

# The Uncanny Intertextuality: Discomfort toward Technology Development in Soseki's *Yume Juu Ya* and Kurosawa's *Yume*

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**Abstract:** This paper is about the uncanny of the intertextuality between Natsume Soseki's series of short stories *Yume Juu Ya* (1908) and Akira Kurosawa's film, *Yume* (1990). Freud (1919) explained uncanny as a class of the terrifying which leads back to something very familiar yet it was become alienated from the mind through the process of repression, so when it comes to light it gives a strange terrifying feeling. The method of this research is textual analysis on Soseki's *Yume Juu Ya* and Kurosawa's *Yume*. The research result shows the reasons why the intertextuality could be perceived as uncanny are the repetition, the concept of dream, and the sublimation of repressed discomfort toward the development of technology in Japanese society. The fact that both artworks internalized the discomfort toward the issue, means that the issue of technology development continued from its beginning in Meiji era in 1900s all the way to the contemporary period in 1990s.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan had been trying to make themselves equal to the Western countries in many aspects, such as military, economical strength, and technology. This enthusiasm of Western modeled modernization in Meiji Era may be summarized by two slogans: *Datsua Nyuuo* (leave Asia, join Europe), encouraging Japanese society to leave the old traditional Asia and pursuing the way of the more modern Western, and *Bunmei Kaika* (era of civilization and enlightenment), acceptance of Western civilization and modernization in all aspects (Kitahara, 1986). This was the beginning of Japanese famous industrialization and technology development. The industrialization of Japan prior to World War II happened very quickly (Minami, 1977) and massive postwar industrial technology development made Japan's growth in productivity the most rapid since 1960 compared to the country with the same industry (Hart, 1992). On the surface the notion of modernization and technology development seemed to be a good idea and welcomed by both society and government. However, if we look deep into the Japanese society, we can see that there are different voices regarding the modernization and technology development in

Japan, which can also be traced down on the art works, such as literature and cinematic works.

Natsume Soseki (1867-1916), one of the most famous modern literature writers of Meiji era, wrote in his 1902 diary that "Japan has tried to absorb Western culture in a hurry and as a result has not had time to digest it" (Fukuchi, 1993). His critics toward modernization can also be traced in his writings, such as series of short stories *Yume Juu Ya* (*Ten Nights of Dreams*, 1908) and *Kokoro* (1914). Response toward modernization, industrialization and westernization did not stop in Meiji Era. In the history of Japanese cinema, Akira Kurosawa (1910-1998), regarded as one of the most important and influential director and screen-writer of all time, directed *Yume* (*Dreams*, 1990) in response to atomic bomb and Japan's "incompetent nuclear power industry" (Shapiro, 2001).

Both Soseki and Kurosawa were actively responding to what happened in Japan during their times using the form of art; Soseki with literature, and Kurosawa with cinema. The connection between literature and film may also be found in the form of intertextuality. Kristeva said that each text is an intersection of texts so at least one other text can be read (Alfaro, 1996.) The similarity between Kurosawa's *Yume* and Soseki's *Yume Juu Ya*, which in fact share the same opening sentence "*konna yume*

*wo mita*” (“I saw a dream like this”), is what to be called as an intertextuality.

One of the responses emerging from intertextuality is the feeling of uncanny (Levin, 2011). Freud explained uncanny as a class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar (Svenaeus, 1999); it is something familiar and old-established in the mind yet it was become alienated from the mind only through the process of repression, so when it comes to light it gives a strange terrifying feeling; for example the theme about death and pain are both familiar, yet it is repressed and gives terrifying feeling when mentioned. Intertextuality can produce some kind of uncanny effect by repetition and rendering up something that was familiar into something strangely foreign (Levin, 2011). This paper will focus on how the intertextuality of *Yume Juu Ya* in Kurosawa's *Yume* gives uncanny effect.

