Sanyūtei Enchō, Ch'ü Yu, and Henry James: Stories of the Supernatural

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In this paper, I will compare Sanyūtei Enchō's (三遊亭圓朝) *Kaidan Botan Dōrō* (怪談牡丹燈籠, A Ghost Story: The Peony Lamp, 1884) with stories by Ch'ü Yu and Henry James in order to understand its sources and its position among stories of the supernatural.[1] It is said that *Kaidan Botan Dōrō* is derived from "A Tale of the Peony Lamp" (牡丹燈記) and "A Tale of the Fortuitous Meeting at Wêi t'ang" (渭塘奇遇記) in *New Tales of the Trimmed Lamp* (剪燈新話 Chien Têng Hsin Hua) by Ch'ü Yu (瞿佑1341-1427) of Ch'ien T'ang (錢塘) in Ming China.[2] It is easy to see that Enchō adapted a number of events and character traits from these two stories in writing his story of Otsuyu and Hagiwara Shinzaburō.

Let us first compare the opening scenes of "A Tale of the Peony Lamp" and *Kaidan Botan Dōrō*. In the first story, we see the housemaid Chin lien (金蓮), who is carrying a lantern with ornamental peony flowers, and a beautiful young lady, Li ch'ing (麗卿). A young man, Ch'iao (喬), is fascinated by the voluptuous figure of Li ch'ing, but he does not know of course, that the two young women are ghosts who have assumed human form. So he offers her shelter, and he is filled with desire:

> In Chin Chêng 20 [1360], a young man named Ch'iao lived at the foot of Chên ming ling, and he was standing idly before a gate without going to see the Buddhist service of lanterns because he felt lonely after having lost his wife. After twelve o'clock at night on the 15th, when visitors were rarely to be met, a housemaid was seen walking west carrying a lantern adorned with ornamental peony flowers in her hand, accompanied by a beautiful girl who was seventeen or eighteen years old. The

> girl wore red clothes with green sleeves. She was attractive and graceful. As Ch'iao gazed at the girl in the moonlight, he found that she was a youthful and rare beauty. (p. 50)

Kaidan Botan Dōrō tells of a similar encounter between the young man Shinzaburō and the young lady Otsuyu who is accompanied by her maid, Oyone, adapting the dress and behavior of the three characters to Japanese customs. But Enchō described the characters and the scene in much greater detail than Ch'ü Yu, and I believe that he also demonstrates a finer technical skill:

> It was the Lantern Festival on July 13. Having made the display shelves for the spirits of the dead, Shinzaburō, wearing a white *yukata* gown, spread a mat on the veranda and made a smudge to keep mosquitoes off. As he was gazing at the bright moon of the thirteenth day, fanning himself to drive mosquitoes away, he heard some persons passing outside the hedge, their wooden clogs sounding in an unusual manner. He happened to see a fine woman aged about thirty walking first. This woman, who did up her hair in a big chignon, was carrying a lantern adorned with fashionable peony flowers worked in silk crepe, accompanied by a girl who was seventeen or eighteen years old. When he beheld the girl in the moonlight with her hair in *bunkin takamage* style for girls of marriageable age, wearing an autumn-colored, long-sleeves kimono and a scarlet silk-crepe long undergarment, tied with a satin sash, holding a Kyoto-fashioned fan with a lacquered handle, it seemed to him that she was Otsuyu, Iijima's daughter. (p. 39)

There are numerous other parallels between Enchō's *Kaidan Botan Dōrō* and Ch'ü Yu's "A Tale of the Peony Lamp." Every night, Shinzaburō receives Otsuyu in his house, and they spend their time happily together like a married couple, so their relationship is similar to that between Ch'iao and Li ch'ing. In the latter case, an old man who lives next door peeps through a hole in the wall and sees Ch'iao sitting in the room with a skull. Similarly, in *Kaidan Botan Dōrō*, the old man Yusai is frightened when he sees Shinzaburō staying with a skull in his room. In the Chinese story, the old man warns Ch'iao directly that since he is living with a ghost, he is doomed to die young.

In Enchō's story, we find the same elements: the Shin-banzuiin temple, the Kaion Buddha as a protective charm, and advice and a warning from Oshō Ryōseki. But Shinzaburō dies because the protective talismans are stripped off by Tomozō. When the old man Yūsa finds that Shinzaburō turned ghastly pale and died in agony with his teeth tightly clenched, he says:

> I have heard stories in which someone was married to a fox or encountered a ghost in a Chinese tale, so I asked the Buddhist priest Ryōseki in Shinbanzuiin temple to lend me a talisman, and I got Shinzaburō to hang it around his shoulder to avert such an event. But we can not escape our fate. It cannot be helped. (p. 114)

The old man also says at one point in the story, "We have never met a ghost secretly from old times, but I hear that someone has a rendezvous with a ghost in a Chinese tale" (p. 50). It seems to me that this tale must be "Mu tan têng chi."

