Religious Studies in Japan

VOLUME 7, 2024

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FUJIWARA Satoko

Foreword

VOLUME 7 of *Religious Studies in Japan* (RSJ) features papers originating from a special panel hosted by our International Connections Committee on 11 September 2022 during the Eighty-First Annual Meeting of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies (JARS). Originally planned for Aichi Gakuin University in Nagoya, the meeting shifted to an online format due to ongoing pandemic concerns. This change, while unfortunate, notably expanded global access to our annual meeting.

Building on the success of the first online international panel at the Eightieth Annual Meeting, the Eighty-First Annual Meeting's international panel featured four up-and-coming scholars from Denmark, France, South Korea (affiliated with Tohoku University in Japan at the time), and Japan. Additionally, Erica Baffelli of Manchester University contributed as a commentator. The panel, entitled "Esotericism, Occultism, and Spiritual Therapies during the Long Twentieth Century: Theoretical Implication," was organized by Ioannis Gaitanidis of Chiba University, a JARS Councilor, under the auspices of the International Connections Committee.

The panel provided an exploration of esotericism in Japan, particularly its intersection with history, sociology, and religion in Japan. Its success led Hoshino Seiji, chief editor of RSJ, to invite Ioannis Gaitanidis to guest edit a special issue of the journal, thereby extending the panel's reach to those unable to attend. Gaitanidis, in turn, invited Erica Baffelli to coedit the issue, an invitation she graciously accepted. On behalf of the RSJ Editorial Board and the

FUJIWARA Satoko is President of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies.

International Connections Committee, we extend our deepest gratitude to these distinguished guest editors.

While hosting an entirely online and international panel was a new endeavor for JARS, the International Connections Committee has consistently organized in-person panels featuring international scholars since the Seventy-Third Annual Meeting in 2014. Let me take this opportunity to summarize the content of these panels:

"Understanding of Other Religions in Changing Societies," given in Arabic and in English, convened and chaired by Shiojiri Kazuko on 13 September 2014 (seventy-third meeting), at Doshisha University, Kyoto.

> This panel examined the dynamic nature of Islamic understanding of others and other religions in changing societies. It focused on religious pluralism in Turkey, the Hui Muslim community in China, the acceptance of Islam in prewar Japan, and the role of religious minorities and interfaith dialogues in Islamic societies. The panelists discussed these topics from the perspectives of secularism, civil society, and religious movements, aiming to deepen the understanding of Islam's role and adaptation in diverse social contexts.

"Secularism and Nation in Modern Asia: Toward a Post-Secularization Theory," given in English, convened and chaired by Yamanaka Hiroshi; and "Public Religion and Public Roles of Religions in Modern Japan," given in English, convened and chaired by Hoshino Seiji on 5 September 2015 (seventy-fourth meeting), at Soka University, Tokyo. (These two panels were organized by the Soka University host.)

> These two panels discussed the public roles of religion in modern Japan and secularism in modern Asia. The first panel, joined by James Beckford as commentator, examined the historical and social contributions of religion, focusing on public religion and religious organizations' societal roles. The second panel, joined by José Casanova as commentator, addressed the secularization debate in Japan, comparing religious freedom in modern Japan to secular trends in Thailand and India, and exploring the relationship between religion and the state in these countries.

"Religious Studies and Global Environmental Issues," given in English and Japanese, convened and chaired by Kimura Takeshi on 10 September 2016 (seventy-fifth meeting), at Waseda University, Tokyo.

This panel explored the role of religious studies in addressing global environmental issues. It included discussions on religious responses to environmental problems, the connection between Buddhism and environmental movements, and the relationship between humanity and nature in Daoism, focusing on the concept of grotto-heaven (cave sanctuaries). The panel, featuring diverse experts including Sarah Frederick, aimed to deepen the understanding of how religious studies can contribute to global environmental understanding.

"Reconsidering Religious Studies in Modern Japan in Light of the Institutionalization of Universities," given in English, convened and chaired by Fujiwara Satoko on 16 September 2017 (seventy-sixth meeting), at the University of Tokyo. (This panel was organized by the University of Tokyo host.)

The panel, featuring Tomoko Masuzawa as commentator, discussed the history of religious studies in Japan from institutional perspectives, focusing on the early modern history of Japanese religious studies and the impact of the university system on these studies. It covered various perspectives, including higher education systems, Christian studies courses, modern Buddhist studies and monastic training, as well as the establishment of philosophy departments, exploring their layered structures and historical significance.

"Rethinking 'the Religious' in Secularized Societies," given in English, convened and chaired by Date Kiyonobu on 8 September 2018 (seventy-seventh meeting), at Otani University, Kyoto.

This panel explored the evolving nature of religious belief and practice in modern secular societies. It featured presentations by experts like Grace Davie, who discussed concepts such as "believing without belonging" and "vicarious religion," applying these to contexts ranging from contemporary Britain to post-Soviet Russia, and examining the paradoxes and diverse aspects of secularization.

"Reconsidering the Role of Biography in the Study of Modern Japanese Buddhism," given in English, convened and chaired by Orion Klautau on 14 September 2019 (seventy-seventh meeting), at Teikyo University of Science, Tokyo.

This panel critically revisited the use of biographies in Japanese studies. It explored how a biographical approach can enrich the understanding of Buddhism in modern Japan through the lives of three influential

> figures: Nakanishi Ushirō, D. T. Suzuki, and Sugimoto Tetsurō. The session included discussions on the impact of these individuals on Buddhist reform, the interpretation of Zen in the West, and the development of modern Buddhist art.

The seventy-eighth meeting in 2020, held online, was considerably downsized due to the pandemic and did not feature an international panel.

"jars-kars Joint Forum: Toward Post-covid-19 Networking," given in English, convened and chaired by Fujiwara Satoko on 7 September 2021 (seventy-ninth meeting), online.

> This panel focused on building scholarly networks in the post-covid-19 era. It featured four young and mid-career scholars from jars and kars (Korean Association for Religious Studies), discussing their research experiences and expectations for international networking, particularly in East Asia. The panel also addressed the challenges and potential benefits of such networks, including the impact of technological advancements on international collaboration.

"Esotericism, Occultism, and Spiritual Therapies during the Long Twentieth Century: Theoretical Implication," given in English, convened and chaired by Ioannis Gaitanidis on 11 September 2022 (eightieth meeting), online. (See the "Introduction" for its content.)

"Translation Matters: Translating Japanese Religious Concepts into Other Languages," given in English, convened and chaired by Okuyama Michiaki on 10 September 2023 (eighty-first meeting), at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

> This panel explored the complexities and philosophical dimensions of translating Japanese religious texts and concepts into other languages. Panelists with diverse expertise discussed various challenges and strategies in translation, touching on subjects ranging from classical *waka* and Shugendō to contemporary issues in religious tourism and spiritual care, while also considering the broader implications of these translations on Japanese religious identity.

While these international panels reflect the broad interests of jars, it is noteable that, with few exceptions, their full papers had not been previously published in English. Volume 7 represents a significant milestone in the inter-

nationalization of JARS, for the first time featuring papers from one of its annual meetings in English.

This volume also highlights the achievements of Iijima Takayoshi and Kameyama Mitsuhiro, the 2022 and the 2023 JARS Award recipients respectively. We invite our readers to explore these authors' summaries of their awarded works and the accompanying statements from the Award Committee. The presentation of an award to a doctoral student, Kameyama Mitsuhiro, marks a first in its history, underscoring the evolving and dynamic nature of our field.

Finally, we acknowledge a significant transition within our journal. Hoshino Seiji, who has served as the chief editor of RSJ for eight years, is stepping down with this volume's publication. On behalf of all JARS members, we express our profound gratitude for his unwavering commitment and contributions to the journal. Simultaneously, we are pleased to welcome Maruyama Takao from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies as the new chief editor.

Fujiwara Satoko
Tokyo, January 2024

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IBARAGI Daisuke

An Existential Analysis of "Limit Situation" in the Japanese Philosophy of Religion: Ishizu Teruji and Takeuchi Yoshinori

Although many studies have been conducted on the Japanese philosophy of religion, the close relationship between this and existential philosophy has not yet been discussed. To exemplify the profound significance of the latter in the developmental trajectory of the former, this article examines the cases of two Japanese philosophers of religion, Ishizu Teruji (1903–1972) and Takeuchi Yoshinori (1913–2002). The key idea under discussion is "limit situation," which originated in the philosophy of Karl Jaspers. Taking into account the findings of anthropology and psychology, Ishizu assimilated the concept of limit situation into his philosophical system and proposed a new theory of human crisis response. By modifying the same concept, Takeuchi created the idea of "extraordinary events" as a religious action. With their backgrounds in Buddhist thought, both philosophers concluded that any limit situation has the potential function of transcendence, transforming the existential subject into a religious one through anxiety.

KEYWORDS: Japanese philosophy of religion—limit situation—functionalism—otherness—anxiety

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Relatively little attention has been given to the fact that existential philosophy, if not existentialism, has played a crucial role in developing the Japanese philosophy of religion, especially that of the Kyoto school. The founder of the Kyoto school, Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945), was sympathetic to Kierkegaard's religious intuition; his final essay, "The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview," referred positively to what Kierkegaard had called the "knight of faith" in *Fear and Trembling* to explain the contradictory unity of God and the human individual (Nishida 1987). Tanabe Hajime 田邊元 (1885–1962), the other pillar of the Kyoto school, developed his religious theory of "metanoetics" under the influence of Kierkegaard (Tanabe 1986) and, throughout his life, wrestled with Heidegger's existential thought of *Being*. Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990), Nishida's most eminent disciple, dedicated his life to overcoming nihilism with Nietzsche and Heidegger, which led him to develop a philosophical position based on the Buddhist idea of emptiness (Nishitani 1982).

This article further investigates the relationship between the Japanese philosophy of religion and existential philosophy. Thus, we focus on Ishizu Teruji 石津照璽 (1903–1972) and Takeuchi Yoshinori 武内義範 (1913–2002), and examine how they applied existential thought to the problems of religion. Strangely neglected by today's researchers, Ishizu Teruji is well known for his research on Kierkegaard and Tientai Buddhism (Ch. Tiāntāi 天台). Having completed religious studies at Tokyo Imperial University, he accepted a professorship at Tohoku Imperial University and eventually became its president. He served as president of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies for four terms beginning from 1956 and was vice president of the International Association for the Study of Religions and the History of Religions in 1960, contributing to religious studies in Japan. While Ishizu had nothing to do with the Kyoto school, Takeuchi Yoshinori, ten years younger, was one of Tanabe's favorite disciples and taught philosophy of religion at Kyoto University along with Nishitani. Takeuchi, who was also a priest of the Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 sect founded by Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263), left behind philosophical reflections on Pure Land Buddhism (Ch. Jìngtǔzōng; Jp. Jōdokyō 浄土教) and early Buddhism. "The Philosophy of the

* This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Numbers 19K00036.

Kyōgyōshinshō," Takeuchi's main work, is a philosophical reading of Shinran's thought and is said to have inspired his teacher, Tanabe.[1]

Although there is no documented evidence of direct interaction between Ishizu and Takeuchi,[2] a noteworthy convergence exists in their philosophical ideas. They shared a common interest in the existential concept of "limit situation [boundary situation]" (JASPERS 1919).[3] They became interested in this concept in 1950; Ishizu published an article, "Genkaiteki jōkyo ni okeru shūkyōteki tekiou" (Religious Adaptation in Limit Situations), in *Tetsugaku zasshi* (Journal of Philosophy), the oldest philosophical journal in Japan, and Takeuchi contributed an essay, "Shūkyō tetsugaku" (Philosophy of Religion), to the sixth volume of *Tetsugaku kōza* (Philosophical Lectures), wherein he explicitly related his idea of "extraordinary events" to Jaspers' concept of the limit situation. Therefore, at first glance, the common source of their inspiration lies in Jaspers' philosophy of existence. However, in reality, both relied on Heidegger's conceptual systems. Some key concepts in Heidegger's main work, *Being and Time* (1927), were deeply influenced by Jaspers' *Psychology of Worldviews* (1919).[4] The primary purpose of this article is to demonstrate how Ishizu and Takeuchi established new theories by redefining or modifying the existential idea of the limit situation from their respective perspectives.

1. For further details on Takeuchi's thought, see chapter 7 of Fritz Buri's work on the Kyoto school (BURI 1997, 224–49).

2. As far as we have been able to ascertain, Ishizu mentions Takeuchi's work only once, in 1959, in a survey article examining trends in studying religion in Japan. Ishizu cites Takeuchi's work alongside numerous other studies as an instance of contemporary inquiry into the philosophy of religion. He states, "Takeuchi Yoshinori has persistently undertaken rigorous investigations and attained accomplishments in the realm of early Buddhism" (ISHIZU 1968, 338). In contrast, there is no mention of Ishizu in Takeuchi's collected works. This tenuous relationship between the two implies the arduousness of engaging in comprehensive discourse across different academic lineages within the Japanese philosophy of religion during that era. Nevertheless, considering that the 1956 General Conference of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies was held at Kyoto University, where Ishizu was elected president, and that Takeuchi published a paper on early Buddhism in the *Journal of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies* the following year, it is difficult to believe that the two eminent scholars were completely unacquainted with each other.

3. In *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (Psychology of Worldviews, 1919), Jaspers defined "*grenzsituationen*" as the critical situations that we can neither avoid nor change in life, such as death, suffering, struggle, and guilt. In the second volume of *Philosophy* (1932), in which the English translator translates the term as "boundary situation," Jaspers defined the term as "situations like the following: [...] that I cannot live without struggling and suffering; that I cannot avoid guilt; that I must die" (JASPERS 1970, 178).

4. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger directly refers to the concept of "limit-situation," especially to reinforce his analysis of death. He also praises Jaspers as "the first to have explicitly grasped the task of a doctrine of world-views and carried it through" (HEIDEGGER 1962, 496).

Basic Ideas in Ishizu's Philosophy of Religion

Before examining Ishizu's study, "Religious Adaptation in Limit Situations," reprinted in chapter 2 of his book *Shūkyō tetsugaku no bamen to kontei* (Scenes and Bases in Philosophy of Religion, 1968), we will first summarize his philosophy of religion by referring to the first chapter of this book. For Ishizu, the task of the philosophy of religion is "to investigate the ultimate meaning and structure of religion" (Ishizu 1968, 7). He argues that we must consider possible experiences unique to religion and distinct from everyday experience to achieve this. He further argues that the philosophy of religion must not ignore empirical studies of religion, but must focus on results and approach religion from within religious facts (Ishizu 1968, 9). However, philosophy differs from the empirical sciences because it is necessary to consider *possible* experiences in the basic realm of existence.

Inspired by Buddhist thought and existential philosophy, Ishizu introduced the three-domain theory in his previous book *Tendai jissōron no kenkyū* (Studies in Tientai Theory of Reality, 1947). In his view, people generally believe that the self and its counterparts (other beings) exist independently as separate entities and then interact with each other. The self pertains to the domain of the psyche, denoting what has been philosophically conceptualized in terms of subjectivity. Ishizu designated this as the first domain or the initial world. If we significantly broaden this domain and establish it as the exclusive metaphysical foundation for all entities, it serves as a locus for spiritualism or idealism. Conversely, we may consider the objective realm, specifically, the realm of external phenomena concerning the psyche that Ishizu referred to as the second domain (the second world). If we refine philosophical deliberation by equating this domain to the material world, materialism will emerge. Within the frameworks of these domains, subjects and objects inherently exist from the outset, and the two are interrelated based on their differentiation. However, Ishizu overturned this sequence. A specific sphere exists wherein the self and its counterparts are already intricately "intertwined" before manifesting as distinct and autonomous entities (Ishizu 1947, 3, 34–35). This sphere of reality is the third domain, which, according to Ishizu, "does not consist in the first and second domains nor succeeds them" (Ishizu 1968, 19), as it instead transcends the other two domains where everything is conceived as relatively autonomous through discriminative understanding. Our naïve conviction tends to rigidly demarcate all beings, rendering us oblivious to the fact that reality exclusively unfolds within the third domain as an intricate web of interdependence.

Ishizu suggests that the third domain ("the scene of reality") is dominated by possibilities, in which a thing can be anything (this or that). Owing to this instability, the constitution of reality is radically indeterminate, and we are not free

to choose what we want. In the inevitable "lack" where we cannot do as we wish, we discriminate between things, desiring one and rejecting another. Thus, we attempt to limit and define the initially undefined beings belonging to the third domain by transferring them to the first and second domains. It is a function of delusory discrimination in the human intellect or understanding that compels us to attach to something specific. To illustrate this, Ishizu uses the example of death (Ishizu 1968, 21). When people say they want to die or do not want to die, they have "death" in mind, as it is understood distinctively as such. They imagine death as an entity that exists there. They mistake "death" for the de facto death that comes at the end of life; they confuse two different domains, and thus they are passionately obsessed with the former. Actual death is never identified as "death" (as perceived intellectually). This in-determinacy, which is ultimately negation, lack, or void, is characteristic of the third domain.

However, the negativity encountered within this context does not denote mere nullity or "nothing." Instead, it corresponds to what is known as "emptiness" (Sk. *śūnyatā*; Jp. *kū* 空) in Mahayana Buddhism. The third domain constitutes a realm that suspends on the substantial nature of all entities and purges them of any independent essence. This state of emptiness must not be regarded as an enduring void, for falling into such a perception would lead to the pitfall of substantializing it. Emptiness does not imply the absence of existence; rather, it signifies that various phenomena are only temporarily or provisionally established in the realm of actual reality. The third domain is never a sphere wherein these phenomena exist autonomously and persistently in isolation. Failing to comprehend this provisional existence as truly "provisional" (Ch. *jiǎ* 假; Jp. *ke* 仮) would result in an immediate regression to a realm of illusory discrimination, where everything possesses its own essence. If the empty and provisional are rigidly delineated, they pertain to the first and second domains, failing to reflect the true essence of the third domain.

Consequently, Ishizu introduced a third category, the middle (Ch. *zhōng* 中; Jp. *chū* 中), relying on the "intersection of threefold truth" (*ennyū santai* 円融三諦), which he underscores as the cornerstone of Tientai doctrine (Ishizu 1947, 154, 156; Murakami 2015, 122). The middle truth resides in the claim that reality is simultaneously empty and provisional while transcending emptiness and provisionality. Ishizu understands this truth "to express the third domain as it is" or "to integrate the empty and the provisional while keeping them intact" (Ishizu 1947, 9). Although Ishizu's hypothesis possesses such a complex structure rooted in the Tientai tradition, reducing it to a simple variant of the Buddhist theory of emptiness may relate it to "the place of absolute nothingness" in Nishida's philosophy, the thought of "emptiness" in Nishitani's philosophy, and the concept of absolute "non-articulation" raised by Izutsu Toshihiko 井筒俊彦 (Izutsu 1982, 125). Nevertheless, this article does not follow up on the similarities between

these concepts; instead, it highlights the uniqueness of Ishizu's concept mainly because of its structural functionality.

Unlike the first two domains, the third domain is beyond the range of our thinking with discrimination and calculation. Our minds lose this reality, taking nonexistence for existent things and desiring them. In this case, the third domain of reality, where all things should occur as they are, is structurally heterogeneous to the discriminating subject, clinging passionately to particular objects. Thus, it functions as the Other or the rejection of our ordinary mentality. "The supernatural," says Ishizu, "can be said to be a mental sign or symbol that appears or presents itself to those exposed to such rejective and alien function" (Ishizu 1968, 24). He sees this function as an essential feature of the religious experience, one that differentiates it from everyday experiences. Whether it is the spiritual being in Tylor's animism, the supernatural power in Marett's pre-animism, or the sacred in Otto's theory, the rejective otherness implies the structural uncontrollability, unmanageability, lack, or "nothingness" in existence. From this, Ishizu concludes that the basic meaning of religion is for humans to live in that structure of inability, surpassing and eliminating our egocentric subjectivity so that each self becomes genuinely as it is in the immediate reality.

Ishizu's Analysis of Crisis and Adaptation

In "Religious Adaptation and Its Base in Limit Situations," chapter 2 of *Scenes and Bases in Philosophy of Religion*, Ishizu explores the fundamental mechanism of religious acts or facts in human existence, likened to a basement below the actual stage in which they are performed. The clue to this elucidation is "limit situation," as a crisis in real life, which causes "frustration or conflict" (Ishizu 1968, 28). For Ishizu and Jaspers, every limit situation is experienced as "unbearable" for life and thus causes "suffering" (Jaspers 1919, 202, 218). For example, Jaspers cited the "struggle" against mutual aid, "death" limiting life, "contingency" limiting meaningful connection, and "guilt" making innocence impossible. Using the word "crisis," Ishizu extended this to all harsh situations that bring danger or significant stress to human life. He also argues the limit situation problems with two other disciplines: social anthropology and psychology. First, Ishizu intensively discusses Malinowski's functionalist theory of culture to analyze crisis and adaptation. For the same purpose, he referred to positions close to Gestalt psychology, such as Lewin and Goldstein. The last section synthesizes these findings to provide a kind of existential philosophical interpretation, suggesting a theoretical bridge to Heidegger's philosophy of existence.

In his posthumous book, *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays*, more often cited in Ishizu's essay, Malinowski (1944) expanded the

anthropological principles used in studying uncivilized societies to analyzing cultures in general. From this perspective, culture is a new artificial environment to be constructed, reproduced, and maintained to solve the problems set by human organic needs; it can be defined as a secondary environment based on the transformation of nature. His theory comprises two axioms: "Every culture must satisfy the biological system of needs" and "every cultural achievement" is "an instrumental enhancement of human anatomy" (MALINOWSKI 1944, 171). In Ishizu's reading of Malinowski, the primary focus seems to be the concept of needs because the installation of "subjective" existence differentiates Malinowski's functional analysis from other structural social theories, such as those of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown.[5]

The human subject is primarily determined as another animal species by basic needs, specifically, nutritive, reproductive, and hygienic needs. Human beings must create a new environment called "culture" to utilize various artifacts or institutions to meet these needs. It means that all human beings meet basic needs only indirectly by fulfilling "derived needs" or "cultural imperatives" (MALINOWSKI 1944, 120). When they begin to use shelter, fire, or clothing for protection from the cold and weather, these items become indispensable to their lives and thus constitute new needs. After arguing that derived needs have the same stringency as biological needs, Malinowski categorized four cultural responses to these derived needs: economics, social control [law or morality], education, and political organization, distinguishing these imperatives from integrating and transmitting them as a custom or tradition through symbolism. These "integrative imperatives" are embodied in "knowledge, religion, and magic." Notably, from a functionalist standpoint, Malinowski interpreted religion and magic as "the indispensable complements to pure rational and empirical systems of thought"; he believed that bridging gaps in human knowledge led people to "the assertion of supernatural forces" (MALINOWSKI 1944, 173–74).

