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# The Ring Goes to Different Cultures: A Call for Cross Cultural Studies of Religious Horror Films

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# The Ring Goes to Different Cultures: A Call for Cross Cultural Studies of Religious Horror Films

## Abstract

Within the field of religion and media, the study of horror films has always been treated as a minor topic, and cross-cultural comparative studies of such films are even rarer. Furthermore, such comparative projects that involve East Asian contexts, despite their influence on the genre of horror, are yet more difficult to find. By attempting a brief American & East Asian comparative analysis of the Ring series as an example and also proposing an empirical comparative audience research, I call for more cross cultural studies of religious horror films.

## Keywords

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## Author Notes

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**Introduction**

Although it is still studied by a minority of scholars, exploring the interaction

between media and religion has been proven to be a promising and unique

research area for those who are in various fields of humanities and social sciences

with interdisciplinary approaches.[1]   Findings from theoretical and empirical

studies have provided meaningful additions not only to sociologists or

anthropologists of religion and media scholars but also to theologians and

philosophers.[2]   Within this minor field, however, even a smaller number of

accomplishments have been made by taking cross-national/cultural perspectives,[3]

and such comparative works that involve East Asian contexts are even rarer

despite the fact that East Asian countries (particularly Japan and South Korea)

provide unique contexts for researchers in media and religion partly because of

their particular encounter with modernity.[4]   I suggest that 1) what Douglas

Cowan calls "religiously oriented cinema horror" films is one of the most

appropriate genres for the proposed task of cross-contextual studies in media and

religion, and that 2) comparing and analyzing East Asian horror films and their

Hollywood remakes is one helpful approach for the cross-cultural study in

religion and media.   While the main purpose of this essay is to pursue a brief

comparative analysis using such films, I will also propose a more empirical

project for qualitative social scientists to conduct that can provide an addition to

the current discussions of religion and media.

**Literature Review**

Many broader researches on media and religion as well as more focused works on

religion and film have shown that religion and popular cultural products influence

each other rather than one dominating over the other.[5]   Some have focused on

the allegedly negative effects of media technology on religion[6]  while others have

argued that media can play both positive and negative roles for religious

traditions.[7]   Similarly, the interaction between religion and film has been

described both as a battle between the two[8]  and as one illuminating the other.[9]

On the more empirical side, Lynn Schofield Clark's *From Angels to Aliens* has

shown that American teenagers have various reactions to TV shows that deal with

supernatural topics (e.g. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Touched by an Angel*)

ranging widely from drawing clear boundaries between such fictions and religion

to being open to the possibility of there being entities depicted in TV shows such

as *The X-Files*.[10]

Douglas Cowan, in his recent book *Sacred Terror*, has argued that horror

films that revolve around topics of the supernatural borrow ideas most heavily

from religion (thus distinguishing such "religiously oriented horror films" from

teen slasher films or thrillers featuring psychopathic killers).[11]   He has

demonstrated that such films exhibit religious "sociophobics" of the society (such

as the fear of sacred places, failure of the sacred order, and the ambiguity or the

possibility of supernatural curses and entities) to which the audiences can relate.

As for explaining why people pay their money just to be scared by such films, one

major attempt has been the catharsis theory; however, both Cowan and Carroll[12]

have argued that the catharsis theory is insufficient for explaining the fascination

with horror films, because, in many cases, audiences with such fascination often

deliberately reject the "cathartic release" but, instead, choose to continue to enjoy

the fear; many horror films are designed for that purpose by letting the

supernatural terror stay – and even grow – in the minds of the audiences after

leaving the theater.

