The Pact of Doom and Fidelty: The Comparison Between the Saka and the Shikigami.

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101000490

Received: 26 October 2026; Accepted: 31 October 2026; Published: 05 November 2026

ABSTRACT

This work examines the cultural agents in Malay and Japanese supernatural traditions, the Saka and the Shikigami, respectively, as representations of and agents for socio-moral values and norms of human agency, spiritual authority and inheritance from families and ancestors. Both are bound familiar spirits, but they are bound on different ontological axes, that of humans as masters and that of humans as masters. The Saka is involuntary, parasitic, and is based on an illicit ancestral pact (ilmu hitam) and theological transgression (syirik), while the Shikigami is created with intent and purpose, and is based on the esoteric discipline and ritual purity (Onmyōdō). This paper uses comparative literary analysis and Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist approach to analyse these stories from the perspective of an "Economy of Souls". Key binary oppositions examined include involuntary inheritance and deliberate creation, parasitic doom and symbiotic utility, and biological determinism versus meritocratic mastery. Moreover, a study of the contemporary media portrayal of both the Saka and the Shikigami would show how the former has morphed into a negative horror metaphor for unrelenting intergenerational trauma in today's Malaysia, while the latter has been sanitised into a symbol of predictable control in hyper-modern Japan. Finally, this work suggests that both are tools of "Spectral Governance," which can be understood as a mechanism for the internalisation of boundaries, responsibilities, and the psychological effects of lineage in more secularised societies.

Keywords: Saka, Shikigami, pact, blasphemy, spiritual mastery, familiars

INTRODUCTION

Supernatural stories reveal matters of significance, namely, all the "significations" represented or constructed by a culture's norms (not just soiled anecdotes or ghost stories). A very significant component of the socio-spiritual imagination of the Malay Archipelago in the complex filmogenesis of these islands and the Japanese archipelago is the bound spirit, or familiar, which is a non-human being bound to a human for some purpose, often an illicit purpose. The between/and/amongness of gifting in time and space is liminal in an anthropological context, which gives the gifting spirits a transgressive force, making it a very volatile one because of the liminality of "betwixt and between. This liminality enables them to either construct social systems by protective effect or to accumulate them destructively, supernaturally, through predatory effect. The best example might be the Malay Saka and the Japanese shikigami. Generally, they are bound spirits that act, in turn, as supernatural means of connecting the wishes of the people to their fulfilment in physical reality, providing a lens through which to view the subliminal fear of each culture in relation to power, lineage, and the order of the cosmos. The choice of medium in which the expression of these cultural fears is made clear is certainly conscious, and is part of the history of society for both cultures; "familiar spirit. With the bound spirit, a meaningful rupture in the natural, sacred divide between the human and the Divinity is created.

All of these cultures provide the mortal actors with a supernatural gift that will enable them to influence and manipulate these forces and create a story that could look at what it's like to deal with what you can't see, what it's like to inherit know-how from your ancestors, what it costs to play with the supernatural, and what it costs to do it at all. This is a project that argues these are the "Supernatural monitoring of Agency", or how community and domestic boundaries and ethics are monitored from within the "supernatural shadow". Furthermore, policing persons can be understood as an intergenerational form of collective problem-solving related to social and familial issues, as it demystifies and even makes palpable an abstract moral order, as in Polynya's discussion of warning messages from the Supernatural. Thus, the Saka can be interpreted as a combination of pre-Islamic animism and ancestor worship, and opposing worldviews to orthodox Islam (Amin et al., 2014). The primary being that the Saka is more likely a spiritual lackey (they call it a channel), bound, subjugated and utilised for the funnelling of more power for the benefit of a certain bloodline, and a conduit of generational trauma and Divine punishment.

The Saka is the traditional pledging formula passed down from ancestors; sometimes, the modern recipient is unaware of its meaning. From the old pledging formula established by the ancestors for the protection of crops, physical invulnerability or accumulation of wealth (Ismail et al., 2010). Domestic order: it is inherited; it is a great "perversion of inheritance"; it is a spiritual lackey. Many psychiatric and culture-specific dissociative disorders have this spirit, and it can take away life from its host, but it is not the pure giving and receiving of life, wealth and wisdom from generation to generation; it is a split between the natural and productive/creative giving and receiving of wealth and wisdom (Ismail et al., 2010). In the modern, mixed Islamic/animist Malaysian society that it is part of, using or transmitting this vehicle of spirits is an open taboo. The Saka is a powerful story that tells of the peril of ‘syirik' (idolatry/polytheism) and the spectre of ‘ilmu hitam' (black magic). The continuity of these viraces, as evidenced by Majid's (2005) study in Kedah on the rural Muslim community, illustrates the ultimate costs of keeping the Muslim community's spirit and togetherness alive. The Saka is not only an invisible servant, but, from the point of view of orthodox believers, a parasite that often ensnares the soul of one human being and presents the “Heir” as the “Host” (Amin et al., 2014).

