

Felicia Katz-Harris, ed., *Yōkai: Ghosts, Demons & Monsters of Japan*

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This book is an exhibition catalog, and the editor, Felicia Katz-Harris, is senior curator and the curator of Asian folk art at the Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA). The onsite and online exhibition hosted by the museum is entitled “Yokai: Ghosts & Demons of Japan” (<https://yokai.moifa.org/#/>). The exhibition began on December 8, 2019, and runs through to October 30, 2022. The book contains ten chapters written by well-known authors, interspersed with many photos of the exhibits.

In chapter 1, Katz-Harris provides a general guideline for readers explaining the concept of *yōkai* culture. Komatsu Kazuhiko, one of the most famous representatives of modern *yōkai* research, presents a definition of *yōkai* in chapter 2. Readers may be familiar with his approach, which takes a critical view of the early studies of *yōkai* by Yanagita Kunio (more on this in the following paragraphs). In chapter 3, Noriko Tsunoda Reider analyzes the representations of *oni* in the history of Japanese literature. Shimazaki Satoko discusses *yūrei* in Edo *kabuki* plays in chapter 4. Chapter 5, by Michael Dylan Foster, which is based on his inspiring fieldwork in Kagoshima and Akita, focusses on the emotional aspects of today’s masked rituals that these *yōkai* are supposed to evoke. Although Toshidon, Namahage, and Paantu are described as visiting deities in this chapter, in the beautiful book of photographs by Charles Fréger, *Yōkainoshima: Island of Monsters* (2016), they appear as characters in folk costumes. Viewing these gives us a chance to consider “the effect of fear” (Foster’s term) from *yōkai*, because we can discover a different image of folk fashion outside a ritual context. Chapters 6 through 8 by Adam Kabat, Kagawa Masanobu, and Zack Davisson, respectively, discuss the cultural representations of *yōkai* in each period; it is fascinating to watch their transition through the history of various media, or comics, toys, and so on. Finally, chapter 9 is by Yumoto Kōichi, the founder of Yumoto Kōichi Yōkai Museum in Hiroshima, and chapter 10 was written by Kōno Junya, a *yōkai* artist and promoter of *yōkai* tourism. Both describe their unique experiences as creators of present-day *yōkai* culture. On the subject of modern *yōkai* artists, I believe it is essential to consider the painter, Tomiyuki Kaneko, whose incredible works are almost too ghastly to avert our eyes from. These artists provide us with more varied dimensions of *yōkai* representation.

The pioneering work on *yōkai* research is *Yōkai dangi* (Discourse on *yōkai*) by Yanagita Kunio (2013), the founder of Japanese folklore studies. The earliest essay in this book, written in 1909, focused on the *tengu* legends through his perspective searching for “mountain people.” That year Yanagita visited northeastern Japan and began editing the monumental folklore study of *tengu* and *kappa* stories, *Tōno monogatari* (The legends of Tōno, 2004). Although the general term “*yōkai*” frequently describes ghosts, demons, and monsters, modern *yōkai* research has more or less maintained a connection to Yanagita’s

work. If we wish to academically approach *yōkai* from any perspective, I think it is necessary to recall Yanagita's initial attempts in this genre.

The question remains: are *yūrei* ghosts, and *yōkai* monsters? If we consider this from the perspective of appearance, do the former seem to be deceased persons and the latter animals? According to Komatsu's well-known definition, "Yūrei are ghosts, which I view as a subcategory of *yōkai*" (65), and "yūrei are part of the *yōkai* world, but they take the unique form of human spirits and are treated differently as the subject of many ghost stories" (65). If so, we must pay attention to whether *yūrei* could be considered representatives of *yōkai*, such as *tengu* and *kappa* or *kitsune* and *tanuki*, even if the cover of this book about *yōkai* features a *yūrei* painting. I think we should explore the proposition again that *yūrei* are *yōkai* in accordance with each case study and historical context. In fact, Shimazaki (chapter 4) presents the sole case of *yūrei* research in this volume, indicating that *yūrei* achieved unique status in Edo *kabuki* plays. She comments on Yanagita's description and Komatsu's definition as follows:

The *yūrei*, in this sense, was a stable category in certain contexts of early modern literary and performative expression. Still, it is extremely difficult to discuss the ghost historically because it could assume a variety of physical forms ranging from shadowy presences to demons and even snakes. (109)

Shimazaki's chapter on *yūrei* includes a section entitled "The Female Body," while Reider's includes "Oni's Gender." Although *yōkai* research in Japan has tackled the problems regarding the sexuality of *yūrei* only to a limited extent, these issues of cultural representation are directly associated with the definition and categorization of *yōkai*. Furthermore, in this context, we should take into consideration the "modernity" of *yōkai* research, and Gerald Figal's *Civilization and Monsters* (1999) is the best entry point into this study for English and Japanese scholars. Figal's book is very important not only for *yōkai* research, but also for international Japanology and the comparative study of religions. Both Yanagita Kunio and Inoue Enryō, the founder of *yōkaigaku* (study of *yōkai*), were researchers at the center of modernization in Japan. Considering the enlightenment movement that was driven by the government and scholars' attempts to eradicate beliefs in *yōkai* and *yūrei*, there is no doubt that early *yōkai* research focused on the historical development of these beliefs.

I would like to mention two noteworthy parts of the book: one is an interview with Amari Yōichirō, a puppet artist in Tokushima (98–101), and the other is a discussion of the Ushioni Matsuri, the cow-demon festival in Ehime (124–27). As they include important information about living *yōkai* practices, readers can gain alternative perspectives beyond the main chapters of the book. Through this book, we do come into contact with various aspects of *yōkai* culture in a material sense, but it is just an entrance to the *yōkai* world.

In addition to the publication of this book, there is a corresponding museum exhibition that will be open through to October 30, 2022. Furthermore, the curators of the exhibit created an excellent website as an online exhibition for all the people interested in the *yōkai* culture. Needless to say, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, this attempt seems to be one of the most successful cases to establish an internet museum for both real and virtual visitors. By visiting the website, we can learn more about the actual practices of *yōkai* culture. For example, in the item "DIVE DEEPER!" we can find two additional academic essays about Pokémon and listen to Japanese ghost storytelling on YouTube,

although these contents are not included in the book. Of course, there are a vast number of photos on the website that provide complementary information and help us learn more about *yōkai* culture. Moreover, the virtual experience of this exhibition evokes a powerful sense of the living culture of Japanese religion.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the curators of the exhibition have also prepared a special exhibit on *Amabie*, which is a type of *yōkai* that has the power to prevent epidemics. Japan has always developed material culture and folktales that involve prayers to overcome crises through belief in the creatures who can withstand natural disasters. While we may not necessarily subscribe to the legend of *Amabie*, we can become aware of the religious practices that surround it. It is worth exploring *Amabie*'s *raison d'être*, even if it will not stop the ongoing pandemic. Through including this online exhibit, the website shows us a prime example of living *yōkai* culture and how it can be applied to the current situation we face.

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Saitō Takashi
Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture