Ioannis Gaitanidis and Justin Stein

Japanese Religions and the Global Occult: An Introduction and Literature Review

As with the relationships between *shūkyō* and "religion" and *supirichuariti* and "spirituality," the Japanese term *okaruto* is embedded in a global network of practice and discourse around "occultism," but is also informed by the politics of local practitioners and the media, and by scholarly narratives that try to make sense of them. In this introduction, we present: 1) an overview of the varied relationships between Japanese religions and "the global occult," 2) an analysis of the Japanese-language scholarship on occult phenomena from sociological, cultural studies, and intellectual historical perspectives, and 3) a brief chronology of modern Japanese occultism. We conclude with some theoretical considerations about how to conceive of the Japanese occult vis-à-vis a transnational community of practice, including the roles of media, translation, and affect.

Keywords: new religious movements – occultism – *okaruto* – *reijutsu* – spiritual healing – spiritualism

If one was to ask a passerby in Tokyo's streets what they think of when they hear the word *okaruto* (a Japanization of the English "occult"), chances are that they will bring up (possibly with a nostalgic smile) a scary urban legend or the performance of someone bending spoons with their mind that they saw on television or read about in a magazine. As in the rest of the world, the occult in modern Japan is inextricable from popular media narratives (Partridge 2012), even though, as we will discuss in this introductory paper, the discursive and epistemic fields associated with this concept in Japan have, in many ways, emerged out of particular circumstances, albeit still connected to global flows of ideas and practices.

A case-in-point is how discussions about the *okaruto* have so closely linked the popularization of that term in the early 1970s to several socio-historical factors of that time (see Ichiyanagi 2006 for the most authoritative book on this period) that it has become near-impossible to think of the phenomenon in Japan without considering contemporaneous worldly conditions. To illustrate this, we will discuss below three of the most-mentioned reasons for which the *okaruto* attracted the Japanese popular imagination in 1973 and proceed to link those to three general trends in scholarly literature about occultism and related currents published in Japan to date. We will then offer a short history of occultism in Japan and end this introductory paper with what

we think are this special issue's contributions to the fields of Japanese religions, Western esotericism, and the broader nexus of religion and global modernity. Before this, however, as the focus of this special issue is to examine interactions between Japanese religions and the global occult, it may be prudent to briefly address how we conceive of these organizing terms of "Japanese religions" and "the global occult."

Religion, Japan, and Japaneseness

In the last decade, a number of books have examined the contested, ever-incomplete process of constructing the category of "religion" (*shūkyō* 宗教) in Japan and the consequences that naming certain organizations "religions" and others "not-religion" have for those organizations, the Japanese state, its foreign relations, and the Japanese public's perceptions of what and what is not "religious" (Josephson 2012, Hoshino 2012, Isomae 2014, Maxey 2014, Thomas 2019). There is no need to recapitulate all of their arguments here (especially as many of our readers are already familiar with them), but we simply wanted to gesture to the growing scholarly consensus that the question of what constitutes "religion" is a constructed, political category—not a *sui generis* entity—and that the uses of "religion" as an analytical category does not always align with its emic uses.

For example, the articles in this issue by Okumura Daisuke and John Person both look at healing practices in interwar Japan in which practitioners purportedly radiated vital force from their hands; although their promoters described these forces in relation to spiritualism in the former case and a kind of ancient Shinto—literally "the national religion" (*kokumin shūkyō* 国民宗教)—in the latter, they did not consider them as "religions." In the parlance of their day (examined in more detail below), these practices were likely understood as "extraordinary techniques" (*reijutsu* 霊術) or "mind cures" (*seishin ryōhō* 精神療法),[1] although their detractors may have considered them "quasi-religions" (*ruiji shūkyō* 類似宗教), a term used by the popular press to deride those movements as inauthentic or superstitious and also used by the state to criminalize them (Endō 2006). Regardless, as these movements conducted ritualized practices explained by reference to mysterious forces associated with spirits and *kami*, we believe they deserve discussion within the pages of *Japanese Religions* regardless of whether or not they are understood as "religions."

1. This translation is meant to evoke American metaphysical traditions, where "mind" refers not only to a personal consciousness but also a transpersonal macrocosm that can heal via influxes of "spirit" or "energy" (Albanese 2007, 13-16).

Turning our attention to the other term in this journal's title, what makes religions (however one defines them) "Japanese"? They cannot be defined in purely geographical or ethnic terms, as "Japanese religions" have been understood as going abroad, where they are practiced by people who are of Japanese descent and by people who are not (Mullins and Young 1991, Clarke 2000, Nakamaki 2003, Pereira and Matsuoka 2007). In his contribution to this issue, Philip Deslippe examines the role of White American occultists in the early history of the Buddhist Mission of North America, the organization established by Nishi Honganji in 1898 to spread Jōdo Shinshū in the United States and Canada. This study is clearly about "Japanese religion" even though it is outside of Japan and many of the protagonists are not of Japanese ethnicity because it is about the propagation of a religious form that took shape in Japan. However, an emphasis on origins creates another conundrum. Jonathon O'Donnell's contribution focuses on a Japanese minister promoting "third wave" evangelical Christianity in contemporary Japan; as this discourse arose in the late twentieth-century U.S., shouldn't this be an example of "American religion" by the same logic of origins that Jōdo Shinshū in the U.S. is "Japanese"? One way around this apparent dilemma is to take the approach that claims of national identity are not self-evident, static "natural kinds" but rather dynamic, context-dependent "interactive kinds" that transform the realities they ostensibly represent (Stein 2017, 24-25). Like the question of whether something counts as "religion," the argument that something is Japanese or non-Japanese is as much (or more) a political contention than an observation about the world. As such, we take a broad approach to our conception of "Japanese religions," erring on the side of inclusion to trace possible connections across emic boundaries, fully realizing that some of the actors we take into consideration might consider their practice neither "Japanese" nor "religious."

The Global Occult

Stemming from the Latin *occultus* ("hidden, secret"), occultism is inextricably linked to esotericism (from the Greek *esōterikós*, "belonging to an inner circle"), of which it is generally considered a subset, although the two are sometimes used synonymously. While these terms are no more natural kinds than "religion" or "Japanese" and can also be considered scholarly inventions or floating signifiers (von Stuckrad 2005, 9-10; Bergunder 2010), they have taken on certain conventional referents in the academy in addition to their more blatantly political emic uses. Esotericism and occultism tend to refer to strategies toward gnosis—means of achieving knowledge that is transcendent, absolute, eternal, and/or divine—that involve initiation and secrecy. The esoteric and occult are constructed in opposition to the exoteric and freely accessible; they are often associated with hierarchical structures and elitism, as well as modes of cultural critique. They are also considered to be "the Other of science and rationality" (Hanegraaff 2012, 254), although many who helped shaped modern science and the social sciences

engaged in esoteric and occult pursuits (Josephson-Storm 2017), and occultism was particularly "committed to the guiding principle of reason and played to a formalized concept of rationality even as it contested a strictly secular rationalism" (Owen 2004: 12).

While terms like "occult philosophy" and "occult sciences" (both denoting magic, astrology, divination, and alchemy) were used in Europe since the sixteenth century, "occultism" began to be used in the nineteenth century and, as an etic category, it tends to be applied to practices, beliefs, and social formations that began at that time (Hanegraaff 1996, 2006). The family of practices produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often associated with occultism—including spiritualism, Theosophy, New Thought, mesmerism (in both its hypnotist and "magnetic healing" forms), and, to varying extents, yogic and meditation movements—draw on premodern discourses and bodily practices, but they are marked by modern concerns. For example, their proponents claimed (and continue to today) that their practices were more rational than contemporary science, because what they considered the crude materialism of scientific naturalism unjustly dismissed vast swaths of human experience as mere illusion.

