

# Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan

Representing, Practicing, Performing

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## Lust for Death

### Dark Tourism, Creation and Consumption of Haunted Places in Contemporary Kyoto

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**Abstract** Since the seventies, Japan has witnessed an increasing boom in narratives about ghosts and the supernatural, spread on a national level by specialised books and magazines. This ‘mediascape’ often refers to specific sites, describing them as ‘haunted places’ (*shinrei supotto*), thus informing people about where they may have some supernatural experience. In the case of Kyoto, starting from the summer of 2009, haunted places have also become the destination of a guided tour created by a small local travel agency, that could be framed as one example of the so-called ‘dark tourism’. Drawing upon ethnographic data I collected through fieldwork, in this paper I will focus on this tour, in order to enlighten the processes of construction, commoditization and negotiation of haunted places in contemporary Kyoto. I will build on the concept of ‘Otherness’ of places related to death. Focusing on one of the haunted places visited during the tour – Kazan tunnel – in order to show the processes of construction of Otherness and their negotiations among supply, demand, and the locals, I will argue that Otherness emerges according to associations or networks of human and non-human actors, including material things related to the tunnel, as well as reified events in the past. I will show that ‘distance’ among actors and networks plays a major role in the emergence of possibilities of commodification and consumption of places connected to death. In doing so, I will argue that the idea of distance can also be useful to a re-conceptualization of ‘dark tourism’.

**Summary** 1 Introduction: Whose Dark? – 2 Research Methods. – 3 Touring Ghosts in Japan. – 4 Construction’s Strategies of Otherness. – 5 Kazan Tunnel. – 6 Ghosts in Kazan Tunnel. – 7 Local Kazan Tunnel. – 8 Distancing Actors. – 9 Conclusions.

**Keywords** Dark Tourism. Haunting. Ghosts. Actor Network. Distance. Memory.

## 1 Introduction: Whose Dark?<sup>1</sup>

In the last decades, studies about the phenomenon of the so-called ‘dark tourism’ have witnessed an impressive increase. According to Stone

<sup>1</sup> This article is one of the results of my postdoctoral project on haunted places and tourism in contemporary Kyoto, which I carried out from 2010 to 2012 at Kyoto University. I am deeply grateful to the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science, which provided the funding for this research. My deepest gratitude goes also to Prof Tanaka Masakazu at the

(2011, 320), the results of a simple Google Scholar search using the generic term 'dark tourism', generated approximately 2,000 entries in 2001, whereas in 2011 they were as many as 63,900. I carried out the same search at the time of rewriting the present article in 2016 and I obtained approximately 120,000 entries.

'Dark tourism' is generally defined – largely from a supply perspective – as “the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites” (Foley, Lennon 1996, 198), or as the “act of travel to tourist sites associated with death, suffering or the seemingly macabre” (Stone 2006, 146) and has presently become the most widely used term in scholarly articles that analyse these kinds of phenomenon. Yet, it is only the most recent of a whole series of tentative terms: 'black spots tourism' (Rojek 1993), 'thanatourism' (Seaton 1996), or 'morbid tourism' (Blom 2000) are only some of the examples of academic attempts to provide classifications and analyses of similar, though not completely identical, phenomena.

Because of the broad scope of the definition, scholars interested in dark tourism took the variety of these different phenomena into account, providing tentative classifications. For instance, Stone (2006) considers multiple levels or shades of dark into which a dark tourism product can be categorised from a supply perspective. In his view, dark sites can be categorised as ranging from darkest to lightest, in relation to its design features and management strategies. Therefore, dark sites can range from “dark fun factories”, “those visitor sites, attractions and tours which predominately have an entertainment focus and commercial ethic, and which present real or fictional death and macabre events” (Stone 2006, 152), such as the London Dungeon, to “dark camps of genocide”, namely “those sites and places which have genocide, atrocity and catastrophe as the main thanatological theme” (Stone 2006, 157), such as Auschwitz-Birkenau. Similarly, Sharpley (2009b) classifies dark tourism into four shades: pale tourism, grey tourism demand, grey tourism supply and black tourism. This classification takes into consideration not only supply but also demand, thus suggesting that there might be darker and paler ends of dark tourism consumption, implying that people have different reasons to visit sites that are created as dark from a supply perspective, as well as that they experience things in different ways.

Institute for Research in Humanities in Kyoto University, who acted as a host researcher, as well as to Prof Sugawara Kazuyoshi and all the graduate students in anthropology at Kyoto University, who provided very insightful comments when I firstly presented my research. Equally, I am grateful also to all the scholars who gave me comments when I presented my research at International Conferences. Needless to say, I am profoundly indebted to all the people involved in the travel agency, the guide, and all the participants who collaborated to my research. Last but not least, I would also like to thank Dr. Giorgio Colombo and Dr. Watanabe Fumi, who gave me their precious advice and time throughout all my research, both as academics and friends.

Although research on dark tourism has tended to focus on the expansion, elaboration and systematisation of these categories (see Raine 2013), the very definition of what constitutes 'dark tourism' is still problematic. As several studies argued, the term 'dark tourism' "continues to remain poorly conceptualized" (Jamal, Lelo 2011, 31) and "theoretically fragile" (Sharpley, Stone 2009, 575), while it might have even become a "fashionable and emotive" term that perhaps "oversimplifies a complex, multi-faceted and multi-dimensional phenomenon" (Sharpley 2005, 220). Moreover, the fundamental features of what constitutes 'darkness' in 'dark tourism' have been questioned (Bowman, Pezzullo 2009), indeed some studies (see Biran et al. 2011) even challenge the very existence of dark tourism as distinct to heritage tourism.

Discussing the definition of the term 'dark tourism' goes beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, although there clearly are issues related to it, the massive amount of studies about this topic testifies to the increase of an academic interest in this field, as well as of the touristisation and commodification of places somehow related to death and disaster.