Napier wrote that *Yume Juu Ya* posses an “effective development of a surreal otherness” (Napier, 1996), which is also a key element to creating the uncanny effect by choosing a setting which differ from the real world. The closest study about intertextuality between *Yume Juu Ya* and *Yume* is an article by Notani talks about the similarity between *Yume Juu Ya* and *Yume*, especially in the sixth dream of the short stories and the fifth dream of the film; but this article did not talk about the uncanny effect in both art works (野谷, 1990).

Both Kurosawa and Soseki are part of the Japanese society, and both of them experienced the rapid development of technology in order to speed up the modernization and advance industrialization. It is reasonable to say that these issues could be sublimated into the artworks of Kurosawa and Soseki through their individual unconsciousness, yet since it's in fact a collective familiarity, the depiction of it brings the sense of uncanny. Through text analysis method, this paper will focus upon why the intertextuality between Kurosawa's *Yume* and Soseki's *Yume Juu Ya* could be perceived as uncanny by the Japanese audience.

## 2 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

We strongly encourage authors to use this document for the preparation of the camera-ready. Please follow the instructions closely in order to make the volume look as uniform as possible (Moore and Lopes, 1999).

### 2.1 Reality in a Dream

*Yume* (1990) consists of eight separated episodes, containing various dreams which are based on the dreams Kurosawa has had since his childhood (Serper, 2001). Each dreams started with an opening sentence, “*konna yume wo mita*” (“I saw a dream like this”). The structure of Kurosawa's *Yume* is pretty much similar to Soseki's *Yume Juu Ya*. *Yume Juu Ya* is a series of ten short stories consisting of ten unconnected dreams, just like Kurosawa's *Yume*. The dreams are narrated by an “I”, but unlike Kurosawa's *Yume*, the “I” here is not perceived as Soseki because the dreams are not based on his own dreams. This series of short stories also use the same opening sentence as above, *konna yume wo mita*, which, a bit different from Kurosawa's *Yume*, is only used in the beginning of four of the dreams: first dream, second dream, third dream, and fifth dream. This is an example of what is to be called as intertextuality.

Regarding intertextuality, Alfaro explained that to understand the concept of intertextuality we need to “understand texts not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical, as traces and tracings of otherness, since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures” (Alfaro, 1996, and one factor which shaped *Yume* was of course the repetition and transformation of *Yume Juu Ya* such as the presence of the same opening sentence and similar narrative structure.

Other than the same opening sentence, the “I”s in both narratives are relatively passive. In Kurosawa's *Yume*, the main character presenting the main plot of the dream is not “I”, but the characters he encountered, while in Soseki's *Yume Juu Ya*, the dreamer is somewhat ghostlike in many ways, a shadowy figure forced to take parts in situations which he does not understand (Napier, 1996).

The key concept to both art works is that they are the embodiment of narrated dreams, which is something already familiar to humanity. The whole process of dreaming itself could be considered as uncanny. Freud said that the uncanny effect is often and easily produced by blurring the distinction between imagination and reality, and those who dream often not realizing the fact that they are in a dream. To Japanese society, to be specific, dream is perceived as important in aesthetics and literature where dreamlike motives are systematically employed in order to explore states of reality and feeling (Botz-Bornstein, 2007). Takeuchi says that the dependent origination, the law of causality in Buddhism, is like a dream: “When we dream, we live in correlatedness with the world of the dream and

though the phenomenal identity of dreamer and dream, keep the dream alive; but as soon as we become aware of its correlatedness, we have already awoken” (Botz-Bornstein, 2004). This implies that a dream is not a result of reality, but reality is a result of dream.

