collections printed for reading at *hyaku monogatari* gatherings, the most popular *kaidan* were adapted to the kabuki stage as well as the *kōdan* and *rakugo* oral storytelling formats. Kabuki playwright Tsuruya Nanboku IV’s 1825 script for *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, literally “The Ghost Story of Yotsuya on the Tōkaidō Road” and commonly known as *Yotsuya kaidan*), in which the vengeful ghost (a classification of spirit known as an *onryō*) of a woman named Oiwa returns from the grave to torment her wicked husband, Iemon, remains Japan’s most famous ghost story to this day.

With the arrival of motion pictures in Japan during the last years of the 19th century, the frequently performed *kaidan* of the kabuki stage quickly found their way to Japanese movie screens, and such films were among the very first examples of commercial cinema in Japan. Adaptations of the most popular kabuki ghost-story plays, including *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, *The Dish Mansion at Banchō* (*Banchō sarayashiki*) and variations on tales of the popular *bakeneko* cat monster – felines that imbibe the blood of a murder victim and take on their form as a half-human, half-feline

³⁷ Michael Dylan Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yōkai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 52-55.

werecat – were remade on a semi-annual basis from about 1910 onward, with all of the major studios frequently producing competing versions of the same story. Most were released during the hot summer months of the *obon* festival of the dead, carrying on the old Edo theatrical tradition of performing ghost story plays in the heat of summer to cool the audience off by giving them the shivers. Unfortunately, in most cases all that remains of these early pictures is their title, the name of the studio, and a release date. Several of the Nikkatsu studio’s first *kaidan* adaptations were directed by Makino Shōzō and starred Onoe Matsunosuke, respectively the first great director and actor of Japanese cinema. It is likely that their versions of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (1912), *The Dish Mansion at Banchō* (1914) and *The Peony Lantern* (*Botandōrō*, 1914) were similar in style to the massive amount of *jidai geki* or “period pictures”³⁸ the duo produced during this time, which were characterized by a one-scene, one-take setup in extreme long shot, with the presumable addition of Georges Méliès-style camera tricks like stop-motion and double-exposure photography to depict the ghosts and goblins.³⁹ Méliès’s influence is clearly visible in the earliest surviving snippet of a Japanese *kaidan* film, which consists of eleven minutes of footage from an unidentified production of *The Dish Mansion* produced sometime before 1923.⁴⁰ In it, we see a samurai lord and his retainer sitting near a well. An audience familiar with the Dish Mansion legend would know the body of

³⁸ At the time of their release these early period pictures were known as *kyūha* or *kyūgeki*, which means “old school;” the term *jidai geki* did not become commonplace until the early 1920s. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

³⁹ Kamiya Masako discusses the affinities between the trick photography techniques of Méliès and Makino in “Shoki nihon eiga no kaiki to torikku,” in *Kaiki to gensō e no kairō*, 33-65.

⁴⁰ The curator of the Kobe Film Planet archive where I viewed this film explained that the filming techniques seen in the footage suggest it predates innovations that were in widespread use by 1923.

a murdered maid, Okiku, lies at the bottom of the well, and viewers would not be disappointed when Okiku's ghost rises from its depths to torment her murderer, the samurai lord. The effect is achieved with a simple double-exposure technique as Okiku's transparent form fades in atop the well, and her later appearance in the lord's bedchamber is marked by the use of stop-motion photography to illustrate her psychic manipulation of objects. Both scenes are framed in long shots which showcase the spectacular nature of Okiku's ghost, much like Méliès's early "horror" films like *The Haunted Castle* (*Le Manoir du diable*, 1896), which are not about frightening the audience so much as enthralling them with the magic spectacle of early cinematic tricks.

By 1915 an average of at least half-a-dozen *kaidan* adaptations were being produced each year, a figure that holds until the late 1930s, when an explosion of *kaiki* films is swiftly followed by their utter suppression at the hands of the government's 1939 Film Act, which forbade "frivolous" subjects in favor of nationalistic propaganda.⁴¹ *Kaiki* was not the only term used at the time for what we would today be tempted to call "horror movies" in English. Film adaptations of the most famous Edo period ghost stories were typically identified as *kaidan eiga*, though promotional materials and reviews from the 1920s show that the same works were sometimes called *obake eiga*, which literally means "monster" or "ghost movies" and would remain a synonymous term for *kaiki eiga* in Japan to the present day. An advertisement for Makino Studios' 1927 *Alias Yotsuya kaidan* (*Iroha gana Yotsuya kaidan*) says that the film is "no mere *obake eiga*" (*tannaru obake eiga ni arazu*), suggesting the film is a more cultured affair than its generic

⁴¹ Shimura Miyoko, "Shinkō kinema no kaibyō eiga." *Eigagaku* 14 (2000): 58.

brethren. Works featuring the perennial favorite *bakeneko* ghost cat were commonly referred to as *kaibyō eiga*, using an antiquated synonym for *bakeneko* borrowed from kabuki traditions. The word *kaiki*, however, featured in discourse surrounding all of these pictures. It appears in promotional material for films throughout the 1920s and 30s that are otherwise identified as *kaidan* or *obake eiga*, frequently as part of a set phrase that promises audiences *kaiki to senritsu* (怪奇と戦慄), which means something like “bizarreness and trembling” but might be more deftly rendered as “thrills and chills.” Advertising for the Japanese release of the prototypical Hollywood horror movie *The Cat and the Canary* makes reference to the picture being adapted from the “great *kaiki* stage show” (*saidai kaiki geki*), and as mentioned, the *Kinema junpō* review for *Dracula* couldn’t say enough about that film’s *kaiki* qualities. By the late 1930s, *kaiki eiga* had become the all-encompassing generic umbrella for the subgenre of native *kaidan eiga* adapted from famous works such as *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* as well as original *obake eiga* stories featuring traditional monsters like the ghost cat, and imported horror movies such as the Universal *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* series. Just ten years after Makino Studios had insisted *Alias Yotsuya kaidan* was “no mere *obake eiga*,” the Shinkō Kinema Studio was proudly marketing its own *Alias Yotsuya kaidan* in advertisements as “part of their unique series of *kaiki eiga*.”⁴² *Kinema junpō*’s preview article for the film names it one of the studio’s scheduled “*kaiki* trilogy” for 1937, placing it alongside another *kaidan*

⁴² “新興京都独特「佐賀怪猫傳」 「本所七不思議」に次ぐ怪奇映画の第三回作！”

adaptation, *The Ghost Story of the Mandarin Duck Curtain* (*Kaidan oshidori chō*, released 1938) and the *kaibyō eiga*, *The Cat of Arima* (*Arima neko*).⁴³



Figure 1: Advertising for Makino’s 1927 *Alias Yotsuya kaidan* (*Iroha gana Yotsuya kaidan*, left) almost apologetically insists the film is “no mere *obake eiga*,” while ten years later Shinkō proudly advertises its own version as one of their “unique *kaiki eiga*” (right).

⁴³ “*Iharo* [sic.] *gana Yotsuya kaidan*,” *Kinema junpō*, June 11, 1937, 106-107.



Figure 2: Advertising for the 1938 Shinkō *bakeneko* picture *Ghost Cat of the 53 Way Stations* (*Kaibyō gojūsan tsugi*) even more unabashedly calls the film one of the studio’s “boastworthy” (*jiman*) *bakeneko eiga*.

So we see that while the English-speaking world found it necessary to posit a new film genre to accommodate the “nightmare pictures” that Hollywood began producing in earnest during the early 1930s, Japanese audiences and critics already had an established categorical niche waiting for such films across the Pacific. Indeed, there seems to have been little question in Japan at the time that the Hollywood productions which came to be known as “horror movies” in the West shared certain affinities with native Japanese narrative traditions of *kai* (怪), and that *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, when adapted to film, all belonged to the same genre. *Kinema junpō*’s review from May 1932 of James Whale’s *Frankenstein* is particularly struck by the film’s

affinities to Japan's classic *kaidan*. Noting that the affect of horror was a key ingredient, film critic Shimizu Chiyota writes:

The film has the flavor of a *kaidan*; indeed it is one of the most accomplished works of that genre. The desire to see something scary is something all people hold in their hearts to a degree. Here is a movie that expertly plays to this fact throughout.⁴⁴

The review concludes by suggesting that Japanese audiences, fond of seeing traditional *kaidan* such as *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* performed year after year, will certainly find much to like in *Frankenstein*, and predicts the film will be a big hit.⁴⁵ When the sequel *Bride of Frankenstein* came to Japan in the summer of 1935, it significantly opened during the week of *obon*, the traditional season for showing *kaidan* and *obake eiga*.

It does not necessarily follow, however, that *kaiki eiga* as a genre should be thought of as wholly and unproblematically equivalent to the Western “horror movie,” or that the term *kaiki eiga* possesses a fixed and unchanging definition over time. An examination of the historical discourse surrounding both “horror” and *kaiki* shows that the act of crossing cultural-linguistic borders disrupts already slippery notions of genre, defamiliarizing categories often taken for granted by those who consume and write about film. As Rick Altman discusses in *Film/Genre*, the borders of a particular genre are anything but stable, and are subject to both retroactive application and periodic redefinition – an observation that holds especially true for the Hollywood horror movie.

⁴⁴ “怪談”趣味の映画である。その最も傑出したものの一つである。怖いものは見たい、といふ心理を多少なりとも人は持っているものである。その的を正しく射当てた映画が、これである。” Shimizu Chiyota, “*Furankenshutain*,” *Kinema junpō*, May 11, 1932, 31.

⁴⁵ “四谷怪談」などが年々上演されているところから見ても、我国の映画や演劇の観衆は相当に豊富に怪談趣味と持っていると考えていいと思ふ。とすればこの映画は、宣伝さへ大いに行へば大呼物となり得るものであることは確かである。” *Ibid.*

When Universal released *The Phantom of the Opera* in 1925, the horror genre had yet to be christened, yet today Lon Chaney's iconic Phantom is often presented alongside Lugosi's Count Dracula and Boris Karloff's Frankenstein's Monster as one of the studio's pantheon of horror movie all-stars. But in the 1950s, when science-fiction thrillers in the vein of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *The Thing from Another World* (both 1951) were in vogue, the Phantom, along with Dracula and Frankenstein's Monster, were rebranded by Universal as "Hollywood's Prize Science-Fiction Creatures."⁴⁶ Adding to the complexity of the issue is the debate among scholars, critics, and fans over the difference between "horror" and "science fiction" as the labels apply to films like *The Thing from Another World*, the giant-ants-vs.-U.S.-military opus *Them!* (1954), or to use a famous Japanese case, *Godzilla* (*Gojira*, 1954). When the monster is not a ghost or vampire from traditional legend or Gothic literature, but an alien from outer space or a giant radioactive lizard, does the work cease to be "horror" and become "science fiction"? Peter Hutchings opens his study of *The Horror Film* with this very issue, noting that the ontology of the genre is particularly vague "when attempts are made to separate out horror from the science fiction genre."⁴⁷ Both Hutchings and Altman note that film genres are seldom if ever pure, and that all films are indeed a hybridization of elements usually perceived by critics and audiences as belonging to disparate genres,⁴⁸ so that *Godzilla* is at once a science fiction film *and* a horror movie. Similar questions have been raised in Japan over the use of the term *kaiki* as a generic label, and not always with the

⁴⁶ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 78-79.

⁴⁷ Hutchings, *The Horror Film*, 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3; Altman, 18-19.

same willingness to acknowledge the vague boundaries of genre. In his overview of the *kaiki* genre, author Izumi Toshiyuki insists that *kaiki* demands a supernatural (*chōshizen*) origin for the monster free of any pseudo-scientific explanation or human creation (intentional or otherwise), and explicitly rules out *Godzilla* and other sci-fi movie monsters from his definition of the genre.⁴⁹ The problem, of course, is that this also precludes *Frankenstein* from the ranks of *kaiki* cinema. While it is easy to see why *Frankenstein* might be considered a science fiction movie, it is almost unthinkable to argue that it is not a horror film, and the *obon* premieres and claims that the film out-*kaidans* *Yotsuya kaidan* make it a representative *kaiki* film for many Japanese, including director Kurosawa Kiyoshi, with whom I discussed the genre in June 2013.

⁴⁹ Izumi, 20-21.



Figure 3: The Phantom of the Opera, along with Count Dracula, Frankenstein's Monster, and other Universal Studios horror movie monsters get re-branded as "science fiction creatures" in the 1950s (reproduced from *Film/Genre* by Rick Altman).

Godzilla, meanwhile, has seldom if ever been called a *kaiki* film. As part of *Kinema junpō*'s feature from July 1957, "The World of *Kaiki* Film" (*Kaiki eiga no sekai*), Izawa Jun says of *Godzilla* and his giant radioactive monster ilk, "These are not serious monsters (*obake*). They are no *Oiwa*," referring to the vengeful spirit at the center of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*.⁵⁰ *Godzilla*, *Rodan* (*Sora no daikaijū Radon*, 1956), *Mothra* (*Mosura* 1961), and the other giant monster movies to come out of the Tōhō studio in the 1950s and 1960s were typically identified as *kaijū eiga* (怪獣映画). Although we have here another *kai* (怪) word, this one signifies a "strange beast," as opposed to the more

⁵⁰ "このお化けは、深刻ではない。お岩様ではない。" Izawa Jun, "Kaiki to wa? Nihon no obake to sei'yō no obake," *Kinema junpō*, July 1, 1957, 44-46.

general atmospheric *kaiki*. Izawa posits that the typical giant radioactive monster narrative – most famously embodied by *Godzilla* but originating in American films such as *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) – depends on its resonance from a Judeo-Christian “Wrath of God” (*kami no ikari*) moral outlook, in which mankind is punished for its sins against the natural order by mutated agents of that order. As part of a society he considers lacking in (Western) religion, Izawa feels that Japanese *kaijū eiga* lack a spiritual dimension and are at best grim satires of the nuclear age. *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya’s Oiwa*, meanwhile, is deeply rooted in Buddhist notions of karmic cause and effect, returning from the grave to exact vengeance upon the adulterous husband who conspired to murder her.⁵¹

History would appear to disagree with Izawa that *Godzilla’s* nuclear narrative lacks any resonance for audiences, Japanese or otherwise, as the big green lizard has gone

⁵¹“しかも、これとて、ゴーストやファンタムと同じように、“宗教”と対決している点がおもしろいと思う。これまでのフランケンシュタインものは、特にそのテーマをズバリと打ち出していた。

それは全能の神の領域を、人間が侵犯しようとして起る神の怒りである。フランケンシュタイン男爵は、身のほどをわきまえず、全能の神のみのよくなることの出来る人間創造に没頭する。そうしてそれが成功したと思いきや、男爵自身は自分の作ったもののために滅ぼされてしまうのだ。

このお化けは、いわゆるお化けではないが、人間ではない、しかし、宗教そのものの影であるから造物主の怒りを当然受ける。そうして、その顔の恐ろしさ自体のなかに、神への恐れがひそんでいる。

だが、フランケンシュタイン以後、人類は原水爆というお化けを作った。見えないもの、いわばファンタムというべきもののなかから、恐ろしいお化けを生み出した。こうなると、フランケンシュタインが、少々ぐらゐ恐ろしくても、現代人には、あまり響かない。

そこで、アリとかクモが原水爆で大きくなって、人類に攻撃をしかけてくるというテーマが、映画のなかに登場してくる。これは空想科学映画というものが生み出したお化けなのだが、ここでも、西洋もの、とりわけアメリカ映画は、造物主に対する人間の思い上りをテーマにする。神を恐れぬ人間が、原水爆を作ったことに対する応報の姿とでもいおうか。

日本のゴジラ、ラドンは、その物まねである。しかし、日本の方には、宗教はない。むしろ、世界ではじめて原爆を浴びた国民、さらに福童丸を出した国として、原水爆に対する小言を、ユーモアの中で訴えたのだが、ゴジラとラドンというお化けだった。だから、このお化けは、深刻ではない。お岩様ではない。” Ibid.

on to become Japan's most internationally recognized movie star and often is included among the ranks of the all-time great movie monsters. What Izawa calls the "Wrath of God" motif in *kaijū eiga* largely conforms to what Noel Carroll identifies as one of the characteristic horror genre plots, which he dubs the "overreacher plot." Typified by *Frankenstein*, the overreacher plot "is concerned with forbidden knowledge...the recurring theme of the overreacher plot is that there is some knowledge better left to the gods (or whomever)."⁵² In *Godzilla*, nuclear experimentation creates a giant monster which threatens to destroy Japan, and the only way to stop it is to employ an even more potentially dangerous technology, Dr. Serizawa's oxygen-destroyer, which the scientist uses to destroy both the monster and himself, intentionally taking the secret of the weapon's creation to his grave. The parallels with *Frankenstein*, while not exact, are enough to justify including *Godzilla* among the ranks of Carroll's typical horror movie plots. Izawa himself comments on the similarity between *Frankenstein* and giant nuclear monster movies in his article.⁵³ And yet there is a consensus among scholars and critics in Japan that the former is a *kaiki* film while the latter are not. *Kinema junpo's* special issue from 1969 devoted entirely to *kaiki* completely omits all *kaijū* movies from its pages, as do later works on *kaiki* cinema such as the above-mentioned edited volume by Uchiyama Kazuki and works by Kurosawa Kiyoshi.⁵⁴ It would not seem enough, then, to locate the definition of *kaiki* cinema in the mere presence of a monster or even in the particular

⁵² Carroll. *The Philosophy of Horror*, 118.

⁵³ Izawa, 45.

⁵⁴ See Kurosawa Kiyoshi and Shinozaki Makoto, *Kurosawa Kiyoshi no kyōfu no eigashi* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2003).

circumstances of the monster's encroachment into the human realm, as Carroll and Robin Wood have done in their respective theorizations of the horror movie.⁵⁵ Izawa's suggestion that it is an intrinsically religious element that gives a certain film a *kaiki* resonance for one culture but not another is also problematic, as this would essentially result in a nativist definition that would exclude most (if not all) foreign films from the genre.

Just a few years after the appearance of *Godzilla*, several films from America and Europe would pose further challenges to the generic identity of *kaiki*. The release of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* in 1960 is frequently cited as a key transitional moment in the history of horror cinema in the West; many historians and critics point to it as a transitional moment between "classic horror" in the tradition of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* and the beginning of "new horror" typified by mundane contemporary settings, bloody onscreen violence, and an ambiguous ending in which the threat is not necessarily defeated.⁵⁶ Film theorist Noel Carroll rules it out of his conceptualization of the genre completely on the basis that there is no monster in the literal sense of the word, although he acknowledges that the film has many of the formal trappings of horror.⁵⁷ In Japan, promotional advertising for *Psycho* featured graphics remarkably similar to films clearly identified as *kaiki* such as *House on Haunted Hill* (1959). Advertisements for both films prominently feature an image of the female lead with a terror-struck expression

⁵⁵ See Robin Wood, "The American Nightmare" and Noel Carroll, "Why Horror?" in *Horror: The Film Reader*, 25-32; 33-46. Major academic theories of the horror movie and their usefulness in defining *kaiki eiga* as a film genre will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

⁵⁶ Hutchings, *The Horror Film*, 169-173.

⁵⁷ Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 38-39.

frozen on her face. But while the ad for *House on Haunted Hill* explicitly names it “a consummate bone-chilling *kaiki* film” (*hone made kōraseru kaiki eiga no iki*), the ad for *Psycho* avoids any generic terminology apart from naming its director as the master of the *surirā*, using the Japanese approximation of the English “thriller.” *Kinema Junpō*’s review of *Psycho*, meanwhile, significantly calls the film a *kyōfu eiga* (恐怖映画), which quite literally means “horror movie.”⁵⁸ The word *kaiki* does not appear in promotional advertising or in the critical review for Hitchcock’s film; however, the old phrase *kaiki to senritsu* or “thrills and chills” from the prewar heyday of *kaiki eiga* can be seen on the advertisement for *Eyes Without a Face* (*Les yeux sans visage*, 1960) which appears in the same issue of *Kinema junpō* as the ad for *Psycho*. Often regarded as a spiritual sister of Hitchcock’s film, its Japanese advertisement features similar imagery in a prominent shot of the film’s female victim staring in abject terror. And despite the promise of good old-fashioned *kaiki to senritsu*, the advert finally settles on branding *Eyes Without a Face* an “art-horror film” or *kyōfu no geijutsu eiga*.

⁵⁸ Okura Mami, “*Saiko*,” *Kinema junpō*, October 15, 1960, 84.



Figure 4: Japanese advertisements for *Psycho* (1960), *Eyes Without a Face* (*Les yeux sans visage* 1960), and *House on Haunted Hill* (1959), all featuring similar depictions of female characters screaming in terror.

At the time of their release in Japan, there seemed to be something about these pictures that simultaneously evoked strong affinity to *kaiki* films and yet precluded them from being listed among their ranks. While something like *House on Haunted Hill* (which like *Psycho* and *Eyes Without a Face* features no “real” monsters) was pegged in the old generic terms, these new pictures warranted the appellation of a different genre label, *kyōfu eiga*, that comes much closer to the Western term “horror movie” than *kaiki* - yet several Western critics and theorists are reluctant to label them as horror movies in English. Undoubtedly this has to do with Hitchcock’s auteur status and *Eyes Without a Face*’s French imported art film pedigree, which set them apart from an obvious pop-culture confection like *House on Haunted Hill*. And yet the advertising for all three films betrays their generic affinities, which were implicitly if not explicitly acknowledged at the time of their release. Just as there are many people today who would disagree with

Noel Carroll that *Psycho* and *Eyes Without a Face* are not horror movies, there are those in Japan who unquestionably conceive of them as, in fact, part and parcel of the *kaiki* genre. When asked about *kaiki eiga*, Kurosawa Kiyoshi explicitly mentions *Eyes Without a Face* as a prime example.⁵⁹

The phrase *kyōfu eiga* was used occasionally by film critics during the 1930s in discussions of Hollywood horror movies and their Japanese imitations. The review for the 1937 film *The Avenging Corpse* (*Fukushū suru shigai*), an apparent remake of the 1936 Warner Bros. picture *The Walking Dead*, starring Boris Karloff, calls the Japanese film a “Boris Karloff-style *kyōfu* movie.”⁶⁰ However, by the end of the decade the term appears to have largely ceased being used for films which featured overtly monstrous or supernatural content. Today there is a strong sense among Japanese film aficionados that *kyōfu* denotes suspense thrillers which feature human murderers.⁶¹ Still, there may have been a sense in Japan during the late 1950s and early 1960s that many works of the now well-established English generic category of “horror” overlapped with *kaiki* and *kaidan* but that the words themselves did not mean the same thing, and the use of *kyōfu* as a generic label might have been a conciliatory gesture to the Western canon. Literary works translated from other languages that had previously been labeled *kaidan* were released in

⁵⁹ Author’s interview with Kurosawa Kiyoshi, June 3, 2013.

⁶⁰ “ボリス・カーロフ風の恐怖映画。” Quoted in Izumi, 115.

⁶¹ When asked about *kyōfu eiga*, *Ring* screenwriter Takahashi Hiroshi had this to say: “What gets called *kaiki eiga* are mainly *kaidan eiga*. Also foreign films like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. *Kyōfu eiga* are Western films like Hitchcock’s *Psycho* and Henri-Georges Clouzet’s *Les Diaboliques* (1955)” (「怪奇映画」と呼ばれているものが、おおむね怪談映画。外国映画でも吸血鬼ドラキュラやフランケンシュタインは「怪奇映画」。恐怖映画は、洋画だとヒッチコックの「サイコ」やアンリ・ジョルジュ・クルーゾーの「悪魔のような女」)。 Author’s Interview with Takahashi Hiroshi, June 18, 2013.

new editions that rechristened them *kyōfu shōsetsu* (“horror novels”).⁶² Beginning in 1958 Tokyo Tsukamoto began publishing their “Collection of World Horror Novels” (*Sekai kyōfu shōsetsu-shū*). However, these were later re-edited by the same publisher in 1969 as “Collection of *Kaiki* Novel Masterpieces” (*Kaiki shōsetsu meisaku-shū*), reverting to the more traditional use of a *kai* (怪) derivative word. The slippage between the use of *kaiki* and *kyōfu* as generic labels and the ultimate futility of trying to sort them out into separate categories is made plain by the editor’s preface, in which he claims that *kyōfu* as a literary genre “deals more than anything with the subject of fear inspired by supernatural occurrences.”⁶³ Yet at least as far as cinema is concerned, *kyōfu* as a genre seems to delineate the exact opposite. Perhaps as a side effect of being used to distinguish films like *Psycho* and *Eyes Without a Face* from more typical *kaiki* films, *kyōfu* ends up demarcating works in which the horror stems from an ultimately mundane source. But as Rick Altman would remind us, the distinction is hardly so neat, as both Western *kaiki* movies like *House on Haunted Hill* and domestic *kaiki* productions like *Diving Girls in a Haunted House* (*Ama no bakemono yashiki*, also 1959) also feature no “real” monsters (though admittedly both films’ narratives more strongly hint at their possible existence than either *Psycho* or *Eyes*).

In the realm of cinema the term *kaiki eiga* continues to exist – if sometimes uneasily – alongside *kyōfu eiga* up through the early 1970s, after which a shift in production trends both within Japan and internationally finally sees *kaiki* fade from

⁶² Izumi, 18-19.

⁶³ “「恐怖小説」というのはあくまでも超自然の怪異による恐怖を主題にした小説のこと。” Ibid.

generic parlance. The *kaidan* and *obake* films derived from traditional dramatic and folkloric sources, which had been suppressed by both the wartime and subsequent Occupation governments for different reasons,⁶⁴ had proven perennially popular since their reappearance in the early 1950s, but by the mid-1970s this central subgenre of domestic *kaiki* cinema was all but extinct. This is no doubt in part due to the overall decline of the Japanese film industry. Shintōhō, the studio responsible for the most acclaimed *kaiki* pictures of the postwar years, collapsed at the end of 1961. Television, in Japan as elsewhere, took a heavy toll on box office attendance, and the families that went to the theaters on a weekly basis in the 1950s were by and large staying home by the close of the 1960s. Catering to the one demographic still buying movie tickets – young, single men – several of the major studios had turned to softcore pornography production by the 1970s.⁶⁵ Although the occasional porno version of a classic *kaidan* such as *The Peony Lantern* or the old *kaiki* staple, the *bakeneko* ghost-cat tale, would appear, they were no longer being made with the intent to deliver “thrills and chills” to mainstream audiences. Abroad, too, the decline of the British Hammer studios, the highest-profile producer of foreign *kaiki* films in the 1950s and 1960s, seemed to signal the death of the genre.⁶⁶ Apart from Tōhō’s attempt at making a Japanese take on the Hammer vampire film with what are commonly referred to as the “Bloodthirsty Series” (*Chi wo sū shiriizu*) of films released between 1970 and 1974, and a minor “occult boom” spurred by the

⁶⁴ Wartime and Occupation censorship of *kaiki eiga* will be discussed in Chapter 4.

⁶⁵ Standish, 257-258.

⁶⁶ See Marcus Hearn and Alan Barnes, *The Hammer Story: The Authorised History of Hammer Films* (London: Titan, 2007), 132-135.

international success of *The Exorcist* that resulted in what might be called a “Shinto *Exorcist*” with 1977’s *Curse of the Inugami* (*Inugami no tatari*), there would be scant few domestic productions that warranted the label of *kaiki* going forward. Indeed, films in the vein of *The Exorcist*, with their striking content and stylistic departures from classic Hollywood horror, seemed especially ill-fitted to the *kaiki* label, being most often referenced in the press as *okaruto* or “occult” movies.⁶⁷ When newer versions of the old *kaidan* mainstay, *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, appeared in 1982 and 1994, they decidedly de-emphasized the *kaiki* elements. Since the 1970s there have been only a handful of pictures that have been presented or discussed in the context of *kaiki*, and these films, such as 2001’s *Sakuya the Demon Slayer* (*Sakuya yōkaiden*) or 2007’s *Kaidan*, are self-conscious, nostalgic throwbacks to the *kaiki* pictures of yesteryear.

Something was also happening in American cinema that would help render the term *kaiki* obsolete, as the seeds sewn by Hitchcock’s *Psycho* began to come to bloody fruition in films like Tobe Hooper’s *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). Much has been written on the emergence of the “slasher” subgenre of horror that rose to prominence in the American cinema of the 1970s; two of the fundamental theoretical accounts of the horror genre, Robin Wood’s “The American Nightmare” and Carol Clover’s *Men, Women and Chain Saws* deal almost exclusively with films in the tradition of *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978). As with Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, these seminal slasher films trade ghosts, vampires, and gothic

⁶⁷ “Kaiki eiga montō,” *Kinema junpō*, October 15, 1974. Reprinted in *Eiga kantoku Nakagawa Nobuo*, ed. Takisawa Osamu and Yamane Sadao (Tokyo: Riburopōto, 1987), 114-15.

castles for small town America, mortal homicidal maniacs, and explicit acts of violence.⁶⁸ The slasher movie enjoyed a boom in the early 1980s, when major Hollywood studios successfully replicated the box office success of the low-budget, independent slashers of the previous decade with the long-running *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series. When these films began to appear in Japan, the old *kaiki* label, having become muddled with *kyōfu* in the 1960s and antiquated by a decade of virtual dormancy in domestic production during the 1970s, was finally put in its grave. Advertising materials simply began to use the transliterated English word for horror, *horā* (ホラー).⁶⁹

The arrival of the American slasher film in Japan coincided with the birth of the direct-to-video film market, which became a fertile learning ground for a new generation of young talent including Miike Takashi and Kurosawa Kiyoshi, two directors who have since gone on to worldwide fame as filmmakers with a flair for the grotesque and horrific. Many of the V-cinema generation's earliest works are plainly inspired by the American slasher film, frequently exceeding their Western counterparts in explicit gore and scenes of depravity. Miike in particular proved to be an especially prolific director of direct-to-video cinema in the 1980s and 90s. His bizarre, ultraviolent imagery was largely influenced by Ishii Teruo's *ero-guro-nansensu* adaptations of mystery writer Edogawa Rampo's canon made during the late 1960s through the 1970s. Eventually graduating to feature theatrical film production, Miike brought his bag of grotesque tricks with him,

⁶⁸ Though, as has been often remarked, later films in the slasher subgenre often call the mortality of the killer into question, and by Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), outright refute it.

⁶⁹ Uchiyama, 26. Anecdotes do exist that attribute the word's introduction to Alfred Hitchcock, who came to Japan to promote *Psycho* in 1960 and told the press that his new film was a "horror picture." Out of respect for the Master of Suspense, the term was supposedly left as-is in translation. However I found no evidence in reviews or promotional materials to verify this account.

culminating in 2000's psychological slasher *Audition* (*Ōdishon*). The film's global critical success and the subsequent international attention it brought to the V-cinema filmmakers cemented, for a brief while, the stereotype abroad that Japanese horror cinema's distinguishing feature was an excess of graphic violence. This proved a short-lived preconception however, as the arrival of the so-called "J-horror" films at the turn of the millennium – with their more atmospheric, psychological approach to scaring their audiences that was at least a partial return to the techniques of *kaiki* filmmaking⁷⁰ – usurped the ultraviolent Japanese slasher film's place as the representative face of Japanese horror cinema. The international popularity and influence of J-horror films like *Ring* and *Ju-on*, which were remade by Hollywood as successful film franchises, put international attention on Japan's horror movie traditions, but with the passing of *kaiki* as an active genre of film in the 1970s and the retrograde application of the *horā* label to films like *Dracula* and *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, discussions about the history of horror cinema in Japan risk losing the categorical distinctions between *kaiki*, *kyōfu*, and *horā* crucial to an understanding of the topic.

Conclusion

Although *kaiki eiga* will no doubt continue to be rendered in English as "horror movie" in general discussions of Japanese cinema for convenience's sake, the term properly applies only to a certain strain of horror/*horā* filmmaking, demonstrating how issues of translation potentially mask disruptions of generic categories that occur when crossing cultural-linguistic boundaries. The use of the word *kaiki* as a genre of film both predates

⁷⁰ I discussed this "return" to the aesthetics of *kaiki eiga* in J-horror with Kurosawa Kiyoshi and Takahashi Hiroshi in separate interviews conducted in June 2013, and will expand on this topic further in Chapter 6.

the coinage of the phrase “horror movie” in English and falls out of usage following several industrial, formal and thematic shifts in international horror movie production. *Kaiki* was the dominant mode of filmic horror in both Japan and the West until the dawn of the atomic age, when American science fiction horrors such as *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* and Japanese imitations like *Godzilla* begin to articulate distinctly postmodern fears. Nonetheless *kaiki* films endure through the 1960s, after which the severe decline of the Japanese film industry, the closure of Hammer Film Productions in England, and the rise of the American slasher film all conspire to bring about the death of the genre. The adoption of the English transliteration *horā* in the 1980s provided a way to talk about the now-defunct *kaiki* genre as part of an ongoing, unbroken continuum of filmmaking traditions, but brought with it a loss of specificity that will be considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: The Heart of Darkness – Toward a Theory of *Kaiki* Cinema

Horā's supplanting of *kaiki* as a category of popular film in Japan has significant consequences for the study of film genre and makes an excellent case study of how crossing cultural-linguistic borders disrupts definitions of generic categories. Genre theorists such as Rick Altman have already shown how notions of genre can change over time with gothic horror's rebranding as science fiction in the 1950s, but the differences between "horror" and *kaiki* demonstrate that generic borders can shift across cultural-linguistic lines as well as temporal ones. It is worth remembering the point S.S. Prawer raises in his study of horror film, *Caligari's Childern: The Film as a Tale of Terror*, that "In regarding the terror-film or the horror-movie as a genre one is not, of course, implying that there is some obligatory set of rules every work in that category must obey. . . . What one is asking about, ultimately, is 'common consensus' *within a given society, a given culture*."⁷¹ The English transliteration *horā* afforded Japanese horror film fans a means by which to place the now-defunct *kaiki* genre within a continuum of an ongoing, living tradition of popular film – the global genre of the horror movie. At the same time, it potentially effaces a more culturally particular way of conceptualizing and categorizing global film. *Horā* as a generic label belongs to the era of globalization. *Kaiki* is the "common consensus" of a given society, a given culture. While these two classifications of what we would deem "horror movies" in English share many of the same formal and thematic markers, significant points of departure remain. An understanding of the difference between *kaiki* and *horā* – terms sometimes carelessly treated as synonyms –

⁷¹ S.S. Prawer, *Caligari's Childern: The Film as a Tale of Terror* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980), 33. Emphasis added.

reveals how issues of genre and language can intersect to rewrite (and in this case efface) cultural constructs often taken for granted.

The infiltration of the word *horā* into the Japanese film lexicon in the 1980s brought with it the same all-encompassing sense that the phrase “horror movie” held in English. Demonstrating Altman’s point of generic re-branding, scholars, filmmakers, and critics in Japan now talk about director Nakagawa Nobuo’s 1959 *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, widely regarded as the pinnacle of *kaiki* filmmaking, as a *horā eiga*, and seem willing to place all *kaiki* films within an even larger generic heading of *horā* that includes everything from silent-era *kaidan* adaptations to the most gruesome contemporary slasher movies.⁷² This mirrors the situation in the English-speaking world, where F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu*, the 1925 version of *Phantom of the Opera*, and other works which predate the advent of the horror-movie label are all today thought of as prime examples of the genre. Although they have been at times branded as mystery or science fiction, since the emergence of the term in the mid-1930s the “horror pictures” typified by Universal’s *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* have almost unanimously been understood as cornerstones of the genre. While they are sometimes referred to as “gothic” or “classic” horror, they remain essentially inextricable from the broader generic term.

⁷² The retroactive application of the term *horā* to *kaiki eiga*, as well as the general slippage between the terms *kaiki*, *kyōfu*, and *horā* that has occurred with increasing ubiquity since the 1980s can be seen in a wide variety of material, from academic articles such as Yokoyama Yasuko’s “Yotsuya kaidan eiga no Oiwatachi: kabuki to wakare, betsu no onna e” in *Kaiki to gensō e no kairō* to the popular volume edited by Haraguchi Tomō and Murata Hideki, *An Invitation to Japanese Horror Film (Nihon horā eiga e no shōtai, 日本恐怖映画への招待)*. Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2000), the title of which uses the characters for *kyōfu* with the phonetic gloss of *horā*. Kurosawa Kiyoshi and Shinozaki Makoto also devote much of their book *Kurosawa Kiyoshi’s Horror Movie History (Kurosawa Kiyoshi no kyōfu no eiga-shi)* to discussion of both *kaiki* and modern slasher *horā eiga*.

Press any Japanese film aficionado on the same subject, however, and one finds that *horā* has not so neatly usurped the full meaning of *kaiki*. Just as *Dracula* was a *kaiki* film even before the category of “horror movie” existed in English, most *horā* films produced since the adoption of the word *horā* in the 1980s are generally understood *not* to be *kaiki*. So, in effect, both *Dracula* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* are horror movies and even both *horā* movies, but only one is a *kaiki* movie. *Kaiki eiga* cannot therefore be properly rendered into English as “horror movie”; for as the various examples discussed in the previous section show, it is clearly a *certain kind* of horror movie. It is not *Godzilla*, *The Exorcist*, or *Friday the 13th Part VII*, but it is *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*; it is *Bride of Frankenstein*, it is *Eyes Without a Face*. I devote the remainder of this chapter to an attempt at understanding what distinguishes a *kaiki* film from the rest of the *horā* genre.

Othered Spaces and Places: Formal Aspects of *Kaiki* and the Question of Fear

On a very rudimentary level, one of the things that sets *kaiki* apart from other *horā* films is merely its age. Today the phrase *kaiki eiga* carries an antiquated, nostalgic value. They quite simply “don’t make them like that anymore.” Even when they do – as in the case of Nakata Hideo’s *Kaidan*, it is at best a one-off homage to a dead genre rather than a genuine revival.⁷³ So the difference between *kaiki* and *horā* is in part a temporal one, but the very fact that the old generic label needed to be retired and replaced by a new one indicates that the difference between *kaiki* and *horā* is not just chronological. According to J-horror director Sasaki Hirohisa, it is impossible to make a *kaiki* movie today. It is not

⁷³ This also can apply to certain more recent Western horror films like *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), which might reasonably be called *kaiki*.

just the fact that true *kaiki* films belong to an earlier era. Sasaki believes there is a lost art involved in their making:

When filming something otherworldly, the artistry of making the thing itself [via makeup and special effects] is important, but how do you go about filming it? If you film it out in the open, you lose the feeling of it. The truth is location shooting, realism, things like that are a hindrance, I think.⁷⁴

For Sasaki, a crucial component of *kaiki eiga* is the sense of “super-realism” (*sūpā riarizumu*) that came with shooting on indoor studio sets, a practice now all but extinct in the Japanese film industry. Praising the 1960 *kaiki* film *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond* (*Kaibyō Otama ga ike*), Sasaki says,

Even the exterior scenes were shot on-set. It’s an all-set movie. . . . For example, the opening scene in the forest, [the camera] doesn’t show the ground. Are the characters walking on a path or not? . . . The forest is scary because you can’t see through it. There are no needle-leafed pine trees, intentionally there are only broad-leafed trees. Nowadays you can’t film a spooky, impenetrable forest like that. In Japan only coniferous forests grow naturally. To show the fear of a forest full of broad-leafed trees, where one can lose their way, requires tremendous power of art direction. Also, the low-lying smoke that hangs on the ground cannot be done today. The smoke is bad for the actors’ health, and is no longer allowed.

He goes on to further lament the impossibility of shooting such a scene today because the contemporary Japanese film industry has neither the money nor the talent to build such sets.⁷⁵ Although Sasaki seems to have only Japanese *kaiki* films in mind when he

⁷⁴“この世のものではないものをどう写すかということと、美術との兼ね合いでこれだけのものを作ったらどう撮るのか。オープンだとこんな感じにはならない。実際のロケーションだとリアリズムが物事の邪魔をいっぱいする気がする。” Q&A with Sasaki Hirohisa, April 13, 2013.

attributes the stylized hyperrealism of constructed sets to growing out of kabuki theater traditions,⁷⁶ much the same argument can be made for Western *kaiki* pictures, which often feature exterior scenes shot on stylized interior sets largely owing to the influence of German Expressionism. *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond*'s "spooky forest" recalls virtually identical interior forest sets featured in Universal's *The Wolf Man* (1941), and even more relatively recent productions such as Hammer's *The Vampire Lovers* (1970). Other examples of the "super-realism" created by the obvious artificiality of *kaiki* films include the well-known Gothic castle interiors of any given *Dracula* or *Frankenstein* movie, which have parallels in the Warring States period (1467-1603) castles, Buddhist temples, and *daimyō* palaces wherein the action of most Japanese *kaiki* films transpires, as well as matte paintings and miniatures used for the establishing shots of such non-existent locales. Kurosawa Kiyoshi, a core creator of the J-horror phenomenon and one of Japan's few academic authorities on the *horā* genre, echoes Sasaki's sentiments in *Kurosawa Kiyoshi's History of Horror Film (Kurosawa Kiyoshi no kyōfu no eigashi)* with his discussion of the Italian-French co-production *Mill of the Stone Women (Il*

⁷⁵“外のシーンはあるがアル・セットの映画...例えば最初の部分の森は地面を見せない。彼らは道を歩いているかどうかは一言も言わない。森が怖いのは奥が見えないから。針葉樹は出てこない。意図的に広葉樹ばかり。現代、怖い奥行きのない森が撮れない。日本の場合は植林されすぎて針葉樹ばかりだから。広葉樹ばかりで道行をふさぐという森の怖さを見せてるとするのは、美術の力が大きい。そして下に這うスモーク、ロウのスモークで人体に悪いので現在は使用禁止になった。いい感じで這っていくスモークが再現できなくなった。” Ibid. *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond* was the directorial debut of *kaiki eiga* master Nakagawa Nobuo's assistant director, Ishikawa Yoshihiro, and along with Nakagawa's work is widely considered one of the finest examples of Japanese *kaiki eiga* filmmaking.

⁷⁶“元は歌舞伎からきた手法。スーパーリアリズムみたいなものを世界が信じられたものが怪談映画としてあった。” Ibid.

mulino delle donne di pietra, 1960), which he names as one of his personal favorite *kaiki* pictures:

Even if I wanted to, I couldn't make a film like *Mill of the Stone Women*. It would take an impossible amount of money to build sets like that today. Even if I could somehow, audiences probably wouldn't come to see it. . . . because of all this I intentionally make a different kind of *horā* film – not 'kaiki' films but 'horā' films.⁷⁷



Figure 5: Low-lying fog accentuates “spooky forest” sets in *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond* (*Kaibyō Otama ga ike*, 1960, above), *The Wolf Man* (1941, left), and *The Vampire Lovers* (1970, right).

⁷⁷“自分ではもちろん、「生血を吸う女」のようなものはやりたくてもできない。あのセット、いま作ったらとんでもない金額かかりますよ。それを無理やりやっても、まずお客さんは見にこないだろうし...そういうところから、別な形のホラー映画－怪奇映画ではなくホラー映画－を、僕は作っているつもりなんですけど。Kurosawa and Shinozaki, 40, emphasis added.



Figure 6: Matte paintings and miniatures evoke Othered spaces – castles atop foreboding hills in *The Ghost Cat of Okazaki* (*Kaibyō Okazaki sōdō*, 1954, left) and *Frankenstein* (1931, right).

Both Sasaki and Kurosawa stress the sense of the stylized, anti-realistic atmosphere evoked by the artificial sets of both Japanese and foreign *kaiki* films as one of the elements that distinguish them from the rest of the *horā* genre. Unlike horror or *kyōfu* cinema, which as Noel Carroll reminds us is essentially defined by the emotion it is meant to produce in its audience,⁷⁸ the word *kaiki* by definition points to an atmosphere of the strange and bizarre, rather than the emotional affect of horror. When asked about this distinction between *kaiki* and *horā*, Kurosawa responded thusly:

Kaiki's nuance might be termed “gothic horror” in English. It's things like Hammer movies and *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, period pieces in which ghosts or mysterious figures like Dracula appear, and the whole movie has a sense of taking place ‘not now,’ but ‘long long ago.’ I suppose that's very similar to gothic horror. Those films aren't mainly about horror, the ones I want to call *kaiki*. They're atmospheric, moody. Even if they're provisionally set in the modern day, the action will take place in some old mansion, like in *Eyes Without a Face*. It's actually ‘the present’ yet it has a very old, period feel to it. . . . I would say fear isn't even a necessary element of *kaiki* cinema.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 15.

⁷⁹“怪奇映画のニュアンスは、英語だとゴシックホラーになるのかな。ハマーフィルムや四谷怪談なんかもそうだが、時代が古くて幽霊が出てきたり、ドラキュラのような怪人とかいる

In other words, an essential ingredient of *kaiki* is its evocation of an Othered time and place, a world spatially alien or removed from our own mundane, contemporary existence. On the most obvious level this is achieved by the period settings that characterize many Western and Japanese *kaiki* films, but for Sasaki and Kurosawa, this otherworldly atmosphere finds expression primarily in the set work and production design, which reject location shooting and other “realistic” elements. That the resulting ambiance need not necessarily be horrific also partially explains how many Japanese *kaiki* pictures warrant their generic appellation when their monsters often do not appear until the third act of the film. While most Western horror movies tend to introduce their monsters early and make them the central focus of the plot, typical Japanese *kaiki* pictures such as *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* will not even hint at the ghost’s existence until the final thirty minutes of the film.

However, it is perhaps too much to suggest that an evocation of the emotion of fear is not even a necessary component of *kaiki*. Delivering scares to the audience was obviously another crucial element of the *kaiki* formula, and appears to have been the main source of *kaiki*’s appeal for viewers. As discussed in the previous chapter, advertising for *kaiki* films typically featured images of the female lead with a terror-struck expression on her face alongside the picture’s title in wobbly, “shivering” characters. The poster for the 1958 film *The Ghost Cat of Yonaki Swamp (Kaibyō Yonaki*

いろなものが出てくるが、映画全体としてやはり今ではないある時代劇、古い時代だから成立する物語、まあゴシックホラーという言い方が近い。そういうものを主にホラーではなく、怪奇映画とつい言いたくなる。感覚的なものですが。例えば時代が仮に現代であっても、どこか少し古い屋敷を舞台にしていたり、「顔のない目」など、実は現代なのだが何かとても古めかしい感じがする...怪奇映画にとって怖さが必要かと聞いたら必ずしもそうではないと思う。” Author’s interview with Kurosawa Kiyoshi.

numa), to cite one example, promises the film is “delightfully scary!” (*kowai ga tsukai!*), blatantly peddling the same intersection of fear and delight that *hyaku monogatari kaidankai* tales provided for Edo period aficionados of *kaiki*.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the most common criticism of the more poorly reviewed specimens of the genre was that the films were not genuinely frightening. Professional critics in Japan often proceeded from the bias that the *kaiki* genre (at least the domestically made product) was a disreputable breed of filmmaking in general, but their reviews suggest they might have been inclined to take a more positive view of the pictures if only they succeeded in truly thrilling the audience. *The Legend of the Saga Ghost Cat* (*Saga kaibyō den*, 1937), the film that touched off the immediate prewar *kaiki* boom and made its lead actress, Suzuki Sumiko, the nation’s first monster movie star,⁸¹ was trounced by *Kinema junpō* primarily for being a “*kaiki* movie that’s not scary.”⁸² The magazine’s negative review of Daiei’s postwar *kaiki* film, *The Ghost Cat of Arima Palace* (*Kaibyō Arima goten*, 1953) perhaps best illustrates the all-too-common complaint, finding the film’s attempts at frightening imagery to be worthy of ridicule: “The filmmakers didn’t have a single truly creepy (*kai-i*) idea . . . before it would frighten the children in the audience, it would more naturally induce howls of laughter.”⁸³

⁸⁰ See Chapter 1, pg. 23-24.

⁸¹ Shimura, “Shinkō Kinema no kaibyō eiga,” 54-56.

⁸² “怖くもない怪奇映画となって居る。” Murakami Tadahisa, “*Saga kaibyō-den*,” *Kinema junpō*, February 21, 1937, 118. The movie’s influential success indicates audiences thought otherwise.

⁸³ “怪異に捧げるアイデアなぞ、このスタッフは何も持っていはしないのだった...見物子供たちが恐がる前に声をあげて笑うもの当然ではないかと思われた。” Ogi Masahiro, “*Kaibyō Arima goten*,” *Kinema junpō*, February 15, 1954, 65.



Figure 7: Poster for *The Ghost Cat of Yokani Swamp* (*Kaibyō Yonaki numa*, 1958) promising the film is “delightfully scary” (*kowai ga tsukai!*).

Interestingly, while the overwhelmingly low critical reputation of Japanese *kaiki* cinema mirrors the generally disreputable standing many now-classic Western horror films suffered upon their initial releases in the West, the above cited complaints demonstrate that the reasons for the critical loathing were in truth often diametrically

opposed. Western film critics hostile to the horror genre most frequently attack the pictures on moral grounds. They are, according to their detractors, at best vulgar and exploitative displays of violence – and at worst, dangerously subversive in their indulgence of the horror aficionado’s latent sadomasochistic desires. As Linda Williams has theorized in her influential piece on the so-called “body genres” (horror, melodrama, and pornography), the critical unease with horror may ultimately lie in the way it seeks to provoke in its audience “an apparent lack of proper esthetic distance, a sense of over-involvement in sensation and emotion.”⁸⁴ One of the most obvious ways in which a horror (or a *kaiki*) film can provoke this sensational response is by shocking the audience with frank depictions of violence, something horror films in the West have been taken to critical task over almost since their inception. Yet this is exactly what Japanese critics of *kaiki* cinema deride the pictures for failing to accomplish. When Hammer’s *Dracula* appeared in 1958, it represented the first time Bram Stoker’s seminal vampire tale had been filmed in color, and much was made in both Japan and the West about its gory displays (for the time) of bright red Technicolor blood. But while the reviewer for the United Kingdom’s *Daily Worker* was “revolted and outraged” by *Dracula*’s use of “realism and the modern conveniences of colour and wide screen,”⁸⁵ *Junpō* critic Sugiyama Shizuo commends the film for precisely the same reason:

⁸⁴ Williams, “Film Bodies,” 705.

⁸⁵ “I went to see *Dracula*, a Hammer film, prepared to enjoy a nervous giggle. I was even ready to poke gentle fun at it. I came away revolted and outraged...Laughable nonsense? Not when it is filmed like this, with realism and with the modern conveniences of colour and wide screen.” Nina Hibbin, *The Daily Worker*, May 24, 1958. Quoted in Peter Hutchings, *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 9.

Scenes that will likely cause weak-willed women and children to spontaneously scream and throw both hands over their eyes appear one on the heels of another. The reasons for this are exceedingly simple – Technicolor, and special effects. In other words, the times are changing, and technology must progress. . . . The script, the performances, the cinematography, every aim and effort is put entirely toward the single focus of creating a sense of gloom and instilling terror, and on this account, we can say the film is a total success.⁸⁶

Finally, audiences themselves plainly went to see these pictures desiring to be scared. Audience research for prewar and early postwar *kaiki* films in Japan is virtually nonexistent, making Yanagi Masako’s 1957 *Kinema junpō* article “*Kaiki* Films and the Audience” (*Kaiki eiga to kankyaku*) an invaluable resource, and worth summarizing its data in detail. The article notes that the audience for *kaiki* in the postwar years was overwhelmingly young, and largely female. Seventy percent of the audience for *The Ghost Cat at Ōma Crossing* (*Kaibyō Ōma ga tsuji*, 1954) was under the age of twenty-five, and fifty percent female. For *The Ghost Cat of the 53 Way Stations* (*Kaibyō gojusan-ji*, 1956) the audience was sixty percent female, and sixty-five percent female for the same year’s *The Ghost Story of Plover Pond* (*Kaidan chidori ga fuchi*). Following a screening of Shintōhō studio’s 1956 version of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, Yanagi polled audience members on their reasons for attending the film. The most common

⁸⁶“気の弱い女子供だったら思わず叫び声をあげて双手で顔を掩いたくなるだろうようなシチュエーションが踵を接して現れるのだ—その理由は至って簡単、一にテクニカラー、二にトリック。つまりは時代の相違、技術の進歩に他ならないのである…脚本も演出も演技も撮影も、そのねらいと苦心は一切あげて如何に陰気に仕立てるか、如何にこわがらせるかの一点のみに集中、そして、その限りでは100%に成功したと断言できるだろう。” Sugiyama Shizuo, “*Kyūketsuki Dorakyura*,” *Kinema junpō*, Fall Special, 1958, 120.

response was, “to see something scary” (*kowai mono mita sa*).⁸⁷ Commenting on the actual screening itself, Yanagi is struck by the nervous laughter in the theater as the movie plays, along with lots of chattering and pointing at the screen, and screams from the audience when something startling appears onscreen, followed by raucous laughter. All of this indicates that the *kaiki* moviegoing experience was indeed rather like similarly boisterous screenings of horror films in the West, and recalls the observation of cultural historian Marina Warner that “The squealing laughter that erupts during horror movies . . . expresses an attempt not to be touched, not to be moved, to overcome the more usual response of fear.”⁸⁸ Yanagi concludes that “if it can just startle the audience and make them scared, that alone lets us say this kind of movie is eighty-percent successful.”⁸⁹

“Changing Things:” Monsters, *Obake*, and the Limits of Horror Movie Theory in the Case of Japanese *Kaiki eiga*

Rather like its *horā* counterparts, a *kaiki* film’s perceived success depended more than anything on evoking a sense of fear. Here one might be tempted to conclude that, as a genre, *kaiki* can be defined simply as a horror movie set in a space marked-off from the everyday modern world, be it a Transylvanian castle, a samurai mansion, a spooky forest, or merely “long, long ago.” We should then be able to apply the major academic theories of filmic horror – most of which focus on the ways in which these films create the sense of horror that lends the genre its name – to *kaiki* cinema without much difficulty.