Indeed, the growing fascination with death and suffering in post-capitalistic societies, which has been documented and analysed by existing literature (Cohen 2011; Sharpley, Stone 2009), is not only confined to the experiences that people can have in touristic sites. As Stone and Sharpley (2008, 580) pointed out, more generally "contemporary society increasingly consumes, willingly or unwillingly, both real and commodified death and suffering through audio-visual representations, popular culture and the media". According to Appadurai (1986, 15), "commoditization lies at the intersection of temporal, cultural, and social factors" and Mellor explains the gradual commodification of death in terms of medicalisation of the dying process and privatization of practices connected to death, together with "the sequestration of death from public space into the realm of the personal" (1993, 19).

The Japanese case is not an exception: studies about death rituals highlighted the relationships among funerary, memorialization practices and social change. Consequently, they shed light on a whole set of different and dynamic ways of negotiating the meaning of death that include commodification (Boret 2014; Kawano 2010; Rowe 2003, 2011; Suzuki 2000, 2013) and, to a certain extent, touristification (Hood 2011). Moreover, in recent years, also the term 'dark tourism' was introduced in Japan, both in the context of strictly academic scholarship (see De Antoni 2013) and in terms of tourism management and promotion, particularly related to the disasters that struck North-East Japan (Ide 2012a, 2012b).

In the context of dark tourism research, Seaton (2009) builds on the concepts of privatization and individualisation of death, introducing the idea of 'Otherness' of death. According to him, this is the main feature of dark touristic sites and, as a consequence, "the Other of Death is the defining feature of thanatourism and [...] evoking and conserving its auratic im-

pacts are the central tasks of management” (75). Moreover, he maintains that “Othering is [...] the almost infinite play of identity with images and possibilities of *difference* that generates strong compulsions of negative and positive desire, approach as well as avoidance” (Seaton 2009, 82-3; italic in the original). Seaton’s approach is quite phenomenological, based on the assumption that death “is the only Other that is universal, existing in all cultures as an absolute, not a construct of relative difference” (83). He links the ‘Otherness’ of death to dark touristic sites, claiming that “they may be perceived as sacred spaces” (85).

These ideas might provide a useful starting point for the understanding of dark tourism destinations’ management and their fascination. Nonetheless, on the one hand, recent research agrees on the fact that “the notion of *darkness* is a socially constructed one, rather than an objective fact – there is no ‘essence’ of darkness that imbues the site” (Jamal, Lelo 2011, 40; italic in the original). On the other, as Yamanaka (2012) shows in his considerations about the definition of tourism – particularly in relation to religion and pilgrimage – ‘Otherness’ (*tasei*) is often a defining characteristic of tourist destinations in general. Moreover, it is not a feature of the place or death themselves, but a symbolically represented one. He identifies three main points as main features of tourism:

1) Travelling to an unusual place (*ikyō*): Tourism means more than anything else travelling to an unordinary place, separated from everyday life. [...] In case of travelling to places such as religious sacred destinations, characterized by world views and grammars different from modern science, this aspect of experiencing the unusual becomes particularly important. 2) Consumption behaviour: [...] If tourism is essentially inseparable from its feature of “moving to an extra-ordinary place”, then it can be said that its consumption is deeply related to symbols that represent ‘otherness’ (*tasei*) and ‘difference’ (*isei*). 3) Social activities (*itonami*) around a specific place: Tourism is not only simply travelling (to an extra-ordinary place), it is travelling to a ‘place’ that tourists consider worthy to be visited. In other words, that place – both in a religious and a touristic context – as a place made worthy to be visited by various actors related to it, becomes a locality to which certain ‘meanings’ are attached. In particular, in cases related to religion, there are many special places – such as sacred sites – that are endowed with a peculiar history, culture, atmosphere, or meaning, and that cannot be considered as mere touristic destinations. Furthermore, it should also be considered that there are also cases in which those places are deeply intertwined to the residents’ identity. (Yamanaka 2012, 6-7)<sup>2</sup>

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2 All translations from Japanese are the Author’s, unless otherwise specified.

Yamanaka's reflections are based on his analysis of religious tourism and sacred spaces. Drawing on previous studies about religion, pilgrimages and tourism, he also shows that practices connected to touristic sites represented as 'Other' – although not necessarily as 'sacred' – differ from those carried out in established religions, based on belief and rituality. Yet, they can be contextualized in the context of 'spirituality' (Sharpley 2007, 2009a; Timothy, Olsen 2006), which "allows an analysis of practices, beliefs, and places in a broader sense, as connected to individualization and consumption" (Yamanaka 2010, 4). In this sense, Yamanaka's definition not only blurs the boundaries between 'tourism' and 'pilgrimage', providing a theoretical framework for analysis of practices and processes of construction of places, based on represented and experienced 'Otherness', but it also clarifies, on the one hand, that 'Otherness' is a feature of touristic sites, not only of 'dark' ones. On the other, it makes clear that it is a matter of representation and not a feature of destinations themselves.

Also this approach, though, tends to be focused more on the supply perspective, not taking into account how Otherness is not only consumed, but perceived and negotiated by tourists. Moreover, although it takes local actors such as residents into play, it clarifies neither their roles in the emergence and shaping of Otherness or of the site itself, nor their relationships with tourists, in case there are any.