One of the core questions in the study of esotericism and occultism is whether they are cross-cultural categories of structurally-similar practices that have arisen independently in different locales (Asprem 2014) or whether they have been produced out of particular discursive strategies of categorizing knowledge and practice that should be historicized and provincialized as "Western" (Hanegraaff 2015). When *mikkyō* 密教 ("secret teachings") is translated as "esoteric Buddhism," does it point out how secrecy practices legitimize and lend social status to teachings and leadership in a similar way as they do in Euro-American settings? Should strategies of secrecy in Japanese religious history be considered as a kind of "Eastern esotericism" that can be productively compared with its "Western" forms? Or are the linguistic, conceptual, and praxic differences so great that it is a form of cultural chauvinism to assume they can be reduced to a(nother) European category?

As we will demonstrate below, the boundaries of the discursive field of the occult/*okaruto* include different phenomena at different times and places; they can even be contested by contemporaries arguing for their own vision. Avery Morrow (2018) gives a particularly vivid example of how the "boundary work" involved in naming esotericism in early twentieth century Japan resists both the cross-cultural and the historicist research programs in his recent treatment of the founder of Japanese religious studies, Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873–1949). Anesaki's interest in the occult and esoteric is apparent in his citation of the British psychical researchers F. W. H. Myers (1843–1901) and Sir Oliver Lodge (1851–1940) to support his own theory of "the immortality of spirit" in 1918 (when the World War provoked a global spiritualist revival), yet he simultaneously critiqued Ōmoto 大本 (a new religious movement that engaged in spirit possession, discussed below) for its "esotericism," in the sense that its proponents' public

claims were based on concealed knowledge. Thus, Morrow concludes, the boundaries of esotericism (or occultism) lack the consistency demanded by both the cross-cultural and the historicist research programs, as they are always drawn by local actors as befits their purposes.

Anesaki, who spent years studying in Europe and teaching in the US, was attracted to British psychical research and averse to his compatriots' arguments from gnosis unrevealable to the uninitiated, but some Westerners coming to Japan had quite different relationships with the occult and the esoteric, while similarly privileging the foreign over the all-too familiar. When the American Percival Lowell (1855–1916) climbed Mt. Ontake in 1891 and observed *kamigakari* 神憑り possession rites for the first time, he believed he had found "an esoteric cult imbedded in the very heart and core of the Japanese character and instinct, with all the strangeness of that to us enigmatic race" (1894: 13). Despite its title, nowhere in his *Occult Japan, or The Way of the Gods: An Esoteric Study of Japanese Personality and Possession* (1894), which describes this and many subsequent encounters with Japanese men and women who became possessed by *kami*, does he explicitly compare *kamigakari* to the spiritualism that was commonplace in his native Boston, perhaps due to his belief in Japanese singularity. In the book's most comparative passage, he calls the Japanese mediums the "civilized cousins of the medicine-men of North America, of the shamans of savage tribes the world over, and Christian scientists generally"; he felt the Japanese possession specialists were inherently different (and superior) because they were "not in the least hierarchic": anyone, regardless of social class or training, could be possessed by the gods if "sufficiently pure" (Lowell 1894, 99-103). Lowell's (ironic) grouping of the "hierarchic" followers of Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910, who founded The Church of Christ, Scientist in Boston in 1879) with "savage tribes", and his placement of both as inferior to Japanese spirit mediums suggests he was unaware that American-style spiritualism had come to Japan just a few years earlier in the national fad of *kokkuri-san* (detailed below), which would likely have been known, if not practiced, by many whom he detailed.

This introduces another, separate but related question that further complicates matters: is "global occultism" better conceived of as a Western phenomenon that "spread" to new environments and adapted to local conditions (Bogdan and Djurdjevic 2013, 5) or as an inherently hybrid phenomenon, formed out of transnational/transcolonial exchange "that bonded newly accessible non-Western traditions with newly discovered Western technologies" (Green 2015: 384). Despite our use of the term "global occult" in the title of this special issue, we suggest that one possible solution to this question is to reconceive this phenomenon in terms that go beyond flattening and (implicitly) binary descriptions such as "global"/"local" or "Western"/"Japanese," which can inadvertently essentialize and overstate the uniformity of particular movements and/or national cultures. Perhaps a focus on specific networks—whether translocal, transnational, transimperial, et cetera—can better maintain the particularity of

individual actors within internally-diverse social assemblages.[2] Yet, as discourses do not only spread from place to place, but also between, among, and within intersecting communities of practice, perhaps we should also begin to think of "trans-epistemic" movement to describe a different kind of cross-pollination of ideas. The following sections detail the movement of the term *okaruto* ("occult") and the development of varied, interrelated discourses among Japanese practitioners, media, and academics.

July 7, day of the occult: Three approaches to explaining the 1970s fascination with okaruto.

It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that every commentator on Japan identifies the year 1973 as a turning point in the country's recent history. Known as the year of "the first oil shock," the Arab oil embargo of 1973 announced the end of the country's postwar economic "miracle," which led to Japan's first postwar decline of GDP the following year (Flath 2014, 137-138). The ensuing industrial, economic, and social changes have been linked by scholars to every singly area of Japanese life, including the occult. For example, this global economic crisis has been argued to have spurred a popular fear of (and fascination with fiction dealing with) the social costs of Japan's frenetic progress: industrial diseases (see Kaneko 2006). One of the representative genres of the so-called "occult (media) boom" of the 1970s was apocalyptic fiction (part of today's nostalgic image associated with the word *okaruto*), whose depictions of humans-turned-monsters who had suffered from the inhumane and over-rationalist pace of Japan's development and returned to take their revenge not only encapsulate the era's rising environmental consciousness, but also illustrate the contemporaneous "subjective turn" that Yumiyama Tatsuya links to the student protests against the Vietnam War and growing critiques of economic growth and social hierarchy (Yumiyama 2004, 254).

Simultaneous to these developments, the post-1973 *okaruto* intersected with global media culture in forms like the Israeli psychic Uri Geller, who first appeared on Japanese television in a program broadcast at 11 pm on Christmas Eve 1973 to demonstrate his ability to bend and break a metal pipe. Then, in February 1974, Geller appeared live this time to show his spoon-bending skills and compete with an eleven-year-old Japanese boy, Sekiguchi Jun, who, influenced by Geller's first appearance, claimed to possess similar powers. As a result, from early April to mid-May 1974, three days did not pass without some type of segment about supernatural powers being broadcast on Japanese television (Takahashi 2019, 98), and in that year alone, 41 specials on the paranormal

2. Thomas Tweed has modeled this approach in his "translocative" analyses of "occult Buddhism" (Tweed 2005, 2015). See also Stein 2017.

were shown (Ishii 2008, 21). 1973 was also the year that Colin Wilson's *The Occult: A History* (1971, Random House) was first translated into Japanese as simply *Okaruto* (by Nakamura Yasuo, published in two volumes by Shinchōcha), encouraging fans to dive further into the historical roots of the ideas and practices they witnessed in Geller's televised performances or in novels dealing with the supernatural (often dealing with Christian demonology), such as *The Exorcist* (translated into Japanese by Uno Toshiyasu 宇野利泰 in 1973 and published by Shinchōcha). The opening of the homonymous film by William Friedkin in Japan on July 7, 1974, established that date as the *okaruto kinenbi* (commemoration day for the occult).[3]