While there are various and sometimes competing explanations of the

fascination with the supernatural religious horror genre,[13] the most repeated and

successful explanation of the fascination with horror has been applying Rudolf

Otto's concept of *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans* to the audiences of

religious horror films.   Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* has been a classic work for

interpreting religious fear.   In short, the observation is that people are both

repelled by AND attracted to supernatural fear.[14]   What is crucial in the argument

is that the cause of this fear which both repels and attracts must be *supernatural*

(indeed, there is nothing fascinating about being chased by a serial killer or a

group of gang members).   Otto does note that there is some distinction between

"awe" and "dread," but interestingly asserts that the "daemonic dread" is the

antecedent stage of all.   He claims that "it is this feeling which, emerging in the mind of primeval man, forms the starting point for the entire religious development in history.   'Daemons' and 'gods' alike spring from this root, and all the products of 'mythological apperception' or 'fantasy' are nothing but different modes in which it has been objectified."[15]   This concept is the most famous theory for explicating the fear (or awe) factors that are found in so many of the world's religions, and scholars refer to Otto's idea for explaining the seemingly paradoxical combination of fear and fascination,[16] and recently, I have written about the theological and cultural implications of Otto's concept and the fascination with supernatural horror for the Evangelical community.[17]   Although *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans* may not be applicable to everyone (i.e., many audiences are not fascinated by supernatural horror films but simply reject them), it still seems to be the best theory for understanding the supernatural horror fans.

At this point, the researcher may ask, does this *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans* take different shapes in different cultural contexts?   The fact that there

are different receptions of cultural products across different contexts is not new.

The sociologist of culture Wendy Griswold has observed such differences in

literary interpretation across the U.S., the U.K., and the West Indies.[18]   For

example, she noted that the American reviewers failed to understand the humors

in certain fictions that made perfect sense to the non-American readers.[19]   In

different cultural contexts, then, what would differences in reception of religious

horror films look like?   Driven by differences in religious traditions, could

certain scenes in East Asian ghost movies, for example, fail to terrify Western

audiences?   Or, in light of the globalization of popular culture, will we rather

observe less distinction in audience reception of religious horror films?   Richard

Peterson and Roger Kern have argued that cultural elites are becoming

"omnivores."[20]   If this is true, could it be that cultural elites from both the West

and the East are less likely to have difficulties in appreciating religious horror

films from each other's cultural context?

**A Trial Textual Analysis & A Proposal for Empirical Research**

Griswold has argued that "in order to look at the interaction between a cultural object and its recipients, the analysis needs to exert some control by holding one side of the relationship constant while allowing the other to vary."[21]   She suggests that one might either have the same audiences with varying cultural products or use the same text with different audiences.   For the comparative purpose of this essay, I suggest that we can incorporate the two approaches together by using religious horror films that were made in East Asia and then were remade in Hollywood, or vice versa.   By grouping the original and the remake as a "series" and observing how the audiences from different cultural contexts perceive the differences between the two versions of the film, the researcher can learn much about the differences as well as the translatability of these cultural products.

Among the numerous Hollywood remakes of East Asian horror movies,

some of the major films include *The Grudge* (the remake of *Ju-on*), *Shutter* (the

remake of a film with the same title), *Dark Water* (the remake of *Honogurai mizu*

*no soko kara*), *The Eye* (the remake of *Gin Gwai*), and *The Uninvited* (the remake

of *A Tale of Two Sisters*).    I choose the *Ring* series which consist of *Ringu* (the

Japanese original which is the first film of the entire series), *The Ring* (the

Hollywood remake of *Ringu*), *The Ring Virus* (the Korean remake of *Ringu*),

*Ringu 2* (the sequel to *Ringu*), and *The Ring 2* (the Hollywood sequel to *The*

*Ring*).[22]    I suggest that the *Ring* series is an ideal choice for the purpose of this

project.    First, *Ringu*, *The Ring*, and *The Ring Virus* all share the same plotline

(with modifications) which is based upon a Japanese novel written by Koji Suzuki

while all the three films were directed by different directors.    By observing the

different choices made by the three directors, then, we can analyze how they

approached different target audiences.    In addition, *Ringu 2* and *The Ring 2*,

which have *different* plotlines, were actually directed by the same Japanese

director Nakada Hideo, who has also directed *Ringu*, the first film of the entire

series.    By observing how the same Japanese director has made different choices

in the two films for approaching different audiences, the researcher can think

about Hideo's understanding of the religious horror cultures in American and

Japanese contexts.    I must also emphasize that the *Ring* series itself is a cultural

product with much cultural power, for if one agrees with Griswold's definition of

"cultural power" as "the capacity of certain works to linger in the mind" and

"enter the canon,"[23]  it is difficult to argue that the "young female ghost crawling

out of the TV screen" as a cultural icon does not have immense cultural power!