Therefore, in this article I will present a part of my research about haunted places (*shinrei supotto*)<sup>3</sup> in contemporary Kyoto, focusing on the relationship between death and place, and on their consumption. I will propose some reflections about dark tourism, focusing on the Otherness of haunted places, which led to their commodification and consumption. I will argue that Otherness is not only constructed and represented by suppliers, but it is negotiated among a variety of actors, that include both humans (i.e. suppliers, tourists and residents) and non-humans (such as material features of the place). I will try to shed light on the processes

3 The Japanese '*shinrei supotto*' is a recent expression that literally means 'spiritual spot', or 'psychic spot'. It indicates places haunted by a ghost (*yūrei*), a monster (*yōkai*), or places where paranormal phenomena occur. In Japanese folklore, the difference between monsters and ghosts is sometimes blurred, since both of them are classified as 'changing things' (*bakemono* or *obake*), not to mention the obvious local and historical variations (Nihon Minzokugaku Kyōkai 2004). Yet, generally speaking, ghosts are the spirits of people who died by sudden and/or violent death, who do not access the afterlife and cling to this world because of their continuing desire to live, or because they did not realise they died. For this reason, they tend to stick to human beings, sucking away their life and, thus, causing weakness, illness and, eventually, death. For references about Japanese ghosts and a broad classification of the spirits of the dead see, among others, Iwasaka, Toelken 1994; Raveri [1984] 2006; Smith 1974. Since *shinrei supotto* renowned for apparitions of ghosts outnumber other kind of places – also because in contemporary Japan beliefs in ghosts are much more widespread than the ones in monsters (De Antoni 2015) – in this article, I will focus on beliefs in ghosts and experiences in places haunted by ghosts.

through which these negotiations take place, starting from an “integrated demand-supply perspective” or “experiential approach”, which “captures the experience as an interactive process involving the tourist and the resources, and highlights the symbolic meaning of the site” (Biran et al. 2011, 2), since processes of construction of touristic sites and experiences are contested and negotiated by actors through networks of relationships (Jamal, Kim 2005).

In order to do so, I will firstly introduce the “*Kyoto kaidan ya-basu*” (“Kyoto bus of ghost stories”) – a tour of haunted places in Kyoto that took place from 2009 to 2011 – as an example of dark tourism, showing the strategies of construction of Otherness during the tour itself. In second instance, I will focus on one of the visited sites: Kazan tunnel<sup>4</sup> in order to show the processes of construction of its Otherness in the media, particularly on the Internet. I will argue that haunted places are constructed as associations or networks (Latour 2005) of actors through a series of interactions based on practice. I will show that features of the landscape itself and things that are enrolled in the network during the tour and in haunted places, along with reified past events selectively presented and enrolled by mediators who construct certain places as haunted, have to be taken into account as actors, since they have an agency on tourists’ perceptions. Furthermore, I will also take the locals’ perceptions of the place into account, thus showing that the process of the emergence of Otherness (or ‘darkness’) changes according to practices and interactions, through which actors are associated and through which networks are constructed. Consequently, I will argue that distance (Latour 2005) within and among networks of interactions plays a fundamental role in the construction of the reality of a place as haunted. Finally, I will try to show that distance can also be a very useful analytical tool to rethink the above-mentioned methodological issues in the field of dark tourism research.

In other words, by opening the ‘black box’ (Latour 2005) of the ghost tour and one particular haunted site, I will try to shed light on the processes of construction and consumption in dark tourism, by showing how and by whom (i.e. whose) ‘darkness’ is created, while also providing a less generalised way to understand the alleged ‘lust for death’ that is assumed as a characterising feature of dark tourism in modern societies.

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4 This tunnel, which connects Higashiyama and Yamashina Wards, is also renowned as Kazan-dō, or Higashiyama Tunnel.

## 2 Research Methods

This study is based on ethnographic data I gathered through fieldwork in contemporary Kyoto in 2010 and 2011, during the Kyoto *kaidan ya-basu* tour, a bus tour created in 2009 by a small travel agency based in Kyoto. Differently from other smaller tours of haunted places, the number of people taking part in it was constantly increasing: the travel agency offered a single route in summer 2009 and two different routes in summer 2010; four different routes and a train tour were scheduled in summer 2011, and the agency planned to offer ten different routes along with the train tour in summer 2012. Yet, due to the massive influence that the great earthquake and tsunami that struck North-Eastern Japan on March 11th 2011 and the subsequent incident in Fukushima nuclear power plant had on tourism in Kyoto, about half of the tours in 2011 were cancelled. This was not only a matter of lack of demand. It was also related to resistance by customers of other tours that the agency organised, who would cancel their reservations as soon as the agency started advertising the Kyoto *kaidan ya-basu* tour on its website, as well as by companies – such as the bus company from which the agency would rent the bus – that suddenly rose prices (De Antoni 2013).

Since most of my research partners stated that, along with specialised books and magazines, their main source of information about haunted places was the Internet, in first instance, I carried out an Internet survey of specialised websites, blogs, forums, chat rooms, and interviewed the webmasters of the most relevant websites. Some of them agreed to meet me and others agreed to answer some questions I sent them by email.

In second instance, I carried out participant observation in the tour, investigating the experiences that people had while visiting and interviewing them. In 2010, the ghost tour started on July 17th and was repeated six times up until September 25th. The normal tour was divided into two routes taking place on different days. There were also two special events, on the 20th and the 2st of August, offering a ‘ghost stories battle live’ (*kaidan batoru raibu*), in which two professional ghost storytellers (*kaidanshi*) entertained the customers with ghost stories. The ‘battle’ was then followed by a special tour that visited haunted places not included in the usual routes. In 2011 the tours took place every Saturday from June 25th to September 24th, and two more routes were added to the previous two. Both in 2010 and 2011 the tours started from and arrived at the tour bus terminal in Kyoto Station and lasted approximately three hours, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. People could take part in them by paying a 6,000 Yen fee, in which a special lunch box (*bentō*) was included.

I took part in the tours five times in 2010 and seven times in 2011. I took part as a normal tourist twice in 2010, whereas, after I interviewed the agency’s director, I was allowed to take part in the tours for free and, during the initial speech, the organisers would introduce me to the cus-

tomers as an Italian researcher in cultural anthropology affiliated to Kyoto University. Since the schedule of the tour was really tight and the guide or the organisers were constantly speaking, talking to the participants was not easy. Therefore, every time I would focus on two or three people, particularly those who stated that they felt some ghostly presence, trying to obtain some more detailed information about their experiences. I repeatedly met and interviewed the staff of the travel agency that organised the bus tour, in particular the director of the agency and the guide. Additionally, I carried out surveys in the areas surrounding the haunted places, and, when possible, I interviewed the residents. In this article I will focus exclusively on Kazan Tunnel.