Following Malinowski's argument, Ishizu reconsidered human existence based on functionality as adapting or adjusting to a natural or artificial environment. The critical question is how human beings overcome the state wherein all adaptations to primary and secondary environments have become impossible: their eventual inadaptability or maladjustment. The central premise is that the satisfaction of desire is essential to life. Regarding functionalism, human life

5. Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) was a British social anthropologist renowned for his accentuation of social structure, diverging from Malinowski's psychological viewpoint. His theory served as the foundation for an analytical paradigm referred to as "structural functionalism." Radcliffe-Brown's ideas were profoundly shaped by the insights of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), who positioned the collective societal representation at the core of his analysis, as opposed to individual psychology.

requires the fulfillment of basic and derived needs; nevertheless, they can be impossible to satisfy comprehensively and adequately, because of the limitations of natural materials or forces in the primary environment, and because human acts are very often thwarted by economic, political, legal, moral, and technological constraints in the secondary environment. These are the roots of conflict and frustration. Ishizu highlighted that, exceeding the limit of such a conflict, the living entity faces ruin at the dead end, where it can no longer meet any needs. "It [dead end] is what we call a crisis of life, an extreme situation," says Ishizu, "each of which happens to human beings in a culture for the reasons mentioned above, but if we dare to divide its types, it frequently occurs in a natural, social, physiological, or psychological way and never ceases to happen" (Ishizu 1968, 34). Nonetheless, Ishizu also emphasizes that the living entity makes a desperate effort to survive in such cases, uses selective interests to adapt, and is governed by particular values, indicating a new adaptation through religion or magic.

Accepting Malinowski's thesis that "the whole religion is a by-product of man's adaptation to his environment" (Malinowski 1936, 57), Ishizu perceives existential limit situations at the source of that religious adaptation. They can be compared to what Malinowski thought were the situations from which religion and magic arose. In *Magic, Science and Religion*, he defines them as "situations of emotional stress: crises of life, lacunae in important pursuits, death and initiation into tribal mysteries, unhappy love and unsatisfied hate" (Malinowski 1948, 87). It does not mean that every emotional crisis creates a new magic or religion; magical or religious acts performed during crises are traditionally modeled following past inheritances as collective rituals. However, such adaptations along these traditional models are similar and correspond to the natural adaptations of the body and mind in critical situations.

Referring to an anthropological textbook (Chapple and Coon 1947, 13–50), Ishizu focused on the correspondence between the physical or physiological processes of the autonomic nervous system, which automatically returns to a state of equilibrium to maintain a stable internal environment, and the mechanism of religious adaptation during a crisis. In a religious institutional society, when a crisis shakes the equilibrium of a living entity, whether an individual or a group, leaders such as shamans and priests attempt to restore that equilibrium through rituals or magic. Ishizu also considered the functional relationship between the subject and the environment from a psychological perspective (Ishizu 1968, 45–48). In Lewin's topological psychology, behavior (B) is a function of a person (P) and their environment (E), and the totality of these factors is defined as "the life space (LSp)"; it is formulated as $B = F(P, E) = F(LSp)$. With this formula, Ishizu relied on psychological research by Schaffer, Rosenzweig, and others to link the life space to

the problem of adaptation.[6] He explained that, as the form of the life space always determines and limits the range of "possible locomotion," the adaptability of the relationship between P and E is highly restricted and often results in desire inhibition, maladjustment, conflict, and mental disorders (Ishizu 1968, 46). Among these psychological phenomena that display the inability to adapt, Ishizu emphasizes the emotion of "anxiety," about which philosophers, psychologists, and psychoanalysts have expressed multiple views. According to Goldstein, a psychiatrist whom Ishizu held in higher regard than the neo-Freudians, anxiety belongs to catastrophic conditions or situations and states that endanger the organism's existence (Goldstein 1940, 91). Goldstein defined anxiety as a subjective experience of that danger to existence. After observing many patients, Goldstein came to the following proposition: unlike fear, which has some object, anxiety does not reference anything definite. Thus, he adds: "Anxiety deals with nothingness. It is the inner experience of being faced with nothingness" (Goldstein 1940, 92). In his terminology, nothingness indicates a state of "uncertainty" about one's existence caused by external or internal difficulties. This theory reminds us of Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's existential analysis of anxiety. However, Goldstein emphasized the psychiatric claim that uncertainty in anxiety leads to abnormal activities, neurosis, or even suicide (Goldstein 1940, 113). Ishizu's reading of Goldstein implies that such abnormal behavior is a loss of freedom of decision, whereas "the sincere faith of the really religious man, which is based upon willing devotion to the infinite" (Goldstein 1940, 115) involves free self-decision and is accompanied by the capacity to bear anxiety.

Owing to the general unification of anthropological and psychological approaches to understanding religion, Ishizu hypothesized three stages (Ishizu 1968, 52–53). First, living subjects typically use commonsense or scientific methods of adaptation. Second, when it comes to an impasse where they are useless, the subject uses and relies on something else, even if it is slightly unconvincing, as an object of selective interest or regressed mental function. We may consider this an object of extraordinary experience, colored by imagination and fantasy (Flower 1927, 26). Third, however, in a deadlock or a crisis at a higher level, where no means are available, the only thing we can do is "to decide ourselves." For Ishizu, self-decision means "deciding oneself" to accept what is unmanageable, uncontrollable, unpredictable, unreliable, and uncertain in the environment; resigning oneself to the lack or absence, to the "nothingness" expressed by the prefix un-, that appears in anxiety. Although admitting that the above is only "an operational hypothesis," Ishizu suggests that the second and third

6. Heinz Rudolf Schaffer (1926–2008) was a British developmental psychologist who studied mother-child interactions. Saul Rosenzweig (1907–2004) was an American psychologist who, influenced by Lewin, refined his frustration theory through experimental psychology.

stages correspond to the essential distinction between magic and religion (Ishizu 1968, 53–54). The second stage remains magical, strengthening the self-ness by adding "supernatural" power to the self's ability or inability.[7] In contrast, the third stage becomes religious if it forces us to abandon ourselves to nothingness in a realm dominated by possibilities and uncertain factors. According to Ishizu, the functionalist analysis of religion by anthropology and psychology failed to fully grasp that self-abandonment or self-denial is at the core of (non-magical) religious attitudes such as faith and devotion, leaving the distinction between the second and third stages unclear. Ishizu's thought consistently maintains that religion is not in a supernatural entity or power but in otherness or rejection capable of abolishing the egocentric self.

Takeuchi's Theory of Religious Action

In the transition from the early period, centered on his main book, *The Philosophy of the Kyōgyōshinshō*, to the period of his research in early Buddhism, Takeuchi (1999a) conceived a comprehensive theory that covers religions not limited to Buddhism. This theory was initially proposed in an essay titled "Philosophy of Religion" in *Philosophical Lectures* (1950), an introductory book consisting of essays by various philosophical experts. He established ideal types of religious action and explained the emergence of religious structures in terms of their relationship. They are respectively called "extraordinary [or nondaily] events and everyday life" (Type I), "religious anxiety" (Type II), "world transcendence" (Type III), and "prayer" (Type IV). The same theory was published over thirty years later, "Four Types of Religious Action" (1984), where its theoretical role is redefined as "a mediator between the so-called descriptive phenomenology of religion and the philosophical phenomenology of religion" (Takeuchi 1999c, 75). Takeuchi mentioned Heidegger, Jaspers, and Scheler as the sources of his thought. More importantly, this typological idea is directly derived from Scheler's description of "*der religiöse Akt*" (Scheler 1960). When studying Takeuchi's theory as a whole, we must remember that the German term "Akt" means action or activity (*Handlung*), process or event (*Vorgang*), actuality, and conscious experience.

We define the four types (Takeuchi 1999c, 6–9) as follows: Type I models a situation wherein an extraordinary event occurs, disrupting daily life and

7. This definition of magic is aligned with Frazer's classical understanding that it is characterized by coercion: "It [magic] constrains or coerces instead of conciliating or propitiating them [inanimate agents] as religion would do" (Frazer 1911, 225). See also the following demarcation by a leading scholar who contributed to the foundation for the comparative study of religions: "Religion differs from magic in that it is not concerned with control or manipulation of the powers confronted" (Wach 1958, 53).

driving us into fear. Type II represents the process by which this emotional state of fear is heightened and crystallized into religious anxiety. According to Takeuchi, religious anxiety leads to religious questions with fundamental skepticism about the value and meaning of life (Takeuchi 1999c, 24–25). Type III indicates that the answer to these questions is in the transcendent realm. The subject's awareness of finitude, produced through the extraordinary (I) and revealed in anxiety (II), is essentially constituted toward the infinite and transcendent. Takeuchi claimed that this awareness spreads from our inner depths to the entire entity. In the self-awareness of our finitude and that of all beings, the world comes to be as it is for the first time ("*Die Welt weltet*" in Heidegger's terms). The whole of finite being is discovered as the world only from a transcendental perspective and in the act of transcendence. This is the world-transcendence ("*Welttranszendenz*"[8]) of Type III, where the subject transcends the world in its intentionality to the realm beyond the world. This can be divided into two aspects—its accomplishment and falling—the former being defined as "vertical" transcendence to the Transcendent and the latter as "horizontal" transcendence to the world. According to Takeuchi, the temporal transcendence described by Heidegger is nothing more than the latter, a convenient variation of the former. The reverse experience of turning from horizontal to vertical transcendence is called a conversion. This action or attitude of religious existence toward the Transcendent is categorized as "prayer" (Type IV). Based on Friedrich Heiler's argument, Takeuchi broadly used this term to comprehend various relationships with divine beings. Particularly noteworthy is that prayer cannot be one-sided but inevitably becomes two-way through return from the Absolute—as the "transfer of merit" is regarded as mutual in Pure Land Buddhism. Consequently, prayer is "the pure expression of living cooperation with the Transcendent" (Takeuchi 1999c, 10).

The religious actions begin with an extraordinary event from the outside, going through a cycle from Types I to IV and eventually reaching a new and higher order that Takeuchi calls "the ordinariness." In this scheme of ideal types, Types I and IV imply transcendental actions from outside life, while Types II and III imply reactions to them from inner life. Classified from a different perspective, Types I and II represent opposing forces against life, whereas Types III and IV embody the positive forces of restored life. These positive forces distinguish ordinariness from the initial order of life before an intrusive event. Filled with the Transcendent, the ordinariness is higher than "everydayness"

8. This term comes from *On the Eternal in Man*, Max Scheler's phenomenological work on religious experience. It means that through the intentionality of revelation, the religious subject is always correlated with an object transcending beyond the world's finitude (Scheler 1960, 250).

and becomes a genuinely religious reaction to the intrusion crisis (Takeuchi 1999c, 11). However, there is another cyclical pattern; as extraordinary events are repeated, the subject may become accustomed to them and integrate them into life without completing a religious response. In this case, although everyday life is not elevated to ordinariness, the original order is restored. Takeuchi calls it a "pseudo-religious reaction" and explains that it corresponds to the type of "primitive religion" that has remained in its primordial state and has not undergone any historical development (Takeuchi 1999c, 11–12). However, the religious response of ordinariness belongs to the type of "historical religion" as it can create and develop history. Takeuchi refers to the similarity in Bergson's distinction between static and dynamic religions (Bergson 1935). However, he adds that we cannot wholly identify it with the distinction between primitive and historical religion. Bergson's view of religion presupposes the discontinuity of "two sources," whereas Takeuchi finds only qualitative differences between them.

Extraordinary Events and Human Crisis

Takeuchi's philosophy of religion aimed to construct a phenomenology of the religious spirit by combining the four types of religious actions and the two reactions. In practice, this attempt failed. Takeuchi's first essay comes to a sudden end before going into a detailed analysis of Types III and IV. His later paper contains only an overview of the theory and a lengthy description of Type I. Neither comes close to a complete and thorough analysis of the four types. A positive reason for this setback may be that he did not need to explain Types III and IV further because they had been specifically described and developed in his articles on Shinran. Takeuchi's notion of transcendence, drawn from Shinran's thought, contains a unique structure of "trans-descendence." In the misery accompanying deep sin, there is a "direction of infinite and hopeless fall to the bottom of oneself" from the inherently exalted position as a member of the human race. The recognition of such an infinite downfall is termed a "trans-descendental" awareness because it forms a descending movement that "subverts the upward trajectory of transcendence" (Takeuchi 1999b, 62). The awareness of sin can prompt an individual to make a religious decision through a collision with the power of the Transcendent (an I-Thou encounter), culminating in an inverted leap toward salvation. This path of Other-power leads from the misery of radical evil to salvation, thereby revealing the paradoxical continuity between the finite and infinite. These fundamental concepts underlie Types III and IV. Takeuchi clarified this structure through a detailed analysis of

Shinran's interpretation of Amitabha's vows,[9] particularly the "twentieth vow," which has the potential to transition to the eighteenth vow (Takeuchi 1999a, 84–134).