I will first attempt a comparative textual analysis of the *Ring* series and

then briefly propose an empirical qualitative research project of the audiences.

Because of the spatial limitation and the comparative nature of this essay, I will

only focus on the implications of the differences between the original and the

remade versions.[24]

**Textual Analysis of the *Ring* Series**

> **1.** ***Ringu, The Ring Virus*, and *The Ring***

The common synopsis of the original *Ringu* and its remakes can be summarized briefly.   A female journalist finds and watches a video tape that is cursed by a girl who was killed unjustly.   Before she was killed, the girl, with her grudge against the world, has used her supernatural psychic power to cast a curse upon a videotape so that anyone who watches it will die in seven days.   The journalist's child accidentally watches the tape too, so she tries to save her child with the help of her ex-husband (the child's father), who also watches the tape.   As it turns out, the curse cannot be stopped.   The father is in his room on the seventh day since he watched the tape, and the TV suddenly gets turned on automatically, and he sees a well in the middle of the screen.   A girl crawls out of the well and then crawls out of the TV.   Encountered by the ghost who stares at him with rage, the father dies, like all other previous victims, by extreme terror and heart attack. The journalist learns that, in order to cheat the curse, whoever watches the tape

must make a copy of it and show it to someone else so that the curse can be

"passed over" to the one who watches the copy.

Despite the common plotline, there are notable differences between the

three versions.    First of all, the Korean version *The Ring Virus* tries to be more

faithful to the original novel by emphasizing the investigative efforts of the

journalist and her ex-husband for discovering the cause of the curse.    While the

child is a son in the Japanese *Ringu*, the Korean and Hollywood versions replaced

him with a daughter (in the Japanese novel, it is a daughter).    And, unlike the

East Asian versions in which the ex-husband takes charge of the investigative

process, Hollywood's *The Ring* lets the female journalist (played by Naomi Watts)

take the leading role in discovering the story behind the curse (in the novel, the

journalist is actually a male, and his wife and his child are the ones who

accidentally watch the cursed videotape).

It is hard to deny that this switching of gender role was deliberate.    But

why the change?    Did the producing agents of *The Ring* think that leaving the

gender of the leading character as it is in the original would not be as appealing to

the American audiences as changing it into a female? There are more than

enough Hollywood films (horror and other genres) in which male characters play

the leading roles, so it cannot be that American audiences are generally more

fascinated by a female protagonist. Perhaps a key aspect in understanding the

gender choice in *The Ring* is the fact that it is the *child* who must be saved from

the curse. In other words, it is the parent who is expected to protect and save the

kid. While over-generalization must be avoided, the heroine-like nature of

motherhood has been highlighted more in American culture than in Japan or

Korea. Traditionally, women in East Asia were not given much voice in the

home or the public sphere. Of course, modernization did take place in Japan and

Korea (particularly with much speed in Korea), and the notion of gender equality

is not new nowadays. Likewise, America is not without a cultural history of

males holding dominant positions over females; otherwise, there would not have

been feminist movements. Nonetheless, the points are that 1) traditional cultures

can linger on in some forms even in modern societies, and that 2) there is still a

difference in *the degree of emphasis* on female roles in today's East Asian cultures

and America culture.    This is to say that, while most Korean and Japanese

audiences would not feel awkward to see the mother's heroic role in Hollywood's

*The Ring*, it would be equally natural for them to watch the male protagonists'

leading roles in *The Ring Virus* or *Ringu*.    However, if the American audiences

would see a mother being helpless in saving her child from a curse while the

father, who is not even raising the child, takes care of everything, I think it is

doubtful that most viewers would be satisfied.

