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Traversing the Natural, Supernatural, and Paranormal

Yōkai in Postwar Japan

Yōkai is an elusive category in Japanese history, folklore, and popular culture. It consists of mysterious phenomena that can exercise extraordinary agency in their interactions with humans. Attempting to grapple with this amorphous category, Japanese folklore studies has defined *yōkai* as malevolent supernatural beings. However, a survey of these studies reveals that most instances of *yōkai* do not fit this definition. This article discusses the supernaturalization of *yōkai* and their relegation to the “otherworld” as a process that primarily occurred in three stages: developments in *kokugaku* cosmology during the early nineteenth century, the import of the concept of the supernatural at the turn of the twentieth century, and the *yōkai* boom of the late 1960s. In particular, this article emphasizes the importance of the *yōkai* boom that straddled a premodern folk community and a modernized popular society, leading to a conflation of the concepts of the supernatural, the otherworld, and *yōkai*.

KEYWORDS: *yōkai*—supernatural—ontology—*kokugaku*—otherworld—occult

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THE TERM *yōkai* 妖怪 is composed of two Chinese glyphs, both of which mean “suspicious, doubtful” (FOSTER 2009, 13). Although the origin of the term can be found in ancient Chinese texts, it acquired multiple meanings throughout its long history in Japan. Here are just a few examples of *yōkai*: *mononoke* 物の気 (an immaterial being that brings troubling disease), *kappa* 河童 (a mischievous, amphibious humanoid that often has a shell on its back and a disk on its head), *tengu* 天狗 (a superhuman being able to fly in the air, causing mysterious events in the mountains), *batabata* バタバタ (a weird sound, the source of which cannot be detected), and *jibanyan* ジバニヤン (a cat-like spirit that appears in the mixed media franchise *Yōkai watch* (*Yōkai wotchi* 妖怪ウォッチ)). The only points of commonality between these *yōkai* are that they do not exist in the real world as conceived in the natural sciences and that they are unique cultural products of the Japanese imagination.

Translating this term into English is, to say the least, a difficult task. Michael Dylan Foster points out that *yōkai* has been “variously translated as monster, spirit, goblin, ghost, demon, phantom, specter, fantastic being, lower-order deity, or, more amorphously, as any unexplainable experience or numinous occurrence” (FOSTER 2009, 2). Indeed, since the word has such a wide range of meanings even in modern Japanese, there is a consensus that any attempt to define *yōkai* is futile.

Yōkai, as they are popularly imagined, have been featured in medieval picture scrolls, early modern picture books, folklore, and modern media subcultures such as manga, anime, and games. To incorporate the multidisciplinary aspects entailed in the study of *yōkai*, the social-anthropologist and folklorist Komatsu Kazuhiko has proposed a definition that has been widely accepted by scholars from various academic fields. Though his construction is complicated, two main points will suffice for this article. First, *yōkai* is a supernatural force or entity that is malevolent or neutral toward human beings. This is in contrast to benevolent entities, which are categorized as *kami*. Second, *yōkai* and *kami* are at the opposite poles of the same continuum, and so when a given supernatural entity changes its attitude toward humans, its position in the continuum shifts toward the other side: a *kami* becomes a *yōkai* and vice versa (KOMATSU 1979; 1994, 35–40). Although Komatsu’s theory has recently been criticized (for example, HIROTA 2014), it is still widely accepted as fundamental to *yōkai* studies.

Komatsu’s model presumes that *yōkai* were imagined as some form of supernatural being, but *yōkai* had never been popularly conceived as such. So how

did the notion of *yōkai* become linked to the notion of the supernatural? This article offers a brief overview of how this association developed over the course of the early nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries and attempts to unravel the complex history of the supernaturalization of *yōkai*. Of particular interest to my argument is the period of the late 1960s to 1970s just before Komatsu published his definitive 1979 article. It was during this period that Japan witnessed two successive “booms” in *yōkai* and the occult.