However, when highlighting Takeuchi's thought in comparison to Ishizu's, more attention should be paid to Types i and ii, for these remind us of Ishizu's existential idea of crisis. According to Takeuchi, "extraordinary events" put everyday life into what Jaspers called a limit situation (Takeuchi 1999c, 18). It seems reasonable to suppose that they function as equivalents of the rejective otherness that Ishizu regarded as a severe threat to life. Type ii, "religious anxiety," is aligned with the anxiety that Ishizu, relying on Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's existential thought, described with Goldstein.

Type i, representing "the occurrence of extraordinary events during everyday life," is the central issue addressed. Takeuchi begins with a philosophical reflection on everyday life and draws three arguments (Takeuchi 1999c, 16–17, 85–89):

(1) People cannot perceive the structure of everyday life if they only live in the facts of immediate experience. To perceive and understand this structure, they must stand in a position beyond everyday life through the medium of extraordinary events. Takeuchi called this position "extraordinariness." Just as stillness can be understood well when contrasted with movement, everyday life can be seen clearly from the perspective of extraordinariness.

(2) In everyday life, various orders, rules, and regulations arise from habits or customs. Considering Eliade's analysis of circular time, periodicity, and eternal return in religion (Eliade 1954), Takeuchi returns those orders to the most basic order of "repetition." For the most part, people do the same thing every day. Takeuchi compared them to polar bears in a zoo, shaking their heads and moving incessantly in their cages. How do people living in such cages feel fresh every day? This is because they are not fully aware of the structure of their everyday lives. In a faint consciousness of boredom, they sometimes try to bring about changes in their daily lives. However, like social fads, these changes are repeated and eventually settle down to the original order.

(3) Repetition, the basic order of everyday life, permeates the space. Most objects around us are arranged in a way that makes them repetitive in everyday life. In his famous analysis of *Being and Time*, Heidegger defined the things in the surrounding world as "equipment," or as means to fulfill some purpose, and

9. For a sophisticated philosophical understanding of Shinran's interpretation, see also chapter 6 of Tanabe's *Philosophy as Metanoetics*. There, Tanabe writes, "Among the forty-eight vows made by Amida Buddha, three vows—the nineteenth, twentieth, and eighteenth—are intended, according to Shinran, to show the process of conversion to authentic faith in Other-power" (Tanabe 1986, 201).

found purposes in the world (Heidegger 1962, 97; 115–17). Similarly, Takeuchi named the things within our range as "utensils" and emphasized that these follow the repetitive orders of everyday life. For example, a professor turns on her laptop, has coffee every morning at 8 a.m., and checks emails. The laptop and cup of coffee are the utensils that repeat their activities and constitute the spatial order in the room. In daily repetitions, this order converges with the temporal order.

Extraordinary events can suddenly disrupt the order of everyday life. Such an event can cause chaos, sometimes putting lives at risk, bringing confusion, fear, and palpitations to the living entity. Here, we find a more profound and stronger correlation than the noesis-noema structure of intentionality: the correlation between emotions and events. Takeuchi noted that this correlation disappears when an extraordinary event thoroughly and immediately extinguishes life. When a volcano or an earthquake destroys a town or village entirely, or when someone dies instantly in a traffic accident, there is no longer any victim to feel fear or trembling and, therefore, no religious response (Takeuchi 1999c, 18). Takeuchi concluded that some interval between life and death must exist for a religious response to be possible and that this interval corresponds to the (dis)order of everyday life intervening between life and extraordinary events (Takeuchi 1999c, 18). In other words, a religious response arises when the extraordinary event does not obliterate everyday life but places it in a "limit situation." Only in this sense can an extraordinary event be defined as negating everyday life or, more precisely, something that causes us to deny the value and meaning of life. From this definition, Takeuchi provides various examples of extraordinary events, including "wars and disasters," "famines and maladies," "defeat and social unrest," and "illness, death, other unfortunate accidents, and guilt" (Takeuchi 1999c, 15). All these are considered fear-inducing.

Taking the example of a mouse cowering in front of a cat, Takeuchi argues that mere fear cannot be a "religious" response and therefore does not cause religious awakening (Takeuchi 1999c, 19). For Takeuchi, anxiety is the deepest emotion in the religious sense. The essential difference between fear and anxiety is that the former is bound to each extraordinary event as an individual object, whereas the latter helps us understand these events from the perspective of extraordinariness. When extraordinary events are successfully passed through, they do not arrive at the core of life, and nothing is left behind. In contrast, if they intrude into everyday life and at the core of life, they can rise to a level of extraordinariness and transform fear into desperate anxiety (Takeuchi 1999c, 20). When we suffer from an illness—an extraordinary event—our fear is associated with the sole desire to escape. However, once we realize that illness is an essential and inevitable part of life and question why we are destined to get sick, the fear of illness deepens into anxiety (Takeuchi 1999c, 19). Takeuchi thus

combines fear with extraordinary events and anxiety with extraordinariness. The former combination belongs to Type I and the latter to Type II. Compared with the crisis theory of Ishizu's philosophy of religion, Takeuchi's analysis is unique in dealing with emotion and otherness.

Ishizu emphasized the functionalist approach to crises and their psychological understanding, addressing "emotional stress" or "frustration" (Malinowski) and "anxiety" (Goldstein). However, the relationship between these states was not clear, and they were only discretely presented. In contrast, Takeuchi distinguished between fear and anxiety, explained the transition from fear to anxiety, and considered their relationships with other emotions. According to him, extraordinary events arise suddenly and bring fear. They soon fade, but the disruption of order caused by them persists. These disruptions indirectly condense the emotional resistance of life to them. Takeuchi calls this "passion," which, in Bergson's thought, meant a mass of psychic elements colored with a certain quality or shade (BERGSON 1910, 8). In Takeuchi's example, even after an extraordinary event has passed, the passion of grief returns repeatedly, never eclipsed by other emotions (TAKEUCHI 1999c, 22). This return of passion (*leidenschaft*) is metaphorically represented by the movement of waves, that converge on suffering (*leiden*).

For Takeuchi, suffering is not a mere feeling, such as individual pain, but an anguish so great that it negatively colors the entire order of life. Nevertheless, this anguish is not religious anxiety. Whereas passion, suffering, and anguish are quantitatively definable states, anxiety is a qualitatively different emotion. There is a sufficient gap between these states that a drastic leap is required to move from the former to the latter or to complete what Takeuchi calls crystallization (TAKEUCHI 1999c, 21). Unlike the former conditions, which are susceptible to the past and pathologically fixated on memories, religious anxiety allows life to unfold creatively into the future. Such anxiety is accompanied by a clear sense of "resignation" in the face of the irreversibility of past events, and a sense of "wonder" about extraordinariness as a new horizon (TAKEUCHI 1999c, 20). Takeuchi suggests that the feeling of awe, which plays a vital role in religion, is born from the internal linkage between fear, anxiety, and wonder.

In addition, Ishizu found the origin of the supernatural in "the third domain," the place of reality where numerous crises strike us. From the perspective of our cognitive world, which centers on the distinction and separation of things, the third domain functions as the rejective otherness. In this domain, self-centered attachment is often thwarted, and the stability of the self is shaken to its core by something alien. Ishizu's view also indicates our inherent uncontrollability or unmanageability of reality, which can manifest as a supernatural holiness that transcends everyday experiences. Although different from Ishizu, Takeuchi considered the same issue: the proximity between rejective otherness and holiness.

The first of the two papers we mainly refer to here concludes with the question, "What is a truly transcendent holy being?" (Takeuchi 1999c, 29). The meaning of holiness continues to be discussed in another article Takeuchi wrote on "God" in the *Britannica International Encyclopedia* (1972). After mentioning the primitive experience of *mana* (a supernatural power beyond good and evil) in Melanesian culture and Eliade's theory of ancient mythology, this article links holiness to Type 1 of religious action: "Where everyday life is denied through such human crisis, the absolute otherness of the sacred appears in an extraordinary form" (Takeuchi 1999c, 295). Immediately after that, Takeuchi referred to a passage in which Bergson discussed William James's description of his earthquake experiences. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson noted that James had spoken of the great earthquake in San Francisco as an "individual being" or a "permanent individual entity" (Bergson 1935, 131). Through this episode, he emphasized the human tendency to personify extraordinary events and pointed out that a similar "primitive" mentality still lingers among civilized people. "The disturbances with which we have to deal," said Bergson, "combine into an Event, which resembles a human being" (Bergson 1935, 132). As Takeuchi cites "extraordinary events such as disaster, war, bankruptcy, sickness, death" (Takeuchi 1999c, 295) when introducing Bergson's analysis of the primitive mind, we may infer that Bergson's word "Event" was the source of extraordinary events. Takeuchi's theory of religious action did not focus on a mentality that personified extraordinary events but rather on the process by which they develop into a mutual relationship with the Transcendent or the Absolute. His theory did not derive the workings of "intellectual instincts" (as Bergson did) from the primitive mentality that stabilized life by personifying and simplifying those events. Nevertheless, it seems inevitable that Takeuchi's idea of Type 1 originated in Bergson's theory of primitive religion. It depicted human encounters with crises, such as the Great Earthquake in San Francisco and the First World War (Bergson 1935, 134).

Conclusion

This study draws attention to the parallelism of thought between two Japanese philosophers of religion. Relying on anthropological and psychological considerations, Ishizu placed the concept of limit situations within his domain theory and refined it into a new philosophical theory of human crisis. However, taking a hint from Bergson, Takeuchi introduces the term "extraordinary events" to redefine the limit situation that strikes human existence as the first type of religious action. It is easy to identify the weaknesses of their arguments because of historical limitations. Indeed, as they heavily rely on the prevailing thought of the first half of the twentieth century, their views of "religion" uncritically internalize the

doctrine of religious evolution assumed by Western modernity. Ishizu's distinction between magic and religion and Takeuchi's distinction between primitive and historical religion form a dichotomous hierarchy based on arbitrary criteria. They are not likely to be accepted by today's religious scholars and anthropologists.

Despite these shortcomings, their ideas have philosophical significance. The argument that the existential self undergoes a decisive transformation facing limit situations is a characteristic aspect of post-Heideggerian phenomenological thought. Ishizu and Takeuchi's philosophical visions can be compared with those of Ludwig Binswanger (1881–1966), who applied Heidegger's existential philosophy to psychopathology, and with the phenomenology of Event proposed by Henri Maldiney (1912–2013), who modified the interpretations of Heidegger and Binswanger. Representing the development of a uniquely Japanese existentialist philosophy, Ishizu and Takeuchi's philosophical reflections provide an interesting case study on the history of comparative thought. From the standpoint of the philosophy of religion, it is safe to say that both described their ideas at the intersection of Buddhist problem spheres. Ishizu and Takeuchi attempted a new Buddhist philosophical approach by incorporating the "four sufferings" of birth, aging, illness, and death, fundamental issues in Buddhism since ancient times, into a more comprehensive existential concept of the limit situation. After the postmodern world of thought, the combination of existentialism and Buddhist ideas seems old-fashioned. However, today, with the universal experience of pandemics or wars, their analysis of "crisis" should be the starting point for thought that responds to the circumstances of the times.