The Shikigami concept within the Japanese esoteric tradition, Onmyōdō (esoteric way of the yin-yang), is a symbol of cleanliness of ritual skills, of intellectualisation, and of the orderly cosmology. The Shikigami is a re-created spirit servant (its original design on paper: Katashiro), as well as from temporal binding through a basic spirit or yōkai made by the highly esteemed Court Onmyōji of the Heian era, at present most famous is Abe no Seimei, as described by S. Shin'ichi (2013). The Saka is an unwanted, parasitic family member, while the Shikigami is an uncommitted, potentially useful free agent.

It is entirely dependent on the spiritual strength, ritual cleanliness and knowledge of the cosmos in which the master human being exists for the summoning and mastering, and for its servitude (Pang, 2013). Shikigami is a technological use of magic: a delimited magico-technological symbol used to break the line dividing life and death and to perform an extremely specific act (Kiejziewicz, 2017). The Shikigami is a covenant of total devotion; it must be maintained and kept. It is closely associated with the Shinto beliefs of purity (hare) and pollution (kegare). The Saka is that feudal menace to be avoided – creeping doom that passes from generation to generation, feasting on its victims. The Shikigami is a threat as a result of ritual subjugation – to be moored successfully for the state and home to stay in harmony. But this mastery is also definitely tenuous. The Shikigami may break the deal if the onmyōji hesitates in art, or tries to take control of a power which he or she can't control spiritually, as studied in the Japanese folktale and modern version (Hartman, 2017). In such cases, it instantly becomes the messenger of violence and retribution, as Shinto would say, the spirits of the disrespectful, untethered ones, the ones which are not "Sitting Positions" (Bathgate, 2004).

Their differences reveal the distinct ways of expressing supernatural folklore used to instil moral values and norms in families and society within Asian contexts, through stories of fear and duty. They both turn out to be less spiritual than material agents of human will, and the cultures which limit their uses have yielded quite distinct attitudes towards the question of human agency and the supernatural world. In the Saka, people live in a zero-sum economy of souls: Ancestral desire is expressed in the actor's suffering. As part of the principle of meritocracy in ritual mastery, the Shikigami expresses anxiety about controlling nature and a profound, esoteric anxiety of mastery (Pang, 2013). The methodology adopted in the present work is comparative literary analysis,

which has been used alongside prevalent ethnographic works, some historical case studies, and a peer-reviewed study so far. Systematic analysis of these stories from a structuralist perspective on the binarised dynamics of culture operating on the bound spirit. This study will examine the contrast between the destructive–inherited parasitism of the Saka and the constructive – produced usefulness of the Shikigami, in exploring the potential of the 'bound spirit' in Asian cultures, which might negate or not certain aspects of morality, the weight of history and the fragility of the supernatural pacts in these and other cultures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Saka: Evil Pacts, Agricultural Origins, and Ancestral Parasitism in the Malay World (Paperback).

The Saka are one of the most popular, feared, and sociologically significant among the complex layers of the Malay supernatural world. The Saka is not a roaming spirit or a haunting attached to a specific location: rather it is like a promise or a contract (perjanjian) that has been made by a human master, which has a binding effect in Cao's home. It was noted that, historically, the Saka is an Old Malaysian tradition related to the animistic/dynamistic beliefs of the pre-Islamic people, and that the emergence of rice cultivation during this time was highly pragmatic and utilitarian in an agrarian society (Amin et al., 2014). During a time when the jungles were thick and wild, and the villages were full of fear of enemies coming to them from all sides, the early Malays would seek supernatural protection in the form of wealth and power for crops, to protect their villages, gain tremendous physical strength, or for wealth and political influence within the area. These they would acquire by using "occult sciences" (forbidden by the Islamists) and by making blood contracts with jinn, nature spirits or demonic spirits. These were dark covenants which none of us consented to, terrible and unalterable covenants, joining man with spirit in a perilous bond. In order to keep its allegiance and force the spirits had to be pacified through regular rituals. These presents (ancak) typically consisted of roasted chicken, or eggs; and in the more wicked or ambitious variants, they could comprise of the blood of sacrificed animals, or even of humans. It could take the form of a ghostly tiger, a crocodile, an invisible, stifling power or anything else, depending on the purpose for which the entity was called.