The Concept of the Supernatural and its Application to Yōkai

On the surface, framing a definition of *yōkai* within a broader concept of the supernatural may seem like an effective way to come to terms with this elusive category. However, there has long been debate regarding the validity of applying the concept of the supernatural to studies of non-Western contexts, which may have differing understandings of what constitutes the “natural” versus “supernatural” worlds. The most renowned critic of the notion that the supernatural is universally applicable was Émile Durkheim (1858–1917). In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, he pointed out that “to be able to call certain facts supernatural, one must already have an awareness that there is a natural order of things, in other words, that the phenomena of the universe are internally linked according to necessary relationships called laws” (DURKHEIM 1995, 25). Durkheim presupposed that the notion of a natural order is a Western concept, and, thus, so is its counterpart, the supernatural. Therefore, non-Western societies, which in Durkheim’s view lacked an indigenous conception of the natural, would likewise have no notion of the supernatural. Prominent anthropologists, including E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD (1976, 30) and Godfrey LIENHARDT (1961, 28) supported such claims based on their ethnographic research, and there are still proponents of this view in the field of anthropology (KLASS 1995, 25–33; DEIN 2016). By contrast, other influential scholars have universally applied the concept of the supernatural as if it were unproblematic (BENEDICT 1938, 628–631; STARK and FINKE 2000, 89–90). Even scholars who approach religion as a cognitive construction tend to favor the supernatural as a useful category for explaining religious phenomena (for example, BOYER 2001).

The debate regarding what constitutes the “supernatural” is semantic and falls broadly into four categories: the spiritual, the transcendent, the universal, and the extraordinary. As Benson Saler suggests, at least two overlapping applications can be found in the social science literature: that which is “superhuman” (the spiritual) and that which transcends the natural order (the transcendent; SALER 1977, 36). Based on this distinction, it can be argued that, in some cultures, spiritual phenomena exist in the natural world without necessarily transcending it (KLASS 1995, 28–29; PRAET 2014, 59). Yet, the boundaries between these two

notions of the supernatural are often porous in common parlance, as the first definition of “supernatural” in the *OED* demonstrates (“[b]elonging to a realm or system that transcends nature, as that of divine, magical, or ghostly beings”). Even religion scholars such as Pascal Boyer hold that the spiritual conception of the supernatural implies that it is transcendent by making a distinction between intuitive and counterintuitive, insisting that the concept of spirit that is found “more or less the world over” has counterintuitive physical properties because it “can go through solid objects like walls” (BOYER 2001, 73). Being spiritual for Boyer is counterintuitive, counter-natural, and supernatural, and since Boyer considers this cognitive property of human beings to be universal, I call this mixture of the spiritual and the transcendent “the universal.”

Rather than a strict dichotomy of natural versus beyond natural, some scholars like Åke Hultkrantz have criticized those who insisted on the supernatural violation of the natural order as too narrow. Hultkrantz simply proposed “a basic dichotomy between two levels of existence,” that is between ordinary and the extraordinary/supernatural (HULTKRANTZ 1983, 231; below I call this conceptualization the “extraordinary”). Note that this concept of the extraordinary has the cross-cultural value of not requiring a Western notion of nature or the natural order.

So which of these four applications of the supernatural—the spiritual, transcendent, universal, and extraordinary—makes best sense when discussing *yōkai*? To answer this, we must first draw attention to the fact that virtually every construction of the supernatural is intended to contribute to defining the concept of religion.¹ Indeed, Hultkrantz went so far as to claim that “religion cannot be defined without reference to” the supernatural (HULTKRANTZ 1983, 231), and so, what matters for us is whether *yōkai* can be incorporated into the realm of religion or not.

As for a spiritual understanding of the supernatural, some anthropologists introduced the concept of the “numinous” or “numinal” to include all spiritual beings, but as Foster observes, they also concede that “there are ... many strange beings—giants, gnomes, fairies, phoenixes and the like—that fit uneasily into such a continuum because they have qualities we associate with neither gods nor spirits” (LEVY, MAGEO, and HOWARD 1996, 12–13). Of course, *yōkai* can be both material and immaterial. Immaterial beings include *mononoke*, *batabata*, and other “strange beings” (FOSTER 2009, 22), while the materiality of *yōkai* can be seen most clearly in what Īkura Yoshiyuki styles “*yōkai* relics” (*yōkai ibutsu* 妖怪遺物), including numerous mysterious bones, mummies, handprints, and even letters from *yōkai* (ĪKURA 2014).

1. So far, I could find only one exception in the formulation of Eduardo VIVEIROS DE CASTRO (2015, 273–294).

Turning to the extraordinary—that is, the extraordinary supernatural—the question has long been whether the same ontological realm that includes deities and ancestors can also incorporate *yōkai*. Most of the early modern literature does not support this. In the seventeenth century, “strange phenomena that had not been associated with the mystery of the deities could be one of the conditions to be *kaii* 怪異 (the monstrous anomaly),” as a wide variety of literature shows (KIBA 2020, 209–212). In various *setsuyōshū* 節用集 (concise dictionaries) published from the end of the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century, *yōkai* and *bakemono* 化物 (monsters) are categorized as *shōrui* 生類 (living things) along with ordinary animals (KIBA 2020, 156, 161–172). Furthermore, intellectuals such as the Shinto theologian Watarai Nobuyoshi 度会延佳 (1615–1690), the Confucian Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 (1657–1725), and the *kokugakusha* 国学者 Kamo no Mabuchi 賀茂真淵 (1697–1769) also refused to rank *yōkai* alongside deities (HIROTA 2021, 75–76).

