

BOOK REVIEWS

JAPAN

REIDER, NORIKO. *Tales of the Supernatural in Early Modern Japan: Kaidan, Akinari, Ugetsu Monogatari*. Japanese Studies Volume 16. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002. v + 182 pages. Japanese and Chinese names and terms, bibliography, index. Hardcover US\$109.95; £69.95; ISBN 0-7734-7095-6.

Japan possesses a long and particularly rich tradition of narratives relating to the *kaii* 怪異 (Ch. *guaiyi*; bizarre and strange). From the *Nihon ryōiki* (c. 822) through the occult fiction by contemporary novelists Kyōgoku Natsuhiko and Yumemakura Baku, Shinto deities, Buddhist demons, *tengu* goblins, *kappa* water spirits, and a myriad of other fantastic creatures, including the spirits of both the living and the dead, have appeared in Japanese tales in great abundance. We can trace many of these creatures, such as foxes and raccoon dogs (*tanuki*) with transformative powers, to continental Asian sources. Indeed, Chinese literature, especially Ming and Qing collections of vernacular fiction, abounds in such tales of the bizarre and strange.

Reider's study is the first of its kind in English, and possibly any Western language. As such, it deserves our attention. After a brief introduction that introduces the term *kaidan* (怪談), or "tales of the strange and mysterious, supernatural stories known for their depictions of the horrific and gruesome" (1, also slightly altered on 7), Reider leads us through a brief history of *kaidan* and collections called *kaidan-shū*, which were published in great quantities throughout the early modern period. She then provides some background regarding belief in what she refers to as the "supernatural" over the Edo period, and finally discusses *kaidan* and their appeal to the Japanese of the time. Readers of this journal may recognize some of the arguments raised in Chapters 1 and 3 in the book, since earlier versions of those chapters have appeared here. The most helpful discussion for this reviewer, though, is found in Chapter 4, Reider's insightful analysis of Ueda Akinari's masterpiece, and the most noted collection of occult fiction of the Japanese tradition, *Ugetsu monogatari* (pub. 1776). The first three chapters, in fact, seem to serve a supplementary role as an introduction to the fourth, which stands as the core of Reider's study.

Reider states her purpose in conducting this study as follows: "This book is intended to assess the significance of kaidan, specifically in its multidimensional reflection of and impact on Japanese culture in the Edo period.... Providing an English-language analytical overview of kaidan, while simultaneously examining its overall impact and significance on Japanese life and culture, it is this book's chief endeavor to contribute to the discussion of this area of Japanese literature" (2). Reider deserves credit for framing her study in this manner, given that Japanese scholarship has generally avoided defining what this reader refers to as "occult literature" as an independent genre. In general, the academy in Japan has treated *kaidan* as a sub-genre, within the rubric of the "recognized" narrative forms known as *kana-zōshi*, *ukiyo-zōshi*, *yomihon*, and the like. Only a few scholars have attempted to recognize such stories as forming an independent literary genre, including Tachikawa Kiyoshi 太刀川清, who refers to them as *kaii shōsetsu* 怪異小説 (novels of the bizarre and strange), and Takada Mamoru 高田衛, who

classifies them as *kaidan-shū* 怪談集. Reider's identification of occult fiction as comprising such a genre derives from a combination of Japanese scholarship, including Tachikawa, Takada, and others, and recent Western literary theorists, including Mikhail Bakhtin and Tsvetan Todorov. As such, Reider's study provides support for transcending conventional Japanese genre categorizations, which usually focus on physical properties of the books published and printer/publisher identification, rather than on content or theme.

The author posits three prototypes for *kaidan* fiction: "stories adapted from Chinese fiction," "work(s) of Buddhist teaching," and "(narratives) with strong traces of Japanese folk tales" (19). She also asserts that such stories compiled in earlier ages generally had a strong Buddhist didactic element to them, and that one characteristic of early modern *kaidan* is the overtly secular, entertaining, and at times even parodic quality of these stories. This trend toward secularization and commodification of fiction is of course true for all types during this period, and not limited to occult tales.

The issues this reviewer finds most troubling in this book are raised in Chapter 2, in which the author attempts to identify the nature of generally-held beliefs concerning the "supernatural" in early modern Japan. Her conclusion, after examining several statements by intellectuals and the general population alike, is that, "prior to the Age of Enlightenment, the belief in the existence in supernatural beings was indeed commonplace" (38). The main difficulty I have here (aside from the obvious problems raised by positing a dichotomy between an "unenlightened" Edo and an "enlightened" Meiji) is with the author's assumption that people over that period distinguished between natural phenomena and transcendent supernatural phenomena. While both readers and writers of the time recognized the strange, the unusual, and even the eerie as occurring only under special circumstances, there is no evidence I am aware of that they considered them as transcendently "supernatural." Reider herself provides good support for this position in her discussion of Yamaoka Genrin and his 1686 collection, *Hyakumonogatari hyōban* 百物語評判 ("Explanations to the Strange and Weird Tales," as Reider translates the title). She quotes Genrin explaining unusual phenomena, including the existence of ghosts, through yin-yang cosmology. "Those who die with a grudge or by the sword are perishing while both [*ki*] energy and shape are still active. Their death is so sudden that it is like pouring water into the flaming fire, and there only remains energy" (62).