⁸⁷ Yanagi Masako, “Kaiki eiga to kankyaku,” *Kinema junpō*, July 1, 1957, 51.

⁸⁸ Marina Warner, *Monsters of Our Own Making: The Peculiar Pleasures of Fear* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 258.

⁸⁹ “観客をおどかし、こわがらせさえすれば、それだけでこの種の映画は、八割方成功したといえるのである。” Yanagi, 51.

However, one finds that many of the most influential and accepted works of horror movie theory rule out the brand of fear featured in Japanese *kaiki* films as incompatible with the horror genre.

Since most of the seminal works of the horror movie genre produced in America and Europe from the 1930s through the 1960s were classified as *kaiki* in Japan, it is not surprising that the main academic theories of film horror also neatly account for most non-Japanese examples of *kaiki* cinema, but we run into trouble when trying to apply them to many of the most famous and representative works of domestic *kaiki* film. In his landmark study of American horror movies of the 1970s, Robin Wood identifies the distinguishing theme of *all* horror film as “Normality threatened by the Monster”:

The very simplicity of this formula has a number of advantages. It covers the entire range of horror films, being applicable whether the monster is a vampire, a giant gorilla, an extraterrestrial invader, an amorphous gooey mass, or a child possessed by the Devil, and this makes it possible to connect the most seemingly heterogeneous movies.⁹⁰

Wood defines his Monster as a symbolic Other, an externalization of what has been repressed in humanity by society and whose presence poses a threat to social order or “normality.”⁹¹ Barbara Creed's work on the “monstrous feminine,” in horror cinema, which draws largely on Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject as “what disturbs identity,

⁹⁰ Wood, 32.

⁹¹ It is important to note that Wood's definition of the Other is not the same as the “Othered spaces” I suggest are a key component of *kaiki* films. While I use the term to describe the “hyperrealism” of stylized, constructed sets, Wood defines his Other as “that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with...it functions not simply as something external to the culture or the self, but also as what is repressed in the self and projected outward in order to be hated and disowned,” 27.

system, order,”⁹² supports Wood's conclusions. Creed asserts that “horror film attempts to bring about a confrontation with the abject...in order finally to *eject the abject* and redraw the boundaries between human and non-human.”⁹³ Both Wood and Creed view the horror film as promoting an essentially conservative social agenda which privileges “normal,” established society. Since the societies that produce horror films are historically patriarchal, the feminine becomes a commonly used representation of the Other, abject, or monstrous, in opposition to the posited normalcy of the social order in which the spectator is assumed to be a part. Wood lists “Woman” as one of his categories of “Other,” writing, “The dominant images of women in our culture are entirely male created...on to women men project their own innate, repressed femininity in order to disown it as inferior.”⁹⁴ The very title of Creed’s work, “The Monstrous-feminine,” indicates its central project, an analysis of portrayals of the feminine as abject, monstrous threats to society, aligning the monstrous-feminine with the non-human in its violation of social norms. A quick survey of prominent monsters in Japanese *kaiki* films reveals that the vast majority are indeed feminine; the two most oft-recurring monsters of the genre being the always female *bakeneko* cat spirit and the *onryō* or vengeful ghost, which traditionally takes the form of a wronged woman seeking vengeance upon her still living oppressors. In Nakagawa Nobuo’s version of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, to cite the flagship example, the “good wife” Oiwa is poisoned, disfigured, and left for dead by her

⁹² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia, 1982), 4.

⁹³ Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-feminine: An imaginary abjection," in *Horror, The Film Reader*, 75. Emphasis added.

⁹⁴ Wood, 27.

husband, but in death she returns to punish the man who wronged her in life. Yet it can be argued that Oiwa's ghost *restores* the normality that has been threatened by the lawless behavior of her husband Iemon, who flouts the moral code of the samurai for personal wealth and gain. Her wrath remains relentlessly fixed upon the social transgressor, Iemon, until at last he begs forgiveness for his crimes in the moment when Oiwa's spirit engineers his ultimate demise. By destroying the wicked Iemon, Oiwa's ghost restores order and harmony to society, her spirit shedding its hideous appearance and returning to its former beauty in the final moments of the film. Wood's horror movie monsters must be annihilated for the good of society, but the monsters of Japanese *kaiki* films often annihilate *on behalf of* society. If the point is, as Creed suggests, to eject the abject and re-establish the boundaries of the human and non-human, *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* and many other *kaiki* films emphasize that the ghosts are often possessed of more humanity than their oppressors, who sacrifice their own humanity for selfish or otherwise unscrupulous motives, and are finally ejected from the world via the ghosts' deadly vengeance. Kristeva writes that "which is subjectively experienced as abjection, varies according to time and space," but that the goal of demarcating the abject always involves "no other goal than the survival of both group and subject."⁹⁵ In the world of *Yotsuya*, the survival of "the group" (Edo society) depends on the removal of the wicked Iemon, not the morally righteous Oiwa. Kristeva's theory of abjection works in this reading of *Yotsuya's* archetypal Japanese ghost story narrative, but only by inverting the places of the monster and its victim in the role of the abject.

⁹⁵ Kristeva, 68.

It might be possible to view Oiwa herself as a social aberration when considered in a Buddhist context. Her intense, unchecked emotions and desire for vengeance bind her spirit to the mortal realm even after death; in Buddhism this intense state of *shūnen* or “fierce attachment” hinders the soul’s attainment of Enlightenment and often requires the interventional prayers of a monk to set the wayward spirit back on the proper path. But here one finds themes of rehabilitation and reincorporation into the whole, rather than the motifs of expulsion and extermination that characterize the diegetic worlds of classic Hollywood horror movies operating in a Judeo-Christian cosmology. And while the explicitly Buddhist problem of the monster’s *shūnen* is frequently a component of traditional ghost stories from the Edo period, this aspect is typically downplayed in *kaiki* film adaptations, which focus more on the punishment of the wicked, socially transgressive human characters at the hands of vengeful spirits.

The preponderance of female monsters in Japanese *kaiki* cinema might seem to lend itself better to feminist psychoanalytic readings of horror film, yet these monstrous females operate in ways that often conflict with psychoanalytic notions of the monstrous feminine. A fundamental link between femaleness and the monster concerns issues of the maternal, which Barbara Creed has written about extensively in “The Monstrous Feminine.” As stated previously, Creed’s work depends largely on Kristeva’s theory of horror as abjection: that which horrifies us is what we have rejected from our own selves. Because all individuals have experienced abjection in their earliest attempts to free themselves from dependency on the figure of the mother, Creed sees a distinguishing

feature of horror film as the construction of the maternal as abject, an issue rendered doubly horrifying by the mother's desire to retain a hold over her child:

We can see abjection at work in the horror text where the child struggles to break away from the mother, representative of the archaic maternal figure . . . constructed as the monstrous-feminine. By refusing to relinquish her hold on her child, she prevents it from taking up its proper place in relation to the Symbolic.⁹⁶

Creed clearly has a certain strain of horror film in mind (*Psycho*, *Carrie*, *The Birds*) in regard to the monstrous-feminine, although she does argue that confrontation with the abject - so often symbolized by the mother - is "the central ideological project of the popular horror film" in general.⁹⁷ Yet it is worth considering her comments on monstrous-feminine mothers in particular regard to Nakagawa Nobuo's *kaiki* works, which are in no small measure concerned with issues of the monstrous in relation to the maternal. Reluctance of the mother to part with her child is a key element in the creation of the monster in Nakagawa's *Ghost Story of Yotsuya*. Dying from the poison Iemon has slipped into her drink, Oiwa cradles their infant son in her arms, refusing to part with the child even in death. "You poor child! How could I leave you with a man like Iemon?" Oiwa laments, "Die with your mother! I could never enter paradise if I left you behind!"⁹⁸ With her dying breath Oiwa's body falls on the child, presumably smothering him. Although such action might seem reprehensible out of context, Iemon has already made

⁹⁶ Creed, 72.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 75.

⁹⁸ “不憫な坊や、なんでそなたはあの伊右衛門などに。この母と一緒に死んでおくれ。かわいいそなたを残して母は成仏できません。”

plain his intention to abandon the baby, and by taking the child with her to the land beyond Oiwa demonstrates her undying love as a mother. Oiwa's ghost frequently appears to Iemon holding their son in her arms, and her vengeful spirit's presence is announced in the climatic scene of the film by the child's cries, making Oiwa's vendetta a mission to punish the sins of the father as much as those of the husband. Film scholar Colette Balmain has identified this valorization of the maternal as a key recurring component of Nakagawa's *kaiki* films.⁹⁹ The elderly ghost cat of Nakagawa's *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, much like Oiwa, returns from the dead in large part to avenge the murder of her grown son, and the mother-daughter team of spirits in Nakagawa's *Snake Woman's Curse* (*Kaidan hebi-onna*, 1968) work together to destroy the wicked landlord who raped the younger woman in life. As in Western horror cinema, maternal attachment gives rise to monstrous mothers in Nakagawa's filmic universe; however the victims are not the children but those who would do them harm. Although Nakagawa's *kaiki* films develop the theme of the "valorous maternal monster" most fully, it is not unique to his own work in the genre. Films like Kato Bin's *The Ghost Cat of Okazaki* (*Kaibyō Okazaki sōdō*, 1954) also feature mothers who transform into monsters in part to protect their children.

Along with the monstrous and the maternal, the most oft-written about incarnation of the feminine in horror is the victim, whose torment at the hands of the monster is considered the result of transgressing traditional gender roles and the theory of the gaze. The act of looking is central to the horror genre as well as *kaiki eiga*, as the audience has come, presumably, to "see the monster" and come face-to-face with the source of fear. In

⁹⁹ Balmain, 62.

American and European horror films, the audience often experiences their view of the monster via the gaze of a female victim, for patriarchal society permits the female horror movie victim to enact responses to the monstrous deemed inappropriate for the traditional male hero. As Carol Clover notes in her discussion of gender and horror film, *Men Women, and Chain Saws*, “Angry displays of force may belong to the male, but crying, cowering, screaming, fainting, trembling, begging for mercy belong to the female. Abject terror, in short, is gendered feminine.”¹⁰⁰ But what are the consequences of this gendered, terrified look at the monster? Mary Anne Doane expands on Laura Mulvey’s theory of the female gaze in classical cinema as essentially passive (women are there to be looked at, not to do the looking),¹⁰¹ theorizing that a woman’s active gaze “can only be simultaneous with her own victimization” in the world of motion pictures.¹⁰² Woman is, in effect, punished for appropriating the active male gaze. Linda Williams applies this idea to the horror genre when she suggests “the horror film offers a particularly interesting example of this punishment in the woman’s terrified look at the body of the monster.” Citing the famous and influential scene from Rupert Julian’s *The Phantom of the Opera* in which the hideous face of Lon Chaney’s phantom is unmasked by the curious young opera singer Christine (Mary Philbin), Williams writes:

Everything conspires here to condemn the desire and
curiosity of the woman’s look...It is as if she has become
responsible for the horror that her look reveals, and is

¹⁰⁰ Clover, 51.

¹⁰¹ See Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*, ed. Marc Furstenau (New York: Routledge, 2010), 200-208.

¹⁰² Mary Anne Doane, “The ‘Woman’s Film’: Possession and Address,” in *Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, eds. Mary Anne Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1983), 72.

punished by not being allowed the safe distance that ensures the voyeur's pleasure of looking.¹⁰³



Figure 8: Mary Philbin unmasks *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925).

The Phantom of the Opera is perhaps the first of innumerable films in which the viewer's initial glimpse of the monster is afforded by the curiosity of a female character subsequently punished for wielding the active, male gaze.¹⁰⁴ This also holds true for Nakagawa's "Western style" *kaiki* film, *Lady Vampire (Onna kyūketsuki, 1959)*, in which hapless female victims fall prey to the clutches of Amachi Shigeru's tuxedo-wearing Dracula knockoff after gazing in abject terror upon his vampiric form. But the female victims of Nakagawa's period ghost story films are the monsters themselves, who have not been punished for wielding the male gaze but are formerly passive souls driven to seek redress beyond the grave against their male oppressors. Orui, the vengeful ghost

¹⁰³ Williams, "When the Woman Looks," in *Horror, The Film Reader*, 62.

¹⁰⁴ As Figure 8 shows, the audience does not see the initial reveal of the Phantom's face from a point-of-view shot of Christine, as she is also in-frame. While the shot is not a literal depiction of Christine's "appropriated" active, male gaze, Williams's point seems to be that Christine's voyeuristic impulses (which, according to Mulvey, are associated with the male gaze) grant the audience their desired look at the monster and justify Christine's subsequent "punishment" for transgressing the gender-coded rules of looking in classical Hollywood cinema.

antiheroine of Nakagawa's *Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp*, returns in death to avenge herself upon her husband Shinkichi and his young lover Ohisa, as well as the villainous Omura, a ronin with designs on Orui who has goaded Shinkichi into eloping with Ohisa. Although Ohisa is the first to fall prey to the vengeful spirit's wrath, only the two male characters actually see Orui's ghost. As Shinkichi gazes upon his mistress, her guise suddenly transforms to that of Orui's deformed spirit. The terrified Shinkichi strikes at the monster with a sickle, only to find he has fatally wounded Ohisa. The ghost's lone female victim thus dies without ever laying eyes upon the monster. The viewer's revelatory glimpses of the monster's form are afforded only via the male gaze, first by Shinkichi and then Omura, who, after murdering Shinkichi, is relentlessly assaulted by Orui's spirit in the final moments of the film. If the typical American or European horror film codes the act of gazing upon the monster as female, frightened, and transgressive, Japanese films like *Kasane's Swamp* present the act as male, frightened, and reactionary, further distancing *kaiki* from theories of how the horror genre operates.

Even more interesting is a scene in Nakagawa's *Ghost Story of Yotsuya* in which Oiwa's ghost appears in the eyes of the female gaze as beautiful while simultaneously appearing monstrous in the male gaze. Oiwa's sister Osode has been forced into marrying Naosuke, a co-conspirator of Iemon's who provided the disfiguring poison used to bring about Oiwa's death. Unaware of her sister's demise, Osode is overjoyed when Oiwa appears one night outside their door. Apart from her pale complexion and inability to speak, Oiwa appears to her sister as the beautiful woman she was in life. Osode excitedly runs to greet her, but Nakagawa keeps the camera behind Osode and gives no view of her

reaction to her sister's appearance. The reaction shot is instead focused on the terrified Naosuke, who knows Oiwa is dead, and behind Naosuke the disfigured, hideous version of Oiwa's ghost lurks ominously.¹⁰⁵ Nakagawa then cuts back and forth between Osode, happily reunited with the beautiful visage of her sister, and the increasingly panicked Naosuke, who finally shrieks in terror when the disfigured version of Oiwa lays her hand upon his shoulder. This is followed by a quick reaction shot of Osode, gazing in perplexity at the spot where previously the hideous ghost of her sister had lain, but when the camera cuts back there is only Naosuke wailing in fear.



Figure 9: Oiwa's ghost appears to her sister Osode beautiful as she was in life, while simultaneously manifesting as the hideous *onryō* behind Naosuke. When Naosuke screams in fear, Osode looks but cannot see the source of his terror (*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, 1959).

¹⁰⁵ Note that, like the image from *The Phantom of the Opera* in Figure 8, the reveal of Oiwa's hideous ghost does not replicate Naosuke's literal point-of-view, but it nonetheless associated with Naosuke's *perception* of Oiwa's ghost. For Osode there is no terror, but for Naosuke Oiwa is terror incarnate, and that is how the audience sees her as well in the shots of Naosuke (see Figure 9).

If anyone is punished for looking at the monster in Nakagawa's period ghost story films, it would seem to be the male characters. The females are spared the consequences of the gaze. They are not even capable of exercising it, a feature of Japanese *kaiki* films that a feminist reading may interpret as even more misogynist than Western horror cinema. And yet even the male characters are not truly punished *for* looking at the monster. Rather, their ability to see the monster is the punishment itself - punishment for their crimes against oppressed women who attain in death and monstrous transformation the justice denied to them in life. However, I would argue that this upsetting of gender norms does not constitute a "threat to normality" that would neatly reconcile domestic *kaiki* cinema with Wood's definition of horror cinema. In life Oiwa and Orui remain filial and devoted wives, subservient to the demands of their husbands. The social transgressors are the men who flout the rules of traditional society, and their deaths at the hands of the empowered female ghosts merely restore normalcy to the patriarchal world. After their vengeance is complete both Oiwa and Orui return to their beautiful, demure selves and cease to haunt the realm of the living.

We might ask ourselves at this point, are the "monsters" of Japanese *kaiki* cinema even monsters at all? They have the audience's sympathy, act as defenders of the social norm, are selflessly devoted mothers, and confound theories of the gaze. Surely the real monster of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* is not the physically repellant ghost of Oiwa, but the morally repellent human villain, Iemon. Likewise, the standard ghost cat movie plot concerns the efforts of the cat spirit to do justice upon the wicked samurai who pose a threat to the peaceful, harmonious lives of the other characters. There can be little doubt,

though, that these creatures – valorous as they may be – are understood to be fundamentally monstrous. Although what exactly constitutes a “monster” remains open to some interpretation, Noel Carroll defines the horror movie monster as a categorically interstitial being – neither one thing nor another but something “in-between” – which produces a sense of repulsion in the beholder.¹⁰⁶ Vampires, zombies, and ghosts are all “un-dead” (as is Frankenstein’s Monster, most often depicted as a reanimated patchwork of corpses); normally tiny ants grow as big as tanks in *Them!*; and the Wolf Man and the Creature from the Black Lagoon are half-human, half-animal. Japanese *kaiki* films are dominated by two iconic figures that also fit Carroll’s definition – the vengeful revenant epitomized by the rotting corpselike figure of Oiwa in *Yotsuya*, and the part-woman, part-feline ghost cat. Even if they are on the side of the angels, their mere appearance induces repulsion in the other characters as well as (presumably) the viewer. That the Japanese word for the general category of beings these creatures belong to, *bakemono* (化け物), literally means “changing thing” makes the point indisputable – here also be monsters.

Marvelously Terrifying: Evoking Cosmic Fear in a Fantasy Setting

I find Carroll’s work more useful when trying to account for the element of horror in Japanese *kaiki* films, in part because he proceeds from a more general structuralist and cognitive approach, rather than the more culturally specific sociological and psychological readings offered by Wood and Creed. In defining what a monster *is* before

¹⁰⁶ See Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 17-24; 40-52. Although he rules out a metaphoric use of the term “monster,” thereby excluding films like *Psycho* from his conceptualization of the genre, it is easy enough to see how a more liberal use of Carroll’s definition could apply to the schizophrenic transvestite Norman Bates, as well as other human serial killers featured in slasher films.

worrying about what a monster *does* in the horror text, Carroll establishes a central common baseline of *horā* and *kaiki*. But monsters alone do not make a horror movie:

even if a case can be made that a monster or monstrous entity is a necessary condition for horror, such a criterion would not be a sufficient condition. For monsters inhabit all sorts of stories – such as fairy tales, myths, and odysseys – that we are not inclined to identify as horror . . . we will have to find a way to distinguish the horror story from mere stories with monsters in them, such as fairy tales. What appears to demarcate the horror story . . . is *the attitude of the characters in the story to the monsters they encounter*.¹⁰⁷

In ruling out “fairy tales, myths, and odysseys” from the horror genre, Carroll deliberately invokes the work of Tzvetan Todorov and his distinction between “marvelous,” “uncanny,” and “fantastic” narratives. Simply put, Todorov breaks fantastic literature into three categories – tales in which seemingly supernatural occurrences ultimately receive a rational explanation (uncanny); tales in which the existence of the supernatural is an accepted part of the narrative diegesis (marvelous), and tales that hint at the existence of the supernatural while holding out the possibility of a rational explanation (what Todorov calls the “pure fantastic”).¹⁰⁸ Carroll notes that most horror movies would fall into Todorov’s subcategory of the “fantastic/marvelous,” which are “stories that entertain naturalistic explanations of abnormal incidents but conclude by affirming their supernatural origins.” Although Carroll finally rejects Todorov’s category

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 16. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ Todorov, 41-57

as too general to define the horror story,¹⁰⁹ his own conception of the genre greatly depends on the idea of “entertaining naturalistic explanations” for the monsters encountered in any given horror narrative.

If the ultimate definition of the horror genre lies in “the attitude of the characters in the story to the monsters they encounter,” Carroll gives two related but distinct components of that attitude. The first is revulsion. The human characters in the horror narrative react to the monsters with “shuddering, nausea, shrinking, paralysis, screaming, and revulsion,” and, Carroll argues, this sense of repulsion comes from the “impurity” of the monster’s categorically interstitial nature.¹¹⁰ This recalls Creed’s theories of the abject in horror film, but shorn of the ideological dimension, becomes more applicable to the case of *kaiki*. *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*’s human villain Iemon may be the ideological impurity that needs to be ejected from the boundaries of society, but his trembling, terrified fear of the physically impure Oiwa mirrors the reactions of the “good guy” human heroes of Western horror cinema. By itself, however, repulsion is not enough to define the horror genre. The monsters of Todorov’s “pure marvelous” narratives also induce fear and revulsion. Hansel and Gretel are terrified of the hideous witch that imprisons them in the gingerbread house, but as Carroll notes, we are not inclined to call Grimms’ fairy tales “horror stories,” despite their frequently gruesome and horrific content. For Carroll, the other essential half of the horror formula is that “the monsters are not only physically threatening, they are *cognitively threatening*. They are *threats to*

¹⁰⁹ Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 16-17. Carroll notes that the fantastic/marvelous encompasses non-horror works as well, such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), in which the supernatural is portrayed as beatific, not horrific.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 18-32.

common knowledge . . . what horrifies is that which lies outside cultural categories and is, perforce, unknown.¹¹¹ “Hansel and Gretel” is not a horror story because, in this and other “pure marvelous” narratives, the existence of monsters like the witch are a known part of the diegetic world. Hansel and Gretel’s fear stems not from the mere fact of the witch’s existence, which is presented as an accepted feature of the fairy tale landscape rather than a cosmological aberration, but from the physical threat she poses to them. In other words, Hansel and Gretel’s fear is more akin to the fear Jane experiences at being cornered by a savage lion in the jungle, before Tarzan swings to her rescue. Much the same can be said of the monsters that populate “myths and odysseys” as well as examples from contemporary fantasy films and novels such as *The Lord of the Rings*, which is loaded with horrific and repulsive ghosts and monsters that are nonetheless depicted as quite natural features of J.R.R. Tolkien’s marvelous Middle-Earth. For Carroll, the real “horror” of the horror genre is an encounter with something truly *supernatural* and which “should not exist,” noting that many horror movie narratives follow what he calls “the complex discovery plot,” in which the monster’s existence is initially revealed only to a select individual or group, who must confirm the monster’s existence in the face of rational skepticism.¹¹² Much of the attending shock and repulsion inspired by the monster springs accordingly from the realization that it merely exists, confounding the characters’ “rational” assumptions about reality. The particular brand of fear that distinguishes the horror genre for Carroll, then, is a type of Freudian uncanny, which “arises when the

¹¹¹ Ibid. 34-35, emphasis added.

¹¹² Ibid. 99.

boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary,” and, Freud notes, finds ultimate representation for many people in “anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits, and ghosts” – or more simply put, monsters.¹¹³

Izumi Toshiyuki largely shares Carroll’s ideas about the necessity of the monster being “cognitively threatening” in his own attempts to define *kaiki* when he says that the supernatural element of *kaiki* film comes from “beyond the limits of human comprehension” and “represents a threat to human understanding,” although as mentioned previously, his insistence on a “supernatural” origin of *kaiki* monsters utterly free from human involvement potentially rules out many representative works of the genre such as *Frankenstein* from his conceptualization of *kaiki*.¹¹⁴ But Carroll’s and Izumi’s theory proves problematic for many domestic *kaiki* cinema as well. Although Japanese *kaiki* productions such as *Lady Vampire* and *Diving Girl’s Ghost (Kaidan ama yūrei, 1960)* which are set in the present day comfortably fit in Carroll’s and Izumi’s schema, the vast majority take place in the premodern Edo period. This is a world in which, rather like Grimms’ fairy tales and other “pure marvelous” narratives, the appearance of a vengeful wraith or a ghost cat may instill fear but not disbelief among the other characters. It will be recalled that most Japanese *kaiki* films are adaptations of *kaidan* ghost stories originally written down in the Edo period, and as Noriko T. Reider discusses in her article, “The Appeal of *Kaidan*,” such stories were in large part received

¹¹³ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintok (New York: Penguin, 2003), 150; 148.

¹¹⁴“結局、超自然は人智の及ばない存在…超自然のみが人間の儂い理性にとって大いなる脅威となる。” Izumi, 21.

as plausible explanations for otherwise inexplicable occurrences. “This was a society in which belief in the supernatural was quite familiar . . . readers found the *kaidan* materials interesting, and to some extent realistic.”¹¹⁵ Although perhaps not everyone in Edo Japan believed the existence of ghosts and goblins was an uncontested fact, none of the characters in the representative *kaidan* of the era treat such beings as anything less than an accepted (if fearsome) part of their world. The filmmakers who adapted these works into the *kaiki* films of the twentieth century preserve this naturalistic attitude to the supernatural in their own work, and as a result, such *kaiki* pictures take on a “pure marvelous” quality for modern audiences. In these fanciful evocations of a society that has yet to deal with the European Enlightenment, no one wastes any time trying to convince the other characters that monsters “don’t exist.” In some of the more sophisticated *kaiki* pictures, the monster will function as an externalization of the guilt plaguing the antagonist, suggesting a symbolic, allegorical reading that, according to Todorov, effaces the marvelous quality of the narrative.¹¹⁶ This is particularly true of Nakagawa’s *kaiki* films, in scenes like the one in *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* in which only the guilt-ridden Naosuke can see Oiwa’s hideous ghost. Yet the film does not consistently hold to a strictly symbolic conceptualization of its monster. Oiwa’s ghost appears to her sister Osode as well, leading her to her missing lover Yomoshichi. In a dream, Oiwa tells Yomoshichi where the villain Iemon is hiding, enabling the lovers to enact revenge on her killer. Thus the monster concretely influences real-world events,

¹¹⁵ Noriko T. Reider, “The Appeal of *Kaidan*: Tales of the Strange,” in *Asian Folklore Studies* Vol. 59, No. 2, (Nagoya: Nanzan University, 200), 274.

¹¹⁶ Todorov, 58-69.

making her more than a mere guilt-induced hallucination on the part of the villains. Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, Osode and Yomoshichi readily accept the otherworldly intervention without question or hesitation. For Freud, this naturalistic attitude toward the monstrous absolutely negates the potential for an uncanny effect:

The imaginative writer may have invented a world that, while less fantastic than that of the fairy tale, differs from the real world in that it involves supernatural entities such as demons or spirits of the dead. Within the limits set by the presuppositions of this literary reality, such figures forfeit any uncanny quality that might otherwise attach to them.¹¹⁷

Although Carroll's theory of horror is not quite as unbending as Freud's declaration (which strictly applied would deny many 'fantastic/marvelous' horror stories the ability to inspire a sense of the uncanny), at first glance it does appear to rule out Japanese *kaiki* films as "stories with monsters in them" as opposed to true horror stories. But to discount the sense of fear evoked in Japanese *kaiki* cinema as such requires two suppositions – first, that the feelings of fear experienced by the human characters in the face of a vengeful spirit or ghost cat is the same type of fear felt by Hansel and Gretel in the face of the witch (or Jane when confronted by the jungle lion, or Frodo Baggins pursued by goblins and Ringwraiths); and second, that the audience experiences that fear in vicariously the same manner, which is devoid of any uncanny quality.

I wish to address the second supposition first. Although the question of how cinema affects the viewer on an emotional level was once considered too individually subjective, in recent years film scholars have been more willing to tackle the issue from a

¹¹⁷ Freud, 155-156. Note Freud's use of the word "fantastic" differs from Todorov's, just as Todorov's "uncanny" is not the same as Freud's.

cognitive approach. Indeed, one of the most influential thinkers on the topic has been Noel Carroll himself, as his theories on how the audience emotionally processes the events of a horror story have proven useful for other film scholars such as Carl Plantinga in dealing with the paradox of the pleasure attendant to experiencing negative emotions in viewing cinema.¹¹⁸ I can hardly do justice to the matter here, but briefly put, in regard to the particular problem of why the obvious fictions of the horror story induce a real sense of fear in the viewer, Carroll finds the “thought theory” to be the most accommodating. If we all know that there are no such things as vampires, then why does Count Dracula frighten movie audiences? According to Carroll, it is because the movies allow us to imagine what it would be like to be in a situation wherein Dracula exists. That is, the viewer need not believe that he or she is in actual danger to experience the actual emotion of fear. Fictional narratives suggest scenarios that produce real emotional responses, “because actual emotion can be generated [merely] by entertaining the thought of something horrible.”¹¹⁹ Carl Plantinga succinctly sums up the argument in *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience* when he declares “belief is not essential to emotion.”¹²⁰ Building on the work of Carroll, Plantinga makes the further argument that, as an audiovisual medium that is *perceived* rather than *read*, film prompts more visceral, spontaneous emotional reactions than literature. Reading about a man

¹¹⁸ See Plantinga’s *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), which draws extensively on Carroll’s work.

¹¹⁹ Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 79-81.

¹²⁰ Plantinga, 65. Although as the title of the book demonstrates, Plantinga uses American cinema as his case-study, he explicitly states that his theories are meant to be equally applicable to any world cinema.

being suddenly bitten by a cobra typically does not produce the same startled, flinching reaction exhibited by moviegoers upon seeing a sudden close-up of a cobra onscreen.¹²¹

Carroll's "thought theory," coupled with the spontaneous, visceral response to cinema that Plantinga calls the "direct affect" of film, offers a way of explaining how Japanese *kaiki* films can instill a sense of uncanny horror in the audience even if its diegetic world belongs to the wholly marvelous. Both Carroll and Plantinga note that while audiences are often cued to experience emotions similar to the characters onscreen, their emotional states are seldom in perfect alignment. The viewer, existing outside the text, may be afraid for characters utterly unaware they are in any danger – as is often the case in *Jaws* (1975), for example¹²² – or they may be at moral odds with a character like Iemon in *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* and experience his fear of Oiwa's ghost while simultaneously desiring to see him punished for his wicked deeds. Accordingly, the fact that a vengeful spirit or ghost cat may be a known and accepted entity in the marvelous Edo landscapes of the *kaiki* diegesis does not mean that the real-world contemporary audience cannot respond to the monster with the same sense of incredulous, uncanny horror that the post-Enlightenment characters of Western *kaiki* films like *Dracula* exhibit. We can spin Plantinga's phrase on its head and it still holds true – if belief (on the part of the audience) is not essential to emotion, then disbelief (on the part of the characters) is not essential to emotion, either. If *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* prompts us to imagine what it would be like to be haunted by a vengeful spirit, and the immediate, spontaneous emotional responses characteristic of the perceived medium of cinema prove effective,

¹²¹ Ibid., 117.

¹²² Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 90.

then it is perhaps more relevant that the monsters represent an uncanny anomaly for the viewer's understanding of reality, rather than the other characters.

Of course, we can extend this logic to other examples like the film version of *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), wherein sequences featuring the ghostly, undead Ringwraiths might easily produce a horrific response in the viewer, and yet we would not name the overall work as part of the horror genre. As Altman points out, genre-mixing is ubiquitous in film, and filmmakers often insert recognizable "genre cues" from a variety of well-known generic motifs, so that one sequence of *The Lord of the Rings* may be obviously horrific in its presentation of the monstrous, while the next may be utterly devoid of anything we are inclined to identify with the horror genre.¹²³ But is it merely the quantity of such scenes that separate such films from the *kaiki* genre? As mentioned previously, many Japanese *kaiki* films withhold the monster's entrance into the narrative until the final act of the film. What then sets such films apart from other works of fantasy in which ghosts or monsters make limited appearances? The difference is, in part, a formal one. Both *kaiki* and other types of horror/*horā* film emphasize the fear experienced by the human characters in the face of the monstrous to a greater degree than analogous scenes in films like the *Lord of the Rings* or *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, most often via lingering close-ups of the victim's terrified face. Such scenes delay the ultimate result of the monster's presence (is it successfully defeated/evaded, or does it have its way with the victim?) and draw out the sense of suspense. I believe, however, that there is a deeper component to the brand of fear presented in *kaiki* cinema, which brings us back to the first supposition that would seemingly disqualify Japanese *kaiki*

¹²³ Altman, 132-143.

films as horrific. Just because the human inhabitants of the marvelous worlds of *kaiki* cinema believe in ghosts and monsters and take their existence at face value, is their fear of such creatures truly the same as the fear of the monstrous exhibited in other marvelous narratives such as the fairy tale or fantasy novel?

As discussed previously, the targets of the monster's wrath in Japanese *kaiki* films are often the true villains of the piece, in contrast to most Western *kaiki* films. The victims were once the victimizers, and the monster their onetime victim. The spirit of Oiwa is the jilted wife of the heartless Iemon, and the myriad ghost cats of *kaiki* cinema all act on behalf of abused wives, maids, and concubines who were either murdered or else driven to suicide by callous lovers or jealous rivals. Powerless in life, the victims become all-powerful in death. While a noble retainer occasionally succeeds in dispatching the ghost cat, somehow he never manages to do it before the monster enacts its revenge on the villain(s) of the piece. An outstanding example of this fact can be seen in the climax of *The Ghost Cat of Arima Palace*, when the virtuous retainer beheads the *bakeneko* only to witness the monster's decapitated head fly through the air and fatally bite its target, the wicked matron who had murdered the cat's mistress. Vengeful wraiths like Oiwa or Orui of *Kasane's Swamp* are even more omnipotent and unstoppable. The villains of Japanese *kaiki* cinema dig their own graves, the monsters they create licensed cosmological agents of their destruction – karmic retribution incarnate. The repetition of this formula, which stretches all the way back to the Edo period *kaidan* tales of *hyaku monogatari* and the kabuki stage, insures that the audience knows the transgressor is utterly doomed from the outset. Interviewing a young lady about her reasons for liking

kaiki movies in 1957, Yanagi Masako recorded the following response: “Female wraiths and ghost cats are somehow sympathetic. They have no choice but to become monsters. . . . Since the makeup effects are so great, and the people they go after are unequivocally evil, it’s gratifying,”¹²⁴ implying Japanese *kaiki* films appeal in part because they play out the drama of karmic vengeance. The fear provoked by these monsters, then, is not simply the fear of an encounter with the monstrous, but the fear of inexorable, inescapable fate – do wrong, and monsters will come to get you. Vengeful wraiths and ghost cats may be “knowable” and even natural in the context of a *kaiki* film’s diegesis, but this does not diminish the awesome and sublime quality of their cosmic omnipotence as agents of karmic retribution.

This element of terrible awe recalls H.P. Lovecraft’s theory of “cosmic fear,” which with some slight modification provides us with the last key component of *kaiki*. Seeking to differentiate what he calls the “weird tale” from “the literature of mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome,” Lovecraft identifies in the weird tale’s evocation of fear an attendant sense of wonder and awe at “spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part:”

The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain *atmosphere* of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present. . . . Atmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation . . . The one test of the really weird is simply this – whether or not there be excited

¹²⁴“女の人のお化け、猫の化けについても言えることですが、それには、何か共感することがあります。化けで出るしか仕方がない...メーキャップがすごいので、やっつけられる人が、必ず悪人なので、小気味がよいのです。” Yanagi, 51.

in the reader a *profound sense of dread*, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers.¹²⁵

Note Lovecraft's emphasis on "atmosphere," which reminds us that, as a generic label, *kaiki* too signifies atmosphere over emotion. Horror can be invoked by any multitude of "mundanely gruesome" things, but cosmic fear, like *kaiki*, depends on a particular ambiance, an impression of "profound dread" at being confronted with vast forces at the limits of human comprehension. Attempting to unpack Lovecraft's idea, Noel Carroll writes:

this kind of awe responds to or restores some sort of primordial or instinctual human intuition about the world. . . . cosmic fear is not simply fear, but awe, fear compounded with some sort of visionary dimension which is said to be keenly felt and vital.¹²⁶

Carroll goes on to rightly argue that this definition of cosmic fear is too narrow to account for the entirety of the horror genre. Cosmic fear is just one kind of horror; but *kaiki*, it will be recalled, is also just one kind of *horā*. Significantly, Lovecraft's theory works well with most of the Western works of horror cinema that get classified as *kaiki* in Japan. *Count Dracula*, *Frankenstein's Monster*, and the ghosts that haunt such films as *The Uninvited* (1944) or *The Haunting* (1963) all induce a "profound sense of dread" in the other characters and suggest the existence of powers beyond human understanding. Even Western *kaiki* films with no corporally present "monster," such as the Edgar Allan Poe adaptations of Roger Corman and Vincent Price, warrant inclusion via the omnipresent sense of predetermined destiny that pervades the narratives of these pictures.

¹²⁵ Lovecraft, 26-28. Emphasis added.

¹²⁶ Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 163.

Like Iemon in *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* or the villains of the many ghost cat pictures, Vincent Price is doomed from the outset, and he is keenly, profoundly aware of it. The very cosmos seems to be arrayed against the human characters of *kaiki* cinema. Kurosawa Kiyoshi calls this sense of a “machine of fate” (*unmei no kikai*) the “fundamental feeling of *kaiki* film.”¹²⁷ And although Izumi Toshiyuki’s fixation on “supernatural” criteria for the monsters of *kaiki* cinema perhaps causes him to overlook the essentially marvelous nature of many *kaiki* narratives, his statement that the type of fear invoked by the genre is “transcendental – a mere threat to human life is insufficient [to explain it] . . . people tremble awestruck before it” both accurately describes the reaction of human characters in *kaiki* cinema and plainly resonates with Lovecraft’s description of “weird” literature.¹²⁸

The problem with Lovecraft’s theory as applied to Japanese *kaiki* film is, of course, his emphasis on the “unknown” aspect of cosmic fear, which leads us back to Carroll’s insistence that the monster be an entity that “should not exist.” It is true that the particular variety of fear present in Japanese *kaiki* cinema may not be “cosmic fear” in the strictest Lovecraftian sense of the term, but it is nonetheless an inarguably cosmic and awe-inspiring form of terror. When pressed about his earlier-quoted statement that fear is not a necessary requirement for a *kaiki* film, Kurosawa Kiyoshi responded thusly:

The idea that something already died away, and yet here it still exists, is a big theme [of *kaiki* film], and you can establish that without so-called “fear” (*kowasa*, 怖さ), I think. It’s not merely “scary” but a feeling of *terror* (*osore*, 恐れ), the nervousness provoked by something still

¹²⁷ Kurosawa and Shinozaki, 35.

¹²⁸“超自然と恐怖の関連を考えるなら、この恐怖は超越者に対する畏怖なのだから、ただ生命が脅かされるだけで充分とは言えない...超自然が絶対者への跪排,” Izumi, 27; 28.

existing that faded away 100 years ago and the dread of still-living humans coming into contact with it is absolutely essential to *kaiki* cinema.¹²⁹

By drawing a clear distinction between something that is “merely scary” (*tada kowai*) and the terror (*osore*) of coming into contact with something that should have long since departed this plane of existence, Kurosawa echoes Lovecraft’s point about cosmic fear almost exactly. For even if the vengeful wraiths and ghost cats are knowable and understood forces, they are nonetheless beings that *should have* moved on from the world of humanity, but are held back by their fierce emotional attachment (*shūnen*), which compels them to seek vengeance on those who oppressed them in life before they can rest. As the young woman attending the screening of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* in 1957 said, “They had no choice but to become monsters,” and the “bad guys” have no recourse but to succumb to their wrath. The machine of fate moves ever on. Lovecraft’s particular brand of cosmic fear hinges on the hinted existence of forces beyond the pale of human understanding, while the *osore* of Japanese *kaiki* cinema is the dread of upsetting or otherwise running afoul of the cosmic order and provoking forces against which there is no defense. Yet both instill the same sense of terrible awe in the human characters via their seeming omnipotence.¹³⁰ One could even argue that there is in fact an unknown

¹²⁹“既に滅んでしまったものが、しかしまだそこには存在しているのが大きなテーマだと思うので、いわゆる「怖い」という表現はなくても成立すると思う。ただ「怖い」というのではなく「恐れ」の感情、100年前に滅んでしまったものに対するある緊張と、今を生きている人間が接するある恐れは、怪奇映画には必ず必要だと思う。” Author’s interview with Kurosawa Kiyoshi.

¹³⁰ This applies even to classical Western *kaiki eiga* such as *Dracula*. Although the audience may know garlic and wooden stakes can defeat the vampire, the characters themselves are typically ignorant of such methods at the outset of the narrative, and the vampire terrorizes his victims unchecked until the second-act appearance of the Van Helsing figure, himself usually presented as an “Other” with affinities to the supernatural.

element to the monsters of Japanese *kaiki* in that, as far as their deserving victims are concerned, no one knows how to stop them.

Definitions of cosmic fear, profound dread, and *osore* recall a centuries-old discourse regarding the difference between “horror” and “terror,” a topic which has been taken up by literary figures from Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Anne Radcliffe to Stephen King. Critics have long championed “terror” while condemning “horror” as crass and vulgar.¹³¹ Summarizing the arguments of Coleridge and Radcliffe, D.P. Varma writes, “Terror creates an *intangible atmosphere of spiritual psychic dread*, a certain superstitious shudder at the other world. Horror resorts to a cruder presentation of the macabre, by an exact portrayal of the physically horrible and revolting.”¹³² This distinction has long informed criticism of the horror movie genre, where a “less is more” aesthetic that merely implies horrific beings and deeds is said to evoke this prized “intangible atmosphere” of dread, while gory displays of blood and grotesquely made up monsters shown in shocking close-ups are often deemed to be artlessly offensive. Of course, many scholars such as Carroll and Julian Petley note that most horror films feature a combination of both terror and horror, and the Japanese critics seem to have been much less worried about the distinction between the two forms and any attendant

¹³¹ In his famous review of Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796), Coleridge disparaged the novel’s penchant for displays of “the horrible” as betraying a “low and vulgar taste,” while Radcliffe theorized the difference between horror and terror in “On the Supernatural in Poetry,” first published in *New Monthly Magazine* in 1826. More recently, popular horror author Stephen King discusses the differences between terror, horror, and repulsion (finding terror to be “the finest” of the three) in *Danse Macabre* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

¹³² Quoted in Julian Petley’s “‘A crude sort of entertainment for a crude sort of audience’: The British Critics and Horror Cinema,” in *British Horror Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 28. Emphasis added.

value judgments, as evidenced by *Kinema junpō*'s review of Hammer's *Dracula* which praised the very use of Technicolor blood which had been condemned by many Western film critics at the time. Still, the typical *kaiki eiga*'s keen sense of *osore*, the very fact that the genre's name stresses "intangible atmosphere" over emotion, and its affinities with Lovecraft's cosmic fear all suggest that *kaiki* traffics more in terror than horror. If we recall the *Film Spectator* review of *Dracula* quoted at the beginning of Chapter 1, we find it may be suitably applied to the entirety of the *kaiki* genre: "The dominant note of the production is *eeriness*, a creepy horror that should give an audience goose-flesh and make it shudder."¹³³ This, perhaps more than any other reason, explains why the *kaiki* label was never able to be comfortably applied to *kyōfu eiga* such as *Psycho* or *Les Diaboliques* (1955) with contemporary, mundane settings and mortal murderers, and finally faded from usage with the rise of the slasher film, after which the more all-encompassing term *horā eiga* became the norm.

Conclusion

What might be deemed "gothic horror movies" in vernacular English, a *kaiki* film is defined by its evocation of spaces physically and/or temporally removed from present-day reality, accomplished via a period setting or else stylized art direction, often relying on elaborate set work. Attendant to this Othered space is an evocation of *osore* or cosmic terror most often embodied in the figure of the monster, which differs from mere horror or *kowasa* in the sense of awe it provokes in the human characters and (ideally) the audience. In the case of Western *kaiki* films this sense of terrific awe stems from the cognitive threat the monster represents as a being whose existence cannot be rationally

¹³³ Emphasis added.

explained and violates our understanding of the natural world. Japanese *kaiki eiga*, most often set in a Todorovian “pure marvelous” envisioning of the Edo period, treat their monsters as more naturalistic features of the fantasy landscape, yet nonetheless invoke a similar sense of cosmic terror in their presentation of the monster as an omnipotent arbiter of karmic retribution.

Of course, whether or not a film successfully realized the *kaiki* potential inherent to its material is an entirely separate matter. That the reviews for a vast majority of *kaiki* pictures produced in Japan up through the early postwar era were overwhelmingly negative, most often complaining that the films were “not scary,” suggests that for many years the Japanese *kaiki* film failed to tap fully into the sense of cosmic *osore* that ideally distinguished the genre. Bearing in mind the conception of *osore* elucidated above as well as the formal markers of the genre, in the following chapter I will more closely examine the production of *kaiki eiga* in Japan from the dawn of cinema through the outbreak of World War II, tracing the genre’s development from simple trick films to the coalescence of a *kaiki* aesthetic informed by the spectacle of star actresses’ onscreen monstrous transformation and the influence of Hollywood horror.

Chapter 3: Ghost Cat versus Samurai – Prewar *Kaiki* Cinema

A case could be made that the oldest narrative film produced in Japan, 1899's *Momijigari* ("Maple Viewing"), is also the nation's first *kaiki eiga*. Shot by Shibata Tsunekichi of the Mitsukoshi department store's photography division, the film records six minutes of kabuki actors Ichikawa Danjūrō IX and Onoe Kikugorō V performing a scene from the play *Momijigari* in which a female demon attacks a samurai admiring autumn maple leaves. One wants to imagine that *Momijigari* is proof that from Japanese cinema's moment of inception, filmmakers were keenly attuned to the medium's potential for displays of *kaiki*. In truth, though, *Momijigari*'s origin has more in common with the early films of the Lumiere Brothers such as *Workers Exiting a Factory* (*La Sortie des usines Lumière à Lyon*) and *Train Arriving at a Station* (*L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*, both 1895) than with something like the Edison Studio's *Frankenstein* (1910), which employed special effects unique to the medium to tell a fantastic narrative. Shibata had been taking his camera around Tokyo, filming street scenes in Ginza and geisha in Shimbashi, and a kabuki performance was another obvious choice for his filmic records of urban culture in the late Meiji era (1868-1912). The film was not even intended for public viewing, and was not screened for a general audience until after Shibata's death in 1904.¹³⁴ Nonetheless, in it we can see several of the seeds of the nascent Japanese commercial filmmaking industry, including those that would bear *kaiki* fruit.

While he conceived of his work as a filmographic record of a theatrical production, Shibata shot no "behind the scenes" footage. The film viewer sees no more than what a spectator in the audience would see of an actual performance. In other words,

¹³⁴ Anderson and Richie, 26.

the film preserves the fictional world of the drama, even when the edges of the stage or onstage assistants are clearly visible in-frame. Although Shibata seems to have thought of himself as a mere recorder and not as any kind of active creative agent akin to what we would now identify as a “film director,” his choice to photograph *Momijigari* in the manner that he did means that the film does convey a wholly diegetic world unto itself. Aaron Gerow notes in his book *Visions of Japanese Modernity* that the incorporation of theatrical stage traditions in commercial Japanese film did not become widespread until 1908,¹³⁵ but *Momijigari* demonstrated from the outset that the medium could in fact be utilized to convey the existence of a fictional universe, and that an already existing and popularly familiar storehouse of theatrical stage scripts could be adapted for such a purpose. The development of narrative *katsudō shashin* or “moving pictures” in Japan during the first fifteen years of the twentieth century soon split into two broad generic classifications which drew from two distinct theatrical traditions – the contemporarily set *shinpa* or “new school” dramas which were based on recent, Western-influenced stage melodramas, and the *kyūgeki* or “old school” period pictures, which drew on kabuki.¹³⁶

Ironically, the spirit of “civilization and enlightenment” (*bunmei kaika*) that molded the Meiji Era inadvertently helped to insure that many of the earliest *kyūgeki* productions wound up being adaptations of premodern Edo *kaidan* ghost stories. At the end of the Edo period, when kabuki performances of Tsuruya Nanboku IV’s *The Ghost*

¹³⁵ Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 99-100.

¹³⁶ By the 1920s these early terms were replaced by the still used *gendai geki* (“modern production”) and *jidai geki* (“period production”), just as *katsudō shashin* fell out of usage in favor of *eiga*. See Gerow, 18.

Story of Yotsuya were all the rage, another grotesque form of flourishing popular entertainment was the *misemono* or sideshow. These open-air carnival spaces, the most famous being at Ryōgoku Bridge in Edo, featured freak shows, haunted houses and other playful representations of the monstrous, much like the traveling American carnivals of the 19th and 20th centuries. However, following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, government unease about Japan appearing backward and primitive in the eyes of the West led to the active discouragement of such “unenlightened” displays, and by the mid 1870s authorities had banned most of the traditional *misemono* acts. Into the place of the old monstrous curiosities stepped new, technological curiosities imported from abroad and deemed more appropriate to the Meiji spirit of “civilization and enlightenment.”¹³⁷ Edison’s Kinetograph being one such marvel, by the turn of the century cinema had supplanted the monsters of the Edo freak shows as the premier sideshow attraction, and indeed the earliest Japanese commentators on the new medium quite deliberately ascribe it the status of *misemono*.¹³⁸ But the old Edo *misemono* monsters were never far away, and were almost literally waiting in the wings to leap back into the public eye via motion pictures.

Kabuki’s wealth of ghost story material had also fallen victim to the Meiji effort to purge Japanese culture of perceived superstitious belief in ghouls and goblins. The major *ōshibai* or “big troupes,” eager to portray themselves as sophisticated and erudite entertainment, began writing the ghosts out of their productions. New plays in which

¹³⁷ Gerald Figal, *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) 21-26.

¹³⁸ Gerow, 50.

ghosts were explained away as psychological hallucinations were performed, and traditional ghost stories like *The Dish Mansion at Banchō* were revised to downplay their *kaiki* content.¹³⁹ Some *ōshibai* stars like Ichikawa Danjūro IX continued to perform the old ghost story material, but it largely fell to the *koshibai* or “little troupes” to carry on the Edo traditions of spooks and specters onstage. Denied access to the larger theater stages and officially recognized as a form of *misemono*, the *koshibai* were at first condemned as low-class, crass amusement,¹⁴⁰ but by the beginning of the Taishō period (1912-26) many theater aficionados came to appreciate these performances as preserving many of the cast-off traditions abandoned by the more modernized *ōshibai*.¹⁴¹ Foremost among such attractions was the spectacle of the split-second costume changes, as actors would transform into ghost cats or vengeful spirits onstage. Shimura Miyoko notes that Meiji and early Taishō audiences flocked to see the *koshibai* not from any interest in the stories (which were already well known), but from a desire to see the spectacle of the actor’s performance, further aligning the little troupes to the phenomenon of *misemono*, which were all about spectacle.¹⁴² When *koshibai*’s fellow *misemono*, the cinema, looked to the stage for material, *ōshibai* groups had little interest in ongoing commercial collaboration, leaving it to *koshibai* performers like Onoe Matsunosuke and Sawamura Shirōgorō to step in front of the cameras, bringing their repertoire of *kaidan* traditional ghost stories with them. Yoshizawa, the nation’s first commercial motion picture studio,

¹³⁹ Izumi, 66.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Shimura, “‘Misemono’ kara ‘eiga’ e: Shintōhō no kaibyō eiga,” *Engeki eizō* 43 (2002): 19-20.

¹⁴² Ibid.

released *Kaidan yonaki iwa* during its initial year of operation in 1908.¹⁴³ In 1910 *kaidan* film production got underway in earnest, as Yoshizawa released the first film version of the *kaidan* classic *The Peony Lantern* (*Botandōrō*) in June, then promptly released the second, *New Peony Lantern* (*Shin-botandōrō*) in July, while newly formed competitor Yokota debuted the first film version of the *Yotsuya* legend, *Oiwa inari*, directly opposite *New Peony Lantern*, and the M. Pathe studio gave Japan one of the first of what would be many ghost cat pictures with *The Evening Cherry Blossoms of Saga* (*Saga no yozakura*) in November. The following year would see competing versions of the third great stage *kaidan*, *The Dish Mansion at Banchō*, and another *Ghost Story of Yotsuya* adaptation, before the three studios would merge to form Nikkatsu in 1912.