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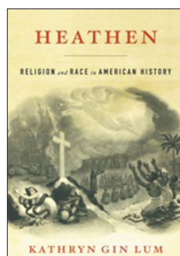
REVIEW



Kathryn Gin Lum, *Heathen: Religion and Race in American History*

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022. 368 pages.
Hardcover, $35.00. ISBN 978-0-674-97677-1.

Kathryn Gin Lum's *Heathen: Religion and Race in American History* is a breathtaking work on the discourse of the "heathen" through American history. Gin Lum, who teaches at Stanford University, is a leading historian of race and religion in America, and her previous publications include *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Race in American History* (coedited with Paul Harvey, 2018). Though *Heathen* primarily focuses on North America, the book will be of interest to a wide range of scholars of religion, for "heathenism" was, after all, such a foundational category to the thinking regarding religion in general in the modern world.

Gin Lum begins the book with a critique of what she calls the "replacement narrative." According to this widely held assumption, the discourse of human hierarchy shifted from one based on *religious* differences to one based on *racial* differences. In this narrative, the notion of the "heathen" is understood to be a thing of the past that was "replaced" by racial hierarchies in the modern world. It is this master narrative that Gin Lum challenges in this book. Far from one being replaced by the other, the categories of "religion" and "race" have been, she argues, closely entangled with each other to this day. It is such "simultaneity of religious and racial othering" through American history that this book attempts to unpack (9–10).

Following the introduction, the author undertakes a meticulous genealogy of the "heathen" throughout the centuries. The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 covers the usages of the term "heathen" from ancient Greece to medieval Europe (chapter 1), to the early modern colonies in the Americas (chapter 2), and to the antebellum United States (chapters 3 and 4). One recurring theme in the European and Euro-American writings was the idea of "degeneration," which held that heathens *used to* worship the true religion (that is, Christianity) but later fell into a corrupted or degenerated condition. This idea dates back at least to the late antiquity, as is evident in the work of the Christian polemicist Eusebius (49–50). But it was,

as chapter 2 shows, the early modern European and Euro-American authors, such as José de Acosta and Joseph-François Lafitau (both Jesuit) and Jonathan Edwards (Congregationalist), that further developed this theory. Native Americans and all the other "heathen" peoples were, in these authors' eyes, "degenerated Christians" who awaited the evangelization and their subsequent return to their *original* status.

Gin Lum further highlights that the "heathen" status was not all about their religious or spiritual inclinations. In fact, heathenness was closely associated with otherness in terms of skin color and bodily practice. The Jesuit missionary Lafitau, for one, found Native Americans deviant not only from the original religion (Christianity) but also from the original skin color (white) (56–57). The physical appearance of heathens is further discussed in chapter 4, where Gin Lum explores the writings of American Protestant missionaries in the early-to-mid nineteenth century. According to the author, what these white missionaries tried to remedy about heathens was not just their spiritual or internal status. In their judgment, the unholiness or impurity of heathens permeated both internal *and* external conditions of their beings. Therefore, to convert heathens must mean to change them in their entirety—including how they were clothed, how they treated their bodies, and how they raised their children.

Part II explores the practical implications of the "heathen" discourse in the nineteenth-century United States. Surveying both domestic and transnational contexts, Gin Lum discusses how white Christians employed the rhetorical weapon of heathenness in a variety of political projects, including colonization and missionary projects in Africa (chapter 5), the exclusion of Chinese immigrants (chapter 6), and the annexation of Hawaii (chapter 7). As these chapters reveal, Anglo-Protestants found heathens everywhere they looked. Any immigrant group could be labeled "heathens" insofar as their habits and economic conditions seemed different from those of Anglo-Americans. The anti-Chinese immigrant literature in this period was full of such descriptions, and remarkably, even European groups like Irish and German immigrants (many of who were poor Catholics) could be called "heathens" (146–47). And of course, heathens were found overseas, too. Africa and Hawaii among other places were depicted as lands of heathenism that needed salvation and, with this justification, American missionaries and colonizers sailed the seas.

Lastly, in Part III, the author explores the lingering impacts of the "heathen" discourse in the late nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. In this period, as chapter 8 shows, more and more people found the term "heathen" offensive and inappropriate, and stopped using it altogether. Aiming at an "impartial" description of world religions, comparative religion authors in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as Lydia Maria Child and James Freeman Clarke, dismissed the term (199–200). In the meantime, a tolerant attitude toward non-Christian faiths developed in the missionary field, too, culminating in the 1932 report, *Re-Thinking Missions*. Using the word "heathen" no more than once, the report gave an ever stronger affirmation of positive values in other religious traditions (219–21). Whereas fundamentalist

Christians kept using the "heathen" discourse in the twentieth century (chapter 9), the term seems to have disappeared from the mainstream American lexicon.

At the same time, however, Gin Lum finds a continuation between the "heathen" discourse in the previous centuries and the seemingly harmless discourse of religious diversity in the modern world. For instance, the term "ethnic religions," adopted by scientifically minded scholars of religion in the late nineteenth century, was in effect keeping the connotations of the very term it allegedly replaced: "heathen religions." As Gin Lum writes, "To have 'ethnicity' meant to be partial, incomplete, confined to one part of the world, and stagnant. Ethnic or heathen religions could not hope to gain adherents beyond a regionally and racially specific nation group" (201). She casts a similar critical gaze at the term "unreached people," which twentieth-century American evangelical Christians came to use to refer to the non-white population in the non-Western world who still remain unevangelized (235–46). Thus disguised in mild terms, the ghost of the "heathen" discourse still haunts various places.

With this exhaustive survey of the "heathen" discourse through American history, Gin Lum's book makes a seminal contribution to the growing scholarship on religion and race in America. In the past few decades, an increasing number of historians have viewed religion and race as *constructed* categories, and examined the historical entanglement of the two. Or, as Paul HARVEY puts in his recent book *Bounds of Their Habitation* (2017), "religious concepts formed racial ideas, and racial concepts infused religious ideas in American history" (2). Gin Lum's study of "heathens" excellently illustrates such intertwined or the "co-constituting" nature of racial and religious categories. As she promises in the introduction, the book indeed makes a compelling case that *religious othering* and *racial othering* have always occurred "simultane[ously]."

Whereas the book primarily focuses on how white Protestants viewed other religio-racial groups under the category of "heathens," the author highlights that religio-racial minorities also used the same rhetorical weapon against the white oppressors. In 1829, African American activist David Walker claimed that "the white Christians of America" were less than "any Heathen nation" for their barbarous treatment of enslaved Africans (129). Other protestors, such as Zitkála-Šá (Native American), Wong Chin Foo (Chinese American Confucianist), Hirai Kinza (Japanese Buddhist), and C. N. Chakravarti (Indian theosophist), strategically took the label "heathen" for themselves and rebuked white Christians for their racism, imperialism, and other hypocritical deeds (172–74, 209–19). Thus, Gin Lum's work brilliantly shows that the notion of "heathenism" was a highly *contested* one, with different groups using it for their own purposes.

Still, the book is not without flaws. Because of the author's ambition to cover a fairly long time period, readers may find her discussion of some periods rough and not fully convincing. Her treatment of the shift of the Western attitude toward Asian religions in chapter 8 is characteristically sweeping. After discussing the nascent

study of comparative religion in the late nineteenth century and the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, she jumps to the 1932 publication of the pluralistic report, *Re-Thinking Missions*, leaving readers puzzled over what happened in the period between. Likewise, this reviewer wanted to learn more about the actual process of how the term "heathen" fell out of use in the modern era. Whereas the author does a superb job in showing the lingering impact of the heathen discourse even in the era after the disappearance of the term, her discussion of how and why the term fell into disuse in the first place is relatively brief. The task of subsequent scholars will be to pick up specific themes in this book, to deepen them, and to revise Gin Lum's fabulous if occasionally rough genealogy.

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Kimura Satoru
Committee on the Study of Religion, Harvard University

Japanese Association for Religious Studies Awards

日本宗教学会賞

2022 Japanese Association for Religious Studies Award

Iijima Takayoshi 飯島孝良 (International Research Institute for Zen Buddhism, Hanazono University)

Katararetsuzukeru Ikkyū-zo 語られ続ける一休像

[Ikkyū Being Narrated: Aspects of Zen Culture as Seen from the History of Postwar Thought]. Pelikan Publishing Inc., 2021

Synopsis by the Author

In this book, I combine evidential research on Ikkyū Sōjun, who lived in the Muromachi period, with changes in the images of Ikkyū that have continuously emerged since his death, and examine inquiries into Zen culture in postwar Japan. Furthermore, retracing the discourse of intellectuals such as Maeda Togama, Haga Kōshirō, and Ichikawa Hakugen, I understand changes in the presentation of images of Ikkyū in terms of postwar Zen thought and probe the unexplored horizons of deciphering the images of Ikkyū in such discourse. In the introductory chapter, I endeavour to describe one development in Zen culture by tracing changes in the image of Ikkyū.

The postwar intellectuals taken up in chapters 1–4 are fine examples of people who sought to shed light on themselves and their times through Ikkyū and Zen in the fields of philosophy, literature, history, the history of thought, Zen studies, and so on. The addendum brings together notes on my attempts to decipher both Ikkyū's writings in the *Crazy Cloud Anthology* and the *Record of Linji*, an important background factor in his writings. I hope that through this book, combined with these textual analyses, the reader will be able to savor at least to some extent just how multistratified, and how much like a polyhedron discourse, Ikkyū and Zen culture have become.

Statement from the Awards Committee

Iijima's book is a challenging work that examines how Ikkyū Sōjun (1394–1481), a Zen monk from the late medieval period, has been discussed over five centuries in Japan, resulting in the formation of a variety of images, some of which acquired distinctive meanings in the post-World War II history of Zen thought and culture represented by Nishida Kitarō and Suzuki Daisetsu (D. T. Suzuki). The awards committee agrees that the book stands out in three ways. First, while it is known that Ikkyu has been represented differently, from an eccentric vagabond to a witty young bonze, Iijima adopted a unique approach to the history of his images by tracing the discourses of four Zen-related philosophers and historians (Maeda Togama, Haga Kōshirō, Ichikawa Hakugen, and Yanagida Seizan). His approach will be found useful in other historical studies of religious thought in different contexts. Second, the book covers an incredibly vast range of primary and secondary sources. Third, it is not only lucid but also elegantly written. Iijima's sophisticated style makes it accessible to a wider audience beyond the academy.

Japanese Association for Religious Studies Awards

日本宗教学会賞

2023 Japanese Association for Religious Studies Award

Kameyama Mitsuhiro 亀山光明
(Princeton University)

Shaku Unshō to kairitsu no kindai 釈雲照と戒律の近代

[Shaku Unshō and the Modernity of Buddhist Precepts]. Hōzōkan, 2022

Synopsis by the Author

This work sheds light on the relationship between religious modernity in Japan and Buddhist precept revival through the case of Shaku Unshō 釈雲照 (1827–1909), a so-called precept-upholding Shingon monk active during the Meiji period in Japan. Even today, the prevalence of clerical marriages in Japanese Buddhism remains contentious and taboo. While some scholars take Japanese monasticism's liberal attitude toward the preceptual tradition as constant throughout its history, many others locate its watershed moment in the official decriminalization of "clerical marriage" by the Meiji government.

Previous scholarship has paid considerable attention to the emergence of radical lay-centric movements initiated by those in the Shin and Nichiren traditions, alongside pioneering scholars working to establish the academic study of Buddhism in Japan, as defining the epochal shift in understandings of Buddhism during Japan's modernization. As such, Unshō's fervent efforts to revive the precepts and thereby reconstruct monastic communities have been largely dismissed as anachronistic or incongruous with the overall movement toward laicization and the import of Western frameworks for understanding religion. Elsewhere, scholars have also described his revivalist movement as a kind of premature stage within the eventual full realization of modern Buddhism in East Asia.