While this difference can be significant for other academic purposes (such

as gender studies), I suggest that the more meaningful differences between the

three versions of the movie for the purpose of this paper have to do with

aesthetics; i.e. how the terrifying figure is expressed.    In order to resonate with

the audiences' imagination of what is frightful, the producing agents of the films

had to adjust the visual representation of the terrifying ghost in the highlight scene

of the movie, which is the ghost crawling out of the TV set.    Both in the

Japanese original and the Korean remake, the dress that the ghost is wearing is

pure white without a single blemish, and her pale face – which is equally spotless

– is mostly covered by her long black hair until only one eye gets revealed.    In

the same scene of Hollywood's *The Ring*, on the other hand, the ghost is wearing

a very dirty and wet dress (probably to indicate that she just crawled out of a well)

and has a zombie-like monstrous face that is covered by her hair at first but then

gets fully revealed.    Why this radically different aesthetic choice for the

American audiences?    Perhaps it can be partially explained by the dominance of

monstrous figures as the terrifying objects in Western horror stories[25]  and East

Asia's traditional featuring of the ghosts of wronged – and thus innocent –

females as the vengeful spirits.[26]    The pure white dress without a single blemish

as well as the pale face that is equally clean without a single scar can represent the

innocence of the little girl.    If a little girl with such an appearance was not a

ghost, there would be nothing that is frightful, but the fact that she is the vengeful

spirit is what causes the fear.    The more innocent she looks, the more punishment

the world that wronged her deserves.

Both in Korea and Japan, allaying the grudge of the spirit of the

marginalized and wronged (mostly females) plays a key role in ghost stories.[27]

Of course, East Asian cultures are not without tales of monstrous creatures, but such creatures are not as popular as in Western myths, and, in Korea and Japan, such creatures are separate entities; they are not "the return of the dead."[28]   In Western religious cultures, on the other hand, Christianity does not have much affinity with the notion of the spirits of the dead returning to curse the material world, although there are notions of the saints briefly manifesting themselves in front of a human eye (e.g. Moses and Elijah in Matt 17, Mark 9, and Luke 9 or Samuel in 1 Sam 28).   The dominant fearful and supernatural entities are rather beasts and dragons (as in the Book of Revelation) or human bodies possessed by demons.   Likewise, supernatural fear-inflicting creatures in the West – although not always originating from the West – are zombies, vampires, and werewolves. When the dead return, they tend to do so in the form of (e.g.) a mummy rather than in a spotless feminine appearance.

Nowadays, however, Hollywood horror films do feature the spirits of wronged innocent girls (though most of them are remakes of Japanese horror films such as *Under the Dark Water*), and East Asian horror films also show

monstrous appearances of the terror inflicting entities.    Still, the dominant

aesthetic practice is still present, and, interestingly, most monster movies in Japan

or Korea are rather science fiction than horror.    But this leads us to ask further:

are the Western audiences today more scared by the monstrous look in *The Ring*,

or is the globalization of popular culture as well as the cultural elites' tastes as

'omnivores' enabling the East Asian taste to get more easily translated for the

Western audiences?


### 2.      *Ringu 2* and *The Ring 2*


*Ringu 2* and *The Ring 2* actually have different plotlines, but they both suggest

that even copying the tape and showing it to someone else does not completely

free one from the curse.    At the end, however, both films suggest the possibility

that the power of the sacrificial love of a parent may finally put an end to the

curse.    But, as in the gender role difference in *Ringu, The Ring Virus*, and *The

Ring*, which parent provides salvation?    In *Ringu 2,* the child's mother dies, and

the child and another female protagonist, who tries to save him from the curse,

fall into the well in which the curse of the wronged girl began as she was killed

there.    At the bottom of the well, the child's father – who already died in *Ringu* –

appears (in spirit) to take away the curse that has been cast upon his son so that he

can be free.    Afterwards, the child and the female protagonist desperately try to

climb out of the well, but the ghost emerges from the bottom of the well and

quickly climbs up and catches the two.    Frightened by learning that the ghost is

now right next to her, the female protagonist screams at the sight of the ghost

looking at her.    Then, however, the ghost says, in Japanese, "*nande anatadake*

*tasukaruno*?" ("Why are you the only one saved?") and then falls back into the

well.[29]    It seems that the father's vicarious sacrifice of taking the curse from his

son actually worked!

