This week, we are examining the rise of the representations that we can commonly find in the genre of J-Horror (Japanese Horror) films, especially the representations of the ghostly woman figure.

Some questions that I would like to consider:

* Compare and contrast the ghosts in Yotsuya Kaidan with those that you have grown up with (good or evil). How are they similar? How do they differ?
* How does the ghost in Yotsuya Kaidan seek her revenge?
* Are there any way to pacific the ghost?
* How is the ghost portrayed visually?
* Does Oiwa fit your expectations of a Japanese ghost? Why or why not?
* How is Ringu similar to or different than an American horror movie?
* What makes Ringu a horror film?
* In Ringu, how is the ghost of Sadako represented in the film?
* What makes Sadako uniquely horrific?
* What are the memorable features of the host image?
* Have you seen other J-Horror films with a similar female ghost?
* How are they similar to or different than Ringu?
* How is Oiwa and Sadako similar? How do they differ?

1. Yotsuya Kaidan (The Ghost Stories at Yotsuya)
2. Tsuruya Nanboku IV (1755-1829)
3. Born into the merchant class who turned into a playwright
4. Thinking of the time period, how is Yotsuya Kaidan a representation of contemporary Edo society (early 1800s)?
5. What can we tell by the setting how life was like in Edo?
6. We can see how the life was like for the low-ranking samurai (recall Twilight Samurai)
7. What does it mean to be a samurai?
8. Chūshingura and Yotsuya Kaidan
9. Introduction: p. 844-846
10. How is Yotsuya Kaidan and Chūshingura interconnected?
11. Chūshingura is an actual even that took place between 1703.
12. As explained in the introduction to the play, Yotsuya Ghost Stories was originally written to be performed in between acts of Chûshingura (1748), sometimes translated as "The 47 Ronin" or "A Treasury of Loyal Retainers," and so it is useful to know the basic plot of Chûshingura in order to understand what Yotsuya is parodying. Chûshingura is a fictionalized account of an historical incident that occurred in 1703. In the play version of events, on the day of an important shogunal ceremony, the evil Ko no Moronao so insults and goads the young Lord Enya that Enya feels compelled to draw his sword and attack Moronao. Moronao escapes serious harm, but because Enya drew his sword when a representative of the Shogun was present, Enya is forced to commit ritual suicide. His house is broken up and his retainers all become masterless samurai (ronin). Nevertheless, they remain loyal to their dead master, who they believe has been unfairly punished, and after a year of great hardship and self-sacrifice, on the anniversary of Enya's death they stage a raid on Moronao's mansion and kill him. Afterwards they all commit ritual suicide (seppuku).
13. Based upon the summary above and what we have discussed in week six, what samurai value is celebrated in Chūshingura?
14. Chûshingura was written at the height of the power of the Tokugawa family, during a period in which the arts, and particularly the performing arts, flourished. In contrast, Yotsuya Ghost Stories was written by Tsuruya Nanboku IV around 1825, in a period generally considered to be "decadent" -- the Tokugawa government was struggling to stay in control of the country and no longer had much interest in keeping up strict standards of censorship.
15. Given that Yotsuya Ghost Stories was written as a kind of parody (or at least negative commentary) on Chûshingura, as you read the story, look for ways that samurai values (for example, loyalty at all costs, a belief in righteous vendettas, a disinterest in wealth) are perverted and betrayed. On the other hand, how are they supported?
16. Oiwa
17. What makes Oiwa horrifying?
18. Do you consider Oiwa as a “true” samurai (or samurai wife)? Why or why not?
19. What is perhaps horrifying about Oiwa is that she is transformed into a ghost right before our eyes (p. 865-868)
20. Some of it, she does to herself (the blackening of her teeth and how it smears across her lips, enlarging her mouth, combing of her hair-hair loss)
21. What do you think is the significance behind having her slowly change into a ghost before the audience’s eyes?
22. Ringu
23. How is Ringu similar to Oiwa
24. Oiwa is one of the earliest examples to the rise of J-Horror
25. Earlier examples of a female ghost and hair can be seen as early as the Heian period, but is told from the perspective of a Buddhist teaching
26. With Oiwa/Ringu, there is a nod towards Buddhism, but this is not the main point, instead both are relying heavily on contemporary issues: the status of the Woman
27. Oiwa is discarded by her husband Iemon
28. Sadako is killed and discarded by her step-father
29. What makes Ringu a horror film?
30. There is no gore or extreme violence
31. It depends upon the tension building up based upon the fear of the unknown.
32. Psychological Thriller
33. Ringu acts as a detective movie
34. It strings us along as if we are part of trying to solve this problem
35. Uses both traditional and contemporary motifs
36. Pacification
37. Does the traditional sense of pacification work on Sadako?
38. No, and this is what makes it terrifying. Perhaps the customs/traditions have also shifted: how do you deal with the unknown?
39. Urban myths
40. Combines with the traditional sense, urban myths that we may have even heard of (in our own cultures)
41. This can happen to anyone, anytime, anywhere
42. Technology
43. Are we all safe?
44. Yes, this is using VHS, which is currently outdated, but think about email attachments…
45. Conclusion
46. How is Oiwa and Sadako similar to a ghost story you may be familiar with?
47. How does that story resolve the issue of the ghost?
48. What is the ghost trying to teach us through the story?
49. How is that story a reflection of society?