This book is an effort to contextualize Unshō's nationwide revival movement in its full complexity, with a particular emphasis on his transnational connections. The book spans his establishment of a lay-centric body of teachings, his foundation of strict precept-focused monasteries central to the resurrection of idealized sangha communities, his ideological critiques of Christianity and Buddhist reformists, and his direct engagement with the increasing demand for moral suasion as part of a larger project of Japanese nation-building. In this sense, this work also aims to address several key contemporary discourses within the field of religious studies, including the relationship between Buddhism and Japanese imperialism, and the complex, interconnected genealogies of the concepts of "religion" and "Japanese Buddhism."

A key finding of this research is that a cornerstone of Unshō's efforts to articulate the ideal of the True Dharma (*shōbō* 正法) was a longstanding confrontation between a realizable, idealized past and the notion that Japan had long ago entered an age of decline, the age of the Final Dharma (*mappō* 末法). This tension, inherited from his premodern predecessors like Jiun Ōnko 慈雲飲光 (1718–1805), sat at the core of his movement to return to the untainted age of Śākyamuni through the revival of the precepts, and forms an essential continuity with premodern intellectual history. In addition, this work explores Unshō's transnational encounters with other Buddhisms, such as Theravāda and various Korean traditions, and their pivotal role in reshaping his thinking and institution building. Through these explorations into Unsho's broader context, and within Japanese history and across colonial Asian contexts, this book uncovers new contours in the narrative of Buddhism and modernity in East Asia by showing Unshō's complex response to the expansive agendas of his contemporaries.

Statement from the Awards Committee

Kameyama Mitsuhiro's *Shaku Unshō to kairitsu no kindai* is a masterful work focusing on the ideas and behavior of Shaku Unshō (1827–1909), a Shingon priest who played a prominent role as an advocate of the religious movement to revive the Buddhist precepts between the late Edo and Meiji periods. The book contributes to

elucidating Unshō's movement from a variety of perspectives, including the reformulation of the Ten Virtuous Precepts into "national morality" and his propagation efforts of moral suasion directed at the laity. Additionally, it explores the establishment, with the aim of educating monks dedicated to upholding the full set of precepts (*gusokukai* 具足戒), of the Precept School (*kairitsu gakkō* 戒律学校)—later known as Mejiro Monastery (Mejiro Sōen 目白僧園)—as well as Unshō's reconsideration of the ideal of True Dharma (*shōbō* 正法) as a means to counter the situation of the Latter Day of Dharma (*mappō* 末法). The book also delves into the confrontation between the concepts of karma and the scientific worldview, Unshō's reflections on contemporary Buddhism in other Asian countries, and the repositioning of Buddhism pertaining to the Imperial Way (*kōdō* 皇道). That is, the book captures Unshō's movements from a variety of perspectives.

Although Unshō was heir to the early modern religious movement to revive the precepts and return to Śākyamuni by preserving the full-set precepts, he also presented unique contributions by responding to expansive modern agendas. Even during his lifetime, Unshō's contemporaries offered conflicting evaluations of his enterprise, ranging from viewing him as a great monk engaged in restoring the "corrupted" monastic community to seeing him as a conservative adherent of "Old Buddhism." Postwar scholarship on modern Japanese Buddhism has also provided an equivocal assessment: scholars have, on one hand, evaluated Unshō's thought as the beginning of modern introspective awareness in the practice of the precepts, and on the other hand, pointed out that it remained a type of nationalistic and feudal Buddhism, positioning it as an incomplete form of the religion, especially in comparison to the thought of later characters such as Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903) and Sakaino Kōyō 境野黄洋 (1871–1933). Or yet, Unshō would be pushed into the modern narrative of precept decline in Japanese Buddhism.

In response to these perspectives, the author does not comprehend Unshō's discourse on the precepts from such a monolithic modernist perspective, but rather, while taking into account the specific context of the cognitive framework and ideological situation of the time, relies on a wide range of recent domestic and international studies to provide a discussion that goes beyond the sociohistorical account of one single monk.

The first outstanding aspect of this book is that, by focusing on the post-Meiji development of Shingon precepts, it opens up the possibility, in contrast to Shinshū-centered narratives, of a new history of modern Japanese Buddhism. This investigation has the potential to contribute to further developments in the study of modern Japanese history of ideas and religion. Second, the book critically examines the stereotype of a "precept-less modernity," thereby paving the way for new research in the field of modern Japanese Buddhist history, an area that has hitherto not sufficiently discussed the role and position of precepts. It focuses on Unshō's attempts to transform the basic Ten Precepts (*jūzenkai* 十善戒) into national morality, a development which, signifying the detachment of these ideals from Buddhism and

therefore their universalization, took place in response to the growing demands for the moral suasion of the laity; the work also reveals the intellectual backdrop of how Unshō's ideas about the Buddhist precepts took shape through his encounters with Theravāda and Korean Buddhism. Third, it should be noted that this work pays considerable attention to the continuities and ruptures between the early modern and modern periods. In particular, this work successfully delineates the intricate connection between early modern Buddhism and that of the post-Meiji era. This is done by drawing parallels with the late Tokugawa precept-keeping monk Jiun Onkō (1718–180), who had a decisive influence on the formation of Unshō's thought and efforts. In this line, the work revisits Unshō's vision to revive the True Dharma during the era of *mappō*, when precept-keeping was considered an especially difficult path.

On the other hand, the work does have a few issues. One of them involves the question of the extent of Unshō's representativeness and the degree to which his ideas influenced the broader context of "precept modernity." While the book touches upon the commonalities and differences between Unshō's thought and those of other individuals who emphasized the Buddhist precepts, a more in-depth analysis of this point would have been beneficial. At the very least, the author should have addressed more specifically how Unshō's patrons and supporters practiced (or not) the precepts. Additionally, questions remain regarding the extent to which the Ten Virtuous Precepts, reinterpreted as "national morality," permeated society. Apart from Unshō's own influence, the social impact of his ideas is not apparent.

Another issue is related to the author's lack of engagement in the closer reading of Unshō's own texts. In other words, this work falls short of fully deciphering Unshō's texts or articulating his ideas in connection to his practice of the precepts. In this regard, several problems remain unaddressed: How did Unshō himself explain to other Buddhist monks each of the articles in the Four-Part Vinaya, and in which ways did he, in terms of setting an example, practice them? In other words, analyses that highlight a more specific background and physical aspects of the practice are almost entirely absent from the work. The book focuses mostly on describing Unshō's more abstract ideas, such as interpreting precepts as a broader type of morality and establishing the foundation for the precepts within Buddhist ontology and its cosmology based on the law of cause and effect and the karmic retribution of good and evil over three lifetimes. These hermeneutical issues related to Unshō's thought, rooted in his practice of the precepts, seem to mirror other challenges in the book. For instance, while the introduction of this book highlights the problem of "meat consumption and clerical marriage" (*nikujiki saitai* 肉食妻帯), deeply interconnected to gender relations, it ultimately leaves the subject for future research. Despite the author's wide-ranging perspective, the book seems to overlook the question of the sexuality of male priests—an integral dimension inseparable from the matter of precepts. In addition, although the author contends that the discursive analysis of precept practices could work as a critique of belief-centered

frameworks, he ultimately seems to accentuate the belief-oriented aspect of Unshō's precept discourse due to his failure to address more concrete discussions on individual corporeality, senses, and emotions.

The work does give us, however, the sense that these are challenges that the author should indeed be capable of overcoming. For these reasons, the Committee acknowledges this work as an achievement worthy of the 2023 Japanese Association for Religious Studies Award.

Religious Studies in Japan volume 7 (special issue): 33–42

Ioannis Gaitanidis and Erica Baffelli

Introduction: Western Esotericism, the Cultic Milieu, and Lived Religion

Problems and Possibilities of "Other-than-Religion" Concepts

This introduction locates the arguments developed by the articles in this special issue within the research interests of Professor Yoshinaga Shin'ichi to whom the original conference panel that this special issue is based upon was dedicated. We note the complications arising out of transposing "other-than-religion" concepts such as "esotericism" or "occultism" in the Japanese context. We then extend the argument to more general issues associated with religious studies categories that have been built in contrast with, or that qualify, the kind of religion in question. We then offer examples of two concepts, "new religions" and "spirituality," which present similar challenges because they have implicitly or explicitly been constructed against normative understandings of "religion." We conclude that the three papers included in this special issue show that by paying attention to the way in which the people involved in the "para/extra/supra-religious" fields explain their engagement with their practices and ideas, we can reveal the limitations and also the possibilities of "other-than religion" concepts.

keywords: lived religion—critical study of religion—Yoshinaga Shin'ichi—spirituality—minority religions—esotericism

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One of the effects of the constructivist turn in religious studies has been the emergence of new fields of inquiry that are implicitly or explicitly critical of what has been perceived under different frames as limited and normative understandings of "religion." These subfields or associated fields of study are framed in comparison to "religion" (for example, spirituality), emphasize the context-dependency of "religion" (for example, "lived religion"), or concentrate on categories that have been interpreted through specific socio-temporal contexts and in which the category of religion has so far (allegedly) struggled to encompass (for example, Western esotericism, cultic milieu). However, while critical approaches to the concept of "religion" have been a welcome and necessary development since the 1990s, the introduction of new categories does not preclude their analytical effectiveness. By shifting the focus to concepts built in contrast with or that qualify the kind of religion in question, new fields addressing religious, semi-religious, or religious-like phenomena and concepts have not escaped from the conceptual issues that normative understandings of "religion" have produced. Indeed, while trying to grasp the distinctive nature of these concepts, one may risk veering toward essentialism or historical fallacies and also ignore the politics that such concepts have been newly confounded with. In other words, the argument here is not that "religion" should not be replaced with or compared to other terms. Rather, the starting point of this special issue is that while these new fields of inquiry offer significant advantages in unearthing phenomena that the study of religion has so far overlooked or undermined, they are not without their own issues.

To illustrate this, we will use an example from our own experience. Ten years ago, when Gaitanidis presented in Japanese a paper quoting from research that was being conducted in Europe in the field of "Western esotericism" (Gaitanidis 2012), he realised that it was hard to explain what this field was about and how it related to existing research on studies of shamanism, "new religions," or the New Age movement in the Japanese context. In fact, the existence of such overlapping concepts put into doubt the need for yet another academic category. What stood out in the research conducted in Europe at the time, however, was the focus on the Theosophical Society, Freemasonry, and other types of organizations, ideas, and practices that had not yet attracted significant interest in Japan, and these became what the presentation ended up being about. In other words, the employment of the category of "Western esotericism" in that paper was not analytical but associative. The subject of the paper had already been

studied under the category of "Western esotericism" elsewhere, and that is why an introduction to the concept was deemed necessary. This, however, does not mean that the term did not come with its own problems.

Professor Yoshinaga Shin'ichi 吉永進一 (1953–2022), to whom the original conference panel that this special issue is based upon was dedicated, single-handedly managed to forge connections with scholars of esotericism internationally and attracted significant interest both within and outside of Japanese academic circles regarding the influence of the Theosophical Society and other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century occultist organizations, peoples, and practices on the Japanese religious landscape. His connections and engagement with that field were, in large part, also associative and resulted in large research projects[1] and the opening of new directions in the study of Buddhism, the Theosophical Society, and the history of alternative therapies in twentieth-century Japan (see, for example, Harding et al. 2015; Kurita et al. 2019; Dake et al. 2020; Yoshinaga 2021; Yoshinaga et al. 2022). Through international collaboration and comparative endeavours, Yoshinaga found people who were speaking the same "language" and had looked into phenomena that others in Japan had seldom shown interest in. Nevertheless, questions soon arose regarding the analytical and scholarly value of concepts such as "esotericism" or "occultism" in the Japanese context. How do we translate them? Do words like *hikyō* 秘教 (esoteric religion) and *okaruto* オカルト (occult) have the same meaning or value as historical categories? Aren't we recreating, in Japan, the definitional and conceptual issues that the field of Western esotericism had already been struggling with elsewhere?