Uncanny, as we have seen, is similarly a product of strange repetition, an eerie recurrence whereby that which was once familiar is rendered strangely foreign so intertextuality will add to this strange repetition and eerie recurrence (Levin, 2011). For the audience who were familiar with Soseki’s works, watching Kurosawa’s *Yume* will evoke an eerie feeling; a feeling like something is being repeated, yet it is not the same thing; the uncanny effect. What also makes Kurosawa’s *Yume* uncanny is because it represents the notion of a dream which brought up repressed wishes as well as traumatic experience. Moreover, it brings up traces of Soseki’s *Yume Juu Ya*, evoking a sense of repetition. Since a dream is supposed to be a road to the unconsciousness, a road to the repressed wishes and traumatic experiences, it is safe to say that the dreams in *Yume* and *Yume Juu Ya* also depict the unconsciousness of someone, or something. Napier wrote that “most of the anxieties and challenges he [Soseki] chronicles [in *Yume Juu Ya*] are universally experienced by modern human beings” (Natsume, 2015). Thus it is arguable that the dreams in Kurosawa’s *Yume* also represent the unconsciousness, not only of Kurosawa as an individual, but even of the broader collective unconsciousness of Japanese society in Kurosawa’s era.

## 2.2 Depiction of Technology

Soseki lived through the Meiji period (1868-1912), when the initial massive industrial and technology development took place. Although in the surface, this development seemed to be well received, but the depiction of it in *Yume Juu Ya* tells otherwise. The dreams in *Yume Juu Ya* talks about the anxiety and challenges, also the feeling of alienated in modern society (Natsume, 2015). “The Seventh Night” also depicts that anxiety and alienated feeling by using a depiction of Meiji modern technology in the form of steamship, where “I” found himself standing on it. He said: “I found myself abroad a great ship. Day and night the ship cut its way through the waves, belching endless black smoke as it went. The noise was horrific” (Natsume, 2015).

The first sight of steam-powered ship for the Japanese society was the sight of *Kurofune* or the Black Ship, the vassal of United States Commodore

Matthew Perry entering Japan in 1853, which then symbolizes the end of Tokugawa period as well as the isolation policy (Nishiyama, 2016). Black Ship demonstrated the power of technology development which brought Japan into realization that the only defense against the West was to adopt its superior technology.

In the dream, the ship was headed somewhere “I” didn’t know, in a never-ending voyage, yet always seemed to be chasing the sun described like a “red-hot fire iron.” The ship was crowded with foreigners, with faces of all kinds. “I” was feeling too much discomfort toward the ship and the foreigners that he decided to end his own life. Unfortunately, just after he leapt out of the ship he found his will to live and being on the ship was the only option to live. To the end of the dream, “I” kept on falling and falling without even touching the water surface; he’s in the state of never-ending fall. Treyvaud wrote that “the seventh dream has long been viewed as a metaphor for Japan in the Meiji Era” which “had lost its way in its attempts to modernize” yet there’s no way of stopping it (Natsume, 2015). Just like the Black Ship symbolizes the superiority of the West, the steam-powered ship full of foreigners symbolizes the modernization of Japan bringing with it foreign cultures, it is unstoppable and no way to escape from.

The appearance of a specifically steam-powered ship puffing black cloud to the sky in the series clearly shows that the notion of Black Ship was still going around even 50 years after its entrance, in 1908 when *Yume Juu Ya* released. The feeling of discomfort toward foreign things has to be repressed in order to keep up with the rest of the world, referring back to the *bunmei kaika* motto, that acceptance of Western modeled modernization was needed and critic toward it was frowned upon because Western was the one who brought Japan civilization and helping Japan to move forward. Since it was narrated as a dream, it stands on the bridge between reality and imagination. The readers realized that it was supposed to be just a dream, but the familiar feeling of discomfort toward technology development and foreign origin things and people was real, resulting in the uncanny.

Kurosawa’s *Yume* also depicts technology in the film despite that technology had been far developed during Kurosawa’s period. Japan even managed to gain some energy independence by building nuclear power plants. However, the depiction of modern technology in Kurosawa’s *Yume*, similar to the depiction of technology in *Yume Juu Ya*, does not speak about the wonders of the technology development.