A third, more recently developed, string of arguments regarding the popular appropriation of the word *okaruto*, places the 1973–74 phenomenon within Japan's intellectual and religious histories, which, as this special issue demonstrates, are no less entangled with global trends than the socio-economic and popular media situations. Famously labeled "the rush hour of the gods" (McFarland 1967) and often used as a counterproof to the secularization thesis (see Casanova 1994, Stark 1999),[4] the 1950s~1970s[5] saw the dramatic increase in membership numbers of several religious groups that had been founded in the prewar period, such as Soka Gakkai 創価学会 (see McLaughlin 2018, esp. Chapter 2) and Shinnyoen 真如苑 (Montrose 2018), as well as new, postwar organizations (such as Sukyo Mahikari 崇教真光 and Byakko Shinkokai 白光真宏会), some of which tend to promote pacifist and internationalist ideals, in stark contrast with the imperialist thought of the earlier decades (Kisala 1999).[6] Quite significantly, books written by members of these groups started swarming Japanese bookstores and became mixed in with an increased number of "occult" publications (including translations from English material). Between 1965 and 1979, at least 5 to 7

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3. The film is said to have provoked a "panic" in both senses of the word. Cinephiles talk of the "Exorcist generation" while some audience members later reported to have "experienced" similar possessions. For more on the impact of the film (and novel) in Japan, see Taniguchi 2006.
4. Ian Reader, scholar of contemporary religion in Japan, disagrees with these arguments, arguing that "the Japanese data indicate the reverse: a striking decline of religious institutions and of much of the 'folk' religion, individual piety and belief" (Reader 2011, 10).
5. Following the American occupation of Japan and the establishment of a new constitution that aimed to protect religious organizations from state interference, a substantial number of new groups sought to acquire the status of religious corporation in immediate postwar Japan. Between 1946 and 1949, for example, 386 new religious organizations were officially registered (Terada and Kojima 2016, 15).
6. Two recent English-language handbooks on "new" religious movements in Japan are Staemmler and Dehn (eds.) 2011, and Pokorny and Winter (eds.) 2018.

books of some kind of religious/supernatural/occult content appeared on the yearly list of Japanese bestsellers, probing sociologist of religion Sumika Masayoshi to argue that the 1970s saw, for the first time, popular books on religion and publications promoting specific religious organizations compete for the same readership out of the same bookstore shelves (Sumika 2006, 138). This means that the postwar religious revival happened in combination and in constant exchanges with an occultist revival, similar in many ways to what was happening in the United States and Western Europe.[7]

Yoshinaga Shin'ichi (2006, 250, 254) notes, for example, that the first sighting of a UFO on Japanese soil was photographed in August 1957 by a famous journalist of the aviation industry who was knowledgeable of the American situation,[8] and who, in August of that same year, founded with three other men, the Cosmic Brotherhood Association (Uchū Yūkō Kyōkai 宇宙友好協会), Japan's first UFO research group. Interestingly, many initial members of the association (including one of its co-founders) were members of Seichō no Ie 生長の家, a religious organization originally founded in 1930, inspired by Fenwicke Holmes' New Thought literature, and currently the "Japanese new religion" with the second largest following outside of Japan, after Soka Gakkai (Staemmler 2018). Later on, in the 1970s, at the peak of the "occult media boom," high-ranked members of the religious group Agonshū 阿含宗, which was yet to reach official status (this came in 1978; see Baffelli and Reader 2018 for a detailed study of this group), published with students of the University of Kyoto a periodical (see Image 1) that aimed in part to inform its readers of the latest developments abroad, including travel reports from "spiritual" tours in the U.S.

スピリチュアルアメリカ

▲ミステリースポット入口(サンフランシスコ付近)　左より、ローラン、筆者、A君

一、カリフォルニア小旅行

カリフォルリアの陽光がサンタモニカフリーウェイにそそがれその中を私たちのステーションワゴンは、一路ラスベガスへと走った。ロサンゼルスの郊外へぬけると、そこは一面砂漠の世界である。この西部劇の背景のまっただ中にいて、いったい誰が、ついきのうまでは灰色の東京にいたのだと感じることができるだろう。町も光も風も、すべてがカラフルなのだ。これが陽気なアメリカの風土である。

砂漠の中の人工都市ラスベガスに着いたのは午後の三時をすぎた頃だった。にぎやかな町だとばかり思っていたら、人も車も、広い道路にあまり見あたらない。友人のフランス人、ローランはこの点をこう語ってくれた。

「ジョン、この町は夜目覚めるんだ。今はみんな寝てるのさ。」

私はこの旅行中、ジョンと呼ばれた。友人のA君はピーターという名をもらった。なぜなら、外国人は私たちの名前を発音するのがとても苦手で、その手間を省くために、英語の名前をつけられたのだった。

私たちはまず、中国人経営のモーテルに宿をとった。メインストリートに面したほとんどの店がカジノであったが、とりあえず、隣の小さな店に入ってみた。スロットマシンや他のマシンが五十台ほど並んでいて、客が十人位入っている。

私たちも、五ドルほどニックル（五セントコイン）にかえて、スロットマシンにアタックをかけてみた。たまに二〜三枚出る時もあったが、ほとんどがハズレである。はじめに抱いていたワクワクするような気持や、気負いは、コインが減少するにつれてなくなってきた。しかし、ついに、どうでもいいや、と思ってマシンのレバーを引いた時、なんと三十倍となってコインがジャラジャラ出てきたではないか。ここで私はハッと思った。人間というものは欲を出したらだめなんだな。無欲になると何でもうまくいくものなんだ、と。日本にいた時、このことはマージャンやパチンコ、ナストやサッカーのプレーなどを通して気づいていたが、今、こうして異国の地であらためて感じたのだった。どんな物事に対しても、執着の念を持たず、自由な気持で楽しむ心がまえが大事なのだ……。そんな事を考え、負けもとりもどしてモーテルにもどると、とても疲れていることに気づいた。そして、この日はそのまま寝てしまった。

次の日、朝早くラスベガスを出て、私たちのステーションワゴンは、デスバレーへ向かった。ここは、西部開拓時代、東部から西の楽園カリフォルニアを目ざしてきた人たちにとっては地獄のような所であった。ユタやアリゾナの大砂漠地帯をやっとのことでぬけ、飲料水も底をついてきた頃、このデスバレーにきしか

Image 1
"Supirichuaru Amerika" ("Spiritual America"), in *Seija*『聖者』("Saint"), vol. 2, p. 6, Nov. 1976

7. See, for example, Hugh Urban's (2011) description of the case of the Church of Scientology, especially Chapters 1 and 3.
8. The Japanese translation of *Inside the Space Ships* by George Adamski (the first and best known "UFO contactee") came out that same year, whereas Takahashi Yutaka 高橋豊's translation of Adamski and Desmond Leslie's *Flying Saucers Have Landed* had already been published in 1954.

The above three approaches to understanding the 1970s popularization of the word *okaruto* in Japan, are, we argue, representative of the three types of scholarly work that has, to date, discussed occultist, spiritualist, and other associated ideas and practices as they developed in the country from the early modern period until today. There are undoubtedly overlaps between these three perspectives, but for the sake of convenience and clarity, we have attempted to divide the Japanese-language scholarship on this subject along the *sociological* approach, the *cultural studies* approach, and the *intellectual history* approach.[9] However, before we delve into a review of the academic literature, we ought also to discuss the elephant in the room: *okaruto* does not necessarily mean "occult".

What is okaruto?