Notwithstanding problems arising out of ahistorical definitions that tend to essentialize the "esoteric" as a type of practice, organization, or discourse instead of treating it as a historiographical category (see Asprem 2014 and 2021), using the term "esotericism" in Japan also risked the reification of the field's politics. Adopting the term to talk about "Japanese esotericism" or even "East Asian esotericism" would not only repeat the problematic identity discourse of esotericism as an essentially Western phenomenon, with little reflection on what the "Western" refers to. An uncritical transfer of the term to talk about case studies already conceived of as "Japanese" would also reify the problematic diffusionist conceptualization of esotericism as *spreading out of the West*, absorbing in

1. Professor Yoshinaga was, for example, a key member of a four-year (2013 to 2017) project that received more than fifteen million yen of funding to conduct "A Comparative Literature Study on the Theosophical Movement and its Pan-Asian Cultural Connections" (Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research [B] headed by Professor Ando Reiji). One of the international conferences funded by this project gathered some of the most well-known scholars in the field of esotericism in March 2017 at the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka. See https://eanase.com/theosophy/.

its global travels everything that resembles it (see Asprem and Strube 2021). Matters of definition and scholarly construction (for example, McCutcheon 1997) or historical contextualization (for example, Josephson 2012) have been amply discussed so far regarding the term "religion," but they are the same for the term "esotericism" and some of the other alternatives that this special issue considers and which have appeared since the rise of a constructionist critique of religion. In other words, even though "esotericism," for example, has been useful in attracting attention first and foremost to the significance of the role played by (allegedly) "eccentric" ideas and practices in framing what we consider today "established" (religious, scientific, and so on) ideas, it does not escape the conceptual and methodological problems of "religion."

The same can be said for other scholarly categories, such as, for example, the category of "new religions," if we consider its postwar emergence as an analytic concept and its problematic construction against the imagined religious identity of the mainstream. As Erica Baffelli has pointed out, while Buddhism and Shinto are portrayed as representative of Japanese identity and culture by tracing back centuries of their history, religious organizations that are not perceived as equally embedded in the structures of the Japanese state and social structures and grouped under the umbrella term "new religions" "are portrayed as somehow different and not part of a supposed Japanese cultural religious identity" (Baffelli 2023, 226).

Yet another example is that of the category of "spirituality," whose scholarly usage worldwide, as well as its "export" to Japan, has demonstrated an equal amount of fallacies. Often framed as a kind of religiousness after the decline of religion, spirituality's construction *against* its allegedly more formative, tradition-anchored, institutionalized sister, namely "religion," has, in effect, worsened the existing methodological problems of naming and quantifying religious identities. Why, for example, would expressing a belief in ghosts be a sign of someone being "spiritual but not religious"? The only context that could assume this is one in which believing in ghosts has already been exhumed from a normative idea of a monotheistic (and, in most cases, Christian) religion. In fact, applied to a Japanese context, the above example would make no sense at all. The common discourse about the non-religiousness of "the Japanese" has never really relied on what type of beings they believe in but on their perceived moral stance, which has been at times considered "lacking" and at other times regarded as "uniquely fit" to support peace, social, economic, and even technological progress (see Fujiwara 2023). In fact, in the aftermath of the March 1995 sarin gas attack perpetrated by members of the religious organization Aum Shinrikyō, several sociologists of religion adorned the newly adopted term of *supirichuariti* with what they had identified as popular religion's positivistic power of renewal and salvation and which they had previously associated with

new religions (see Gaitanidis 2022). Hence, like esotericism or new religions, spirituality is not really constructed against religion but is an extraction out of religion of something that some people may not want to associate with religion anymore. This does not mean that this non-religious term avoids the issues associated with religion in the first place.

Returning to Yoshinaga Shin'ichi's work, its particular strength lay in the ability to show how the vitality of human connections and the impact stemming from people's convictions in the verity of their beliefs and practices should invite the reader to doubt binary worldviews. From the perspective discussed so far, Yoshinaga's studies can be interpreted as having demonstrated that new and old categories that scholars often use to interpret certain phenomena do not necessarily make sense when we look at practices. Interactions and boundaries between what is "established" and what is "alternative" are more fluid and often not a concern for the practitioners themselves. As articles in this special issue also demonstrate, it is important to pay attention to emic perspectives and how different boundaries are negotiated by practitioners depending on circumstance and in relation to other actors, including other religious institutions, media, the general public, and clients.

The distinction between "mainstream" and "alternative/rejects" is not clear-cut, and these categories shift over time. In some cases, the "alternative" can become part of the "mainstream," while in other cases, some practices stop being "in tune with the period" and could even be perceived as a "minority" or even as potentially dangerous. Thus, the labels of minority and official and unofficial practices that minoritize certain groups or individuals are "never merely descriptive of a social reality but serve the interests of one social group 'minoritizing' another or a social group minoritizing itself" (see Stausberg, van der Haven, and Baffelli 2023). Therefore it is important to look not only at the mechanism of survival and adaptation of practices and organizations, but also at instances of decline and demise (see Stausberg, Cusack, and Wright 2020).

In this special issue, we consider how concepts explicitly or implicitly constructed against "religion" can be problematized when we pay attention to how people involved in "para/extra/supra-religious" fields explain their engagement with such practices and ideas. To do this, the three papers reexamine categories of noninstitutional religion by grounding them in case studies focusing on the motivations of practitioners and their clients.

The papers address two general questions:

(1) How do individuals' intentions and their practices put into question conceptual labels about what religion "usually looks like"?

(2) How do these individuals borrow, negotiate, and reappropriate concepts employed to distinguish them and their practices from normative religion?

More specifically, in the first paper of this special issue, *Rethinking Lived Religion in Contemporary Japanese Shamanism*, Murakami Aki observes how the concept of "lived religion" has dramatically helped scholars to rethink the limitations of studies excessively focused on institutional religion, but, as a result, it has tended to ignore how organizational and doctrinal aspects of religion remain entangled in daily religious practices. Murakami notes that this entanglement had been instrumental in framing Japanese folk religion in the 1970s and 1980s through, for example, the concept of "lived Buddhism" (*seikatsu Bukkyō* 生活仏教) coined by the anthropologist Sasaki Kōkan 佐々木宏幹 (b. 1930). Sasaki's concept of lived Buddhism relies on the existence of a category of individuals that he calls the mediators, an "ambiguous and elastic realm" (see Murakami's paper in this issue, page 23) between doctrinal Buddhism and laypeople, populated by shamans, ascetics, and Buddhist priests. Murakami proceeds then to explore the case of one such mediator, Ms. Kasai, a shamanistic practitioner called *kamisama* living in the city of Hirosaki, in Aomori Prefecture. Although Ms. Kasai's status as an "effective" *kamisama* is determined by her reputation among her clients, for reasons of common practice that are related to the historical persecution of shamanism she also holds a Shingon priest license. However, Ms. Kasai is not just a *kamisama* and a Buddhist priest. When the circumstances demand it, such as at local festivals or events targeting tourist groups, she also adorns the "hat" of an *itako*, a blind shaman that used to own exclusive rights to the performance of *kuchiyose*, a ritual to summon the dead spirits and listen to their voices, popularized in the media since the 1970s. Considering the dearth of *itako* in contemporary Japan, Ms Kasai "becomes" one when necessary. Seamlessly navigating established Buddhism, popular religion, and its mediatized imagination, the case analyzed by Murakami not only helps us reconsider what "lived religion" is about but also erodes the prescriptive boundaries between "religion" and "non-religion."

In the second article of this special issue, *Alien Astronauts, Underwater Civilizations and Radioactive Volcanos: A Global Esoteric Business Imagines Japan*, Stephen Christopher considers another contemporary case that blurs the religion/other-than-religion divisions. The Modern Mystery School (MMS) is a global business with headquarters in Toronto, London, Florianópolis (Brazil), and Tokyo. It combines multilevel marketing techniques developed in the U.S. in the twentieth century with the teachings of its Icelandic founder Gudni Gudanson, inspired by a variety of esoteric ideas such as Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and Universal Kabbalah. Studies on "Western esotericism," which have usually dealt with such ideas, have highlighted the influence of (supposedly) Asian traditions on esoteric teachings. In fact, as recent research has illustrated, it is difficult to study esotericism without considering colonialism and the ways people uneasy at materialist

developments in Western contexts sought "wisdom from the East." And, of course, vice versa: to understand the Theosophical Society, for example, it is important to understand how the fascination with the "wisdom from the East" started. Christopher's analysis of Gudni's infatuation with (his constructed image) of Japan is a clear demonstration of this phenomenon. Indeed, based on extensive fieldwork within the organization, Christopher's ethnographic study shows the complex dynamics of "collective formation" in the process of the adaptation of Western esotericism in Japan.

As Christopher observes, MMS actively harnesses an East/West dichotomy to ground its teachings in a discourse of Japanese spiritual exceptionalism that is both meant to attract new recruits in Japan and to advance to the rest of MMS initiates a business narrative of global expansion. The esoteric ideas that are employed to appeal to this Japanese exceptionalism consist, however, of very common symbolisms in the Japanese religious landscape. The examples of Mount Kurama, Mount Aso, and Yonaguni that Christopher discusses are frequent members of sacred geographies referred to by local religious groups, para-scientific theories about ancient civilizations and extraterrestrial beings, and popular media products. As such, they acquire value in MMS theology, not because of their secrecy, but because of their contribution to locating MMS and its initiates within a global network of practices centered on and oftentimes emanating from (an imagined and orientalised) Japan. In other words, in the process of familiarizing themselves with esoteric ideas, Japanese members of MMS also tend to espouse ideas that reaffirm Japanese exceptionalism, therefore questioning the category of "Western esotericism" altogether.

In the third and final article of this special issue, *Historicising the (Oc)cultic Milieu: Mikkyō in 1970s Japan*, Han Sangyun examines the concept of the "cultic milieu," which Colin Campbell coined in 1972 to refer to a sort of cultural underground pool of systems and practices considered deviant and unorthodox, and which were thought to be directly feeding the continual process of formation and collapse of individual "cultic" groups. Han proceeds to critique this concept by noting how, like in the case of "lived religion," the overemphasis on one dimension of religion, in the case of the "cultic milieu," "unorthodox" or "deviant" religion, leads to at least two interrelated issues: the context-dependent meaning of that dimension, that is, "deviancy," and the mutual construction of the religion and other-than-religion pair, "unorthodox" religion and "mainstream" religion. To explore these ideas, Han employs the cases of three authors who, in the 1970s, seemed to share a common interest in associating Mikkyō 密教 (commonly translated as "Esoteric Buddhism") with the acquisition of psychic powers (*chōnōryoku*). The three authors, however, do not have anything else in common. Nakaoka Toshiya 中岡俊哉 (1926–2001) was a popular writer who earned his living from books on parapsychology. Kiriyama Seiyū

桐山靖雄 (1921–2016) was a licensed Shingon Buddhist priest who later (in 1978) became the head of the new religious group Agonshū 阿含宗 and had reinterpreted Mikkyō as techniques of healing and salvation suited to the apocalyptic era he considered himself to be living in. And Yamasaki Taikō 山崎泰廣 (b. 1929) is a traditional Shingon priest who served as head of Buddhist temples and held a professorship at Shuchiin University, an institution partly dedicated to the teaching of Mikkyō. Despite the distinct *milieux* that these three authors were active in, and even if some of their ideas were not in line with "orthodox" Buddhism, they all contributed to a reimagining of esoteric Buddhism as offering practical tools for self development, which "traditional" Shingon was starting to accept as one way of popularizing their teachings. Han shows, therefore, that not only are the lines between parapsychology and new and established religious ideas porous, but also that these distinctions feed from each other to such an extent that it becomes very complicated to identify an "underground pool of deviant ideas" as Campbell had originally suggested.

