An Introduction to Yôkai Culture: Monsters, Ghosts, and Outsiders in Japanese History. Komatsu Kazuhiko. Translated by Hiroko Yoda and Matt Alt. Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture (JPIC), 2017. 196 pages. ISBN 978-4-916055-80-4.

In 2009, the journalist Régis Arnaud (2009, 24) once observed, "American culture mostly influences the arts around the globe through its popular culture. France mostly influences the world through its traditional arts; Japan influences the world through both, and I know no other country which achieved this." Although Arnaud appreciates the global appeal of Japanese culture, he was also critical of a then growing discussion on the widening impact of Japan's 'soft power.' To Arnaud, the country's cultural influence does not translate to hard power—manifested by military, diplomatic, or even spiritual power. More than a decade after, Arnaud's assessment still rings true. Japan, with its much-lauded *manga* and *anime*, is still a pop culture powerhouse. Yet, to dismiss soft power as not real power, as Arnaud did, remains debatable. Japan's popular culture has allowed it to have an immensely positive impact, evident from the growing number of consumers who look at the country favorably.

Interestingly, a good number of consumers of Japan's popular culture come from former colonies in Southeast Asia. With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe dressed up as Super Mario in the 2016 Olympics to herald the planned 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the world came face to face with the articulation of Japan's soft power diplomacy, legitimized by its top politician, in the 21st century. Here, Abe and his cabinet show how Japanese soft power deploys the 'Cool Japan' brand to mesmerize the world. It also reassures the nation of Japan's economic revitalization and new manifestation of nationalism.

Komatsu Kazuhiko's *yôkai* scholarship is pivotal to understanding the depth of Japan's soft power in the 21st century. Even without knowing what yôkai are, consumers of Japanese culture would have encountered

them at some point. Komatsu argues nevertheless that it is necessary to be familiar with yôkai if one wants to learn about Japan, since it is "a keyword for Japanese culture" (6).

The term "yôkai," as argued by Komatsu and other early scholars such as Inoue Enryô, Yanagita Kunio, and Miyata Noboru, is ambiguous. Over the centuries, it has become a catchphrase for any mysterious or eerie creature, presence, or phenomena. Komatsu's ten-chapter book provides a systematic way of articulating the world of yôkai. He divides the discussion of the term into three domains–incidents or phenomena; supernatural entities or persons; and depictions (12). Chapters three to nine feature lively discussions on, and various beautiful illustrations of, the yôkai–the *tsukimono*, "a vaguely defined spiritual presence that causes some abnormal or undesirable situation" (42); *kappa*, "creatures believed to live in and around bodies of water" (78); *oni*, "something inhumanly strong, fearless, ruthless, and terrifying" (98); *tengu*, all-male entities that "dwell deep in the mountains [that] possess supernatural powers..." (117); *yamauba* or *yamanba*, "mountain hag" (127); *yûrei*, "ghost" (134); *ijin*, "outsiders" (150); and *ikenie*, "sacrifices" (154). These, however, are merely working definitions.

Komatsu provides the necessary context to help readers understand that much of the content in Japanese popular culture, now prized for their entertainment value, derive from the country's remote past: "behind the yôkai characters in popular animated films...as well as televised animation...lies a traditional yôkai culture nurtured over many centuries within Japan itself" (12). It stretches as far back as the Classical period (eighth century), and is strongly evident during the Muromachi period (1336 C.E.–1573 C.E.) and the Edo period (1603 C.E.–1868 C.E.), which is deemed as yôkai's golden age. The final chapter seeks to explain how its popularity and the recent revival of yôkai studies offers fresh horizons and poses new questions. Yôkai is being reimagined in Japan and rearticulated by the manga artist, Mizuki Shigeru, and the novelist, Kyôgoku Natsuhiko, among many others. There is also a reconceptualization of the boundaries of Japanese folklore studies. As mentioned, anything attributed as yôkai

meant an "eerie phenomena, of which yôkai themselves are just one example" (175). With yôkai sucked into the mainstream, what remains of their mystery? This is part of the challenge of this field of study.

The book casts a wide net with its intended audience. It originally had local readers in mind, but the English translation enables enthusiasts, consumers of Japanese culture, and academics to take part in the proliferation of yôkai studies.

The book is a charming addition to any library. Beautifully designed, the hardbound edition, with its predominantly black cover, provides an effective background to select illustrations of yôkai taken from picture scrolls and illustrated books of yore. Komatsu is an engaging guide, whose scholarly exploration of its subject, along with witty explanations and sample narratives from folklore, never bores. Overall, the book leaves the reader convinced that Japan and its brand of cultural influence will continue to excite the world for decades to come.

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End Notes

[1] In 2008, the "overseas sales of anime" amounted to ¥ 13.3 billion (Nagata 2010).
[2] In the 1970s, "university students in several countries launched anti-Japanese demonstrations" (Chachavalpongpun 2018).
[3] Taku Tamaki (2017) states: "[w]ith patriotic education at home and cultural outreach abroad, Abe is turning the old myth of Japanese uniqueness into a different kind of nationalism."

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