### 3 Touring Ghosts in Japan

Ghost stories or tales of the strange and mysterious (*kaidan*) have been present in Japan since the Heian period, when they could be found in collections of Buddhist stories (*setsuwa*), such as the *Nihon Ryōiki*. Yet, as such, they were known mainly to Buddhist monks and were not a part of the knowledge background among common people. Besides this, they do not appear in historical records until the Edo period (1603-1869), when they reached their peak, as they entered vernacular literature as collections of oral-derived narratives. Along with the spread of tales of the supernatural, also the practice of organising gatherings in which people would tell ghost stories (*kaidankai*) became popular (Reider 2000, 2001, 2002). Ghost stories reached their peak during the middle of the eighteenth century, because of the adoption of print that made popular literature possible. According to Reider,

in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Japan, each Japanese would have reasons and expectations that would vary with their different socio-economic background and experience. Overall, however, the general appeal of *kaidan* appears to be fourfold: 1. fascination with the grotesque, 2. plausible explanations for unexplained common occurrences, 3. attraction to the exotic, and 4. social commentary. (2000, 269)

Yet, along with the progressive modernisation, westernisation, and secularisation of the country, a strong ideological campaign carried out by intellectuals such as Inoue Enryō (1858-1919) depicted beliefs on the supernatural as unscientific, against the progressive 'enlightenment' of the country, and categorised them as untrue 'superstition' (Figal 1999; Foster 2009; Josephson 2006, 2012). Moreover, the introduction of Western medical practice and psychotherapy, contributed to the medicalisation of the majority of those phenomena that previously belonged to the religious

sphere or were categorised as supernatural, such as spirit possession or religious healing (Harding et al. 2015). For instance, Sanyūtei Enchō (1839-1900), an oral storyteller, complained about the fact that “the teachers of the Age of Enlightenment (the Meiji period) thought that the supernatural was the product of the mind, and *kaidan* an extension of that neuropathy” (quoted in Reider 2000, 278).

Nevertheless, ghost stories survived and, along with phenomena such as spirit possession, witnessed a renewed boom in the seventies, as a part of the so-called “boom of the occult” (*okaruto būmu*) (Taniguchi 2006), in which the popularity of Hollywood horror films, such as *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968) and *The Exorcist* (1974) played a major role (De Antoni 2015, Taniguchi 2006). Since then, ghost stories have been spread on a national level by the media – particularly by television programs and the Internet – in constant feedback with a more and more flourishing market of specialised books and magazines (Miki 2007, Namiki 2010, Yamaguchi 2013).

This ‘mediascape’ (Appadurai 1996) often refers to specific places, informing people about where they can have some ghastly experiences. Haunted places (*shinrei supotto*) are often liminal ones, legitimated by some historical link to death. Among the various areas in Japan in which they can be found, Kyoto provides a peculiarly interesting field of investigation, since, on the one hand, narratives on the supernatural are also embedded in a number of both scholarly and non-scholarly studies about local history and folklore (Irie 2007; Kikuchi, Kasha 1999; Komatsu, Naitō 1985; Komatsu 2002). On the other, the ongoing national discourse that depicts Kyoto as the mythological cultural capital of Japan and the representative of ‘true’ Japanese culture, through the use of historical narratives (Macdonald 1995), also plays a major role in the construction of the authenticity of hauntings. Haunted places in general attract people who visit them in order to perform different practices, that range from ‘courage testing’ (*kimodameshi*) to, like in the case I will take into consideration, tourism.

In this context, a small travel agency in Kyoto decided to start the Kyoto *kaidan ya-basu* in 2009. The agency was made of three people, but only two of them used to take part in the tour. Usually I.-san, the Director of the agency – a forty-one-year-old man in 2010, born and raised in Kyoto and former mountain guide – was there. He was accompanied by K.-san, a male in his late twenties, who specialised in Kyoto history of monsters and the supernatural in Kyoto University of Art and Design (Kyōto Zōkei Geijutsu Daigaku). When I.-san could not take part in the tour, K.-san played his role, introducing all the staff and the tour to the participants in the bus. T.-san was the third person and the only female in the agency, but she worked as a receptionist and she used to carry out mainly administrative work, so she never took part in the tour and I never met her as K.-san. Sometimes, however, she would wear a monster (*yōkai*) outfit and silently accompany the tour, thus contributing to create an eerie atmosphere. Yet, the main

character on the bus was the guide, U.-san, a male in his early sixties, from Kyoto Prefecture, always dressed in black. He used to work as artistic director in an advertising company and, after he retired, he decided to become a ghost storyteller. Since then, he has often been invited to radio and television programs about ghosts and ghost stories, and he manages a free web-magazine with around 30,000 readers, a website (*Ōmagatoki*)<sup>5</sup> through which he promotes and sells his books and CDs with ghost stories. U.-san not only entertained the people on the bus during the travel from one place to another with a number of stories about ghosts or supernatural phenomena, but he also provided information about the history of and the ghosts in the places that the tour would visit, thus playing a major role in constructing places as haunted.

In 2010, an average of twenty people attended the tour every time. The bus had twenty-four available seats and three times the bus was completely full. There were also people who took part in the tour two or three times. I met relatively few people from Kyoto, although most of the participants were from Osaka and Shiga Prefectures, or from other cities in the Kansai or Kanto areas. As I mentioned above, in 2011, because of the influence of the great disasters that struck North-East Japan, about half of the tours were cancelled due to lack of demand and resistance from surrounding actors and stakeholders and, when they took place, there was an average of ten participants.

Most of them were people in their late thirties to early fifties, both males and females (with females slightly outnumbering males), but there were also small groups of university students, young teenagers or children with their mothers. Most of the tourists joined the tour in small groups, from two to four people. Yet, every time there were two or three people (mostly males in their forties), who joined the tour on their own.

