

*Critical Essays on Film,
Literature, Anime, Video Games*

JAPANESE HORROR CULTURE



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Introduction

Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns and Subashish
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Ever since the emergence of the J-horror phenomenon in the late 1990s with the opening and critical success of films such as Hideo Nakata's *The Ring* (Ringu, 1998) or Takashi Miike's *Audition* (*Ôdishon*, 1999), Japanese horror has been a staple of both film studies and Western culture. Scholars worldwide have been keen to observe and analyze the popularity and roots of the phenomenon that took the world by storm, producing a corpus of cultural artefacts that still resonate and influence today.

Encompassing a range of genres and media including cinema, manga, video games and television series, the loosely designated genre has often been known to uniquely blend Western cinematic techniques and tropes with traditional narrative styles, visuals and folklores. Tracing back to the early decades of the twentieth century, modern Japanese horror have had tremendous impact on popular culture, introducing many trends which are widely applied in contemporary horror narratives. The hybridity that is often native to Japanese aestheticization is an influential element that has found widespread acceptance in the genres of horror. These include classifications of ghosts as the *yurei* and monsters as the *yôkai*, tentacle erotica or the plight of the suffering individual in modern, industrial society. Furthermore, settings such as damp, dank spaces that reinforce the idea of the morbid are features that have now been unconsciously assimilated into the canon of Hollywood or western horror, and may often be traced back to Japanese horror roots. Besides the often de facto reliance on gore and violence, the psychological motif has been one of the most important aspects of Japanese horror.

J-Horror is term coined by British distribution label *Tartan Video*, which distributed overseas content via their Asian Extreme collection through an extremely astute art of branding. Soon, J-Horror was making waves