This chapter traces the emergence of *kaiki* as film genre during the silent and early sound eras of commercial cinema in Japan. With their emphasis on trick photography to portray the magical quality of vengeful spirits and ghost cats, the earliest *kaidan* adaptations of the 1910s belong – like the films of Georges Méliès – to Tom Gunning’s “cinema of attractions,” which he posits as the dominant mode of cinema from its inception in the 1890s through the middle of the 1910s.¹⁴⁴ Films produced in the mode of the cinema of attractions centered on displays of pure spectacle such as the special effects of Méliès and Japan’s early *kaidan* films. Narrative continuity was of minor importance, and what little story there may have been in these films served primarily as a way to string the moments of spectacle together. As the Japanese film industry transformed its primary mode of production to what Gunning calls the “cinema of

¹⁴³ According to Izumi this may have been a re-titled release of a foreign film. Izumi, 209.

¹⁴⁴ Gunning.

narrative integration” in the 1920s, the marvel of trick photography ceased to be the centerpiece of *kaidan* adaptations. However, moments of spectacle continued to be of crucial importance to the emerging *kaiki* genre. The main site of attraction shifted from special photographic effects to the body of the actresses who portrayed ghosts and goblins onscreen, and the emphasis on the metamorphosis of Japanese cinema’s first screen sex symbols into grotesque monsters brought back the element of horror to the *kaidan* adaptation. The interplay between the spectacle of the actress’ performance – which critics often criticized as being a relic from the days of the cinema of attractions – and the themes of cosmic *osore* – which depended on the cinema of narrative integration to be properly conveyed – provides much of the framework for discussion of the *kaiki* film genre from the mid-1920s until its demise at the end of the 1960s.

Playing Tricks: The Primordial *Kaiki eiga*

We can only conjecture as to the content of the very earliest screen adaptations of Edo *kaidan* like *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*. Even going so far as to identify them as primordial specimens of the *kaiki* genre requires something of a leap of faith, and must be based solely on the pictures’ titles, which suggests they were – like other *kyūgeki* films of the day – straightforward adaptations of the stage plays that would go on to be mainstays of the *kaiki* genre in subsequent decades.¹⁴⁵ As anyone who has made a study of prewar Japanese cinema knows, less than a third of all films made prior to the end of the Second World War are thought to still exist, and virtually nothing from the first decade of

¹⁴⁵ This may not even be true in the case of *Oiwa inari*, which draws its title from the name of the real Oiwa shrine in Shinjuku and could conceivably have had little to do with the narrative of the *Yotsuya* legend proper.

commercial studio film production in Japan survives. The situation is even more woeful for *kaiki* films, which even today are haunted by the legacy of their poor critical standing and remain a low priority for restoration efforts. Of the hundreds of *kaiki* pictures made in Japan before 1945, less than a dozen are thought to survive, and even these exist mostly in fragmented, incomplete states. Barely a frame of anything that could be grouped with the *kaiki* genre exists from these earliest years of studio filmmaking in Japan.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, many of these prototypical *kaiki* pictures were created by director Makino Shōzō and actor Onoe Matsunosuke, part of the approximately 800 *kyūgeki* period pictures the duo made at Nikkatsu during the 1910s. Their unprecedented financial and popular success was matched only by the disdain their pictures received from the intellectual film critics of the day. The proponents of the “Pure Film Movement” (*Juneiga geki undō*), a group of intellectuals desiring a Japanese cinema that mirrored what they saw as the more sophisticated filmmaking techniques of Europe and America, lambasted the *kyūgeki* typified by the Makino/Onoe pictures for being little more than “canned theater,” shot in a one-scene, one-take tableaux style that replicated the viewpoint of a theater spectator, the screening of which relied on live, in-house *benshi* narrators for any sort of narrative comprehensibility. Film aficionados Kaeriyama Norimasa and Shigeno Yukiyaishi, two of the founders of the Pure Film Movement in the early 1910s, numbered among the first Japanese to develop theories of the cinematic medium as an art form distinct from other modes of performance and storytelling, though as Gerow writes, their aim was “less an effort to establish the motion picture as a pure art

form in opposition to commercial cinema than to introduce the filmic innovations of Hollywood and European production.”¹⁴⁶ Kaeriyama eventually became a filmmaker, putting his principles into practice, and newly founded studios in the 1920s like Shōchiku would devote their resources to implementing the Pure Film Movement’s vision of Japanese cinema that made more thorough use of techniques like the close-up and continuity editing. While the question of whether the Pure Film Movement’s ideals constituted a superior form of cinema to the “canned theater” of Makino and Onoe remains debatable, the tastes of the Kaeriyama and Shigeno’s circle came to dominate critical discourse of Japanese cinema for decades, informing much of the critics’ disdain for domestic *kaiki* films through the postwar era.

Gerow has suggested that these early pictures may have included more so-called ‘filmic’ techniques than their critics were prepared to give them credit for, but notes the lack of surviving examples makes it difficult to verify the conjecture.¹⁴⁷ Although it appears that in many ways the early *kyūgeki* filmmakers were in fact content to present their work in much the same manner it would be seen on stage, in the case of stories like *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* and *The Peony Lantern*, they swiftly realized the new medium’s potential for portraying *kaiki* special effects in a fashion quite different from kabuki’s established repertoire of stage tricks. While films like the 1915 version of *Yotsuya* evidently clung to such obvious trappings of the traditional theater as casting an *oyama* female impersonator in the role of Oiwa, evidence suggests that the stage methods

¹⁴⁶ Gerow, 3.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 94-117.

of portraying the otherworldly nature of her vengeful spirit via trap doors and split-second costume changes were supplanted by trick photography in the manner of Georges Méliès. The brief review of the 1915 version of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* in *Kinema Record*, the mouthpiece of the Pure Film Movement, notes “The spectacle of simple trick-photography, such as the double-exposure ghost creates a sense of mystery for the audience.”¹⁴⁸ As film historian Kamiya Masako points out in her article on the trick films of Makino and Onoe, the Pure Film Movement critics – despite their well-known hostility to *kyūgeki* in general – were more favorably disposed to the duo’s work when it made use of such essentially filmic techniques as double-exposure, reverse filming, and stop motion photography. These tricks featured most prominently in their tremendously popular ninja pictures, typified by 1914’s *Jiraiya*, as well as the many adaptations of *kaidan* and *bakeneko* (ghost cat) stage plays produced at the same time.¹⁴⁹ *Kinema Record* atypically praises the pair in its review of the early ghost cat picture *The Cat of Okazaki* (*Okazaki no neko*, 1914), saying, “The cat trick effects are in truth admirably done. Only Matsunosuke’s group can pull off this kind of production.”¹⁵⁰ The magazine is equally generous to their follow-up effort, *The Ghost Cat of Sannō* (*Sannō no bakeneko*, 1914), declaring that “from first to last it is crammed with incredibly

¹⁴⁸ “二重焼等の簡単なトリックの化物で見物は只もう不思議がつて居る。” “Film-Record during October 1915. Guide to Exhibitions and Spectators,” in *Kinema Record* Vol. 5, No. 29, November 10, 1915, 25.

¹⁴⁹ Kamiya, 38-40.

¹⁵⁰ “鯖猫のトリックは実に感服仕る。斬うした劇は松之助一派に限る。” “Film-Record during April 1914. Guide for Exhibitors and Spectators,” in *Kinema Record* Vol. 2, No. 11, May 10, 1914, 30.

interesting tricks.”¹⁵¹ The surviving footage from the pre-1923 *Dish Mansion* film discussed in Chapter 1, which depicts the double-exposure ghost of Okiku dissolving atop her well and playing stop-motion tricks on the sleeping samurai, confirms that such uniquely filmic tricks were the likely centerpiece of these formative *kaiki* pictures.



Figure 10: Okiku’s double-exposure ghost in a frame from the unidentified production of *The Dish Mansion* legend, pre-1923.

Trick photography was also being employed in the *rensa* or “chain drama” performances, a hybrid of film and theater in which live actors performed the interior-set scenes, then cleared the stage to make way for the silver screen, where the same actors would be seen on film performing exterior scenes or, in the case of more *kaiki* material, scenes featuring double-exposure ghosts. In *100 Horrors of the Silver Screen*, Izumi Toshiyuki quotes an audience member’s recollection of one such *rensa* performance:

¹⁵¹ “始めから終わりまでトリックばかりで実に面白い。” “Film-Record during July 1914. Guide to Exhibitors and Spectators,” in *Kinema Record* Vol. 3, No. 14, Aug. 3, 1914, 27.

An actress named Shikishima Hanaeda, who always played ruffians and scoundrels, portrayed a thief who sneaks into a temple and murders a priest in one scene. The priest was played by an actress from Nakano, Abe Nobuo, who's since passed away. It was a simple scene but lasted about ten minutes, after which was a scene in which the ghost appears. . . . Via an incredibly primitive technique the ghost floated out, the thief tumbled over, surprised, and the curtain fell. That was it. This was at the Mitomo Theater in Asakusa.¹⁵²

Izumi suggests the *rensa* in question may have been *Ghost Mirror (Yūrei kagami)* from 1908. Although, as Izumi points out, it is unclear from the audience member's recollection which part of the performance was live and which was filmed, it is highly likely that the scene featuring the ghost involved some manner of filmed trick photography, as other *rensa* productions such as the fairy tale *Momotarō* are confirmed to have utilized trick photography for the more fantastic sequences of the story.¹⁵³ As studios like Yoshizawa and Tenkatsu produced straightforward *katsudō shashin* intended to be screened with *benshi* narration as well as the film components of *rensa*, it is uncertain from the records of film titles how many of these primordial *kaiki* films were actually part of a *rensa* show.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵²“なんでも壮士のような悪党と敷島花枝という女優の強盗が、どこかの寺へ忍び込んで、その坊主を殺す場面だけなんです、その坊主というのが中野で、女優は死んだ阿部信夫でした。簡単なもので十分くらいで済んでしまいましたが、その後に幽霊の出る場面があるんですね。 . . . 頗る幼稚な拙い手法で幽霊が浮き出すと、悪党が驚いて倒れるという所でおしまひでせうよ。これが浅草では初めてでしような。三友館でした。” Izumi, 72.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 71-74.

¹⁵⁴ *Rensa* rivaled more conventional films as popular entertainment until the practice was swiftly extinguished by the Tokyo Moving Picture Regulations in 1917, which banned the practice on the grounds that the small, wooden theaters in which they were performed represented a major fire hazard. See J.L. Anderson, “Spoken Silents in the Japanese Cinema; or, Talking to Pictures: Essaying the *Katsuben*, Contextualizing the Texts,” in *Reframing Japanese Cinema: Authorship, Genre, History*, ed. Arthur Nalletti Jr. and David Desser (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) 271-272.

In subsequent years domestic *kaiki* films would find themselves at the bottom of the critical heap, derided for clinging to modes of production and storytelling deemed primitive and outdated; but ironically enough these earliest years of commercial Japanese filmmaking saw traditional ghost story adaptations among the few domestic films to enjoy a modicum of respect from the intellectuals of the Pure Film Movement. The issue of their “superstitious” thematic content had ceased to be a significant cause of alarm in political and intellectual corners by this time, with Japan feeling more secure about its standing in the world after victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5), and figures such as anthropologist Yanagita Kunio and writer Izumi Kyōka arguing for the cultural legitimacy of traditional marvelous tales in their own work.¹⁵⁵ But for the cinephiles of the Pure Film Movement, the admiration for films based on old ghost stories and other marvelous subjects had little to do with Yanagita’s patriotic repositioning of *kaiki* narratives. As the short reviews quoted above show, their interest in these films was entirely due to their use of cinematic tricks, or “*torikku*.” I have been somewhat reluctant to use the term *kaiki eiga* when discussing these films, as it is clear from the reviews in *Kinema Record* that – among the early film critics, at least – if *kyūgeki* films featuring ghosts or monsters belonged to a particular subgenre, it was the trick film. Shigeno Yukiyaoshi may have (almost) coined the phrase *kaiki eiga* in 1914, when he writes in *Kinema Record* that *torikku* or trick photography techniques can greatly enhance the enjoyment of certain films such as “*kikai naru eiga*” (奇怪なる映画), but Shigeno

¹⁵⁵ Gerald Figal discusses Yanagita’s and Izumi Kyōka’s reappraisal of traditional marvelous narratives in Chapters 4 and 5 of *Civilization and Monsters*.

positions this fleeting observation in a larger discussion of “trick films,” bestowing the status of genre on the term by giving his article the English title, “Trick Pictures and Illusion Pictures.”¹⁵⁶ For the authors, and presumably the readers, of *Kinema Record*, the ghost story pictures were not generically defined by any sense of *kaiki* or cosmic *osore*, but the same special effects that could also be found in Onoe Matsunosuke’s ninja films, or the “tanuki exterminator” (*tanuki taiji*) pictures which depicted the antics of the shapeshifting Japanese raccoon-dogs.

Miriam Hansen’s theory of “vernacular modernism” provides a useful method for approaching these primordial *kaiki* films of Japan’s first decade of commercial cinema. Hansen writes that Hollywood cinema was globally successful “not because of its presumably universal narrative form but because it meant different things to different people and publics, both at home and abroad,” and that American film genres were “dissolved and assimilated into different generic traditions, [and] different concepts of genre.”¹⁵⁷ Although here we are dealing with early cinema considered by scholars like Tom Gunning to predate the primacy of “narrative form,” a similar sort of vernacular modernism works to describe the earliest Japanese *kaidan* film adaptations and their obvious affinities to the work of French filmmaker Georges Méliès. The Japanese films adapt native material – in this case the Edo period ghost stories – to the screen by

¹⁵⁶“然るに不動的の物体が自動してこそ此処にトリックの結果が認められるので謂れはトリックとは活動写真術中の重要技工で奇怪なる映画も亦失笑すべき映画も此の術の鷹揚に依つて一倍の興を呈し且つ一段の印象を深からしめるのである。” Shigeno Yuki-yashi, “Trick Pictures and Illusion Pictures,” in *Kinema Record* Vol. 2, No. 6, January 1, 1914, 12. Shigeno inverts the characters for *kaiki* to “*kikai*” (奇怪), a synonym with an identical meaning. Directly analogous to the Classical Chinese *zhiguai*, Shigeno’s word choice has a more archaic flair to it. *Kaiki* appears to have become standard by 1926, when the word appears in Kawabata Yasunari’s *Dancer of Izu* (*Izu no odoriko*).

¹⁵⁷ Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses,” 341.

discarding the theatrical stage conventions of depicting ghosts and monsters and instead utilizing techniques seen in Méliès' pioneering films. Interestingly, Makino Shōzō claimed to have accidentally discovered several of the techniques seen in earlier films like Edison's *The Execution of Mary Stuart* (1895), such as stopping and restarting the camera to make actors "disappear."¹⁵⁸ Whether or not Makino learned such tricks from watching European and American cinema or developed them on his own, the utilization of them shows the ways in which early cinema developed an international common vernacular of expression. A consequence of this vernacular modernist style was that, much like the Méliès films, early Japanese ghost story adaptations became showcases for spectacular tricks at the expense of de-emphasizing the inherently horrific features of the ghosts and goblins they depict. The narrative intertitles in the surviving silent footage discussed above identify it as an adaptation of *The Dish Mansion at Banchō*, but the footage has little to do with the narrative of Okiku's revenge on her murderer, instead dwelling on the spectacular appearance of her see-through ghost, her ability to appear and disappear in a cloud of smoke, and to psychically manipulate objects. Such tricks apparently invoked a sense of wonder and awe in early audiences, but there is nothing particularly grotesque, repulsive, horrific or terrifying about their execution.

The scant bit of visual evidence surviving from this era – while not enough to make any sweeping conclusions about the content of Taishō era *kaidan* films – supports the hypothesis that many of these pictures were made with the intent to dazzle audiences with the spectacle of cinema rather than frighten them with themes of cosmic *osore*. A still frame in the collection of Misono Kyōhei from an unidentified Taishō era film shows

¹⁵⁸ Kamiya, 41-42.

what appears to be a samurai confronting a ghost cat. Battles between samurai and ghost cats are a commonplace sight on the kabuki stage, and the Shinkō studio's *kaiki* films of the 1930s and their 1950s Daiei counterparts also regularly feature such scenes, leading Misono to surmise that the still in his collection comes from an early ghost cat picture such as *The Cat of Okazaki* or *The Evening Cherry Blossoms of Saga* (both adapted from the stage and remade in the sound era by Shinkō, and later Daiei).¹⁵⁹ It is all the more striking, then, that the ghost cat is not an actor with disheveled hair and grotesque makeup, as actresses Suzuki Sumiko and Irie Takako would perform the role in decades to come. Instead the cat monster appears to be an actor in a large *kigurumi* plush costume, looking like nothing so much as a character one would expect to meet wandering around Tokyo Disneyland. Horror (and *kaiki*) films tend to lose much of their ability to scare with age – today's young horror movie fans often have a hard time believing anyone ever found Boris Karloff frightening in *Frankenstein*, until they read about people fleeing the theater in 1931¹⁶⁰ – but it is difficult to imagine that anyone in the audience for this film would have been scared by the frankly adorable *bakeneko* seen in this image, nor that the filmmakers intended it to be frightening.

¹⁵⁹ Misono Kyōhei, ed., *Misono korekushon: Meiji, Taishō, Shōwa eiga shiryōshū taisei* (Tokyo: Katsudō shiryō kenkyūkai, 1970).

¹⁶⁰ Spadoni, 94.



Figure 11: A samurai confronts a rather cuddly looking *bakeneko* in a still from an unidentified film.

There is reason to suspect, however, that this represents an atypical depiction of the ghost cat in the cinema of the day. Although he would achieve his greatest fame as the heroic male leads of countless ninja pictures, according to the recollections of his son, Onoe Matsunosuke performed the *oyama* female role in several of his earliest screen roles, including Oiwa in *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* and the ghost cat in *The Evening Cherry Blossoms of Saga*.¹⁶¹ It is unthinkable that the stage-trained Onoe – who by the end of 1914 was already the most famous face of Japanese cinema – would have performed the part of the ghost cat in such an all-concealing plush costume like the one in Misono's still. More likely he would have appeared in the traditional kabuki makeup denoting a ghost cat, with feline face paint and a disheveled wig. As no visual evidence is known to survive from Onoe's ghost cat films, however, we cannot comment with any certainty that such a portrayal would have been undertaken with any serious attempt to convey a sense of *kaiki* or *osore*.

¹⁶¹ Izumi, 78.

Misono's plush ghost cat may in fact come not from a straightforward *kaidan* adaptation like *The Cat of Okazaki*, but one of the many *nana fushigi* or "Seven Wonders" films made at the same time, which were based on the folklore motif of the *tanuki ongaeshi*, or "The Tanuki who Returns a Favor." As mentioned above, films about magical, shape-shifting tanuki were another popular topic of Taishō era trick films. Although tanuki tales tended to be more whimsical than the ghastly narratives of otherworldly revenge typical of *kaidan*, they shared much of the same *kaiki* imagery, as tanuki were fond of taking on the guise of more gruesome monsters like vengeful wraiths and ghost cats to play pranks on unwitting human victims. In the typical "Seven Wonders" story, a tanuki who has been aided by the human protagonist will take on the form of seven *kaidan*-esque monsters to frighten and punish the villain of the piece, usually a wicked samurai or even the shogun himself. Although this is thematically quite close to other tales of marvelous karmic comeuppance such as the *Yotsuya* legend or the typical ghost cat narrative, tanuki tales most often dilute the horrific dimension of the act of vengeance. In Shintōhō's *Seven Wonders of Honjo* (*Kaidan honjo nana fushigi*, 1957), for example, the film significantly undercuts any sense of horrific *osore* by portraying the tanuki in human form as cute young women, and including whimsical shots of the humanized creatures dancing merrily after playing their ghostly tricks on the villains. Presumably this sense of whimsy would have figured into the Taishō era "Seven Wonders" films as well, and the plush ghost cat in Misono's still could quite conceivably come from such a production.

Director Yoshino Jirō was something of a specialist in “Seven Wonders” films, making at least five versions for three different studios between 1917 and 1922. A quick look at his oeuvre also turns up productions of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (1921) and *The Dish Mansion at Banchō* (1922), *bakeneko* pictures such as *The Ghost Cat of Arima Palace* (*Kaibyō Arima goten*, 1919) and *The Cat of Nabeshima* (*Nabeshima no neko*, 1923), a slew of ninja pictures starring Onoe Matsunosuke’s rival, Sawamura Shirōgorō, and Tenkatsu’s two-part special effects extravaganza *Journey to the West* (*Saiyūki*, 1917), also starring Sawamura.¹⁶² With *kaidan*, ghost cat, tanuki, ninja, and Monkey King pictures all to their credit, Yoshino and Sawamura – like Makino and Onoe at Nikkatsu – laid much of the foundation for the eventual genre of *kaiki eiga*, and it was a foundation wholly intertwined with and probably largely indistinguishable from other trick films of the day. Yoshino and Sawamura’s move to the new Shōchiku studios in 1921 demonstrates the ongoing importance of the trick film’s uniquely cinematic special effects to certain strains of the continually popular *kyūgeki* – which by now were beginning to be called by the still-used appellation for period pictures, *jidai geki*. Shōchiku famously entered the film production business in 1920 with the intention of making movies that would showcase the latest innovations in style and technique, hiring several Hollywood-trained filmmakers to realize their goal, which seemed to be the fulfillment of the Pure Film Movement’s calls for a Japanese cinema which would not merely replicate the kabuki or *shinpa* theatergoing experience.¹⁶³ The common enemy of

¹⁶² Izumi Toshiyuki examines records of *Journey to the West*’s use of special effects in *Ginmaku no hyakkai*, 80-81.

¹⁶³ Anderson and Richie, 40-41.

Shōchiku and the Pure Film Movement was, of course, the *kyūgeki* churned out by Makino, Onoe, Yoshino, and Sawamura. But despite Shōchiku's stated purpose of "the production of artistic films resembling the latest and most flourishing styles of the Occidental cinema,"¹⁶⁴ the studio hired Yoshino and Sawamura to make the same sort of presumably trick-heavy period pictures they had been making for Tenkatsu and Kokkatsu. Although the studio would come to be known for its contemporarily set *gendai geki* productions, early Shōchiku pictures include Mori Kaname's *Ghost Cat of Nabeshima* (*Nabeshima neko sōdō*, 1921), *The Peony Lantern* (also 1921) and *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (1923), as well as Yoshino's *Dish Mansion at Banchō*, *The Seven Wonders of Honjo* (*Honjo nana fushigi*), *The Seven Wonders of Fukugawa* (*Fukugawa nana fushigi*, all 1922), and his own version of *The Cat of Nabeshima* (1923).

Unfortunately it is difficult to ascertain anything about these early Shōchiku *kaidan* adaptations. *Kinema Record* ceased publication in 1917, and although its spiritual successor, *Kinema junpō*, appeared just two years later, it only reviewed foreign films until 1922. Even then its coverage of Japanese cinema was selective, and tended toward pictures that more fully exemplified the ideals of the Pure Film Movement and eschewed genre cinema aimed at a mass audience. It was not until the beginning of the Shōwa era (1926-1989) that the magazine began to offer more comprehensive coverage of domestic releases.¹⁶⁵ The competing publication *Eiga hyōron* ("Film Review") also did not appear until the last year of Taishō, making the first half of the 1920s something of a black hole

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Gerow, 172.

¹⁶⁵ Izumi, 91.

of critical information about *kaidan* pictures, which appear to have no longer been garnering praise solely by virtue of their special effects. Although the critics in *Kinema Record* had initially been indulgent of the trick-heavy *kaidan* and ghost cat films, by the end of the journal's run the novelty seems to have been wearing off. An editorial from the October 1917 issue of *Record* commenting on Tokyo's recently established rating system for movies (A for adults-only, B for general audiences), groups *kaidan* among the "vulgar" entertainment of children and the uneducated, saying, "if the films [made in Japan] remain at the level of ghost stories or *shinpa* tragedy, they will not interest an adult, whether grade A or even grade B films."¹⁶⁶ The *kaidan* trick films were of course never the Pure Film Movement's ideal cinema, the group desiring a more comprehensive marshaling of various techniques including close-ups and the use of actresses in place of *oyama* in addition to the use of essentially filmic, in-camera effects and trick photography, and after a few years of double-exposure ghosts appearing and dissolving onscreen, the *kaidan* pictures may have begun to feel like one more variation of the old *misemono* spectacles that according to critics represented a primitive precursor to the "mature" cinema of narrative integration.¹⁶⁷ Whatever the case may have been, *Kinema junpō* evidently inherited the bias against *kaidan* adaptations expressed in the 1917 *Record* piece, as coverage of such pictures before the late 1920s is scant. By this time Shōchiku had mostly abandoned its early interest in trick-heavy *kaiki* productions.

¹⁶⁶ "Shinchōrei tai gyōsha mondai," in *Kinema Record* No. 50, October 1917, 1-3. Quoted in Gerow, 125.

¹⁶⁷ See Gunning, 56-62. According to the Pure Film Movement, Japanese cinema of the day had several impediments to achieving narrative integration, most conspicuously in the person of the *benshi*, without whose live narration the plot of many Japanese films was largely indiscernible.

Yoshino Jirō would leave the company in 1927 to join Makino Shōzō's self-titled studio, formed in 1921 after parting ways with Onoe Matsunosuke. By the beginning of the Shōwa era Makino's former employer Nikkatsu also appears to have lost interest in traditional ghost stories. Although Shōchiku would continue to produce the occasional *kaidan* adaptation into the 1930s, until the government's 1939 Film Act effectively shut down all production of *kaiki* film, the genre would remain mainly the province of minor studios.

It was at Makino that Yoshino directed his sole surviving *kaidan* film, 1929's *Kaidan: Fox and Tanuki* (*Kaidan kitsune to tanuki*), and although it appears to be an atypical specimen of the genre in several respects, it suggests that the spectacle of special photographic effects had ceased to be the main site of attraction in such films. At thirty-three minutes, *Kaidan: Fox and Tanuki* also represents the only substantial extant footage from a silent-era *kaiki* film apart from the eleven minutes of *Dish Mansion* footage discussed in Chapter 1. The "*kaidan*" in the picture's title, however, is tongue-in-cheek, as the film follows not the antics of actual shape-shifting foxes and tanuki but comical intrigue among a family of thieves, who in an isolated sequence attempt to frighten each other by disguising as ghosts and rigging mock *hi no tama* floating fireballs onto fishing poles. Yoshino here may be spoofing his earlier, presumably more earnest depictions of *kaiki* at Tenkatsu and Shōchiku, or mimicking Hollywood haunted house mysteries like *The Cat and the Canary*, wherein the "ghosts" are actually criminals in disguise. In any case, *Fox and Tanuki* feels like an atypical *kaidan* production. It does, however, demonstrate that many of the developments in film style that had been championed by the

Pure Film Movement had by this time infiltrated even the “vulgar” *kaidan* productions of the minor studios. Comparing *Fox and Tanuki* to the surviving footage from the unidentified *Dish Mansion at Banchō* picture, one sees a greatly diminished emphasis on trick photography for pure spectacle’s sake. Whereas the obvious centerpiece of the *Dish Mansion* footage is the extended scene in which Okiku’s ghost magically manipulates *shōji* curtains via stop-motion photography, the fleeting ghost imagery in *Fox and Tanuki* is achieved with simpler, on-set lighting and shadow effects, and their presence is more definitely tied into the narrative flow of events, as the ghosts and goblins are revealed to be human pranksters. Yoshino’s film also makes use of close-ups, parallel editing, and more detailed intertitles – though it should be noted that the *Dish Mansion* footage also includes the occasional medium close-up and intertitles, lending credence to Gerow’s conjecture that early Japanese cinema could be more dynamic than its reputation suggests.

Although I was unable to locate a review for Yoshino’s *Fox and Tanuki*, *Kinema junpō*’s coverage of other *kaidan* films which do not survive from the same period, including Makino Studio’s *Alias Yotsuya kaidan* from 1927, Shōchiku’s *Autumn Flower Lantern* (*Akisaku dōrō*, 1927), and the Kawai studio’s *Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (1928), tellingly make little to no mention of trick effects, suggesting that by this time spectacular displays of trick photography had indeed ceased to be the defining element of such films. The *Junpō* reviews strike a sharp contrast to the ones found in *Kinema Record*. Admittedly, the *Junpō* reviews are much longer and more in-depth than the one or two sentences that appeared in *Record*, but the tricks were the *only* thing worth mentioning

for the *Record* reviewers. Discussing *Alias Yotsuya kaidan* in *Kinema junpō*, critic Yamamoto Ryōkuyō is more concerned with the film's fidelity to the narrative and spirit of Nanboku's kabuki text and the performance of the actors than being dazzled by special effects.¹⁶⁸ While the films themselves almost certainly continued to make use of tricks like double-exposure ghosts, such displays had undoubtedly become a commonplace sight in *kaiki* productions by the start of the Shōwa era, ceasing to even be worthy of mention as a potential draw for audiences.

Beauty is the Beast: Vamp Actresses and Monstrous Transformations



Figure 12: Vamp (*vampaiyā*) actress Izumi Kiyoko in a medium close-up shot from *Kaidan: Fox and Tanuki* (*Kaidan kitsune to tanuki*, 1929).

If trick photography was no longer a novelty for Japanese audiences of the 1920s, *Fox and Tanuki* features another relatively recent and novel element in the person of “vamp” actress Izumi Kiyoko, who plays the female lead. Although there was some precedent for actresses appearing in the *shinpa*-derived *rensa* films of the previous decade, female impersonators continued to be the industry standard in both *gendai geki* and *jidai geki*

¹⁶⁸ Yamamoto Ryōkuyō, “*Iroha gana Yotsuya kaidan*,” *Kinema junpō*, August 1, 1927, 54.

into the early 1920s,¹⁶⁹ after which the more widespread adoption of the close-up in Japanese films likely played a part in the switch to actresses, as a female impersonator in close-up was too obviously male. The advent of the female movie star brought a new site of attraction to Japanese cinema, one that could be seamlessly injected into the emerging “cinema of narrative integration” and, in the case of the *kaidan* adaptations, supplant the trick photography set pieces that belonged more conspicuously to the cinema of attractions. The spectacle of *kaidan* films would no longer revolve primarily around displays of trick photography, but instead the sight of Japan’s newly minted screen sex symbols transformed into hideous monsters before the audience’s eyes. In her article on the portrayal of Oiwa in both prewar and postwar film versions of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, Yokoyama Yasuko notes that the first time Oiwa appears to have been played onscreen by an actress occurred in 1925, when Satsuki Nobuko performed the role.¹⁷⁰ Izumi Kiyoko made her screen debut the same year, and like Satsuki quickly gained a reputation as a silver screen vamp. From the adoption of screen actresses in the 1920s up through the war years, Japanese cinema vamps would have a complex and close relationship with *kaidan* and *kaiki eiga*, a phenomenon rendered a bit ironic given the etymology of the term “vamp,” or *vampu*. Originating in the 1915 Hollywood film *A Fool There Was*, in which Theda Bara appears as a femme fatale nicknamed “The Vampire Woman,” the term in English was quickly shortened to “vamp” and applied to actresses who specialized in playing bad-girl roles, divesting the term of any overtly

¹⁶⁹ Gerow, 224.

¹⁷⁰ Yokoyama Yasuko, “Yotsuya *kaidan eiga* no Oiwa-tachi: kabuki to wakare, betsu no onna e,” in *Kaiki to gensō e no kairō*, 149.

horrific or supernatural association. Erudite Japanese cinema aficionados, always eager to adopt the latest film terminology from abroad, imported the word almost as soon as actresses began appearing in analogous roles in Japanese films. In 1922 *Kinema junpō* first applied the term to none other than future Oiwa Satsuki Nobuko, but left it in its original, longer form as “vampire” (*vampaiyā*).¹⁷¹ As late as 1980 old filmmaking hands like Nakagawa Nobuo were using the elongated term “vampire” to describe femme fatale actresses.¹⁷² Despite the obviously monstrous connotations, the roles that earned actresses like Satuski Nobuko and Izumi Kiyoko the appellation “vampire” were not initially vengeful wraiths or ghost cats, but those of the *yōfu* or “seductress” (妖婦), the beautiful yet dangerous female criminals and bandits that appeared as foils to the male heroes of the *jidai geki* ninja action films popular with younger audiences of the day.¹⁷³ While not literal monsters, the *yōfu* (like “vamps”) had an etymological connection to the monstrous; the character *yō* (妖, “bewitching”) being the same one that appears in the word for goblin, *yōkai* (妖怪). And like many *kaiki* monsters, *yōfu* possessed an ambiguously attractive and frightening, Othered quality to them, sexually desirable yet formidable.¹⁷⁴ Shimura Miyoko elaborates:

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Izumi, 105.

¹⁷² Nakagawa Nobuo refers to actress Suzuki Sumiko as a “*vampaiyā*” in a piece he wrote for *Kinema Junpō* in 1980 on “Five Outlaw Women of Japanese Film History.” See “Wa ga nihon eigashi ue no shiranami gonin onna,” reproduced in *Eiga kantoku Nakagawa Nobuo*, 126-128.

¹⁷³ Writings in Japanese on cinema often will use the characters for *yōfu* with the phonetic gloss of *vampu*.

¹⁷⁴ Isolde Standish sees this same combination of allure and threat in Japanese cinema’s portrayals of *modan gāru* or “modern girls” in the *gendai geki* of the 1930s. See *A New History of Japanese Cinema*, 57.

Based on the “star system,” *jidai geki* originally had an aspect of heroism, and under that system big stars like Bandō Tsumasaburō, Arashi Kanjūrō, Kataoka Chiezō, and Ichikawa Utaemon became the heroes of children [in the audience]. Arrayed against these hero actors were the so-called vamp actresses like Tōa’s Hara Komako, Nikkatsu’s Sakai Yoneko and Fushimi Naoe, Teikine’s Matsueda Tsuruko, and Makino’s Suzuki Sumiko, who were ubiquitous in the mid-1920s. Billed as putting the male actors to shame in grand *tachimawari* (fight scenes), the vamps were incredibly popular, in what could be called the female version of the star system. In contrast to the straightforward symbols of heroism the male actors were for the youngsters that made up the bulk of the audience, the vamp actresses’ alleged mixture of allure and fearsomeness was likely a complex symbol of eroticism. Outwardly feminine while being able to partake in the exceedingly masculine physical activity of the *tachimawari*, audiences were startled and captivated by the unlikely appeal of the vamps’ bewitching figure combined with her contrary physicality.¹⁷⁵

Like Noel Carroll’s horror movie monsters, which are often “fusion figures” that compound “ordinarily disjoint or conflicting categories” of being,¹⁷⁶ the Japanese vamp actress constituted a categorically interstitial entity, possessing feminine beauty and masculine physical strength. Soon enough, the vamps began taking on more overtly

¹⁷⁵“時代劇は本来、スター・システムの下で坂東妻三郎、嵐寛寿郎、片岡千恵蔵、市川右太衛門等の「御大」と呼ばれるようなスターが子供達のヒーローとなった。男優が子供のヒーローであったのに対し、相手役の女優はヴァンプ女優と呼ばれ、東亜キネマの原駒子、日活の酒井米子、伏見直江、帝キネの松枝鶴子、マキノの鈴木澄子等の女優が揃って大活躍をしたのが一九二〇年代半ばを過ぎた頃である。男優顔負けの大立ち回りを披露したヴァンプ女優達の人気は絶大であり、いわばスター・システムの女性版ともいえる。少年を中心とした観客にとって男優が率直なヒロイズムの対象であるのに対し、ヴァンプ女優はいわば憧憬と畏怖が交錯した複雑なエロティシズムの対象であったのではないだろうか。外見は女性でありながら、立ち回りという極めて男性的な活動性を備えたヴァンプ女優に対し、観客は妖艶な姿態とは裏腹の活動性に驚愕し、その意外性に魅了された。” Shimura, “Shinkō kinema no kaibyō eiga,” 54.

¹⁷⁶ Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 44.

monstrous forms, cast in the roles of vengeful wraiths and ghost cats that had heretofore been played by the male *oyama*.



Figure 13: Beauty and Danger combined in the person of vamp actress Suzuki Sumiko. Promotional image from Makino Studio's *Jokai* (女怪, "Weird Woman," 1926).

As the most representative works of *kaidan* drama and literature featured female ghosts and monsters, the trend of casting the “fearsome” vamps in the screen versions of these stories was in some ways a quite obvious and natural one. Had Western gothic horror literature contained a similar preponderance of iconic female monsters instead of the male Count Dracula, Mr. Hyde, and Frankenstein’s Monster, Hollywood vamps might also have found themselves typecast as more literal vampires. Still, the association between vamp actresses like Suzuki Sumiko and monsters like *Yotsuya*’s Oiwa was not

wholly unproblematic. As Yokoyama points out, prior to her poisoning Oiwa is an attractive beauty (*bijo*), who then through her curse becomes a wrathful destroyer of men. This in itself has a certain thematic affinity with the femme fatale vamp, but as a personality, Oiwa is the archetypical virtuous woman or *teijo*, loyal to her unfaithful husband and sacrificing all to protect her child.¹⁷⁷ Reviewers of the day were also aware of this contradiction. About Suzuki Sumiko's performance as Oiwa in *Alias Yotsuya Kaidan*, Yamamoto Ryōkuyō complains that the vamp actress is miscast as the *teijo* Oiwa, failing to convincingly convey the character's inherent virtue in a role unsuited to her talents.¹⁷⁸ Nonetheless, throughout the mid to late 1920s the monsters of *kaidan* were played onscreen almost exclusively by vamp actresses like Suzuki, Satsuki, and Matsueda Tsuruko, who earned a more favorable review for an effectively frightening performance in the Teikine studio's *Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp* (*Kaidan Kasane ga fuchi*, 1924) and went on to appear in versions of *The Dish Mansion at Banchō* (1926), *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (1927), and *The Peony Lantern* (1930).¹⁷⁹ Like Oiwa in *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, *Kasane's Orui*, *The Dish Mansion's* Okiku, and *The Peony Lantern's* Otsuyu are all virtuous female archetypes, and in terms of personality are, in most versions of their respective stories, diametrically opposed to the *yōfu* vamps that the actresses who portrayed them were identified with by critics and audiences of the day. There is, however, an interesting affinity between the *yōfu* vamps and the virtuous ghosts.

¹⁷⁷ Yokoyama, 152.

¹⁷⁸“鈴木すみ子嬢のお岩は嬢の真価を味ふには寧ろ不適當な役であると云ひたい。それは嬢の持つこわくの演技の見せ場が此処の演所に絶無であるが故である。” Yamamoto, 54. Yokoyama quotes this passage directly in “Yotsuya kaidan eiga no Oiwatachi,” 152-153.

¹⁷⁹ Izumi, 106.

Keeping in mind that the Japanese word for monster, *bakemono*, literally means “changing thing,” one finds that the portrayals of Oiwa, Orui, and their ilk are marked by a stark physical transformation, from attractive living lover to hideous undead revenant, typically occurring at about the halfway point of the narrative.¹⁸⁰ The two contradictory halves of the *kaidan* female monster, Beauty and Beast, alluring and repellent, offer a concrete, physical separation of the ambiguously feminine-yet-fearsome qualities that coexist in the person of the vamp. In this sense, the appeal of the female *bakemono* and the vamp function in a quite similar manner, the former being a visual sorting out of the commingled natures of the latter.

The physical transformation of Beauty into Beast was what had supplanted the by-now commonplace trick effects as the main site of spectacle in late-1920s *kaidan* films, despite Yokoyama’s argument that, once monsters like Oiwa began to be portrayed by actresses onscreen, the roles lost much of their sense of carnival. On the traditional kabuki stage, the male actor cast in the role of Oiwa typically also appears as the male ghost Kohei and (perhaps more importantly) Yomoshichi, the handsome hero of the piece and the character who actually kills the villainous Iemon in the play’s climax, making him a thematic counterpart to Oiwa’s ghost. According to Yokoyama this lends the otherwise grim and ghastly *Yotsuya* a carnivalesque quality that lightens the proceedings, as audiences delight in watching the actor pull off the split-second costume changes, alternating between the hideous female ghost and the dashing male hero. This made the part of Oiwa/Yomoshichi a choice role for kabuki actors, and presumably for the male

¹⁸⁰ Of the representative female ghost characters in the most famous *kaidan* stories, only *The Dish Mansion’s* Okiku remains wholly beautiful in death. As several commentators have noted, this results in many versions of the story being more romantic than horrific.

actors who played the characters in the earliest film versions of the story. Conversely, Yokoyama suggests that Oiwa was not an attractive part for actresses, as the performance became separated from Yomoshichi, leaving only a hideous transformation that was unrelentingly grim.¹⁸¹ I would argue, however, that the sense of carnival merely became extra-textual in the case of the vamp actresses' portrayal of Oiwa and other monsters. As Shimura points out in the previously cited passage, by this time a star system was in place in commercial Japanese cinema. Such a system had been lacking in the previous decade, when the main selling points of a film were the *benshi's* live narrative accompaniment,¹⁸² and in the case of the formative *kaiki* films, the trick effects. Although the star system in the mid-to-late-1920s was institutionally organized around promoting the image of male action heroes like Bandō Tsumasaburō, Shimura notes the vamp actresses rivaled their male counterparts in actual popularity. The cult of personality surrounding figures like Matsueda Tsuruko and Suzuki Sumiko certainly was being exploited by casting these “complex symbols of eroticism” in roles that would throw their seductive and sexy personas into sharp relief by transforming them into grotesque monsters right before the audience's eyes. The sense of spectacle and carnival, then, relied not on the actor's taking on multiple personas within a single text, as in the stage versions of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, but on the actress's established star persona as an object of sex appeal being playfully inverted by rendering her (temporarily) hideous. Focusing on Suzuki Sumiko's late-1930s Shinkō ghost cat films, Shimura suggests the spectacle of Suzuki's

¹⁸¹ Yokoyama, 153.

¹⁸² See Fujiki Hideaki, “The Advent of the Star System in Japanese Cinema Distribution,” *Jōhō bunka kenkyū* Vol. 15 (2002): 1-22.

transformations into the grotesque ghost cat was in part a result of the aging actress no longer being cast as the sexy young heroine, and that for audiences much of the appeal of these pictures lay in seeing the former sex symbol rendered monstrous.¹⁸³ While this is undoubtedly the case, the spectacle of Suzuki's monstrous transformations was clearly already happening concurrently with the height of her popularity as a sexy vamp in the late 1920s. The fact that reviews of the day tend to dwell on the quality of makeup on display in these pictures demonstrates the importance of vamp's Beauty-to-Beast transformation to the perceived success of the film. *Kinema junpō* attributes Matsueda Tsuruko's effectiveness in 1924's *Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp* to her costume and makeup as much as it does to her performance, reporting that the mere sight of Matsueda is enough to instill fear in the audience.¹⁸⁴ Just one year after her turn as Oiwa in *Alias Yotsuya kaidan* earned Suzuki Sumiko an unfavorable review, she reprised the role for the Kawai studio's *Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (1928), which was even more negatively received by *Junpō*, notably listing among the film's deficiencies that "Suzuki Sumiko's makeup was better in the [previous year's] Makino version."¹⁸⁵ Although other vamps like Matsueda seem to have been better received by critics in the role of the vengeful wraith, it was Suzuki who would eventually become the vamp most associated with playing monsters onscreen. The movement of the site of spectacle in Japanese *kaiki* films

¹⁸³ Shimura, "Shinkō kinema no kaibyō eiga," 54-55.

¹⁸⁴ "松枝鶴子嬢の豊志賀は...演技も扮装も充分観客に恐怖を抱かしむる足るものがあつた." Quoted in Izumi, 106.

¹⁸⁵ "鈴木澄子のメイクアップもマキノ時代の方が眞實味があり," Mizumachi Seiji, "Yotsuya kaidan," *Kinema junpō*, August 11, 1928, 102.

from trick photography to the body of the female performer – which relied on an established, extra-textual star persona – would find its ultimate expression a decade later with the minting of Suzuki Sumiko as the *bakeneko joyū* or “ghost cat actress,” Japan’s first great monster movie star.

Like other modes of popular genre filmmaking like the musical, the horror movie, and the action film, domestic *kaiki* films from the 1920s onward operate in two distinct yet complimentary modes of cinema: the cinema of attractions, represented in the case of *kaiki* by moments of spectacle surrounding the actress who portrays the monster, and the cinema of narrative integration, wherein lies the themes of *osore* that the monster embodies. Spectacular moments like the onscreen transformation of the vamp actress into a ghost cat or a vengeful wraith, along with set performance sequences built around her monstrous figure, were the sites of attraction that drew in audiences. But unlike the trick films of the previous decade, these moments became couched in more elaborate narrative continuity, which fleshed out the themes of karmic vengeance necessary to infuse the grotesque imagery with a sense of cosmic terror. While critics desired *kaiki* film that would employ both modes of cinema with equal skill, in practice many Japanese *kaiki* films of the prewar and early postwar eras tended to rely more on spectacle than careful narrative expressions of *osore*. This was particularly true of the ghost cat subgenre of *kaiki* film. Unlike her sister-monster, the vengeful wraith, the ghost cat had no quintessential narrative to which it belonged like *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*.¹⁸⁶ What

¹⁸⁶ Probably the best known ghost cat tale is the Nabeshima or “Saga” legend, which studios typically adapted first at the start of each wave of ghost cat cycles, although the Okazaki, 53 Way Stations, and Red Wall ghost cat legends were just as popular. The notion of the vengeful spirit, meanwhile, is dominated by the figure of Oiwa and the narrative of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*.

defined the ghost cat in the public consciousness more so than the karmic retribution it represented were the archetypal moments of spectacle which belonged to the cinema of attractions such as protracted feline pantomimes and extended fight scenes with multiple samurai, and above all the Beauty-to-Beast transformation of the star actress, which relied on the extra-textual spectacle of famous sex symbols rendered monstrous.

Meanwhile, the vengeful wraith, while also depending on moments of spectacle like the Beauty-to-Beast transformation, was defined more by the circumstances of her creation in the story, placing greater emphasis on the cinema of narrative integration. Variations on the presentation of ghosts like Oiwa or Orui of *Kasane's Swamp* tended to be character-driven. As Yokoyama Yasuko notes in her essay “*Yotsuya kaidan's* Many Oiwas,” some screen versions portray Oiwa as hopelessly in love with Iemon even after death, making the story one of doomed romance, while others hew closer to the original kabuki play, in which Oiwa's attachment to Iemon comes only from her sense of duty as a wife and mother.¹⁸⁷ The “difference in repetition,” to quote Stephen Neale, is one of narrative and character. Ghost cat narratives also varied from film to film, but with their tendency toward a greater emphasis on spectacle, we often find the most conspicuous variations in the execution of feline pantomimes – which, in the case of the postwar Daiei series of ghost cat films, increases in complexity with each subsequent entry – or in the formal presentation of the monster – as in the experimental kaleidoscope technique seen in *The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen (Kaibyō nazo no shamisen, 1938)*.¹⁸⁸ Of course

¹⁸⁷ Yokoyama, 154-156.

ghost cat films could operate in a more narrative-driven mode. Shimura Miyoko discusses how the Shintōhō studio's two ghost cat films, *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* (1958) and *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond* (1960), downplay the spectacular emphasis on the body of the actress in "From 'Spectacle' to 'Cinema': Shintōhō's Ghost Cat Films."¹⁸⁹ Likewise vengeful spirit narratives like *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* could over-rely on spectacle, as the over-the-top makeup worn by Suzuki Sumiko in 1938's *Alias Yotsuya kaidan* suggests.¹⁹⁰ But overall, the ghost cat tends to be more firmly rooted in the cinema of attractions than the vengeful spirit, whose defining characteristics belong more to the cinema of narrative integration. With more than thirty screen versions, *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* is the most often filmed *kaiki* narrative in Japan, but the ghost cat subgenre was the most prolific, with no fewer than sixty ghost cat movies made between 1910 and 1970. The ghost cat's tendency toward spectacle over narrative appears to have been successful with audiences, even as it explains much of the critical hostility toward domestic *kaiki* films overall. In the pages that follow and in subsequent chapters, I consider how this interplay between moments of spectacle and narrative-driven themes of *osore* defines the domestic *kaiki* film.

Kaiki* as Vernacular Modernism: Hollywood Horror and Sound-era *Kaiki eiga

In "The Mass Production of the Senses," Hansen puts forward the argument that classical Hollywood cinema was globally successful "not because of its presumably universal

¹⁸⁸ The Daiei ghost cat films and their emphasis on spectacle will be examined more closely in Chapter 4. A close reading of *The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen*, including its experimental presentation of the monster, concludes this chapter.

¹⁸⁹ Shimura, "'Misemono' kara 'eiga' e."

¹⁹⁰ See Figure 1, pg. 28.

narrative form but because it meant different things to different people and publics, both at home and abroad,” and that American film genres were “dissolved and assimilated into different generic traditions, different concepts of genre.”¹⁹¹ Applying this approach to *kaiki* film in 1930s Japan, we see that – with the introduction of Hollywood’s Universal monster movies – *kaidan* adaptations and ghost cat movies were now understood to be native manifestations of a larger, transnational genre of film, one that was existentially defined in English by the emotional affect of horror, while in a Japanese context, the focus was slightly shifted to the Weird-with-a-capital-‘W’ atmosphere of *kaiki*. As discussed in Chapter 1, American reviews of the Bela Lugosi *Dracula* tended to dwell upon the horrific emotions the film evoked, while *Kinema junpō* focused instead upon the “*kaiki* atmosphere” of the camerawork and art design.¹⁹² However, an important development that arose out of transforming the beautiful vamp into a grotesque monster onscreen that was fear began to take the place of wonder as the aesthetically prized affect of *kaidan eiga*. The original stage versions of tales like *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* and *The Peony Lantern* had always been expected – if somewhat playfully – to give audiences the shivers, providing air conditioning in the hot summer season of the *obon* festival of the dead during which the plays were traditionally performed, or so the story goes. But as we have seen, the wonder of seeing the incredible trick photography on display in the earliest film versions of the same stories appears to have trumped any sense of *osore* inherent in the material. In 1915 the reviewer in *Kinema Record* commented that the latest screen incarnation of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* would instill a wondrous sense

¹⁹¹ Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses,” 341.

¹⁹² See Chapter 1, pg. 22-23.

of mystery (*fushigi*) in the audience, rather than fear or dread. Nine years later, the review in *Kinema junpō* for 1924's *Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp* is also concerned with what sort of reaction the film will elicit from audiences, but with Matsueda Tsuruko's monstrous transformation now taking center stage, we find *kyōfu* ("horror") replacing *fushigi* as the operative word. From this period onward *kaidan* adaptations and ghost cat films begin to emerge as their own genre distinct from other trick films such as the ninja picture and the purely whimsical "tanuki operettas" inaugurated by Tenkatsu's *Tanuki Palace* (*Tanuki goten*) in 1915. Now identified as *obake eiga* (monster movies) in advertising promising to deliver *kaiki to senritsu* or "thrills and chills," the late Taishō and early Shōwa *kaidan* and ghost cat films represented, much like German Expressionist films such as *Nosferatu* and Lon Chaney's silent-era Universal pictures like *The Phantom of the Opera*, the seminal steps toward a world horror cinema.

Ironically, it was a lull in the domestic production of such pictures that precipitated the final coalescence of *kaiki eiga* as a genre. After enjoying a boom prompted by the showcasing of the vamp actresses and their monstrous transformations which saw three competing versions of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* produced in 1927 and three more in 1928 (along with other usual suspects like *The Peony Lantern*, ghost cat pictures, and Yoshino's *Fox and Tanuki*), production of *obake* monster movies severely declined in the early 1930s. Izumi suggests several reasons for the sudden dearth of films that had been perennially popular, including the onset of the Great Depression and the beginnings of national militarization with the Manchurian Incident of 1931, though a more direct cause was certainly the burning down of Teikine's Kyoto studio in

September 1930, which had been one of the main producers of *kaidan* films.¹⁹³ What little remained of Teikine would be folded into the newly formed Shinkō Kyoto studio the following year. Secretly funded by Shōchiku capital, Shinkō would ultimately come to be the prewar studio most closely linked with the *kaiki* genre in the public eye. The studio's formative years, however, were plagued by violent strikes and walk-outs, and it would not be until the latter half of the decade before Shinkō would find its *kaiki* voice.¹⁹⁴

Fortunately for Japanese fans of ghosts and monsters, this domestic dry patch corresponded exactly with the advent of the Hollywood horror movie, set off by the worldwide success of Universal's *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* in 1931-2 and prompting a plethora of similar productions from the studio, as well as from rivals Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The Universal pictures in particular were very well received in Japan, and Izumi's conjecture that the newly-minted American horror movie genre sated the Japanese filmgoer's taste for *kaidan* during this period is borne out by the *Kinema junpō* review of *Frankenstein* quoted in Chapter 1, which explicitly compares the work to a *kaidan* and predicts the film will be a hit with Japanese audiences.¹⁹⁵ As a generic label, however, *kaidan* was evidentially too inextricably linked to a discourse of Edo culture to be applied to foreign films, however appropriate the comparison may have seemed to some critics. Another word was needed. By the late 1920s, Shigeno's *kikai naru eiga* had

¹⁹³ Izumi, 111.