Relatively recent field research supports this perspective. In 1990, someone asked a researcher, “Do you know the scientific name for a *kappa*?” To the elderly person, a *kappa* “is an animal, and its reality is as evident as that of dogs or cats” (KAGAWA 2005, 9). Ikura tells of another informant who did not believe in deities but was certain of the mysterious power of the fox (ĪKURA 2015, 6). As we see, just because *yōkai* are extraordinary does not place them at the same level of existence as deities and ancestors.

The Supernaturalization of Yōkai in the Early Nineteenth Century

Modern studies of *yōkai* tend to employ the category of “supernatural” but without much explanation of the historical context. To understand the historical conditions that have enabled this oversight, we must first examine how the concept of *yōkai* has been supernaturalized, that is, assigned to the religious realm (HIROTA 2021, 115–165). There are two crucial moments: the first is the *yōkai*’s move to the “otherworld” by Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843); the second is the introduction of the modern Western concept of the supernatural to Japanese literary criticism at the turn of the century.

In the late Edo period when it was commonly believed that numerous *yōkai* haunted the Japanese archipelago, many in the educated classes began to reject the existence of unexplainable phenomena. The growing importance of the mind (*kokoro* 心) in ethical thought may have contributed to this trend, because acknowledging the existence of the anomalous creates an epistemological problem. Therefore, to the educated it was essential to fix one’s own mind in order not to be deceived by malevolent agents (KIBA 2020, 218–225).

However, as eighteenth-century enlightenment thought eventually brought forth a spiritual revival in mid-nineteenth century Europe, late-Edo period

empiricism paved the way for a nascent Japanese spiritualism that emerged in the Hirata school of *kokugaku*. Atsutane, a paragon of the tradition, sought to establish an ontological realm for beings that had been rejected by several empiricists.

Early modern intellectuals toward the end of the eighteenth century were adamant about making a distinction between monstrous anomalies and revered “authentic” deities. Regarding this dichotomy, Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801) suggested that not only the primordial deities but also “such things as dragons, *kotama* 樹霊 (wood spirits), foxes, and so forth” are kami because they are in some aspect superhuman and extraordinary (MATSUMOTO 1970, 84). His definition of kami was, as he himself recognized, distinct from previous arguments on this subject (KOYASU 2001, 129–181). Two points must be made clear: first, kami include both good and evil; and second, kami are beyond human comprehension. Here, we can discern certain similarities between Norinaga’s deity and Komatsu’s supernatural continuum.

Atsutane elevated Norinaga’s configuration to another level, that is, to the cosmological and the ontological. In his cosmological work, *Tama no mihashira* 靈能真柱, he learned from banned Christian books and Dutch Learning (*rangaku* 蘭学) that even Westerners recognize the “god” that exists beyond “the order of the things” (MURAOKA 1920), and without hesitation, he put the spirits of pestilence, ghosts, and mysterious foxes into the realm of the kami (HIRATA ATSUTANE ZENSHŪ KANKŌKAI 1977, 7: 183–184). He called the supernatural realm *yūmei* 幽冥 (the hidden world): “There was another world within the tangible and visible world in which humans normally lived” (HAROOTUNIAN 1988, 153). While the two worlds share the same spatial extension, the otherworld has ontological primacy because its occupants can see our world and exercise influence on us.

In *Tama no mihashira*, “the roles of beings in the hidden world other than kami are scarcely mentioned” (IWAMATSU 2004, 37), but in *Tamadasuki* 玉だすき, a book on everyday ritual, Atsutane recommends that when you encounter a monster like *heusube* へうすべ (a kind of water goblin) or *mikoshi nyūdō* 見越し入道 (a huge monk who can change his height), you might serve food and ask what the world of *yūmei* looks like (HIRATA ATSUTANE ZENSHŪ KANKŌKAI 1977, 6: 427–429). Both monsters appeared regularly in the monster scrolls that circulated during the eighteenth century (KYŌGOKU and TADA 2000), but they were not considered kami in Edo where Atsutane located his school. Atsutane explicitly placed these monsters in the otherworld alongside kami and ancestors, and thus extraordinary (and to some non-empirical) beings had a path to their own realm. Atsutane was the first to supernaturalize *yōkai* and to link them to the otherworld, in much the same way that he was the first to transform the “ancient Way” (*kodō* 古道) studies of Kamo no Mabuchi and Norinaga into a contemporary religion. His colleagues and successors such as Ōkuni Takamasa 大國隆正