It may safely be said that Enchō borrowed the plot of the love story of Shinzaburō and Otsuyu from Ch'ü Yu's tales. He might have been led to these tales, moreover, through the adaptations made by the writer Asai Ryōi (淺井了意), who wrote *Otogibōko* (伽婢子). Asai adapted eighteen of the stories in this work from the twenty-two stories in Ch'ü Yu's *New Tales of the Trimmed Lamp.* In particular, "A Tale of the Peony Lamp" and "A Tale of the Fortuitous Meeting at Wêi t'ang" are included under the title, "Botan Dōrō" (牡丹燈籠 The Peony Lamp) and "Yume no chigiri" (夢の契り A Pledge in a Dream) in *Otogibōko.* But the story of Kōsuke's vendetta, which is the core of *Kaidan Botan Dōrō*, is Enchō's own plot. Kōsuke avenges his father's murder and tries to reestablish a family which was ruined, and this concept of punishing the wicked and rewarding the good reflects the values of Japanese society at that time.

As we have seen, the use of talismans to protect Shinzaburō in *Kaidan Botan Dōrō* is probably derived from the earlier Chinese story, "A Tale of the Peony Lamp." The idea of a protective charm against evil spirits and demons is derived from Taoism. It is closely related to the Taoists' concern with perpetuating life from generation to generation. In particular, they make much of expedients and medicine to enjoy longevity. And they have magical rites to escape disasters. They cast horoscopes to look into the

> Oh, my goodness, how terrible! Human beings are vigorous in the light of the world but ghosts are filthy in the dark world. You are living with a ghost without knowing it. You do not seem to mind sharing a bed with a ghost. Once you lose your essential vigor and face disaster, however, you will go to the next world while still quite young. I am very sorry for you. What a pity! (p. 50)

In the Japanese story, the old man gives a similar warning to Tomozō, who is living in the room next to that of Shinzaburō, namely, that the latter's union with a ghost will sap his vigor, causing him to die. When Tomozō asks the old man, "Will Mr. Hagiwara [Shinzaburō] die if he sleeps in the same bed with a ghost?" the old man replies:

> He will die. A human being is vigorous, rightful, and pure while he is alive. When he dies, however, he becomes very gloomy and viciously soiled. If he is united with a ghost as man and wife for weal or woe, he will die by losing his vigor, even though he is a man who would normally live to a hundred. (p. 50)

Finally, in both stories, the young men are told how to avoid disaster by the use of talismans, but they both die horrible deaths. In "A Tale of the Peony Lamp," Wêi fashih (魏法師) of the Hsüan miao kuan temple (玄妙觀) gives Ch'iao charms with spells inscribed on them in vermillion ink in order to protect him from the ghost. He instructs Ch'iao to put one of the charms on the gate to his house and another one on his bed, and he then warns him never to visit Hu hsin ssu temple (湖心寺) because that is where Li ch'ing's remains are interred. Getting drunk, however, Chiao forgets this warning, and when he passes near Hu hsin ssu temple, Li ch'ing invites him to her bed, and he dies:

> The old man next door wondered why Ch'iao did not return to his home, and he visited here and there. When he came to the casket room in Hu hsin ssu temple, he noticed that the skirt of Ch'iao's clothes protruded out of the casket. He asked the priest to open the casket. Ch'iao had been dead for a fairly long time, and he and the woman's corpse were embracing each other. The woman's features were lifelike. (p. 51)

future, and they use talismans to avoid bad luck, to cure diseases, and to drive ghosts and evil spirits away. Consequently, it may be said that the taboos and talismans described in Japanese stories of the supernatural can be traced to Taoism.

Next, let us consider the apparitions of ghosts in the stories of Enchō and Ch'ü Yu. Generally, ghosts walk the earth because of a deep rooted feeling which continues beyond the grave: sometimes jealousy, other times a grudge against a malefactor. Usually, such feelings are deeply entangled with each other. Ghosts haunt someone in order to resist some purpose or plan, to take revenge, and to force a sacrifice. In the case of Enchō's *Kaidan Botan Dōrō*, Otsuyu and Oyone haunt the earth because they have a strong feeling which continues beyond the grave. In contrast to the ghosts in other Japanese tales such as Ueda Akinari's (上田秋成) *Ugetsu monogatari* (雨月物語), Enchō's ghosts, Otsuyu and Oyone, might appear warmhearted and lovable because of the influence of the tales of Ch'ü Yu. Nevertheless, Otsuyu drains Shinzaburo's vigor, causing him to die, because of her tender feelings for him.

