



# **In Ghostly Japan: Spooky Stories with the Folklore, Superstitions and Traditions of Old Japan**

*Lafcadio Hearn*

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## In Ghostly Japan: Spooky Stories with the Folklore, Superstitions and Traditions of Old Japan

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**The Japanese have two kinds of ghosts in their folklore—the spirits of the dead, and the spirits of the living. This classic of Japanese literature invites you to take your choice if you dare.**

*In Ghostly Japan* collects twelve ghostly stories from Lafcadio Hearn, deathless images of ghosts and goblins, touches of folklore and superstition, salted with traditions of the nation. While some of these stories contain nightmare imagery worthy of a midnight creature feature, others are not ghostly or ghastly at all. "Bits of Poetry" offers an engaging study on verse, and "Japanese Buddhist Proverbs" explains the meaning of several aphorisms based on Japanese cultural references.

Whether you're looking to spot the demons that walk among us, or simply to enjoy the prose of a legendary craftsman, *In Ghostly Japan* affords countless delights. Stories include:

"Fragment" about a young pilgrim who encounters a mountain of skulls

"Ingwa-banashi" about a dying wife who bequeaths a rival a sinister legacy

"A Passional Karma" about a spectral beauty who returns for her handsome samurai lover

## In Ghostly Japan: Spooky Stories with the Folklore, Superstitions and Traditions of Old Japan Details

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Author : Lafcadio Hearn

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## **From Reader Review In *Ghostly Japan*: Spooky Stories with the Folklore, Superstitions and Traditions of Old Japan for online ebook**

### **Ariel Hudnall says**

More a philosophical and spiritual musing on the supernatural stories of Japan than a collection of ghost stories, *In Ghostly Japan* by Lafcadio Hearn is beautifully written and wonderfully thought-provoking.

The text leans heavily into the doctrines of Buddhism, but with a clear, Western interpretation and consideration. Despite not totally living up to its name (think more anecdotes, rather than actual ghost stories), *In Ghostly Japan* is still worth a read for its cultural relevance, as well as Hearn's unique and powerful imagery.

There are a couple of short ghost stories in the collection, but most lend themselves to 'impressions' of ghosts rather than full-on haunting, so if that is what you are looking for, you won't find it here. As well, some background in the language and culture of Japan will greatly increase your enjoyment, as there are not enough footnotes or translations of certain pivotal words (like *sen* for money) to make the work abundantly clear. Also, as I mentioned, the book leans on Buddhism for most of its readings, so be aware of that going in.

A book I would happily pick up for a second or third reading.

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### **Horace Derwent says**

in japan there're two kinds of ghosts, the ones from the living and the ones from the dead, which doesn't mean there're living ghosts and dead ghosts :]

people(including chinese) convince that when people die, there'll be ghosts, ghosts are dead people. but here, this book will let you learn some other opinions

lemme offer an instance:

i wanna kill someone, and i'm alive, and then my spirit go off of my body to kill that person :D well, that's a living ghost homicide. and when i fulfill my revenge, the ghost return to my flesh and i'm still alive \m/

i can't figure out whether a ghost is from a living human or a dead corpse, but ghosts do have good and evil features like us

so i believe that not all of the stories in the book are of horror...so looking forward to the Kagutaba shit, ???

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### **Max Nemtsov says**

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### **Czarny Pies says**

I read "In Ghostly Japan" immediately after finishing Hearn's "Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan" for which it serves as a very good annex. In addition to the ghost stories, this volume also contains interesting discussions of incense, Japanese proverbs and Haiku. It lacks however any unifying theme which is why I urge to GR members to read "Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan" first which provides a framework for the motley assortment of items in this book.

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### **Rufus says**

In Ghostly Japan is Lafcadio Hearn's wonderfully-written long essay on various interesting subjects in Japan. He talks of supernatural and ghost stories, Buddhist proverbs, there's an interesting meditation on spirituality brought upon by the howling of his dog (I particularly liked this one because of its humor), the curious history and activities surrounding incense, on the science of divination, among other subjects. This is a must-read for any serious cultural understanding of Japan. Treat it as an introduction of sorts. What stands out is the writing of Hearn. It is warm and inviting. Though written more than a century ago, it is still highly readable. (Also I recommend his separate short essay 'On the Gothic' as it explains the reason for his fascination with subjects of this sort.)

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### **Celine says**

Wonderful, and wonderfully read by the good folk at librivox

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### **Concertina says**

El libro cuenta con detalles bastante curiosos sobre Japón, un Japón que posiblemente ya no existe ahora y hasta el mismo autor lo remarca constantemente cuando describe festividades y costumbres.

El libro lo sentí bastante disperso, a veces hasta sentí que intentaba venderme productos japoneses.

Me encantó como termina con una analogía entre el mar y la música, el miedo y la vida.

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### **Abraham says**

El japon Fantasmal nos trae una serie de leyendas del antiguo japon donde nos muestra parte de su gran cultura al igual que muchas de sus tradiciones, es un libro donde descubrirás las bellezas de la cultura japonesa y sentirás por medio del misterio una gran expectación hacia sus tradiciones  
Es un compendio de historias con un toque de misterio entrelazadas con la vida, costumbres y tradiciones del japon que nos llevaran de la mano para conocer un poco mas de este increíble y rico país.

Este libro es para personas con interés en culturas diferentes de las nuestras, gente que desea conocer mas, si no eres de ese tipo de gente es probable que el libro se te haga pesado y te llegue a aburrir

Tiene un 4 porque hay un punto (un par de paginas) donde se me hizo un poco pesado a mi modo de ver.