(1793–1871), Mutobe Yoshika 六人部是香 (1798–1864), and Mozume Takayo 物集高世 (1817–1883) by and large followed the incorporation of *yōkai* into the otherworld; and even Honda Chikaatsu 本田親徳 (1822–1889), the progenitor of modern Shinto esotericism,² critically adopted and passed this association on to the so-called new religions (HIROTA 2021, 145–148, 154).

The Supernaturalization of Yōkai in the Early Twentieth Century

The first appearance of the word *chōshizen* 超自然 (a literal translation of the English word “supernatural”) in Japanese texts is in a posthumous literary criticism by Kitamura Tōkoku 北村透谷 (1868–1894) titled “Manfureddo oyobi Fōsuto” マンフレッドおよびフォースト (Manfred and Faust). His use of the concept is not unlike that of contemporary Western authors in that he contrasts the supernatural to “the real” (SHIMAZAKI 1895, 367). In another article, “Takai ni taisuru kannen” 他界に対する観念 (Ideas Concerning the Otherworld), Tōkoku distinguishes the otherworld from “physics,” by which he meant “a real picture of the human world,” or “the real.” Tōkoku enumerated otherworldly beings such as “fairies, angels, sirens, and the sphinx” (KITAMURA 1892, 566–567), so even though his article does not use the word *chōshizen* it is evident that the concept of the otherworld was, for Tōkoku, synonymous with the supernatural and inhabited by monsters.

The literary critic Natsume Kinnosuke 夏目金之介 (1867–1916; also known as Sōseki 漱石) used both *yūmei* and *chōshizen* in his writings. In one of his earliest essays, he postulates the world of *yūmei* in opposition to the world of “causal material change” (*inga busshitsuteki henka* 因果物質的変化) and describes belief in the *yūmei* as “superstition” (*meishin* 迷信; NATSUME 1899, 9). In another piece discussing the effectiveness of the ghost in *Macbeth*, he defined “the supernatural element” as that which “defies the laws of nature and the principles of the material world or is hardly explainable by modern scientific knowledge” (NATSUME 1904, 55). His use of the concepts of *yūmei* and *chōshizen* are interchangeable. More extensive use of the concept can be found in his theoretical work *Bungakuron* (Theory of Fiction), in which ghosts, hags, *henge* 変化 (shapeshifters), *yōkai*, and “mysterious elements” are categorized as the supernatural (NATSUME 1907, 130–131). Since both Tōkoku and Sōseki knew English well, their ideas of the supernatural must have come from modern Western literature.

Though contemporary to Sōseki, Izumi Kyōka 泉鏡花 (1873–1939), a giant of the world of fantastic literature, often professed his personal belief in the supernatural. According to Kyōka, the *kijin riki* 鬼神力 (demonic power), one of two

2. Modern Shinto esotericism designates several religious groups that emphasize spiritual cosmology and mystic rituals such as *chinkon kishin* 鎮魂帰神 (controlled possession; YOSHINAGA 2021, 236–238).

great supernatural powers in the world, manifests itself as *yōkai henge*, such as a three-eyed rascal, a giant monk, or a one-legged umbrella monster (IZUMI 1907, 12). As far as I know, this is the first case that describes Japanese monsters with the word “supernatural.” In another essay, Kyōka states that monsters such as demons (*ma* 魔) or *tengu* are inhabitants of the otherworld (IZUMI 1909, 69–70). In his way of thinking, *yōkai* are cosmologically and ontologically transcendent over our everyday realm.

As we have seen, the supernaturalization of *yōkai* by influential authors at the turn of the century was based on Western scientific notions of an empirical reality. They constructed a transcendent-supernatural-nonscientific realm into which they then located *yōkai* and monsters. While for Sōseki and Tōkoku *yōkai* are illusionary, for Kyōka they are actual, but for all of them *yōkai* are supernatural.