Worse still and more fearsome was that the foundation clause of the contract was that it was "everlasting." It was more than just a diabolical omission or eradication by the original master's death; it had to be handed down through the bloodline by force: the spiritual lackey had to be passed down to a descendant (Ismail et al., 2010). The consequences of this breach of the terms of the accord, or if the original master failed to be able to find anyone who would become an heir to the Saka, were well known and horrible. According to the ethnographers' records and the villagers' tales, the master's last agonies are those of delayed death, when the master is unable to pass on the familiar. Physically eaten "while still alive", they were said to have their soul housed in their bones until the hungry spirit could locate another body to enter. The conceptualisation and social function of the Saka radically changed as Old Malaysia became a modern, fast-growing, and religiously orthodox country, especially after the Islamic resurgence (dakwah movement) of the 1970s and 1980s. Keeping, feeding or inheriting a Saka (Marsala) is an action forbidden in most of the modern Islamic theology because it is an act of polytheism (Syirik) and unbelief (Kufr) towards Allah and cannot be forgiven. Consequently, the officiatory status of the Saka was totally reversed, from an admired, very useful institution of the rural gentry to a useless and shameful drag.

In Malaysia today, the Saka is not discussed as part of village defence but rather in medical, psychiatric, or urban anthropological contexts. In the present day, medical professionals and modern Islamic healers (perawat Islam) can now better see this as a culture-specific dissociative disorder or visceral response to deep intergenerational trauma (Ismail et al., 2010). In fact, modern descendants, often fully urbanised, educated, and totally divorced from the agricultural requirements of their ancestors, are tormented by a spirit they don't want to inherit. It is no longer cherished by anyone, and with its traditional privileges stripped from it, the entity becomes violent to its host. This results in unnecessary excess medical conditions, high-level abuses of marriage, problems with reproduction and emotional distress. Against the backdrop of this modern context, the Saka is a ghost-like whistleblower, wife of the parasite known by its name: a punishment of living parasitism, tackling the present with a heavy hand for the dubious and self-serving success of the past. It's the worst kind of inheritance - bloodlines engendering spiritual rot instead of wealth or wisdom.

Shikigami: The Faithful Protectors and Ritual Mastery and Thaumaturgical Emblems.

On the contrary, the idea of the bound spirit plays a completely different ontological role in the esoteric School of Onmyōdō (Way of Yin and Yang): as a protector and strict discipline, and a formalising measure of state and personal security. Abe no Seimei is a legendary figure whose history is both interesting and complicated, who served the imperial court as an onmyōji – in English, a magical spirit-guiding official, a person directing spirits, a spirit servant, or a spirit chief. Whereas the Saka is only a dark thing, a rogue affair of blood pacts so as not to trigger ghosts or avoid being one's victims, the Shikigami comes from extreme concentration of thought, extreme alignment of the cosmos and extreme spiritual discipline. These entities were not normally inherited but were dabbed into by the esoteric force and purity of the Shapiro Practitioner (Shin'ichi, 2013), dabbed at invisible spirits, minor gods (called kami), or demonic forces (called yōkai) roaming around. Shikigami is an extremely protective, structured and useful species. These were employed as symbols in cosmology as a sort of thaumaturgical practice: to ward off evil, neutralise an incoming curse, foretell the future, or clear an area of spiritual pollution (kegare) (Kiejziewicz, 2017). This was a very formal binding. A Shikigami might be attached to a piece of paper cutouts (katashiro), wooden talismans—he or she will hide it—or might be invisible and obey the master—What he says, goes. The history and literature on this subject concerned the Shikigami's significance in protecting the Heian imperial court from evil spirits and from potential political interference and manipulation, providing evidence of an almost infinitely circumscribed and bureaucratized supernatural defence system (Pang, 2013).

Most important of all, the unequivocal loyalty of the agreement underlying the protection of the Shikigami is strictly insisted upon thereafter, and its presence and protection are dependent on the steady mind and righteousness of the master. While the Saka is not strong enough to bounce the Shikigami out of control, these two are formally in a "subjugated" relationship between Man. Don't make it a family member, it's a tool! But as with their relationship, absolute control is a precarious situation. The purity of the mind of one of the onmyōji can be suddenly warped by it, if it is one of the onmyōji who gives up his asceticism, or his prideful effort to work a magic that he is not naturally equipped to perform. On these occasions, the spirit does not come by the rules and kills the unworthy master, which is a brutal Inspector of the impudence of the human soul toward its God (Hartman, 2017; Bathgate, 2004). The Shikigami, therefore, represents an idealised, but always menacing, world of tranquity and orderly dominion of the forces of nature over transcendently elevated man, of the human intellect and ritual purity over the supernatural – provided man is unerring.

The Methodological Research Gap based on previous studies is introduced.