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### **Laura Gaelx says**

El título es totalmente engañoso. Propiamente "fantasmales" únicamente hay dos o tres relatos. El resto son reflexiones sobre el budismo, incluyendo aforismos y leyendas.

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### **Nick says**

Pretty good. Not gonna write an elaborate review. Listened to the whole book on Libravox while doing manual tasks: <https://librivox.org/in-ghostly-japan...> The best chapters were the ones which were actual horror stories. Ingwa-Banashi, A Passional Karma, pt 1 and 2, and maybe one or 2 im forgetting. The Buddhist proverbs and bits of poetry were kind of nice too. A lot of this book is premised in Buddhist culture, as opposed to Shinto. I don't know how representative this is of archaic Japanese "horror", but it certainly is entertaining. Its not really a horror text though. If anything it is merely strange or weird.

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### **Jackie Munzar says**

A fantastic book from the chief exporter of Japanese culture to the westerns world. A sketchbook of sorts, in the same vein of The Sketchbook by Washington Irving, full of short stories and well informed observations of a rural Japan that has now, unfortunately, mostly slipped into the clutches of urban development.

Hearn was obviously extremely enamoured by his chosen subject, and as such he has left us with a plethora of vivid descriptions that help conjure beautiful, ethereal and often chilling images of the darker corners of Japan. The story of the peony lantern stuck in my mind as a wonderful amalgamation of all the aforementioned elements and helped highlight the unique nature of the Japanese supernatural world view.

All in all a charming book that won't take up to much of your time but will hopefully find a fond place in your heart.

If the subject matter should interest you enough that you would like to read something in a similar vein then I highly recommend *Kwaidan*, by the same author, and also *Japanese Ghosts and Demons: Art of the supernatural* by Stephen Addiss.

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### **Stacia says**

Though I read a later edition, the first edition was published in 1899. In a way, this little collection reminds me of Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra*. Both are men in foreign countries, traveling, learning about, living in, & experiencing cultures other than their own. Some of the essays or stories give you insights into the cultures, habits, & surroundings, while others recount local folktales & folklore.

This is a delightful little collection that surely must have been an enticing look at Japan through a Westerner's lens, especially when first published. A standout in the book is the chapter titled "A Passional Karma", which is Hearn's retelling of the *Botan D?r?* (The Peony Lantern), a Japanese ghost story.

In another section (entitled "Bits of Poetry"), Hearn explains...

"The first curious fact is that, from very ancient times, the writing of short poems has been practiced in Japan even more as a moral duty than as a mere literary art. The old ethical teaching was somewhat like this: -- "Are you very angry? -- do not say anything unkind, but compose a poem. Is your best-beloved dead? -- do not yield to useless grief, but try to calm your mind by making a poem. Are you troubled because you are about to die, leaving so many things unfinished? -- be brave, and write a poem on death! Whatever injustice or misfortune disturbs you, put aside your resentment or your sorrow as soon as possible, and write a few lines of sober and elegant verse for a moral exercise."

One last comment. In the section "Japanese Buddhist Proverbs", number 11 made me chuckle a bit:

"The priest who preaches foul doctrine shall be reborn as a fungus."

Succinct & to the point, no?

A neat window, via 1899, looking into Japan.

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### **Andrew says**

This is an odd hodgepodge of essays and recollections by Hearn, a European who became a Japanese citizen in the late 19th century. Although there are one or two ghost stories, in the Western sense, the book focuses more on the occult and spiritual aspects of Japanese culture, including a collection of Buddhist proverbs. I had intended to read this while I was on vacation in Kyoto, but never had much time. It was a great way to "revisit" my trip a month or so later.

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### **Marta Conejo says**

Me ha decepcionado.

Ale, ya lo he dicho. Pero no me ha decepcionado por el autor, ya que su prosa me parece magnifica, y la verdad es que se puede conocer mucho del historiador por el amor puesto en cada historia y su interés por describir en detalle las costumbres japonesas. Estoy un poco decepcionada por la editorial.

La sinopsis ya avisa de que el libro no sólo va a hablar de la parte de Japón fantasmal, sino que se conjugaría con otro tipo de historias... pero es que historias sobre espíritus o sobre la parte más "oscura" de Japón solo hay tres. El resto parece que la editorial ha tenido que aumentar páginas al libro y han metido rollo relacionado con historias del autor que no tienen ningún sentido en el libro, frases de Buda que están interesantes pero que para eso me compro un libro que vaya sobre ese tema, y cosas varias.

¿Conclusión? Si buscas aprender de manera general sobre la historia de Japón lo recomiendo. Si quieres conocer sobre los fantasmas y las historias más oscuras de Japón, ahorrate lo, porque no lo es.

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### **Suki St Charles says**

Based on the title of this book, and the cover art (my copy depicts the Bodhisattva and a pilgrim climbing an enormous mountain made of human skulls), I was expecting a collection of ghost stories and weird fiction. Instead, this is primarily a collection of essays, parables, and fables of Buddhist life in old Japan (the book was first published in 1899). There is also an interesting essay about incense, and a lovely essay about poetry. The "ghostly" tales in this volume are gently spooky, with strong Buddhist overtones. There is one exception, however: 'Ingwa-banashi' is a wonderfully eerie story that would be perfectly at home in any collection of weird fiction. The final piece, 'At Yaidzu', starts out sounding as if it might be a ghost story, but it morphs into a beautiful meditation on the sea, life, death, and the eternal Self. I enjoyed this book even more because it was a total surprise, completely different than what I was expecting.

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