Deities and Yōkai in Japanese Folklore

In the first half of the twentieth century, folklore studies (*minzokugaku* 民俗学) focused on collecting *yōkai* traditions from rural Japan, specifying their characteristics, classifying them, and exploring the continuity with deities (FOSTER 2009, 139–159; 2015, 59–61). Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男 (1875–1962), a founder of the discipline, wrote in his *Yōkai meii* 妖怪名彙 (*Yōkai* Glossary) in 1936 that he wanted to know the relationship between belief and awe (*fui* 怖畏) by collecting the names of *yōkai* from around the country (YANAGITA 1956, 215). One of his most renowned hypotheses of *yōkai* is the “theory of degrading gods” (*reirakuron* 零落論) in which *yōkai* had once been highly revered gods but in the course of history gradually lost worshipers and finally turned into abject creatures who dwell in liminal spaces. He concluded that *yōkai* are, as it were, unofficial deities (YANAGITA 1934, 16). This hypothesis remained widely accepted even into the postwar period.

Then, how did Yanagita conceive of the ontological status of *yōkai* and deities? Surprisingly, his voluminous writings on folk beliefs in Japan lack any explicit statement in Western ontological terms. He never uses the word *chōshizen* in reference to *yōkai* (YANAGITA 1926; 1934; 1956). Needless to say, simply because Yanagita was a scholar of folk beliefs does not mean he necessarily discussed the ontological status of such beings, but considering the interest in *yōkai* that he shared with Kyōka or the fact that his pupil Seki Keigo 関敬吾 (1899–1990) used the concept of the supernatural in his coauthored study of folktales (YANAGITA and SEKI 1934, 8), Yanagita’s relative silence is striking.

However, Yanagita’s early work does hint at an ontological theory of *yōkai*. Before Yanagita himself identified as a folklorist, he had an idiosyncratic interest in *yōkai*. A 1905 interview concerning *yūmei* titled “Yūmei dan” 幽冥談

(“Discourse on *Yūmei*”) reveals how Yanagita accepted the existence of *yūmei* as proposed by Atsutane. Yanagita posited *obake* おばけ (a popular term for *yōkai*) as the main inhabitants of the hidden world, claiming that what we usually take as *obake* are, in fact, accidental communications from beyond (YANAGITA 1905, 248). As Adashino Rin argues, Yanagita “consistently thought of *yōkai* as kami. In fact, although not all anomalous things including many *obake* in fiction are grounded in the existence of kami, most of us to this day are captivated by the framework that he established” (ADASHINO 2018, 233).

However, a shift in the *yōkai* discourse began to take shape in the immediate postwar period. What differentiates this discourse of the first half of the twentieth century from that of the second half is the growing popular attention devoted to *yōkai* that would develop into the “*yōkai* boom” of the 1960s and 1970s. As Komatsu argues, post-Yanagita *yōkai* studies were conceptually sterile (KOMATSU 1994, 20). We can list folklorists who followed Yanagita’s framework by collecting and classifying a number of cases of *yōkai* from rural areas around Japan such as Katsurai Kazuo, Konno Ensuke, and Inokuchi Shōji. However, none of these scholars offered a clear definition of *yōkai*, or their ontological status. The folklorists generally wrote as if the referent of *yōkai* was obvious.

There were a couple of notable exceptions. INOKUCHI Shōji (1975, 17) provided a definition of superstition (*zokushin* 俗信) in which he used the concept of “superhuman power,” implicitly referring to Charlotte Sophia Burne’s *The Handbook of Folklore* (BURNE 1914; Japanese translation 1927). To scholars of superstition like Inokuchi, *yōkai* are a merely a subset of this broader topic, which meant that *yōkai* are also a subcategory of superhuman power. Another exception is the definition by Fujisawa Morihiko who, having compiled an eight-volume illustrated encyclopedia of Japanese folklore, ignored Yanagita and his followers and defined *yōkai* in the encyclopedia as “that which is either (1) supernatural in the philosophical truth in that time, or (2) inexplicable by scientific knowledge in that time” (FUJISAWA 1960, 70). As I discuss below, Fujisawa influenced the *yōkai* boom of the late sixties, but other folklorists largely eschewed the concept of the supernatural and the word *chōshizen* concerning their writings on *yōkai*.

The Yōkai and the Occult Boom in Japan in the Late Sixties and Seventies

From the mid-fifties to the early seventies, Japan experienced a wave of unparalleled economic growth. Of particular importance to this discussion is the popularization of television and weekly magazines because this was when *yōkai* became a popular theme in the growing mass media of the 1960s. The most renowned *yōkai* creation of this period is undoubtedly *Gegege no Kitarō* ゲゲゲの鬼太郎, a series of manga by Mizuki Shigeru 水木しげる (1922–2015), which was published in the weekly *Shōnen magajin* 少年マガジン (Boy’s Magazine)

from 1965, and an animated adaptation broadcast from 1968.³ Because of the sheer amount of writing on *yōkai* and related subjects, the late sixties witnessed unprecedented interest in *yōkai*—the “*yōkai* boom”—and the illustrated piece (*gahō* 画報), a form of a magazine article, became the main vehicle of transmitting *yōkai* knowledge (TAKAHASHI 2010, 471).

