

## **Ghosts of the Past, Ghosts of the Future: Monsters, Children, and Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema**

by **Lindsay Nelson**

Cinematic depictions of children—in family dramas, in horror films, in romantic comedies that so often end in weddings and the promise of birth—have long presented an image of something that must be nurtured and protected, a single body standing in for a collective sense of hope for the future. The threats depicted in such films, be they extreme forms of violence or simply the dissolution of a family unit, have the potential to inflict the most harm on children, and it is thus in the name of children that humanity must be defended. What happens, then, when the child itself is a force of destruction and death? When the figure of the child and the monster are merged in a way that forces adult figures to shun and even destroy that which they are otherwise meant to embrace? This question lies at the heart of several recent Japanese horror films that feature monstrous child figures. In their depiction of children as vengeful ghosts and perpetrators of violence, these films invite an examination of the historical and cultural significance of both the child and the monster in Japan, as well as how the use of each figure intersects with periods of change and crisis.

Japan's social stability and its prospects for the future are, as in the United States and many other countries, tied to the concept of the child, who must be shielded from the destructive and violent forces that seem to be infiltrating Japanese society at an alarming rate. On the figure of the Child in contemporary American discourse, Lee Edelman writes in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* that "the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust...we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child" (Edelman 11). For Japan, the figure of the child is not only an icon of the future and the one for whom social order must be maintained, but an icon of the past, of a fixed and unchanging sense of traditional values and identity. When the child is under threat—or, in the case of the films under

discussion here, turns monstrous—it is not only a stable future that is threatened but a utopian vision of the past. Such periods of national anxiety, which often stem from a perceived breakdown of traditional values and roles, have existed throughout Japan's history. Fear for the safety of children became especially evident, though, during the 1990s and early 2000s, a period that bore witness to the Hanshin Earthquake, a series of high-profile murders, and the infamous sarin gas attack on a Tokyo subway by members of a doomsday cult. The fact that many of these crimes involved children and took place in schools, in particular a 2001 incident in Osaka in which a man entered a school and fatally stabbed eight children, only added to the overall sense of fear and unease. During the 1990s and early 2000s Japanese cinema often depicted child characters who existed at the center of frequently horrific scenarios involving genetic mutation, vengeful ghosts, spirit possession, dangerous machines, and the more earthly problems of abandonment, neglect, and bullying became commonplace. Films such as *Honogurai mizu no soko kara* (*Dark Water*), *Ringu* (*The Ring*), *Juon* (*The Grudge*), *Dare mo shiranai* (*Nobody Knows*), and *Battle Royale* imagined both adolescents and pre-adolescents forced to grow up too quickly as a result of abuse or abandonment, which often led them to engage in violent acts themselves.

Within the realm of Japanese horror cinema, the films of Nakata Hideo, particularly the famous *Ringu* series, have arguably received the most attention from critics. There has been much focus on the role played by technology in these films—in particular the haunted video cassette and the scene in which the vengeful spirit of the female child Sadako moves from the digital realm into the “real” world, literally crawling out of a television screen and into a living room. *Ringu* has been described as part of a trend of “tech horror” films which combine ghostly apparitions with technologies such as cell phones, computer disks, and video cassettes. Somewhat less attention has been given to Nakata's *Honogurai mizu no soko kara* (literally *From the Depths of the Murky Black Water*, hereafter referred to as *Dark Water*), though the film's original story was written by the same author and the film contains many elements similar to *Ringu* (a vengeful female spirit, death by drowning, and a single mother). At the same time, *Dark Water* explores the more commonplace horror of single motherhood and parental neglect in a way only touched on by the *Ringu* films,

to the extent that the ghostly horrors portrayed in the film serve almost as a backdrop to the more frightening realities of the protagonist's everyday life. The film's depiction of a vengeful child ghost portrayed within the context of a divorce, parental neglect, and the alienation of urban life allow *Dark Water* to clearly illustrate the role of the monstrous child figure as an intersection of national anxieties and national hopes. In reading *Dark Water*, this paper will attempt to show the changing ways in which both monsters and children have been depicted in Japanese visual and performing arts, and what those depictions reveal about the relationship of such icons to national fears and hopes. It is my position that the figure of the monstrous child in Japanese cinema exists in a space of temporal paradox, embodying hopes for a prosperous future that are at the same time tied to notions of an unchanging, idealized past.

As in Europe and the United States, the very concept of childhood in Japan is relatively new. The development of a modern idea of childhood, one which emphasizes the difference of children from adults and their need of protection, nurturing, and especially formal education, is strongly linked in Japan to the proliferation of schools.<sup>1</sup> The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a shift in household structure from larger communities made of kin and non-kin toward a smaller family unit, a shift that "helped to create a powerful household (*ie*) identity—a sense that each individual held a stake in the long-term survival of the family" (Platt 967). By the early nineteenth century a huge number of schools had been established for children of all classes, further strengthening the notion that it was the duty of the state to educate and provide for all children. During the Russo-Japanese and Sino-Japanese conflicts, children's education became strongly linked to a sense of national pride and military obligation—children's comic books and magazines of the early nineteenth century often depicted young boys wearing military uniforms, singing patriotic songs, and demonstrating how to "be more like a soldier" The figure of the child became a nationalist symbol, and the education and protection of children was seen as key to a prosperous and successful future. As much as images of children

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on the invention of childhood as a concept, see Philippe Aries' *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1965) and Linda Pollock's *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (1983).

were associated with hope, however, the many economic and cultural crises of the twentieth century also saw the child become the focus of the nation's fears. In the 1990s and early 2000s, when the nation and the child seemed to be under threat from forces of violence and the breakdown of traditional values, images of violent and demonic children could be seen in many Japanese films. Such depictions of children were arguably most frequent in Japanese horror films, which drew on a lengthy tradition of *kaidan* (vengeful spirit) narratives.

Japanese horror cinema of the 1990s and early 2000s has often been characterized as a cinema of "everyday horror," harkening back to American horror films of the late sixties and early seventies (*Night of the Living Dead*, *The Stepford Wives*) that used monsters and the supernatural to reveal the real horrors of contemporary existence.<sup>2</sup> Donna Haraway's assertion that "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (Haraway 149) can in certain cases also be applied to the horror genre, with its monsters, ghosts, and serial killers that often stand in for society's more mundane fears. In the realm of Japanese horror cinema, films such as *Pulse*, *Cure*, *Juon*, the *Tomie* series, and *Audition* took urban Tokyo as their setting and juxtaposed stories of serial killers, ghosts, torture, and possession with stories of broken families and lonely singles. Though innovative in their approach, many of these horror films drew from a long tradition of Asian ghost story motifs, particularly the *onryou* (vengeful spirit) and *kaidan* (ghost) narrative: "...*kaidan* films depicted the incursion of supernatural forces into the realm of the ordinary, largely for the purposes of exacting revenge. In the majority of cases, visual representations of the 'avenging spirit' assumed the form of a 'wronged,' primarily female entity returning to avenge herself upon those who harmed her...prominent features associated with the *onryou* include long black hair and wide staring eyes (or, in some instances, just a single eye)" (McRoy 2008, 6). Nakata Hideo's *Ringu* series, with its portrayal of black-haired, vengeful Sadako frightening victims to death with the gaze of her single eye, seems to be a direct descendant of *kaidan* / *onryou* narratives. But in *Ringu*, as in *Dark Water*, the vengeful spirits are not women but pre-adolescent children. And in *Dark Water* in particular, the spirit does not seek only to harm those in the living world but to find a mother figure to

<sup>2</sup> McRoy, Jay. *Japanese Horror Cinema*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.

replace the one she has lost. This connection of monstrosity and vengeance to childhood, in particular the use of a child figure to symbolize the breakdown of the family and of traditional parental roles, merges the ancient motifs of the *onryou* / *kwaidan* narrative with the very real, contemporary horror of urban life in modern Japan.

In examining the question of what lies beneath the merging of monster-figures and child-figures in contemporary Japanese cinema, it is helpful to turn to a discipline founded and promoted by Inoue Enryô in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: *yôkaigaku*, roughly translated as “monsterology,” though closer in meaning to “superstition studies” or “psychical research.” As Gerald Figal’s exhaustive study of the connection between the monstrous / supernatural and the intense modernization of the Meiji period (1868-1912) has revealed, *yôkaigaku* was promoted as a way to “classify” monsters, to “bring apparently inexplicable objects into the purview of rational explanation,” to turn monsters and other supernatural phenomena into “real and natural objects that can fall into fields of rational meaning” (Figal 46). In the Meiji period, such a science had a very practical purpose: to bring Japan out of a “dark ages” ruled by superstition and belief in the supernatural and into an age of *bunmei kaika* (civilization and enlightenment). But for many rural Japanese, the real monster was the government itself: “To many village folk, the new rulers of Meiji Japan, by associating with monsters (foreigners) had themselves become monsters...at the same time the state was striving to cast folk knowledge as a demon-enemy to be avoided, the folk was striving to cast state knowledge as a demon-enemy to be expelled” (35). Monstrosity was a slippery tool—in attempting to purge Japan of its dependence on the supernatural, the Meiji government unwittingly became, in the eyes of many rural Japanese, the very monster it sought to vanquish.

Beyond the classification and “de-fanging” of monsters as a means of political control, Figal cites a connection between certain crises and the appearance of monsters in art. He describes the work of anthropologist Komatsu Kunihiko, who suggests “a fundamental link between ‘times of crisis’ and the prodigious appearance of monsters in narrative, visual, and performative art,” and argues that “an inordinate appearance of the weird seems to coincide with periods of crisis and transition in Japanese history” (22-34).

Two major forces seem to be at work here: the appearance of monsters and “the weird” in art as a form of protest against governmental authority, and the classification and study of monsters by that governmental authority as a means to strip them of their power. It becomes clear that monsters and the supernatural played a key role in Japan’s modernization, whether as symbols of a past to be discarded or of a new kind of “official” monstrosity that took the form of an oppressive and unfamiliar government feared by the common people.

In addition to monsters and the supernatural, another figure to become the embodiment of all that was ripe for reform and modernization in Meiji Japan was the figure of the child—both the pre-adolescent child in need of protection and nurturing by the family-state, and the juvenile delinquent whose wayward instincts threatened to undermine state stability. In *Bad Youth: Juvenile Delinquency and the Politics of Everyday Life in Modern Japan*, David R. Ambras writes that, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, dealing with the problems of street children, child thieves, and child prostitutes was closely associated with Japan’s “modernization”: “Since 1868, the Meiji state had promoted a series of far-reaching reforms aimed at constructing a modern nation that could thrive in an international capitalist economy and an imperialist diplomatic structure...(the war with China) and its aftermath stimulated a heightened perception among urban middle-class intellectuals that society required them to act upon the problems they confronted” (33). Though it was this “modern” way of thinking that spurred efforts to combat juvenile delinquency and other societal problems, it was the ultra-rapid economic growth, urbanization, and industrialization of the late Meiji period that exacerbated such problems. A drive toward modernity was coupled with a fear of losing “Japaneseness” in the face of an influx of foreign influences, both bad and good. H.D. Harootunian writes that Japan’s rapid modernization “prompted a widespread effort among intellectuals, writers, thinkers, scholars, and activists to discover a fixed identity in relation to origin in the pre-capitalist past” (144). Specifically, this search for a “fixed identity” took the form of native ethnology, with scholars attempting to construct “an imaginary folk, complete, coherent and unchanging, continuously living everyday life under the sign of immutable custom” (144). The ethnographer Yanagita Kunio sees this task as “particularly urgent...To freeze-dry this moment of cultural unevenness, it was

necessary to create an image of a timeless and eternal folk (*jōmin*), which continued to exist in custom and religious observances within the vortex of modernizing changes" (qtd. in Harootunian 149). Children, of course, were ideal figures onto which this notion of a "fixed identity" could be projected—being young and uneducated they were unaware of the heterogeneity that characterized Japanese society, and they could be taught customs and culture in such a way as to preserve the idea that such customs and culture had always existed. When such children were perceived to be threatened, it was as if the very foundation of Japanese traditions and values were also at risk

There is, of course, a great divide between the reforms and upheavals that characterized the Meiji period and the world of Japan in the 1990s and early 2000s, and I do not mean to suggest a direct link between Meiji-era conceptions of monsters and children and the portrayal of monstrous children in contemporary Japanese horror films. Rather, I use the examples of *yōkaigaku* and the status of the child-figure in the Meiji period to provide an example of one way in which both monsters and children have been manipulated by the state and the media in response to perceived threats to the nation's stability. The idea that delinquent youth and neglected children represent a breakdown of traditional values is, of course, hardly unique to Japan. What *is* unique is the way in which the control and protection of delinquent youth and pre-adolescent children connects the political desire to both preserve a traditional, unchanging image of folk life *and* to promote modernizing reforms. As with the child, so with the monster, which has been both embraced as a form of resistance to state-sponsored progress and condemned as a remnant of the superstitious and un-modern past.