Although many materials have been written about these creatures, previous works have been conducted in such isolated cultural and/or disciplinary contexts that they do not relate to other folktales from Southeast and East Asia. The fields of medical anthropology, localised sociology, and Islamic theology have been the areas in which most work has been carried out regarding the Saka. The literature of Ismail et al. (2010) showed that there were foundational and peer-reviewed psychiatric case reports about the manifestation of the Saka as a culture-bound syndrome in the Malaysian context, in which it was accepted as a communication of severe psychological distress in the rural context. Similarly, Majid (2005) and Amin et al. (2014) focused on the theological aspects of belief in hantu (ghosts) and provided empirical evidence of the retention of polytheistic elements and familiar keeping as spiritual coping or resistance strategies in rural Muslim societies. These thoughts were taken to a much greater extent more recently by Yusof et al. (2025), who examined the role of supernatural warnings and folkloric beings as active moral controllers. Their study of the entities that address child- and family-based issues uncovers the general cultural role of such horrifying narratives, highlighting how this other-than-human aspect is utilised to both frighten and set limits on familial obligations, community safety, or cultural rules and norms – and does so in culturally sensitive ways.

This has been accompanied by scholarship on the Shikigami, which has been limited to historical reconstruction, literary analysis, and esoteric Heian studies. Then again, Pang (2013) and Shin'ichi (2013) have written copiously on the history of Onmyōdō and the biographical truth about Abe no Seimei, as well. Kiejziewicz (2017) and Hartman (2017) have studied how the Shikigami has been adapted to modern film, anime, and literature as a stylised and sentimental symbol of traditional Japanese spiritual beliefs that compete with a super-modernised

society. But to date, there has been no substantial, serious study conducted from a cross-cultural perspective on the archetype of the ‘bound spirit'. What has been tried to find out in comparative folklore is the portion of universal archetypes in supernatural enforcement, while the comparison of each other tends to be overshadowed by East-West comparison. Even though there is a large body of literature on spirits, none of it has examined them in a comparative study that shows the common yet opposite socio-cultural functions of spirits along the axes.

Remaining understudied is the way that the internal dynamics of the supernatural pact – that is, against the will familial parasitism characteristic of the Saka versus the more deliberate, more useful production of the Shikigami – are suggestive of strongly oppositional cultural attitudes toward human agency, to the unhelpful burden of parents and the moral boundaries of mastery over the supernatural. This study directly addresses this lack by offering a critical examination of these two distinct spiritual lackeys in the regulation of socio-moral norms and in the articulation of the multifaceted concept of 'spectral agency' from the perspective of comparative structuralism, drawing on Malay and Japanese cosmologies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In response to this, the purpose of this study is to systematically divide the socio-cultural meanings and analyse the psychological mechanisms of both supernatural beings. The study is consciously analysed through the main technique of analysing Comparative Literature. As the term itself makes clear, comparative literature traverses linguistic, national and disciplinary limits and focuses on the different ways in which common human fears and the organisation of society are recounted in various cultural periods. Using a comparative literary approach to the study of these supernatural narratives (ghost stories) can help researchers examine texts not simply as ghost stories but as rich, dense works that embody the moral systems of their societies. These can highlight the universal human condemnation of power and agency in oral histories, religious texts, and more recent literary retellings of the Malay Saka and the esoteric manuals, as well as in both historical court documents and modern representations of the Japanese Shikigami.

Taking a comparative perspective, like in the case study of Malay Hantu Kopek and Japanese Ame-Onna by Yusof et al (2025), reveals that apparently different cultures share common patterns of supernatural beings that confound moral boundaries, social obligations, and care for parents. In this study, a comparative approach in the parallel method is undertaken. When placed in juxtaposition using comparative literary methodology, the two forms (parasitic inheritance and ritualistic subjugation) have a common ontological function as the use of the "bound spirit" as an internalised measurement of human moral character, spiritual rectitude, and social responsibility; the inheritance of the Saka and the subjugation of the Shikigami. Such a methodological approach does not simply leave the entities to stand on their own but critically examines them in relation to one another, revealing the substructures of Asian spectral governance.

Analysis

The fundamental concept of structuralism was the "economy of souls.

Also, to further anchor the comparative literary analysis, the researcher draws on Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1963) Structuralist theory, which posits that human cultures, mythologies, and folktales are essentially patterns of complex structures of opposites, or binary oppositions. But oppositional forces are not simply story elements but mythic tools used by a civilisation to mediate, articulate, and ultimately resolve many of the actual conflicts and fears it encounters in its everyday social environment. So far as the topic of this research is concerned, the familiar spirit, the Saka, or the Shikigami is a powerful liminal signifier used to manoeuvre the perpetual liminality between human desire for power, protection, and wealth on the one hand, and godly acquiescence to religious orthodoxy and a harmonising cosmos on the other.

We take inspiration from George Foster's Theory of Limited Good (1965) and adopt an anthropological and conceptual approach to operationalise this structuralist framework. In the traditional peasant society, all things that are supposed to be desirable, or valued in some way – land, wealth, health, status, etc. – are supposed to be resources, scarce resources, Foster said, with the proviso that someone's gain be at least as great as somebody's

loss. In this context, Foster's economic model is transposed to the supernatural sphere under the labels of the "Economy of Souls" or "Supernatural Accounting Mechanisms", as demonstrated through the use of Saka and Shikigami, which vividly illustrate the differences, deficits, and surpluses of human spiritual capital. They represent the coins of the other economies; they assign a position of a family or practitioner in the wider cosmos and community.

This article contends that the governance of China's spectra is carried out by using binary oppositions. By means of comparative literature and structuralism, it is possible to see how the moral and the functioning logic of the Saka and the Shikigami can be seen as deconstructing into three main binary oppositions:

The human-spirit bond has its root in the first binary: Involuntary Inheritance vs. Deliberate Creation. The Saka is based on the system of involuntary and inevitable inheritance. A violation of an agreement made with the physical body rather than forced upon by choice – the unconfessed fears of inescapable ancestors, the passed-on trauma and the incurable familial sins all represented by the descendant (Ismail et al., 2010). At the other extreme of intentions, the Shikigami is intentionally made, conjured, and bound tightly in a ritual practice. It will be the triumph of the human will active through the human intellect, over sublimation to the past, produced by intense will of school-determined action against nature, and not of its passive acceptance of past events.

The other binary is the relationship between the master and bound spirit (Parasitism/Symbiotic Utility). Basically, it's parasites, feasting on the 'living force' - mentality and social factors of the host - to nourish themselves, it lives, and the man dies, by living off others. On the other hand, Shikigami symbolises symbiotic utility and active generation. Seeking to join the master and submit to his/her authority, it can, and does, play a vital role in executing a specific task; it is neither biological nor spiritual, nor even necessarily dependent, it is purely functional, used as such for a specific purpose, such as exorcism or divination, etc. Absolute Fidelity vs Generational Doom will be this pact's final destiny in time. Intrinsically, the Saka is the slow and inevitable decay of the host's soul, which leads to illness and alienation from God/polytheism (Majid, 2005). The Shikigami, however, moves along a perfectly straight line, without the least hesitation, without even an attempt to deviate from it, without an effort, seamless and disobedient, until the task it had taken upon is finished, the pact is safely dissolved, ritually by the onmyōji as Kiejziewicz (2017) says.

The Ontological aspects of social control are examined.

The spirits thus created in this comparative, literary and structuralist scenario are "in-between" spirits, "internalised regulators" that, in their vulnerable status as humans, serve as major points of moral, spiritual and social policing. Through these binarisms, we discover the ontological aspects of spectral controls:

In the approach of the ontological Dimension, Saka, Malaysia and Shikigami, Japan.

- The Saka power comes from extensive religious sin, black magic (ilmun hitam) and the tainted heritage of their bloodline. What made the Shikigami powerful was their ritual purity (hare), their Shinto-Daoist cosmology and their great scholarship.

- The dominant social role — the primary role of the Saka narrative is to actively warn people against committing acts of idolatry and to discontinue the animistic pasts they would have. The story of the Shikigami exercises control over the State and psychological maintenance: it advocates esotericism, intellectual restraint, and the safeguarding of the socio-political hierarchy.

- The Saka is a form of extraction that sucks energy out of people, families, and communities, leaving everyone worse off. The Saka is the model for stripping the spirit and life energy from the people, families, and communities in a manner that is illegal and harmful to all. The model of the generative-functional use of the Shikigami shows that the acquisition and exercise of supernatural power are directly connected to the benefits of the practitioner's strict discipline and good works.
- Human-Host Relationship (Master/Host Relationship): Coercive, binding, and inevitably, the spirit subverts the hierarchy, and the human host becomes owned/possessed by the spirit. The Shikigama is

based solely on top-down, strict command and reverence, with the practitioner's spiritual authority as the only hierarchy.

- The Loss of Control is accompanied by Consequences of the Loss of Control that comprises devastating Divine Punishment in the form of bala (severe misfortune), long death throes, ruination of the family and the ultimate spiritual ruination. When the Shikigami goes out of control, it spontaneously regresses to the old magic and the bound mago (Onmyouji/sorcerer/magician) is instantly split, and the 'too high or too low' mago gets sliced by the low or the high mago as well, as appropriate, and as he realises his doom is immediate and violent (Bathgate, 2004).