As with the relationships between "religion" and *shūkyō*, "spirituality" and *supirichuariti*, and other Japanese concepts that translate or transliterate non-Japanese words, the emic meaning of *okaruto* is intimately associated with the narratives that it came to collectively refer to at a particular point in time, namely the 1970s. Popular books on *okaruto* ideas and practices (for example, Harada 2012, Hatsumi 2012, Mori 2012, Maeda 2016, ASIOS 2019) often categorize under this banner eschatological (and mostly apocalyptic) beliefs and conspiracy theories,[10] legends about cryptids,[11] individuals with extraordinary powers, UFOs and fringe science, and ghosts and other types of supernatural creatures that are often seamlessly blended with the folk category of specters (*yōkai* 妖怪). What unites all these is a general feeling of *fushigi* 不思議, the "mysterious," or as Michael Dylan Foster creatively translates this word, "that which

9. There have been of course publications from other fields of interest, most notably (para) psychology. See, for example, Watanabe and Nakamura 1998, Kikuchi 1999, Nakamura 2003.
10. The number one bestseller in 1973 was the science-fiction novel narrating the disappearance of Japan, *Nihon Chinbotsu* 日本沈没 (*Japan Sinks*, by Komatsu Sakyō 小松左京), which was made into a film the same year (and adapted several times since). As David Leheny notes, the film has received tremendous scholarly attention, perhaps unjustified, since disaster movies were ubiquitous in cinema worldwide at the time (Leheny 218, 192).
11. In Japanese, cryptids are usually referred to as U(nindentified) M(ysterious) A(nimals), an English neologism created in 1976 by the then editor-in-chief of a Japanese science fiction magazine, who was inspired by the acronym UFO. Similar "hidden" contributions to English by Japanese speakers can be found in the earlier history of occult beliefs in Japan: Fukurai Tomokichi, for example, when he published the English version of his monograph *Tōshi to nensha* 透視と念写 in 1931, he translated it as *Clairvoyance and Thoughtography*. It is believed that "thoughtography" is a word made up by Fukurai to convey the meaning of *nensha* 念写 (Warren 2008, 8).

cannot be grasped in thought" (Foster 2009, 17). From this perspective, *okaruto* is therefore nothing more than part of late twentieth-century Japanese folk religion, in the same way that, for example, contemporary spiritualist seances in Norway can be located within revivals and (re)constructions of beliefs surrounding the dead among Viking cultures (Kalvig 2017, 9) or that the "New Age" is "a sub-type of 'popular religion'" (Sutcliffe 2003, 11) that arose in the UK and US but has since gained transnational appeal.

As we have seen above, however, the Japanese term confounds a large amount of practices that have tended to attract the attention of researchers only when they become visible and, to some extent, self-conscious,[12] through socio-religious movements and groups that both feed off and sustain a large media culture. In fact, it is only from the 1980s, as a reaction to the 1970s *okaruto* boom, that scholars in Japan slowly started looking into the history of spiritualist, occultist, and other ideas originating from similar epistemic fields in modern global history. In this way, we could argue that the post-1980s Japanese academic interest in these fields resembles the development of scholarly literature concerned with the "New Age," which by the time it attracted scholarly attention in the 1990s, had already lost its emic appeal (Introvigne 2001), and most certainly been replaced by other terms that continued to express its "popular millennialism" (Robertson 2015). Nevertheless, like for the "New Age" in the Western hemisphere, the 1970s Japanese phenomenon described above spurred at least three strands of research that, as we summarize below, almost immediately introduced a blend of etic and emic terms to trace the history and contemporary manifestations of *okaruto*/occult.

Some preliminary notes on terminology

Although, the term *okaruto* holds popular value as to the media cultural imagery that it is usually associated with, it is only recently that the term *okarutizumu* (occultism) has begun to enter academic vocabulary in Japan. More common in Japanese-language scholarly writings on phenomena that would be the equivalent of Western occultism are terms using the character *rei* 霊 ("spirit"), such as *reisei* 霊性 (lit., the quality of *rei*, often translated as "spirituality") or *reijutsu* (霊術, lit., "spiritual techniques" or "extraordinary techniques"). Like previously mentioned regarding "occultism," these analytic categories are constructed upon emic usages, with which they do not always perfectly align, but to which they are substantially indebted. For example, contemporary understandings of *reisei* (and the later *supirichuariti*) have been significantly influenced by the thought

12. In the same way, the "New Age movement" and its subsequent scholarly study resulted from "the cultic milieu having become conscious of itself" (Hanegraaff 1996, 17).

of D.T. Suzuki (1972 [1944]), who combined Buddhist modernist, Western esoteric, and Zen elements to present an (orientalist) idea of religion that was appealing to twentieth century audiences (see Borup 2004, Yoshinaga 2005). At the same time, scholarly understandings of the occult-type of therapeutic techniques that thrived in Japan in the early twentieth century came to strongly associate them with the term *reijutsu*, following Nishiyama Shigeru's influential typologies of Japanese new religions (described below) and the pioneering historical work of Imura Kōji (1984a).

However, when the term *reijutsu* first appeared in 1903, in the works of experimental hypnotist Kuwabara Toshirō 桑原俊郎 (1873–1906), the prefix *rei* did not refer to "spirit," as it is understood today, but rather meant "extraordinary" (*reimyō* 霊妙) or "wonderful," as in Kuwabara's expression *seishin reidō* 精神霊動 ("the wonderful movement of the mind") (Yoshinaga 2018, 183). At the same time, the use of the word *shinrei* 心霊 to translate terms such as "psychic" in English spiritualist literature imported to Japan in the first decade of the twentieth century facilitated the later associations between *rei* and spiritualism (Ichiyanagi 2020, 45-49). However, despite the popularity of the term *reijutsu* in late twentieth-century scholarship to describe the occultist surge of alternative therapies in the Taishō period, at the time they were more commonly described in terms of *seishin ryōhō* ("mind cures") than *reijutsu*. Ichiyanagi Hirotaka argues that concepts such as *rei*, *kokoro* 心 ("heart-mind"), and *tamashii* 魂 ("spirit") became discursive floaters torn in a fight between the *seishin* 精神 ("mind, spirit") that the recently imported scientific knowledge could not "explain" and the *seishin* that the expansion of science absorbed as an object of analysis (Ichiyanagi 2014, 24). Accordingly, despite the overlapping meanings of *seishin ryōhō* in the prewar decades (which could be used to reference psychotherapy, autosuggestion, breathing methods, hands-on-healing, meditations, etc.), in the postwar period it came to simply reference "psychotherapy," with no occultist connotation (Harding 2015, Yoshinaga 2015).

From new religions to spirituality: rei 霊 *and sociological approaches to the "occult"*

What one needs to take out of all these terms, which were often used interchangeably at the time, is the importance they attributed to techniques (*jutsu* 術), regardless of how these were meant to work. This emphasis on the practical dimension of religious experience—and its contrast with the intellectualist, belief-centered exegeses that had occupied the study of religion in modern Japan up to that time (Terada and Kojima 2016)—is a large part of why they began to receive scholarly attention in the 1970s and 1980s. Already in 1979, the sociologist of religion Nishiyama Shigeru had coined the term "new-new religions" (*shin-shinshūkyō* 新新宗教) to describe religious groups that gained popularity in the 1970s, among which he identified a sub-category of organizations (such as God Light Association [GLA] and certain subgroups of Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan) whose teachings promoted a counter-rationalist ethos and

emphasized "occultism (*okarutizumu*), magic (*jujutsu* 呪術), and mysticism (*shinpishugi* 神秘主義)" (Nishiyama 2016 [1979], 175). Later, Nishiyama would add these religions to a larger category of groups which includes early twentieth century organizations such as Ōmoto (see Stalker 2008) and Taireidō (see Yoshinaga 2008) and which he called the "*reijutsu*-type" (*reijutsu-kei* 霊術系) new religions, because "they have turned *reijutsu* into their main weapons for salvation and for their propagation by manipulating the components and the effects of godly, human, and animal spirits, 'proving' the existence of such spirits, bringing about relief from calamities such as disease, and attracting good luck" (Nishiyama 1988, 171).