Mizuki has widely been thought of as a specialist on *yōkai* despite the fact that he is a manga artist and not a scholar. This is partly because Mizuki presented himself as an authority on folkloric *yōkai*. We do not know whether he was following instructions from the editors of the magazines, but Mizuki contributed illustrations of *yōkai* with brief descriptions of how each *yōkai* was described in folklore or literature to the weekly *Shōnen sandē* 少年サンデー, *Shōnen magajin*, monthly *Shōnen gahō* 少年画報, and others from 1966 to the 2010s. One of these publications was a 1968 collection of nearly a hundred illustrated pages of *yōkai* titled *Nippon yōkai taizen* 日本妖怪大全 (The Complete Book of Japanese *Yōkai*), published in a special issue of *Shōnen magajin*. In a preface, Mizuki states that he had “collected paintings by Toriyama Sekien 鳥山石燕 (1712–1788) and read volumes of folklore to draw my illustrations of *yōkai*” (MIZUKI 1968, 4). In reality, he read Yanagita’s book and visited Fujisawa to obtain information about *yōkai* (MIZUKI 1980, 168).

Besides Mizuki, there were a host of authors who contributed to the boom such as Kitagawa Sachihiko, Saitō Morihiko, Miyazaki Tsutomu, Ōtomo Shōji, and Nakaoka Toshiya. Their articles not only concerned *yōkai* but also a wider range of *kaiki* 怪奇 (anything weird, strange, mysterious, monstrous, horrific, criminal, abnormal, exotic, spiritual, and supernatural).⁴ At times, these writers and Mizuki coauthored articles, and at other times they influenced each other. For instance, after having been fabricated by Saitō Morihiko in 1966, *gashadokuro* がしゃどくろ—a giant skeleton *yōkai* roaming in a field—was incorporated into Mizuki’s collection as an authentic *yōkai* despite there being no historical record of it before the late sixties (MIZUKI 1968, 6–7).

While Mizuki by and large confined *yōkai* to the nostalgic countryside and the past (FOSTER 2009, 169–177), most *kaiki* writers cared little whether or not each *yōkai* had folkloric-historic origins. For example, a small illustrated article titled “Anata no soba ni iru Nippon no *yōkai* tokushū” あなたのそばにいる日本の妖怪特集 (“Japanese *Yōkai* Haunting around You”) introduced twenty-five *yōkai*, warning that “uncanny *yōkai* are inhabiting every corner of Japan! They may be near you” (SAITŌ 1966, 111). In contrast to Mizuki’s distancing of *yōkai*, Saitō and other writers emphasized that even readers abroad might encounter a malicious

3. For a study of *Gegege no Kitarō* and Mizuki in English, see FOSTER (2009, 164–182).

4. MAKUHARI HONGŌ Takeshi (2018, 2–8) lists over two hundred articles on *kaiki* published from 1965 to 1970.

creature on their way home (for example, MIYAZAKI 1966, 10–11). Note that the inclusive term *obake* was used more frequently than either *yūrei* 幽霊 (ghost) or *yōkai* until the sixties (TAKAHASHI 2010). Generally, ghosts manifested themselves to readers more often than *yōkai*, judging from the abundance of ghost *jitsuwa* 実話 (alleged “true stories”), but for most readers both were simply mysterious agents inciting fear. While folklore scholars connected *yōkai* with kami, *kaiki* writers did so with ghosts. Note that Yanagita warned not to confuse *yōkai* with ghosts because ghosts came under the jurisdiction of Buddhist temples and not folk belief (YANAGITA 1956, 15).