DISCUSSION

Recontextualisation, modernity and magic: orality to mass media.

The continuity of the ontology of folklore in the twenty-first century utterly depends on its semiotic adaptability. But in the modern period, these Saka and Shikigami lose their oral-culture tradition and become part of international mass media. Such a large-scale cross-media migration indicates a transformation in basic societal anxieties, from a local ghost that can be invested in a spatial centre to an invisible space that is insecure and unstable in modern life. In agricultural or feudal times, these bound spirits were literally employed to answer for the failure of an agricultural crop, sudden illness or misfortune in political times. In developed Malaysia and Japan, however, it's the physicality of such things that has been hard hit by religious and scientific teachings, and it seems the same happened in Japan.

In this way, the supernatural is completely rethought. In many ways, Magic is as much about deep allegorical expression today as about a literal art, as much about the anxiety of late-stage capitalism, urban alienation, and the dissolution of the traditional family as anything else. In the course of their discussion, Yusof et al. (2025) mention a notion of ‘supernatural moral regulator'—after all, they argue, ‘any folkloric entity one needs to remember needs to be transformable, adaptable to the pressing psychosocial questions of an era. In this way, the enclosed spirit is the dynamic focus of investigation into the modern, here-and-now issue of human agency. Then the decoding spectre can be a starting point for a dialogue about various “spectral anxieties” of society, as they exist in contemporary movies, novels, and popular culture, that portray the Saka and Shikigami.

A golem born into despair, a monster of urban horror: the Saka as a symbol of abjection, trauma and spectral debts. These Saka have been inverted in modern Malaysian films, in literary works of this era, and even in religion. Now it's not as much of a close-to-saccharine, pragmatic tool for rural village defence, but almost a giant symbol of familial abjection and psychological terror, and entrenched in history, a trauma repeated down generations and untouchable. It is clearly shown through a reflection (not just in on-screen movies but in literary stories) that not only has the rural agricultural practitioner ceased to exist, but the figure is also a metaphor for inevitable family trauma. Little by little, the young people, technologies, and artisanal practices were abandoned, leading them to forget traditional cultivation as they migrated from the old village, or ‘kampung', to the metropolises. What made the Saka so ghastly today is that it can never be forgotten. Challenged by the revival of a supernatural debt of which he is no longer a debtor, the meaning of modern urbanised Malay, usually educated, religiously pious, and completely estranged from the animist tradition, is called into question.

This power stems from a loss of autonomy in a neoliberal world that will certainly value individualism and self-determination. It is not so much the fear of the creature itself as the desperate responses of human beings, in the form of magic, to material needs when the economy is unstable that anthropologists classify as 'Occult Economies'. Forced to spread the costs of the women, the heirs, pilgrims, and martyrs needed to be recruited from the original ancestors for their use in wealth and power. This means that there's a ghostly kind of debt. A medical sign in medical anthropology, which is symbolised by deep-seated psychological problems. In the perceptive part of the study, both Tougas et al. (2010) and Ismail et al. (2010) reported that among the patients who presented with both DID and extreme psychosis, the most frequent acquittance of the problem they experienced is that of the "not understanding it or learning it" – this is the language of the supernatural referred to as Saka. Theologically, on the other hand, the modern Saka is a demarcation line to the Islamic orthodoxy. The continued existence of the Saka shows the contradiction of idealised Malay cultural identity and absolute

Islamic monotheism (Tawhid). Both Majid (2005) and Amin et al. (2014) have quoted that the fright of the Saka in the current narration of the narrators is evidence of the complete condemnation of syirik (polytheism). It carries the notion of the human body transformed into an arena of battle between the unacceptable Otherness of Old Malaysia and the cleaned-up orthodoxy of the New.

Toshiro Mifare's Shikigami: Pop-Culture Fidelity - Stylisation and the Illusion of Control

Although the Japanese Shikigami is also portrayed as a shadow in horror stories, the material seen by the Sakas is so bad that Shikigami is seen as a kind of aesthetic product, and that is how it is seen in today's Anime, Manga, and literature. Since the introduction of Onmyōdō, authors such as Baku Yumemakura and the great multimedia products have completely changed the image of the bound spirit. Most often, the Shikigami is envisioned as a super-elegant, deadly summoning of elementals or as a magical weapon utilised by stylish, urban magicians.