In Hollywood's *The Ring 2*, the female journalist (and the child's mother

who, unlike in the Japanese version, is still alive to protect her son) ends up

falling into the well all by herself.    She realizes that the top of the well has

always been open so that the ghost could come out of the well.    Now the

mother's task is to climb out of the well and seal the well completely so that the

curse would not reach her son again. As she climbs up, the ghost also emerges

from the bottom of the well and climbs up the wall to stop her. As the mother

reaches the top of the well, the ghost grabs her ankle, but she kicks the ghost back

into the bottom of the well as she climbs out of it and then starts pushing the

cover of the well. As she is about to completely seal the well, the ghost cries out

to her ("mommy…") to arouse her sympathy. Unlike the female protagonist in

*Ringu 2* who desperately asks for help (in Japanese, "*tasukete*" which can be

translated as "help me" or "save me") while trying to climb out of the well, the

mother *The Ring 2* responds with a very Hollywood-friendly line "I'm not your

fucking mommy!" and seals the well in its entirety. Mommy saves the day.

Mommy is the heroine.

In addition to the heroic role played by the mother in *The Ring 2* as

opposed to the child's father's role in *Ringu 2*, one also notices the difference in

the nature of the action taken to stop the curse. The difference in gender role has

already been discussed in the previous discussion about *Ringu, The Ring Virus*,

and *The Ring*.    However, the method of salvation in the Japanese version is also

notably different from Hollywood's version.    *Ringu 2* takes the strictly spiritual

approach.    It was the spirit of the dead father who took the curse away from the

child, and while the female protagonist actually gets physically overpowered *by*

the ghost (the ghost quickly catches up with her and the child), it is the father's

spiritual sacrifice that keeps the ghost from inflicting harm to them.    To the

contrary, the victory of the mother in *The Ring 2* is quite physical.    She was able

to climb fast enough to escape, and she even kicks the ghost back into the well.

And, of course, the final physical victory is achieved when she seals the well with

the heavy cover.    Earlier, we have seen the difference between the innocent and

feminine appearance of the fearful entities and the monstrous creatures.    Here,

we observe the difference in the method of stopping supernatural evil.    Shamans

in Japanese or Korean culture perform rituals in order to stop or allay the spiritual

entities from inflicting harm to the material world; this differs from using a cross,

garlic, wooden stake or silver bullets to fight vampires or werewolves, or shooting

at the head to stop zombies.[30]

Perhaps this difference can also be explained by the traditional East Asian view that the spirits of the dead (ancestors) live on and continuously interact with the material world whereas, in the traditional Western religious beliefs, discourses on life after death revolve more around "the other places" such as heaven and hell.[31]   Of course, one has to be careful not to dichotomize the East Asian and Western religious traditions.[32]   Indeed, East Asian religions do have views of heaven and hell (such as Pure Land Buddhism), and Western traditions are not without the spirits of the dead revisiting the human world (as discussed above, Christianity has saints that manifest themselves).   The difference, rather, is in the *degree of prominence* of each view.   Even this, however, deserves a closer look in light of the globalization of popular culture as well as religious worldviews. Indeed, today, there are quite a few Hollywood horror films in which the spirits of the dead interact with the material world (one can think of films such as *The Sixth Sense, The Others, The Messengers*, or *The Haunting in Connecticut*, but *The Ghost* is an earlier classic example).