Shimazono Susumu, perhaps the most famous representative of the sociological approach, talked originally of the *seirei shinkō* 精霊信仰 ("spirit belief"), which he saw as having risen at the start of the twentieth century in competition to three "Others": "traditional" spirit belief of village societies, belief in salvation gods, and rationalism (1987, 139-143). Borrowing the term "new-new religions" (*shin-shinshūkyō*) from Nishiyama, Shimazono compares the post-1970s religious movements to their predecessors, but distinguishes them as "post-modern", in that they responded to different needs, namely feelings of emptiness (rather than poverty, illness and struggle), and employed newly popularized psychological and person-centered techniques to preach self-development and benefits related to a holistically-conceptualized universe (Shimazono 1992, 23-50). Together with these new religious groups, however, Shimazono argued that the post-1970s "religious boom" included two other phenomena: "the rise of a magico-religious popular culture," referring to the aforementioned *okaruto* boom, and the "new spirituality movements" (*shin-reisei undō* 新霊性運動), which he positioned as something less organized than new religions, but expressing a more unified worldview than the popular *okaruto* (ibid. 54).

Although his original distinction between these three phenomena seems to have been mostly based on the relative (and perceived) homogeneity of their corresponding worldviews, Shimazono's later arguments focused on the "new spirituality movements" (also *shin-reisei bunka* 新霊性文化 or "new spirituality culture"), which he developed in discussion with studies of the New Age in the Anglo-American West.[13] These endeavors would eventually reflect early twenty-first-century debates on the rise of spirituality (Heelas et al. 2005, Shimazono 2007, Aupers and Houtman 2010,

13. It is significant to note here that the first English-language academic publication (Mullins 1992) on the Japanese New Age mentions the popularity among Japanese readers of both Shirley McLain's *Out on a Limb* and books by the founder of the 1980s new religion Happy Science or Kōfuku no Kagaku 幸福の科学, reflecting earlier (and perhaps more correct) stages of understanding, in which the distinction between ("bad") religion and ("good") spirituality had not yet appeared.

Watts 2020) and form the basis of a new subfield of scholarly interest on spirituality (*supirichuariti*, see Itō, Kashio, and Yumiyama 2004) in post-Aum Japan. In brief, the popularization in 1977 of a category of books and magazines named *seishin sekai* 精神世界 (lit. "the spiritual world," see Shimazono 2007 [1996], 13), which were mostly translations of Anglophone New Age literature, turned scholarly attention to a distinction between "positive spirituality" and the "scary/entertaining occult". Although the spiritual world was perhaps no more than the Japanese counterpart of New Age in the West (Prohl 2007, 359), Shimazono and others have attempted to position the Japanese "phenomenon" within global debates about the "spiritual, but not religious," while at the same time arguing that Japan is unique because Japanese new spirituality culture does not reject "traditional spirituality" (Shimazono 1999, 2004) and is more in tune with the characteristic Japanese "non-religious religiousness" (Horie 2019, 35-37).

It is worth noting here that Shimazono and other post-1970s sociologists used these arguments to steer away from earlier sociological attempts to adapt Weberian theory to the Japanese case, and argued that, on the contrary, the multitude of new religions that appeared in twentieth century Japan were "proof" that there had never been any disenchantment in Japan (Ōtani 2018).[14] These scholars were probably also reacting to more contemporary evaluations of the social role of religious groups whose aggressive media presence in the 1980s and 1990s had attracted criticism (Baffelli 2016) and their image had hit "rock-bottom" after the 1995 Aum affair, to the extent that even the study of organized religion lost its appeal (Dorman 2012). Eventually, even if there are overlaps with the third approach to the occult that we discuss later in this paper, sociological studies of the occult in Japan developed out of an interest in those "new-new religions" that shared epistemic fields of the 1970s fascination with the *okaruto*, before joining contemporary discourse on the New Age and new spiritualities. In other words, an excision seems to have been made gradually within the sociology of religion in Japan, through which, the character *rei* ("spirit"), originally found in Nishiyama's *reijutsu*-type of new religions, lost its mysterious, uncanny, "hidden" meanings to become progressively associated with a positively evaluated, inner, expressive religiosity called *reisei-teki* ("spiritual"), that culminated in the complete purification of *rei* in its replacement by its loan word *supirichuaru*.[15]

14. In refuting the applicability of the Protestant work ethic framework to the Japanese case, Shimazono has argued that the Japanese early modern ethic was a "philosophy of the heart," devoid of a purely religious goal (Shimazono, 2004, 43).
15. Horie argues that the "Western notions of 'spiritual' and 'spirituality' are more religious than the Japanese equivalent" (Horie 2009), but this only reflects how the word has been constructed in Japan in contrast to a notion of "religion" based on non-Christian conceptualizations.

Spectres, ghosts, and the supernatural: kaii 怪異 *and the cultural studies approach to the occult*

The uncanny qualities of *rei* were, in a sense, salvaged from the 1990s onwards by becoming the focus of new developments in cultural studies, stemming mostly from analysis of Edo-period literature, and then spreading into studies of other media, such as manga and Japanese horror cinema, which reinvented and gave new breath to research on the *kaii* 怪異: the unrealistic (*genjitsu ni arienai*) or strange (*fushigi*) (Ichiyanagi 2016). In his brief review of the field of *kaii* studies (2020, 5-9), Ichiyanagi Hirotaka, the chief representative of this approach to the study of the occult, notes that the 1990s popular rediscovery of a genre of stories, called *kaidan* (怪談),[16] literally tales of the strange and mysterious, coincided with several scholarly projects centered on the study of *yōkai* (妖怪)[17] and other historical folklore treatments of what has been considered as strange and monstrous in Japanese oral and textual traditions. Although, some of this research still echoes old orientalist treatments (see, for example, Lafcadio Hearn's *Kwaidan*, 1904) by sometimes falling into essentialist and homogenizing arguments regarding the uniqueness of the Japanese psychology that these traditions allegedly reflect, the last two decades have seen a plethora of scholarly work that has focused on the historical contingency and social co-construction of the strange. Notable examples are Takaoka Hiroyuki's analysis of the appearance of "ghosts" (*yūrei* 幽霊) in conjunction with the beginnings of Japanese urbanization (Takaoka 2016), Taniguchi Motoi's study of *kaidan*'s shifting content in the progress of the Japanese nation from Meiji to Heisei (Taniguchi 2009), and Itō Ryōhei's examination of the methods and processes of transmission of supernatural and occult content on the internet (Itō 2016).[18]

However, perhaps no one has done more in this field than Ichiyanagi Hirotaka, who in only the last twenty-five years has been involved in editing, writing or contributing to nearly forty books, many of them in collaboration with the publishing

16. Perhaps one should not be surprised that, like for *okaruto*, there is also a day for commemorating *kaidan* (*kaidan no hi*) which falls on August 13, and which was established in 1993, following the success of Kaidan Night, a yearly national tour of *kaidan* storytellers headed by Inagawa Junji (http://www.inagawa-kaidan.com/)
17. Komatsu Kazuhiko and his work at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies was instrumental in establishing a field of "specter studies" (*yōkai-gaku*) and for popularizing this aspect of Japanese culture nationally and internationally.
18. For English-language contributions, see Foster 2009, 2015 and Reider 2002 and 2010.