One *kaiki* writer of ghost stories was Nakaoka Toshiya, notable for introducing a spiritualist framework to popular publications and television. Modern Western spiritualism had been introduced to Japan as early as the turn of the twentieth century; it then merged with modern Shinto esotericism and flourished from the 1910s to the 1930s (YOSHINAGA 2021). After the end of World War II, some intellectuals were interested in how spiritualism could prove the existence of the afterlife (KONNO 1957, 64–72; MIYAGI 1961, 155–208), but the discussion was still largely confined to spiritualist groups and their writings. Toward the end of the sixties, however, authors, including Nakaoka, began to adopt spiritualist terms to interpret *jitsuwa* in their magazine articles (OKAMOTO and TSUJIDŌ 2017, 43–76). From the early sixties, girls’ magazines in particular regularly contained modern ghost stories along with other *kaiki* pieces, and so a kind of interpretive framework was welcomed. For example, an article by Nakaoka in the weekly *Shōjo furendo* 少女フレンド (Girl’s Friend) introduced such categories as the earthbound (*jibakurei* 地縛霊) and the floating spirit (*fuyūrei* 浮遊霊) to explain several horrific stories posted by young readers (NAKAOKA 1968). That these concepts are still widely used in common parlance (for instance, “jiba” in *jibanyan* comes from *jibakurei*) demonstrates Nakaoka’s persistent influence on our understanding of spiritual affairs, as he introduced local traditions of *obake* to nationwide publications (OKAMOTO and TSUJIDŌ 2017, 60–62). For example, in “Zenkoku obake meguri” (“Traveling Haunted Places Around the Country”) coauthored with Kitagawa Sachihiko, he shared his own encounter with a famous *yōkai*-ghost, Zashiki Warashi 座敷わらし, as one of the real ghost stories (*jitsuwa*) alongside other chilling contemporary legends (NAKAOKA and KITAGAWA 1969, 145).

Thus, in *kaiki* articles, other than those by Mizuki, *yōkai* shifted from the distant past and the remote countryside to the neighborhood of consumers of mass media. This move slightly preceded what Ōmichi Haruka argues was a shift from the “*hikyō* 秘境 (remote uncivilized area) boom” of the sixties to the “occult boom” of the seventies, which she attributes to an increase in personal mobility (ŌMICHI 2016; 2018, 64). She argues that since people felt that there were no more unknown places in the world, where then is one to situate *obake*? As discussed above, there is a very convenient realm within which to place them: the

supernatural *yūmei* otherworld, which overlaps our own natural, rational, and scientific world. *Obake* occasionally transgress this porous boundary between the natural and the supernatural to threaten our everyday life, as Yanagita claimed in his early work.

In fact, there were modern ontological frameworks before World War II that made room for *yōkai* in spiritualist movements. For example, Asano Wasaburō 浅野和一郎 (1874–1937) took the notion of a “nature spirit” (*shizenrei* 自然霊) to indicate deified dragons (*ryūjin* 竜神), Western fairies, and *yōmi* 妖魅, which was a category of “nonhuman spectral beings” (*jinrui ni arazaru yūteki sonzaibutsu* 人類にあらざる幽的存在物), as well as demons (*mamono* 魔物) including *tengu*, witch foxes (*ninko* 人狐), and witch dogs (*inugami* 犬神). He called their ontological abode the “super-material ethereal world” (*chōbusshitsuteki ēteru kai* 超物質的エーテル界), and he even claimed to have had a dream discussion about *yōmi* with the spirit of Atsutane (ASANO 1931; 1934).

Moreover, the late sixties saw frequent use of concepts of the otherworld in *yōkai* discourse in popular publications. For example, Abe Kazue, in his long-selling book on *yōkai*, pointed out in the preface that ghosts, *yōkai*, and *henge* “bring misfortune to the living with their power which is beyond the physical laws of our three-dimensional world” (ABE 1968, 4). In a short piece in *Shōnen magajin*, Ōtomo Shōji states that *yōkai* “come from another world” (*betsu no sekai* 別の世界; ŌTOMO 1967), which makes it clear that these concepts denoting a world beyond our own fit into the category that I have labeled the “universal supernatural.”

The occult boom of the seventies grew out of this previous period. As Kaneko Takeshi suggests, “the word ‘okaruto’ オカルト [occult] was basically understood as a generic term of mysterious supernatural phenomena and agency including magic, telepathy, clairvoyance, alchemy, astrology, spiritual power, afterlife, and even UFOs and lost super-civilizations like Atlantis and the Mu continent” (KANEKO 2006, 18). Here, we do not find the words *yōkai*, *yūrei*, or *obake*, but *yōkai* nonetheless continued to haunt popular publications, as one observes in a series of articles titled “Roman saiensu” ロマン・サイエンス (“Roman Science”) published in *Shōnen magajin* in 1974. The author asserts that “our age is full of elusive and mysterious things hardly explicable by science. This series challenges the world of the unknown and explores what these things actually are.” Topics included UFOs, ESP, exorcism, and *kappa*, as well as *tengu* and vampires (ICHIYANAGI 2020, 169). However, a majority of those who were interested in the occult were mainly concerned with the secrets behind the photography of ghosts, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, and the afterlife.