¹⁹⁴ Anderson and Richie, 79-80.

¹⁹⁵ Izumi proposes the taste for *kaidan eiga* in the early 1930s was satisfied by Universal horror movies in *Ginmaku no hyakkai*, 112.

become standardized as *kaiki eiga*, and *kaiki* – being a more general term than the more culturally specific *kaidan* – was applied to prototypical horror movies from abroad like *The Cat and the Canary*. Although, as I discussed in Chapter 1, the term *kaiki eiga* predates the coinage of the term “horror movie” in English, it is not until the proliferation of Hollywood horror movies in Japan during the first half of the 1930s that *kaiki eiga* becomes more ubiquitous as a generic label. Film scholar Ōsawa Jō has even stated that, until the coincident critical and commercial success in Japan of Hammer Films’ color remakes of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* alongside Shintōhō’s color *kaidan* pictures in the late 1950s, the term *kaiki eiga* was only applied to foreign horror films.¹⁹⁶ While it is true that up through the 1950s Japanese films like *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* and the ghost cat pictures were most commonly called *kaidan*, *kaibyō*, or *obake eiga*, advertising and reviews from the late 1930s clearly show that all three terms were by this point understood to be subgenres of *kaiki eiga*.¹⁹⁷ Accordingly, Hollywood horror in this period was not, as Ōsawa suggests, received as a generically distinct, alien form of filmmaking, but in an example of Miriam Hansen’s theory of vernacular modernism, conceptually repositioned in a local context. American horror does, however, seem to have increased a demand among critics and audiences that domestic *kaiki* films be even more frightening than the vamps had previously been able to effect via their grotesque transformations. Japanese reviews of the Universal horror movies often dwell on the element of *kyōfu* or “horror” and – although the term eventually came to designate murder thrillers like *Les*

¹⁹⁶ Ōsawa Jō, ‘Shintōhō no obake eiga to *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*: jyanru no fukkatsu to kakushin,’ in *Kaiki to gensō e no kairō*, 78.

¹⁹⁷ See the discussion of *kaiki*’s history as a generic label of film in Chapter 1.

Diaboliques and *Psycho* – as mentioned in Chapter 1 *Kinema junpō* does make mention of “Boris Karloff-style *kyōfu eiga*” during this period. When production of *kaidan eiga* finally resumes in earnest from about 1936 onward, one begins to notice for the first time what would remain a common refrain among critics well into the postwar years – that Japanese *kaiki* films “weren’t scary” (*kowaku mo nai kaiki eiga*).

That the movies were not frightening enough was only one of a plethora of complaints levied at domestic *kaiki* films in the 1930s. Sea changes in the Japanese film industry such as the advent of sound and the increasing influence of classical Hollywood continuity shooting and editing techniques at the major studios like Shōchiku and, later in the decade, the newly established Tōhō, all conspired to make the low-budget genre pictures made at places like Shinkō look all the more backwards in the eyes of the critics. By 1936 – when domestic *kaiki* production resumed in earnest – talkies had finally become the norm at the big studios, but unable to afford the production costs, the smaller studios like Shinkō, Kyokutō, and Daitō were still making “part talkies” as late as 1939.¹⁹⁸ Content-wise, too, there was little hope of successfully competing with Shōchiku’s and Tōhō’s glossy *gendai geki* productions, which were being directed by avid students of foreign cinema like Ushihara Kiyohiko.¹⁹⁹ Instead, small-studio heads like Shinkō’s Nagata Masaichi turned to the perennially popular yet critically unfashionable *jidai geki* genres – specifically ninja pictures, tanuki fantasies, and of course, *kaiki* and *obake* pictures – carrying on the Onoe Matsunosuke *kyūgeki* tradition

¹⁹⁸ Shimura, “Shinkō kinema no kaibyō eiga,” 52.

¹⁹⁹ Standish, 38.

largely unchanged, according to Shimura.²⁰⁰ These were certainly more cinematic efforts than the old “canned theater” *kyūgeki* films of the early Taishō era.²⁰¹ As Yoshino’s *Fox and Tanuki* demonstrates, it was not that the B-studio *jidai geki* failed to adopt more elaborate filmmaking techniques like the close-up and parallel editing. If the films were derided for being throwbacks to the Onoe era, it had more to do with their thematic content – and, ironically enough, the presence of trick effects, which by the late 1930s had lost all of their novelty and were now viewed as something that would only amuse the small children in the audience. An article from the February 1939 edition of *Eiga hyōron* sums up the general critical hostility to *jidai geki*:

If [*jidai geki*] are low-class affairs, it’s because they don’t give a damn about human psychology, and are only about violence and cutting down people. On top of that, there are ninja tricks to divert the kiddies; even ghost cats show up. Things like this are, in a word, utterly unnecessary.²⁰²

Other writing from the era complains that period pictures lacked the relevancy of contemporarily set films, totally missing the point of cinema as an art form at the forefront of modernity.²⁰³ It would be more fair to say the *jidai geki* of the small studios were quite simply B-grade genre pictures, following proven conventions and formulas,

²⁰⁰ Shimura, “Shinkō kinema no kaibyō eiga,” 52.

²⁰¹ Daisuke Miyao considers the change in terminology for period pictures from *kyūgeki* to *jidai geki* in the early 1920s as indicative of fundamental changes in formal technique, noting that *jidai geki* of the 1920s were often considered more sophisticated in their technique than *gendai geki*, though clearly by the end of the 1930s this attitude had changed. See Daisuke Miyao, *The Aesthetics of Shadow: Lighting and Japanese Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 68-69.

²⁰²“ (時代劇は) 下流ともなれば、心理もへったくれもなく、人間をぶった斬ってしまふ。その上に忍術使ひの出てる子供だましから、化猫まで現はれる至っては、これ等のものは全く「不要」の一語に尽きる。” “Jidai eiga ni nozomu,” *Eiga hyōron*, February 1, 1939, 35.

²⁰³ Shimura, “Shinkō kinema no kaibyō eiga,” 57.

turned out quickly for a fast profit and with no aspirations of competing artistically with the majors. Still, it would be remiss to say that the filmmakers responsible for these pictures were incapable or unwilling to innovate when the opportunity arose. Looking at the few surviving domestic *kaiki* films from this period, one sees not simply a retread of the old familiar material, but an emerging mode of *kaiki* filmmaking that begins to incorporate a vernacular modernist style, conscious of its *kaiki* cousins around the globe and pointing the way to the truly groundbreaking *kaiki* films the Shintōhō studio would produce in the postwar era.

Reacting to Hansen's theory of vernacular modernism, Michael Raine sees in many Japanese films of the 1930s examples of what he calls "transcultural mimesis," which he conceptualizes as a more overt borrowing of particular Hollywood conventions and scenarios (as opposed to the more generalized common film grammar proliferated worldwide by Hollywood at the same time, according to Hansen). Raine notes that 1930s Japanese films often "aimed, simultaneously, at *re-creating* Hollywood film in Japan, *parodying* the absurdities of American cinema...in the Japanese context, and even *learning* from the gap between Japanese and American cinema."²⁰⁴ Perhaps the most striking examples of transcultural mimesis in 1930s Japanese cinema, and ones with *kaiki* connections, are the blatant *King Kong* knockoffs *King Kong: Made in Japan* (*Wasei Kingu Kongu*, 1933) and *King Kong Appears in Edo* (*Edo ni arawareta Kingu Kongu*,

²⁰⁴ Raine, 115. Author's emphasis.

1938).²⁰⁵ Izumi also discusses a picture that appears to be a deliberate, scene-for-scene remake of the Boris Karloff vehicle *The Walking Dead* (1936), proof that even in the prewar era Japan was already producing *gendai geki kaiki* films in the fashion of films like Nakagawa Nobuo's 1959 *Lady Vampire*, which demonstrate obvious Hollywood horror influences.²⁰⁶ But the most emblematic domestic *kaiki* films remained *jidai geki* like *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* and the ghost cat pictures, which could result in a tension between the desire to be more like Hollywood horror on the one hand, and to be faithful to other, older, and more culturally specific narrative and thematic patterns on the other. While the late 1930s versions of these classic *kaiki* stories clearly exhibit the influence of their distant Hollywood cousins in certain moments, the precious few surviving prewar Japanese *kaiki* films we have demonstrate a more obvious debt to a native ancestor, the special effects laden ninja and *chambara* (swordplay) period pictures from which the *obake eiga* genre emerged.

Recalling their old affinities with the ninja trick films of previous decades, the last great prewar flowering of Japanese *kaiki* cinema grew directly out of a series of ninja pictures Nagata Masaichi put into production at Shinkō upon taking over the studio in 1936. The studio's first ghost cat picture, *Legend of the Saga Ghost Cat (Saga kaibyōden, 1937)*, was originally intended to be the third part of a trilogy of ninja films, following the previous year's *Ninja of Osaka Castle (Ninjutsu Osaka-jō)* and *Jiraiya: The Stormcloud Scroll and the Transformation Scroll (Jiraiya: yōun no maki/hengen no*

²⁰⁵ The word *kaiki* appears in an advertisement for *King Kong Appears in Edo*, although – as I discuss in Chapter 1 – the Japanese *King Kong* knockoffs might be more accurately classified as early examples of the *kaijū* pictures typified by *Godzilla*.

²⁰⁶ Izumi, 115.

maki). The filmmakers originally planned to incorporate the famous “Ghost Cat of Nabeshima” legend into a genre hybrid *ninja/bakeneko* picture; but one of the studio’s production managers, being a descendent of the Saga family which features prominently in the legend, decided a ghost cat was entertainment enough in itself, and the project became a straightforward *bakeneko eiga*.²⁰⁷ By this time Suzuki Sumiko was under contract to Shinkō, and though the aging actress (she had already reached the ripe old age of thirty-two in 1936) was finding it more and more difficult to be cast as the sexy young vamp, having her reprise her monstrous *obake* performances from a decade before was evidently still quite acceptable for the studio. Directing duties were entrusted to the newly-signed Mokudō Shigeru, a former actor and protégé of Mizoguchi Kenji. *Legend of the Saga Ghost Cat* was Mokudō’s first directorial effort in four years, and the film’s popular success ensured that he would spend the remainder of his career at Shinkō as the studio’s go-to director for *kaiki* projects. Likewise, Suzuki found herself labeled as the “ghost cat actress” (*bakeneko joyū*) from this point forward. Despite the fact that she had been appearing in *kaiki* pictures on a semi-regular basis ever since the late 1920s,²⁰⁸ and that such films continued to be a comparatively small percentage of her total output until her retirement from the movie business in 1941, it was her performance as the title monster in *Legend of the Saga Ghost Cat* and her subsequent appearances in other Shinkō *kaiki* films such as *Alias Yotsuya Kaidan* (*Iro wa gana: Yotsuya kaidan*, 1937, a remake

²⁰⁷ Shimura cites an article from the newspaper *Miyako shimbun* that contains this anecdote. See “Shinkō kinema no kaibyō eiga,” 52.

²⁰⁸ Although domestic *kaiki eiga* production had been sporadic for the first half of the 1930s, Suzuki’s filmography from this period includes titles like *Oiwa’s Row House* (*Oiwa nagaya*, 1931), *Kaidan: Dark Riverbank* (*Kaidan kurayami kashi*, 1933), and *Kaidan of the Harbor’s Kuniya* (*Kaidan tsu no kuniya*, 1935).

of the 1927 Makino film in which Suzuki also appeared as Oiwa), *The Cat of Arima* (*Arima neko*, 1937), *The Ghost Story of the Mandarin Duck Curtain* (*Kaidan Oshidori chō*, 1938), *The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen* (*Kaibyō nazo no shamisen*, 1938), and *The Ghost Cat and the Red Wall* (*Kaibyō akakabe Daimyōjin*, 1938) that resulted in Suzuki Sumiko becoming Japan's first *bona fide kaiki* superstar, as synonymous with playing movie monsters as Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff.

The Daitō studio had actually beaten Shinkō to the punch with their own version of *The Saga Ghost Cat* (*Kaibyō Saga no yosaku*) in 1936, which received a rare favorable review from *Kinema junpō* for a domestic *kaiki* picture. The film was praised for its successful “*kaiki* atmosphere” (*kaiki-teki na funiki*) and its use of a real cat (presumably in the scenes which occur prior to the animal's transformation into the humanoid *bakeneko*).²⁰⁹ Shinkō's version, meanwhile, was drubbed by *Junpō* as a “*kaiki eiga* that's not scary” (*kowaku mo nai kaiki eiga*),²¹⁰ but if it lacked the “successful *kaiki* atmosphere” of Daitō's earlier effort, it possessed a far more bankable asset in the star figure of Suzuki Sumiko, as Shimura notes Daitō's film failed to ignite the renewed interest in the genre that Shinkō and Suzuki created.²¹¹ Following the commercial success of Suzuki's appearance in *Legend of the Saga Ghost Cat*, competing B-studios like Daitō and Zenkatsu followed suit in casting star actresses Miki Teruko and Miyagawa Toshiko as ghost cats, and Shinkō even tried to create their own second star ghost cat actress in

²⁰⁹ *Kinema junpō*, February 1, 1936, 149. Quoted in Shimura, “Shinkō kinema no kaibyō eiga,” 52. This and other reviews of *kaibyō eiga* from the 1930s which make a point of mentioning the use of a real cat instead of a *nuigurumi* (stuffed animal) suggest that a fake cat was the norm in silent-era *bakeneko* films.

²¹⁰ Murakami Tadahisa, “*Saga kaibyō-den*,” 118.

²¹¹ Shimura, “Shinkō kinema no kaibyō eiga,” 52.

the person of Yamada Isuzu, who finally refused to accept the role.²¹² And despite being branded the “ghost cat actress,” Suzuki, along with the other leading ladies of the small studios, also began appearing once again as Oiwa and other vengeful spirits from the famous ghost stories of the Edo period. Shōchiku even got partially back into the *kaiki* act with their own star actress Tanaka Kinuyo, in that most genteel of the great *kaidan* tales, *The Dish Mansion of Banchō*, in 1937.²¹³ Perhaps even more so than the late Taishō films, the Japanese *kaiki* boom of the late 1930s was a star-driven phenomenon, to the extent that critical calls for more horrific *kaiki* pictures seem to have had little impact on their popularity.

To Suzuki’s credit, *Junpō* blames the failure of *Legend of the Saga Ghost Cat* to be properly frightening not on the actress’s performance, but on the fact that the title monster only appears in the penultimate scene of the film.²¹⁴ As mentioned in Chapter 2, this is typical of the plot structure for many traditional *kaidan* narratives, wherein the monster does not appear until the third act to visit karmic vengeance upon the human villains of the piece. Critics of the late Taishō and early Shōwa years, it will be recalled, found the 1924 adaptation of the traditional *kaidan* narrative *The Ghost Story of Kasane’s Swamp* starring vamp actress Matsueda Tsuruko more than adequately frightening, and one can safely assume that this film followed the typical pattern of withholding its monster until the final act. But after several years of being fed a steady diet of Universal

²¹² Ibid., 56; 54.

²¹³ The majority of this film survives, although incomplete. Okiku’s ghost does not appear in any of the extant footage.

²¹⁴ Murakami Tadahisa, “*Saga kaibyō-den*,” 118.

horror movies, in which the monster typically appears early in the film and remains the central focus of the plot, Japanese film critics repeatedly fault domestic *kaiki* films like *Saga Ghost Cat* and *The Cat of Arima* for not featuring enough monster and – in effect – not being frightening enough.²¹⁵ The reviewers generally fail to acknowledge that the cause of this lies primarily in the Edo-period source material, necessitating that any reasonably faithful adaptation of *kaidan* narratives will be structurally quite different from a Hollywood horror movie. On the other hand, the films were by this time being quite consciously marketed by the studios as part of the same *kaiki* genre which included *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *The Mummy*. When the monsters do finally show up, the growing influence of Hollywood can be seen in their presentation, but even then these scenes in many ways owe more to the *chambara* (swordplay) aesthetic of the ninja films and their common ancestor, the *jidai geki* trick film.

Three Case Studies: *The Cat of Arima*, *The Ghost Story of the Mandarin Duck Curtain*, and *The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen*

Three surviving films from the late-1930s heyday of Japanese *kaiki* pictures demonstrate the continuing place of prominence held by the conventions of *chambara* alongside motifs inherited from stage productions of *kaidan*, and the ways they share the screen with moments influenced by Hollywood horror in an emerging vernacular modernist style of *kaiki* cinema. Unlike previous decades, we have multiple surviving specimens from this era to examine, although what exists today constitutes only a fraction of the substantial *kaiki* output from the Japanese studios between 1936 and 1940, by which time the government Film Act of 1939 had effectively stamped out *kaiki* film production and

²¹⁵ *Junpō* critic Murakami Tadahisa's review of *The Cat of Arima* echoes his complaint levied against *The Legend of the Saga Ghost Cat*. See "Arima neko," *Kinema junpō*, January 13, 1938, 274.

mobilized the studios for the total war effort. Shinkō alone made at least thirteen *kaiki* pictures during this period, and records indicate the total domestic *kaiki* output from all the studios topped forty productions in less than four years. Three Japanese *kaiki* films from this period survive almost in their entirety, and they are all Shinkō efforts: 1937's *The Cat of Arima* and two pictures from 1938, *The Ghost Story of the Mandarin Duck Curtain* and *The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen*. That each of them are “all-talkies” (*āru tōkii*) shows that although the genre was generally held in critical contempt, these were prestige pictures for the B-studio. All three star Suzuki Sumiko, and both *Arima* and *Mandarin Duck Curtain* were directed by Mokudō Shigeru, who by the end of 1938 was the most prolific director of *kaiki* films in the country. The combination of Suzuki and Mokudō makes it reasonable to assume we have here two representative examples of the genre to examine. The third film, *Mysterious Shamisen*, was directed by the acclaimed Ushihara Kiyohiko, who had just left Shōchiku and was undoubtedly given the project by Shinkō in an effort to elevate the artistic standing of their stock-in-trade B *kaiki* pictures. Ushihara's film contains several stylistic flourishes and departures from Mokudō's work, providing a useful counterpoint for the other two films in determining the breadth of formal and thematic material the domestic *kaiki* genre allowed. But even Ushihara's more experimental genre piece – which unlike Mokudō's films is not based on a classic ghost story – adheres to a rather conventional revenge narrative arc typical not only of *kaidan*, but many non-*kaiki jidai geki* as well. The problem of the mere existence of the monster is not the crux around which the plot turns, as in a Universal horror movie. In all three pictures, the monster is an avenging agent injected into the

narrative to exact retribution upon the villains for the murder of the heroine, its monstrous status almost incidental to the main story. While it is the literal ghost of the main protagonist in *Mandarin Duck Curtain*, the other two films utilize a *bakeneko* cat-spirit acting on the victim's behalf. In both *Mandarin Duck Curtain* and *Mysterious Shamisen*, the monster assumes a supporting function in the final act of revenge, which is ultimately achieved by the victim's still-living younger sister, further marginalizing the monster from the centrality of the narrative. *The Cat of Arima* allows its monster to carry out the actual act of punishment itself, but of the three films withholds its appearance the longest, only revealing the ghost cat in the final climatic moments and with virtually no prior foreshadowing that a *kaiki* conclusion is in store to what is otherwise a pretty mundane *jidai geki* tale.

Even *Arima's* climatic confrontation, during which ghost cat Suzuki Sumiko uses her marvelous powers to battle a small army of spear-wielding maidens single-handedly, demonstrates more obvious affinities with the *chambara* swordplay pictures, which feature an extraordinarily masterful (yet human) swordsman who can take on a multitude of opponents at once.²¹⁶ Throughout most of the picture's runtime Suzuki appears as the human maid Onaka, whose mistress, Otake, is bullied into committing suicide by the wicked matron of Arima Palace. When the loyal Onaka tries and fails to avenge her mistress herself, Otake's pet cat assumes the form of Onaka and massacres the matron and the complicit harem of Arima in the film's climax. Although he arms his star actress with only her *bakeneko* cat claws, Mokudō stages Suzuki's fight with the group of

²¹⁶ Although not appearing until several decades after the films discussed here, Tōei's *Zatoichi* series is probably the best-known example of *chambara*, though the tradition stretches all the way back to the silent era.

maidens in a manner that emphasizes her ability to engage her opponents in a physical, concrete fashion, much like the human heroes of *chambara* with whom she shared the matinee bill. Placing Suzuki in the center of the frame and surrounding her with her adversaries, Mokudō undercranks the camera to film the fight at high-speed, a convention of swordplay pictures since the days of Makino and Onoe. The sequence employs other trick photography effects typical of earlier *kaidan* and ghost cat films as well as ninja and *chambara* pictures, and again Mokudō's emphasis remains on creating a spectacle of action and excitement over horror or *osore*. A brief shot of Suzuki crawling upside-down on the ceiling, achieved by flipping the camera, might evoke a sense of otherworldly *osore* in a different context, but by placing the shot amid the chaos of the ghost cat's battle against the maidens, it instead adds to the thrilling excitement of the *tachimawari* fight, a flourish akin to Errol Flynn swinging from a rope during a swordfight aboard a pirate ship (Suzuki, incidentally, also swings from a rope during the sequence). There are no double-exposure shots of Suzuki fading in and out of the frame, and no stopping the camera to have her instantly traverse the space of the shot in a more ethereal, ghostly fashion. Indeed, *The Cat of Arima*'s most impressive expression of the *bakeneko*'s superhuman ability involves no trick photography at all, and consists of a single long take in which the monster rapidly ascends a series of winding staircases, all the while fighting off her pursuers. Yet for all its effectiveness, this shot would not be at all out of place in a non-*kaiki*, action *jidai geki*. Overall, the monster's brief appearance in *The Cat of Arima* instills heart-pounding excitement more so than bloodcurdling dread.



Figure 14: Suzuki Sumiko surrounded by a bevy of spear-wielding maidens in *The Cat of Arima* (*Arima neko*, 1937).

Mokudō does include a few fleeting shots that take a break from the otherwise relentless *chambara* action and speak to an emerging *kaiki* aesthetic at least partially informed by Hollywood horror (and its roots in German Expressionism). The film’s villains not hesitating to engage the ghost cat in battle greatly dilutes the sense of cosmic *osore* attendant to the monster’s mission of karmic vengeance for the murder of her mistress, and the wicked matron spends no time agonizing over her inexorable fate. However, prior to the final battle, an effectively creepy shot of Suzuki as the ghost cat emerging from the shadows and walking slowly, straight-on towards the camera recalls similar shots of actor Max Schreck as the vampire Count Orlock in *Nosferatu*. A more complex sort of *kaiki* vernacular modernism can be seen in *Arima*’s obligatory *neko jarashi* (“cat toying”) scene, a holdover from the kabuki stage in which acrobats performing as the ghost cat and their human victim(s) would leap about the stage in a

pantomime of a cat toying with a mouse. In the postwar Daiei ghost cat films of the early 1950s, the protracted *neko jarashi* becomes an explicitly marked-off moment of spectacle, with acrobatic stunts that increased in length and complexity from film to film, and traditional kabuki musical accompaniment that breaks sharply with the otherwise Western orchestral scores. *The Cat of Arima's* *neko jarashi*, though also demarcated by a musical detour to traditional kabuki on the part of the film score, is not nearly as elaborate and features no complex acrobatics, but concludes with Suzuki hypnotically compelling her victim into complacency before sinking her teeth into her the neck in a vampiric fashion that cannot fail to draw comparisons to Bela Lugosi. Writing in 1993 about his impressions of the film, movie historian Satō Tadao could just as easily be describing Lugosi's performance in *Dracula* when he recalls being impressed by the image of "Suzuki Sumiko's ubiquitously piercing, seductive look in her eyes that followed you everywhere . . . lunging at her prey and chewing at their necks like a vampire."²¹⁷ But the moment is not a mere pastiche, nor a thoughtless grafting of the Hollywood vampire motif onto the Japanese ghost cat tale, for the imagery of hypnotic eyes and sinking fangs into jugular veins derives not only from Lugosi. Edo woodblock prints of ghost cats, some of which depict the monster not as the humanoid costumed performers of the kabuki stage, but as the fearsome, giant cat creature of legend, show the creature gripping its victim by the throat in its jaws in the manner of a vicious beast. Suzuki's more demure, vampiric attack to her victim's neck represents a blending of

²¹⁷“そして鈴木澄子は、要所要所で大見得を切るようにして妖艶な眼つきで追ってくるみんなを睨む。その目つきのあだっぼいこと。手は猫のように丸め、猫背になり、ひらりと身をひるがえして獲物にとびかかり、吸血鬼のようにノドに喰いつく。” Satō Tadao, in *Shinkō kinema: senzen goraku eiga no ōkuni*, ed. Satō Tadao, Sumigawa Naoki, and Marubi Sadamu (Tokyo: Firumuātosha, 1993), 126.

traditional and modern *kaiki* visual iconography in the synergy of popular cinema. The neck-biting scene in *The Cat of Arima* – which Irie Takako would imitate but never quite duplicate in her postwar ghost cat pictures – thereby invokes Lugosi’s Dracula not only as an acknowledgement of generic affinity between Universal monster movies and Japanese *kaiki* film, but as a way of conveying an element of traditional ghost cat depictions in the terms of modern film iconography.

Likewise, Suzuki does not ape Lugosi but uses an established asset of her star persona for a horrific effect suggested by her male American counterpart. The striking eyes of Suzuki’s ghost cat simultaneously recalled Lugosi’s piercing stares in *Dracula* while also being long-associated with Suzuki herself. Sato describes them as *adappoi* (coquettish), and Shimura notes that, even under the monstrous feline makeup, Suzuki’s femininity shines through in her eyes, recalling her earlier vamp and *anego* (“big-sis”) roles in non-*kaiki* productions.²¹⁸ In truth, the amount of makeup Suzuki wears in *The Cat of Arima* is minimal compared to the much more elaborate makeup her successor Irie Takako would don in the Daiei ghost cat films of the 1950s, or what Suzuki herself wore in her various portrayals of Oiwa’s ghost.²¹⁹ Suzuki instead sells the performance primarily with her expressions and mannerisms, mewling with a trickle of blood from her lips and sporting disheveled, unkempt hair. *The Cat of Arima* being the oldest extant example of a *bakeneko eiga*, it is hard to say if this represents a significant departure

²¹⁸ Shimura, “Shinkō kinema no kaibyō eiga,” 55.

²¹⁹ Although none of Suzuki’s several *Yotsuya kaidan* films survive, advertising materials from both the Makino Studio’s 1927 version and Shinkō’s 1937 version show her in rather heavy makeup as Oiwa. Suzuki’s makeup in the Shinkō film, an advertisement for which can be seen in Figure 2 of Chapter 1, is especially grotesque, and appears to have been far more elaborate than the makeup seen in any of the surviving postwar *Yotsuya kaidan* films.

from earlier cinematic portrayals. Yet whether the monstrous transformation was effected primarily via makeup or by the performance of the actress, it is still in the body of the female star that the main site of spectacle lies in domestic *kaiki* films of the late 1930s. That Suzuki became known as the “*bakeneko* actress” instead of the “*bakemono* (monster) actress” suggests, however, that there was something more memorable about her performances in pictures like *The Cat of Arima* for audiences than, for example, her multiple portrayals of Oiwa in various versions of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*. Speaking of Suzuki’s ghost cat performances, Satō Tadao echoes Shimura Miyoko’s observations about the vamp actresses being “complex symbols of eroticism” when he says,

Of course, the performance of [Suzuki] taking on the form of a cat may be thought of as frightening to the point of inducing shivers, but at the same time, wrapped up in that fear is an intense element of eroticism which is also important. For youngsters of the time, we might say the fear of eroticism was driven home most intensely by Suzuki Sumiko’s ghost cat.²²⁰

In the more restrained makeup of the ghost cat, Suzuki retains her feminine beauty even as she performs the horrific acts of the beast, giving these performances in particular an uncanny quality very similar to the same beautiful-yet-dangerous appeal of the vamp.²²¹

²²⁰“もちろん、猫の姿態を真似たゾクゾクするほど怖かった演技で憶えているのだが、その怖さには同時に強烈なエロチシズムが含まれていたのが重要な特色である。あの時代の子どもに、エロチックなもの怖さということを強烈に叩き込んだのが鈴木澄子の化け猫だったと言えるかもしれない。” Satō, *Shinkō kinema*, 125.

²²¹ Shimura makes a similar argument when she says that Suzuki’s status as a ghost-cat actress was marked by possessing the masculine physicality (*katsudō-sei*) of the vamp and the “creepiness” (*kaiki-sei*) of Oiwa, both of which were founded on an established femininity (*josei-sei*) that made her appealing. See “Shinkō kinema no kaibyō eiga,” 55.



Figure 15: Suzuki's *adappoi* ("coquettish") eyes and bloodstained lips convey femininity and monstrosity in *The Cat of Arima*.

Suzuki's makeup is similarly restrained in 1938's *Ghost Story of the Mandarin Duck Curtain*, in which she portrays a facially scarred vengeful wraith in the Oiwa mold. Unlike *The Cat of Arima*, this time Suzuki plays the suffering heroine herself. Having witnessed in childhood her mother's murder at the hands of yet another wicked matron (a stock figure of *kaidan* revenge narratives), as an adult Suzuki falls victim to the same woman's evil machinations while searching for her missing younger sister, whom the matron had raised as her own. Suzuki's discovery of this fact results in having her face slashed with a needle, and finally her murder at the hands of the matron and her attendants, who attack her while wearing various bestial Noh masks. Suzuki's ghost then appears to her younger sister, asking to be avenged and leaving behind the *hannya* female demon costume the matron wore during the murder.²²² The matron is then tormented by

²²² In Noh the *hannya* mask symbolizes out-of-control female rage, which turns jealous women into demons.

both Suzuki's ghost and the still-living younger sister who, wearing the *hannya* mask, avenges Suzuki's death by killing the matron and her attendants.

Directed by Mokudō Shigeru, *Mandarin Duck Curtain* continued the duo's trend of poor critical reception. *Kinema junpō* was particularly harsh to the film's depiction of multiple murders, calling the film "excessively sadistic, and too much to swallow as simple entertainment. It's hard to call the mass murder of women entertaining."²²³ Ethical viewing matters aside, compared to *The Cat of Arima's* action-heavy *chambara* conclusion, *Mandarin Duck Curtain* showcases several accomplished *kaiki* sequences that anticipate the work of Nakagawa Nobuo at Shintōhō in the latter 1950s – which would be enthusiastically received by critics for its masterful conveyance of *kaiki* atmosphere. *Mandarin Duck Curtain* suggests that Mokudō and Suzuki's work deserves at least some of the credit for establishing the idealized aesthetic of Japanese *kaiki* films. Suzuki's facially disfigured ghost has obvious affinities with Oiwa and *Kasane's* Orui, but unlike Suzuki's multiple appearances as Oiwa in various versions of the *Yotsuya* legend, here Mokudō keeps her makeup to a minimum, allowing the actress to retain her feminine beauty even after her "monstrous" transformation. The truly grotesque Oiwa represents an obvious externalization of the vengeance-consumed monster into which the virtuous woman becomes, but Mokudō conveys the transformation more subtly in *Mandarin Duck Curtain*. As her slight facial scar inexplicably swells and worsens, Suzuki sits in bed, wailing and clutching her face. Mokudō films these scenes in long shots that make use of low-key lighting and heavy shadows, much like the German

²²³“之は余りに惨酷すぎて、単なる娯楽映画としても葉がきつ過ぎる感じがする。十数人の女が殺し殺される惨らしさは決して健全なる娯楽とは言ひ難い。” Murakami Tadahisa, “*Kaidan oshidori chō*,” *Kinema junpō*, April 12, 1938, 79.

Expressionist films and the Universal horror movies. When he finally brings the camera in closer, Suzuki turns so that the scarred side of her face cannot be seen. After delaying the reveal of Suzuki's disfigurement in such a manner over two non-consecutive sequences, Mokudō finally gives the audience their first glimpse of Suzuki's entire face in a point-of-view shot of her reflection in a bowl of water, her own horrified reaction ideally mirroring the audience's own state. The fact that the scar itself is quite small compared to other vengeful ghosts like Oiwa and does not compromise Suzuki's natural beauty is irrelevant, as the protracted, suspenseful build-up and the starkly terrified reactions of both Suzuki and the other characters to the unnatural disfigurement lend the sequences a more nuanced, narrative-driven sense of *osore* than a simpler reveal of more exaggerated makeup might provoke. Significantly, Nakagawa Nobuo would stage his own reveal of Oiwa's facial disfigurement in a very similar manner in 1959's *Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, which – unlike the derided and forgotten *Mandarin Duck Curtain* – was almost immediately hailed as a masterpiece of the *kaiki* genre.

These scenes also demonstrate another important element of an emerging, vernacular modernist style of *kaiki* filmmaking in their use of sound. Complimenting the dark, shadowy shots of Suzuki wailing in bed are the sounds of a temple bell tolling in the distance over the wind howling ferociously. The sounds of a dark and stormy night were first introduced to the *kaiki* genre in the work of director James Whale in *Frankenstein* and *The Old Dark House* (1932), and as in those pictures, in *Mandarin Duck Curtain* they act as an otherworldly harbinger, giving voice to the notion that dangerous cosmic forces are on the verge of being unleashed. The temple bell

underscores a popular religious dynamic, as Suzuki's transformation into a vengeful spirit plays into Buddhist conceptions of both karmic retribution and the unchecked *shūnen* or rage that affects her spirit. Thus the sound of the bell belongs to the traditional world of Edo period *kaidan*, even as it resonates with the modern transnational style of *kaiki eiga*, where Western church bells also toll on dark and stormy nights to warn of ghouls and vampires. Of the few surviving talkie *kaiki* films made in Japan before World War II, only *Mandarin Duck Curtain* makes such extensive use of sounds that would become horror movie clichés, although the Daiei ghost cat films made in the first half of the 1950s would make similar use of howling wind, driving rain, and crashing thunderstorm sound effects.

Mokudō continues to imply Suzuki's monstrous transformation via subtle means, having her hair become unkempt and disheveled (part of the iconography of vengeful wraiths and ghost cats) as a matter of course during her final struggle with the Noh mask murderers. Once Suzuki's character has been killed and the transformation is complete, the film still relies on low-key lighting and Expressionistic shadows to convey a sense of *kaiki* atmosphere around her spirit. Rather than have her ghost magically appear via a double-exposure effect, Mokudō merely under-lights Suzuki during the scene in which her ghost visits her younger sister, lending a sense of ambiguity as to whether she is truly dead, until she tells her sister that she is no longer of this world. The film does resort to the old double-exposure technique for the scenes in which Suzuki's ghost becomes a more invasive presence, haunting the wicked matron by appearing suddenly in her bedchamber. Like *The Cat of Arima*, an action-heavy, *chambara* style fight sequence

concludes the picture, but with the younger sister taking on the physical action, Suzuki's character is freed up to become the locus of the film's expressions of *kaiki* in the climax. In the most striking moment of the film, the matron's cronies are disposing of the body of yet another of their mistress's victims, when suddenly they all drop the corpse in horror. Mokudō then cuts to an empty shot, into which Suzuki suddenly flies up from the bottom of the frame in an extreme close-up, from the position of the dropped corpse. This quite effective "startle" moment would become a hallmark of *kaiki* and horror moviemaking conventions, and the shot in *Mandarin Duck Curtain* may well be the first of its kind in the genre's history. Like the protracted reveal of Suzuki's facial scar, this shot would be echoed in Nakagawa's *Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, as would the film's increasingly rapid cutting during the climax. In her final moments the matron seems to be haunted by the film itself, as Mokudō employs a series of swift cuts depicting both Suzuki's ghost and the *hannya* mask now worn by the sister, who finally stabs the matron to death. While Nakagawa's later film would feature a more extreme and experimental montage, it has a clear antecedent in Mokudō's work on *Mandarin Duck Curtain*.

Experimental cinematography is on even greater display in Ushihara's *Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen*, which employs a method of filming its monster unique in the history of the genre. Likely because of its director's reputation, more prints of this film survive than of Mokudō's work, and in 2011 it became only the second prewar Japanese *kaiki* film known to have publicly screened outside of Japan, after Mizoguchi Kenji's now lost version of the *Kasane's Swamp* legend, *Passion of a Female Teacher*

(*Kyōren no onna shisō*), was favorably received in France in 1926.²²⁴ While *Mysterious Shamisen* remains an obscure film little-seen both in Japan and abroad, its comparatively high profile vis-à-vis the two more conventional surviving Mokudō films has the potential to result in a somewhat skewed perception in regard to domestic prewar *kaiki eiga*. Unsurprisingly, Ushihara demonstrates far less interest in the emerging generic conventions of *kaiki* cinema than Mokudō. The screenplay by Hata Kenji – who scripted several of Shinkō’s *kaiki* films, including *The Cat of Arima* and *Mandarin Duck Curtain* – suggests some of the departures. Since the domestic *kaiki* boom got underway in early 1937 the various B-studios had by this time adapted most of the traditional ghost cat tales to the screen, and Hata crafted an original story for Ushihara’s film. The *kaiki* elements appear much earlier in the film’s runtime than in those based on Edo-period ghost stories, though they remain isolated segments in Hata’s screen treatment, which adheres to a revenge arc narrative typical of both *kaiki* and non-*kaiki jidai geki*. This time out Suzuki appears in the role of the villainess Mitsue, deviating from the established pattern of casting her in the role of the sympathetic monster. After she murders the pet cat of her lover, Seijuro, as well as a young rival for his affections named Okiyo, her victims’ two spirits become merged into a vaguely defined entity that alternately appears as a cat and as the ghost of her rival. The most significant appearance of this hybrid vengeful wraith/ghost cat occurs at the start of the second act, as the shamisen gifted to Okiyo by

²²⁴ *Mysterious Shamisen* has been shown at various film festivals in the United Kingdom since 2011, when an English-subtitled print was commissioned by Japanese film historian Jasper Sharp. Mizoguchi’s film was praised at the time of its release by *Kinema junpō* for “brimming with passion and power that exquisitely captured the lives of the lower Edo classes,” (全編に熱と力があふれ、下町情緒を描く手腕はすぐれている), but not surprisingly appears to have downplayed the *kaiki* elements. Kawabe Jūji discusses Mizoguchi’s film and its reception in *B-kyū kyoshōron: Nakagawa Nobuo kenkyū* (Tokyo: Shizukadō, 1983), 114; 123.

Seijuro passes through the hands of a variety of owners, all of whom are haunted by the ghost of Okiyo and/or the cat. Seeking a novel way of presenting his monster, Ushihara uses a kaleidoscope lens to alternately photograph the face of a stuffed cat and the face of actress Utagawa Kinue as Okiyo, creating a multifaceted image in which multiple visages swirl about the frame. As a consequence of this technique, virtually all of the footage of the ghost results in surreal, hallucinogenic point-of-view shots from the perspective of the character currently being haunted by the spirit, which suggests a more ambiguous reading of the ghost as potentially existing only in the mind of the character. Ushihara resorts to filming his ghost in a more conventional manner in only one scene, itself a convention of the genre by this point, in which Okiyo's spirit visits her younger sister, reveals the identity of her murderer, and begs to be avenged. Here the ghost can be seen cohabitating the same physical space of the scene as the human character, fading in via the familiar double-exposure technique. Although Okiyo's ghost imparts information it would be otherwise impossible for her sister to know, Ushihara pointedly concludes the scene by showing the sister rouse from sleep, implying the sequence was a dream and reinforcing the same ambiguity that his more experimental shots of the ghost create. The kaleidoscope effect returns with some modification in the climax, when Okiyo's sister conspires with Mitsue's now-jilted lover Seijuro to murder her onstage during her farewell performance with the theater troupe to which she and Seijuro belong. Now it is the haunted who appears in the center of the swirling multitude of ghostly visages, as Suzuki appears surrounded by infinite manifestations of her victims (both feline and human). In a montage even swifter and more delirious than the one which concludes

Mokudō's *Mandarin Duck Curtain*, Ushihara juxtaposes these shots with close-ups of the masked younger sister, disguised as a fellow performer portraying a monkey onstage and advancing upon Suzuki with dagger in hand, as well as with shots of Seijuro ever more intensely strumming the titular shamisen, which constitutes the sole musical accompaniment of the scene. As in the earlier scenes which employed the kaleidoscope effect, Ushihara never shows the ghost inhabiting the same physical space as the other characters, and the rapid montage adds to the impression that the ghost exists merely as a hallucination on the part of Suzuki's character.



Figure 16: Publicity still from *The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen* (*Kaibyō nazo no shamisen*, 1938) which showcases Suzuki Sumiko as well as the unique kaleidoscope technique used to portray the ghost cat. Such a shot that combines the ghost and the human characters in this fashion does not appear in the actual film.

All of this roots *Mysterious Shamisen* more firmly in what Tzvetan Todorov calls the “pure fantastic” mode of fiction typified by the work of Edgar Allan Poe, wherein the existence of supernatural forces remains thoroughly ambiguous, as opposed to the “pure marvelous” worlds more typical of Japanese *kaiki* films and exemplified in the late 1930s

by the work of Mokudō, which presents the monsters' existence as a matter of fact.²²⁵ Pure fantastic narratives allow for a psychological interpretation of *kaiki* phenomenon. The murderer in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" may be haunted by nothing more than a guilty conscience, and Roderick Usher in "The Fall of the House of Usher" not cursed but merely insane. Likewise, the semi-abstract kaleidoscope images of the ghost which swirl about Suzuki in the climax of *Mysterious Shamisen* lend themselves to being read as a manifestation of Mitsue's repressed guilt, or else an expression of the sister's and Seijuro's burning desire for revenge, as the shots are juxtaposed in montage with close-ups of their intense expressions as Seijuro strums the shamisen with mounting fervor. Since the Meiji Restoration this "pure fantastic" mode of *kaiki* had been the preferred model of many literary and social critics, conforming as it did to the Western ideal of the genre popularized by Poe (whose work was incredibly popular in Meiji Japan)²²⁶ and allowing readers to fancifully indulge in entertaining the possibility of supernatural forces while simultaneously disavowing an unquestioning belief in their existence. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Meiji government was insistent in dissuading any "backwards" traditional belief in the supernatural, to the extent that classic, "pure marvelous" *kaidan* were revised to present their *kaiki* incidents as psychological allegory. Sanyūtei Enhcō's late Edo tale *Kasane's Swamp* – which after *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* is the most often filmed *kaidan* narrative – was republished in

²²⁵ See Chapter 2, pg. 71 for a discussion of Todorov's categories of fantastic literature.

²²⁶ J. Scott Miller discussed Poe's popularity in Meiji Japan as part of his presentation "The Feline as Agent of Karmic Retribution: Poe's *Black Cat* in Japan," given at the annual conference of the American Comparative Literature Association held in Vancouver, Canada, March 31-April 3, 2011.

1888 under the title *Shinkei Kasane ga fuchi* or “The Neurosis of Kasane’s Swamp,” complete with a new tongue-in-cheek preface by the author explaining that stories which presented the unambiguous existence of ghosts were out of fashion.²²⁷ Figures like Yanagita Kunio having subsequently made it safe to tell the old stories in their original, pure marvelous modes under the mantle of cultural heritage, the movie versions that came in later decades most often reverted to a variation of Enchō’s original title, *Kaidan Kasane ga fuchi*.²²⁸ But Shinkō’s *Mysterious Shamisen*, with its obvious attempts to raise the artistic pedigree of the *kaiki* genre in the hiring of Ushihara, the film’s unique cinematography, and its atypically “pure fantastic” presentation of the material, reveals the lingering sentiment that such approaches carried more cultural sophistication.

That *Mysterious Shamisen* aspired to an even more narrative-driven evocation of *osore* than the typical genre fare that Mokudō (and presumably other *kaiki* directors of the day) were turning out can also be seen in the fact that the film features no spectacle of monstrous transformation built around a star persona. Genre star Suzuki Sumiko of course still receives top billing, and Shinkō’s marketing wing built the advertising campaign around her image, as they did for all of the *kaiki* films in which the “ghost cat actress” appeared. But here alone among Shinkō’s *kaiki* films does Suzuki forego the role of the monster. The film instead engages in an alternative, more highbrow showcase of spectacle in its protracted scenes of Suzuki performing kabuki theater, recalling similar interludes of traditional theater that disrupt the narrative flow in Mizoguchi’s works like

²²⁷ Figal, 27-28.

²²⁸ Enchō first performed the tale in 1859 as an oral *rakugo* under the title *A Latter-day Kaidan of Kasane’s Swamp* (*Kasane ga fuchi gojitsu kaidan*).

Osaka Elegy (*Naniwa eregi*, 1936) and *Ugestu* (1953). Stepping into the role of the monster usually occupied by Suzuki, Utagawa Kinue wears not even the restrained makeup her predecessor displays in *The Cat of Arima* or *Mandarin Duck Curtain*, and she undergoes no grotesque transformation onscreen. The ghost appears either as the cat, or as Utagawa, but never as the categorically interstitial were-cat of more typical ghost cat films, nor as the repellently disfigured wraith in the Oiwa tradition. Its sense of *kaiki* derives mainly from the film's Todorovian fantastic presentation, which allows for an interpretation of events as a manifestation of *osore* cosmic vengeance, even as it holds out a possible psychological interpretation of its unique *kaiki* imagery. Nakagawa Nobuo would perfect his own *kaiki* approach to filmmaking along similar lines twenty years later at Shintōhō, grounding his films more firmly in the traditional marvelous mode of *kaidan* while infusing the imagery with an allegorical level that made his monsters both literal and figurative symbols of fear and guilt.

The stigma that had built up around domestic *kaiki* cinema was perhaps insurmountable by this time, and the critics lamented that a talented director like Ushihara would stoop to make a ghost cat movie, regardless of the fact that here was a *bakeneko* film that did not feature Suzuki Sumiko running about performing *chambara* acrobatics in monster makeup.²²⁹ The same year Shinkō put another of its critical darling directors, Mori Kazuo, to work on *The Ghost Cat and the Red Wall*, which restored Suzuki to the role of the ghost cat, but was nonetheless expected to raise the prestige of the genre in the same way it was hoped *Mysterious Shamisen* might have done. The film

²²⁹ Shimura, "Kōgeki no kōzō: *Kaibyō nazo no samisen, Kyatto piiporu wo megutte*," *Eiga gaku* 16 (2002): 29.

was reasonably better received than Ushihara's,²³⁰ but forces external to the film industry insured this was not the beginning of a *kaiki* renaissance.

In 1939 Japan's increasingly fascist government instituted the Film Act (*Eigahō*), effectively drafting the studios into service of the propaganda machine. The film industry was now under the direct control of the Cabinet Propaganda Office (*Naikaku jōhōkyoku*), which instituted government censorship at the pre-production level, and began rationing film stock.²³¹ *Kaiki* pictures, along with other pure entertainment genres like the ninja films with which their history was so entwined, while not outright banned, were effectively forced out of production. Films that were already in the pipeline still sneaked out. During the week of *obon* in 1940 Suzuki Sumiko made her final appearance in a Shinkō *kaiki* film as the titular *Golden-Tailed Fox* (*Kinmō kitsune*), a role probably similar in many respects to her ghost cat performances, but once this last batch of *kaiki* pictures wrapped, the genre would vanish from Japanese cinema screens amid a decade of war and occupation.

Conclusion

The primordial domestic *kaiki* pictures of the early twentieth century had begun as trick films in the tradition of Georges Méliès, and if they belonged to any genre *per se*, it was the cinema of attractions, films whose purpose was to dazzle and amaze early cinema audiences with special effects unique to the medium, not chill them to the bone in the manner of the Edo *kaidan* ghost stories from which they were frequently adapted. This initially earned them a modicum of respect among the reformers of the Pure Film

²³⁰ Murakami Tadahisa, "Kaibyō akakabe Daimyōjin," *Kinema junpō*, January 14, 1939, 82.

²³¹ Standish, 142-143.

Movement, who otherwise disdained works adapted from traditional theater for not making proper use of techniques specific to the medium. In the early 1920s, as the novelty of trick photography began to wear off, the Japanese film industry began to universally embrace more so-called “cinematic” methods such as the close-up and the use of actresses in place of *oyama* female impersonators. The predominantly female monsters of traditional ghost stories were now portrayed onscreen by women, and the site of spectacle shifted from the special effects themselves to the body of the star actress, around whom they effected a monstrous transformation from Beauty into Beast. Popular screen vamps like Suzuki Sumiko, already Othered by their interstitial combination of feminine sex appeal and masculine physicality, found a literal expression of their fearsomeness in the onscreen mutation of the beautiful and virtuous heroine into the grotesque, facially disfigured vengeful wraiths and half-human, half-feline ghost cats. Fear, too, returned to the equation, as reviewers began to talk about the frightening aspects of the actresses’ performances (or else their failure to be effectively frightening), and as with their stage antecedents these *obake eiga* or “monster movies” began to be expected to scare audiences instead of merely dazzle them with trick photography. In the 1930s, the critical and commercial popularity of Hollywood horror movies brought an ever greater demand for pictures deemed truly frightening, as well as an awareness of Japan’s own *obake eiga* as existing within a global vernacular of popular genre filmmaking, the overarching label of which informally became *kaiki eiga*. Japanese *kaiki* films produced in the mid to late 1930s exhibit a partial assimilation of Hollywood horror style and techniques (themselves owing much in turn to German Expressionism) in a

vernacular modernism of horror cinema, innovating ways to capture a sense of *kaiki* and *osore* onscreen. That said, many prewar domestic *kaiki* films continued to differ markedly from their Hollywood counterparts in the narrative structure inherited from the Edo *kaidan*, often withholding the appearance of the monster until the final act and assigning it a secondary role in the act of karmic retribution. This, combined with the *tachimawari* action swordplay sequences inherited from its *chambara* cinematic cousin, could render the film structurally and tonally more similar to a non-*kaiki jidai geki* action picture than a Hollywood horror movie. When *kaiki* filmmaking resumed in earnest in the mid 1950s, the Shintōhō studio and director Nakagawa Nobuo would refine the genre along more uniformly horrific lines, bringing domestic *kaiki* cinema unprecedented critical acclaim and laying the groundwork for the eventual shift from *kaiki* to *horā*.

Chapter 4: The Dead Sleep Unwell – Wartime and Occupation Censorship, and the Postwar Return of *Kaiki*

Ring screenwriter Takahashi Hiroshi compares the presentation of the monstrous in many early postwar *kaiki* films to the *obake yashiki* or “spook house” rides common at Japanese amusement parks. Echoing his colleague Kurosawa Kiyoshi’s comments quoted in Chapter 2 about the primacy of mood and atmosphere, Takahashi believes the ideal *kaiki* films “have a psychological sense of value to them. They’re aesthetic things,” but goes on to suggest the “spook house” mode of *kaiki* film lacks a true sense of *osore*:

The way things like Oiwa are depicted in representative *kaidan* films like *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* – ghosts with swollen faces, hanging from the ceiling and appearing with a surprise – is a traditionally Japanese thing. They’re like carnival spook-house gimmicks that pop out at you, but they’ve been around a long time, and are also in kabuki . . . Actually, they’re not that frightening . . . What a lot of people call ‘scary’ (*kowai*) is really just a surprise or startle. It’s the same as a spook-house ride. The frightening feeling you get when you return home [late at night] and are alone in your room is a completely different thing.²³²

The “completely different thing” Takahashi describes is *osore*, the feelings of terror and dread that we find in Lovecraft’s cosmic fear and in Japanese *kaiki* films’ dramas of omnipotent karmic vengeance (the “psychological aesthetic thing”), but not in the momentary startles of the carnival spook-house ride. Moments of frightening spectacle have been a fundamental component of the *kaiki* genre ever since actresses’ grotesque

²³²“怪奇映画は確かに心理的な価値観がある。美学的なもの...東海道四谷怪談に代表される怪談映画で描かれているお岩のように、顔が腫れあがったり、天井に張り付いていたり、サブライズで現れる幽霊は、日本の伝統的な、例えばお化け屋敷とかのギミックで出てくるものなのだが、昔からああいうのはあるし、歌舞伎にもある...実はそんなに怖くはない...怪奇映画は確かに心からゾッとするような要素がなくても、十分に神秘的な世界を楽しめればそれで良いし、多くの人が怖いと呼んでいるものはサブライズだ。それはお化け屋敷と同じだ。家に帰って一人で部屋にいるのが怖いみたいな感覚とは全然違うもの。” Author’s interview with Takahashi Hiroshi.

portrayals of ghosts and monsters replaced trick photography as the main site of attraction in silent-era *kaidan* adaptations. While such spectacular moments litter early postwar *kaiki* films, the narrative themes of karmic vengeance often remain underdeveloped. In the case of the very few *kaiki* films made in Japan under the American Occupation, this was primarily an issue of censorship policies, which prohibited themes of revenge. When the genre returned in force following the end of the Occupation in 1952, paradigm shifts had occurred in the commercial Japanese film industry, which had resulted in the elimination of minor studios like Shinkō that relied on popular genre films for survival. Major studios like Daiei produced *kaiki* films as program pictures to fill out production slates in-between A-list projects. This resulted in an inattention to narrative detail that, like the Occupation-era censorship policies, diluted the themes of *osore* – Takahashi’s “psychological, aesthetic thing” – leaving only the spectacle of spook-house scares and accounting for the genre’s continued low critical repute into the postwar era.