house Seikyūsha and Yoshida Morio, also a specialist of modern Japanese literature. Ichiyanagi's original research, which began with detailed examinations of the infamous "clairvoyance incident" (*senrigan jiken* 千里眼事件) in late Meiji (Ichiyanagi 1994) and the 1900s interest in hypnosis that preceded it (Ichiyanagi 1997), remain groundbreaking in our understanding of the impact of European and American scientific theories on the modern Japanese "unconscious" (Ichiyanagi 2014) and the formation of "the strange (*kaii*) as the Other" in twentieth century Japanese media culture (Ichiyanagi 2020). As a result, Ichiyanagi's cultural studies approach often seeks to link the content and format of media dealing with strange phenomena with what these stories (*monogatari* 物語) reveal about the mood and feelings (of insecurity) of the society in which they were produced, and also with how media simultaneously reinforce feelings of strangeness *and* create new occult content. His studies of literary content are therefore multidisciplinary, from textual analysis to media studies and intellectual history, but, like the eight-volume *Nightmare Library* (*Naitomea sōsho*, 2005~2011) that he co-edited with Yoshida Morio, they often both seek to understand and at the same time celebrate the entertaining value of *kaii* as subcultural genre. In this, they can be conceived as the Japanese counterpart of research in Victorian culture and the occult, for example, which has also thrived in the last two decades (e.g. Franklin 2018), or, more generally, of scholarly interest in "the occult and [blank]", where the blank can be "film," "music," "comics" and the like (see for example part 4 of Partridge ed. 2015), or "[blank]: A Cultural History", where the blank is an established theme in the popular culture of the second half of the twentieth century, such as ghosts (Owens 2017) or zombies (Luckhurst 2016).

Metaphysical religion, esotericism, and mind cures: seishin ryōhō 精神療法 *and the intellectual history approach to the study of the occult*

If *kaii* is to be treated as a culture of its own, it is inevitable that it is to be separated, even if artificially, from the "mainstream," both by some of those who espouse it and also by those who study it. On the other hand, the cultural studies approach has demonstrated that, if the strange, the occult, and the supernatural have attracted the imagination of such a multitude of narrators and audiences, including such canonical figures as Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867–1916) and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介 (1892–1927), it must have been less "deviant" and "rejected" than it has been assumed. Echoing, therefore, similar trends in the study of entanglements between esotericism and scientific, intellectual, and religious thought in European and American history (Hanegraaff 1996, Hammer 2001, Sutcliffe 2002, Albanese 2007), a third approach to the study of the occult has been developing more recently in Japan, which locates the phenomenon more firmly in the translocal historical contexts of intellectual and religious exchange both within Japan and abroad. This approach undoubtedly started with the aforementioned work of Imura Kōji, who noted the

continuities and innovations between *reijutsu* and Buddhist, Shinto, and folk religious traditions in Japan (Imura 1984a), but who was also writing during the 1980s and 1990s, when the *okaruto* was undergoing an "externalization" (*gaizaika* 外在化) (see Yoshida 2009, the sequel to Ichiyanagi 2006's edited collection on the 1970s). Briefly, the 1970s fascination with the strange seems to have pushed occult narratives into everyday life and encouraged: 1) the outsourcing of these narratives to illustrate and explain contemporary social issues, such as child abuse, or support the popularity of New Age science[19] books and other theories regarding healing and therapy that had started flooding the Japanese market, 2) the Japanese media audiences' interest in supernatural phenomena outside of Japan, and 3) the export of Japanese occulture as part of the globalization of Japanese popular culture which began during that same period (see Tsutsui 2010).

Scholars writing in Japanese henceforth noted that healing (*iyashi* 癒し) had, by the end of the 1980s, started attracting popular interest, and this led to several collaborations between sociologists of "new spirituality culture" and sociologists of therapy and welfare, such as Tanabe Shintarō and Araya Hidehiko, on several projects centered around the religious dimensions of therapy.[20] From an examination of contemporary healing practices in and outside of Japan among religious groups, both established and new (Araya, Shimazono, Tanabe, and Yumiyama 1995), to an interpretation of self-help, self-development, and other trends in a rising "therapy culture" as new ways to seek human connectedness (*tsunagari* 繋がり) (Tanabe and Shimazono 2002), these scholarly efforts eventually made the important jump to analyzing the historical continuities of such therapeutic concerns throughout Japan's modern history (Tanabe 1989, Tanabe, Shimazono, and Yumiyama 1999 and Shimazono 2003). In doing this, they, in a sense, set up the ground for the two major themes (found in the last chapter of Tanabe, Shimazono, and Yumiyama 1999) that have since occupied the intellectual history approach to the study of occult: the parallels and exchanges with similar, not purely biomedical therapeutic concerns found worldwide, and the critical role played by self-cultivation or *shūyō* 修養 (see Kurita 2018) in linking early modern and modern religious concerns with political and social thought across the Japanese intellectual world.

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19. Imura was himself a proponent of New Age science (see Imura 1984b, 1984c) or "New Science" as it was called in Japan, in yet another Japanese neologism created during that period to refer to work such as Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (translated into Japanese in 1979). For more on "New Science", see Ichiyanagi 2009.
20. Incidentally, the 1980s and 1990s saw also the firm establishment of the disciplines of medical anthropology and cultural psychiatry in Japan.

Yoshinaga Shin'ichi's scholarly work perhaps exemplifies best this third approach to the study of the occult as he has been behind several efforts (including the present special issue!) to both examine the Japanese role in translocal networks of esoteric and occult (especially Theosophical) thought and practices and to link these to modern developments in the Japanese Buddhist (intellectual) world (for English publications, see Yoshinaga 2009, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, forthcoming). In all these endeavors, the word *seishin* 精神 (which roughly translates to "psyche," as, like that term, it refers to the non-physical self, whether mind, soul, or spirit) and the related term *seishin ryōhō* ("mind cure", see footnote 1) has played a significant role in understanding the concerns of such a variety of individuals involved in these intellectual networks, especially as it became associated with both Buddhist notions of salvation *and* with popular wishes for self-cultivation. Yoshinaga's fifteen-volume anthology of *seishin ryōhō* (2004) has been and continues to be instrumental in defining the key primary texts of Japanese occultism, especially as it always includes hints to the concurrence with contemporary debates within organized religious organizations—including Shinto, Buddhist, Christian, and new religious movements—as well as the constant influx of European and American ideas and practices, which were not always duly recognized as such by their Japanese importers, translators, and audiences. More than anything else, occultism in Japan can be conceived as a locus where modern religious, therapeutic and ethical concerns were debated freely by a loose network of intellectuals coming from a variety of backgrounds (Yoshinaga 2020). In the end, all these "extraordinary" (and later "spiritualist") techniques (*reijutsu*) used to control the otherwise commonly unexplainable phenomena (*kaii*), had as their ultimate purpose to manipulate (and often improve) the *seishin*, the psycho-spiritual, which was intimately connected to the physical realm, and beyond (for the latest collaborative study on *seishin ryōhō* see Kurita, Tsukada, and Yoshinaga 2019).

To readers familiar with the field of Western Esotericism, the above three approaches may sound comparable to the three approaches identified by Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm in their edited volume, *Contemporary Esotericism* (2013, 23). Although trying to find too many correspondences between Japanese and English scholarship may render our paper excessively "esoteric," the social scientific "Partridge approach" shares similar methods and concerns with the sociological approach of Shimazono and scholars of *supirichuariti*; the discursive "von Stuckrad approach" has commonalities with the cultural studies trend in Japan, represented by Ichiyanagi and others; and "the Hanegraaff approach" undoubtedly reminds us of the historiographical research exemplified by Yoshinaga and his circle. However, like the European scholarship, there are, as already demonstrated, several overlaps between the three approaches, to the extent that such a categorization is helpful only to convey the contours of this field of study, and not to encourage the idea that there exists some kind of academic factionalism.