Rather than the technology itself, the dreams in Kurosawa's *Yume* depict more of the side effects of technology. The dream in the episode of "Mount Fuji in Red" for example is a dream about Mount Fuji that was dyed in red color as the result of the explosions of six nuclear reactors surrounding it.

During the catastrophe, a female character met by the "I" enraged and said that the government promised nuclear was safe, and if anything is dangerous it would be the human: "But, they said that the nuclear plants were safe! What's dangerous is the miscalculation, but the nuclear plant itself is harmless. They said they will not do any miscalculation so there will be no problem. I will never forgive those people" (Baishō, & Harada, 1990). Shapiro described that in this sequence "Japan's scandalously incompetent nuclear power industry causes a catastrophic meltdown" (Baishō, & Harada, 1990).

Mizumoto in Thomas (2015) argued that Japan has four faces regarding nuclear issue: face of an atomic victim, of a US ally under a nuclear umbrella, of an active promoter of peaceful nuclear energy, and of a peaceful nation promoting nuclear abolition. Japanese can neither securitize nor de-securitize nuclear weapons, nor to be introduced to or excluded from it (Doyle, 2015). However, this tension and the anti-nuclear power movement did not stop the government from planting atomic power generators and having an alliance with the US under their nuclear umbrella.

A dream is supposed to be a road to one's unconsciousness. "Mount Fuji in Red" was designated to bring up a repressed trauma and fear of the unconsciousness of Japanese society. Although, until this film was released, there was no high level nuclear related accident ever happened in Japan, yet the trauma of the atomic bombing and the fear of another nuclear catastrophe existed during Kurosawa's period. This repetitiveness connected to collective trauma creates an effect of the uncanny (Svenaeus, 1999). Both dreams, "The Seventh Night" from *Yume Juu Ya* and "Mount Fuji in Red" from *Yume*, are depicting the dark side of modernization and technology development in a narration of a dream. Despite the difference in time period, both internalized the issue of discomfort toward technology development, an issue repressed by the need to catch up with the rest of the developed country.

One reason why this discomfort remains a century after the initial development begun was the war as it was the perfect example where the development of technology brought destruction to the humanity.

Japanese also developed a collective trauma to the notion of nuclear energy after the bombing (Doyle, 2015). Another was the risk of using nuclear powered energy, especially after Chernobyl disaster happened in 1986. Even with all the risk, Japan chose to continue their development in nuclear energy to gain economic independence. These were the reasons why the discomfort toward technology remains in the 1990s; the development of high-risk technology.

### 2.3 The Gods of the Past

Tibesar (1937) argued that Japan possessed a "deeply religious nature". The ancient religion's belief and value had been a part of the society for so long that it could not be separated and defined as a "religion". Yet, the root of the beliefs and value could be traced back to Shinto and Buddhism.

In *Yume Juu Ya*'s "The Sixth Night", "I" was watching Unkei, an influential Japanese Buddhist sculptor, carves Niou (Two Benevolent Kings, the guardian gods of the Buddhism) out of a wooden log at the gate of the Gokokuji Temple. What's interesting is that Unkei was a real influential sculptor from the 13<sup>th</sup> century Kamakura period, while Gokokuji Temple was not built until 1681, and "I" himself is depicted as someone from Meiji era. "I" was fascinated with the way Unkei carved without hesitation when a young man near him said: "Those exact eyebrows and noses are buried in the wood, and he just uses the hammer and chisel to dig them out. It's just like digging a rock out of the ground – there's no way to get it wrong" (Natsume, 2015). Thinking he could do it too, the narrator heads home to carve gods out of wooden logs in his garden; it was unsuccessful. Niou, the Two Benevolent Gods, were only accessible to Unkei and his Kamakura period log; it was nowhere to be found in the wooden logs of Meiji. Napier explained that "The Sixth Night" suffused with nostalgia for a purer, richer past, an increasingly inaccessible past for the modernizing Japan of the Meiji period (Napier, 1996). Since Buddhism and Shinto is more like a way of living than of a way of praising the gods and deities, the inexistence of gods in Meiji's wooden log could also be interpreted as the failure of some ancient ways of living to prevail in the "modernized" Meiji era.