Most of the tourists, regardless of their age or gender, told me that they decided to take part in the tour because they found it 'unusual' (*mezurashii*). Many people, generally in their forties, stated they chose the tour because they wanted to 'shiver' (*zotto suru*) or because they wanted to see 'weird things' (*henna mono*) or 'ghosts' (*yūrei*). Yet, there were also people who were interested in Kyoto history, as well as people who told me that they often visit haunted places and that had a personal interest in the supernatural. In other words, since most of the participants joined the tour because they wanted to try to engage with ghosts, namely with spirits of people who (allegedly) died in those places, it is clear that the Kyoto *kaidan ya-basu* can be analysed as an example of dark tourism.

Indeed, during the tour people tried to interact with ghosts. Some of them told me their own experiences with the supernatural besides the

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5 URL <http://www.e-oma.com/index.htm> (2017-04-04).

tour, but taking them into account goes beyond the scope of this article. During the tour, in some cases ghosts did interact with people, as I will show below. Needless to say, all these events would contribute to the eerie atmosphere and would be perceived, to various extents, as an evidence of the authenticity of the experience. An experience whose Otherness started being constructed well before tourists were taken to the haunted places, as I will show in the next section.

#### 4 Construction of Strategies of Otherness

Below the uncanny aspects of the tour, there was a series of strategies through which several actors were brought into play. These strategies began well before the start of the actual tour, continuing until the end. For instance, when participants placed their reservations by telephone or email, they were advised to absolutely take a flashlight with them, because the places would be dark and scary. When we entered the bus, all the curtains were shut, in order not to let the afternoon light in, and we were welcomed by screeching noises and eerie music from the speakers, along with a woman's voice telling frightening ghost stories. We found a plastic bag on our seat, containing some pamphlets of the agency, a survey to compile at the end of the tour and a small plastic envelope with some salt. In the initial speech, one of the organisers would explain that

The salt is to be purified and to keep ghosts away, because we are going to visit some fairly scary places. So, absolutely take it with you every time you get off the bus. Sometimes someone happens to start feeling strange, or to have a sudden headache, or to see strange things during the tour. If this happens to you, then throw some of the salt on your body and around you, and everything will be solved. (I.-san, initial speech, 2010-07-31)

We were constantly reminded to take the salt and the torch with us every time the bus stopped nearby a haunted place.

One more actor that contributed to the emergence of Otherness during the tour was the *bentō* (fig. 1) that the travel agency had prepared from a shop in Kyoto, using natural food-colouring to give it a scary aspect. The composition of the *bentō* was created in compliance with the route theme. The organisers explained that "although it may look weird, it is definitely good, so don't worry. We are going to haunted places, but we don't want you to die, so be sure that it is safe" (I.-san, initial speech, 2010-07-31).

Moreover, all the routes started from a Shinto shrine, somehow connected to stories of murderers and demons in the past: Kubizuka Daimyōjin, on the borderline between Kyoto and Kameoka, and Shimogoryō *jinja*, close to Kyoto city centre in 2010. The two new routes added in 2011



Figure 1. An example of *Kaidan bentō* that was part of the tour

started respectively from Fushimi Inari Taisha and a small shrine next to Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei. These starting points were explicitly brought into play as ways to be purified and protected during the tour. We were informed by the guide about the history of the shrine and guided to the main altar, where everyone would pay their offerings, clap their hands and bow.

The participants' general reactions were sometimes amused: most of the people giggled in front of the *bentō*, commenting "How scary!" (*kowai*), or "How eerie!" (*kimochi warui*). Yet, most of them were completely silent during the visits to both the shrines and the haunted places. Their attention was absorbed by the stories that U.-san told both on the bus and on the spots. During the tour, people tried to interact with ghosts. Many of them took photos of the places, evidently looking for something weird and, sometimes, someone claimed they could actually take some sort of ghostly picture. In some cases, ghosts interacted with people: sometimes one person, or a small group of participants, claimed that they heard lamenting voices that nobody else had heard. Depending on the place, sometimes people would suddenly start feeling cold, or start crying, or screaming because something touched their shoulder. In some cases, someone's camera would suddenly stop working properly, just to get back to its normal conditions as we left the haunted place. Needless to say, all these events would contribute to the eerie atmosphere and would be perceived, to various extents, as an evidence of the authenticity of the experience.

Tourists were given the possibility to contribute to the improvement of the strategies of construction of Otherness during the tour, through the survey that they found on their seat. U.-san's ghost stories became more and more gruesome over time, and his attitude in telling them more and more serious, with the repeating of the tour. As I asked him why, he replied that this was a consequence of tourists' comments and suggestions in the surveys. The satisfaction rate became higher and higher: at the beginning, U.-san was criticised for making too many jokes and for telling stories that

were not scary. On the contrary, his stories were praised by most of the tourists who took part in the last two tours.<sup>6</sup>

## 5 Kazan Tunnel

Kazan Tunnel is a narrow tunnel that connects Higashiyama and Yamashina Wards, on the top of Gojō-zaka, on the Eastern side of Kyoto. It was built in 1903, in order to facilitate the route from Eastern Kyoto to Yamashina, on the Shibutani *kaidō*, the previous path. Yet, when in 1967 the broader Gojō bypass was open, Kazan Tunnel was destined to exclusive pedestrian and cycling use (Kyoto-shi 1987).

This tunnel was not only one of the most famous *shinrei supotto* in Kyoto in 2010, but it was also included by most of the websites that listed *shinrei supotto* in the whole Japanese territory. However, it was not included in specialised magazines and books about haunted places in Kyoto, thus showing that its fame spread mainly through the Internet, or by word-of-mouth. In order to understand the relevance of narratives of the tunnel as a haunted place, suffice it to say that a simple Google search showed that the results with the names of the tunnel were 4.9% of the haunted places in the whole Japan, whereas they were 11.4% of the haunted places in Kyoto. Furthermore, information about Kazan Tunnel as a haunted place was entered in the Wikipedia page even before its history, and the tunnel was also the first haunted place in Kyoto to be listed in the Wikipedia page about *shinrei supotto*, on the 13th of October 2005 (Wikipedia 2016a).

## 6 Ghosts in Kazan Tunnel

As I pointed out above, associations that constituted Kazan tunnel as a haunted place were very widespread on the Internet. Most of them constructed the place as haunted because of some historical links to death or to violent events in the past, as well as because of its proximity to cemeteries in the neighbouring temples and to Kyoto central crematory:

Around Kazan Tunnel, in Awataguchi, there is the place that was used for executions during the Edo period. There are also Kyoto central crematory, and several cemeteries of Honyoshi dera, Jōmyōin, and Hokkeji. Since the place where Akechi Mitsuhide's retreat after the battle of Yamazaki was put to an end, is close to Kazan Tunnel, it is said that one

<sup>6</sup> The agency's director let me access only part of the surveys (the final comments on the tour), because of privacy issues.

can see the figure of a *bushi*.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, because in July 1994 a man who was riding a mini-bike really died on an accident in the neighbouring Higashiyama Tunnel on the 1st National Street, it is said that one can see the shape of a beheaded rider, or of a dead male.

The two stories mentioned above about Kazan Tunnel are famous, but it is uncertain whether they are actually true or not. (Wikipedia 2016b)<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, some peculiar actors also played a major role in the construction of the haunting: famous mediums (*reinōryokusha*), who acknowledged the place as haunted. Some of the people who managed websites dedicated to haunted places in Kyoto, or in Japan, claimed to have supernatural powers and to be mediums themselves. Their experiences on the spot were fundamental in the enrolment of new, different actors in the network, and the Internet became the way through which those associations were strengthened also by means of pictures (fig. 2) and spread:<sup>9</sup>

Kazan dō: This is a pedestrian street and, apparently, close to the crematory. The place for executions used to be there. It is said that the spirits of the people dead during a war wander about here. This place was visited by several mediums, such as Gibo Aiko.<sup>10</sup> (Okaruto Jōhōkan 2016)

Kyoto Prefecture, haunted places – Kazan- dō: Former Higashiyama Tunnel, also called Kazan tunnel. [...] It is a famous haunted places visited even by famous mediums such as Gibo Aiko. [...] Since, while passing through Kazan Tunnel, [...] there is the possibility to be possessed, it is bet-

7 Akechi Mitsuhide (1528-1582) was a general under Oda Nobunaga. He betrayed his lord, attacking him as he was resting in Honnōji, in Kyoto, on the 21st of July 1582. Knowing there was no way out for him, Nobunaga committed *seppuku* and Mitsuhide took over his power and influence on the Kyoto area. Thirteen days later, he was defeated during the battle of Yamazaki by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. For references about Akechi Mitsuhide and the battle of Yamazaki, see Kyoto-shi 1987 and Nagai 1999.

8 The part of the Kazan Tunnel Wikipedia page titled “Kazan Tunnel as a Haunted Place” was deleted with an edit on the 7th of February 2011 and, therefore, it is no longer present on the main page.

9 I identified the most influent websites on haunted places in Kyoto by using a specialised software (Google Touchgraph). I contacted the webmasters and asked them for an interview. I met some of them (Ryūsuidō was one of these cases), whereas I interviewed the others via email. People who claimed not to have any psychic power maintained that they were managing the website as a hobby, and that they would update information about haunted places they received by people who lived in the areas. Yet, most of them claimed that, when they could, they would go and try to experience the places, in order to understand whether they were really haunted.

10 In particular Gibo Aiko (1932-2003) was often quoted as an actor. She was a very famous medium, author of several books, and was often invited to television programmes, especially during the eighties.



Figure 2. Picture of the ghost of a child in front of the Yamashina side of Kazan Tunnel (Ryūsuidō 2016)



Figure 3. Tourists visiting Kazan tunnel during the tour

ter not to get close to it carelessly. If you absolutely have to walk through it, it is better that you take some *o-mamori* with you. (Ryūsuidō 2016)

U.-san told me that his main sources of information about ghost stories and haunted places were specialised books, as well as the Internet. Consequently, also the association he constructed in front of Higashiyama Tunnel, while relating various actors to the place as haunted during the tour, always included the crematory, the accident, and the story of Akechi Mitsuhide. Moreover, he also added that the place was haunted because of the neighbouring Shogun-zuka, where Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, the second Shogun of Japan whose spirit is said to be still guarding Kyoto, was buried. I report here a historical narrative about this place, from a book on haunted places that the guide indicated as one of his sources:

Shogun-zuka is where the grave of Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, who wanted the place to be named after the name of his military rank, is said to be. Apparently, the place is one of the seals by which Emperor Kanmu protected the capital from demons, as he moved it to Heian. Sakanoue no Tamuramaro is firstly renowned for having become a Shogun, but there are also several tales of his heroic deeds as a military man. He continues to be famous even today as the man who subjugated the Emishi and expanded the territory [of the Empire]. (Yoshida 2002, 74)

The tunnel was accessible only by walking a couple of minutes through a dark and narrow path, flanking some old Japanese style houses. Moreover, being the last place visited in that tour route, we always arrived there in pitch darkness, and the only light was provided by the illumination inside the tunnel. After U.-san introduced Kazan tunnel to us, we were invited to cross it and to come back. The staff and the guide would not cross it, stating that they did not want to go too much into such places. It was also the only place in which four different times some people refused to enter, stating that it was 'creepy' (*kimiwarui*), 'weird' (*okashii*), and that they were feeling a "too heavy atmosphere" (*kūki ga omosugiru*) or some 'ghastly presence' (*rei wo kanjiru*).