It's, rather, an indication of a universal social demand for stability, routine, and control in a world that has become unpredictable and swiftly changing. In a confused Japanese society facing economic doldrums, a feudal social order, and continuing uncertainties and excesses of hyper-modernity, the Shikigami is a nostalgic longing for transparency and simplicity—to know where one stands, how one was treated, and what one can expect next. The modern-day little man, who has heavenly-given intelligence, wants to be like an onmyōji and control his environment. This popularisation is, however, a great sanitisation of the original/historical/peril of the spirit. Shin'ichi (2013) and Pang (2013) say that this historical fact of such a being of the Shikigami is a very dangerous one because the subduing of the kami or the yōkai would be a very shaky tightrope walk.

But today's media is all too willing to overlook the existential horror that may lurk in a broken region, and instead replaces the fear of that region with a mutualisation of the Shikigami. In a similar fashion to the psychological wall, this movement towards becoming a pop culture artefact occurs. The contemporary Japanese media portrayal of a more contemporary illusion of human transcendence over nature or spirit (Kiejziewicz, 2017) may be due to the psychological tricks the hat performs to transform the mechanical, uncontrollable etymology of ‘runfaa, omukata' into controllable and bailable entities that host Pokémon. Thus, Shikigami is infused with romantic notions of total fidelity and total agency, giving a sense of assurance that certainly wasn't readily available to us all in this day and age.

The Bound Spirit as a Societal Mirror: Points of Convergence.

As culturally heterogeneous as they might be, it can be demonstrated by comparing the Saka and the Shikigami, however, that there are some thematic points of common ground, which makes it evident that this is a sociological phenomenon with a universal function: The "bound-spirit.

Both are highly sensitive and can reflect and store the moral "condition" of the human participants in the form of a moral "barometer. As Guptia (2023) defines the complexity of the social relation, and Yusuf et al. (2025) describe the consequences as manifestations of the supernatural familiar, these consequences are manifested as a monitoring body and force for controlling social behaviours. There is rejection of syirik and of the ancestors' greed in the worship of the Saka, and, in the case of the Shikigami, absoluteness in the ceremony and a penalty for hubris. In both "evil" supernatural turns out not to be "evil" but rather a reaction to the moral faults of her/his master, humankind.

Second, they are internalised regulators, both of which consider the domestic/personal sphere as an institutional field of moral control. They pose a supernatural threat to social rules/borders. Then the Saka is the boundary of Islamic orthodoxy and terrorises the people into submission, while the Shikigami monitors the boundary of esoteric discipline and state security.

Finally, both spirits voice the universal fear of all mankind, “Limited Good” and the moral cost of God playing shortcuts. In both worlds, Malay villagers connect to unseen forces to gain more than they are entitled to—whether a bountiful harvest or political success—and both worlds understand that this utilisation of unseen forces comes at a great price, often a devastating one of unseen magnitude.

Helen Frankel is working on a book entitled Points of Divergence: The Metaphysics of Agency and Debt (1994). They do agree that they are moral regulators, but the two (the Saka and the Shikigami) differ on fundamentals such as human agency, the nature of the pact, and the soul's destination. The largest division is that between Involuntary Inheritance and Meritocratic Creation. Here, it is the passive victimhood of the Saka which is an inevitable force of nature. Today, it is indeed their bloodstream that determines whether they are of the Saka race and whether they are the present host race. This is a cultural disease rooted in the unspeakable weight of inheritance and the idea that, for one of us, an act of betrayal is forever set in motion. In contrast, the Shikigami is more a tale about meritocracy, intelligence and agency. To invinculate the spirit (Shin'ichi, 2013), an onmyōji must learn, purify themselves, and actively engage in complex rituals. Seeking to understand Shikigami, one finds that it is not a "stoning curse" of biological origin but rather a technological achievement: spiritual mastery.

Secondly, they divide Parasitic Doom and Utilitarian Fidelity in the middle. Parasitic The Saka not only sucks the blood and essence of life from the master's body into itself but also reduces his/her physical and mental health to a state of madness and even physical and spiritual death. God created it to be a master-slave relationship, one which, over time, devours the master. Shikigami is definitely an authentic pragmatist. It's a symbiotic tool capable of creating value and protection without degrading the master's soul (Pang, 2013).

Lastly, the two differ significantly in their Theological and Cosmological Framing. As it stands today, the Sakas language is in outright conflict with the predominant religious system. Doing so in Malaysia, the Saka would consider themselves to be in a state of religious rebellion and a contaminant of their spirituality—intrinsically harmonious with nature—which would force them to promise hellfire (Majid, 2005). The Shikigami does, however, appear to be quite at home in the historical Japanese Shinto/Daoist worldview. It was not envisaged as a form of rebellion against the divine rules, but rather as a 'national tactic' for coping with them (Bathgate, 2004). The Shikigami is just the law of human reason, which trampled the forces of Nature, and the Saka is the frightening law of the Unlawful past on the frail Present. It is from this sorting out that we see the difference between the Malay cosmology, concerned with the theme of 'submission to God' (in the process of divinity works towards the rejection of the familiar), and the Japanese esoteric tradition, concerned with the theme of 'submission of the universe' (in the process of divinity also works towards the mastery of the familiar).