Silencing the Dead: Wartime and Occupation Censorship

In the wake of the 1939 Film Act, the combination of the Cabinet Propaganda Office’s discouragement of “vulgar” subjects like spooks and monsters,²³³ along with a limited, government-rationed supply of film stock and the injunction that all studios must produce a quota of “national policy films” (*kokusaku eiga*) each month,²³⁴ effectively eradicated domestic production of *kaiki* films. Foreign *kaiki* pictures like the Universal horror movies also were subject to censorship, and exhibition of international films was severely

²³³ Kawabe, 115.

²³⁴ Standish, 143-144.

curtailed.²³⁵ With the outbreak of war with the United States in December 1941, Hollywood horror completely vanished from Japanese theaters. The nation's defeat and subsequent occupation by the Supreme Command of Allied Powers (SCAP) in 1945 might have been expected to prompt a return to the production of escapist entertainment like *kaiki* movies for the war-weary masses – and in part it did, with the MacArthur government actively seeking to purge the film industry of the nationalism and militarism that had permeated it under the wartime administration. In its effort to do so, however, SCAP instituted a censorship program of its own that was in some ways even stricter than its predecessor. *Kaiki* cinema was once again virtually banned from production, albeit for reasons utterly different from the wartime government's. In order to pass the Occupation censors, the very few examples of the genre that managed to make it to theaters in the years from 1945 to 1952 had to discard the thematic elements of karmic retribution that made them *kaiki* in the first place.

The Film Act was not the last measure the wartime government adopted to control the output of Japan's commercial film studios. Shortages of film stock due to the war effort, coupled with the desire to streamline the process of preproduction censorship, prompted the government in 1941 to demand the merger of the ten largest commercial studios into just two companies, and limiting their production to two films per month. Minor studios like Shinkō would, in effect, be swallowed up by the industry's two biggest players, Shōchiku and Tōhō, while the government's plan was to dissolve the

²³⁵ Ibid.

assets of third major, Nikkatsu, among the other two.²³⁶ Only Shōchiku, which came out of the proposed restructuring stronger than Tōhō, liked the plan. Shinkō head Nagata Masaichi presented an alternate, three-studio solution to the government's orders to consolidate the industry, which saw Shōchiku and Tōhō each absorb some of the minor studios in a fashion that put them on more equal footing. Shinkō notably was not one of the minors in question, but would instead merge with Nikkatsu and Daitō to form a new major studio. The government approved of Nagata's solution. Nikkatsu, owning a considerable stake in its own chain of theaters, agreed to surrender its production and distribution wings to Nagata on the condition that it could remain its own exhibition company. The result was the creation of Daiei, with Nagata at the helm.²³⁷ The head of a minor studio infamous for its disreputable *kaiki eiga* had maneuvered both himself and the Shinkō talent responsible for filling Japanese movie screens with vengeful ghosts and cat monsters into the position of a major studio comparable to Shōchiku and Tōhō in size and distribution power.

The actress and the director most responsible for the ghosts and monsters, however, did not join in this new era of Japanese film studio history. Suzuki Sumiko, the face of the *kaiki* genre, abruptly retired from film in 1941 to devote herself full-time to performing in live stage productions, appearing in many of the same roles (including ghost cats) she had played onscreen for Shinkō. The move reportedly infuriated Nagata, though Suzuki's decision was not a novel or unique one among *jidai geki* film stars of the

²³⁶ Anderson and Richie, 142.

²³⁷ Ibid., 143-144.

time. With *chambara* and *kaiki* films no longer being produced, many actors who built their fame on playing ninjas and ghost cats found live theater a way to circumvent the government's suppression of these genres onscreen. After the end of the war Suzuki continued to appear onstage in her trademark ghost cat roles, and at the height of the postwar *kaiki* craze, made a momentary return to cinema screens in Tōei's *The Ghost Cat and the Clockwork Ceiling* (*Kaibyō karakuri tenjo*, 1958). *Kaiki*'s chief creative talent behind the camera, Mokudō Shigeru, also left Shinkō in 1941 and retired from directing. His last work for the studio was a production of *Momijigari*, whose maple-tree demoness had been featured in Shibata Tsunekichi's pioneering 1899 film. Thus the industry's attempts to return to *kaiki* filmmaking after the war ended in 1945 would represent something of a fresh start, bereft of the duo that arguably had defined the genre in terms of domestic production and brought it to its first flowering of maturity.

It might be more accurate to call these initial efforts a “false start” rather than a “fresh start” in light of the obstacles the Occupation's own film censorship program presented for *jidai geki* productions. Into the place of the wartime Cabinet Propaganda Office stepped the Civil Information and Education Section (CIE) which, seeking to undo the work of its predecessor, maintained much of its practice. Films initially continued to be subject to censorship at the preproduction level, with the CIE examining screenplays and demanding rewrites of anything that smacked of militarism or feudal loyalty in the eyes of the American occupiers.²³⁸ In November 1945 – just two months after Japan's surrender – the MacArthur government issued a list of thirteen themes that would not

²³⁸ Anderson and Richie, 162.

pass censorship and result in the film being confiscated. Number two, “showing revenge as a legitimate motive,”²³⁹ guaranteed that the archetypal Edo *kaidan* narrative – which was all about the bloody, wrathful vengeance of sympathetic monsters from the grave against those who had defeated them in life – would not pass the censors. This presented a crisis not only for any return to *kaiki* filmmaking, but for many of the most popular *jidai geki* subjects like *Chūshingura*, the famous tale of the loyal 47 *rōnin* who sacrifice their own lives to avenge the death of their master. The most oft-filmed story in Japanese cinema history, screen versions of *Chūshingura* had continued to appear with the Cabinet Propaganda Office’s blessing during the war years, unlike its sister-narrative, *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, which takes place in the same fictionalized world as the 47 *rōnin* and features some of the same characters.²⁴⁰ But now not only the “vulgar” *jidai geki* projects like ninja and *kaiki* films faced censorship. Film histories sometimes erroneously state that the CIE forbade the production of *jidai geki* outright, despite obvious exceptions like Kurosawa Akira’s *Rashōmon*, which won the first-ever Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1950. But any filmmaker wishing to make a traditional *jidai geki* picture had to traverse a mine field of possible censorship, and not surprisingly, most chose not to even try, sticking to *gendai geki* projects that promoted the Occupation’s stated “desirable subjects” such as “showing Japanese in all walks of life co-operating to build a peaceful nation” and “promoting tolerance and respect among all races and

²³⁹ Standish, 156-157.

²⁴⁰ Tsuruya Nanboku’s kabuki version of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*) was conceived as a side-story to *Chūshingura*, with Oiwa’s husband Iemon being the would-be 48th *rōnin* who instead throws his lot in with their lord’s enemies. His eventual slayer, Yomoshichi, is one of the loyal 47. *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* was originally performed in 1825 over the course of two evenings on a double bill with *Chūshingura*.

classes.”²⁴¹ This new, peaceful Japan where democracy and the rule of law would always prevail held no room for vengeful ghosts of the past like Oiwa, though a few filmmakers would brave the attempt to resurrect the spirits of *kaiki eiga* during the Occupation years.

The first was Kinoshita Keisuke, the director who would become internationally renowned for films like *A Japanese Tragedy* (*Nihon no higeki*, 1953) and *Twenty-four Eyes* (*Nijūshi no hitomi*, 1954), which depicted the terrible cost of the war and its aftermath on everyday Japanese. It might have been felt that if anyone could get a *kaiki* picture past the CIE censors, it was the great humanist Kinoshita, who had managed even to subtly critique the war effort in his 1944 national policy picture *The Army* (*Rikugun*).²⁴² In 1949 Shōchiku got approval to release his two-part *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya: A New Interpretation* (*Shinshaku Yotsuya kaidan*). Shōchiku and Kinoshita only got the film made, however, by virtually eliminating the *kaiki* elements. In Kinoshita’s version of the famous ghost story, Oiwa’s spirit makes only the briefest of appearances in fleeting, point-of-view shots from her husband/killer Iemon’s perspective, constituting less than a minute of screen time in a two-part picture that runs almost two-and-a-half hours. The film compensates in small part by including two “dark and stormy night” sequences full of howling wind, driving rain, thunder crashes and lightening flashes. Such scenes were by now established tropes of both foreign and domestic *kaiki* pictures thanks to the work of James Whale and Mokudō Shigeru, and as in their films, here Kinoshita uses the motif to suggest omnipotent, cosmic forces of *osore* arrayed against

²⁴¹ Standish, 155-156.

²⁴² Ibid., 144-145. Standish describes how the final sequence of the film depicts actress Tanaka Kinuyo as a mother desperately trying to catch a final glimpse of her son as he marches off to war – which by 1944 was a likely death sentence.

the human characters. Kinoshita also retains some of the original story's sense of inevitable karmic comeuppance by depicting the uncanny recurrence of Oiwa's facial scar afflicting other characters such as her sister Osode, Iemon's new bride Oume, and finally Iemon himself.

All of this works to suggest that Iemon's ultimate demise is divine karmic justice, but in order to prevent his death from being depicted as karmic *vengeance* (which would not pass CIE censorship), the desire for his punishment cannot be given expression in the persona of Oiwa's wrathful ghost. Being the oldest extant *Yotsuya* film, it is impossible to say how Kinoshita's version compares to what had come before, but actor Uehara Ken portrays Iemon as a far more remorseful figure than any subsequent performer would onscreen. Badgered by the truly villainous Naosuke into poisoning his wife, Uehara's Iemon regrets the decision almost instantly, and spends the remainder of the film plagued with guilt, making the split-second, point-of-view appearances of Oiwa's ghost easily read by the audience as a hallucinatory manifestation of Iemon's tormented conscience.²⁴³ This recalls Ushihara Kiyohiko's use of point-of-view shots in *The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen* to suggest an ambiguous interpretation of the ghost, but unlike Suzuki Sumiko's poker-faced Mitsue, Uehara's Iemon vocally expresses his sense of guilt to the point of raving madness, which more unequivocally implies Oiwa's ghost is a mere psychological hallucination. Other directors like Nakagawa Nobuo who would subsequently tackle the *Yotsuya* legend would follow Kinoshita's lead in using Oiwa's ghost in part as an externalized symbol of Iemon's internal guilt, but would also retain a

²⁴³ Both Gregory Barrett and Yokoyama Yasuko argue for this interpretation. See Barrett, *Archetypes in Japanese Film*, 99-100, and Yokoyama, "Yotsuya kaidan no Oiwa-tachi," 156.

sense of her as a character in her own right, with the omnipotent agency to exact revenge on her husband/murderer. Oiwa typically voices her *onnen* – the uncontainable rage that gives birth to her vengeful spirit – in plain terms to Iemon. Nakagawa’s 1959 version adapts original lines from Nanboku’s 1825 kabuki script such as “I will visit my hatred upon you - be sure of that!” and “I will make an end to the blood of the Tamiya line!”²⁴⁴ Only in Kinoshita’s film does Oiwa’s ghost remain utterly silent. In her momentary appearances she gazes impassively at Iemon, without even so much as a look of anger or judgment on her face. Robbing Oiwa’s ghost of her voice divests the narrative of any personal, vindictive dimension to Iemon’s karmic punishment, but it also robs *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* of much of its *kaiki* potency, as no fearsome monster drives the machine of fate toward its inevitable, horrible end. Without the theme of Oiwa’s grave-transcending hatred there is no act of revenge to upset the censors, but neither is there any sense of *osore*. Critics have remarked that, as a result, *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya: A New Interpretation* works as one of Kinoshita Keisuke’s humanist tragedies, but fails to satisfy as a *kaiki eiga*.²⁴⁵

The film’s reveal of Oiwa’s disfigured face – an iconic moment in the *Yotsuya kaidan* legend – best illustrates the way in which Kinoshita trades *kaiki* and otherworldly horror for human tragedy. As Mokudō did in *The Ghost Story of the Mandarin Duck Curtain*, and Nakagawa would do in his own version of *Yotsuya*, Kinoshita withholds the reveal as long as possible, creating suspense by having another character react in horror

²⁴⁴ この恨み、必ずはらしますぞ...民谷の血筋絶やさでおくものか.

²⁴⁵ Yokoyama, 156-157.

to Oiwa's appearance while obscuring her face from the camera.²⁴⁶ The musical accompaniment, however, is not ominous as it is in more typical *kaiki* film, but melancholic and wistful, emphasizing tragedy over horror or *osore*. Mokudō and Nakagawa both finally reveal the ghastly disfigurement in point-of-view shots that replicate the woman's own horrified, initial glimpse of herself in the mirror. Kinoshita, meanwhile, first shows us Oiwa's disfigured face in a shot that replicates Iemon's point of view, underlining the sense of guilt and remorse he feels over his misdeed, rather than Oiwa's own sense of shocked horror, which triggers her need for revenge. Kinoshita as a director seems to have been little interested in themes of vengeance regardless of censorship policies, and he seizes upon the element of the original story – the tragic breakdown of the family unit – that both complements his own recurring themes as a filmmaker and would appease the censors' desire for films that promoted social harmony. Accordingly, Kinoshita's *New Interpretation* concludes not with Oiwa's ghost completing a vendetta against the husband who betrayed her, but with her sister Osode and her husband Yomoshichi happily awaiting the birth of a child, reaffirming both Kinoshita's and the CIE's notion of the ideal family unit that Iemon had cast aside.

One month after *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya: A New Interpretation* premiered during the *obon* season of 1949, director Watanabe Kunio's *Legend of the Nabeshima Ghost Cat (Nabeshima kaibyōden)* also passed CIE censorship and made it to cinema screens. Unlike Kinoshita, Watanabe had been labeled a C-class war criminal by SCAP

²⁴⁶ It should be noted that Nanboku's original stage directions also call for this delayed reveal, and although it is impossible to say with any certainty, at least some of the prewar film versions of the *Yotsuya* story likely also incorporated such a setup.

for his participation in national policy filmmaking in Manchuria.²⁴⁷ This made his production of the Nabeshima ghost cat legend – a feudalistic tale of revenge if there ever was one, in which the titular monster wreaks its vengeance on the hotheaded *daimyō* who murdered its master over a game of *go* – all the more remarkable. The film was made at a relatively new studio, Shintōhō (or “New Tōhō”), founded in 1947 by defectors from Tōhō following a series of violent strikes. By the mid-1950s Shintōhō would become Japan’s “grindhouse” studio, devoted to the production of B-genres like *kaiki eiga*, but in its formative years its aim was the production of quality cinema at a studio by and for artists.²⁴⁸ Like *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya: A New Interpretation*, Watanabe’s *Legend of the Nabeshima Ghost Cat* focuses more on the human drama than on *kaiki to senritsu* thrills-and-chills, and while this represents Shōchiku and Shintōhō’s interest in refined cinema over genre formula, it also was an unavoidable consequence of Occupation censorship.

As in Kinoshita’s revamped version of *Yotsuya*, Watanabe’s film weights the interpretation of the *kaiki* elements toward a purely psychological symbol of guilt, rather than the wrath of cosmic forces. *The Legend of the Nabeshima Ghost Cat*, like Kinoshita’s film, features a totally silent ghost that appears exclusively in very brief, subjective point-of-view shots, and once again silencing the ghost effaces any overtly expressed theme of revenge from the narrative. Only the wicked lord of Nabeshima and his crony, Hanzaemon, ever see the ghost of the murdered *go* player, Mata-ichirō. There is no scene equivalent to the ones in the *kaiki* work of Mokudō Shigeru or Ushihara’s

²⁴⁷ Anderson and Richie, 164.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 164-168.

Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen in which the ghost appears to a loved one to reveal the crime and plead for vengeance. Other versions of the *Nabeshima* story typically include multiple monsters, not only the vengeful spirit of the murdered *go* player but a ghost cat that acts on behalf of his entire family, who all subsequently fall victim to the cruelty of the Nabeshima lord. Watanabe's version includes ample talk of "ghost cat rumors" (*bakeneko uwasa*) among the townsfolk who live in the shadow of Nabeshima Castle, but the creature never makes an appearance in any form save as a small, real kitten – hardly the stuff of *kaiki*. Of course, had the title monster actually appeared in the film as a full-fledged werecat *a la* Suzuki Sumiko, its presence would signal karmic vengeance incarnate. The climax of *The Legend of the Nabeshima Ghost Cat*, accordingly, includes no ghost cat at all, and only a single brief shot of Mata-ichirō's ghost holding the black kitten before the police invade the castle to subdue the lord and Hanzaemon. Truth and Justice prevail in place of vengeance from beyond the grave, which no doubt pleased the purveyors of the American Way in the CIE.

Daiei and the Return of the Ghost Cats

Daiei tried an alternative workaround to the problem of producing *kaiki* films under the American Occupation by turning to the *shinpi* or "mystery" genre, which at least as far back as Universal's *The Cat and the Canary* in 1927 had shared an often blurry boundary with *kaiki* in Japan.²⁴⁹ Nagata's new studio was the undisputed king of the period film in the few years it existed prior to the end of the war, comprised of the *jidai geki* talent of

²⁴⁹ It will be recalled from Chapter 1 that *The Cat and the Canary* not only wielded a huge influence on the creation of the Hollywood horror genre, but was marketed in Japan as being adapted from "the great *kaiki* stage show."

Shinkō, Daitō, and Nikkatsu. But rather than try and squeeze the feudal worlds of samurai and ghost cats past the censors like Kinoshita and Watanabe did at Shōchiku and Shintōhō, Daiei opted to switch focus to production of *gendai geki*. To satisfy the market for *kaiki*, this meant looking not to the Edo period *kaidan* ghost stories that traditionally formed the backbone of domestic *kaiki* production, but to the then-popular *shinpi shōsetsu* or “mystery novels,” which often featured horribly disfigured murderers, or else criminals posing as ghosts and monsters – a trope established by haunted house whodunits like *The Cat and the Canary* that had long been associated with the *kaiki* genre.²⁵⁰ Human criminals without the cosmic license of *osore* and karmic retribution on their side invited the audience’s revulsion without the attendant sense of awe inspired by true monsters like the sympathetic Oiwa and the ghost cat, and the Japanese filmgoers and the CIE could agree on their unequivocal condemnation when they are brought to justice at the conclusion of the picture. Daiei’s Occupation era *shinpi eiga* like *Ghost Train* (*Yūrei bessha*, 1949) and *The Iron Claw* (*Tetsu no tsume*, 1951) always conclude with a rational explanation for the *kaiki* goings-on, but as Uchiyama Kazuki notes, the pictures overall emphasized the horrific and *kaiki*-inflected elements over detective-work and mystery. For example, Nakagawa Nobuo’s postwar *shinpi-kaiki* hybrid, *The Vampire Moth* (*Kyūketsuki ga*, 1956), adapts one of mystery novelist Yokomizo Sieshi’s “Kindaichi Kōsuke” stories, the Japanese equivalent of Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe. *Vampire Moth*, however, only introduces Detective Kindaichi halfway into the picture’s

²⁵⁰ Discussing the relationship between mystery stories and fantastic narratives, Tzvetan Todorov says, “The murder mystery approaches the fantastic, but it is also the contrary of the fantastic: in fantastic texts, we tend to prefer the supernatural explanation [for the mysterious events]; the detective story, once it is over, leaves no doubt as to the absence of supernatural events.” *The Fantastic*, 49-50.

runtime, and instead of his dogged detective work mainly follows the point-of-view of the title “monster’s” terrified – and clueless – female victims, whom he stalks in shadowy corridors, foggy graveyards, and gothic mansions. The elaborate makeup and special effects employed to create the “fake monsters” and malformed criminals – much of it done by special effects wizard Tsuburaya Eiji, famous for his work on Tōhō’s *Godzilla* series – also invited comparisons to the makeup-heavy Universal horror pictures.²⁵¹ The focus on the “monster” and the other characters’ horrified reactions to it rather than the process leading to its eventual unmasking aligns such films more closely to Tzvetan Todorov’s conception of the fantastic rather than his definition of the mystery genre. Commenting on the similarities and differences of the horror story and the murder mystery, Todorov writes, “the emphasis differs in the two genres: in the detective story, the emphasis is placed on the *solution* to the mystery; in the texts linked to the uncanny (as in the fantastic narrative), the emphasis is on the *reactions* which this mystery provokes.”²⁵² Genuine ghosts and monsters would return to Japan movie screens following the end of the Occupation in 1952, but modern-day *shinpi-kaiki* hybrids like Nakagawa’s *Vampire Moth* also continued to appear, and the Shintōhō studio would throw a third genre into the mix – the skin flick – with the epically titled *Diving Girls in a Haunted House* (*Ama no bakemono yashiki*, 1959). Although today’s *kaiki* film authorities like Takahashi Hiroshi, Izumi Toshiyuki, and the editors of the book *An Invitation to Japanese Horror Film* hesitate to include these pictures in their definitions

²⁵¹ Uchiyama, 15-16.

²⁵² Todorov, 50 (emphasis added).

of *kaiki*, the Occupation era advertising reveals that, at the time, they were intended to fill the demand for *kaiki* created by the CIE censorship policies: the poster for *The Iron Claw* explicitly calls it one of “Daiei’s unique *kaiki eiga*.”²⁵³



Figure 17: Poster for the Occupation era film *The Iron Claw* (*Tetsu no tsume*, 1951). Despite no “real” monsters or themes of cosmic *osore*, the poster advertises it as one of “Daiei’s unique *kaiki eiga*.”

When the Occupation ended in 1952 and sovereignty was once again officially in Japanese hands, Nagata wasted no time in getting Daiei back into the business of more traditional *kaiki* film production that had been the hallmark of the studio’s prior incarnation, Shinkō. Once more Japanese cinema screens would be filled with monsters like the ghost cat and vengeful spirit that explicitly operated as agents of karmic retribution, potentially restoring the themes of *osore* which lent weight to their

²⁵³ “大映異色怪奇映画.”

spectacular imagery. Unlike its predecessor studio, however, Daiei was able to compete head-on with Shōchiku and Tōhō in the production of prestige pictures, and after the Daiei-produced *Rashōmon* won the American Academy Award in 1950, Nagata set the studio on a two-pronged course of production. On one side were high profile, A-list pictures designed to win awards at foreign film festivals, and on the other were B-list “program pictures” (*puroguramu pikuchua*), which could be dashed-off between prestige projects – sometimes using leftover sets and costumes from the A-pictures – and filled the domestic demand for popular genre pictures.²⁵⁴ As a result, Daiei’s post-Occupation *kaiki* films demonstrate less concern with innovation than Shinkō pictures like *The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen* or *The Ghost Cat and the Red Wall*, which employed acclaimed directors and experimental filmmaking techniques in an effort to elevate the genre in the eyes of the critics. Instead, Daiei sought to simply replicate the old, profitable Shinkō formula. Most prominent among its first efforts to do so were direct remakes of two Shinkō ghost cat films: *The Ghost Story of Saga Mansion* (*Kaidan Saga yashiki*, 1953), which was a reworking of Shinkō’s first *kaiki* hit, *The Legend of the Saga Ghost Cat*, and *The Ghost Cat of Arima Palace*, a new version of *The Cat of Arima*. But to recapture the prewar ghost cat successes, the most visible and bankable component of the formula – Suzuki Sumiko – would first have to be replaced.

Irie Takako, recently arrived at Daiei following her departure from Tōhō due to illness, was drafted to step into Suzuki Sumiko’s paws. Like her predecessor, Irie’s subsequent status as a “ghost cat actress” completely overshadowed her earlier career. Unlike Suzuki, Irie was never known as a vamp, but had been one of Japanese cinema’s

²⁵⁴ Anderson and Richie, 228.

most popular leading ladies in *gendai geki* contemporary dramas of the prewar era. Forty-two years old in 1953, she was also a decade older than Suzuki had been when she became typecast as a “ghost cat actress.” Perhaps in part because of these factors, Irie’s performances as the ghost cat do not hinge as much on the ambiguity of monstrous sex appeal. Suzuki’s limited makeup in *The Cat of Arima* let the vamp’s large, coquettish eyes shine through the feline façade, the monstrosity conveyed primarily through the actress’s performance. Irie’s portrayals usually relied more on the makeup itself, which was more generously applied to the older woman’s features. Heavy lines around the mouth and eyes, prosthetic cat ears, and masculine fur-covered forearms almost completely obscure any traces of the actress’s femininity. While the 1953 films *The Ghost Story of Saga Mansion* and *The Ghost Cat of Arima Palace* adhere to the convention of showing Irie as a beautiful maiden prior to her monstrous transformation, the metamorphoses are more complete and spectacular than Suzuki’s vampish ghost cat. In a masterful shot from *The Ghost Story of Saga Mansion*, Irie morphs from her normal human appearance to the grotesque cat creature in a single, unbroken take that lasts thirty seconds in duration, achieved via subtle lighting effects that disguise her makeup for the first half of the shot. On posters and advertising, however, potential audiences usually only saw the ghastly visage of Irie in her monstrous persona. The sense of beauty-into-beast spectacle surrounding a once-popular silver screen starlet still undoubtedly remained the films’ main selling point, but even more so than Suzuki’s prewar pictures that spectacle became extra-textual, relying on the audience’s memories of Irie from two decades ago.



Figure 18: Irie Takako applying her makeup for *The Ghost Story of Saga Mansion (Kaidan Saga yashiki, 1953)*.



Figure 19: The poster for *The Ghost Cat of Okazaki (Kaibyō Okazaki sōdō, 1954)* puts Irie's monstrous makeup on grotesque display.

The Daiei ghost cat films relied a little *too* much on the audience's memories, for as the series progressed, the conventions and iconography of the archetypal ghost cat

legend continued to appear, but not always accompanied by narrative explanations for them. Postwar audiences, not as familiar with the old kabuki stories as previous generations, questioned why some of the pictures were even about cats in the first place,²⁵⁵ and indeed some of Daiei's *kaiki* films such as *The Ghost Cat at Ōma Crossing* (*Kaibyō Ōma ga tsuji*, 1954) and *The Ghost Cat of Yonaki Swamp* (*Kaibyō Yonaki numa*, 1957) are simply *kaidan* tales of vengeful ghosts who inexplicably sport cat ears and perform *neko jarashi* feline pantomimes. Shimura Miyoko observes the tacked-on feeling of the cat motif in these pictures actually preserves the ad-hoc approach to the ghostly and fantastic that characterized the kabuki and *kōdan* oral storytelling formats from which the films were descended.²⁵⁶ Nonetheless, Daiei's first two ghost cat pictures, perhaps influenced by the Hollywood preference for tight continuity, carefully foreshadow the presence of the cat monster, establishing the pet cat of the murder victim early in the picture and including the crucial shot of the animal imbibing the blood of its master, which enables it to assume its half-human monstrous form. Later entries in the series assumed the audience knew the formula well enough and, as in *Ghost Cat at Ōma Crossing*, barely acknowledge the pet cat and omit the blood-lapping scene. Irie's makeup in *Ōma Crossing* looks more like the ghost of Oiwa than her prior ghost cat appearances (indeed other characters in the film comment on the resemblance between Irie's character and "Oiwa-sama"); yet her appearances are heralded by the mewling of a cat, and she faithfully performs the *neko jarashi* on one of the villains during the climax.

²⁵⁵ See Tada Michitarō's review of *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, quoted on page 174.

²⁵⁶ Shimura, "'Misemono' kara 'eiga' e," 14.

The narrative ellipses evidentially led to confusion among casual viewers of the *kaiki* genre. In his review of the Shintōhō studio's 1958 *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* – which re-established the narrative connection between cat and ghost-cat – critic Tada Michitarō happily remarked that he had seen several ghost cat movies, but until viewing *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* had never understood why a vengeful spirit would take the form of a werecat.²⁵⁷ Yet even in Daiei's first ghost cat outings, *The Legend of the Saga Ghost Cat* and *The Ghost Cat of Arima Palace*, the real biological cat and the human actress portraying the *bakeneko* it becomes serve two distinct and somewhat dislocated functions. As Shimura explains, the symbolic role of the cat-turned-*bakeneko* can be divided into two phases:

‘Phase One’ is the *neko* (cat), which symbolizes loyalty [to its murdered master] . . . ‘Phase Two’ is the *bake-neko* (ghost-cat), which symbolizes revenge. The *bakeneko* film's story develops from Phase One to Phase Two, with the great feelings of loyalty in the *neko* giving rise to the vengeful behavior of the *bakeneko* . . . [but]there is no onscreen transformation of the *neko* into a *bakeneko*, as in a werewolf movie, and thus the two have an onscreen presence independent of each other. Additionally, conventional *bakeneko* films that emphasize the actress [Suzuki Sumiko or Irie Takako] place a much greater emphasis on Phase Two. The loyal relationship of Phase One is there merely to foreshadow the later appearance of the *bakeneko* actress.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷“私は怪猫映画なるものを見たが、どうして怨霊が猫に化身するのか分からなかった。この映画をみて合点したのだ,” Tada Michitarō, “*Bōrei kaibyō yashiki*,” *Kinema junpō*, September 1, 1958, 75.

²⁵⁸“①猫 . . . 忠義...②化猫 . . . 復讐（憑依、仇討ち行為）。怪猫映画とは①を経て②が展開していく物語であり、猫の忠義の気持ちが高じて復讐行為に発展する...また、猫から「化猫」に変化する様子は、狼人間のように克明にその変化の様子が描かれることもなく、①と②は互いに独立して画面上に表象される関係にある。そして、化猫女優を重視する従来の怪猫映画は②に主眼が置かれている。したがって、①は飼い主との主従関係を説明し、その後の化猫女優の登場を暗示する役割にすぎなかった。” Shimura, “‘Misemono’ kara ‘eiga’ e,” 15.

In other words, the filmmakers treated the narrative of the actress-driven ghost cat vehicle as negligible compared to the spectacle of Suzuki Sumiko or Irie Takako prancing around in feline makeup. In the case of the Daiei films this privileging of performance over the script clearly reflects their status as program pictures produced quickly between prestige projects. It also, as Shimura would remind us, remains in line with theatrical performances of previous eras, in which the story was merely a shaky skeleton upon which to showcase the actors' craft.

The emphasis on spectacle over tight narrative cohesion went beyond the physical appearance of Irie Takako, as the Daiei *kaiki* pictures gradually became more and more crowded with ghosts and ghouls that would pop out at the unwitting human characters in set pieces which Takahashi Hiroshi compares to the *obake yashiki* or “spook-house” rides at Japanese amusement parks. Director Katō Bin's trio of ghost cat pictures for Daiei, *The Ghost Cat of Okazaki* (*Kaibyō Okazaki sōdō*, 1954), *The Ghost Cat at Ōma Crossing*, and *The Ghost Cat of the 53 Way Stations* (*Kaibyō gojūsan tsugi*, 1956), best exemplifies this spook-house approach to *kaiki* filmmaking. Katō's first *kaiki* film for Daiei, *The Ghost Cat of Okazaki*, opens *in media res* to give the audience a momentary glimpse of Irie already transformed into the ghost cat before flashing back to tell the film's story in a more conventional order. The establishing matte-painting shot of Okazaki Castle atop a hill in the gloom of night evokes affinities with Hollywood *kaiki* films – notably *Frankenstein*²⁵⁹ – but the subsequent shot replicates the effect of riding a car through a carnival spook house. Katō employs a point-of-view tracking shot gliding straight-ahead

²⁵⁹ See Figure 6 in Chapter 2, page 52.

through the halls of Okazaki Castle, although the film has yet to introduce any characters to which the point-of-view might be identifiably attached in the audience's imagination. In effect the audience itself is the one traveling through the haunted castle, and the camera conveniently comes to a halt right in front of a wall that begins to crumble on cue. Irie flies out from behind the wall in full ghost cat regalia accompanied by a swell of music until her grotesquely painted visage fills the frame – and the audience ideally squeals in pleasurable terror.

Perhaps because director Arai Ryōhei's attempt at innovative *kaiki* special effects to depict Irie Takako's still-living decapitated head flying through space in the previous year's *The Ghost Cat of Arima Palace* had been met with such derision,²⁶⁰ Katō's *kaiki* efforts stick to comparatively simple fun-house setups like the opening of *Okazaki*. Katō has Irie glide out from behind shōji curtains while his frightened human characters are looking the opposite direction, then turn in time to see the ghost cat standing over them and shriek in terror. In one effective shot from *Okazaki*, the camera tracks left to follow a fear-stricken actress as she creeps backwards along a castle wall until she bumps right into the form of Irie standing still where she had been waiting out of frame. The director's favorite trick, however, involved nothing more elaborate than to position his ghosts behind a closed door, which would slide open of its own accord at the moment the monster's victim approaches. Variations on the technique appear in *The Ghost Cat at Ōma Crossing*, such as a scene in which Irie hangs concealed in the branches of a tree until her murderer walks under the boughs and she descends floating on wires to startle

²⁶⁰ *Kinema junpō*'s damning review of *The Ghost Cat of Arima Palace* quoted in Chapter 2 specifically mentions the effect when it proclaims the film more likely to make the children in the audience howl with laughter before it would frighten anyone.

him. All of this is not to say that Katō's *kaiki* films did not make use of other established tropes of the genre like double-exposure, thunderstorm sound and lighting effects, and the *neko jarashi*; nor that the spook-house startle moments which feature in his work fail to produce the desired effect. But more so than Arai Ryōhei's earlier ghost cat efforts for Daiei and Suzuki Sumiko's surviving prewar work, Katō's films perpetuate the lingering notion that domestic *kaiki* films prior to the work of Nakagawa Nobuo were little more than amusement park spook-house rides transferred to the silver screen.



Figure 20: *Obake yashiki* (“spook-house”) scares in *The Ghost Cat of Okazaki*.

Herein lays the problem with the later Daiei ghost cat films' inattention to narrative detail. Emphasizing the startling moment over the themes of cosmic vengeance dilutes the power of the work in much the same way the Occupation censorship of those same themes had done. Unlike Kinoshita's and Watanabe's muted monsters, Irie was free to express her cosmic rage vocally; but even though her presence is undeniably portrayed as no mere guilt-induced hallucination,²⁶¹ Irie's performances as the ghost cat were still largely silent. Omitting the themes of loyalty in the pet cat that enable the act of cosmic

²⁶¹ As in the prewar Suzuki Sumiko films, Irie's *bakeneko* inflicts bodily harm and engages in *tachimawari* fights with hordes of samurai, marking her as physically existing the films' diegesis.

revenge by neglecting to establish the blood-lapping motif further robs the text of its *kaiki* potency. The Daiei films frequently succeed in crafting startling spook-house moments, but – to paraphrase Takahashi’s comments quoted at the beginning of this chapter – they do not follow you home from the theater to your empty room at night.

Blurring and Redrawing the Boundaries – Tōei’s “Chinese-style Romances,” Atomic Age Science Fiction, and Hammer Horror

At the same time Daiei was producing their annual spook-house mode of *kaiki* pictures, additional developments both in Japan and abroad contributed to a moment of existential crisis in the critical imagination regarding the boundaries of the genre. Studios like Shōchiku and the newly formed Tōei began to experiment with blending the domestic *kaiki* film with elements from other genres like comedy and romance. While Rick Altman reminds us that the blending of motifs from supposedly disparate genres is nothing new,²⁶² critics felt that comedy and romance were antithetical to the narrative themes of *osore* which defined the ideal *kaiki* film. However, Japanese critics seemed willing to embrace the blurring of the boundaries between horror and science fiction that was occurring in 1950s Hollywood cinema. By 1957 critics like Satō Tadao were proclaiming science fiction to be the future of the *kaiki* genre. The same year, however, the release of the British Hammer Films’ *The Curse of Frankenstein* would re-assert the original conception of *kaiki* cinema as belonging to what might be termed the gothic mode of horror filmmaking.

The Daiei ghost cat films lacked attention to narrative detail that undermined the themes of *osore* that the feline monsters represented, but another place where the absence

²⁶² Altman, 18-19.

of *osore* was keenly felt was in the recently formed Tōei Studio's initial forays into the *kaiki* genre. Created in 1949 and occupying the former facilities of Shinkō, Tōei also occupied the place in the Japanese film industry that Shinkō had partially vacated upon becoming Daiei – home of the B-grade *jidai geki*. Tōei even employed much of Shinkō's prewar talent, and by the middle of the decade was "making money hand over fist" with *jidai geki* double bills.²⁶³ This reasonably would lead one to suppose that Tōei's *kaiki* films might be truer successors to the Shinkō spirit than Daiei's ghost cat pictures. Tōei eventually would produce some of the more horrific latter-day *kaiki* films in the 1960s, but their earliest efforts in the genre tended to resemble the occasional Shōchiku romantic *kaidan* production like Tanaka Kinuyo's appearance in the 1937 *Dish Mansion at Banchō* more than anything else. Although Tōei films like the ghost cat spoof *The Ghost Cat and the Chicken* (*Kaibyō koshinuke daisōdō*, 1954) clearly respond to Daiei's series, more typical entries in the studio's 1950s *kaiki* output include a version of *The Peony Lantern* (1955) which emphasizes the ghostly romance between the hero and his departed lover and discards the gruesome consequences of a man copulating with a corpse that feature prominently in the original version of the tale. The following year's color production *The Ghost Story of Plover Pond* (*Kaidan chidori ga fuchi*) continued Tōei's romantic *kaiki* bent, as did 1957's production of *The Dish Mansion at Banchō* starring Misora Hibari. Everyone's favorite onscreen sweetheart of the 1950s, it was unthinkable that Misora's turn as the ghost of Okiku would draw inspiration from the earliest, horrific versions of the Dish Mansion legend, in which the murdered maid's ghost rises each night from the well in which she was drowned to torment her killer Aoyama with her incessant wailing.

²⁶³ Anderson and Richie, 239.

Instead, like Tanaka Kinuyo before her, Misora appears in an adaptation of Okamoto Kidō's romantic reworking of the legend, which reconceived Okiku and Aoyama as star-crossed lovers. While the results no doubt pleased Misora's throngs of adoring fans, critics with an appetite for *kaiki to senritsu* "thrills and chills" found it lacking:

There's none of the *urami* (hatred) and curses [typical of the genre] . . . Even after becoming a ghost Okiku still adores Aoyama. It feels like some kind of Chinese-style romance, while interesting Japanese-style ghouls and goblins are nowhere to be found. The whole thing's got a watered-down feeling to it. . . . you'd expect Misora Hibari's *obake* to burst into some insipid song.²⁶⁴

Condemning the film as a "Chinese-style romance" and lamenting the absence of "Japanese-style ghouls and goblins" draws an explicit contrast between two East Asian traditions of *kai* (怪) storytelling. On the Chinese side the reviewer appears to have in mind the ghostly love stories of Pu Songling (1640-1715). The Qing dynasty author wrote many tales of ghouls and goblins that equal or surpass Japanese *kaidan* in gruesomeness, but his most popular stories feature human men who marry ghosts or fox spirits and live happily ever after. Pu Songling's collected writings are considered by many the epitome of Classical Chinese strange fiction, and as such the Chinese cultural conception of *kai(ki)* carries a more romantic flavor than the representative Japanese *kaidan*, which tend toward the grotesque and horrific.²⁶⁵ Thus, while a Chinese

²⁶⁴“恨み、たたりの要素がほとんどない...お菊が、幽霊になってまで青山__を恋したうという、いわば中国風のロマン趣味であって、逆にいえば日本的妖怪の面白味がさっぱりない。骨抜きされた感じである...美空ひばりのお化けが歌をうたうという程度ではあまりぞっとしない。” Tada, “*Kaidan Banchō sarayashiki*,” *Kinema junpō*, September 15, 1957, 68.

²⁶⁵ Of the “Big Three” Japanese *kaidan* (*The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, *The Dish Mansion at Banchō*, and *The Peony Lantern*), only *The Peony Lantern* has a clear Chinese antecedent. While Okamoto Kidō and Misora Hibari (among others) eventually turned *The Dish Mansion* into a love story, the earliest

conception of *kaiki* might allow for Misora Hibari to profess her love for her paramour and burst into song, the above-quoted review shows that Japanese critics expected their *kaiki* films to come with *urami* and curses – *osore*.

If Tōei's "Chinese-style" ghostly love stories and the continuation of the occasional *shinpi-kaiki* mystery hybrids like Shintōhō's *The Man who Vanished in the Black Cat Mansion* (*Kuroneko-kan ni kieta otoko*, 1956) began to blur the boundaries of the *kaiki* genre, Hollywood horror faced a similar existential crisis in the 1950s with the proliferation of the science fiction/horror hybrid. As noted in Chapter 1, debating the boundaries of sci-fi and horror became one of the central projects of film critics, genre theorists, and movie aficionados after the gothic horrors of Universal gave way to films like *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (both 1956). The differences went beyond merely replacing traditional folkloric monsters like the vampire, ghost, and werewolf with distinctly 20th-century creatures like space aliens and radiation-mutated lizards and insects. The individualized, personal terror engendered by Count Dracula, Frankenstein's Monster, or even Irena Reed from *Cat People* (1942) stalking their few chosen victims through shadowy corridors found itself supplanted by mass panic on a societal level. Often read as expressing Cold War fears of nuclear Armageddon, many science fiction horrors of the 1950s feature hordes of people fleeing whole cities that fall victim to the monsters' rampage of destruction. Such depictions of mass panic afford little chance for either the characters or the audience to reflect upon the nature of the monsters' violation of our rational understanding of the natural world –

versions of the legend featured no such romance between Okiku and Aoyama. Only the Chinese-derived *Peony Lantern* had love story elements intact from its inception.

which Noel Carroll and other horror movie theorists deem a necessary component of the horror movie formula.²⁶⁶ There is only enough (screen) time to flee for one's life.

The most famous example of such a film is of course a Japanese one, though it must be remembered that the original 1954 *Godzilla* took its inspiration largely from a Hollywood release of the previous year, *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*. Interestingly, while Japanese critics in the 1950s seemed willing to consider American and European science fiction horror hybrids as *kaiki eiga*, they were less inclined to view domestically made *kaijū* giant monster movies like *Godzilla* as serious efforts in the genre, considering them hollow parodies of Hollywood sci-fi. By 1957, the undeniable global popularity of what were in Japan known as *kaiki eiga* prompted *Kinema junpō* to commission a series of feature articles by several of the most prominent film critics of the day, published under the umbrella title of “The World of *Kaiki* Film” (*Kaiki eiga no sekai*).²⁶⁷ In “The Appeal of *Kaiki* Films” (*Kaiki eiga no miryoku*), Satō Tadao doubts that traditional *kaidan* tales of vengeance from beyond the grave retain relevance for a contemporary audience, finding them unable to address the particular fears of a postwar society in which the personal vendetta of an angry ghost seemed trivial compared to the possibility of nuclear holocaust and human extinction, writing “Actually, what must be considered as the modern-day *kaidan* is the science fiction film (*kūsō kagaku eiga*).”²⁶⁸ One might think the obvious case study for Satō's argument would be *Godzilla*'s homegrown

²⁶⁶ See Chapter 2.

²⁶⁷ The feature appeared in the July 1, 1957 edition of *Kinema junpō*.

²⁶⁸ “むしろ、現代の怪談として評価しなければならないのは空想科学映画だろう。” Satō, “*Kaiki eiga no miryoku*,” *Kinema junpō*, July 1, 1957, 47.

nuclear narrative, but instead he goes on to discuss an American film, *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), praising the film's use of special effects to depict spectacles like a miniaturized human battling an enormous housecat. Echoing somewhat the formalist sentiments of the Pure Film Movement critics from four decades earlier, Satō considers these uniquely filmic techniques far more frightening than the “theatrical” (*gekijoteki*) tricks of Japanese ghost cat pictures and *kaidan* adaptations.²⁶⁹ Meanwhile Izawa Jun, in his piece “What is *Kaiki*?” (*Kaiki to wa?*), finds traditional Japanese *kaidan* more relevant than the science fiction films, at least for a domestic audience. He draws a clear line from what he argues are the roots of the Western sci-fi/horror hybrid in *Frankenstein* to the giant radioactive ants and spiders of contemporary Hollywood science fiction films, identifying a “Wrath of God” (*kami no ikari*) motif which expresses fears of reprisal for overreaching scientists tampering in God's domain that Izawa says carries a special resonance for Western Judeo-Christian society. But it will be recalled from Chapter 1 that Izawa finds the Japanese versions of the giant radioactive monster narrative nothing more than pale imitations, lacking the religious dimension for Japanese audiences. Instead, what speak to a Japanese sense of horror are Oiwa-sama and tales of karmic comeuppance that mark the traditional *kaidan*.²⁷⁰ While Satō and Izawa disagree about the value of *kaidan* movie adaptations in 1950s Japan, they both give the domestic radioactive *kaijū* genre short shrift (“These are not serious monsters”),²⁷¹ while perhaps

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ See Chapter 1, pages 33-35.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

unfairly finding their Hollywood counterparts seriously frightening and worthy of discussion as *kaiki* cinema. However, a decade later when the magazine published an entire issue devoted to “*Kaiki and Horror Film*” (*Kaiki to kyōfu eiga*) in the summer of 1969, not only were Japanese *kaijū* movies like *Godzilla* omitted from discussion, so too were the foreign sci-fi horror hybrids that Satō Tadao found so compelling. After a few years of mild identity crisis, *kaiki* was once again the exclusive domain of vampires, werewolves, ghost cats and vengeful spirits.

What had happened in ten years that caused *Kinema junpō* to rethink their inclusion of science fiction in its conception of the *kaiki* genre? A glance at the 1957 “World of *Kaiki* Film” feature shows portents of things to come. A picture of actor Peter Cushing in the just-released *The Curse of Frankenstein* appears on the first page of the feature, directly above Izawa Jun’s title “What is *Kaiki*?” – a prophetic placement in hindsight. The film’s release was apparently too recent to allow much discussion of it in the articles which made up the feature, apart from a brief mention in Shimizu Akira’s “*Kaiki* Movies A-to-Z,” in which the author comments that the film’s emphasis on the doctor over his monstrous creation hews closer to Mary Shelley’s original novel than James Whale’s 1931 version.²⁷² *The Curse of Frankenstein*’s worldwide commercial success and subsequent impact on global horror (and *kaiki*) film production would, however, be enormous. The United Kingdom-based Hammer Film Productions’ first of many remakes of 1930s Universal horror movies, *The Curse of Frankenstein* appeared in the midst of the sci-fi/horror craze to inaugurate a revival of the gothic mode of horror moviemaking, a return to crumbling castles, traditional monsters like the vampire and

²⁷² Shimizu Akira, “*Kaiki eiga no arekore*,” *Kinema junpō*, July 1, 1957, 48-49.

werewolf, and a sense of dread in place of the mass panic of the sci-fi disaster epic. The movement was not limited to the Hammer studio, although their long-running *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* series starring Cushing and Christopher Lee, respectively, remain the highest profile examples. The success of *The Curse of Frankenstein* and especially Hammer's follow-up, *Dracula* (1958) formed part of a global zeitgeist of gothic horror in the late 1950s and 1960s, which included Roger Corman's eight-film cycle based on the works of Edgar Allan Poe for American International Pictures, Italian director Mario Bava's bold experimentation with color in pictures like *Black Sabbath* (*I tre volti della paura*) and *The Whip and the Body* (*La frusta e il corpo*, both 1963), and – in the case of *kaiki eiga* – the critically acclaimed work of Nakagawa Nobuo at Shintōhō. Very few of these films were merely clones of Hammer product (in the case of Nakagawa, his work appears contemporaneously with the first Hammer horror movies, ruling out the possibility of trying to copy the “Hammer horror” formula that had yet to coalesce), but represent the concept of vernacular modernism at its best, as different filmmaking cultures shared a common stylistic movement to tell their own stories, be it the American gothic work of Poe in Roger Corman's Hollywood or a Japanese *kaidan* from Shintōhō. The gothic horror revival did not kill the *kaijū* or science fiction horror hybrids: Tōhō's *Godzilla* and *Mothra* (*Mosura*) series flourished during the 1960s, and filmmakers like Mario Bava did not limit themselves to gothic pictures like *Kill, Baby, Kill* (*Operazione paura*, 1966) but also directed science fiction horrors like *Planet of the Vampires* (*Terrore nello spazio*, 1965) and prototypical slasher films (*giallo*) like *Blood and Black Lace* (*Sei donne per l'assassino*, 1964).²⁷³ But what the gothic horror revival

²⁷³ Also worth noting is *The Manster*, a B-grade, 1959 US-Japanese co-production in which an

did do was re-establish and strengthen the original Japanese conception of *kaiki* as a genre that dealt with themes of *osore* – be it the terror of the existence of vampires or the cosmic, karmic vengeance of Oiwa and the ghost cat – in settings removed from the modern, everyday world. Such pictures largely had vanished from American and European screens during the 1950s until Hammer brought them back in vogue with the innovations of lurid, bright-red Technicolor blood and widescreen cinematography, qualities that won them critical praise in Japan.²⁷⁴ The special issue of *Kinema junpō* devoted exclusively to *kaiki* and *kyōfu* (horror) attests to Hammer’s central role in reasserting the original markers of the *kaiki* genre in Japan, featuring a large illustration of Christopher Lee as Dracula on the cover and including a translation of the complete screenplay for 1958’s *Dracula* as one of two “Horror Scenario Classics” alongside Nakagawa Nobuo’s *Ghost Story of Yotsuya*.²⁷⁵ As far as *Kinema junpō* was concerned, Christopher Lee was the face of *kaiki*.

American journalist in Tokyo falls victim to the experiments of a deranged Japanese scientist who keeps among his mutated creations a woman that bears a striking resemblance to the ghost of Oiwa – likely the first time the classic *kaidan* iconography of the vengeful ghost appeared on foreign movie screens.

²⁷⁴ Chapter 2, pages 56-57.

²⁷⁵ *Kinema junpō*, August 20, 1969. The phrase is rendered in English in the magazine.



Figure 21: The cover of the 1969 *Kinema junpō* devoted entirely to *kaiki* and *kyōfu*, featuring Christopher Lee as the face of the genre.

Japanese critics' admiration for Hammer horror stood in contrast to most domestic *kaiki* films based on traditional *kaidan* and ghost cat tales, which had reappeared several years before Hammer's *The Curse of Frankenstein* with the end of the American Occupation in 1952, but like their prewar ancestors were generally held to be not frightening, be it due to laughable special effects, the irrelevance of Edo-period ghost stories to contemporary postwar Japan, or the presence of Misora Hibari – all elements deemed to dilute the themes of *osore* inherent in the *kaidan* narrative. However, at the same time Hammer horror was redefining Count Dracula and Dr. Frankenstein for a new

generation of theatergoers, the Shintōhō studio and its senior director, Nakagawa Nobuo, were doing the same for the ghosts and werewolves of domestic *kaiki* cinema.

Conclusion

When *kaiki* film production in Japan resumed in earnest following an almost twelve-year moratorium imposed by wartime and occupation censorship, the Japanese film industry was a very changed business from the late 1930s. The government mandated consolidation of the industry into three major studios in 1941 eliminated smaller outfits like Shinkō, which relied on popular genres like *kaiki* for survival and strove to make horror pictures that would both please the crowds and the critics with innovative techniques like those seen in *The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen*. This was a moot point, however, as first the wartime Japanese government and the ensuing American Occupation both suppressed the production of *kaiki* films for different reasons. The studios attempted a few workarounds to the problem of censorship in regard to the production of traditional *kaidan* adaptations, although in the bargain had to remove most of the themes of *osore* cosmic revenge which made the films *kaiki* in the first place. When the Occupation ended in 1952, former Shinkō head Nagata Masaichi, now head of Daiei, reinstated annual production of ghost cat pictures. However, no longer reliant on cheaply produced genre pictures for its survival, Nagata's new studio did not lavish the same level of attention on their *kaiki* productions, which were quickly filmed during breaks between more ambitious, A-list pictures. The newly founded Tōei studio also began an annual production schedule of *kaki* films, though these tended to either be comedic parodies of the Daiei films, or else romantic reworkings of classic *kaidan* that

emphasized undying love between man and ghost over ghastly tales of revenge from beyond the grave. Not surprisingly, domestic *kaiki* films of the immediate post-Occupation years continued to receive the same critical drubbing their prewar counterparts had received – either through lack of innovation or detours into comedy and romance, the films still “weren’t scary.”