In the second dream of *Yume*, "The Peach Orchard", "I" encountered the personification of the peach tree's spirits who appear in the form of *hina* dolls. The spirits told the young narrator that they shall not come to his house again because his family chopped the whole field of peach trees. During modernization and industrialization, nature has long

been the victim of the process. If a family cutting an orchard of peach trees resulting in the gods' desertion of the house, what will happen to a whole nation sacrificing the nature for the sake of capital advantages? Is there still any *kami* (gods) in modern Japan? The question probably could be answered by looking back at Soseki's "The Sixth Night"; the inexistence of gods, the lost of ancient ways of living.

The second appearance of the depiction of god or *kami* in *Yume* is in the episode of "Mount Fuji in Red". Mountains in Japan have been regarded as holy places of ancestral spirits and gods, and Mount Fuji is worshipped as the sacred place of various *kami*. The threatening blazing red Mount Fuji depicted in the episode contrasts the usual benevolent image of Mount Fuji. Regarding the red Mount Fuji, Serper explained: "The angered god of the mountain, who was badly treated, causes natural disaster as a contemporary polluter" (Serper, 2001). As the result of technology development disaster, the benevolent ancient traditional god changed into the threatening polluting god. The image of red threatening Mount Fuji has become an uncanny image to the eyes of Japanese society that worship the great gentle Mount Fuji.

Dream does not only bring back the traumatic experiences, but also the repressed wishes. Soseki's "The Sixth Night" and Kurosawa's "The Peach Orchard" can be read as a representation of repressed wishes of Japanese society toward modernity and technology; wishes of going back to the past, to the traditional beliefs and norms that were silenced by the force to catch up with modernity and technology. In the last dream, "The Watermill Village", Kurosawa shares a hope that somewhere there's a place where human being can live without modern technology and one with nature, where the gods are benevolent, and where everybody is happy with their life that they want to live long.

This last dream of Kurosawa's *Yume* probably could also answer the question why the discomfort towards development of technology and modernization lasts even during the contemporary era. When "I" encountered an old man in the Watermill Village, the old man said something like this: "What's worse, most people see those stupid inventions as a miracle and worship them. They don't realize how nature is destroyed by it and that they are going to perish with it" (Baishō & Harada, 1990).

The discomfort toward the development of technology is not without reason. The existence of atomic power reactor means there will be radioactive wastes that must be managed correctly. Even if the waste is dumped somewhere safe, far from

civilization, it will still going to be a pollutant decades after it was dumped.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS

Through text analysis applied on the two art works above, it can be concluded that there are three reasons why the intertextuality between Kurosawa's *Yume* and Soseki's *Yume Juu Ya* could be perceived as uncanny by the Japanese audience: because of (1) the repetition, (2) the concept of dream, and (3) the repressed "familiar something" sublimated in the art works.

Intertextuality between Kurosawa's *Yume* and Soseki's *Yume Juu Ya* allows repetition to happen and to the Japanese audience who had already familiar with Soseki's works, especially *Yume Juu Ya*, the similar structure and opening sentence of Kurosawa's *Yume* will trigger the strange feeling of having already visualized the work, yet it still felt different; thus the uncanny.

*Yume Juu Ya* allows the reader to fit into the place of the anchor character by the usage of first speaker point of view, while *Yume* allows the audience to be attached to the anchor character by using the same actor along all along the series of dream. As the result, although they are technically the dreams of the anchor characters, the uncanny experience of a dream could be transferred from the fictional world to the readers or the audiences.

The repressed "familiar something" which internalized in both artworks is the issue of discomfort toward modernization and technology development. This feeling of discomfort continued from its initiation in Meiji era, even to the contemporary 1990s when *Yume* was released as the result of the war trauma, and the development of high-risk technology.

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