Reider rightly identifies the nine stories in Akinari's collection as being driven by the notion of *shūnen* 執念 (obsession). Her analysis of the varieties of obsession in these stories provides the reader with new tools for interpreting and appreciating these carefully crafted narratives. For example, in the tale of a woman who, after death, enacts gruesome revenge on her adultrous husband, "Kibitsu no kama" 吉備津の釜 ("Cauldron of Kibitsu"), Reider states that Akinari "places the major responsibility of the relationship in the hands of the man," and that women's "demonic transformations in fact were brought about by man's frivolous actions.... When a character in one of his stories deviates from Akinari's strict ethical code, he or she is destined for severe, divine retribution" (108). Other scholars and translators of Akinari writing in English have failed to present this reading in this manner.

Finally, and most unfortunately, the book suffers greatly from insufficient editing. One major reason for this is found in the nature of the publisher, who accepts only camera-ready copy. The American tenure system forces junior faculty to publish as soon as they possibly can, and this creates the need to take shortcuts by relying on publishers who do not make the effort to edit work submitted. (Further discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this review, however.) The book is riddled with typos, simple errors of fact (names, dates, page numbers, and so on), and awkward locutions, many of which might have been picked up by a competent editor. In spite of these serious drawbacks, many readers will find *Tales of the*

Supernatural in Early Modern Japan a helpful study of one of the most important works of early modern Japanese literature.

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KOREA

GRAYSON, JAMES HUNTLEY, *Myths and Legends from Korea: An Annotated Compendium of Ancient and Modern Materials*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001. xvi + 454 pages. Appendices, index. Hardcover US\$114.95; ISBN 0-7007-1241-0.

This impressive collection of Korean folktales and foundation myths is a major addition for studies of Korean folklore and for those who wish to do cross-cultural studies with Korean materials. This volume, compiled and annotated by James Grayson, is quite surely the most authoritative collection of Korean materials translated into English to date and opens up a cornucopia of materials to an English reading audience.

Grayson's work is more than simply a retelling of the various renditions of myths from the Three Kingdoms and Silla periods (1st century BCE–10th century CE). He includes a thorough analysis of each narrative based upon what he refers to as "dramatic structural analysis in which the tale is treated like a drama and examined for the flow of its themes" (2). From this analysis, the narratives are then grouped as similar types based on structure. Grayson states that once the structural type of a narrative based on its narrative format is known, "comparisons can then be made about the purported purpose, or function, of the tale" (5). It is from such a basis that each narrative in this collection is analyzed, categorized, and compared.

The volume examines three categories of materials: "stories of the foundation of the nation, folktales from the ancient period, and folktales from the modern period" (1). Such a collection pattern, according to Grayson, is to, "illustrate the continuity and disjunctures in the structure, theme and function of folktales from early to contemporary times" (1). While the writer's desire to demonstrate what type of narrative has survived from antiquity to the contemporary period is an interesting aspect, it does omit the largest portion of recorded pre-modern Korean history, specifically that of the Koryŏ (918–1392) and Chosŏn (1392–1910) dynasties. It was in these two periods, and particularly in the latter dynasty, that much of what we term as "Korean" culture developed and thus the leapfrog over this millennium is a significant omission.

Of particular importance in the Chosŏn period was the utilization of the Neo-Confucian ideology as a governing tool. The rather eclectic cultural milieu that existed in Koryŏ and earlier times was slowly transformed over the first half of the dynasty to a much more rigid Confucian model. Such a transformation was not without many conflicts in the ways people were accustomed to living and the model they were pushed towards. While discontent with the changes wrought by the strict social system was plentiful, especially among women, the ability to express these complaints in writing was not only difficult, but could be harmful to the well-being of one's family. Hence, oral literary forms such as folktales and shamanic narratives became a seedbed for the growth of narratives that can be deemed as subversive. While Grayson does allude to the difficulties brought about by the emphasis on Neo-Confucianism in Chosŏn (242–43), I do not believe this can replace an actual review of the narratives of this period.

Notwithstanding the above criticism, which, in all fairness, is in part a result of the present reviewer's own research interests, Grayson's work is thorough and his analysis of each