In summary, both the figure of the child and the figure of the monster have long been linked in Japan with notions of modernity, tradition, and adherence to international norms. Threats to the safety and virtue of children, often imagined in film as supernatural monsters, are naturally seen as threats to the social order. As Lee Edelman writes, "whatever refuses this mandate by which our political institutions compel the collective reproduction of the Child must appear as a threat not only to the organization of a given social order but also, and far more ominously, to social order as such" (11). In Japan, this threat to the child is a threat not only to the future

but to the past—to the breakdown of traditional values, the desecration of a past based on notions of fixed identity and an unchanging folk. In pulling the mind forward to a threatened future world the figure of the monstrous child also pulls it backward, into a mythical realm of fixed identities and values. Such a dynamic is vividly revealed in Nakata Hideo's *Dark Water*, where a womb-like world enveloped in murky water is the place from which a vengeful child-ghost will attempt to pull the living into the realm of the dead. In its depiction of a struggling single mother whose child is threatened not only by a ghost but by the breakdown of the family unit, *Dark Water* also reveals the ways in which the figure of the child and the figure of the monster are simultaneously tied to hopes for the future and the fear of losing the traditional structure of the past.

*Dark Water* tells the story of a mother, Yoshimi, trying to settle into a new life as she struggles to maintain custody of her daughter during divorce proceedings. The new apartment that she finds for herself and her daughter is an old, concrete block of a building typical of Tokyo suburbs. From the moment they move in something isn't quite right—water drips constantly from the ceiling, the mother sees glimpses of a child in a raincoat who quickly vanishes, and a child's abandoned red purse is thrown away only to appear again and again. In the midst of trying to find a job and prove that she is stable enough to maintain custody of her daughter, Yoshimi learns that a young girl, Mitsuko, went missing two years previously, and she realizes it is the vengeful spirit of this girl that is causing the water to drip into her apartment and dogging the footsteps of her daughter. Ultimately it is revealed that the missing girl, who had been abandoned by her mother, drowned in the apartment's water tank. To save her own daughter from Mitsuko's vengeful spirit, Yoshimi joins the girl in her ghost-existence to become her surrogate mother.

*Dark Water's* opening credits unfold over a backdrop of stagnant, murky water lit from above by an amber light. From there the film moves into a scene of falling rain and an image of the young Yoshimi waiting for her mother at school, then cuts to an image of the adult Yoshimi waiting in the rain to begin a divorce mediation meeting. Yoshimi and her daughter trudge through the rain to view their new apartment, where water is puddled on the floor of the elevator. While playing at school Ikuko is attacked by the ghost Mitsuko, whose watery presence almost drowns

her—Ikuko will almost drown again multiple times, once in the water-soaked apartment where Mitsuko used to live and again in her own bathtub when Mitsuko attempts to pull her underwater. The landscape of the film itself, Mitsuko's former apartment, Yoshimi and Ikuko's bathtub, the apartment water tank where Mitsuko drowns, and even the apartment elevator become deadly, womb-like spaces that eject murky water into hallways and through ceilings, "birthing" the monstrous presence of Mitsuko. Not content to send forth destruction and pollution into the world of the living, these womb-like realms must also pull the living into the realm of the dead—when Mitsuko cannot succeed in drowning Ikuko, Yoshimi enters Mitsuko's womb-world in her place. Unclean water, wetness, and the various water-filled spaces in the film create a realm of abjection, defined by Julia Kristeva as that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite." The corpse, the "utmost of abjection... is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (4). Mitsuko's corpse and the polluted water that surrounds it are at first rejected by Yoshimi, who pushes Mitsuko's body away and cries out that she is not her mother. In the end, though, Yoshimi realizes that being "engulfed" by the abjection of Mitsuko, embracing that which she would push away in disgust, is the only way to save her own daughter. The monstrous child embodies the space of in-between, transgressing the boundaries between cleanliness and purity, innocence and abjection, death and birth.

The womb-space of the bath, traditionally a place of innocent play and family bonding, is made uncanny by the tortured presence of Mitsuko. In one scene we see young Ikuko soaking in the bath, happily splashing, but then she begins speaking to someone who isn't there—the ghost Mitsuko, who "loves the bath" and "wants to stay in it forever." It is a larger version of this bath, the apartment water tank, that Mitsuko, perhaps seeking the same kind of comfort that she found in the bath, ultimately falls into and drowns. Drowning itself takes on a complicated significance in the film—the very real threat of drowning almost kills Ikuko several times, Mitsuko drowns at least partly as a result of neglect (she was playing alone near the water tank when she fell in), and Yoshimi chooses to drown voluntarily in Mitsuko's world in

order to save her daughter. In her death by drowning Yoshimi is in a sense “reborn” as Mitsuko’s ghost-mother, while Mitsuko herself is reborn as a monstrous spirit as a result of her drowning. In the film’s final image of water, after Yoshimi has left Ikuko to join Mitsuko, we see the flooded elevator open its doors to release a torrent of murky water that washes over Ikuko. Lying pitifully on the ground and crying “Mama, Mama,” her body drenched in water, Ikuko resembles a newborn infant, one pitifully helpless in the absence of her mother. The births, re-births, and deaths or near-deaths of the film’s characters all take place within the context of a watery, womb-like world that signifies a perverse sense of renewal in the same moment that it embodies death and decay.<sup>3</sup>