It is striking that a book on *yōkai* published amid the occult boom used the word *chōshizen* in only limited fashion to describe *yōkai*. The book, *Nippon yōkai zukan* (Illustrated Book of Japanese *Yōkai*) by Satō Arifumi (SATŌ 1972), which

has been in print for nearly half a century and is considered a classic of the genre, divided *yōkai* into four categories: *yūrei*, *yōkai*, *henge*, and *chōshizen*. The book places “mysterious creatures” into *yōkai*, shapeshifters into *henge*, and mysterious phenomena such as the *shiranui* 不知火 (phosphorescent light mistaken as a ghostly fire), and foxfire and mirages into *chōshizen*.

In this book, *yōkai* (in the narrow sense), shapeshifters, and ghosts are not merely natural. *Chōshizen* was used to contrast with empirically confirmable phenomena in the natural sciences. For example, an introduction to a series of articles titled “*Chōshizen no nazo*” 超自然のなぞ (“Mysteries of the Supernatural”), published in *Shōnen magajin*, claims that even ongoing human endeavors (that is, developments in the natural sciences such as space travel) cannot unlock the mysteries of nature (MINAMIYAMA 1969, 132). The supernatural, in this case, is that which is beyond our current scientific perspective, which, in more recent parlance, would likely be called *chōjō* 超常 (paranormal). In contrast, *yōkai* exist in a liminal position. On the one hand, folklore studies deal with *yōkai* without mentioning the natural sciences. On the other hand, *kaiki* writers present them as *obake* and a potential threat to modern readers, so that they could posit *yōkai* in relation to current scientific knowledge. In short, folklore studies regard *yōkai* as something related to a nostalgic folk belief, but *kaiki* writers relegated these entities to the paranormal.

The same binary construction applies to the supernatural in Satō’s book. He divides the supernatural into the explicable and the inexplicable (SATŌ 1972, 32). The explicable includes the *shiranui* and mirages, once regarded as mysterious but later revealed by science to be merely optical phenomena. The inexplicable includes comparable but enigmatic fires. Satō’s categorization scheme was premised on a scientific explanation of such phenomena, on which he, in contrast, constructed the category of the supernatural. However, this approach departed from how folklore studies had previously applied the term *chōshizen*, which never contrasted it with a scientific notion of the natural world.

Concluding Remarks: The Dual Aspects of Yōkai

In this article, I have presented two different strategies for constructing a discourse on *yōkai*: the boom that supernaturalized *yōkai* and linked them to the realm of ghostly paranormal activities but not to kami; and folklore studies, which did not explicitly conceptualize *yōkai* ontologically but still linked them to kami. It may be that folklorists ignored the tales of *yōkai* as *kaiki* because modern popular culture was of little interest to these scholars. Foster observes that popular culture is characterized by “the orientation toward commodification and monetary exchange value,” while folklore tilts “toward the informal, unofficial, noncommercial, [and] noninstitutional” (FOSTER 2015, 7; emphasis omitted).

The same may be said of Japanese folklore studies generally. However, as is always the case with such binary distinctions, there is an ambiguous or hybrid area that Foster calls “folkloresque:” a concept suggesting “popular culture’s own (emic) perception and performance of folklore” (FOSTER 2015, 5). Mizuki and his *yōkai* would be prime examples.

The dual aspects of *yōkai* reflect the bifurcated identity of Japanese society during the later period of high economic growth. It is largely true for the Mizuki version of *yōkai* that, as Foster states, *yōkai* are “icons of a shared rural history ... [and] represent characters from a presumed national memory” (FOSTER 2009, 207). However, for other *kaiki* writers, *yōkai* represent the identity of those Japanese who, armed with the natural sciences and rushing headlong into economic growth, are at the same time anxious about the unintended effects of material development such as environmental pollution. These ambivalent representations of *yōkai* reflect a Japanese identity that straddles the rural folkloric past, where *yōkai* are natural, and the urban scientific present, where *yōkai* are paranormal. Notions of the otherworld would later be integrated into the new concept *ikai* 異界 (other world), again constructed by Komatsu in the eighties (IKEHARA 2011); *yōkai* have emerged as the main inhabitants of this *ikai* world. Since that time, the supernatural and the otherworld have been explicitly and inextricably linked in both current *yōkai* studies and folk/popular parlance.

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