CONCLUSION

Governance through the Spectral and the Metaphysics of Agency

While both are described as familiar spirits or bound spirits in their respective folk belief systems, a comparative study of the Malay Saka and the Japanese Shikigami clearly shows that they are two morphologically opposite moral agents within their respective cultural and cosmological settings. This study has shown that the Saka is a fearful symbol of inherited spiritual debt and the uncrossable determinism of nature. It is a package of moral transgression, forbidden occult alliances (ilmu hitam), and the "taking" of a surplus of supernatural capital. The Saka story actually reinforces Malay socio-religious values and norms, and serves as a 'Social Levelling Mechanism' that denounces pre-Islamic values and individualistic greed, and promotes orthodox Islamic integrity and communal transparency. On the other hand, the Shikigami represents ritual mastery, intellectual rigour, and active human agency. It functions as an 'Obedience' and a 'Moral Barometer' in the Japanese Shinto-Daoist Cosmology, where the spirit's submission reflects the strength of the moral and spiritual character of the *onmyōji* practitioner; the power of the spirit is conditioned, and its power of obedience is subordinate. The Saka is always the dominant one and turns the human into a parasitic power, whilst the Shikigami stands for the idealisation of human control over the forces of nature and the supernatural.

From the very grim and traumatic Malaysian horror film to the highly stylised and commercialised Japanese pop culture, these spirits remain with us today, making folklore not a static, decaying, pre-modern phenomenon. This study presupposes that supernatural mythology is a very dynamic semiotic system that constantly surges to meet the "spectral anxieties" of the modern world. It is a belief that transcends the notion of "old-fashioned ghost stories" and becomes an elaborate means of Spectral Governance, an internalised regulator of human agency, obligations at home, and social behaviour, that gives us deep insights into the continuing cultural significance of the supernatural in shaping human action in a secularising world.

Glossary of terms for Cultural and Literary Studies: Suggestions for use.

Based on the results of this comparative study, a few suggestions can be offered to scholars in comparative literature, cultural studies, and medical anthropology. First, it is proposed that literary critics and media analysts should not view contemporary horror and fantasy texts solely as entertainment but rather as active sites of socio-religious negotiation. When modern texts use the Saka or the Shikigami, they are, in fact, part of a moral and power discourse that has been ongoing for a millennium. Structuralist approaches should be used to uncover these entities and go beyond mere aesthetic analyses and perceptions to comprehend how these monsters serve to police the borders of their respective societies.

Moreover, as Yusof et al. (2025) showed, it is crucial to continue the research between Southeast Asian and East Asian folklore in the future, especially when dealing with entities such as the Hantu Kopek and Ame-Onna. It is necessary for the academic field to de-centre Eurocentric models and Gothic and the supernatural, paying attention to the fact that the 'bound spirit' in Asian literature operates along different axes of Karma, filial piety, and ritual purity. To sociologists and anthropologists, it is worth noting that these beliefs are not the fault of modern education, but rather it is a culturally specific language for marginalised or traumatised people who are trying to describe the great psychological pain in an ever-changing world.

The following recommendations for future studies were offered:

This study provides an initial comparative framework between the Saka and the Shikigami, but also raises a number of compelling areas for academic research.

- Future studies should quantitatively and qualitatively explore the relationship of these folk beliefs to contemporary psychiatric diagnoses. It is hoped that a focused empirical study that investigates how rural versus urban Malayans in Malaysia express symptoms of intergenerational trauma using the language of the Saka will provide invaluable information that will help to provide culturally responsive psychological care.

- Secondly, the structuralist approach should be extended to other bound entities in the context of the Asian supernatural pantheon. The following comparative research on the role of the familiar in three different cultures - the Malay *Toyol* (child-like familiar used exclusively for financial activities), the Japanese *Inugami* (dog spirit known for its viciousness), and the Chinese *Gu* (poisonous magic) - would prove to be more complete maps for the understanding of how the other cultures conceptualize the economic relations of the familiar and the capital.

- Finally, the effects of the digital age on the governance of the spectrum need to be addressed in future literature. What does the internet's hyper-accessibility of occult knowledge do to the conceptually different process of lineage-based transmission of the Saka? What does it mean when players can now conjure up and operate the ancient fear of the broken pact, and do so digitally? A study of these questions will place comparative folklore studies at the forefront of our understanding of the human monsters' never-ending capacity for reinvention in meeting our modern fears.

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