Mitsuko’s existence as a vengeful spirit in a murky, watery world is clearly connected to parental neglect, in particular to her abandonment by her mother. Though *Dark Water* presents a mostly sympathetic portrait of the struggling single mother, it still drives home the idea that parental selfishness (in the form of divorce, to be certain, but also in the form of mothers who choose to work and pursue lives outside of the role of homemaker) is responsible for any “abnormal” behavior on the part of the child. Ikuko is literally threatened by the presence of a vengeful ghost and figuratively threatened by the dissolution of her family, which the film not so subtly hints is responsible both for Mitsuko’s disappearance and Ikuko’s “odd” behavior. The child figure thus embodies hope for a future that must be made better than the present, and an attachment to an idealized sense of a fixed, unchanging past in which parental roles and the stability of the family unit were unquestioned. Like Mitsuko, Ikuko is constantly alone, whether purposefully left that way by her mother or because she has wandered off, lured into dangerous situations by the ghost of Mitsuko. Alone and unattended, just as Mitsuko was when she fell into the water tank and drowned, Ikuko narrowly escapes being pulled into Mitsuko’s monstrous world. Shots of Ikuko waiting for her working mother are juxtaposed with shots of Yoshimi waiting for her own absent mother, and shots of Mitsuko waiting for the mother who abandoned her. When Yoshimi sees a “missing child” leaflet with Mitsuko’s picture, the fear on her face suggests that her own child could be next—another victim of

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of water and womb imagery in Nakata Hideo’s *Ringu*, see Sheng-Mei Ma’s “Asian Cell and Horror,” included in *Asian Gothic: Essays on Literature, Film, and Anime* (2008).

parental selfishness. In the film's final scenes Yoshimi confuses her own child with Mitsuko—finding what she believes is Ikuko's water-soaked body on the bathroom floor, she runs with her to the elevator. As it floods with water, she looks out to see Ikuko emerging from the apartment—and realizes that the girl in her arms is in fact Mitsuko, who calls her "Mama" and tries to strangle her with green, scaly hands. Juxtaposed with the image of her own daughter vulnerable and crying out for her, this scene of Yoshimi rejecting but ultimately embracing Mitsuko drives home the idea that Yoshimi is facing her ultimate fear—the fear that her own child will be made "monstrous" through neglect and abandonment. The only way to prevent this, it seems, is to embrace Mitsuko and leave her own daughter behind.

While the constant message of the film seems to be a warning to parents not to abandon or neglect their children, its choice of resolution is puzzling. Yoshimi saves her own daughter from Mitsuko's wrath, but in doing so must abandon her. The resolution seems to not resolve anything, but in a film that is often of two minds about its protagonist (subtly shaming her one minute for being a working, single mother but also sympathizing with her struggle to do the right thing), I would argue that such a contradictory ending fits. The film's coda initially seems unnecessary but ultimately provides an intriguing perspective on the nature and result of Yoshimi's sacrifice. Ten years after Yoshimi embraces Mitsuko and leaves Ikuko behind, we see a teenage Ikuko wander into the now-abandoned apartment building where she once lived. The skies are clear and there is no rain in sight, a sharp contrast to the grey, damp landscape that dominates the rest of the film. The apartment building itself is decayed and uninhabited, but Ikuko's former apartment looks exactly as it did when she lived there as a child. Her mother is waiting for her, dressed in the same clothes she wore on the day she left, and apparently the same age. They share a few idyllic moments as mother and daughter, but their peace is disrupted by the dark presence of Mitsuko, who lurks in the background. Yoshimi tells Ikuko that they cannot be together. As Ikuko leaves the building, her voiceover tells us that she realized her mother had always been there, protecting her.