A chronology of occultism in Japan up to the 1970s

The reception and production of modern occultism in Japan was shaped by earlier practices such as shamanism (Imura 2014) and personal cultivation (Sawada 2004). Many of these practices—including divination, spirit mediumship, healing prayer rituals called *kaji kitō* 加持祈祷 or *yose kaji* 寄加持 in which the practitioner embodies a Buddhist deity, incantation, and the production of healing talismans and charms—were outlawed in the early years of the Meiji state as "superstitions" (Kawamura 2007, Josephson 2012, 2013). Thus, the first waves of what might be understood as occultism in Japan, starting around Meiji 20 (1887), have been understood as substitutes for these proscribed practices (Imura 2014, Yoshinaga 2015).

From 1885, hypnotherapy began to spread among Japanese elites, including medical doctors and researchers, as it was considered to provide a scientific explanation for "the magical phenomena of religion", including spiritual healing (Yoshinaga 2015: 85ff.). Then, beginning in late 1886, Japan underwent a brief but powerful fascination with a three-legged tray called Kokkuri-san 狐狗狸さん ("Mr. Nodding," but using the characters for foxes, dogs, and *tanuki*, three animals known for their ability to spiritually possess humans). A miniaturized version of the Western spiritualistic practice of table-turning (similar to the later Ouija board), Kokkuri-san became a national phenomenon; contemporary reports say nearly every household in Japan, regardless of region or class, experimented with it. As questions posed to the device commonly included the diagnosis of misfortune, including illness, this practice somewhat resembled prohibited spirit interrogation traditions, but it was tolerated as an imported American phenomenon rather than a folk superstition (Ichiyanagi 1994, Foster 2009).

Contemporaneous with the importation of these Western spiritual technologies, a cohort of Japanese Buddhist intellectuals, including Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919), Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903), and Shaku Sōen 釈宗演 (1860–1919), engaged with Western philosophy to create forms of "new Buddhism" that stressed elements that would later be described as fundamental aspects of "spirituality," including personal development, direct experience, the importance of lay practice, and antipathy to institutional authority. These intellectuals had a complex relationship with the occult: Inoue wrote articles criticizing Kokkuri-san, but also claimed hypnotherapy's efficacy explained the healing potential of religious faith (Yoshinaga 2015, 88-89).

While the modernist intellectual trend continued for decades, it was overshadowed in the early twentieth century by hypnotism and spiritualism which, beginning around 1903, saw major resurgences in the modern spaces of salons, lecture halls, research groups, and therapists' clinics. Publishing on hypnotism particularly exploded, with nearly fifty titles containing the word (*saiminjutsu* 催眠術) released between 1903

and 1905 (Yoshinaga 2015, 85) and many more were published on related topics, like clairvoyance (*senrigan* 千里眼). Hypnotists and spiritualists made claims to scientific rationality and offered medical and personal development applications, helping fill the role of suppressed forms of early modern spiritual therapies but with the trappings expected of the production and circulation of fully modern forms of knowledge. The aforementioned "clairvoyance incident" of 1910–1911 involving Tokyo Imperial University psychology professor Fukurai Tomokichi 福来友吉 (1869–1952) led to the end of this "boom" around the start of the Taishō period (1912–1926),[21] but key concepts and practices from hypnotism and spiritualism took on new life in subsequent decades under the rubric of *seishin ryōhō* or (increasingly from the late 1920s) *reijutsu*.

Between the 1910s to the 1930s, many new techniques were developed which incorporated aspects from self-cultivation, mesmeric healing, and controlled spirit possession practices, emphasizing methods involving abdominal breathing (*kokyūhō* 呼吸法), laying-on-of-hands (*teate* 手当て), and automatic bodily movements (*reidō* 霊動). A contemporary book entitled *Reijutsu to reijutsuka* 霊術と霊術家 (*Reijutsu and Reijutsu Therapists*) estimated there were thirty thousand *reijutsuka* practicing in Japan at that time, and described dozens of distinct therapies (Reikai Kakusei Dōshikai 1928). The largest occult therapies, like Taireidō 太霊道 (The Way of the Great Spirit) and Kenzen Tetsugaku 健全哲学 (Wellness Philosophy), attracted tens of thousands of followers, in part through their use of print media, such as inexpensive pamphlets and books, as well as frequent advertisements in major newspapers (Yoshinaga 2008, Hirano 2016). Some new religious movements of the time also engaged in occult practices, the most notable being Ōmoto, which attracted hundreds of thousands of followers in the years leading up to its 1921 state suppression with its spirit possession practice called *chinkon kishin* 鎮魂帰神; after the suppression, their leader, Deguchi Onisaburō 出口王仁三郎 (1871–1948), adapted this practice into a less sensational method of channeling spiritual energy called *miteshiro otoritsugi* み手代お取次 (Stalker 2008, 89-105; Staemmler 2009).

With the rising of militarism in Japan and new regulations regarding medical practice, the number of *reijutsu* practitioners declined, some of them turning to

21. It also effectively ended mainstream institutional support for the field of abnormal psychology (*hentai shinrigaku* 変態心理学) (which Fukurai taught) in Japan, which not only impacted parapsychological research (then called "psychical research" in the West), but also clinical psychology more broadly (Takasuna 2012). Interestingly, Fukurai's former student, Nakamura Kokyō 中村古峡 (1881–1952), established a "semi-academic" society, whose journal (*Hentai Shinri* 変態心理, 1917–1926) attacked occultist practices, particularly Ōmoto's *chinkon kishin*, described below. See Oda et al. 2001; McVeigh 2017, 100-101.

more body-focused techniques, such as Noguchi *seitai* 野口整体, or joining larger organizations of professional therapists that allowed them to survive under more recognized standards of work. The Theosophical Society and other global networks of occultists lost many of their Japanese members in the 1930s and 1940s,[22] but the role that the Pacific War has played as a "convenient" threshold of (dis)continuity is also more recently being revised. Indeed, some prewar *reijutsuka* such as Okada Mokichi 岡田茂吉 (1882–1955) and Taniguchi Masaharu 谷口正治 (1893–1985)—both high-ranking members of Ōmoto in the early 1920s—continued their practices (based on Ōmoto's) and eventually established their own religious groups: Okada founded Sekai Kyūsei-kyō 世界救世教 (Church of World Messianity), and Taniguchi founded Seichō no Ie which, as previously mentioned, was in the immediate postwar years involved with occultist endeavors such as the Cosmic Brotherhood Association (CBA).[23] Others returned from the war with new ideas about the place that Japanese religious thought "ought" to play in a pacifist world, and a surge of new translations of occultist literature flooded again the Japanese market, often thanks to individuals, such as Miura Sekizō 三浦関造 (1893–1960), who had managed to expertly navigate the politics of the war years and reinvent themselves in the postwar (Yoshinaga 2010). Despite the aforementioned attention by scholars and media to the influx of foreign materials on occultism from the 1970s on, the legacy of premodern shamanistic practices continues to inform "spiritual therapists" (*supirichuaru serapisto*) in contemporary Japan (Gaitanidis 2012, Gaitanidis and Murakami 2014).

The ensuing popularization of television and a new market for periodicals targeting specific religious and occult interests, coupled with a growing interest in (and reinventions of) local magico-religious techniques (see, for example, Ōmichi 2016, 2017 on the *itako*) eventually led to the occult boom of the 1970s and the subsequent developments mentioned earlier in this paper. As with the early twentieth century's popularization of hypnotism and spiritualism, here the use of "boom" flags several important phenomena that should be kept in mind when reading scholarship in Japanese.

