



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

KAIDAN

If you're a fan of the horror genre, you may have heard of kaidan (怪談). A combination of the kanji 怪 (kai) meaning "strange, mysterious, rare or bewitching apparition" and 談 (dan) meaning "talk" or "recited narrative," these stories are Japan's own ghost stories, particularly those from the Edo-period. Kaidan first entered the vernacular during the Edo period, when a parlour game called Hyakumonogatari Kaidankai (百物語怪談会, A Gathering of One Hundred Supernatural Tales) became popular. The game required participants to try to tell 100 ghost stories in the hope of causing a ghostly apparition to appear. The difficulty of remembering 100 stories, in conjunction with the advent of the printing press, led to the first a demand for books and pamphlets dedicated to Kaidan.

These printed collections of kaidan were circulated widely throughout Japan, creating a new literary genre focusing specifically on supernatural stories and enabling party-goers to prepare in advance for their Hyakumonogatari events. As the game grew more and more popular, the demand for new stories also grew, and authors travelled all over Japan to find unique, new scary stories. Some kaidan even contained specific references to major historical events, such as tragic battles, which were also incorporated in Noh and Bunraku plays.

More recently, kaidan have found their niche in horror films. You can recognize a movie influenced by kaidan if it includes the basic Kaidan formula of a geographically specific tale depicting core Japanese superstitions and beliefs. Even the famous J-Horror film "Ring" borrows the historical Kaidan formula using geographically-based ghost stories which spread in range as the victims increase. Whether ancient or modern, the Japanese kaidan are still making their mark around the world even today!