The tunnel was actually dark, even when I visited it during daytime. Moreover, because of the mountain air that flows through it, it was always colder than the surrounding and very humid: I often had the impression that my face was touched by or that I passed through some sort of veil, particularly in the very moment I entered. Furthermore, water percolated through its walls, creating dark shapes that, sometimes, resembled the shape of a human face, or a human body. Visitors were generally attracted by these shapes, which became associated to the network and ghosts straight away, thus contributing to the emergence of the Otherness of the place and of the experience of visiting it. While walking in the tunnel, most of participants uttered comments such as "It's creepy!" (*kowa!*), or "How eerie!" (*kimi waru!*). Three times, while walking through the tunnel, some people claimed they heard some voices. As I asked for more detailed information, they explained what they heard as whispers, or small squealing voices coming from afar. Furthermore, in two different times, two people suddenly moved towards the wall with a small scream, claiming that they were touched by something on their side, or as if something had swiftly brushed past them, at the centre of the tunnel.

## 7 Local Kazan Tunnel

As a remote place as the tunnel is, on its Western side, there are a funeral company, a couple of little offices, a small Buddhist temple called Seikanji, and a bunch of houses. All of them composed the small Seikanji Yamanouchi-chō, populated only by 49 people in 2010 (Kyoto-shi 2016).

Although the area was served by public transport, it was very liminal, at the top of an extremely steep slope and far away from the city centre. Most of the people had moved to other areas and, therefore, the neighbourhood was inhabited mainly by over-sixties, who lived in their family houses.<sup>11</sup> No one among the people I interviewed in the neighbourhood acknowledge the tunnel as a haunted place, often defining it “a simple tunnel” (*tada no tonneru*):

Yes, I heard the rumours about ghosts. They have been circulating for about thirty years. Apparently, the story firstly came out on a magazine, but I don't know which. [...] I've always lived here and I've never seen a ghost, though. You know, the tunnel has always been there and, although some time ago it was even dirtier, darker, eerier, full of rubbish and graffiti... Sometimes motorcycle gangs (*bōsozoku*) gather here... [...] I have never thought it could be haunted. I think it is a simple tunnel. However, actually, there are quite a few people visiting the tunnel at night: I see them. They come especially during the Summer. They are mainly University students, but there are also older people. [...] Sometimes, someone comes here and asks me “do ghosts appear here?” And I can only answer: “I don't know, I've never seen any... [Laughs]. (Woman, aged sixties, Kazan tunnel, 2010-07-10)

I know the stories, but I don't believe them. I used to live here before those rumours came out, and I have never thought that the tunnel could be haunted. (Man, aged sixties, Seikanji, 2010-10-06)

In other words, people living in the area did not consider Higashiyama tunnel as a *shinrei supotto* because, for them, it was an element of their everyday life. This means that the practices of everyday life that they carried out in the tunnel, namely certain kind of interactions such as utilizing it as a passage from one point to the other, created a Kazan tunnel that was a different association to the one created by actors during the tour. In fact, the actors that the woman mentioned above, were completely different to the ones that constituted the haunting: instead of cemeter-

<sup>11</sup> No age census is available for Seikanji Yamanouchi-chō. However, people who lived in the area, approximately estimated that more than 80% of the locals were over-sixties.

ies, crematories and ghosts, the tunnel was associated with dirt, rubbish, graffiti and motorcycle gangs.

Interestingly enough, though, some residents enrolled also some actors from historical narratives and social memory that did overlap with the network of Kazan tunnel as a haunted place:

This used to be a nice area, during the Edo period, you know. People used to come here to have fun. My husband's grandfather owned a tea-house here. Then... Do you know Shōgun-zuka? It's right nearby. There's the grave of an important person, called Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, so the history of this area is very important. Yet, everyone went away because there are no jobs. Then no one comes to live here because it is unpractical, so only people whose families have always lived here remain. And, since we are all old, we have a lot of troubles. (Woman, aged sixties, Kazan Tunnel 2010-10-09)

Actors such as Shōgun-zuka and Sakanoue no Tamuramaro are enrolled in this association as well. Yet, when associated to other actors related to daily practice, their agency completely changed, for they became carriers of some sort of positive value, in a very similar way to the one that several classic studies about Japanese 'communities' and 'neighbourhoods' pointed out (Ben-Ari 1995; Bestor 1989, 1992; Martinez 1990, 2004; Robertson 1991).

Thus, on the one hand, people who were directly linked to the place, associated it with a series of actors closer to their everyday life, thus creating a network that would not result in the haunting. This happened because for them it was a 'simple tunnel', namely an environment in which they carried out certain practices related to their everyday life. On the other hand, associations between Kazan Tunnel and ghosts were constituted by and negotiated among mediators (the media, U-san and the tour organisers), who were not connected to the tunnel through everyday practice and, therefore, had more possibilities to create networks of Otherness. Also visitors played a role in this process, not only with their comments in the survey. As a matter of fact, as I showed above, during their visit, they had already been made part of the association to it, through a series of strategies and progressive associations with specific actors both before and during the tour (the flashlight, the salt, the *bentō*, the shrine), and while reaching Kazan tunnel (the narrow and dark path, old-style Japanese houses). Thus, when tourists actually directly experience the place in practice, they enrolled (or would be enrolled in the network by) further actors that were present in the tunnel (darkness, humidity, stains...), thus strengthening the association of the tunnel as haunted.

After I talked to the residents and became aware of what actors they would identify, I decided to try a small 'experiment' during the visit to Kazan tunnel. I repeated it twice, with two different people, a male in his early forties and

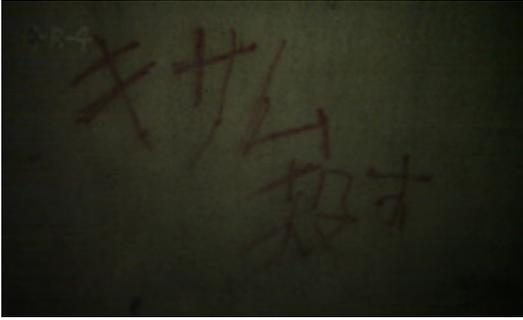


Figure 4. An example of graffiti left by motorcycle gangs, that can be found in Kazan tunnel. This means “Kisamu, I will kill you”

a female in her early fifties. While walking in the tunnel next to the person, I suddenly brought into the association one of the actors pointed out by the residents, by saying “Look at that! That is real horror!” and pointing at one of the graffiti (fig. 4). In both cases, the tourists got slightly upset and accused me to have spoiled the atmosphere, adding that they could not enjoy the place anymore because now it was ‘too real’; and similarly once two people came from the other side of the tunnel, while riding their bicycles and chatting cheerfully. One of the tourists, a woman in her forties, commented with a disappointed tone: “No... Now I know that this is a normal tunnel”, implying that she could not enjoy the experience anymore. People around her agreed.