The two works, "A Tale of the Peony Lamp," and *Kaidan Botan Dōrō* are similar in that the protagonists' behavior is described as the symbol of a spiritual relationship. Li ch'ing and Otsuyu drain their victims' vigor, causing them to die. Incidently, Li ch'ing is like a vampire in that her corpse appears young and beautiful, although she has been dead for a hundred and fifty years.

Next, I would like to compare Henry James's short story, "De Grey: A Romance," with Sanyūtei Enchō's *Kaidan Botan Dōrō*. In "De Grey: A Romance," a kind of spiritual vampirism is transmitted from generation to generation as a cruse in the De Grey family.[3] The men in the family sap the vigor of their wives, causing them to die young. This curse has lasted from 1583 to 1786. There is, however, one exception to the plight of the women who marry into the family – if the bride is not the first love of the bridegroom, she is not subject to the curse. For example, Mrs. De Grey lives to be sixty-seven years old because she was not the first love of her husband, George De Grey.

On the contrary, however, George De Grey dies mysteriously of a loss of vigor two months after the birth of his first son, Paul. Father Herbert believed that the longevity of Mrs. De Grey is an exception to the family curse. Later, while Paul stays in Europe, Mrs. De Grey takes charge of Margaret, who is without a single human tie, in order to divert her mind

from loneliness. Then Paul returns to his home near New York. He has "grown up a charming young man, handsome, witty, and wise" (p. 23). Although he had wanted to marry a woman in Europe, he finally broke off the engagement because, as he explains to Father Herbert, "She enchanted me, she entangled me, but before Heaven, I never loved her" (p. 52).

After Paul returns home, he meets Margaret and settles down. Enjoying the pleasure of her company, he decides to give up the woman in Europe. Yet, of course, the important thing is that if he really does not love the woman in Europe, Margaret is his first love. Paul and Margaret make a firm determination to get married. When Father Herbert learns that Paul is on intimate terms with Margaret, however, he is seized with a shudder of fear because he knows about the curse of spiritual vampirism which is transmitted from generation to generation in the De Grey family. Although he tries to warn Margaret about the family curse, she is not frightened. In fact, she defies the curse: "What abominable nonsense is this? What does it mean? I barely heard it; I despise it; I laugh at it!" Nevertheless, Father Herbert tries to persuade her of the danger she faces by offering the following explanation:

> You see it's the first love, the first passion. After that, they're innocent. Look at Mrs. De Grey. The race is accursed. It's an awful, inscrutable mystery. I fancied that you were safe, my daughter, and that that poor Miss L. had borne the brunt. But Paul was at pains to undeceive me. I've searched his life, I've probed his conscience: it's a virgin heart. Ah, my child, I dreaded it from the first. I trembled when you came into the house. (p. 55)

Even as Father Herbert presses his case against the marriage, Margaret remains unperturbed. She says, "I revoke the curse, I undo it. *I curse it!*" (p. 56). Margaret, who fearlessly defies the curse, is a girl who has cast off the mythology of an old, doomed race. We may say that Margaret represents those who have grown up in a liberal society, in this case, America. She challenges a dark, doomed race with fresh passion and unyielding courage. It seems that the occult power in the doomed De Grey family has no effect on a fresh, young American girl.

Eventually, Margaret marries Paul, but while she seems to blossom and

develop physically after her marriage, Paul loses his vigor and turns pale. Moreover, Father Herbert becomes emaciated from day to day through anguish. Margaret seems to thrive physically by absorbing Paul's vigor. In fact, she blooms and prospers. Paul droops and languishes from day to day. The curse still overshadows the De Grey family, and it seeks a new victim covetously. "While she is living for him, he is dying for her" (p. 65). Finally, Paul falls sick and dies, and Margaret goes mad. He is the victim of a cruel, insentient curse.

According to Father Herbert's warning, Margaret was destined to die young according to the cruel curse of the De Grey family because she was Paul's first love. As we have seen, however, the situation reverses itself, and it is Paul who dies young. It seems that Margaret challenges the occult power which controls the destiny of the De Grey family, and she challenges it bravely as an American who is independent of this old, accursed race. We should note, however, that she is also a victim of the curse in that she goes mad after the death of Paul.