This world of the apartment, a world seemingly disconnected from both the time and space of the derelict building and the changing world outside, is a sort of idyllic, idealized space where Ikuko can momentarily take refuge. Combined with

Ikuko's final voiceover, it presents the idea that Yoshimi did not completely abandon her daughter, only moved into a separate world with Mitsuko, one from which she could continue to watch over and protect her own daughter. This world exists in stark contrast to the elevator world of murky water and death that Mitsuko pulled Yoshimi into. It embodies a fixed and unchanging past, the kind of idealized world that is threatened by the forces of neglect, abandonment, and instability embodied in a monstrous figure like Mitsuko. It is the threatened past that connects to a threatened future. The film's coda provides us with a final juxtaposition of seemingly disparate elements: there are the womb-like spaces that embody a mixture of death and birth, decay and renewal, the merging of monster and child that brings together that which must be protected and that which it must be protected *from*, and finally a disconnected world that, while inhabited by ghosts and vengeful spirits, exists as an idyllic vision of a peaceful, unchanging past.

Monsters, horror, and the *onryou* narrative obviously take on new significance when the potential victims (and perpetrators) are children rather than adults. Lee Edelman's reading of the Hitchcock classic *The Birds* analyzes the ways in which children embody the ideals of domestic life in the 1960s, and how that ideal comes under attack from dark, winged monsters that come to represent any threat to heterosexual family norms:

Their first all-out assault...takes place at the party thrown in honor of Cathy Brenner's eleventh birthday...the choice of the children's party for this first fully choreographed attack suggests the extent to which the birds take aim at the social structures of meaning that observances like the birthday party serve to secure and enact: take aim, that is, not only at children and the sacralization of childhood, but also at the very organization of meaning around structures of subjectivity that celebrate, along with the day of one's birth, the ideology of reproductive necessity. (121)

If children in *The Birds*—blindfolded on a beach, singing in a schoolhouse, and running in abject terror from attacking birds—are the embodiment of a domestic ideal, then the birds that attack them embody any perceived threat to that ideal. In the same way, the monstrous child Mitsuko embodies the very real threat to innocent Ikuko—the threat not only of supernatural violence, but of the damage that will surely

be visited upon all children who come from broken homes, and particularly children with absent or neglectful mothers. Jay McRoy calls Nakata's ghost figures "culturally-coded entities in that they function allegorically, their demises inextricably linked with social transformations and the anxieties that often accompany such changes...Yoshimi, (*Dark Water*)'s heroine, endeavors to sever a cycle of perceived abandonment and neglect by exchanging her living daughter, Ikuko, for the ghost of a dead child, Mitsuko" (87-88). It is the child who suffers most from the tumultuous changes occurring in the Japanese social structure, and it is the child who must be saved, even if it requires the mother to sacrifice herself

Emerging during a perceived crisis centered around the disintegration of traditional values and identity, as depictions of monsters and the supernatural are wont to do, creations such as *Dark Water*'s Mitsuko are emblems of a lost past and an uncertain future, a future portrayed as so detached from tradition and national identity as to be frightening. If, as Komatsu Kunihiro argues, there is truly a link in Japan between the appearance of monsters and times of crisis, then the monster that has emerged out of recent anxieties and fears over the safety and security of children is the monster of neglect, abandonment, and the lack of a stable home life. Such monstrous children exist, to again quote Donna Haraway, at a point of "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities," embodying the hopes and ideals projected onto the faces of countless children even as they represent the perceived threats to those hopes and ideals. Mitsuko and the many monstrous children of contemporary Japanese cinema stand at a crossroads of Japan's past, present, and future, crying out for compassion even as they drag those around them into death.

### Works Cited

- Ambras, David R. *Bad Youth: Juvenile Delinquency and the Politics of Everyday Life in Modern Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
- Aries, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. Trans. Robert Baldick. New York: Vintage, 1962.
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004.
- Figal, Gerald. *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999.
- Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 149-182.
- Harootunian, H.D. "Figuring the Folk: History, Poetics, and Representation." *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Tradition in Modern Japan*. Ed. Stephen Vlastos. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. 144-157.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982 (1980).
- Leheny, David. *Think Global, Fear Local: Sex, Violence, and Anxiety in Contemporary Japan*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006.
- Ma, Sheng-mei. "Asian Cell and Horror." *Asian Gothic: Essays on Literature, Film, and Anime*. Ed. Andrew Hock Soon Ng. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008.
- McRoy, Jay. *Japanese Horror Cinema*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.
- . *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema*. New York: Rodopi Press, 2008.
- Platt, Brian. "Japanese Childhood, Modern Childhood: The Nation-State, the School, and 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Globalization." *Journal of Social History* 38 (2005): 965-985.
- Pollock, Linda. *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.