They were, however, still perennially popular with audiences, and in 1957 *Kinema junpō* acknowledged this with their “World of *Kaiki* Film” feature, in which top critics of the day debated the essence of *kaiki*. Some found the spark of the genre in the karmic omnipotence of traditional Japanese monsters like the ghost of Oiwa, while others felt the Hollywood science-fiction/horror hybrids of the 1950s were the true successors to the outdated wraiths and ghost cats of premodern Japan. By the end of the decade, the former seems to have won out, as the tremendous popularity of Hammer Films’ gothic revivals of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* reasserted the primacy of period costumed horror to the *kaiki* label, and – perhaps even more importantly in the Japanese case – the Shintōhō studio brought Oiwa and her undead ilk back to movie screens with a frightful vengeance.

Chapter 5: Uncanny Invasions and *Osore* Incarnate – Shintōhō Studios and Nakagawa Nobuo

Critics and fans alike generally consider the Shintōhō *kaiki* films of director Nakagawa Nobuo the most accomplished domestic examples of the genre. Although he frequently professed to have no personal interest in such films, having been assigned all of his *kaiki* projects at the studio by executive producer Ōkura Mitsugi, Nakagawa brought his technical and artistic expertise as a passionate filmmaker to the world of vengeful spirits and ghost cats. Films like Nakagawa's *The Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp* (*Kaidan Kasane ga fuchi*, 1957), *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* (*Bōrei kaibyō yashiki*, 1958), and *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, 1959) exhibit a sophistication of camerawork, staging, and mise-en-scène not seen in a domestic *kaiki* film since the prewar heyday of the Shinkō studio, and more typically associated with the films of auteurs like Kurosawa Akira, Ozu Yasujiro, and Mizoguchi Kenji. They also demonstrate a consistency of vision in regard to Nakagawa's pet themes as a filmmaker. His *Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, generally regarded as the best of the more than thirty screen adaptations of the tale, dwells on the psychology of its two main characters – the stoically self-serving Iemon, and the rage-consumed ghost of Oiwa – reflecting Nakagawa's professed interest in story over spectacle.²⁷⁶ A careful depiction of Oiwa's hatred is also essential to establish the narrative themes of *osore* which inform the spectacular imagery of *kaiki* films, as Oiwa's ghost enacts the terrible drama of karmic retribution against the husband

²⁷⁶ When asked about how he approached his *kaiki* filmmaking assignments, Nakagawa replied "Whatever kind of movie you're making, it's the same. If the scenario is no good, it's hopeless." (結局どの映画を作っても同じことで、シナリオがよくないとダメだということです). Nakagawa Nobuo, "Obake eiga sono hoka/watashi no kiroku eiga ron," in *Eiga kantoku Nakagawa Nobuo*, 106.

who betrayed her. Nakagawa revisited the notion of karma again and again in his pictures, his characters becoming trapped by inexorable fate brought on by past misdeeds, from the star-crossed lovers of *Kasane's Swamp* to the cursed protagonists of *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* and the doomed antihero of his idiosyncratic horror film *Jigoku* (1960). Although he claimed to hold no interest in *kaiki*, Nakagawa's sensibilities as a storyteller lent themselves extraordinarily well to a powerful depiction of *osore* that critics felt had been sorely lacking in Japanese *kaiki* films almost from their inception. At the same time, his skill in formally depicting the symbols of *osore* in ways that delivered pleasurable scares to the audience meshed the spectacular sites of attraction with narrative sophistication and achieved the elusive equilibrium of spectacle and *osore*.

Nakagawa would be the first to point out that his films were not the work of one man. Both Nakagawa and commentators on his work like Kurosawa Kiyoshi give much of the credit for the films' success to art director Kurosawa Haruyasu for the expert conveyance of the *kaiki* themes and imagery.²⁷⁷ The contributions of cinematographer Nishimoto Tadashi, as well as screenwriter and assistant director Ishikawa Yoshihiro, also should not be overlooked. Furthermore, the industrial-commercial circumstances in which Nakagawa and his crew created these films played an important role in elevating the *kaiki* genre at Shintōhō. While I take these factors into consideration, in particular

²⁷⁷ According to Kurosawa Kiyoshi, "Kurosawa Chian's [Haruyasu's] art direction was rather like old German Expressionism, with a psychological, spiritual effect. Psychological expressions and images that heightened the drama would appear directly onscreen. He once said that he would think about how, without any money in the budget, he could pack in things from reality that would convey a mental, spiritual meaning." (黒沢治安の美術は特殊で、古くはドイツ表現主義みたいなことでもあるのだが、心理的な精神的なある効果、ドラマ上の心理的な表現をそのままダイレクトに画面として見せてしまう。黒沢治安によると、予算のお金がない中で、どのように現実の中にある精神のようなものをバンッと表現することができるのか、というのをあれこれ考えた)。Author's interview with Kurosawa Kiyoshi.

discussing the role of studio head Ōkura Mitsugi and the business decisions that resulted in these films at some length, they are nonetheless also the work of a director with a distinct vision and style. Nakagawa undeniably left his personal stamp on *kaiki* film history, providing a showcase for the argument that genre cinema need not be antithetical to auteurism.

Ōkura Mitsugi, Nakagawa Nobuo, and Shintōhō's *Kaiki* Revolution

Shintōhō underwent sea changes in management during the years following Watanabe Kunio's Occupation-era release of *Legend of the Nabeshima Ghost Cat* in 1949. The studio's commitment to high-end artistic works reached an apex with Mizoguchi Kenji's *Life of Oharu* (*Saikaku ichidai onna*, 1952), to this day acknowledged as a masterpiece of world cinema, but the studio's lack of capital and inability to procure sufficient booking venues kept the company perpetually on the verge of collapse.²⁷⁸ Unlike its competitors, Shintōhō owned none of its own theaters, a problem almost overcome when Nikkatsu decided it wanted back into the production business and considered a merger with the struggling studio. Perhaps realizing that such a proposal would see the company completely swallowed up by Nikkatsu, the Shintōhō stockholders objected, and ultimately Nikkatsu resumed film production by itself.²⁷⁹ In late 1955 the Shintōhō board turned to Ōkura Mitsugi, a former *benshi* and business mogul with a reputation for revitalizing struggling theater chains, and offered him the position of chief executive in hopes that he could turn their fortunes around. His successful career as a *benshi* and his hands-on approach to theater management gave Ōkura a keen appreciation of the value of

²⁷⁸ Kawabe, 89-90.

²⁷⁹ Anderson and Richie, 242.

pandering to the tastes of a mass audience, and with absolute authority over the studio he put Shintōhō on a path diametrically opposed to its previous filmmaking philosophy.

Ōkura expert Yamada Seiji elaborates:

[The first studio head's] philosophy was if time and money were risked on top-notch directors who produced work that could compete with the most popular stars, the result would surely be a hit, and the studio's booking contracts would increase. Ōkura's policy was the exact opposite. He thoroughly slashed the budgets and the shooting schedules, promoted young directors and actors from within the studio, and implemented a "Planning First" production strategy that targeted a young, twentysomething audience.

²⁸⁰

Under Ōkura's management the studio that produced *Life of Oharu* became Japan's grindhouse factory, and projects that could not be produced cheaply, quickly, and pegged into a genre that had proven mass appeal did not make it past Ōkura's desk.²⁸¹

The studio's new dedication to popular but seedy genres like *yakuza* crime dramas and what might be called prototypical *pinku* erotic films like *Revenge of the Pearl Queen* (*Onna shinju-o no fukushū*, 1956) soon gave Shintōhō a reputation as "the lurid flower of Japanese cinema."²⁸² Central among the "lurid" genres was *kaiki*, and much like the

²⁸⁰。「金と時間を掛け、一流監督の演出による、人気スターを並べた作品」を製作すれば必ずヒットし、契約館数も増加するとの信念に従って会社を運運営していた。大蔵の方針は、まったくその逆で、徹底した製作の費用と日数の削減、そして自社の若手監督と俳優の積極的な登用を敢行し、観客を二〇代の若者に絞った「企画第一主義」を推進した。” Yamada Seiji, *Maboroshi no kaidan eiga wo ōtte*. Tokyo: Yōsensha, 1997. 48.

²⁸¹ A notable exception would be *The Meiji Emperor and the Russo-Japanese War* (*Meiji tennō to Nichi-Rō sensō*). Upon assuming leadership of Shintōhō Ōkura sunk the studio's last yen into this ultra-nationalistic, widescreen color epic in a go-for-broke attempt to save the company from bankruptcy. The gamble paid off spectacularly. When the film was finally released in April 1957 it wound up being the highest grossing film of the year and single-handedly got Shintōhō out of the red. See Anderson and Richie, 250-251.

²⁸² “*Kikai na hana*.” Both Uchiyama Kazuki and Shimura Miyoko use the appellation in quotation marks independently of one another, suggesting the moniker has some precedent.

Hammer studio in England, Shintōhō would take its *kaiki* efforts to new levels of gruesomeness that would attract praise and repulsion in equal measure from critics and audiences.

No doubt recalling its popularity during the days of the *benshi*, one of the first *kaiki* projects Ōkura put into production was a revival of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (*Yotsuya kaidan*, 1956), directed by Mōri Masaki. More than twenty versions of this most famous and gruesome Japanese ghost story were made before the war, but with Daiei now focusing on ghost cats and Tōei devoting its attention to more romantic *kaidan* adaptations, Mōri's picture was only the second *Yotsuya* film to appear in the postwar era, after Kinoshita Keisuke's *The Ghost Story Yotsuya: A New Interpretation* in 1949. Although quickly forgotten in the wake of Nakagawa Nobuo's superior version three years later, Mōri's *Yotsuya* remains important for several reasons. Unlike Kinoshita's "new interpretation," Mōri's film marked the true return of Oiwa – Japan's most iconic *onryō* or "vengeful ghost" – to Japanese theater screens after an almost twenty-year absence.²⁸³ Interestingly, this gap roughly corresponds to the period between the end of the Universal studio's first cycle of gothic horror movies in the late 1930s and their British remakes by Hammer beginning in 1957. Thus did actress Sōma Chieko's Oiwa serve as a re-introduction of a classic monster to a new generation of moviegoers in much the same way Christopher Lee brought Frankenstein's Monster and Count Dracula back from their cinematic crypts to haunt movie theaters once again. And just as the popularity

²⁸³ Not counting Tanaka Kinuyo's genteel, silent ghost in Kinoshita's film, the last time Oiwa had vented her fury onscreen was in the form of Suzuki Sumiko, in Mokudō Shigeru's *Alias Yotsuya kaidan* in 1937.

of *The Curse of Frankenstein* and *Dracula* forever transformed the Hammer studio into a factory of horrors, Shintōhō's financial success during the *obon* season of 1956 with *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* and Watanabe Kunio's *The Vengeful Ghost of Sakura* (*Onryō Sakura daisōdō*) prompted Ōkura to institute a policy of producing at least two new *kaiki* films each year in time for the summer festival of the dead.

As Shimura Miyoko observes, while these films often lacked even the production value of Daiei B-pictures like the Irie Takako ghost cat series, by Shintōhō's standards many of their *kaiki* productions received A-list treatment.²⁸⁴ Daiei produced its ghost cat films as program pictures made to fill out the studio's quota and mark time between more "serious" productions, and they were likely treated as such by most of the staff. Shintōhō's *kaiki* films, meanwhile, were vital to the studio's continued existence under Ōkura's system. He assigned the studio's top talent to their production, and beginning in 1958 the top-billed feature of the annual "monster cavalcade" (*obake daikai*) was made in widescreen and color – an extravagance a studio like Daiei rarely deigned to bestow upon the disreputable *kaiki* genre. Color and widescreen were of course another innovation of the Hammer gothic horror remakes, furthering the affinities between Shintōhō's domestic *kaiki* product and their imported counterparts from Britain.

Most of the creative talent at Shintōhō, remembering the days when the studio mantra was to make films by artists, for artists, resented Ōkura and his "one-man system" (*wan man taisēi*), under which all projects were genre pictures mandated from the top.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Shimura, "'Misemono' kara 'eiga' e," 14.

²⁸⁵ Yamada, 126-128.

Watanabe Kunio, the studio's most renowned filmmaker under contract, resigned in 1958. This left Nakagawa Nobuo as Shintōhō's senior director under contract, having made his directorial debut in 1934, unlike the majority of Ōkura's directors who had only begun making pictures after the war. Trusting him with key projects, Ōkura gave Nakagawa the job of realizing the studio's first two annual color widescreen *obon* releases – 1958's *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* and the following year's revisiting of *Yotsuya*. In later years, when these pictures began to be acknowledged as classics of the genre, Nakagawa frequently spoke of his irritation at being forced by Ōkura to make *kaiki eiga*, but even if Watanabe had remained at the studio Nakagawa likely still would have been given the task.²⁸⁶ Shintōhō's 1957 *kaiki* triple bill had consisted of a re-release of Mōri's *Yotsuya* along with two short, black-and-white features - Kadono Gorō's *Seven Wonders of Honjo* (*Kaidan Honjo nana fushigi*), and Nakagawa's first full-blown *kaiki* effort, *The Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp*.²⁸⁷ Kadono's picture was a throwback to the “seven wonders” tanuki films Yoshino Jirō had specialized in during the silent era, and following the “seven wonders” pattern attributes the *kaiki* phenomena depicted in the film to the whimsical, shapeshifting tanuki, undercutting any frightening sense of *osore*.

²⁸⁶ In an interview with *Kinema jumpō* from 1974, Nakagawa was asked if he had any particular interest in *kaiki eiga*, to which he replied, “Not especially...It was simply work assigned to me by the studio, nothing more...when the order came to make *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* my honest reaction was to say a bit wearily, ‘What, another *obake eiga*?’” (特に怪奇映画に興味をもっていません...その仕事に会社から指名されたことが原因にすぎません...「東海道四谷怪談」を撮れというわけで、ああ、またお化けか、と正直なところ多少ゲンナリしながら、スタートしたんです。) “*Kaiki eiga montō*,” 114-115. Nakagawa remained dismissive of all his *kaiki* work save *Yotsuya* and *Jigoku* until his death in 1984. However, when the Art Theater Guild (ATG) gave him free reign to make a final picture of his choosing in 1984, the result was *Kaidan ikiteiru Koheiji* (*The Kaidan of Undead Koheiji*), suggesting Nakagawa had finally come to embrace his legacy as the nation's foremost director of *kaiki eiga*.

²⁸⁷ Nakagawa had flirted with *kaiki* material in his 1949 comedy *Enoken: Tobisuke's Vacation Adventure* (*Enoken no Tobisuke bōken ryokō*), his freelance *shinpi-kaiki* mystery hybrid for Tōhō, *Vampire Moth* (*Kyūketsuki ga*, 1956), and a short sequence in his 1956 *jidai geki* for Ōkura and Shintōhō, *The Ceiling at Utsunomiya* (*Utsunomiya no tenjō*), but *Kasane* was his first unequivocal *kaiki eiga*.

Nakagawa's *Kasane*, meanwhile, won rare praise from the critics at *Kinema junpō*, who to this point had been almost universally hostile to domestic *kaiki eiga*. Despite his insistence that he had no personal interest in the genre, Nakagawa's accomplished work on *Kasane* assured he would become Ōkura's go-to director for *kaiki eiga* until Shintōhō's collapse in 1961.

Junpō critic Tada Michitarō's review of *Kasane* explicitly compares it to both the Tōei *kaidan* romances and Daiei's ongoing ghost cat cycle, taking the other studios' films to task for compromising the genre's sense of *insan* or "doom and gloom," which Tada admiringly finds ample amounts of in Nakagawa's work:

We can call this an orthodox (*ōsodokkusu*) *kaidan* story, which is to say there is a consistent tone of doom-and-gloom (*insan*) permeating throughout. It does away with heresies like using Misora Hibari to make a "beautiful monster movie" (as seen in last year's Tōei production – a "beautiful monster" makes about as much sense as a "beautiful hydrogen bomb"), or crafting themes of heroic salvation (as in this year's Daiei production), or injecting Achako-style laughs (this year's Shōchiku production); *Kasane's* single-minded purpose is *insan*. That's why, when it comes to monster movies, to my mind Shintōhō's are the most impressive. These are old-fashioned, fearsome kabuki monsters, whose grasp reaches beyond lifetimes, wreaking vengeance on the children for the sins of the parents, and from which there is no hope of salvation. The thought that such dreadful enmity (*enkon*) is not something that ends after a single lifetime strikes a deep chord.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸“オーソドックスの怪談ものといえる。終始陰惨な調子でつらぬいているのである。美空ひばりを使って「きれいなお化け映画」をつくろうとしたり（これは昨年の東映作品に見られた。「きれいなお化け」とは「きれいな水爆」というものだ）、英雄主義で救いを準備したり（今年の大映作品）、アチャコなどの笑いで色あしらったり（今年の松竹作品）そういう邪道をしりぞけて、陰惨一本槍である。お化け映画に関して新東宝のものが一ばん見ごたえあると私の思うゆえんである。これは一代のタリタリでなく、親の因果が子に報いるという、救いも何もないドロドロのお化けである。すさまじい怨恨は一代で終るものでないという思想は、やはり私をふかく捉えたが。” Tada Michitarō, “*Kaidan Kasane ga fuchi*,” *Kinema junpō* September Special, 1957, 91. Misora Hibari's "beautiful monster movie" of the previous year is of course Tōei's *Dish Mansion* at

The word *insan* (陰惨), which I translate as “doom and gloom,” conveys the nuance of *inevitable* tragedy, making it an apt choice to describe the themes of inescapable karmic fate found in domestic *kaiki* cinema and aligning Tada’s use of the term closely with my own usage of *osore* or cosmic terror to describe the horrific affect of the genre. *Kasane* establishes this atmosphere of *insan* from the very first frames of the title sequence, with the credits superimposed over a series of successive images of a beautiful woman gradually dissolving into a rotten corpse, then finally a pile of bones.²⁸⁹ As Tada notes in his review, the mood is maintained for the subsequent entirety of the picture, without any detours into sentimental romance, samurai heroics, or comedy relief, resulting in an “orthodox” *kaidan* adaptation that was welcomed for its generic purity.

The film’s prologue sequence showcases Nakagawa’s technical mastery of his craft even as it sets the stage for a new direction in domestic *kaiki* filmmaking. *Kasane*’s lengthy opening shot and its careful mise-en-scène invite comparisons to the films of Mizoguchi, though the techniques came to be associated with Nakagawa as well.²⁹⁰ On a snowy night out front of the dwelling of the blind masseur Minagawa Sōetsu, the

Banchō. Daiei’s “heroic” production is most likely a reference to *The Ghost Cat of Yonaki Swamp* (*Kaibyō Yonaki numa*), the poster for which appears in Figure 7 on page 55 of Chapter 2. “Achako-style laughs” refers to popular comedian Hanabishi Achako’s supporting role in Shōchiku’s *Kaidan of Repentance: Passion of a Jealous Teacher* (*Kaidan iro zange: kyōren onna shishō*).

²⁸⁹ This is also explicitly Buddhist imagery, as the visual depiction of a beautiful woman becoming a rotten corpse has long been used as didactic tool in Buddhism to convey the impermanence of all things.

²⁹⁰ In an interview with Nakagawa for *Movie Magazine* in 1981, Katsura Chiho observes that from the production of *Kasane’s Swamp* onward we can see the emergence of a “one scene, one take” style in Nakagawa’s work reminiscent of Mizoguchi, with which Nakagawa concurs. The interview is reprinted in its entirety in *Eiga kantoku Nakagawa Nobuo*, pp. 193-220 (The comparison to Mizoguchi appears on page 214). In the same volume Yamane Sadaō argues the hallmark of Nakagawa’s style is the “fluidity” (*ryūdōsei*) of his camera, citing the opening long take of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* as the quintessential example. See page 296 of *Eiga kantoku Nakagawa Nobuo*.

narrative begins to unfold in a long take over a minute in duration. Sōetsu's housekeeper and his young daughter Orui see him off at the door as he ventures out to pay a visit on the samurai Fukami Shinzaemon, to whom he has loaned some money. The camera at last cuts in on a key moment as Sōetsu trips on his way out into the snow, which the housekeeper takes as a bad omen, and she implores her master to remain at home. Sōetsu laughs off the warning and asks Orui what she would like him to buy for her once he collects the debt. She asks for a shamisen, and Sōetsu continues off into the night. Two important elements of foreshadowing warrant Nakagawa's termination of the initial long take and motivate the cut to a medium shot of the father, daughter, and housekeeper. Sōetsu's stumble and his dismissal of the housekeeper's warning not only tip off viewers that his attempt to collect the money will end in tragedy, but suggest that the subsequent tale of what befalls his daughter Orui becomes predestined as a result of his decision to scoff at fate. The shamisen Orui asks for also becomes central to the fated drama that plays out.



Figure 22: The opening shot of *The Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp* (*Kaidan Kasane ga fuchi*, 1957) with its painterly mise-en-scène (left), from which the camera cuts in at a fateful moment (right).

As the prologue sequence continues, *Kasane's Swamp* effectively frontloads the *kaiki* elements that earlier films typically withheld until much later in their running times. On average, the monster first appears in surviving prewar *kaiki* pictures and the typical Daiei ghost cat film around the fifty-minute mark, sometimes with little foreshadowing that a *kaiki* third act follows the heretofore mundane *jidai geki* drama. By contrast, Nakagawa gives his audience the full *kaiki* experience at the twelve-minute mark of *Kasane*, more akin to foreign *kaiki* films from America and Europe which introduce the horrific elements early in their runtimes. Sōetsu's efforts to collect the loan from Shinzaemon end in the predictable tragedy, further foreshadowed by the incessant crying of Shinzaemon's infant son Shinkichi during the masseur's visit. The arrogant, hot-headed Shinzaemon – unable to repay the money he owes to a man beneath his caste – murders Sōetsu and has his body dumped into Kasane's Swamp. The masseur's ghost soon returns to haunt Shinzaemon, driving the samurai to accidentally murder his own wife before stumbling into Kasane's swamp himself, plagued by visions of Sōetsu's ghost as he drowns. The film's prologue thus stands as a complete mini-*kaidan* of its own, the fifteen-minute sequence hitting all of the familiar plot points of the typical Japanese ghost story: the unjust death of an innocent, followed by their return from the grave and ghostly revenge against their oppressor, who unwittingly kills his own loved one before meeting his own end.

It will be recalled that Katō Bin's 1954 *Ghost Cat of Okazaki* also included a monster-filled prologue in the form of a brief flash-forward sequence of Irie Takako's ghost cat emerging from behind a crumbling wall, but devoid of any narrative context the

sequence becomes a pure *obake yashiki* spook-house moment, startling but without any lingering sense of dread. *Kasane's* prologue has its spook house touches as well, with Soetsu's ghost popping out at Shinzaemon at opportune moments, but the sequence also invokes a strong sense of the uncanny in its implication that cosmic forces of predestination are in play. Sōetsu's failure to heed the bad omen, the infant Shinkichi's inexplicable wailing – and in hindsight, Orui's fateful request that her father buy her a shamisen – all serve to evoke the uncanny when the murder and subsequent haunting occur. The uncanny themes established in the prologue become even more pronounced by having the tragedy repeat in more elaborate fashion over the course of the main narrative, which concerns the fate of Sōetsu's and Shinzaemon's grown children. Writing about the doppelgänger in the fiction of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Freud could just as easily be discussing Nakagawa's *Kasane's Swamp* when he locates its uncanny affect in “the constant recurrence of the same thing, the repetition of the same facial features, the same characters, the same destinies, the same misdeeds, even the same names, through successive generations.”²⁹¹ Orui and Shinkichi grow up only to replicate the tragedy of their parents. Taken in by as an infant by a family friend of the Fukami clan, the adult Shinkichi falls in love with his adopted sister Ohisa, whom he accompanies to her weekly shamisen lessons under the tutelage of the now-grown Orui. Ohisa's parents disapprove of the young man's affections for their daughter, and believing his true love forever beyond his reach, the weak-willed Shinkichi finds himself goaded into a romantic liaison with Orui, who uses him to deflect the unwanted advances of a villainous admirer,

²⁹¹ Freud, 142.

Omura. Meanwhile, Sōetsu's aged housekeeper learns that Shinkichi is the son of Fukami Shinzaemon and that Orui has become romantically involved with the child of her father's murderer. Imploring her to end the relationship lest she invite the wrath of her father's spirit, Orui stubbornly defies fate, declaring "I shall do as I please!" and spurning the warnings of the housekeeper just as her father had in the film's opening.²⁹² The shamisen, first mentioned in the prologue sequence and later the vehicle through which she became acquainted with Shinkichi, then recurs in the narrative once again, this time acting as the agent of Orui's inevitable karmic doom. The shamisen pick tumbles from the shelf where it rests, striking Orui across the eye and inflicting her with a disfiguring facial scar. Such a wound is of course a primary trope of *kaidan*, most famously seen in the person of *Yotsuya's* Oiwa but also familiar from Enchō's original version of *Kasane's Swamp*, as well as Suzuki Sumiko's performance in 1938's *Ghost Story of the Mandarin Duck Curtain*. Kinoshita Keisuke utilized the motif to uncanny effect in his *Ghost Story of Yotsuya: A New Interpretation*, lending the picture what little sense of *osore* it possesses in the uncanny reappearance of Oiwa's scar afflicting the other characters. In Nakagawa's film the trope signals that Orui is now fated to die and return as a vengeful spirit, not only because the audience recognizes the generic cue, but because the wound uncannily recalls the cut her father received to his own face at the hands of Shinzaemon in the prologue, which prefigured his own death and ghostly return. Orui's now-unavoidable demise occurs after her frustrated suitor Omura convinces Shinkichi to elope with Ohisa, prompting Orui first to attempt to take Ohisa's life and, when that fails, her own. At the climax of the film Shinkichi and Ohisa flee Edo and by chance stumble upon

²⁹² “あたしは好きなようにするんだ!”

Kasane's Swamp, where the ghost of Orui tricks Shinkichi into murdering Ohisa in an uncanny repetition of the prologue, in which Shinkichi's father unwittingly killed his mother. Omura then shows up to rob and murder Shinkichi, who meets his end in the waters of Kasane's Swamp, where his own father drowned a generation ago. Uncanny repetition piles upon uncanny repetition.

The script's careful attention to bearing out these themes restores a true sense of *osore* or cosmic dread to the proceedings that was noticeably lacking in the Daiei ghost cat series' comparative inattention to narrative detail. Elaborating on the themes of recurrence and repetition he deems crucial to the uncanny, Freud writes "it is only the factor of unintended repetition that transforms what would otherwise seem quite harmless into something uncanny and forces us to entertain the idea of the *fateful* and *inescapable*, when we should normally speak of 'chance'."²⁹³ It is the invisible hand of fate, the "single-minded" *insan* which "permeates throughout" Nakagawa's *Kasane*, and the main source of the film's sense of *osore*. Of course, the original 19th-century version of the tale by Sanyūtei Enchō contained many of the same uncanny narrative elements, and another fundamental motif of the *kaidan* genre, the Return of the Dead (either as a vengeful wraith or as a half-feline ghost cat), also constitutes a manifestation of Freud's uncanny ("anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits, and ghosts").²⁹⁴ Even the most artless of the Daiei ghost cat films with their spook-house tricks evoke the uncanny in the mere physical presence of the monster. But in Nakagawa's first *kaiki* film, the

²⁹³ Ibid., 144. Emphasis added.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 148.

uncanny assumes a more subtle presence. It takes the obvious physical form of the ghost – first Sōetsu’s, then Orui’s – but it is also consistently woven into the film’s diegesis, from the opening shot to the climax, and finds expression both in thematic and visual, filmic repetition. Nakagawa’s turn toward a more thorough, nuanced invocation of the Freudian uncanny, as opposed to what might be deemed the more overtly Todorovian marvelous worlds of the Daiei and Shinkō *kaiki* pictures that present their ghosts and monsters as natural phenomena, constituted a key development of the Shintōhō pictures.²⁹⁵ While its period setting and its characters’ willing acceptance of the existence of ghosts place Nakagawa’s *Kasane* in the same Todorovian marvelous universe as other domestic *kaiki* pictures, one of the film’s most effective moments of horror works by suggesting one of the uncanny moments which occurs may in fact have a perfectly mundane explanation, thus creating a more ambiguous reading of the uncanny that invokes in turn a sense of the Todorovian “pure fantastic” – a narrative containing events that may or may not have a ghostly, otherworldly explanation behind them.²⁹⁶ After Orui’s death, Shinkichi and Ohisa elope and take refuge in the upper room of a teahouse. When the door to the room appears to open of its own accord, the couple exchange horrified glances. The next shot, however, reveals the teahouse attendant in the entrance, and a seemingly ghostly occurrence receives an indisputably mundane explanation. Shinkichi and Ohisa relax, but immediately become unsettled once again when the

²⁹⁵ It is important to restate that Todorov’s “uncanny” is not the same as Freud’s usage of the term. Todorov uses the category of “uncanny” for seemingly supernatural occurrences which ultimately receive an unequivocally mundane, rational explanation, in contrast to the ambiguous “fantastic” and overtly supernatural “marvelous.” See Todorov, 41-42.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

attendant sets three cups of tea before them, explaining that the third cup is for “the woman who accompanied them upstairs.” Once again the adulterous couple exchange looks of dread, and the scene concludes with the camera tilting in for a close-up of the third teacup. Orui’s ghost does not manifest herself to confirm the marvelous explanation, and the scene leaves the viewer wondering if the attendant made an error, or if Orui’s ghost is pursuing the couple. *Kasane* thereby operates in the inverse of many Western horror narratives, which begin with ambiguously fantastic events whose explanations gradually become weighted toward the marvelous.²⁹⁷ In *Kasane*, we begin with a marvelous setting, into which an interlude of doubt regarding the seeming omnipresence of otherworldly powers is introduced. The uncertainty of the moment unsettles both the characters and the viewer, wavering as it does between two possible interpretations.



Figure 23: The “third teacup” scene in *The Ghost Story of Kasane’s Swamp*.

Like virtually all domestic *kaiki* films adapted from Edo period *kaidan* literature, Nakagawa’s *Kasane’s Swamp* must be classified as a “marvelous” text according to Todorov’s schema; however the teacup scene approaches a “fantastic” reading of its

²⁹⁷ See Carroll’s description of Todorov’s “fantastic/marvelous” narrative category in *The Philosophy of Horror*, 16-17.

marvelous world. According to the recollections of actor Kawabe Jūji, the scene – which does not appear in Enchō’s original tale or in the shooting script – was improvised by Nakagawa on-set.²⁹⁸ Although Nakagawa claimed he personally was never interested in the horror genre, the scene showcases a masterful understanding of horror tropes that were more typical of Western ghost stories and horror movies than domestic *kaidan* film adaptations.²⁹⁹ The initial moment when the door appears to be sliding open of its own ghostly accord, only to reveal the maid behind it, recalls the famous and influential “bus” sequence in Jacques Tourneur’s *Cat People*, in which the viewer is led to think that a hissing, roaring sound signals the imminent attack of a supernatural panther woman, but is subsequently revealed to be nothing more than the sound of a bus pulling up to a stop. Having dispelled this first ambiguously fantastic moment with a mundane explanation, Nakagawa immediately re-establishes the dissipated uncertainty with the third teacup, for which he significantly refuses to give a conclusive explanation, either marvelous or mundane. Thereby he swings the pendulum away from the “pure marvelous” tone of the *kaidan* genre toward the ambiguously fantastic worlds of the Western ghost story, before returning to the marvelous in the climax. However, in re-avowing the objective existence of the ghost in *Kasane*’s climax, Nakagawa’s film is not out of line with the typical Western horror narrative, in which the monster’s existence is confirmed and confronted. Noel Carroll identifies this common structure of the horror genre as Todorov’s sub-

²⁹⁸ Kawabe, 122-124.

²⁹⁹ When I asked Nakagawa’s son Shinkichi and Suzuki Kensuke, his assistant director on *The Kaidan of the Undead Koheiji*, whether Nakagawa was influenced by Hollywood or Hammer horror films when making his *kaiki eiga*, they agreed that Nakagawa might have seen the Universal and Hammer films, but never talked about them as being conscious influences on his own *kaiki eiga*. Interview with Nakagawa Shinkichi and Suzuki Kensuke, January 19, 2013.

category of the “fantastic-marvelous,” in which the ambiguous events are ultimately given a definitive supernatural explanation.³⁰⁰ In this manner, *Kasane’s Swamp* remains what critic Tada Michitarō happily calls an “orthodox *kaidan*” even while taking on the techniques of Western, fantastic horror.

Bakeneko Redux – Mansion of the Ghost Cat (1958)

In the next few years Nakagawa and his crew swiftly brought the domestic *kaiki* genre to its pinnacle, at the same time laying the groundwork for a new style of horror filmmaking in Japan that would eventually see the *kaiki* label retired and replaced by *horā* in the ensuing decades. The unexpectedly positive press *Kasane* had received convinced Ōkura that it was worth investing talent and money in a widescreen, color *kaiki* film.³⁰¹ For the 1958 *obon* season Ōkura put the color feature *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* into production with Nakagawa once again in charge. Also retained from *Kasane* were assistant director Ishikawa Yoshihiro and composer Watanabe Chūmei, both of whom would eventually make considerable creative contributions to Nakagawa’s *Ghost Story of Yotsuya*. Another significant talent to join Nakagawa on *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* was cinematographer Nishimoto Tadashi, who would also film *Yotsuya* for Nakagawa before moving to Hong Kong in 1960, where under the name Ho Lan Shan he would shoot King Hu’s *Come Drink with Me (Da zui xia, 1966)* and Bruce Lee’s *Way of the Dragon (Meng long guo jiang, 1972)*. But most important was the presence of art director Kurosawa Haruyasu,

³⁰⁰ Carroll, 16-17.

³⁰¹ Shimura Miyoko notes that *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* was one of only two out of the thirty-one pictures released by Shintōhō in the second half of 1958 to be made in color, revealing just how seriously Ōkura considered the *kaiki* genre to the studio’s survival. See “‘Misemono’ kara ‘eiga’ e,” 14.

whose collaborations with Nakagawa on *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, *The Ghost and the M.P.* (*Kenpei to yūrei*, 1958), *Lady Vampire* (*Onna kyūketsuki*, 1959), *Yotsuya*, and *Jigoku* (1960) – as well as Ishikawa Yoshihiro’s solo directorial debut, *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond* (*Kaibyō Otama ga ike*, 1960) – were deemed the key element to the films’ success by Nakagawa himself.³⁰² Kurosawa had done the art direction for Mōri Masaki’s 1956 version of *Yotsuya*, but his innovative work with Nakagawa on pictures like *The Ceiling at Utsunomiya* (*Utsunomiya no tenjō*, 1956) and especially *Poison Woman Takahashi Oden* (*Dokufu Takahashi Oden*, 1958) – which included ambitious set designs allowing interior scenes to be shot from an exterior camera position through the holes in the roof of a dilapidated, weather-beaten dwelling to convey the poverty of its inhabitants – first showcased his potential.³⁰³ Collectively, Nakagawa’s *kaiki* unit represented the studio’s top craftsmen, a mixture of seasoned veterans like Nakagawa, who had been directing films since before the war, and newcomers like Kurosawa, who began as an art director in 1955 but brought a wealth of innovative ideas to his work. The assemblage of proven talent along with Ōkura’s desire to have *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* filmed in color and widescreen demonstrate that while in generic terms Shintōhō’s *kaiki* films may have been the brethren of Daiei’s ghost cat B-pictures, they were given far more attention to

³⁰² According to Suzuki Kensuke, “If you told him [Nakagawa] that *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* or *Jigoku* was good, he would tell you it was all due to Kurosawa Chian [Haruyasu] (「東海道四谷怪談」、 「地獄」はいいですねと言うと、「あれは黒沢治安がやったんだ」と言うような人でした). Author’s interview with Suzuki Kensuke.

³⁰³ Nakagawa credits the idea entirely to Kurosawa. See *Eiga kantoku Nakagawa Nobuo*, 214-215.

detail – the Shintōhō equivalent of a Mizoguchi Kenji or Naruse Mikio prestige picture.³⁰⁴

In tackling the ghost cat subgenre of *kaiki* cinema, Nakagawa's film adheres to several of the conventions in place since the heyday of Suzuki Sumiko in the late 1930s, but as with *Kasane's Swamp*, they create a film that manages to be “orthodox” in its presentation of traditional material while at the same time innovating new ways to convey more effectively a sense of horror and *osore* for a contemporary audience. The long middle section of the film presents an all-color *jidai geki* ghost cat tale that deliberately invokes many of the standard, spectacular ghost cat motifs: the cat lapping the blood of its slain master, assuming a humanoid feminine form, performing wire-assisted leaps while battling multiple samurai, and completing the obligatory *neko jarashi* cat-toying pantomimes with an acrobat doubling for the monster's possessed victim. Kurosawa's art direction takes full advantage of the color filming, and like the same year's *Dracula* from Hammer Films, *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* makes ample use of dripping, bright red blood, which audiences of the time found shocking and transgressive. Shimura Miyoko elaborates:

In the Shintōhō [ghost cat] films [the color red] is used in places like bloodstained walls, a blood-filled teacup (*Mansion of the Ghost Cat*), blood dripping onto an ornamental hairpin, blood-red ponds of water, and the burned red face of an old woman (*The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond*). Furthermore, it is a fascinating fact that the first color *bakeneko* film, *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, and the British Hammer Films' monument to classic horror movies, *Dracula* (directed by Terrence Fisher) are both produced in the same year (1958). . . . Compared to the American Universal Studios' *Dracula* (1931, directed by Tod

³⁰⁴ Shimura, “‘Misemono’ kara ‘eiga’ e,” 14.

Browning), [Hammer's] *Dracula's* candid depictions shocked audiences with scenes like the staking of the vampire's bride and vampire hunter Professor Van Helsing's destruction of Dracula in vivid Technicolor. In response to fierce attacks from critics regarding the film's violence and suggestive sexuality, director Terrence Fisher remarked in later years that the candid scenes in question were the most important parts of the film. *Dracula's* candidness can be thought of as quite similar to Shintōhō's. For example, the image of the [bloodstained] wall can be compared with Daiei's *The Ghost Cat and the Cursed Wall* (*Kaibyō noroi no kabe*, also produced in 1958, directed by Misumi Kenji). In this film the curse of a woman and her dead cat sealed up within a wall causes the image of a large black cat to appear on the wall no matter how many times it is covered over. On the other hand, in *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* red blood drips from a wall that contains a sealed-up corpse, which conveys a much more directly shocking affect to the audience.³⁰⁵

It may seem simplistic to say that red, dripping Technicolor blood made both *Dracula* and *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* more terrifying for audiences in 1958 by virtue of its shocking (for the time) presentation of gore, but Shimura's comparison of the same year's black-and-white Daiei release *The Ghost Cat and the Cursed Wall* touches on the import of its presence. *Mansion of the Ghost Cat's* bleeding wall is no more realistic than

³⁰⁵ “「新東宝」では壁にじんだ血、血の祝杯（「亡霊怪猫屋敷」）、簷に滴る血、血の池、焼けただれた老婆の顔（「怪猫お玉ヶ池」）等が使われている。また、初のカラーの怪猫映画である「亡霊怪猫屋敷」と、英国ハマー・フィルムズの記念碑的映画である「吸血鬼ドラキュラ」（監督・テレンス・フィッシャー）が、一九五八年という同じ年に製作されているのは興味深い事実である...また、「吸血鬼ドラキュラ」は米国ユニバーサル社の「魔人ドラキュラ」（一九三一年、監督・トッド・ブラウニング）とは対照的に表現があからさまであり、観客は、吸血鬼の花嫁に杭を打ち込むシーンや、吸血鬼ハンターのブアン・ヘルシング博士がドラキュラを倒す一連の出来事を、鮮やかなテクニカラーで目撃する。この作品の暴力と性的暗示に関する批評家達の激しい抗議に対して、監督のテレンス・フィッシャーは「あからさまな描写は（映画の）最も重要なシーンに表れる」と後年答えているが、「吸血鬼ドラキュラ」のあからさまな描写は「新東宝」の傾向と類似しているように思われる。例えば、壁の描写に関していえば、大映の「怪猫呪い壁」（一九五八年、監督・三隅研述二）とは対照的である。「怪猫呪い壁」では壁に塗込められた女性と死んだ猫の怨念によって、何度壁を塗っても大きな黒猫が壁に浮かび上がる。一方、「亡霊怪猫屋敷」の場合、死体が塗り込められた壁には赤い血が滴り、それは観客に直接的なショッキング効果を与えている。” Shimura, “‘Misemono’ kara ‘eiga’ e,” 18.

The Ghost Cat and the Cursed Wall's black-and-white cat silhouette, and they both symbolically represent the same thing (the *onnen* or cosmic wrath of the murder victim). However, in an example of Carl Plantinga's "direct affect" of cinema,³⁰⁶ a close-up of red, dripping blood prompts a visceral response in the viewer, while a cat's silhouette elicits no such immediate reaction of its own, inherent accord. The cat may be just as cosmically terrifying if the audience takes the time to consider its symbolic significance, but the blood horrifies on its own, and the uncanny phenomenon of a wall that bleeds compounds the visceral horror with the terror of cosmic *osore*. The scene does not use gore gratuitously, but to make an already *kaiki* moment doubly frightening.



Figure 24: Cursed walls in *The Ghost Cat and the Cursed Wall* (*Kaibyō noroi no kabe*, 1958; above) and *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* (*Bōrei kaibyō yashiki*, 1958; below).

³⁰⁶ Plantinga, 117. See Chapter 2, pages 77-78 for a discussion of Plantinga's theory.

And yet, for all of *Mansion of the Ghost Cat's* effective use of color in the *jidai geki* sequence, the black-and-white sections that bookend the picture constitute the film's most innovative and considerable contributions to the development of horror cinema in Japan. The picture begins in the present day with a doctor's wife being haunted by the mysterious spirit of an old woman who appears suddenly in the middle of the night, eventually causing the wife to fall into an unexplained illness. The doctor's visit to a nearby Buddhist temple reveals the old woman is the lingering spirit of the ghost cat that had plagued his wife's ancestors. Rather like *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the film then moves from our black-and-white everyday world to a full-color fantasy, recounting the origins of the cat's curse in a "pure marvelous" Edo wonderland in which characters and audiences alike would expect to find a ghost cat or two. As typical of the genre, in the color sequence the film does not shy away from the spectacle of the half-woman, half-feline monster. Shintōhō's film lacks a former screen beauty like Suzuki Sumiko or Irie Takako in the role of the monster – the cat spirit exclusively inhabits the form of sexagenarian actress Satsuki Fujie. But like the *Shinkō* and *Daiei* pictures, during the *jidai geki* scenes the camera provides a clear look at her spectacular, monstrous visage, with close-ups in high key lighting of Satsuki in elaborate makeup performing the traditional *neko jarashi* and *tachimawari* battle against armed samurai. Satsuki also portrays the ghost cat in the contemporarily set *gendai geki* sequences, but here Nakagawa and cinematographer Nishimoto's filming technique takes a strikingly different approach to the character. Unlike the *jidai geki* sequence, Nakagawa and Nishimoto keep the camera at a distance from Satsuki, whom they film mainly from

behind in long shots, keeping her face obscured from the audience. She does not leap and bound about the frame with the feline agility seen in the *jidai geki* sequence, but her movements remain unnatural in their creeping slowness, her zombie-like undulations conveying a more understated sense of horror. The filmmakers bring the camera in closer for a tense long take in which the doctor's wife convalesces in the background while the ghost cat rises into frame in the foreground, then slowly creeps toward the fear-stricken woman and briefly strangles her before slinking back out of frame when the doctor enters the room. But even here, the filmmakers deliberately choose to keep the monster's visage hidden from clear view of the audience, with Satsuki's hair pulled forward over her face. In other shots they avoid showing Satsuki entirely, consciously evoking the Expressionist use of shadows to imply the lurking presence of the vampire Count Orlock in *Nosferatu* (1922) by casting Satsuki's silhouette onto the walls of the mansion, and alternately employing subjective tracking shots that replicate the monster's point-of-view as it slowly stalks the halls of the doctor's renovated dwelling, which doubles as a family residence and a medical office. Anticipating the often-discussed "Killer's P.O.V." that became a hallmark of the slasher subgenre of horror in the 1970s and 80s with pictures like *Halloween* (1978), a particularly memorable setup in *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* lets the audience look through the monster's eyes while it approaches the doctor's receptionist from behind as she obliviously reads a magazine.³⁰⁷ Watanabe's score menacingly swells until the suspense comes to a head when the receptionist looks up and gasps in alarm. The tension recedes as the camera finally cuts back to a medium long shot

³⁰⁷ See Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* for the most developed discussion of the technique.

of Satsuki standing before the receptionist, hunched over with her back to the camera, as the receptionist berates what she assumes to be an ordinary old woman for startling her. The sequence represents a stellar example of Hansen’s vernacular modernism in postwar *kaiki* cinema, using the established international film grammar of German Expressionism to give a modern spin on the culturally particular traditions of the ghost cat, and also contributing to the emerging aesthetic of the “Killer’s P.O.V.” which would itself become an integral part of global horror filmmaking traditions.



Figure 25: Actress Satsuki Fujie as the *bakeneko* in the color *jidai geki* sequence of *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* (above), and as she appears in the monochrome *gendai geki* sequences (below).



Figure 26: Expressionistic shadows and point-of-view tracking movement in a series of successive shots from *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* (left-to-right).

Excepting the color *jidai geki* sequence, Nakagawa creates a radically new way of portraying a traditional mainstay of domestic *kaiki* cinema. Shimura Miyoko considers this possible in part by the casting of the elderly Satsuki Fujie as the ghost cat, implying that a younger star actress like Suzuki Sumiko or Irie Takako would demand a more spectacular, revealing screen presence.³⁰⁸ While it is true, as Shimura notes, that Satsuki cannot perform the wire-assisted acrobatics with the same elaborateness as Suzuki or

³⁰⁸ Shimura, “‘Misemono’ kara ‘eiga’ e,” 19-20.
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Irie,³⁰⁹ *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* does in fact make the usual spectacle of the creature in the color sequence. The drastically different portrayal of the monster in the black-and-white sequences, then, appears to have been motivated purely by aesthetic considerations, and more so than perhaps any other domestic *kaiki* film, provides a blueprint for the portrayal of ghosts and monsters in the J-horror films of the past twenty years. *Ring* screenwriter Takahashi Hiroshi, who along with Kurosawa Kiyoshi became the J-horror movement's central theorist, describes six ideal techniques for the portrayal of ghosts on film:

- 1.) Don't show the face.
Show only a fragment of the body or clothes. Or, put it in a long shot so that the details of the face are blurred.
- 2.) Make the standing position or behavior unnatural.
Human beings have a specifically human sense of space and distance between themselves. Position someone in such a way to defy this sense subtly...
- 3.) Make its movement non-human.
Make its movement unrelated to the natural motility of human muscles...
- 4.) Put it [a body part] in an impossible position...
- 5.) Use an awesome face.
There is nothing to add, if the actor's face terrifies. It is an ultimate tour-de-force, an ideal of the ghost film.
- 6.) Show nothing.
Your weapon is premonition and atmosphere in space and the use of sound. Robert Wise's *The Haunting* (1963) is an exemplary case.³¹⁰

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 18.

³¹⁰ Takahashi Hiroshi, *Eiga no ma* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2004), 27-28. Quoted by Chika Kinoshita in "The Mummy Complex: Kurosawa Kiyoshi's *Loft* and J-horror," in *Horror to the Extreme*, 115.

Takahashi's first rule in particular perfectly describes the monster in the *gendai geki* sequence of *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, as do most of his subsequent commandments. And although he names Robert Wise's *The Haunting* as the premier example of the technique, Nakagawa's film predates Wise's by five years.³¹¹

What about the modern-day, monochromatic *gendai geki* sequences demanded such a departure in the portrayal of a classic *kaiki* monster? Previous ghost cat films were either adapted from Edo period *kaidan* and kabuki stage plays (*The Legend of the Saga Ghost Cat*; *The Ghost Cat of Okazaki*), or else deliberate imitations of traditional *kaidan* settings and motifs (*The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen*). Significantly, Shintōhō adapted *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* from a 1952 novel by science fiction author Tachibana Sotō. Although the film only loosely bases its story on Tachibana's original work, both follow the same novel approach to the ghost cat legend by beginning in the present day. Both book and film rip the traditional cat monster out of her marvelous Edo fantasyland and deposit her in postwar Japan, where her victims are not geisha and samurai who take the existence of monsters for granted, but affluent, urbane modern Japanese. The wealthy doctor in *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* represents the pinnacle of modernity, but like the rational protagonists of the typical Western horror film, he must ultimately rely on mystical, arcane intervention (the Buddhist priest) to successfully cure his wife of her mysterious affliction, which is caused by the supernatural curse of the *bakeneko*. The act of removing a traditional, premodern monster from its marvelous setting and inserting it somewhere it does not "belong" – rational, postwar Japan –

³¹¹ *The Haunting* famously never depicts its ghosts on-camera, only implying their existence with empty frames and sound effects. While this makes it the ultimate example of Takahashi's "Show nothing" rule, *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* fulfills more of Takahashi's criteria than Wise's film.

strongly invokes Freud's uncanny as the past invades the present. As in *Kasane's Swamp*, once again Nakagawa's film relies on the uncanny to evoke a sense of fear in the viewer. The entirely premodern narrative of *Kasane* achieves this primarily through narrative repetition and visual doubling (father and daughter's facial wounds, the swamp which claims the father in the prologue and the son in the climax). *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, by virtue of its contemporary opening and closing sequences, evokes an even more directly affective sense of the uncanny by depicting a traditional monster which previously had been contained exclusively in the marvelous, premodern past invade the rational, modern present-day world of the audience. Unlike the *shinpi-kaiki* mystery hybrid films, no one reveals the monster to be a criminal in disguise, and both characters and audience must accept its uncanny existence. In the premodern *jidai geki* sequence, a ghost cat is familiar and knowable, and Nakagawa's film treats it accordingly, depicting it in the direct, spectacular fashion typical of the genre. In the *gendai geki* sequences the same monster becomes an unknowable anomaly, its presence less spectacular and more abjectly terrifying, and Nakagawa adjusts his filmic portrayal to convey its more mysterious, uncanny and frightening presence. The ghost cat now embodies both the *osore* of omnipotent karmic retribution – transcending time itself to visit its curse upon the descendents of those who wronged its master – and, for the first time in a Japanese *kaiki* film, fully fulfills the standards of Lovecraft's unknowable “cosmic fear,” representing forces beyond the pale of rational human understanding. *Kasane's* sense of uncanny is primarily narrative, but *Mansion of the Ghost Cat's* uncanny works on a more fundamentally cultural level. Being part of Japan's collective cultural consciousness in

much the same way the vampire or werewolf functions for Western audiences, the ghost cat is shared cultural shorthand for a monster typically contained in long-long-ago campfire stories. Its uncanny appearance in the heart of modern-day, everyday Japan destroys the barriers of safety that previously confined it to the past. Like Nakagawa's formal techniques for depicting this rupture, the thematic motif of a traditional monster of the past invading the present would become one of the central themes of the J-horror movement at the turn of the millennium.³¹²

Contemporary *Kaidan* – Vampires, Werewolves, and Beach Bunnies

On the heels of *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, which *Kinema junpō* prophetically deemed a “new flavor” (*shin-aji*) of *kaiki* filmmaking,³¹³ Shintōhō produced several *gendai geki* horror films that further transgressed the boundaries of time and space which had separated the marvelous monsters of period *kaiki* films and the rationally debunked fake monsters of contemporarily set *shinpi-kaiki* mystery hybrids. Nakagawa and his crew delivered two key entries. Just one month after the *obon* premiere of *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, the studio released Nakagawa's *The Ghost and the M.P. (Kenpei to yūrei)*. The picture was a modestly budgeted black-and-white attempt to copy the success of the studio's hit from the previous year, *The M.P. and the Dismembered Beauty (Kenpei to bara bara shibijin)*, a gruesome but monster-less murder mystery set in the military policemen's barracks of the immediate prewar years. Inspired by the positive commercial and critical reception of the studio's *kaiki* efforts, Ōkura demanded Nakagawa inject *kaiki* elements into what became *The Ghost and the M.P.*, which told a similar tale of murder

³¹² I discuss this point in greater detail in Chapter 6.

³¹³ Tada Michitarō, “*Bōrei kaibyō yashiki*,” 75.

among military policemen. The picture's climax, in which the guilt-ridden killer portrayed by actor Amachi Shigeru stumbles into a graveyard where the ghosts of his victims assault him, can be interpreted as a purely symbolic hallucination on the part of Amachi's character – unlike traditional *kaidan* the ghosts do not appear to multiple characters, nor do they demonstrate any active agency to influence the “real-world” events of the narrative.³¹⁴ In later years Nakagawa referred to the picture's baroque, Grand Guignol final sequence as “embarrassing” (*hazukashii*),³¹⁵ but its ambiguous portrayal of the monsters which plague Amachi represented, like *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, an uncanny rupture of the boundary between the monster-filled, premodern past and the previously monster-free modern era that would characterize the later J-horror pictures.