In "De Grey: A Romance," a young knight, Paul's ancestor, returns from the Crusades, but he is infected with the plague. He is engaged to marry a young girl, but when her elder brother, a physician, learns of the knight's sickness, he insists that the marriage should be delayed. In spite of the elder brother's warning, however, the marriage takes place. Infuriated, the elder brother calls down a curse on the knight's family, and the curse affects the succeeding generations of the family. The young bride dies within a week, and thereafter the family is cursed. We can say that in both the East and the West, an evil action often brings retribution in the form of a curse. And it is very tragic that the innocent offspring are victimized by a curse or by a revengeful ghost.

In Japan, there are a number of tales in which the ghost of a person who is killed for another's crime enters into the body of another person and in the end punishes the malefactor. An example of this type of story is *Kaidan Botan Dōrō* by Sanyūtei Enchō in which the ghost of a wife, Omine, who was killed by her husband, Tomozō, enters into the body of the female servant, Omasu. Speaking for Omine, Omasu says to Tomozō,

> I felt pain when I was slashed from the shoulder blade to the breast by a sharp-edged tool.... We had lived together in poverty for eight years, but recently we made a decent living after much effort. In spite of this, you did me great wrong to

kill me and to make Okuni your new wife!" (pp. 126-27)

In addition, Omasu tells Tomozo that he had a ghost kill Shinzaburō and that he stole a pure gold Kaion Buddha and buried it under a flower bed. Soon afterwards, Tomozo is arrested, and Omine's ghost is avenged.

Although the ghost stories in Japan are permeated by Buddhist ideas and values and those of the West are permeated by Christian ideas and values, there are a number of similarities among the stories which we have considered in this paper. The reasons for the existence of ghosts and curses seem to be common to both cultures. Essentially, people remain strongly attached to the world because of some grievance or passion, and this attachment continues beyond the grave, sometimes in the form of a curse on the succeeding generations of a family, other times in the form of a revengeful ghost.

From the point of view of Buddhism, we are living in an environment in which we cannot attain Buddhahood because we are strongly attached to this world. According to Christianity, we are living in a materialistic civilization, and it is consequently difficult to go to our Father's house in heaven. In both Buddhist and Christian societies, therefore, people often stand face to face with death before they can realize their aspirations or satisfy their resentments. In such cases, the regrets seem to carry over beyond the grave.

As we have seen, Enchō's *Kaidan Botan Dōrō,* like Ch'ü Yu's "Mu tang têng chi," is the story of a strong passion which continues even after death. In *Kaidan Botan Dōrō*, the strong feeling of revenge continues even after death as the revengeful ghost of Omine punishes the man who murdered her. Moreover, Enchō depicts vividly the corruption of the Edo era in which the human desires for wealth, fame, advancement, and sex exceeded the intelligence and virtue of the people. Tomozō steals a pure gold Kaion Buddha from Shinzaburō and tears off the protective charms which Shinzaburō had attached to the house in order to prevent the revengeful ghost from entering. In payment of his assistance, Tomozo receives the sum of one hundred *ryō* from the ghosts. Although this story is humorous, we can say that Enchō realistically describes the corruption of those days when people ignored humanity and were blinded by a love of gain.

In the case of "De Grey: A Romance," Paul's ancestor defied the warning of the physician and married the physician's younger sister. As a result, the grievance of the physician was so strong that his curse continues

beyond the death of Paul's ancestor, beyond his own death until the time of the story when Paul falls victim to it.

Considering these details of some supernatural stories of the West and East, we can see that one common feature is that it is important to have a tender mind and to consider the feelings of others. The pursuit of profit often excludes such considerations in modern materialistic civilization. Our minds are worn out in these days of electronic computers, and we tend to be estranged from the humane values of life. It is necessary to see in such stories of the supernatural a warning to our times. It seems to me that the writers we have discussed thus weave a didactic strand into their entertaining stories.

Notes

1. Sanyūtei Enchō (三遊亭丹朝), *Kaidan Botan Dōrō* (怪談牡丹燈籠) (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1980). All references are to this text; the translations are mine.
2. Ch'ü Yu (瞿佑), *Chien Têng Hsin Hua* (剪燈新話 *New Tales of the Trimmed Lamp*), ed. Chou Leng-chia (Shanghai, 1981). All references are to this text; the translations are mine.
3. Henry James, "De Grey: A Romance" in *Henry James: Stories of the Supernatural,* ed. Leon Edel (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1971). All references are to this text.