Aesthetic differences can be found in the sequels as well, and the difference here (which would be Nakada Hideo's choice) even intensifies the aesthetic difference that we have already seen in *Ringu, The Ring Virus*, and *The Ring*. The highlight scene which appears both in *Ringu 2* and *The Ring 2* is the scene already discussed above in which the female protagonist (again, the same mother journalist in *The Ring 2* but another female character in *Ringu 2* since the journalist dies in the Japanese version) falls into a well and tries to climb out of it. While the woman climbs up (with the child in *Ringu 2*) to reach the top of the well, the ghost emerges out of the water at the bottom and also climbs up the wall to chase the woman. Here there is an addition to the difference in appearance of the ghost that could be observed in *Ringu, The Ring Virus,* and *The Ring*. This time, Hideo has the ghost in Hollywood's *The Ring 2* (who, as in *The Ring*, has a zombie-like monstrous appearance and is wearing a dirty dress) climb up the wall with a crooked spider-like motion. This means the monstrous aesthetic is employed not only in appearance but also in action. And it is also action (i.e. the kick) through which the mother defeats the ghost. In *Ringu 2*, such crooked

motion of the ghost is completely absent.    As in *Ringu* – and *The Ring Virus* for

that matter – she is wearing a spotless white dress and simply climbs up the well

to reach the female protagonist and the child.    As in our previous discussion, this

aesthetic modification must be deliberate.    Remember, unlike *The Ring*, Nakada

Hideo himself directed both *Ringu 2* and *The Ring 2*.    It seems that Hideo agreed

to the aesthetic choice of the producing agents of Hollywood's *The Ring*, and even

wanted to intensify it, agreeing that a more monstrous look would appeal more to

Hollywood's audiences.

**Proposal for More Empirical Research**

As for testing the multi-vocality as well as assessing the translatability of cultural

products, the researcher would do well by incorporating empirical observations of

the audiences.    One of the key questions that the researcher may seek to ask is

"do these different approaches to different audiences work as the producing

agents have intended?"    In other words, are the East Asian and American

audiences still heavily influenced by their traditional religious contexts when

interpreting religious horror films?   Or are such boundaries becoming less and

less distinguishable in light of globalization?   Furthermore, what are the

implications of the findings for religion in general?   Are foreign religious

characteristics becoming increasingly more embraced by Western and East Asian

audiences?   Or is the presence of the long held religious influence still making it

difficult for the audiences to cross boundaries and experience *Mysterium*

*Tremendum et Fascinans* in different ways?

Although it is desirable to conduct in-depth interviews with a large

number of individuals as Clark did in *From Angels to Aliens*, it would be much

too time consuming and difficult for scholars or graduate students to carry out

unless one is working on a doctoral dissertation or a high budget long term project.

Therefore, for scholars who are interested in pursuing a smaller scale research, I

propose several focus group interviews.   After viewing selected clips from the

different versions of the *Ring* series, the participants can engage in conversations

about what they have watched as well as their general taste in horror movies: i.e.,

what scares them and why.

The focus groups can include participants from American, Korean, and Japanese contexts.   Some groups may have participants from a single context while others can consist of participants with mixed backgrounds.   Following Michael Quinn Patton's guidelines for qualitative interviewing,[33]  each group can consist of 6 to 10 participants.   Unlike the survey method, it would not be sufficient to ask dichotomous questions such as "which version of the *Ring* series scares you more?"   Rather, the researcher would ask open-ended questions after the screening about the differences in the different versions, and also possibly open up some group discussions among the participants – particularly among participants with different cultural backgrounds – and have them exchange their impressions.   Also, in order to learn something about the audiences' reception of the broader genre of religious horror in general, conversations about other films can be included.   Indeed, it is quite likely that the selected clips will remind the participants of other films they have watched in the past.   For analyzing the gathered data, rather than simply coding (i.e., sorting) them only into degrees of

responses (e.g., "that was scarier than the other one"), the researcher must also

assess the quality of the fear felt by the focus group members. For example,

some scenes may appear simply unpleasant to watch while others may provoke

the idea of the possibility of spiritual entities and supernatural curses.