## 8 Distancing Actors

In this article, I tried to show processes of construction of Otherness, on which basis fascination with and commodification of places connected to death in contemporary Kyoto emerge. On the one hand, I showed that, like Jamal and Lelo (2011) pointed out, the ‘Otherness’ (or ‘darkness’) of haunted places is not a feature of places or death themselves: it is the result of associations made by several actors through practice. On the other, though, I showed that it is not only simply produced by suppliers and mediators: it is negotiated through relationships and interactions among human and non-human actors, whose mutual agencies create a network. The Otherness of haunted places and the fascination with them, thus, emerged according to the kind of networks that actors could create. It was the result of the reciprocal position of the actors in a network of interactions and relationships. Consequently, as a function of positionality, also distance among actors comes into play:

even the most routine, traditional, and silent implements stop being taken for granted when they are approached by users rendered ignorant

and clumsy by *distance* – distance in time as in archaeology, distance in space as in ethnology, distance in skills as in learning. Although these associations might not trace an innovation per se, the same situation of novelty is produced [...] by the irruption into the normal course of action of strange, exotic, archaic, or mysterious implements. (Latour 2005, 80)

In other words, on the one hand, the residents saw the tunnel and all the actors associated to it as literally matters of everyday life. On the other hand, for the people involved in the tour, the Otherness of Kazan tunnel could emerge because of the distance between them and the tunnel, which was mainly bridged by associations constructed by mediators. These two different Kazan tunnels were equally real, and they could emerge because of two completely different – that is, distant – modalities of interactions with the tunnel. Moreover, the two different associations could coexist because of the distance between them, as well as between residents on one side and visitors and mediators on the other.

In this sense, because of distance in space and practice, the Otherness of Kazan tunnel, along with the fascination with the site and its consequent commodification and consumption, could emerge and be negotiated. As the webmasters who managed websites about *shinrei supotto* pointed out, conflicts would arise when the locals could take part in the processes of negotiation of associations with ghosts in their own area.<sup>12</sup> They told me that they received emails from the locals, who threatened to sue them because they had not cancelled the haunted place from their websites. Webmasters also stated that they have similar issues with half of the places they upload in their websites; according to the residents' perceptions, associations of specific places with hauntings may have an influence on the image of the area and, as a consequence, on the price of the land.<sup>13</sup>

From a different perspective, I believe that the concept of 'distance' may be helpful also in order to understand the role of death in the construction and negotiation of dark touristic sites. For instance, in the association that constituted Higashiyama Tunnel as a *shinrei supotto*, a battle that occurred in 1582 was directly linked to the present, and therefore closer to it than any other event that happened up to 2010, with the only exception of the death of the poor rider in 1994. Consequently, those two events became actors in a broader network that constituted the haunted tunnel. In this sense, a shorter distance was constructed and perceived between those two particular deaths and any other event that might have happened

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12 This was made particularly clear by the webmaster of one of the most influential websites on *shinrei supotto* (Okaruto Jōhōkan), in an email I received on 14 December 2010.

13 Real estate agencies employers in Kyoto confirmed this as a general trend, though with differences according to the areas. I am still working (with greatest difficulties) to produce hard data about this aspect.

in that place even, for instance, ten minutes before the arrival of tourists. Whatever happened ten minutes before, consequently, was not associated to the haunting or the place through the practice of tourism and, therefore, it resulted much more distant than the battle in 1582.

One more kind of distance that can be seen, is the one between tourists and the ghosts of the people who (allegedly) died in or around the tunnel: there was no personal relationship among them. As Suzuki (2000) points out:

Community funerals reflected the participants' fear of death, which they believed caused the release of malevolent spirits. [...] The ritual's purpose was to usher the deceased's spirit safely to the other world and to strengthen family ties as well as the relationship between the deceased's family and community members. [...] Deprived of the common ground on which funeral rituals united communities, funeral ceremonies [...] solidify the ties between the bereaved and the members of groups to which they belong, including the colleagues of the deceased. [...] Various elements such as the migration of families into cities, the increase of nuclear families over household of extended kin, and the progress of work specialization have contributed to the transition. (4-5)

In this sense, it is clear that, in contemporary Japan, death and spirits of the dead are managed by the bereaved and the groups to which they belong. Consequently, 'distance' in personal relationships can emerge with the dead who are not related to those groups. Nevertheless, the deaths associated to the place were public: two important historical characters and one young man whose death was brought to the public sphere by the media. Therefore, these deaths did not totally belong exclusively to the private space of the bereaved (Mellor 1993), thus presenting some possibilities to be managed and associated by mediators. Because of this distance, thus, there emerged a space in which the spirits of the dead could be related to other actors, thus allowing Otherness to emerge, along with the possibilities of commodification and consumption of places related to death.

## 9 Conclusions

In this article, I showed that an approach based on the analysis of interrelationships and interactions among human and non-human actors, including material actors related to the place and reified events that constitute social memory, as well as on 'distance' in and among networks, can be useful to the understanding of processes of emergence and negotiation of the Otherness of dark touristic sites. This approach, moreover, could help the comprehension of tourists' fascination with places connected to death, and the consequent possibilities for commodification and consumption. I

also believe that a similar approach can also be challenging and useful for a deeper understanding and a better conceptualisation of the wide range of 'dark tourism' phenomena, as well as of the broad assumption of commodification of and fascination with death in modern societies.

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