First of all, as we have seen, a significant amount of scholarly research on the occult relies on the "boom" motif of Japanese media to trace popular trends and argue

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22. For a detailed examination of Theosophical activities in interwar Japan, see Čapková 2020.
23. These postwar organizations received a degree of state protection that had been denied to prewar groups like Ōmoto due, in part, to the production of the category of "new religions" (*shinshūkyō*) through campaigns by the Federation of Japanese New Religious Organizations (Shin Nihon Shūkyō Dantai Rengōkai 新日本宗教団体連合会), which received the support of Japanese scholars of religious studies (Thomas 2019, 230ff.).

for larger social, cultural and ideological shifts. The term "boom", however, ought to be handled with caution, because the act of announcing its existence sets it up as both timely corrective and ephemeral fad; its arrival to the scene silently suggests its imminent departure.[24] Thus, when spiritual therapists and clients; purveyors and consumers of spiritual goods; and the journalists (and sometimes scholars) who covered them generally portrayed their activities and products as novel, based on groundbreaking revelations, and indicative of the dawning of a qualitatively new era, they act out the conventions of the "boom" phenomenon.

Secondly, the significant role played by media in the development and spread of the occult has yet to attract further theoretical interest (with some exceptions, see Natale 2016, Takahashi 2019). Indeed, the media (especially magazines as well as newsletters and "amateur"-produced material) have not just been transmission tools, but full-fledged actors that support networks, accelerate flows, and construct markets. More importantly, perhaps, the occult owes much of its "power" and legitimacy to the printed/typed word, the drawings of imaginary worlds, the readership fees, the work of translators, the encyclopedic possibilities, the copy-paste. In all this, the speed at which news circulates depends on the editors, curators, influencers, and taste-makers of these media products, and, hence, such figures ought to be given more attention in descriptions of popular fascinations with the occult.

This Special Issue

The articles we have in this issue demonstrate the diverse ways that Japanese religions intersect with the global occult. Philip Deslippe's paper shows American occultism as an arena that facilitated White engagement with Japanese Buddhism and that helped enable Shin Buddhism's adaptation to American settings. Moreover, he demonstrates how these interactions led to the uptake of U.S. Spiritualist and New Thought songs into a transnational Buddhist hymnal.

Okumura Daisuke and John Person's papers both examine healing practices developed in interwar Japan which mirror each other in interesting ways. While Okumura shows how Matsumoto Chiwaki 松本道別 (1872–1942) produced a "scientific" form of mesmerism that he closely tied to Western science by describing it in terms of "human radium," Person demonstrates that Mitsui Kōshi 三井甲之 (1883–

24. In this way, the Japanese media's use of "boom" functions somewhat like the "turn" motif in English-language academia. See also Baffelli (2016, 19-22) on the interplay between bookstore marketers, and media in creating a so-called "religion boom" in 1970s and 1980s Japan.

1953) attempted the inverse: a fully nativized form of palm healing that is "verified" scientifically, but that is incidental to its ostensible ancient Japanese roots. Interestingly, as Matsumoto developed his healing practice while imprisoned as a socialist and Mitsui promoted his as a means of resisting Marxism, they provide examples of how occultist healing practices in interwar Japan intersected with both left- and right-wing politics in an interesting contemporaneous parallel with how, despite the conflicts between leftist Theosophists and the rightist occultist René Guénon and his followers, they engaged in similar modes of Orientalism, perennialism, and hierarchical thought (Godwin 1994, 198-200; Ingram 2007).

The Christianity S. Jonathon O'Donnell describes and the occult forces it opposes, are self-consciously at once Japanese, Western, and "global." The article reminds us of the need to go beyond "postglobal" religious identity politics (Borup 2020) and also reconsider what is really "new" or "alternative" about the occult (in the same way that NRMs are perhaps less "new and "alternative" than we have conceived; see Baffelli and Reader 2018, 164-167).

Although it is not technically part of the special issue, this issue of *Japanese Religions* also includes a partial translation of an article by Itō Satoshi on medieval beliefs regarding Mt. Takakura near Ise Jingū, including associations of it with the Heavenly Rock Grotto (*ame no iwado* 天岩戸) where Amaterasu Ōmikami famously hid. Although Itō-sensei's text was not written with "the occult" in mind, as the central text he analyzes is "The Secret Comments about Takakura" (Takakura Hishō 高倉秘抄) which contains descriptions of the "secret rites" (*higi* 秘儀) at the Takakura grotto, even this article illustrates the pre-modern "culture of secrecy in Japanese religion" (Scheid and Teeuwen 2006) that provided cultural resources with which modern Japanese would make sense of transnational occult forms centuries later.

Finally, if we were to suggest a framework for future research in the global occult, this issue illustrates how Japanese religionists participated in the global occult from the Meiji period to the present day by different combinations of six processes: 1) *importing* or *receiving* occult practices, ideas, artifacts from abroad; 2) *translating* foreign occult practices, ideas, and objects for Japanese audiences through *adapting* them to local settings and *hybridizing* with practices and beliefs that already existed in Japan; 3) *developing* original occult practices and teachings influenced by imported and/or translated ones; 4) *reimagining* earlier forms of Japanese religion in light of the global occult; 5) *exporting* Japanese practices, whether by teaching or training foreigners in Japan who take them abroad or by actively proselytizing overseas; 6) *interacting* with foreign occultists through correspondence, foreigners' lectures or classes in Japan, and overseas study and travel. These six processes help problematize three questions that perhaps ought to continue occupying the minds of researchers in the field of "the global occult": 1) *what occult?* (the terminology issue); 2) *whose occult?* (the origin issue); and 3) *how global?* (the scale/medium issue).

In summary, as widely recognized in religious studies, concepts like *okaruto*, which excite popular imagination, are double-edged swords when used as analytical categories by intellectuals and commentators who argue for larger sociocultural shifts, because they are burdened with the particular connotations of that signifier (e.g., *okaruto* as European cultural import, as media trend, as 1970s Japanese social mood, etc.). Moreover, when considered part of longer historical processes, such shifts may not be such sudden discontinuities as some contest; in this case, "occult Japan" has been essentially translocal and trans-epistemic since at least the late nineteenth century, and the same can be said about the last forty years of Japanese-language scholarship on this phenomenon, which in many ways, mirrors Anglophone trends in the study of Western Esotericism. In this sense, the occult is undoubtedly no one's *and* everyone's. For it seems to be always associated with human affect and emotions: marvelous *rei*, uncanny *kaii*, scary *okaruto*; rather than rejected knowledge, perhaps what the papers in this issue illustrate is therefore a modern repression of certain emotional experiences, which various media and mediators have nevertheless specialized in recording, transmitting, and creating with the speed and innovation characteristic of modern technological progress. The scale at which these experiences have been shared seems to become larger and larger as research, like the four papers in this issue, continues to unveil the global intellectual connections that sustain them and which now point towards the idea that the occult is not as hidden as we had originally thought. The question therefore that will continue to occupy us is not "what global occult?", but "how global is which occult?"

We are grateful to Professor Yoshinaga Shin'ichi, the editor of *Japanese Religions*, for having offered us the chance to put such a special issue together, and we also thank all the authors (and co-translator) of the papers and book reviews for their continuous collaboration despite the pandemic and associated challenges. We hope the arguments made in this special issue will be read widely and will inspire researchers in Japan and abroad to consider including "the occult" and related phenomena in their future scholarly endeavors.

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