**Possible Findings and Discussion**

While mixed methods may provide more concrete theories to the question of the

translatability of religious horror films across different cultural contexts, the

proposed project can still make an addition to future cross-contextual researches

as well as similar works that already have been conducted in America. As

discussed above, in addition to possibly demonstrating the multi-vocality of

horror films, this project can also add more flesh to Rudolf Otto's *Mysterium*

*Tremendum et Fascinans* by demonstrating how the concept can be materialized

in different ways. To the contrary, it may instead show that globalization of

popular culture is blurring the contextual boundaries and perhaps making the

horror film viewers "omnivores" within the genre. And finally, the findings of

the project may also have broader implications for assessing religious aesthetics

in general in the age of globalization in terms of whether there is an increasing

translatability of religious aesthetics across different contexts or indigenous

traditions are still constraining the audiences in interpreting what looks, or sounds,

"terrifying yet fascinating."

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have attempted to make a call for more cross-cultural studies of

religious horror films by providing a trial textual analysis of the *Ring* series in

addition to briefly proposing an empirical project for researching the audiences.

I have emphasized the usefulness of comparing and contrasting East Asian horror

films and their Hollywood (and perhaps other Western) remakes (and possibly

Asian remakes of Western horror even though there are not many) as well as

taking the contextual differences of the audiences more seriously. In light of the

strong yet often unnoticed presence of religion in today's globalized media, it

seems to me that the suggested approaches can make important contributions to

the interdisciplinary field of religion and popular culture.

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1  Daniel A. Stout, and Judith M. Buddenbaum. "Genealogy of an Emerging Field: Foundations for the Study of Media and Religion." *Journal of Media and Religion*, 1, 1 (2002): 5-12

2  Stewart M. Hoover "Religion, Media, and the Cultural Center of Gravity." In *Religion and Popular Culture*, eds. Daniel A. Stout and Judith M. Buddenbaum. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 2001.    See also Robert K. Johnston. *Reel Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

3  For cross-cultural works with a focus on African or European contexts, see, for example, Knut Lundby. "Between American Televangelism and African Anglicanism" in *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media,* eds. Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.  See also Alf Linderman. "Religious TV in Sweden." In *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media,* eds. Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

4  The speed of transition from traditional to modern societies in these countries has been so rapid; especially in South Korea, it is often said that what took five hundred years in the West only took fifty years in Korea.    See Hyug Baek Lim. "The Crisis of Korean Society and Korean Social Science." (in Korean) a lecture delivered at Seoul Education and Culture Center on March 27, 2009.   It can be argued that such speed of transition can be a crucial variable in terms of how religion interacts with modernity (i.e. how secularization takes place).

5  Hoover, "Religion, Media, and the Cultural Center of Gravity."

6  Neil Postman. *Technopoly*. New York: Vintage, 1993.

7  Clifford Christians. "Religious Perspectives on Communication Technology." *Journal of Media and Religion*, 1, 1 (2002): 37-47.   See also Quentin J. Schultze. "Evangelicals' Uneasy Alliance with the Media." In *Religion and Mass Media*, eds. Daniel A. Stout and Judith M. Buddenbaum. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996.

8  Michael Medved. *Hollywood vs. America.* New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

9  Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*.

10  Lynn Schofield Clark. *From Angels to Aliens.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

[11]  Douglas E Cowan. *Sacred Terror*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008.

[12]  Noel Carroll. *The Philosophy of Horror.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

[13]  For example, while Bryon Stone concludes that the role of religion in horror films may not be more than an enhancement of the entertainment value of the spectacle, Cowan strongly disagrees and argues that, while Stone is correct about the commercial aspects of cinema, he fails to consider the reasons such religious symbols are so effective.   Cf. Bryon Stone, "The Sanctification of Fear: Images of the Religious in Horror Films." *Journal of Religion and Film*, 5, 2 (2001).   See also Cowan, *Sacred Terror*, 43-46, 50, 57, and 220.

[14]  Rudolf Otto. *The Idea of the Holy*. Translated by John W. Harvey. London: Oxford University Press, 1950.

[15]  Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 14-15.

[16]  In addition to Cowan, *Sacred Terror*, 22-24 and 52, for example, see Timothy Beal. *Religion and Its Monsters*. New York: Routledge, 2001, 7-8.   See also Stone, "The Sanctification of Fear."

[17]  Seung Min Hong, "Redemptive Fear" in *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, Vol. 22, No. 2.

[18]  Wendy Griswold. "The Fabrication of Meaning." *American Journal of Sociology*, 92, 5 (1987): 1077-1117.

[19]  Griswold, "The Fabrication of Meaning," 1094.

[20]  Richard A. Peterson, and Roger M Kern. "Changing Highbrow Taste: from Snob to Omnivore." *American Sociological Review*, 61, 5 (1996): 900-907.

[21]  Griswold, "The Fabrication of Meaning," 1082.

[22]  There are actually two more films in the entire series which are *Rasen* (another sequel to *Ringu*) and *Ringu 0*, which is a prequel to *Ringu*.   However, these two have not been remade outside Japan, and for the cross contextual purpose of this paper, I do not include them.

[23]  Griswold, "The Fabrication of Meaning," 1105.

[24]  Indeed, there can be much more to learn from the *Ring* series for the broader purpose of understanding religious horror films in general.   Much more could be said if the purpose of this essay was to construct a comprehensive film criticism.

[25]  Timothy Beal. *Religion and Its Monsters*.

[26]  Steffen Hantke. "Japanese Horror under Western Eyes." In *Japanese Horror Cinema*, ed. Jay McRoy. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005.   See also Jong Seung Lee. *Film and Shamanism* (in Korean). Paju: Sallim Publishing Company, 2009.

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[27] Moon Im Baek. *A Girl's Wail under the Moonlight* (in Korean), Seoul: Chaek Sae Sang, 2008, 18-28.   In fact, in Korea, there are even new religious movements that took Korean shamanism and developed this concept of allaying the grudge of the spirits into a more systematic belief. See Seung Min Hong. "Kang Jeung San: the Object of Belief in Jeung San Do." *Sacred Tribes Journal*, 3, 2 (2008): 132-151.

[28] If one expands this argument to the broader East Asian culture, Chinese Kyonshi can be an exception, for a Kyonshi, like a zombie, is the corpse of the dead.

[29] I am greatly indebted to Youn Kyung Cho, Mina Otsuki, and Eriko Kawakami for teaching me and advising me on the Japanese language.   My deepest appreciation goes to them.

[30] Again, the Chinese Kyonshi is different.   Albeit using Taoist symbols, it takes physical action to stop a Kyonshi from attacking humans.

[31] Carley H. Dodd. *Dynamics of Intercultural Communication*. Columbus: McGraw-Hill, 1998, 97-99 and 105.   See also Joon Shik Choi. *Reading Korean Religion Through Culture* (in Korean). Paju: Sa Gae Jeol, 2011, 54-101 where Choi briefly introduces Shintoism as the Japanese equivalent of Korean shamanism while exploring Korean shamanism in depth.   He also describes how Korean Christians have criticized those who believe in Korean shamanism for being obsessed with "worldly matters" (meaning their rituals are concerned with the spiritual entities' interaction with this world) and not concerned enough about the afterlife (i.e. from Christianity's view of afterlife).

[32] Speaking of Western and Eastern religious views, in the field of Christian missiology, scholars have argued that traditional Western Christianity has ignored issues that are not too relevant to the European culture yet can be found in the Christian scripture, thus making Christianity more Western than it really is.   Contextual theology is the missiological attempt to recover those issues in the bible – such as ancestorship and supernatural curses – that have been largely ignored by Western Christianity so that the Christian faith can become more relevant to the indigenous cultures in which missionaries are located.   For an example of a contextual approach to Korea, see Seung Min Hong. "Korean Contextualization: a Brief Examination" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, (April 2011): 206-212.

[33] Michael Quinn Patton. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2002.

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