A film Nakagawa found even more embarrassing was another Tachibana Sotō adaptation, *Lady Vampire (Onna kyūketsuki)*, and it too marked an important step toward the shift from *kaiki* to *horā*. It also serves as perhaps the most conspicuous case of vernacular modernism in Nakagawa's oeuvre, reinterpreting Western vampire lore in a Japanese context, and at the same time anticipating later developments in the vampire subgenre of horror. Japan's first Western-style vampire movie, Ōkura doubtless intended the picture's release in early 1959 to capitalize on the popularity of Hammer's *Dracula*. However, Nakagawa's black-and-white vampire film, featuring Amachi Shigeru as the cape-and-tuxedo-clad eponymous monster (the title “*Lady Vampire*” refers to the

³¹⁴ Kawabe suggests this was Nakagawa's way of resisting Ōkura's order to make the picture into an overt monster movie. See *B-kyū kyōshōron*, 118.

³¹⁵ *Eiga kantoku Nakagawa Nobuo*, 216.

vampire's dining preferences, not its gender) owes more to Universal's horror films of the 1930s and 40s, mixing the iconography of Bela Lugosi's Count Dracula with Lon Chaney Junior's Wolf Man when the light of the full moon unleashes Amachi's feral, hairy-faced version of a vampire. Despite its shaky understanding of Western horror movie monster taxonomy, *Lady Vampire* expertly adapts what Noel Carroll calls the "complex discovery" plot of the typical Western horror film, with the monster's existence initially revealed only to a select few characters, who must then convince the others that the mysterious goings-on in fact stem from a supernatural force that must be confronted and defeated.³¹⁶ *Lady Vampire* even anticipates later additions to the Dracula mythos by making the vampire's primary victim the descendent and physical reincarnation of his long-dead love, both roles played by pinup actress Mihara Yoko. Today the conceit of portraying either Lucy Westenra or Mina Harker as the spitting-image reincarnation of Dracula's wife has become an oft-repeated trope of *Dracula* adaptations, although it has no analogue in Stoker's original novel and was first introduced in Dan Curtis's television movie *Dracula* in 1973, fourteen years after the release of *Lady Vampire*.³¹⁷ Curtis, Francis Ford Coppola, and other filmmakers who adopted the conceit likely were unfamiliar with Nakagawa's vampire movie, which possibly draws inspiration from traditional Buddhist tales in which reincarnated lovers act out the same roles across multiple lifetimes. Nonetheless, *Lady Vampire's* themes of doomed romance,

³¹⁶ Carroll, 99-108.

³¹⁷ Curtis borrowed the conceit from his earlier vampire soap opera television series *Dark Shadows*, which aired from 1966-1971.

reincarnation and the curse of immortality anticipate later key developments in the Dracula mythos.³¹⁸

Unlike Hammer's *Dracula*, but similar to Universal's 1931 version, *Lady Vampire* takes place in the present day, but far more so than the Universal film, Nakagawa's vampire picture constantly points to the "now-ness" of its setting. Indeed, many horror fans forget that the 1931 *Dracula* takes place in a world of automobiles, electric lights, and telephones, as the picture downplays these elements in favor of gothic Transylvanian locales with horse-drawn carriages. Even the sequences set in London linger on Victorian drawing rooms and ancient crypts, lending the production the feel of a period piece. By contrast, *Lady Vampire* opens with an automobile driving through the night, alternating close-ups of a gloved hand on a steering wheel with shots of a steadily increasing odometer. Electric headlights pierce the dark of night as the protagonist heads toward a birthday party held by a group of young women sporting the latest contemporary fashion and hairstyles who sing "Happy Birthday" in English to the guest of honor – a quintessentially postwar moment in Japanese cinema. The invasion of the vampire into the urban Tokyo setting of the picture recalls Bram Stoker's original depiction of Dracula penetrating the bustling, turn-of-the-century London; but whereas Dracula chose the anachronistically gothic ruins of Carfax Abbey for his metropolitan base of operations, Amachi's vampire resides in a posh Tokyo hotel decorated in of-the-moment late 1950s trappings. The film's most elaborate vampire attack occurs in a

³¹⁸ The "lost love reincarnated" motif has continued to appear regularly in contemporary Dracula films as recently as 2014's *Dracula Untold*.

downtown Tokyo club, Amachi's victims all trendy postwar socialites.³¹⁹ Apart from a brief flashback which recounts the vampire's origins as a follower of Amakusa Shirō's ill-fated Christian rebellion in the early 17th century, it is only in the final sequence, when the heroes trace the monster to his centuries-old subterranean dwelling in a remote island off Kyushu, that the film abandons the thoroughly modern setting for the gothic, stylized set design which J-horror creators Kurosawa Kiyoshi and Sasaki Hirohisa identify as a necessary element of the *kaiki* genre. In its insistence on keeping the look of contemporary postwar Japan central to the mise-en-scène, *Lady Vampire* goes even further than *The Ghost and the M.P.* and *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* towards establishing the uncanny invasion of monsters of the past into the present as a theme of the newly emerging style of Japanese horror film. Despite the groundbreaking style and subject matter, Nakagawa considered the picture little more than regrettable consequence of working at Ōkura's Shintōhō. When asked about *Lady Vampire*, he responded to his interviewer, "Ah, the kind of stuff you like. The kind I hate. Mihara Yoko, wasn't it? That was an Ōkura-style thing – those kinds of movies I made."³²⁰

³¹⁹ Another influence on *Lady Vampire* may have been American International Pictures' films like *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), which similarly imported classic movie monsters to present-day locales, although Nakagawa's vampire film and subsequent Shintōhō *gendai geki* horror films lack the overt exploitation of youth culture that characterize the A.I.P. films.

³²⁰“キミの好きな奴ね。僕は嫌いね。三原葉子だるう。あれは大蔵、ごきげんだな。ああいうの作ったらな。” *Eiga kantoku Nakagawa Nobuo*, 216.



Figure 27: A promotional still for *Lady Vampire* (*Onna kyūketsuki*, 1959) which showcases the contemporary characters and setting plagued by Amachi Shigeru's vampire-werewolf hybrid.

“Those kinds of movies” went on to redefine the domestic *kaiki* genre, which continued to utilize traditional ghosts and monsters and stylized sets, but brought them into the world of contemporarily-set *gendai geki* productions with the same uncanny affect that Nakagawa pioneered in *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, *The Ghost and the M.P.*, and *Lady Vampire*. One of Shintōhō's final concessions to the old *shinpi-kaiki* mystery hybrids, in which the ghosts and monsters received a rational debunking, was 1959's *Diving Girls in a Haunted House* (*Ama no bakemono yashiki*), directed by Magatani Morihei. The film possesses a certain sleazy charm, representing one of Ōkura's more go-for-broke attempts to combine as many exploitation genres as possible into a single picture, as a sexy heiress and her pearl-diving compatriots wrestle each other in bathing suits on the beach in-between attempts to solve a haunted house mystery and discover

hidden treasure.³²¹ The film ultimately rejects Nakagawa's innovations, however, by revealing the ghosts to be thieves in masks, trying to scare off the bathing beauties so they can find the treasure themselves. *Kinema junpō*'s review of the picture shows that "real" ghosts were still firmly entrenched in the marvelous past in the popular conscious when it authoritatively states that "because this is a *gendai geki* story, no 'real' monsters appear."³²² But by the time Ōkura ordered the inevitable follow-up picture the following year, *Diving Girl's Ghost* (*Kaidan ama yūrei*, 1960), Shintōhō had completely overturned the convention that *gendai geki* could not feature "real monsters." By including the word *kaidan* in the original Japanese title, the film more unequivocally aligns itself with traditional *kaiki* narratives than *Diving Girls in a Haunted House*, although significantly the action does not take place in the Edo period that to this point had been almost exclusively associated with the *kaidan* genre, but the contemporary world of scantily-clad diving beauties. Further distancing itself from *Diving Girls in a Haunted House*, *Diving Girl's Ghost* presents its ghosts as real entities, not living men in disguise, and despite the contemporary setting weaves a very traditional *kaidan*-esque tale of murder and revenge from beyond the grave. The picture itself is of dubious quality, technically inferior even to the hokey *Diving Girls in a Haunted House*, but in its importation not just of the iconography but the themes of the traditional *kaidan* into contemporary postwar Japan, it is emblematic of Shintōhō's revolution of the *kaiki* genre.

³²¹ *Kinema junpō*'s review opens with the witty observation that "[the film] stinks, but the title is some kind of genius" (泥臭いがしかし傑作の題名である). Uryū Tadao, "Ama no bakemono yashiki," *Kinema junpō*, August 15, 1959, 84.

³²² "話が現代劇だから、ホンモノのおバケは出ない." Ibid.



Figure 28: *Kaidan* meets skin flick – posters for *Diving Girls in a Haunted House* (*Ama no bakemono yashiki*, 1959, left) and *Diving Girl's Ghost* (*Kaidan ama yūrei*, 1960, right).

A more accomplished grafting of *kaidan* themes onto a *gendai geki* horror film was director Namiki Kyōtarō's *Vampire Bride* (*Hanayome kyūketsuma*, 1960), the most interesting of the Shintōhō *kaiki eiga* not produced by Nakagawa and his circle of talent, and perhaps the best example of vernacular modernism at work in Shintōhō's *kaiki* canon. Just as *Diving Girl's Ghost* was a variation on *Diving Girls in a Haunted House* and Ishikawa Yoshihiro's *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond* would be an attempt to recycle the success of *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, *Vampire Bride* recalls shades of Nakagawa's *Lady Vampire*, but Namiki's film represents an even more liberal departure from the iconography of the Western vampire than Nakagawa's vampire-werewolf hybrid. Namiki's vampire, played by actress Ikeuchi Junko, looks and behaves nothing like the suave Victorian bloodsuckers associated with the word. Instead of a jumble of Western

movie monster motifs, *Vampire Bride* combines *kaidan* thematic elements with a native Japanese, pseudo-Shintō mysticism in a perfect display of Miriam Hansen's point that vernacular modernism uses Hollywood models to reinterpret local traditions in the cinematic medium.³²³ Ikeuchi's character, like Oiwa and the archetypical suffering heroines of *kaidan* literature and film, finds herself the victim of a cruel plot by jealous rivals, which leaves her face disfigured in the predictable Oiwa fashion. She seeks the help of a mysterious relative, a reclusive mountain witch who practices a profane form of shamanism that has kept her alive for centuries. When the spell to restore Ikeuchi's beauty misfires with fatal consequences, the unfortunate heroine finds herself resurrected and seemingly lovely once more, although now possessed of an uncontrollable thirst for blood that transforms her into a winged, hair-covered beast compelled to hunt down and murder the women who conspired against her. The final acts blends the *kaidan* revenge-narrative arc with a plot structure that anticipates the teen slasher subgenre of American horror film in vogue during the 1980s, as the wicked conspirators, now living glamorous lives since disposing of their rival, are murdered one by one. Although remembered today primarily for a film industry rumor that Ōkura Mitsugi forced Ikeuchi to don the heavy, unflattering makeup of the title monster as punishment for spurning his lecherous advances, *Vampire Bride* may be Shintōhō's most creative endeavor to blend the narrative and visual motifs of the native *kaidan* subgenre of *kaiki eiga* with the emerging aesthetic of *horā* filmmaking.

³²³ Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses," 341.

“Truly like unto the greatest terror there is,” – *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* (1959)

Ōkura seemed willing to experiment with breaking the rules of the *kaiki* genre in his lower budget black-and-white pictures, but for the color centerpiece of Shintōhō’s 1959 *obon* “monster cavalcade” release the studio head decided to offer audiences a more traditional, period *kaidan* adaptation. Having outdone Daiei the previous year by producing a widescreen, color, and critically well-received ghost cat picture in *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, Ōkura next chose to revisit the most famous Japanese ghost story, *Yotsuya kaidan*, and the resulting picture was ultimately released on the same day as Daiei’s own color adaptation of the tale. Daiei’s *Yotsuya kaidan* (1959), directed by Misumi Kenji, drew large inspiration from Kinoshita Keisuke’s Occupation-era *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya: A New Interpretation* with its sympathetic portrayal of Iemon (this time played by romantic lead actor Hasegawa Kazuo) and restrained depictions of Oiwa’s ghost – indeed it could be considered a color remake of Kinoshita’s film. Nakagawa Nobuo, meanwhile, went back to Tsuruya Nanboku IV’s original 1825 kabuki script for his *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* (or “The *Kaidan* of Yotsuya along the East Sea Road”), retaining the full version of the play’s title not just so audiences could tell it apart from Daiei’s version on the theater marquee, but to proclaim its comparative fidelity to the spirit of Nanboku’s lurid *kaidan* masterpiece. Identifying two main strains of *Yotsuya* film adaptations, Yokoyama Yasuko places Misumi’s version in the revisionist category also occupied by Kinoshita’s film.³²⁴ These pictures, Yokoyama notes, depart from Nanboku in depicting Oiwa as hopelessly in love with Iemon and omit their infant son

³²⁴ Yokoyama, 154-156.

from the narrative, making the tragedy that befalls the couple a tale of doomed romance rather than the destruction of the family unit. The adaptations in Yokoyama's other, conservative category, to which both Mōri Masaki's 1956 version as well as Nakagawa's 1959 film belong, retain Nanboku's themes of (dis)loyalty and vengeance that mark not just the sequences involving Oiwa's ghost, but characterize her relationship with Iemon even while alive. Nanboku's (and Nakagawa's) Oiwa stays with the abusive Iemon not out of any professed romantic love, but from a promise that Iemon will avenge her father's murder (unbeknownst to her, Iemon is in fact the murderer), remarking at one point in Nanboku's script, "Living in this house is constant torture...But I must remember that Iemon promised to help me attack my father's murderer...If I can just endure this a little while longer, I'll be able to leave this evil man."³²⁵ The infant son – also retained from the kabuki play in these film versions – becomes a symbol of Iemon's familial obligations, cast aside when he plots to poison his wife and marry the daughter of the wealthy Itō Kihei. Although the son receives short shrift in Nanboku's script – being devoured onstage by the ghost of another of Iemon's victims – in Nakagawa's film he serves as a conspicuous reminder of the father's guilt. For example, during the climax of the picture, Iemon is at one point plagued by images of a blood-red mosquito net descending from the sky upon him while Oiwa wails his name, and at one point the baby's cries are clearly heard, recalling Iemon's previous attempt to pawn the mosquito net for cash despite Oiwa's pleas that without it, the baby will be eaten alive. Although the scene has no correlation in Nanboku's script and was apparently an innovation of

³²⁵ Tsuruya Nanboku IV, "Ghost Stories at Yotsuya," trans. Mark Oshima, in *Early Modern Japanese Literature*, ed. Shirane Haruo (New York: Columbia, 2002), 855.

Kurosawa Haruyasu,³²⁶ it reinforces the themes of familial betrayal central to the kabuki tale.

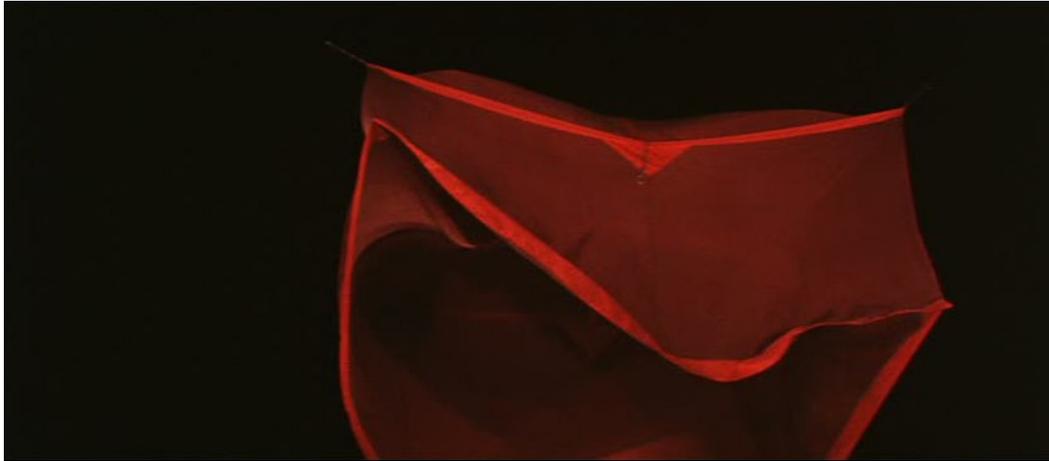


Figure 29: The blood-red mosquito net descends in *Tōkaido Yotsuya kaidan* (1959), a symbolic reminder of Iemon's forsaken paternal duties to his infant son.

While Misumi's film was soon forgotten, Nakagawa's *Yotsuya* swiftly became acknowledged as a classic of Japanese cinema. Kurosawa Haruyasu won a Japan Film Technology Award (*Nippon eiga gijutsu shō*) for his art direction on the picture, and *Kinema junpō* placed it on their list of the best films of 1959, an unprecedented honor for the critically ill-reputed *kaiki* genre.³²⁷ For a special issue devoted entirely to “*kaiki* and *kyōfu* (horror) *eiga*” in 1969, *Kinema junpō* published the complete shooting script for Nakagawa's *Yotsuya* together with a translation of the script for Hammer's *Dracula*, choosing the two films as the exemplary domestic and foreign examples of the genre and

³²⁶ Nakagawa attributes the idea to Kurosawa in his notes that accompany *Kinema junpō*'s publication of the shooting script for the film. See Nakagawa Nobuo, “*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* enshutsu zakki.” *Kinema junpō*, August 20, 1969, 79-94.

³²⁷ Kawabe, 133.

inviting Nakagawa to contribute detailed commentary on his memories of the shoot.³²⁸ In 1982 *Junpō* chose it as one of the “Best 200 Japanese Films of All-Time,” – the only *kaiki* film to make the list.³²⁹ According to Takisawa Osamu, when Ōkura assigned Nakagawa *Yotsuya* as his fifth *kaiki* project in two years, the director told him, “You have stature as the studio head, but if you appoint me to direct, then I have more stature than you,” and Takisawa says that there was an implicit understanding among Nakagawa’s staff that this would not be just another *obake eiga* monster movie, but an effort to create something special.³³⁰ Nakagawa later recollected that, more so than even their previous *kaiki* productions, the cast and crew put their all into the production, even while the director himself was initially less than enthused about the project.³³¹ The film’s fidelity to the Edo period themes and spirit of Nanboku preclude the kind of experimentation with generic tropes seen in pictures like *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* or *Vampire Bride*, which more pointedly anticipate the move away from *kaiki* towards what would eventually be called *horā eiga*. Even the dizzying layers of the Freudian uncanny that distinguished Nakagawa’s other “traditional” *kaidan* adaptation, *Kasane’s Swamp*, find comparatively little expression. Instead, *Yotsuya* plays to the hilt the old-fashioned themes of *osore* that were the prized aesthetic of *kaidan* literature, conveyed through the terrifying, unstoppable omnipotence of Oiwa’s curse. As I suggest in Chapter 2, when effectively invoked, such terror approaches H.P. Lovecraft’s “cosmic fear” in its sublime power

³²⁸ *Kinema junpō*, August 20, 1969.

³²⁹ Takisawa Osamu, “*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*,” in *Eiga-shi jō besuto 200 shirizu: Nihon eiga 200* (Tokyo: Kinema Junpō, 1982), 270-271.

³³⁰ “あんたは社長で偉いが、監督をさせればおれのほうが偉い。” *Ibid.*, 270.

³³¹ “*Kaiki eiga montō*,” 114.

against which even the Buddhas cannot afford the condemned any protection.

Nakagawa's film expertly portrays the extent of Oiwa's fury when Iemon seeks refuge in a Buddhist temple, only to have the great gold Buddha statue he covers before recede into darkness, leaving him to his fate. In its powerful realization of the themes of *insan* and *osore* that made Nanboku's play the ultimate *kaidan*, and in its culmination of the techniques that Nakagawa, Kurosawa, and their crew had perfected over the course of their previous *kaiki eiga* endeavors, *Yotsuya* represents the zenith of domestic *kaiki* filmmaking. The decade that followed its release would alternately see attempts to replicate its success in further *kaidan* adaptations, and further moves away from the period settings and marvelous cosmologies it typified. Daiei made yet more adaptations of *Kasane's Swamp* (*Kaidan Kasane ga fuchi*, 1960) and *The Peony Lantern* (*Botan dōrō*, 1968), while Tōei and Tōhō produced respective versions of *Yotsuya* in 1961 and 1965. Shōchiku, meanwhile, which had briefly flirted with *kaiki* material at intervals throughout its history, released modern day *kaiki* films like Satō Hajime's *Hunchback Kaidan* (*Kaidan semushi otoko*, 1965) and Matsuno Hiroshi's *The Living Skeleton* (*Kyūketsu dokurosen*, 1968), continuing down the trail blazed by Shintōhō's *gendai geki* horror films. In a way, Nakagawa's *Yotsuya* marked the beginning of the end of the *kaiki* genre in Japan. Acknowledged as the last word in *kaiki* filmmaking, Japan's horror filmmakers would ultimately seek new horizons of fear beyond the realm of traditional *kaidan* adaptations.

Because of the film's reputation in Japan, Nakagawa's *Yotsuya* has received some small attention from English-language film studies, which has more often tended to

overlook popular postwar Japanese horror movies in favor of more internationally known art films like Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* (1953) and Kobayashi Masaki's *Kwaidan* (1964) that deal with ghostly subject matter but ultimately eschew many of the generic conventions of *kaiki* cinema. Colette Balmain devotes part of her book *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film* to a consideration of Nakagawa's *Yotsuya*, in which she offers a sociopolitical reading of the film reflective of the postwar era in which it was produced. Seeing it as representative of the *kaidan* subgenre of *kaiki eiga* – which she deems the “Edo Gothic” – Balmain explicitly posits the film in opposition to the *shakaimono* or “social problem film” genre which was also popular in Japan during the late 1950s and early 1960s and critiqued established social institutions: “Edo Gothic films were traditional and tended to reinforce conservative values, with their helpless victims trapped in nightmarish gothic landscapes, articulated through the expressionistic surfaces of a subjective rather than objective reality.”³³² Drawing on the work of Japanese film historian Isolde Standish, Balmain goes on to suggest that the Edo Gothic films are furthermore:

expressive of a type of 'post-defeat victimization' or *higaisha ishiki* (victim consciousness) . . . embodied within the physical scars of the vengeful ghosts, through which individual and historical trauma becomes displaced from the ‘self’ onto the ‘other.’ However, the boundaries between self and other become increasingly problematized, as the external alien turns inward.³³³

³³² Balmain 51.

³³³ Ibid.

Balmain and Standish do not simply invoke the phrase *higaisha ishiki* as a convenient way to describe elements present in the films they examine. The term has entered the Japanese lexicon as a catch-all way of explaining and describing the tendency of many Japanese films of postwar era to portray their protagonists as victims of circumstance and the times in which they live, relatively powerless against the forces arrayed against them and capable only of reaction (as opposed to any assertive action).³³⁴

The most obvious examples of *higaisha ishiki* films deal explicitly in uncoded terms with the Pacific War and its disastrous aftermath for the Japanese people, such as Shindō Kaneto's *Children of the Bomb* (*Genbako no ko*, 1952) and Kinoshita Keisuke's *Twenty-four Eyes* (*Nijūshi no hitomi*, 1954). If, as Balmain suggests, Nakagawa's *Yotsuya* also belongs to the realm of *higaisha ishiki*, the collective postwar experiences of trauma must by necessity be coded and embedded within the imagery and conventions of *kaiki eiga*. However, although I believe Balmain is correct in seeing *higaisha ishiki* manifest in Nakagawa's version of *Yotsuya*, she does not take the iconography of the *kaiki* genre and collective Japanese cultural knowledge of an already well-established narrative more fully into account, thereby arriving at predictable and somewhat unsatisfactory conclusions about how and why the film functions as postwar *higaisha ishiki*. For example, Balmain sees the wicked, self-interested Iemon as an indictment against American notions of capitalist consumerism that were imported and enforced by the occupation of Japan at the end of the war.³³⁵ While this explains how a particular

³³⁴ Standish 189-190.

³³⁵ Balmain, 56-57.

postwar audience may have collectively read and reacted to the themes presented in Nakagawa's film, the movie places no greater emphasis on Iemon's greed and materialism than Nanboku's early 19th-century kabuki play, nor the many other film versions produced before and after the war. Balmain's reading of *Yotsuya's* central iconic image, the disfigured face of Oiwa's vengeful ghost, is likewise perhaps too grounded in the postwar moment. The right side of her face swollen by the poison she is tricked into drinking, her long black hair disheveled and falling out in bloody clumps, Oiwa is not only the obvious template for contemporary J-horror ghosts like *Ring's* Sadako, but also bears resemblance to photographs of radiation victims from the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Seizing on the comparison, Balmain writes,

While [O]Iwa's disfigurement is key to the original folktale, it can also be interpreted as a metaphorical reference to the traumatized and defeated Japan after the Second World War. This is manifest trauma as genetic scar written on the female body, as symbolic of nationhood.³³⁶

She then immediately quotes a passage from Julie Rauer in *Little Boy: The Art of Japan's Exploding Subculture*: "Twenty-two years after...the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and three days later on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, monstrous deformities persisted in the Japanese psyche."³³⁷ But the question must be asked, did postwar Japanese audiences see in Oiwa's face the scarred radiation victims of the atomic bombs, and by extension their own collective war trauma? Japanese scholarship on Nakagawa

³³⁶ Ibid., 58.

³³⁷ Julie Rauer, "Persistence of a Genetic Scar: Japanese Anime, Manga, and Otaku Culture Fill an Open National Wound," in *Little Boy: The Art of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (<http://www.asianart.com/exhibitions/littleboy/intro.html>). Quoted in Balmain, 58.

and *Yotsuya* does not make the correlation, and makes little if any reference to postwar attitudes toward collective war trauma in their discussions of Nakagawa's work, neither from the standpoint of auteur theory or audience reception.³³⁸ Oiwa's disfigured face was an established convention of Japanese representations of the grotesque since kabuki makeup and woodblock prints first made it famous in the late Edo period. Nothing suggests Nakagawa's version of Oiwa's physical appearance was consciously modeled on atomic bomb victims,³³⁹ and if the similarities were noticed by the postwar Japanese audience, it seems too obvious to warrant comment.



Figure 30: Publicity still of Wakasugi Katsuko as Oiwa from *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* (left), and a 19th-century woodblock print of Oiwa by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (right).

While it would be wrong to dismiss the notion that *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* (as well as other postwar “Edo Gothic” films featuring victimized, disfigured ghosts) are part of the *higaisha ishiki* phenomenon, I think it more fruitful to consider the film as primarily reflecting the same themes that had characterized the *kaidan* genre since its

³³⁸ See Ōsawa Jō's and Yokoyama Yasuko's articles in *Kaiki to gensō e no kairō*, 68-94; 146-169, as well as Izumi Toshiyuki's *Ginmaku no hyakkai*.

³³⁹ Interviews with Nakagawa's cast and crew - including the actress who played Oiwa - nowhere suggest the makeup was modeled on atomic bombing victims. See *Jigoku de yōi hai!: Nakagawa Nobuo, kaidan/kyōfu eiga no gyōka*, ed. Suzuki Kensuke (Tokyo: Wides, 2000).

inception in the Edo period. The collective cultural lode Oiwa mined most strongly for postwar audiences was not Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but traditions of *osore* – the aesthetically idealized sense of terror engendered by the wrath of unstoppable cosmic forces. Nakagawa blatantly invokes both the tale’s roots in kabuki theater as well as the traditional themes of omnipotent, undying cosmic fury during the opening credits of *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, superimposed over images of a kabuki stage being prepped for performance while a voice sings an opening *gidayū* chant, “How can you kill one who is yours body and soul, who is bound to you for generations to come? . . . O, the fury of a woman maddened is truly like unto the greatest terror (*osoroshisa* – a nominal variant on *osore*) there is!”³⁴⁰ Two years before the release of Nakagawa’s *Yotsuya*, critic Izawa Jun wrote the following in his article “What is *Kaiki*?”:

More than anyone, I think the great Nanboku lodged “*obake* drama” in the popular imagination. Without him, Oiwa’s *kaiki* would not still be appearing on Japanese movie screens. *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*’s grotesque, decadent, utterly thorough heartlessness makes it the masterpiece of Japanese ghost stories...Oiwa has become an icon. Her performance, the *kaiki*-ness of her makeup, these immediately took root in cinema. . . . Iemon’s a thoroughly wicked guy, who can kill without batting an eyelash . . . but against Oiwa’s ghost he cannot do anything but utterly succumb. . . . The notion that against such forces one must inevitably succumb comes from kabuki’s moralistic bent. The Japanese are suckers for this sort of thing.³⁴¹

³⁴⁰“身も心もささげし夫に、何の因果か毒を盛られて死ぬとは...迷い狂いし、女心の恐ろしさ。”

³⁴¹“お化けをドラマにして、大衆のなかに持ち込んだのは、なんといっても、大南北だと思ふ。彼がいなかったら、あのお岩様の怪奇がいまでも日本映画のスクリーンに登場するなんてことは、あり得なかった。あの「四谷怪談」のグロテスクな、頹廢的な、そのうえ、徹底した非情さは、日本のお化けの傑作とっていい...お岩様は一つの完成されたものになってしまった。その出現の仕方、そのメーキャップの怪奇さ、これらは、すぐにも映画に移し植えられるものだ

Oiwa, according to Izawa, was the ultimate icon of everything that had appealed to Japanese audiences in ghost stories since the heyday of *kaidan* literature and theater in the Edo period. However, apart from Mōri Masaki's 1956 film, postwar audiences had only been given Kinoshita Keisuke's watered-down version of Oiwa's ghost. As noted in the previous chapter, Nakagawa's film, by contrast, restored Oiwa's cosmic wrath by incorporating lines from Nanboku's original play that conveyed the power of the vengeful ghost's *urami* or hatred. Mōri's earlier film adopted this strategy to a lesser extent, but actress Wakasugi Katsuko as Oiwa in Nakagawa's version utters the dialogue with a quivering rage, while Sōma Chieko adopts a more wistful, melancholic delivery in Mōri's film. Nakagawa seems to have understood that an emphasis on Oiwa's anger would amplify the themes of *osore* present in the work which lent it its power, and the success of Nakagawa's take on *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* lies in its ability to convey more strongly than any *kaiki* film before or since the profound terror of the vengeful ghost's wrath, surpassing even Nanboku's original play in certain respects. In a significant departure from Nanboku's script as well as Mōri's earlier film, Nakagawa's Oiwa does not suffer the effects of the disfiguring poison she has imbibed until she learns of her husband's betrayal. Upon receiving the news, Wakasugi immediately clutches her face and screams in pain, as if the knowledge of Iemon's treachery impels her monstrous transformation, rather than the mere physical effects of the poison. To this point in the film Nakagawa and cinematographer Nishimoto have kept the camera at a distance from

った...伊右衛門という男は悪いヤツだ。徹底的に悪い男で、平気で人を殺すこと...それなのに、お岩様の幽霊にはがらにもなく降参してしまう。これ位で降参するはずはないのだが、そここのころでは、カブキは道徳的であり、日本人そのものの神経の弱さもある。” Izawa, 44.

Wakasugi. Apart from a few expository close-ups, Nakagawa's preferred framing of scenes in long shot predominates the film's portrayal of the living Oiwa. From the moment she begins her hideous metamorphosis into an angry, vengeful ghost, however, the camera favors close-ups of Oiwa's bloody visage. As in *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* and the Hammer horror films there may be a bit of exploitative motivation in lingering on the bright red blood dripping down Oiwa's face, but these shots prove crucial in conveying the anger of Wakasugi's performance, emphasizing the look of hatred in her eyes as her undead corpse vows revenge even in death upon her unfaithful husband. In his overview of *kaiki* cinema, *100 Horrors of the Silver Screen*, Izumi Toshiyuki's thoughts on the importance of establishing the anger which gives birth to the vengeful ghost's curse support the idea that Wakasugi's performance – and Nakagawa's careful highlighting of it through formal technique – help to make the film the ultimate example of the genre. Izumi writes:

If this enmity is not depicted as existing in their mind [while the character is still living], then when their ghost appears, its character becomes vaguely defined, and the impression is severely weakened . . . the actress's nature is crucial, and naturally goes a long way towards giving the work the proper feel of a *kaidan*. Emotions like enmity are not generally rare things in this world, but a ghost must be enmity incarnate, something we never wish to casually encounter.³⁴²

³⁴²“疑着の相を念頭に置いて描かないと、幽霊を登場させてもその性格が曖昧になって印象は至って弱くなる...女優の柄に困るのは大きいものの、やはり作品の視座が怪談とは程遠い点が指摘できよう。怨恨なら世間一般に珍しくないが、幽霊はその具現、怨念の凝結した形の筈だから、そう易々と出て来られては溜まらないという気さえ拭えない。” Izumi, 47.



Figure 31: *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* prefers long shots for the living Oiwa (above), but brings the camera in close to depict the wrath of her bloody, vengeful ghost (below).

Nakagawa's *Yotsuya* also demonstrates a formal sophistication that goes beyond the disciplined, strategic use of the close-up to depict the wrath of Oiwa's ghost, and proves that – for a director who claimed to be utterly disinterested in the *kaiki* genre – Nakagawa carefully considered the best ways to employ the formal aspects of the cinematic medium to convey suspense, dread, and shock to an audience that was, after all, looking for *kaiki to senritsu* thrills-and-chills. A comparative look at a pivotal moment in both Mōri's and Nakagawa's respective films, in which the viewer gets their first look at Oiwa's ghastly, poison-disfigured face, demonstrates the superior horrific affect of the latter film. Mōri stages his reveal in a basic shot-reverse-shot setup. After

unwittingly drinking poison, Oiwa clutches her face, moans in pain, and falls to the floor. The camera quickly cuts to a close-up of the startled, horrified reaction of the masseur Takuetsu (whom Iemon has paid to seduce Oiwa), then quickly cuts back to a high-angle reverse shot of the now disfigured Oiwa on the floor, her grotesque deformity plainly revealed by the high-key lighting. Nakagawa's film, conversely, delays the reveal of Oiwa's face to create an atmosphere of dread and suspense, strongly recalling an analogous moment from Mokudō Shigeru's forgotten prewar *kaiki* effort for Shinkō, *Mandarin Duck Curtain*, discussed in Chapter 3. As in Mōri's film, the horrified reaction of Takuetsu anticipates the reveal, but instead of a close-up, Nakagawa frames the moment in a wide shot that includes the figure of Oiwa lying prostrate on the floor in the foreground. Low-key lighting keeps her face hidden from the viewer, and there is no cut as Oiwa slowly, agonizingly crawls to her mirror. Finally the camera cuts to a point-of-view shot of the mirror itself, Oiwa's trembling hand slowly entering the frame to remove the mirror's cover, and the viewer's first glimpse of her hideous face is that of her own shocked, horrified reaction in the mirror. Where Mōri's film takes less than thirty seconds from the time the poison takes effect to reveal its ghastly results, Nakagawa stretches the reveal out over twice as long a period of time.

The initial appearance of Oiwa's ghost is handled in similar fashion. Mōri again gives us a simple shot-reverse-shot in high-key lighting, first of Iemon gazing at his new bride Oume, then a cut to an over-the-shoulder shot in which Oiwa's ghost rises up into the frame from Oume's position. Nakagawa, meanwhile, employs more nuanced cinematography to achieve a horrific effect in his double-reveal of Oiwa's ghost. The first

appearance is heralded by her ghostly wailing to Iemon, who sits alone in the frame drinking tea, lit by atmospheric, low-key lighting. As Iemon shrugs off the sound of Oiwa's voice as a trick of the imagination, Nakagawa lets the camera linger on the scene a moment before suddenly and unexpectedly whip-panning straight up to reveal Oiwa's ghost hanging from the ceiling directly above Iemon's head. Nakagawa later replicates the moment in Mōri's film where Oiwa's ghost takes the place of the new bride Oume, improving on Mōri's reveal, in which Oiwa rises into the frame behind Iemon's shoulder. In place of the shot-reverse-shot setup, Nakagawa stages the moment in a single take, having Oume demurely drop out of the frame as if lying on the nuptial bed, only to have the hideous Oiwa slowly rise back up into the frame from Oume's place to a menacing crescendo of kabuki drums. Here Nakagawa demonstrates that by *not* cutting to a different shot, the effect of horror may be increased, contrary to the comparatively rapid cutting of Mōri's film.



Figure 32: Oiwa's ghost rises into frame in place of Iemon's new bride in a single take from *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*.

Nakagawa's film follows up the whip-pans and clever framing of the ghost's initial, startling appearance with a set piece of *obake yashiki* spook-house scares that shamelessly recall Katō Bin's work on Daiei's ghost cat series. Iemon inadvertently slays both his new bride and in-laws while slashing away at the ghosts of Oiwa and Takuetsu with his sword, as gruesome looking ghouls pop out from behind sliding doors and

curtains, then recede, only to be replaced by Iemon's unintended victims. In moments like these, Nakagawa offers concession to generic convention and audience expectations. Reviewing the film during its initial release in 1959, Takisawa Osamu only had one complaint – Nakagawa showed a bit too much of Oiwa's ghost, which he felt lessened the shocking affect of the picture.³⁴³ Takisawa's opinion reflects Takahashi Hiroshi's comments quoted in the previous chapter about the shallowness of the carnival spook-house mode of *kaiki* film, and Nakagawa himself later admitted to “showing the ghost too much” in his pictures, but went on to defend the decision:

I think it's probably a case of excessive fan service, but on the other hand, when you're making these kinds of films, should you make a monster movie in which no monsters appear? Will the audience who came to see a monster movie feel satisfied? Then again, as we've been discussing, monsters that appear too frequently in an opportunistic or exploitative manner have the opposite [intended] effect. However, psychologically speaking if you can emphasize a sense of, “Will it appear? Will it appear?” then the moment when it inevitably *does* appear is effective. I think that's a good method.³⁴⁴

Nakagawa's spook-house moments serve their purpose in giving the audience what they paid to see, but I disagree with Takisawa that they lessen the film's impact. Unlike many of the Daiei ghost cat pictures, which offer plenty of momentary scares and startles bereft of careful narrative attention to the themes of *osore* latent in the material, Nakagawa's

³⁴³“ただお岩の亡霊をすこし出しすぎた。そのために画面の衝撃効果が弱められたのは惜しい。” Takisawa Osamu, “*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*,” *Kinema junpō*, September 1, 1959, 83.

³⁴⁴“私なども、いつもお化けを出しすぎるのです。サービス過剰なのだろうと思います。一つ、こんど作る時は、お化けの出ないお化け映画を作りましょうか。ただ、それでお化け映画を観るお客が満足してくれますかどうかですが、それは二の次にすれば、お説の通り、あまり御都合主義すぎるお化けの登場の多いことは、逆効果なのです。むしろ心理的に、出るか、出るかというところに重点がかかって、必要欠く可からざる時に出すという方法がいいのではないかと思います。” Nakagawa Nobuo, “*Obake eiga sono hoka/watashi no kiroku eiga ron*,” 106.

Yotsuya delivers these scenes as a weighty payoff to the meticulously established wrath of Oiwa's vengeful spirit. As a result of retaining much of Nanboku's original dialogue, Wakasugi's performance, and the manner in which the filmmakers deploy the camera to highlight her burning hatred, the spook-house startles do not merely make the audience jump out of their seats; they provide punctuation for the underlying *osore* of Oiwa's revenge, as the ghost makes good on her dying words, "Iemon, you heartless brute, do you think I will leave you with this debt unpaid?!"³⁴⁵

In addition to the film's effective use of the stock tricks of the *kaiki* genre, Nakagawa and his crew also found ways to experiment with the conventional portrayals of *kaiki eiga*'s ghosts and ghouls onscreen, particularly in the use of montage. The climax of *Yotsuya*, a barrage of quick cuts that depict Oiwa's final assault on Iemon, stands in sharp contrast to the straightforward *tachimawari* fight with the monster that concluded most *kaiki* films to that point. Rather than have the monster physically engage its victim in a choreographed confrontation in the manner of Suzuki Sumiko and Irie Takako, Nakagawa barely even shows Oiwa and Iemon in the same frame. Instead, Oiwa's ephemeral, spectral presence is conveyed via an increasingly rapid montage, suggesting she is at once everywhere and nowhere, making escape impossible for the increasingly unsettled Iemon. Simultaneously pursued by Oiwa's sister Osode and her paramour Yomoshichi, Iemon finally attempts to flee straight towards the camera, only to have Oiwa's ghost suddenly fly in to fill the frame in close-up. The sequence never resorts to the double-exposure technique of filming a see-through ghost, making Oiwa a physical, concrete and more threatening presence, yet her ghostly status is effectively conveyed via

³⁴⁵ “血も涙もない極悪非道の伊右衛門、この恨み晴らさずにおくものか！”

an assault of images on the viewer, rather than a physical assault on her victim. In her essay “A Study of *Yotsuya kaidan* Films: In a Case of Nobuo Nakagawa’s Experimental Expression of Horror,” Hirose Ai suggests that it is as if the camera, like Oiwa’s wrath, becomes unleashed by her monstrous transformation.³⁴⁶ From the moment Oiwa drinks the poison and begins the transformation into a vengeful spirit, the number of cuts increases dramatically. The film’s opening five-minute sequence, in which Iemon murders Oiwa’s father following an argument between the elderly man and his would-be son-in-law, consists of a single uninterrupted take, and subsequent scenes between Iemon and the living Oiwa likewise play out with a minimum of camera movement and cutting. Oiwa’s death scene, meanwhile, contains twenty shots in roughly the same amount of time as the single-take opening sequence. The ghostly assault on Iemon at the film’s climax consists of more than seventy-five shots – many of them only lasting one or two seconds in duration – in less than five minutes. The briefest shots in the climatic sequence are of Oiwa and her fellow ghost Takuestu, physically removed from the space of Iemon’s battle against Osode and Yomoshichi and occasionally lit by red or green filtered lighting that heightens the Othered space they inhabit, anticipating a similar use of extreme color to mark unreal, *kaiki* spaces in the period horror films Roger Corman and Mario Bava would direct in the 1960s. There are a few spook-house moments as well, where for shocking effect Nakagawa alternates the montage effect with in-camera startles, such as having Oiwa’s corpse suddenly descend into frame in close-up as Iemon runs toward the camera, but the fast-paced cutting of the entire sequence leaves no

³⁴⁶ Hirose Ai, “Eiga *Yotsuya kaidan* kō – Nakagawa Nobuo no jikkenteki kaiki hyōgen,” in *Shokei gakuin daigaku kiyōdai*, 2 September 2011, 53-58.

feeling of incongruity, and despite the disparate action of Osode and Yomoshichi's earthly attack cross-cut with Oiwa and Takuetsu's more ethereal assault on Iemon, the film's final set piece flows as a seamless whole.

Yotsuya's greatest achievement, however, may lie in the way in which Nakagawa and his staff deliver another "orthodox" *kaiki* film that adheres to the audience's expectations for a popular genre picture, while mining the material for a nuanced, psychological portrait of its stock characters. Ōsawa Jō attributes much of this to Amachi Shigeru's poker-faced performance as Iemon. Mōri Masaki's 1956 version of *Yotsuya* had distanced itself from Kinoshita's 1949 *New Interpretation* by returning to the notion of Oiwa as a wrathful ghost exacting karmic revenge on her unfaithful husband, but Wakayama Tomisaburō plays Iemon as a nervous, guilt-riddled wreck following the death of his wife, much as Uehara Ken had portrayed him in Kinoshita's liberal remake. In Nakagawa's film, Amachi plays Iemon neither as a nervous repentant nor as a thoroughly conniving villain, but as a stoic who guards his emotions. Even when Oiwa's ghost appears to haunt him, Amachi looks visibly startled and, as the film progresses, increasingly agitated, but never fearful, guilt-stricken, or regretful. Only in the final moments of the picture, when Iemon stabs himself with Osode's sword and shrieks, "Oiwa! Forgive me! I was wrong! Forgive me!" does the audience at last receive confirmation of his true feelings.³⁴⁷ Since the audience cannot read his emotions, it remains ambiguous to what extent Iemon truly repents of his actions, which Ōsawa argues makes him more psychologically interesting for the viewer than the one-sided,

³⁴⁷ “岩、許してくれ...悪かった...許してくれ!”

unrepentant sinner Nanboku's kabuki script suggests, as well as the obviously guilt-riddled portrayals of Uehara and Wakayama.³⁴⁸ Amachi's performance also has important implications for the presentation of Oiwa's ghost, which allows for a multilayered interpretation of the film's *kaiki* elements. Rather like Suzuki Sumiko's similarly poker-faced villain in the prewar *Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen*, Amachi's reserved performance makes a symbolic reading of Oiwa's ghost as a manifestation of internal guilt possible, but leaves the matter ultimately ambiguous. Uehara's and Wakayama's more obviously repentant takes on Iemon, meanwhile, weight the interpretation of the *kaiki* phenomena toward the metaphorical, and Kinoshita's film all but outright rejects a reading of Oiwa's ghost as anything more than a guilt-induced hallucination. In opposition to the mystery of Iemon's true feelings on the matter of his misdeeds, Nakagawa's film blatantly dwells on the emotions Oiwa makes plain in her speech and actions as an omnipotent, vengeful wraith. In this way Oiwa carries the dramatic import of psychological symbolism while simultaneously existing as a character in her own, terrifying right. What plagues Iemon may be allegorically read as a guilty conscience, but it is also undoubtedly an old-fashioned *kaiki* monster, and it will have its revenge. Blending allegory and symbolism with the spectacular sensibilities of genre cinema, Nakagawa and company have their proverbial cake and eat it too, crafting a pop horror crowd-pleaser that also stands as a serious study in the psychology of men, women and monsters.

³⁴⁸ Ōsawa, 80-85.

Twilight

The 1960s proved to be the twilight of the *kaiki* genre, but it was a fertile twilight, as other filmmakers and studios sought to emulate and further develop the modes of visual style and storytelling pioneered by Nakagawa and Shintōhō. Nakagawa's critical successes were not enough to save the perennially struggling Shintōhō from bankruptcy, but the studio continued to innovate in the arenas of horror filmmaking until shutting its doors for good in 1961. The previous year had seen the resignation of Ōkura Mitsugi as studio executive following a series of scandals and claims of embezzlement, but even prior to Ōkura's exit, the sense among the staff was that Shintōhō's days were numbered.³⁴⁹ Several of the studio's releases throughout 1960 had a "go-for-broke" nature to their content and/or production. No longer concerned about turning a profit, the prevailing attitude seemed to be to use the remaining capital to produce something interesting. Nakagawa got approval from the embattled Ōkura to direct an original project, *Jigoku* ("Hell"), which along with *Yotsuya* generally ranks among the director's masterpieces in critical esteem. *Jigoku*'s first hour recounts a sordid tale of a young college student played by Amachi Shigeru who finds himself mixed up with a variety of unsavory characters, primarily his Mephistophelian coed Tamura (Numata Yoichi). Through an uncanny set of circumstances, the entire cast dies at the same instant, and the film's final sequence is an avant-garde display of gorily realized Buddhist hells. Despite the film's hallowed reputation among horror movie fans worldwide, *Jigoku*'s idiosyncratic style represents an impressive but singular anomaly in the history of *kaiki*

³⁴⁹ "Building the Inferno: Nobuo Nakagawa and the Making of *Jigoku*."

and *horā* cinema.³⁵⁰ More representative of both the past and future of Japanese horror cinema was *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond*, the directorial debut of Nakagawa's longtime assistant Ishikawa Yoshihiro. Having started with the studio as a writer, Ishikawa had only served a few years as an assistant director, but with the studio on the brink of inevitable collapse, Ōkura put Ishikawa in the director's chair for what would be the color centerpiece of the studio's final *obon* "monster cavalcade." Working with Kurosawa Haruyasu and much of Nakagawa's former crew, Ishikawa's effort matches Nakagawa's work in its technical accomplishment, and if the apprentice falls a little short of the master, it is only because of the recycled material from *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, presenting another tale of a modern-day couple beset by the curse a ghost cat placed upon the young woman's ancestors, related in lengthy flashback by a Buddhist monk. Issues of the convoluted, recycled script aside, *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond* builds on lessons learned from *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, notably in its portrayal of the title monster. Nakagawa's ghost cat film had pioneered new ways to depict traditional monsters onscreen, specifically in its limited reveals of the ghost cat's face during the *gendai geki* sequences. Recognizing the effectiveness of the technique, for *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond* the decision was made to never show the ghost cat's face at all, even in the *jidai geki* period sequence. Exemplifying the "less-is-more" aesthetic espoused by J-horror creator Takahashi Hiroshi, Ishikawa's film points, like its predecessor, towards the style and motifs of the J-horror films and their faceless ghosts of the past, which invade the present with their undying curses.

³⁵⁰ Remakes of the film appeared in 1979 and 1999, but otherwise *Jigoku*'s idiosyncrasy has had little direct impact on the style and production of Japanese horror cinema.

Following Shintōhō's closure in 1961, Daiei and Tōei continued a steady production of *kaiki* offerings throughout the decade, noticeably influenced by the innovations Shintōhō brought to the genre in their final years of operation. While most failed to match the critical acclaim of Nakagawa Nobuo's *kaiki* work, their employment of his techniques in representing a more horrific style of *kaiki* onscreen left a profound impression on the generation that would grow up to produce the J-horror phenomenon at the turn of the millennium. Kurosawa Kiyoshi explains:

Nakagawa provided the model, but it wasn't just him who was producing this imagery. The *kaidan* films made in the 1960s were inspired by his example, and they attempted all sorts of things in the effort to portray their ghosts in a scarier fashion. After [Nakagawa's] *Yotsuya kaidan* I think other filmmakers said to themselves, "This is interesting – let's make stuff like this." We [the J-horror filmmakers] are influenced by the entirety of ghost imagery from that era.³⁵¹

Tōei's *Ghost of Oiwa* (*Kaidan Oiwa no bōrei*, 1961) recalls both Mōri Masaki's 1956 *Ghost Story of Yotsuya* by recasting Wakayama Tomisaburo as Iemon, and Nakagawa's 1959 version in its more unsavory, villainous interpretation of the character, along with a mix of old-fashioned, in-frame spook-house tricks and montage to depict the ghostly attacks on Iemon. Oiwa's appearance also receives a more visually startling treatment. For the classic scene in which Oiwa's undead corpse appears floating in a bog nailed to a door, *The Ghost of Oiwa* has the door swiftly shoot up out of the water in a vertical position, Oiwa's undead body standing at attention as it gazes menacingly at Iemon.

³⁵¹“中川が代表的ではあるが、中川一人だけがそういう表現していたのではない。60年代ごろの怪談映画は、いろんな人が中川信夫に刺激されたということはあるが、幽霊を怖く見せようといろんな試みをやっていると思う。大映の三隅けんじ、森しょう、とか他にもいろいろいると思う。象徴が中川だろうし、東海道四谷怪談があったからみんなこれはおもしろい、ということになったと思う。ぼくたちは、全体のあの当時の幽霊の表現には影響を受けていると思う。”
Author's interview with Kurosawa Kiyoshi.

Tōhō's rare 1965 foray into *kaidan* material, another *Ghost Story of Yotsuya* adaptation directed by Shirō Toyoda and released as *Illusion of Blood* in the United Kingdom, employed even more shocking, extreme techniques. In one shot, Iemon hacks at Oiwa's ghost with his sword, slicing the skin off her face which falls away to reveal the skeleton underneath. Even the comparatively romantic *Peony Lantern* took on a more ghastly, Shintōhō-esque flavor in Daiei's 1968 version, which employed creative makeup and costume effects to make the bones inside the flesh of its female ghost seem to shine through her skin. Nakagawa's pioneering use of montage also continued to be used as a way to depict the omnipresence of malevolent spirits. Nakagawa Nobuo and Ishikawa Yoshihiro both made a momentary return to feature *kaiki* production for Tōei in 1968, respectively directing *Snake Woman's Curse (Kaidan hebi onna)* and *The Ghost Cat and the Cursed Pond (Kaibyō noroi no ike)*, released as a double-bill which Shimura Miyoko has noted curiously mimicked Daiei's offering of *The Ghost Cat and the Cursed Wall* and *White Snake Beauty (Hakuja komachi)* from exactly ten year prior.³⁵²

On December 20, 1969 Daiei released its final ghost cat film, *Secret Ghost Cat Legend (Hiroku kaibyō-den)*, ending a run that arguably began when Daiei's predecessor Shinkō debuted *The Legend of the Saga Ghost Cat* in early 1937. *Secret Ghost Cat Legend* was a hit, but owed its popularity to the fact that actress Mōri Ikuko, who played the title monster, had been arrested just five days before the film's release for murdering

³⁵² See Shimura, "Kaibutsu ka suru joyū-tachi: neko to hebi wo meguru hyōshō," in *Kaiki to gensō e no kairō*, 172-174.

her married lover in a fit of rage.³⁵³ Without the unfortunate circumstances surrounding its star, *Secret Ghost Cat Legend* would likely have gone relatively unnoticed at the box office. As the 1960s wound to a close, not only *kaiki eiga* but the whole of the Japanese film industry faced an existential crisis. The rise of television had dealt a brutal blow to ticket sales. With women and families no longer attending the cinema on a weekly basis, by the end of the decade the Japanese studios were targeting their films primarily at a young, single, male audience.³⁵⁴ As Yanagi Masako's audience research in 1957 showed, young women made up more than half of the audience for the typical *kaiki* film,³⁵⁵ and as the studios shifted their focus to the production of more supposedly male-friendly genres like *yakuza* crime dramas and softcore pornographic "pink films" (*pinku eiga*), *kaiki eiga* fell by the wayside. The perennial summertime adaptations of *kaidan* moved to television in the early 1970s, where old hands like Nakagawa Nobuo and Ishikawa Yoshihiro directed episodes of anthology series with titles like *Japanese Kaidan Theater* (*Nihon kaidan gekijō*, 1970) and *13 Nights of 'Kaiki'* (*Kaiki jūsan ya*, 1971).³⁵⁶ But on the big screen, *kaiki* was in its death throes. After *Secret Ghost Cat Legend*, Daiei released its

³⁵³ Mōri was known for a slew of snake-themed *kaiki* pictures Daiei produced in the late 1950s. Fond of snakes in real life, the actress had no reservations about letting them slither over her buxom, scantily clad form for the camera, and the studio played up her predilection in its promotional advertising campaigns, giving Mōri a reputation as a sex symbol with a taste for the macabre. The murder of her married paramour, to which Mōri confessed, played into the actress's persona as a deviant vamp and gave *Secret Ghost Cat Legend* the kind of publicity money cannot buy.

³⁵⁴ Standish, 270-271.

³⁵⁵ See Chapter 2, 57-58.

³⁵⁶ Nakagawa's adaptation of *The Peony Lantern* for *Japanese Kaidan Theater* was particularly well-received, and approaches the level of his Shintōhō *kaiki eiga* in quality. *Kaidan* anthology series sporadically appeared on Japanese television as late as 2002's *Kaidan hyaku monogatari* and preserve many old *kaiki* filmmaking traditions, but lie outside the scope of this study.

last *kaiki* film, yet another adaptation of *The Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp* (1970). In 1971 the studio went bankrupt and closed its doors, ten years after Shintōhō had suffered the same fate.

Daiei's collapse brought over sixty years of *kaiki* filmmaking traditions to a conclusion. Tōei had essentially given up on the genre after their 1968 double-bill release of Nakagawa's *Snake Woman's Curse* and Ishikawa's *The Ghost Cat and the Cursed Pond* failed to replicate the same level of interest as the two's innovative work at Shintōhō. Tōhō produced a trilogy of vampire movies directed by Yamamoto Michio between 1970 and 1974, though they little resembled anything Japan had produced in the *kaiki* genre to that point. Unofficially known as the "Bloodthirsty Series" (*Chi wo sū shiriizu*),³⁵⁷ Yamamoto's films exhibit the exemplary *kaiki* atmosphere of gothic set design, Expressionistic lighting, and of course bloodthirsty monsters, but draw their inspiration almost exclusively from the Hammer vampire movies they are plainly meant to imitate, rather than traditional *kaidan* adaptations or even the amalgam of Western and Japanese horrific tropes in films like Shintōhō's *Vampire Bride*. Nikkatsu, which had switched over to producing softcore "romantic pornography" (*roman poruno*), mined the erotic elements of *The Peony Lantern* in 1972, though predictably *osore* is not the emotion it primarily seeks to instill in the viewer. Taking inspiration from Nikkatsu, Tōei brought the ghost cat back for an encore in the tongue-in-cheek titled *The Ghost Cat in the Turkish Bath* (*Kaibyō toruko furo*, 1975), but these erotic detours into *kaiki* tropes

³⁵⁷ The individual entries are *Haunted House of Horrors: The Bloodthirsty Doll* (*Yūrei yashiki no kyōfu: Chi wo sū ningyō*, 1970), *Cursed Mansion: Bloodthirsty Eyes* (*Noroi no yakata: Chi wo sū me*, 1971), and *The Bloodthirsty Rose* (*Chi wo sū bara*, 1974). The films were released on home video in the United Kingdom under the respective titles of *Vampire Doll*, *Lake of Dracula*, and *Evil of Dracula*, despite the series' very tenuous connections to Bram Stoker's character.

were not part of any continuing production schedule of *kaiki* films. By the end of the decade even the occasional *pinku kaidan* had ceased to appear. With the passing in Japan of the studio *kaiki* film and drastic changes in the style and content of imported horror films like *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), the word *kaiki* itself became relegated to the past, a relic of a bygone era of filmmaking traditions.

Under the newly designated moniker of *horā*, Japanese filmmakers of the 1980s and early 1990s like Miike Takashi drew their inspiration from the graphic gore of American slasher film series like *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, as well as director Ishii Teruo's adaptations of the "erotic-grotesque nonsense" or *ero-guro-nansensu* genre pioneered by author Edogawa Rampo (1894-1965), which Ishii had depicted in all its voyeuristic excess in pictures like *Horrors of Malformed Men* (*Edogawa Rampo zenshū: Kyōfu kikei ningen*, 1969). In both the American-derived slasher subgenre of horror and *ero-guro-nansensu*, the source of horror lies not so much in its supernatural origin – in fact the "monster" in both cases is frequently human – but in graphically depicted excess of physical deformity and violence. Miike in particular became infamous as a "gross-out" director for works like *Audition* (1999) and *Ichi the Killer* (*Koroshiya ichi*, 2001). However, when the small cadre of filmmakers who founded the J-horror movement at the turn of the millennium desired a return to a more psychological presentation of horror, one of the places they sought it was in the uncanny resurrection of traditional ghosts of the past, along with the themes of karmic omnipotence and *osore* they embodied. In J-horror, the ghosts of *kaiki* cinema returned to haunt the world of the living once again.

Conclusion

The appointment of Ōkura Mitsugi as head of Shintōhō in 1955 transformed the struggling studio from an artistic haven for filmmakers to a B-genre factory, churning out lurid crime dramas, erotic exploitation, and *kaiki eiga*. Although cheaply made by the standards of the more financially secure studios, Ōkura treated his *kaiki* films as A-list product. Whereas Daiei continued to hastily produce its annual ghost cat releases as program pictures, Shintōhō's top talent were put to work reintroducing *kaidan* classics like *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* and *The Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp* to postwar movie screens. The resulting films often made use of widescreen and color – extravagances the other studios seldom deigned to use on their own *kaiki* B-pictures. Shintōhō's premiere *kaiki* unit, headed by veteran director Nakagawa Nobuo, not only made innovative use of the latest advances in available film technology, they invigorated the genre with a sophisticated use of the Freudian uncanny, earning unprecedented critical acclaim for domestic *kaiki* cinema. Developing a more mysterious style of filming their monsters by implying rather than showing their presence and keeping their facial features hidden from view, Nakagawa and his crew also anticipated the more contemporary style of Japanese horror filmmaking that would come to be known as J-horror. A series of *gendai geki kaiki* films that brought the monsters of the past into the present day likewise prefigures one of the central themes of the J-horror movement. And yet, the studio's most acclaimed *kaiki* film, Nakagawa's *Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, succeeded by marrying the formal innovations pioneered by the Shintōhō staff with a very traditional take on the themes of *osore* which had distinguished the genre since the

premodern Edo period. Following Shintōhō's collapse in 1961, the other studios continued to produce visually innovative *kaidan* adaptations and further pioneer the *gendai geki* horror picture. However, by the dawn of the 1970s the Japanese film industry began to succumb to a decade-long decrease in attendance, as the rise of television kept families out of the theaters and in their homes for audiovisual entertainment. The coming decades would see the death of the *kaiki* genre, the birth of *horā*, and *kaiki*'s ghastly, partial resurrection in the guise of J-horror.

Chapter 6: Back from the Dead – The *Kaiki* Legacy of J-horror

Facing Fears

Screenwriter Takahashi Hiroshi relates the following anecdote about the production of *Ghost Actress* (*Joyūrei*, 1996), retroactively recognized as one of the first J-horror movies:

When [director] Nakata Hideo and I were making *Ghost Actress* I told him absolutely do not show the ghost's face. Back then, Nakata hadn't yet really developed a sense for that sort of thing. No matter what I said, he thought if we made it like a traditional *kaidan* movie, it would be a success. Nakata had faith in the actress cast in the role, and felt like it was unthinkable to *not* to show her face. So in *Ghost Actress* you can clearly see the ghost's face. Later, when we made *Ring*, I begged him to please follow my advice this time! Since *Ring* was a big-budget movie, the producers' camp wanted a famous actress to play the part of Sadako. From the producers' standpoint it would be impossible to not show the face of someone like that, but Nakata steadfastly refused. This time he was on my side, insisting the face would not be seen on camera. Unexpectedly everyone agreed, thinking maybe this was the start of something fresh and new.³⁵⁸

The debate between Takahashi and Nakata over whether or not to show the ghost's face on camera recalls the decision in 1958 to keep the ghost cat's face obscured for the

³⁵⁸..私は田中さんと組んで「女優霊」の映画を作って、その時から中田さんに絶対顔を出すな、と話をしていた。中田さんは、まだその頃そういう意識はなかった。どちらかという伝説的な怪談映画を作ろうとしてたんで、けっこう大もめした。中田さんとしては、自分が信頼した女優さんをキャスティングしているわけだから、顔を出さないなんてことはあり得ないんだということで、「女優霊」ははっきりと顔が出てますけど。次に「リング」をやる時に、今度こそ言うことを聞いてくれと頼んだ。「リング」はビッグバジェット映画だったので、プロデューサー陣は貞子の役にけっこう有名な女優を内定していたが、その人の顔を出さないということはプロデューサー的にあり得ないと、中田さん以上に激しい反発があったけど、今度は中田さんが私の味方になってくれて「顔を出しませんから」と言ったら意外とみんな「これは何か新しいことが始まるかもしれない」と思ってくれたみたいで、言うことを聞いてくれた。” Author's interview with Takahashi Hiroshi.

gendai geki sequences of Nakagawa Nobuo's *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, which was hailed as "new flavor" of *kaiki* filmmaking rather like the choice never to reveal Sadako's face in *Ring* was felt to be "the start of something fresh." And just as Nakagawa's former assistant Ishikawa Yoshihiro took the technique a step further in *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond*, never showing the monster's face even in the marvelous *jidai geki* sequence, Sadako's perpetually hair-obscured visage in *Ring* makes an abstractly terrifying improvement over her counterpart in *Ghost Actress*, whose face the camera finally reveals in the film's climax. The admittedly underwhelming result of Nakata's insistence that *Ghost Actress* be more like "a traditional *kaidan* movie," results in a latter-day example of "showing the monster too much," a charge critics levied even at Nakagawa Nobuo's acclaimed *kaiki* films.³⁵⁹ But the tension between Nakata's desire to return to *kaidan eiga* fundamentals and Takahashi's intuition to deviate from the norm also perfectly encapsulates the manipulation of traditional *kaiki* themes and motifs that in part made J-horror so frighteningly effective for audiences. Like Nakagawa Nobuo and the Shintōhō *kaiki* filmmakers had done forty years prior in films such as *The Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp* and *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, the J-horror auteurs created something that was simultaneously orthodox and innovative, taking the traditional ghosts and monsters of Japan's premodern, marvelous past and injecting them with an element of the uncanny, not just in their inventive formal portrayal, but in their uncanny invasion of the modern world.

³⁵⁹ See Chapter 5, pg. 245.



Figure 33: The ghost's face completely revealed in the climax of *Ghost Actress (Joyūrei, 1996, left)*, and completely hidden in the climax of *Ring (Ringu, 1998, right)*.

The term J-horror – or *J-horā* in Japanese – first appeared about fifteen years ago in the wake of *Ring*'s unexpected and tremendous international success. Takahashi and Nagata's work on the low-budget *Ghost Actress* won them the job of realizing the film version of Suzuki Kōji's bestselling horror novel *Ring*, which combined an urban legend conceit about a cursed videotape with elements of traditional *kaidan* tales of vengeful ghosts. While Suzuki's novel and its two sequels – a trilogy that eventually becomes more science fiction than ghost story – concoct a pseudo-scientific rationale for the vengeful ghost Sadako and the videotape that kills whoever watches it, Takahashi's screenplay offers no explanation for the horrific events beyond the wrath of Sadako's angry spirit.³⁶⁰ The result met with popular acclaim in Japan, and much like the videotaped chain-letter curse depicted in the film, VHS copies of *Ring* circulated throughout the globe, garnering worldwide interest. Following a 1999 South Korean

³⁶⁰ Director Iida Jōji's film version of the second novel in Suzuki's trilogy, *Spiral (Rasen)*, was released simultaneously with *Ring* and retained much of Suzuki's pseudo-science. While *Ring* was a hit with Japanese critics and audiences, *Spiral* was a box office failure. As a result, Nakata directed *Ring 2 (Ringu 2, 1999)*, which ignored the events of *Spiral* and maintained the more supernatural tone of the first film.

version,³⁶¹ Hollywood produced *The Ring* (2002), a big budget effort starring Naomi Watts.³⁶² *The Ring* was an even bigger box office hit in Japan than the original, and its critical and commercial success in the United States spurred a slew of Hollywood remakes of similarly themed Japanese horror films such as Kurosawa Kiyoshi's *Pulse* (*Kairo*, 2001) and Shimizu Takashi's *Ju-on* (2002) that had appeared in the years following the release of Nakata's *Ring*. It is unclear whether the term "J-horror" originates in Japan or abroad, though the Japanese use of a term comprised of "J" for "Japan" (the foreign designation for *Nippon* or *Nihon*) and the English loanword *horā* conspicuously points to the films' status as cultural and commercial exports to the wider world while also designating them as uniquely "Japanese" – another example of the much-touted "soft power" of the nation's cultural commodities in the global marketplace at the turn of the millennium. In the English-speaking world, "J-horror" quickly became a catch-all label for any film made in Japan at any point in history which features horrific and/or supernatural narrative elements. This tendency not only eliminates any distinction between classic *kaiki eiga* and films like *Ring*, *Pulse*, and the *Ju-on* series; it creates a massively broad classification schema that includes everything from golden age art house cinema to direct-to-video pornography. For example, an online guide to "alternative J-

³⁶¹ Although the filmmakers claimed the picture was an adaptation of Suzuki's original novel and not a remake of the Japanese film, the South Korean version contains several scenes that appear to have been modeled on Nakata's film.

³⁶² Julian Stinger discusses the "Hollywood folklore" promulgated by the creators of the American *The Ring* around the circulation of bootleg copies of Nakata's *Ring* in the U.S. and the reputation it accrued among horror fans, prompting the producers to option the film for a remake. As Stinger notes, the story mimics the tale of Sadako's cursed videotape almost to the point of parody. See "The Original and the Copy: Nakata Hideo's *Ring* (1998)" in *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Alastair Phillips and Julian Stinger (New York: Routledge, 2007), 296-307.

horror” lists Nakagawa's *Jigoku* alongside Mizoguchi Kenji's 1953 classic *Ugetsu*, Miike Takashi's musical black comedy *Happiness of the Katakuris* (*Katakuri ke no kōfuku*, 2001), and S&M softcore offerings *Guinea Pig 2* (*Ginii piggu 2*, 1985) and *Flower and Snake* (*Hana to hebi*, 2004).³⁶³ A great deal of confusion also surrounds the question of whether or not to include Hollywood remakes of films like *Ring* and *Ju-on* under the rubric of J-horror - an issue made all the more confounding by the fact that the original Japanese directors occasionally helmed the American remakes of their own films. Finally, there is the unfortunate tendency to categorize horror films made elsewhere in Asia like Hong Kong's *The Eye* (*Jian gui*, 2002) and South Korea's *A Tale of Two Sisters* (*Janghwa, Hongryeon*, 2003) as “J-horror” without regard to their country of origin and the unique cultural traditions and filmmaking histories these films invariably incorporate.³⁶⁴

Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano cautions that a “loss of filmic context” engendered by new modes of distribution and consumption such as DVDs and digital downloads results in this kind of categorical confusion, as films such as Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu*, Shindō Kaneto's *Onibaba* (1964), and even Fukasaku Kinji's *Battle Royale* (2000) – all of which previously had never been marketed, received, or discussed as specimens of the horror genre – were repackaged by American media as precursors to (or relatives of) J-horror.³⁶⁵ While this trend has even begun to infiltrate Japan, with iTunes Japan listing *kaiki eiga*

³⁶³ Zack Davisson, “J-Horror: An Alternative Guide.” *SeekJapan*, <http://www.seekjapan.jp/article-1/765/J-Horror:+An+Alternative+Guide>. Accessed Nov. 6, 2010.

³⁶⁴ See Terrence Rafferty, “Screams in Asia Echo in Hollywood,” *The New York Times*, January 27, 2008.

³⁶⁵ Wada-Marciano, 33-36.

like Nakagawa's *Snake Woman's Curse* under the category of *J-horā*, both Wada-Marciano and Chika Kinoshita point out that *J-horā* typically has a more precise definition in its home country, which Kinoshita summarizes as referring to a cycle of relatively low-budget films produced in the last twenty years by a closely knit group of filmmakers, which emphasize atmospheric and psychological fear over graphic gore, and capitalize on urban legends proliferated through mass media and popular culture.³⁶⁶ The seeds of the movement were laid in direct-to-video productions such as *Evil Spirit (Jaganrei)*, 1988), *Scary True Stories (Hontō ni atta kowai hanashi)*, 1991), and various incarnations of the long-running *Schoolhouse Ghost Stories (Gakkō kaidan)* series, achieved worldwide success with the release of *Ring*, and reached its zenith of popularity with the complementary Japanese and American series of *Ju-on/The Grudge* films directed by Shimizu Takashi between 2000 and 2006.

Although J-horror accordingly accounts for only a comparatively small and rather brief moment in the history of Japanese cinema, its transnational popularity and influence on mainstream Hollywood film culture has spurred a profuse body of scholarship on the phenomenon, much of it focused on the mass communication technology that typically provides the vehicle for the J-horror ghost to spread its curse throughout the modern world. Examples of the motif include *Ring's* chain-mail videotape, the internet chat-room haunting ghosts of *Pulse*, and the death-inducing cell phone messages in *One Missed Call (Chakushin ari)*, 2003). In each case a deadly supernatural force spreads contagiously on the back of communications technology, using copied videotapes, the internet, and cell phone address books to reach an exponentially increasing and seemingly limitless

³⁶⁶ Kinoshita, 104.

number of victims. Colette Balmain analyzes the motif as expressive of fears that mass communication technology actually creates a banal, “dead” society bereft of face-to-face human interaction,³⁶⁷ sentiments echoed in other readings of J-horror which ascribe its popularity across cultural borders to themes of technophobia universal to postmodern societies.³⁶⁸ The viral nature of the J-horror ghosts’ curse has also inspired studies of the genre as expressing topical, universal fears of real viral pandemics such as SARS and bird flu. Ōshima Kiyooki, for example, devotes his book-length *A Study of the J-horror Ghost (J-horā no yūrei kenkyū)* to a reading of Sadako and her ilk as metaphors for biological viruses.³⁶⁹ Balmain’s and Ōshima’s analyses ground J-horror firmly in horror movie theorist Andrew Tudor’s discourse of “paranoid horror,” which he identifies as the dominant mode of the global horror movie of the past quarter-century. Ironically Tudor argues against universal readings of horror films, insisting that any given horror movie cannot be properly understood outside of the particular socio-historical circumstances in which it was produced, but of “paranoid horror” he writes, “[It] presupposes a thoroughly unreliable world. In this respect it is popular and pleasurable because its basic codes

³⁶⁷ Balmain, 168-187.

³⁶⁸ See for example Pennylane Shen’s “It Came from the East...Japanese Horror Cinema in the Age of Globalization,” in *Gnovis*, vol. 9, issue 2 (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2009), <http://gnovisjournal.org/2009/05/13/it-came-east-japanese-horror-cinema-age-globalization>, accessed May 16, 2013. Shen writes, “The recurring J-horror film theme of the destructive and alienating nature of modern technologies, including televisions, cameras, computers, videos, cell phones and the Internet, represents a growing anxiety in urban societies.”

³⁶⁹ See Ōshima Kiyooki, *J-horā no yūrei kenkyū* (Tokyo: Akiyama Shōten, 2010), 3-5.

correlate with our distinctive experience of fear, risk and instability in modern societies.”³⁷⁰

While such readings are certainly valid and undoubtedly go a long way toward explaining the ease with which these films cross cultural boundaries, past studies of J-horror tend to focus on the vehicle of the curse at the expense of the culturally specific supernatural entity behind it, which incorporates a rather different set of fears. To Kinoshita’s and Wada-Marciano’s definition of J-horror, I would add that another central ingredient of the formula is the invocation of traditional Japanese *kaiki* motifs in a modern, urban setting, specifically the notions of *urami* (“wrath”) and *tatari* (“curse”), and their personification in the figure of the *onryō* or vengeful ghost. More so than technophobia or a metaphorical fear of viral pandemics, the vengeful ghost is the fundamental recurring motif of J-horror, and its physical appearance, formal presentation, and thematic import all deliberately invoke the classic image of the vengeful wraith, also the central figure of domestic *kaiki* film. *Ring* provides the textbook example in the figure of Sadako, whose tattered white robe, long disheveled hair, bloody fingernails, grotesque bodily contortions, and insatiable *urami* not only derive from Tsuryua Nanboku’s stage directions for *Oiwa*, but were duplicated *ad nauseam* in both domestic and foreign films to the degree that the “long-haired Japanese ghost” has become a worldwide cinematic cliché. In this way J-horror represents an advanced stage of Miriam Hansen’s vernacular modernism of cinema, blending the motifs of traditional *kaidan* with a style and story structure influenced largely by American and British ghost movies, and in turn

³⁷⁰ Andrew Tudor, “Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre,” in *Horror, The Film Reader*, 52.

influencing Western cinema via Hollywood remakes of J-horror, which recast Japanese vengeful spirits in the context of American horror films like *The Exorcist*. For example, *The Ring* conceives Sadako's American counterpart, Samara, as more of a demonically possessed child than her misunderstood Japanese prototype. In contrast to Sadako's tragic backstory, Samara is presented as more of an inherent "bad seed" not created by the acts of cruelty that give rise to Sadako's vengeful spirit. *The Ring* even shows Samara's face at the end, in defiance of Takahashi's tastes and revealing a ghastly visage bears more than a passing resemblance to *The Exorcist's* possessed Regan.



Figure 34: Regan from *The Exorcist* (1973, left) and Samara from *The Ring* (2002, right).

While J-horror creators like Takahashi Hiroshi and Kurosawa Kiyoshi name Western ghost story films like *The Haunting* (1963) and *The Innocents* (1961) as their biggest inspiration, they readily admit that the iconography of the ubiquitous J-horror ghost has its origins in the *kaiki* work of Nakagawa Nobuo and his contemporaries. Returning to the issue of "showing the ghost too much," Kurosawa Kiyoshi echoes Nakagawa's own sentiments in arguing for the effectiveness of a physically present

monster in-frame, noting both Nakagawa's expert use of it and its surviving legacy in J-horror:

A problem for us J-Horror filmmakers is, it's all well and good to have a ghost appear in our films, but to what extent should we show it rushing in and attacking people? In Nakagawa's case, it actually intrudes quite a bit. The ghost will appear to be standing far away softly moaning "I will get you!", then the next thing you know she's so close you can touch her. To be able to pull off having a ghost physically coming at you like that is rather difficult. Nakagawa had several challenges; in his case there weren't old *kaidan* movies in which the ghost flies at the protagonist like that. Beginning with Nakagawa, there were various experiments with this directly-attacking ghost figure. . . . [*Ring*'s] *Sadako* is like that. She doesn't just vaporously appear, she comes at you violently, clutching and attacking. . . . In the imagery of the ghost they [the Shintōhō *kaiki* films and J-horror] are definitely connected. *Ring* demonstrates that well, the continuum of ghost imagery, though the story is utterly different from classic *kaidan*.³⁷¹

Kurosawa himself made a similar effort to portray the ghost as alternately far-off and ethereal, then corporeally present, close, and threatening in the climax of *Pulse*, in which the hero Ryosuke confronts one of the multitude of vengeful spirits that have all but annihilated humanity. Rushing towards the blurry, vaguely defined outline of the wraith that had materialized in the background of the frame, Ryosuke reaches out towards the

³⁷¹“J ホラーを撮っている人たちの間でも問題なのは、幽霊が出てきたのはいいけれどどこまで襲いかかってくるのか。中川の場合は、実はかなり襲いかかってくる。なんとなく奥の方で「恨めしや」と立っているだけかと思ったら、かなり近くまで寄って来てほとんど触れるくらいまでになっているのではないか。幽霊が物理的にこっちを襲ってくるというのがあり得るのか、ということはない。中川もいろいろチャレンジしているし、そのへんは古い怪談映画だとそこまで主人公に向かってどんどん襲いかかってくるような幽霊像難ってあんまりない。それも中川信夫あたりをきっかけに、かなり積極的な攻撃的な幽霊像がいろいろ日本でも試されたのかもしれない...貞子もなんとなく出てくるのではなく、どんどんこっちへ暴力的に掴みかかる...幽霊の表現については、もちろんつながりがある。そういう意味でリングがうまかったのは、幽霊表現においてはすごくつながりがあるが、物語は全く古典とは違う。Author's interview with Kurosawa Kiyoshi.

vision, expecting that his hand will pass through the shadowy form and confirm its status as a mere illusion. To his horror, his hands make physical contact with the ghost's body. The spirit then says "I am not an illusion" (*Watashi wa maboroshi de wa nai*) in a disembodied voice before approaching the camera until its digitally blurred face occupies the entire frame, whereupon only the eyes come into concrete, clear focus, further confirming the ghost's corporeal reality.



Figure 35: The ghost as ambiguously ethereal and yet physically concrete in *Pulse* (Kairo, 2001).

Pulse also demonstrates Kurosawa's attempts to replicate what he calls the impression of "the space between life and death" (*ikiteiru no to shindeiru no no aida*) in Nakagawa's *kaiki* work. As the ghosts' viral curse spreads through the internet to infect all of humanity, characters that have fallen victim to the spectral pandemic begin to gradually turn into *onryō* themselves, their faces drained of color and void of expression save for a vacant, dead look in their eyes. Kurosawa explains how he derives inspiration for scenes like this from Nakagawa's *Ghost Story of Yotsuya*:

Something I think is really great about [Nakagawa's] *Ghost Story of Yotsuya* is the scene where [Oiwa] hasn't yet become a ghost and is still alive, but her face is deformed and she's dying – in other words she's in-between life and death, fading, in a liminal state. That scene takes a pretty long time. We understand she's gradually dying, becoming a ghost/monster, but she's not dead yet. Her face has changed but we can't get a good look at it yet. This liminal, weird state, [Wakasugi's] performance, the visuals, all left the strongest impression in my memory. I also have shown ghosts bluntly in my own movies, but this impression of a still-alive person whose existence suddenly changes and they go from the world of the living a little bit towards the world of the dead – when I want to express that feeling in my movies, it's an especially Nakagawa-esque thing, moving dimly a little bit towards the land of the dead, and suddenly the face grows dark and you're unable to see what kind of expression is on it. I use that a lot. That clearly comes from that central scene in *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*, which had a tremendous influence on me, I think.³⁷²

³⁷²“東海道四谷怪談ですばらしいなあと思うのは、幽霊になる前にまだ生きてはいるが、顔が崩れて死にかかっている、つまり生きているのと死んでいるの間、ぼんやりして向こうにいて、というシーン。かなり長い時間をかけて、だんだん死につつつあるのはわかるけどまだ死んではなく、顔が相当のことになっているけどなかなか見せないとか、異様な時間 – 死につつつあるけどまだ死んではいない – あの演出、あのビジュアルが一番強烈に記憶に残っている。ぼく自身も映画の中で露骨に幽霊を出したこともあるが、まだ生きている人なんだけどふっと存在が変にこの人この世から少しあの世に行きかけているのかな、という感じを表現したい時にとても中川信夫的なちょっとおぼろげな何かの向こうにいるとか、突然ふっと顔が暗くてどんな表情してい

Screenwriter Takahashi Hiroshi independently confirmed Kurosawa's comments about the importance of Nakagawa's *kaiki* films in the portrayal of the J-horror ghost, as well as "the space between life and death" depicted in Oiwa's death scene in Nakagawa's

Yotsuya:

I'm often watching 1960s Western movies, but for the portrayal of ghosts, Japanese films are important for their worldview of life, death, and the afterlife. Naturally our work has a bit more of that domestic Japanese element, and that frankly comes from Nakagawa Nobuo, I think. . . . Take his Oiwa, and the hair-combing scene. Oiwa's still human; she hasn't yet died, and she's in front of the mirror, combing her hair out in bloody strands, and her wrath against Iemon is gradually coming to a boil. That scene, where she's still human and yet becoming something that's not human, is *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*'s scariest moment.³⁷³

As we have seen in our look at prewar *kaiki* cinema in Chapter 3, much of what Kurosawa and Takahashi attribute to Nakagawa Nobuo – namely the physically threatening vengeful spirit and depictions of characters in the liminal state between living and (un)dead – has antecedent in Mokudō Shigeru's *The Cat of Arima* and *The Ghost Story of the Mandarin Duck Curtain* (and these examples in turn draw on kabuki stage traditions stretching back into the Edo period). Nakagawa's work is the more well-known

るか見えなくなるとか、そういうのはよく使う。それは明らかに東海道四谷怪談の真ん中の部分、そこをものすごく影響されているんだと思う。” Author's interview with Kurosawa Kiyoshi.

³⁷³“六十年代前後の西洋映画もよく見ているが、幽霊表現に関しては、日本の作品が重要だったが、世界観というか死生観、そういう日本のもっとドメスティックなものが私たちの中に当然あって、それを端的に表しているのは、中川信夫だろうと思う...お岩の表現で言うと、髪をすくシーン（髪すきの場）では、まだお岩は人間で死んでいない。髪すきの場で鏡に向かって髪をすいている内にぼろぼろと髪が抜けていって、血がたれていって、イエモンに対する恨みがどんどん込み上げてくる。まだ人間なのだけど、もう人間じゃないものに変わりつつあるというシーンが、四谷怪談では一番怖い。” Author's interview with Takahashi Hiroshi.

and arguably the more accomplished presentation of such motifs, but as my study of the *kaiki* genre hopefully illuminates, J-horror draws on over fifty years of popular filmmaking in its formal depictions of the “long-haired Japanese ghost girl” that took the world by storm.

Breaking the Rules

A debt J-horror owes more specifically to the work of Nakagawa and the other Shintōhō *kaiki* filmmakers lies in its presentation of the traditional vengeful wraith plucked out of its marvelous period setting and unleashed into the “rational” world of modern-day Japan, albeit with important modifications to the old formulas that represent the end of a process begun in the late 1950s with Shintōhō films like *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, *Diving Girl's Ghost*, and *Vampire Bride*. The Shintōhō films contain many elements that depart from old *kaiki* conventions and point the way toward the development of a more *horā*-esque style, but retain conspicuously *kaiki* touches as well. The stylized set work, period settings, or else an explicitly gothic ambiance all work to suggest the action takes place in some Othered space. The uncanny presence of an old-fashioned vengeful wraith in the high-tech, postmodern landscapes of J-horror evokes the same sense of the uncanny that *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* and *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond* achieved by displacing the monsters of the past into the present, but J-horror goes a step beyond the Shintōhō ghost cat pictures by wholly removing the monsters from their *kaiki* landscapes. To encounter the uncanny *kaiki* in the contemporarily set Shintōhō films, the protagonists often must journey to some suitable *kaiki* locale, such as the old dilapidated dwelling of the wife's ancestors in *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, a witch's cavern in *Vampire Bride*, or the

Victorian-style mansion in *Diving Girls in a Haunted House*. Only in Nakagawa's *Lady Vampire* does the monster first appear in the heart of contemporary Tokyo; but not only is the title bloodsucker an atypically Western-style monster, the human heroes eventually must trace him to his *kaiki* castle in distant Kyushu for the final confrontation.

Conversely, in *Ring* Sadako's haunted well journeys to the protagonists, appearing in their very living rooms via the cursed videotape that brings the monster directly into the heart of everyday existence. Likewise, the cursed house that stands at the nexus of the vengeful wraith Kayako's curse in the *Ju-on* series is no gothic mansion atop a foreboding mountain, but a nondescript looking Tokyo home, intentionally made to look like any other house on the neighborhood block. As directors like Kurosawa Kiyoshi and Sasaki Hirohisa point out, these stylistic decisions come in part from practical necessity, as the meticulously crafted sets that created the hyper-realistic, otherworldly locales of *kaiki* cinema now belong to a bygone era of Japanese filmmaking.³⁷⁴ J-horror uses the limitation to its advantage, however. The location shooting heightens the films' sense of realism, which runs counter to the "super-realism" of the *kaiki* genre's stylized set work,³⁷⁵ but makes the appearance of a *kaiki* monster like the vengeful wraith even more uncannily frightening, so incongruous is its presence in the *mise-en-scène*. Shimizu's *Ju-on* series probably best exemplifies the technique, strategically placing its ghosts in the most mundane settings – elevators, public restrooms, apartment living rooms, and other such locations the audience likely encounters on a daily basis. The realism of the J-horror films' production design aligns them with the new breed of international horror films like

³⁷⁴ See Chapter 2, 45-53.

³⁷⁵ See Sasaki Hirohisa's comments on "super-realism," *Ibid.*

Rosemary's Baby (1968) and *The Exorcist*, which appeared in the late 1960s and through the 1970s and significantly were not labeled as *kaiki eiga* in Japan. These *okaruto* (“occult”) *eiga*, as they were called, dispensed with the gothic locales of Hammer-style horror – one of the defining markers of the *kaiki* genre – and, like the J-horror films, invoke the uncanny by suggesting primordial monsters yet lurk in our everyday world. But the demonic entities that possess the human characters in *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist* never manifest directly save for fleeting shots of disembodied faces and out-of-focus visions. In preserving Nakagawa’s physically present, “directly-attacking ghost figure” from *kaiki eiga* in the mundane *mise-en-scène*, the J-horror ghost also evokes an additional dimension of meta-uncanny. On the level of the film’s narrative she is, like the Shintōhō ghost cats, a monster from the marvelous past, uncannily invading the rational present. But the J-horror wraith is also the ghost of *kaiki* cinema itself, a relic returned from a dead genre. The mere act of its return is enough to infuse it with a new potency as a marker of the uncanny.

As her *kaiki* ancestors did before her, the J-horror vengeful ghost also invokes a sense of cosmic *osore* in the way she wields seemingly omnipotent powers of retribution. As we have seen, the typical domestic *kaiki* film drew primarily on Edo period *kaidan*, either in direct adaptations like *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* and *Kasane's Swamp*, or original screenplays like *The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen* or *Vampire Bride* which retained the themes of karmic vengeance central to the *kaidan* structure. But even in a work with a contemporary setting like *Vampire Bride*, the Japanese *kaiki* monster adheres to the laws of karmic cause-and-effect which govern the traditional vengeful

wraith's behavior. A popular notion of karma as a cosmic moral arbiter, in which evil acts are punished, is central to these stories. Traditional *kaidan* justify the hauntings they depict as a form of karmic comeuppance, implying the victims simply get what they deserve. The vengeful spirits of *kaidan* literature and *kaiki* cinema never haunt random victims, but specific targets. To take the classic example, in *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* Oiwa only does harm to those who have transgressed against her – namely her wicked husband Iemon and his coconspirators, whom Oiwa tricks Iemon into slaying. As I argue in Chapter 2, the *osore* of *kaiki* cinema is the horror of running afoul of forces against which there is no recourse or protection – for the misdeeds of *kaidan* villains place them beyond the intervention of even the archetypal Buddhist monk, who otherwise wields power over such beings as the vengeful wraith. Recall that near the climax of *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (both Nakagawa's film and Nanboku's original play) Iemon seeks refuge in a Buddhist temple, but his sins render the protection of the monks inefficacious as Oiwa's spirit itself becomes an agent of karmic retribution. Nanboku's kabuki script acknowledges the somewhat paradoxical nature of this when the ghost of Oiwa says, "The light of the moon should guide me to Buddha's paradise, but instead it chills like the vengeful face of Oiwa."³⁷⁶ Moonlight was well-established figurative shorthand for Enlightenment, yet here it is implied that Buddhist law itself compels the vengeful ghost to carry out its curse, which cannot be expurgated by the temple monks because it now operates as the very arbiter of karmic justice. Oiwa's spirit only finds rest once all of

³⁷⁶ Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *The Ghost Stories at Yotsuya on the Tōkaidō*, trans. Paul B. Kennelly, in *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Darkness and Desire 1804-1864*, ed. James R. Brandon and Samuel L. Leiter (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 154.

those complicit in her undeserved demise have paid with their own lives. The kabuki play alludes to this when, upon slaying Iemon, Yomoshichi exhorts Oiwa to “Find rebirth in Buddha’s paradise!”³⁷⁷ Nakagawa even more unambiguously grants Oiwa peace in the final shot of his film, depicting her ghost no longer hideously deformed, but beautiful as she was in life, cradling her infant son in her arms as she ascends from among the stone stupas of the temple grounds into the heavens.

Like Oiwa and other *kaiki* monsters like the ghost cat, the source of the J-horror ghost’s grave-transcending wrath finds root in violent acts of betrayal perpetrated against them by an immediate family member. In a flashback sequence from *Ring* that recounts the origins of Sadako’s ghost, we see her teenaged, living self, who has demonstrated potentially dangerous telekinetic abilities, clubbed over the head and pushed down a well by her adoptive father, who fears her powers. Kayako, the vengeful spirit at the center of the *Ju-on* film cycle, parallels Oiwa’s circumstances even more directly. While *Ring* hints that Sadako’s extrasensory abilities are what enable her to come back from the dead, Kayako – like Oiwa – is a perfectly mundane housewife.³⁷⁸ Her brutal murder at the hands of her own husband is all that is necessary to transform Kayako into a fearsome wraith, recalling Iemon’s betrayal of Oiwa and its ghastly consequences in *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*. Although film scholar Jay McRoy argues the fractured families in J-horror are another manifestation of the films’ modernity that voice contemporary fears of

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 163.

³⁷⁸ *The Grudge 2* (2006), the second film in the series of American remakes of *Ju-on*, reveals that Kayako was the child of a Shinto priestess who used her as a medium for containing evil spirits; however this is not suggested by any of the prior films in the franchise.

the breakdown of the traditional family unit,³⁷⁹ their clear antecedent in *Yotsuya* – as well as the variants on the *Kasane's Swamp* legend and other Edo tales in which the ghost is that of a murdered immediate family member – reveals these anxieties were already well established in premodern vengeful ghost narratives.

The J-horror ghost also frightens because she confounds the audience's expectations, adhering to enough of the conventions surrounding traditional depictions of vengeful ghosts to be clearly identifiable as an *onryō* (“vengeful wraith”), but breaking enough of the established “rules” to make things interesting – and terrifying. For all the ways in which these films draw on traditional *onryō* legends, Buddhism and notions of karmic retribution are virtual non-entities in J-horror. Unlike *kaidan* narratives which foreground a cosmological worldview that takes the monster's existence for granted from the outset, J-horror movies' narrative structure often follow Noel Carroll's “complex discovery” category of horror movie plots. Rational, “normal” people encounter a seemingly supernatural threat that cannot logically be explained. After exhausting rational and scientific avenues of inquiry, the protagonists are forced to confront the unknown head-on.³⁸⁰ This structure characterizes the opening acts of *Ring*, Kurosawa Kiyoshi's *Pulse* and *Retribution* (*Sakebi*, 2006) – to name but a few – as well as most film versions of *Dracula* and William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*, to give a few Western examples. However, once the monster's supernatural presence has been verified, Western

³⁷⁹ See McRoy's chapter on “*Kaidan* and the Haunted Family in the Cinema of Nakata Hideo and Shimizu Takashi,” in *Nightmare Japan*. Despite invoking *kaidan* in the chapter's title, McRoy does not examine traditional *kaidan* narratives in any detail and does not mention that the broken-family motif has precedent in premodern Japanese narratives.

³⁸⁰ Carroll, 99-108.

horror movies in this vein typically re-invoke the old traditional religious methods of combating them – think of Professor Van Helsing’s wooden crucifixes, or Father Merrin’s final exorcism in *The Exorcist*. The message seems to be that, having discarded the traditional Christian spirituality of the past, modernity has left the door open for primordial demons to invade the present, and only recourse to the old beliefs will save humanity. But in J-horror, no one ever calls the Buddhist priest once the existence of the ghost has been irrefutably revealed. Reiko, the journalist, single-mother heroine of *Ring*, quickly comes to believe in the curse of Sadako, but instead of visiting a temple or shrine, she seeks the help of her psychic ex-husband Ryūji. Her intention, however, is not to use Ryūji’s powers to combat the curse directly, but to do a bit of psychic detective work to decode some hidden meaning in the cursed videotape. Seeking a religious or even a spiritual means to appease Sadako’s ghost is never brought up as a possibility in *Ring* or any of its sequels. On the rare occasions when a monk, priest, or shaman does show up in J-horror, they are either played for laughs, or prove utterly incapable of dealing with the vengeful spirit’s curse. In *Ju-on* creator Shimizu Takashi’s self-parodying television series *The Great Horror Family* (*Kaiki daikazoku*, 2004), an itinerant Buddhist monk appears uninvited on the doorstep of a modern family’s haunted house, having detected an evil presence and offering his services, only to be driven off by the oblivious family, who dismiss him as an anachronistic relic. Attempted exorcisms in *One Missed Call* and *Ju-on: White Ghost/ Black Ghost* (*Ju-on: shiroi rōjo/kuroi shōjo*, 2009) end in utter disaster and the deaths of the spiritualists who were foolish enough to attempt them. If Western supernatural horror films like *Dracula* ultimately reaffirm that the old religious

methods of combating demons and vampires still hold up, J-horror seems to take a perverse delight in denying this possibility.

Why are the protagonists of J-horror unable to turn to Buddhist monks in the way that the heroes of Hammer's *Dracula A.D. 1972* (1972) seek out the descendent of Professor Van Helsing to defeat Count Dracula with wooden stakes and crucifixes? The implication in these Western horror films is that the Judeo-Christian cosmology remains intact in the modern world, even if society remains perilously oblivious to its perseverance. Vampires might survive into the present day, but so does the traditional Christian framework of good and evil to which they have always been part. In J-horror, a culturally-attuned viewer familiar with the *modus operandi* of the traditional *onryō* gets the sense that the *system itself* has vanished, even if its monsters remain. Although not explicitly stated, this notion is implicitly pervasive in the impersonal, viral nature of the J-horror ghost's curse. As previously mentioned, the circumstances that give birth to the modern vengeful wraith remain mostly identical to their *kaiki* ancestors, but there is no longer any sense that these spirits operate as agents of karmic retribution in the manner of Oiwa or the ghost cat. Sadako, Kayako, and their ilk do not haunt "the right people" – those responsible for their feelings of hatred – but instead turn their anger on humanity at large. The spirits who haunt the spiritually devoid modern cityscapes of J-horror, no longer contained by a traditional cosmology that both regulated their activity and held the power to ultimately abate their wrath, become unfocused and unstoppable. Sadako's ultimate purpose in creating the cursed videotape is not to expose the crime of her own murder, as Reiko and Ryūji mistakenly think for most of *Ring*, but simply to spread her

wrath to untold multitudes. Likewise does *Ju-on*'s Kayako employ television, cell phones, and other communicative technology to haunt perfectly innocent people who have nothing to do with her murder at her husband's hands. Kayako's victims' only sin is coming into contact with the scene of murder – or with someone else who visited the murder site, underlining the viral nature of Kayako's curse. Containment gives way to contagion as the once-focused curse of the vengeful wraith – no longer operating along karmic lines of cause-and-effect – now only concerns itself with consuming as many victims as possible. Again we can see the first steps towards this reconfiguration of the vengeful spirit motif in contemporarily set Shintōhō *kaiki* films of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The modern day, guiltless victims of the title monsters in *Mansion of the Ghost Cat* and *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond* unwittingly suffer for the sins of their ancestors, the ghost cats' curses lingering through generations in a contemporary twist on the multigenerational doom that critic Tada Michitarō found so compelling in Nakagawa's take on *The Ghost Story of Kasane's Swamp* in 1957. But even in the Shintōhō ghost cat films, the monster's wrath remains limited, focused upon a select individual. Perhaps more significantly, the guiltless status of the victims allows for the successful intervention of a Buddhist monk in both films, whose prayers put the vengeful spirit to rest and save the young heroines, unlike their doomed ancestors. Against the unfocused rage of the J-horror ghosts like Sadako and Kayako, however, there can be no such recourse.

What can we make of this cosmological vacuum in J-horror, and the juggernaut, all-consuming viral curse that rushes in to fill the void? One possible interpretation is

suggested by Marilyn Ivy's anthropological work, *Discourses of the Vanishing*, which examines several modern Japanese cultural phenomena that express a longing for a lost (and largely imagined) traditional Japanese past. Ivy examines a variety of texts, written and otherwise, which express this desire to rediscover authentic Japanese folk traditions in which a pure Japanese spirit can be located and at least partially recovered.³⁸¹ J-horror's retention of the fearsome ghosts from classic *kaidan* literature and *kaiki* cinema coupled with its nihilistic lack of karmic justice becomes, in this sense, the nightmare flip-side of this longing for this traditional past. Ivy's examination of domestic travel advertising campaigns, Yanagita Kunio's works on rural folk traditions, and spiritual mediums in the remote Tōhoku region all point to a notion that contemporary urban Japanese society has lost touch with its cultural identity and must seek it in remote, rural areas of the country that still remember the old ways. In the case of J-horror, these "old ways" might be conceived of as the missing cosmological system, once an integral part of the *kaidan* narrative that most often takes place in a mythical, romanticized Edo period. In an age when contemporary filmmakers such as Iwai Shunji, Kore-eda Hirokazu, and Miyazaki Hayao reject urban metropolises to seek what they package as the true Japanese spirit in the rural countryside, J-horror addresses the fate of those who remain in the spiritual (un)dead zone of contemporary Tokyo. Those who forget the past are doomed to be destroyed by its vengeful ghosts.

This is, however, a perhaps too-tidy explanation. Like the readings of J-horror as expressive of technophobia and fears of new viral pandemics, it helps explain J-horror's

³⁸¹ Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 10-17; 63, 243.

topical appeal, but none of these theories deal directly with the sense of *osore* central to the figure of the vengeful ghost, which has a sublime quality present in both classic *kaiki* films and in J-horror. As expounded upon in Chapter 2, in foreign *kaiki* pictures like *Dracula* or *The Haunting* this *osore* constitutes a manifestation of H.P. Lovecraft's "cosmic horror," the awe-inspiring existence of entities beyond the pale of human understanding. The marvelous monsters of domestic *kaiki* cinema like *Oiwa* and the ghost cat may be "knowable" in the fairy tale context of the films' diegesis, but invoke a similarly awe-inspiring sense of *osore* in their cosmologically licensed, omnipotent power to exact karmic vengeance upon the wicked. For an audience aware of both traditions, the J-horror ghost invokes the former *and* the latter, perverting the karmic rules of domestic *kaiki* cinema by retaining the formal presentation of the vengeful wraith and its rage-fueled *modus operandi*, but eliminating the laws that governed its behavior. Because the ghosts of *kaiki* films based on traditional *kaidan* operate in a structurally sound cosmology, it is possible for the audience to learn the rules of the system and thereby avoid the terrifying fate of the vengeful spirit's curse. In J-horror there is no system, and therein lies the fundamental terror. This may in part be interpreted as a lament for lost Japanese traditions, but this post-structural *osore* of J-horror perhaps conveys, at a more baseline level, the fear of living in a world that old cosmologies can no longer satisfactorily explain, which brings us back to Tudor's conception of "paranoid horror." J-horror repositions the once knowable old monsters of *kaiki* cinema as perfect specimens of Lovecraft's cosmic fear – utterly unpredictable and unknowable. The ghosts

of traditional culture remain with us, but the old rationales for their existence no longer satisfy. And that is what truly frightens.

Conclusion

At the false climax of *Ring*, the protagonists mistakenly believe they have put Sadako's angry spirit to rest by recovering her corpse and exposing her murder. The scene strongly parallels the true climax of Nakagawa Nobuo's *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, in which an inner wall of the doctor's haunted mansion crumbles during a terrific thunderstorm, revealing the sealed-up remains of the murdered innocent whose curse gave birth to the titular monster. The doctor and his wife give the bones a proper burial, freeing themselves of the ghost cat's curse. In the final scene the couple, now safely back in Tokyo, look back on their ordeal and remark, "Such enmity is a terrifying thing indeed!" (*Sono urami wa osoroshii mono ne!*), using the adjectival form of the word *osore*. More terrifying still is the enmity of *Ring's* Sadako, who in keeping with the nihilistic themes of J-horror, cannot be appeased as easily as the *kaiki* ghosts of yesterday. *Ring's* genuine climax returns to the final image on the cursed videotape that set the film's plot in motion, as a flickering, out-of-focus recording of a well inexplicably appears on the doomed protagonist Ryūji's television screen. Unlike the videotape itself, which abruptly ends with the enigmatic shot of the well, this sourceless imagery continues on to show the ghost of Sadako emerge from the well's depths, crawling toward the screen, then through it into Ryūji's living room.

Sadako's uncanny violation of the television screen breaks down the barrier between present reality and the recorded image and underscores one of the film's central conceits: the mere act of watching a horrific film is enough to allow its monster to "get" you. The scene's power to instill a sense of terror in the viewer requires no knowledge of

the long cultural history of the *onryō* or vengeful wraith and its manifestations in decades of classic *kaiki* films, borne out by the fact that the American remake *The Ring* replicates the scene virtually unchanged. However, for a viewer aware of these traditions, the image of Sadako crawling out of her well activates the uncanny on multiple levels. Japanese ghosts have been emerging from wells ever since the spirit of the murdered maid Okiku began haunting her master in *The Dish Mansion at Bancho* over two centuries ago. Okiku and her well remain one of the most iconic images of the *kaiki* genre, but until *Ring* the motif had been contained in a Todorovian marvelous past as depicted in prewar and early postwar *kaiki* cinema. Sadako emerging from her own well thus serves the same function as Shintōhō's monsters who invade modern-day Japan in pictures like *Mansion of the Ghost Cat*, *The Ghost Cat of Otama Pond*, *Diving Girl's Ghost*, and *Vampire Bride*. The ghosts and monsters of a fairy tale past take on a new, terrifying aspect via their uncanny appearance in the rational present, transgressing the boundaries of the marvelous narratives that safely separate them from our own reality – the monster under the bed made flesh. But Sadako and her J-horror spawn are also the ghosts of *kaiki* cinema itself, a point underscored by the fact that in *Ring* Sadako's ghost is encountered via the same medium through which more recent generations have experienced classic *kaiki* films – home video. Resurrected from her cinematic crypt, the ghost of Okiku now quite literally reaches through the screen to terrify her victims.

Fittingly, the image of Sadako and her well also harkens back to that precious bit of surviving silent era footage of Okiku's see-through spirit emerging from the well to haunt her murderer with stop-motion tricks. The title *Ring* refers to the unbreakable,

never-ending cycle of Sadako's curse, but the film's pivotal image makes a ring of its own, circling back to the earliest extant imagery from what might be deemed a Japanese *kaiki* film. The *Dish Mansion* footage and other primordial *kaiki eiga*'s emphasis on trick photography may have been intended to dazzle spectators with the uncanny miracle of cinema rather than frighten them with attempts to instill a sense of *osore* in their content, but once early audiences swiftly grew accustomed to the new medium's potential for special effects, domestic *kaiki* films sought to invoke the same themes of cosmic, karmic terror that distinguished their *kaidan* ancestors from Edo stage traditions. The site of spectacle shifted to the body of vamp actresses like Suzuki Sumiko, whose onscreen transformations from a beautiful, sexually appealing woman to a hideous wraith or ghost cat became a focal point for the convergence of domestic, stage-inspired traditions of *kaidan* and the emerging global genre of the horror movie. In her encapsulation of old and new, Suzuki Sumiko and her monstrous performances stand as yet another precursor to Sadako and the postmodern, J-horror ghosts, who likewise combine tradition and innovation. Following the interim of war and occupation, Ōkura Mitsugi's transformation of the Shintōhō studio into a genre factory created the conditions for Nakagawa Nobuo and his staff to bring domestic *kaiki* cinema to the pinnacle of form, retaining the themes of cosmic *osore* which had distinguished the genre but adding a new layer of uncanny by displacing the monsters of the past into the present in a move that even more so than Suzuki Sumiko's prewar films anticipated one of the central themes of J-horror. *Ring* and the globally popular film movement it spawned, like all good genre cinema, build on the conventions and motifs that came before, even if knowledge of such traditions is not

necessary to enjoy them. What once thrilled early cinema audiences returns to chill new ones to the bone.

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