If other-than-religion concepts are useful in pointing us toward what our discussion of religion had so far missed or undermined, they are also eventually effective in qualifying the value judgments that lie at the basis of the artificial distinctions that we make within "religion" and between "religion" and "non-religion." We hope that this special issue will foster further discussions on "other-than-religion" concepts and would like to thank the contributors, the reviewers for their constructive comments, Professor Hoshino Seiji, the editor of *Religious Studies in Japan*, and also Professor Fujiwara Satoko and the rest of the steering committee of the 81st Annual Conference of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies, where earlier versions of these papers were presented.

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Religious Studies in Japan VOLUME 7 (SPECIAL ISSUE): 43–61

MURAKAMI Aki

Rethinking Lived Religion in Contemporary Japanese Shamanism

The primary aim of this article is to reassess the scope of the concept of lived religion by considering its limitations and possibilities through a comparison with associated debates in Japanese scholarship. I first examine the discussion of lived Buddhism by Sasaki Kōkan as the Japanese counterpart of the lived religion argument. Sasaki's ideas provide important hints for a further understanding of how—and from what—religion is formed at the individual level. I then analyze the case of a contemporary shaman in the Tsugaru area of Japan in accordance with the perspective of lived Buddhism. Through this case, I clarify the complexity of elements that make up lived religion and argue that locating institutional religion at the core of lived religion consists of a perspective that is too narrow. I conclude that we need to analyze individual practices without taking the influence of institutional religions for granted.

KEYWORDS: lived religion—lived Buddhism—shamanism—*kamisama*—*itako*

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One of the major areas of interest for contemporary religious studies is lived religion. According to David Hall, one of the proponents of the concept, lived religion is "an approach to the study of religion that foregrounds practice: 'lived' in the sense of the performed or enacted" (Hall 2010, 1282). In short, what makes lived religion distinctive is the focus on the daily practices of individuals inside and outside religious organizations. Religion is not limited to religious teachings and belongings. Since the concept gained popularity around the first decade of the twenty-first century, researchers have tried to capture the fluid and dynamic aspects of religions in everyday life under the concept of the "lived." They have emphasized that religions are not static or dead objects waiting to be studied by researchers. Instead, they are in the process of constant change. The connotations of the word "lived" in the concept of lived religion have therefore been amply discussed, but what about "religion"? What does it mean to study lived *religion*?

The primary aim of this article is to reassess the scope of the concept of lived religion by considering its limitations and possibilities through a comparison with associated debates in Japanese scholarship. This discussion will lead me to critically examine the meaning of religion in studies of lived religion.

Religion remains a controversial concept within religious studies: it is a biased concept that has been historically constructed in specifically Western, and especially Protestant, contexts (Asad 1993). As a result, some scholars even suggested dropping the concept itself altogether (Smith 1991; Fitzgerald 2000). Timothy Fitzgerald harshly criticizes the application of religious concepts to non-Western regions. Using Japan as an example, he argues that the concept of religion should not be used in the Japanese context because to use the concept is to impose a Western ideological distinction between religion and the secular that obscure Japanese realities (Fitzgerald 2000, 181). However, his argument overlooks the pervasiveness of the concept of religion in Japanese scholarship (Nagatani 2021, 79). In addition, Kevin Schilbrack argues that pointing out that the concept of religion as a social construct does not necessarily mean that religions do not exist "out there" in the world (Schilbrack 2012, 100). Hoshino Seiji 星野靖二[1] mentions this point in his book on the concept of religion in modern Japan. He writes:

1. Japanese personal names have been ordered according to the Japanese convention of surname before first name.

> Although the concept of religion cannot be strictly defined, there is an agreement, including among researchers, as to what it is. Besides, in our daily lives, we make judgments about what is and is not religion. We know what "religion" is. We need to bear in mind that the concept of religion is factual (in Japan).
> (HOSHINO 2012, viii)

The above notes that the concept of religion is already part of reality in Japan, even if it is derived from Western ideology. Therefore, the work that needs to be done is not to abandon the concept of religion, but to reframe it in order to make it a more appropriate tool for understanding human activities that have been framed as religious in a broad sense.

Since the concept of religion is now accepted in many parts of the world, not only in Japan, a comparison of cases from different regions could help us to rethink what religion is. The perspective of lived religion, which focuses on individual practices, provides a basis for such a comparison (AMMERMAN 2016, 95). Thus, the study of lived religion has much to contribute to this attempt at reframing the concept of religion. For this purpose, it is necessary to take a close look at the meaning of *religion* in studies of lived religion.

This article begins by clarifying the characteristics and problems of the concept of lived religion, then moves to its acceptance in Japan by introducing the concept of "lived Buddhism," formulated by Sasaki Kōkan 佐々木宏幹. It will then examine an example of contemporary shamanistic practitioners in the Tsugaru area of Japan.[2] This example will provide a better understanding of Sasaki's concept and make it possible to compare the perspective of lived Buddhism with that of lived religion. Finally, it will explore new possibilities for the study of lived religion.

The Characteristics and Problems of Lived Religion

The study of lived religion addresses the fact that people's actual religious lives cannot be reduced to a single doctrine or affiliation. For example, Meredith McGuire, in her book *Lived Religion*, introduces an example of a professor who identifies himself as a "Zen Presbyterian." He belongs to a Presbyterian congregation, but doctrines are not important to him. He practices Zen meditation and writes poetry inspired by his reading of Buddhist, Hindu, and Taoist philosophies. It is these varied practices that constitute his spiritual life, not his religious belonging. Based on such examples, McGuire tries to reconsider the Western image of religion as unitary, organizationally defined, and a relatively stable set of collective beliefs (MCGUIRE 2008, 185–86). In her book, McGuire focuses on

2. The Tsugaru area is in Aomori Prefecture in the Tōhoku region, at the northern end of Japan's largest island, Honshū.

case studies in the USA, and, in general, the study of lived religion has developed mainly in the United States. However, the perspective of lived religion is not only valid for the United States.

A large number of essays focusing on lived religion have been published in the last two decades, with cases from all over the world, and not just English-speaking countries. How do people explain "lived religion" in these studies? Nancy Ammerman analyzed sixty-four journal articles published in English that have used either "lived religion" or "everyday religion," and found that lived religion tends to be defined "by contrasts."

> What emerges as people have attempted to set the focus and boundaries of lived religion research, then, is an emphasis on what lived religion is NOT, a definition by contrasts. Most especially, lived religion is about ordinary people, not religious professionals, and it is about everyday life, not what happens in institutionalized religious settings. (AMMERMAN 2016, 87)

Lived religion is a new perspective to target ordinary people who have not been the subject of research before. However, this creates a new issue of excluding the institutionalized aspects of religions. Thomas Tweed mentioned this by stating that there is "a tendency to attend most fully to ordinary people and everyday life, which minimizes the significance of clergy, beliefs, ecclesiastical institutions, prescribed rituals, and consecrated spaces" (TWEED 2015, 372). Kim Knibbe and Helena Kupari also make this point as follows:

> Paying attention to the margins—to people whose experiences have previously been left unarticulated—has been a crucial objective in the study of lived religion. If, however, the center is overlooked in the process, scholars risk perpetuating the dichotomies they are working to overcome. Focusing solely on the disadvantaged is untenable as it gives the impression that "élite" religiosity does not fit in the category of lived religion and is somehow fundamentally different: perhaps doctrinally purer, more rational or less focused on instrumental concerns. (KNIBEE and KUPARI 2020, 167)

Knibee and Kupari are concerned about lived religion becoming a limited category that excludes "élite" religiosity. Ammerman's finding, mentioned above, that lived religion tends to be defined "by contrast," shows that this exclusion is actually happening. This point is not the only criticism of the study of lived religion,[3] but it is crucial since it contradicts the premise of the concept,

3. There are two main types of further criticisms: the first concerns the definition of religion as per John Smolenski in a review of *Lived Religion in America* (HALL 1997), who states that the perspective of lived religion obscures what religion is by blurring the boundaries between the sacred and the secular (SMOLENSKI 1999) that will be discussed later in this article; and the second concerns a criticism of the representativeness of cases associated with lived religion. This

which is to break the division of high and low or elite and popular religions in order to rethink what constitutes religion (Hall 1997, viii–ix).

Lived Religion Studies in Japan

While discussions on lived religion are flourishing in English, it is difficult to find works written in Japanese on this concept. One of the reasons for this may be found in the development of the study of folk (or popular) beliefs (*minkan shinkō* 民間信仰) that have played an important role in the development of religious studies in Japan. *Minkan shinkō* first appeared in 1897 in the work of Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873–1949), the pioneer of Japanese religious studies (Anesaki 1897; Suzuki 2003). After that, it was mostly Japanese folklore studies that took the lead in studying the field, before Hori Ichirō 堀一郎 (1910–1974), in the immediate postwar period, bridged the field of folklore studies with that of religious studies (Hori 1951). Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, Japanese scholars began to use the term "folk religion" (*minzoku shūkyō* 民俗宗教) instead of *minkan shinkō*,[4] and both religious studies and folklore studies flourished (Murakami 2022).

It is interesting to compare Japan's research history with the history of religious studies in the United States. Don Yoder wrote in 1974 that "in the field of religious studies in the United States, the interest in folk-religious phenomena has been minimal" because "the teaching of religious studies in the United States has concentrated largely on the theological and institutional level, which either neglects folk practices and folk interpretations of religion as unimportant or it neglects them because the discipline has too rigid a framework to include such phenomena" (Yoder 1974, 7). Religious studies had started under the strong influence of Protestant theology in the United States (Fujiwara 2013, 109). It was not until the 1960s that the field started to think about religion outside the church and that "popular" or "folk" religions became recognized as subjects of study in religious studies (Hall 2010, 1283).

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is a point that Paul-François Tremlett points out (2010) in his severe criticism of Meredith McGuire's book *Lived Religion*. He states that McGuire's study neglects broader social relationships by focusing too much on individual practice, and he questions the statistical significance of her cases (Tremlett 2010). It is better to think of this as a criticism directed at qualitative research in general rather than only at lived religion studies. Ammerman (2021) repeatedly argues that the study of lived religion is about the relationship between the individual and society. The studies of lived religion or qualitative studies in general are based on the premise that individual practice does not exist independently of society but is part of it.

4. There are several reasons for this: for example, Ikegami Yoshimasa 池上良正 explains that researchers of the time used the term "religion" rather than "beliefs" because they sought to emphasize the "religiosity" of popular practices (Ikegami 1999, 129).

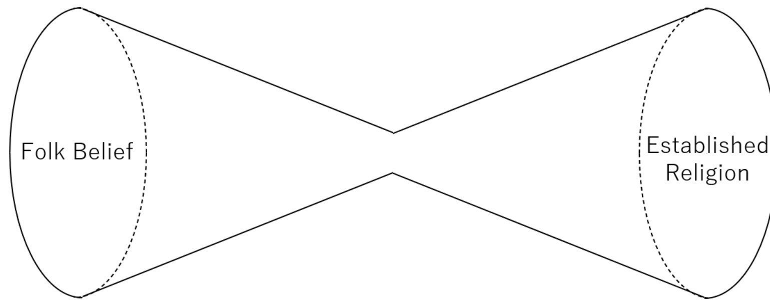

FIGURE 1. Diagram of the relationship between folk beliefs and established religions. Drawn by the author and based on SAKURAI (1973, 709).

It could be said, therefore, that when it comes to research on folk beliefs or popular religion, Japan was decades ahead of North America. Japanese scholars have taken a keen interest in folk beliefs in order to explore the uniqueness of Japanese religion (*koyū shinkō* 固有信仰, lit. autochthonous beliefs). The study of Japanese folk beliefs was first undertaken in folklore studies. According to Miyake Hitoshi 宮家準, the goal of the founders of Japanese folklore, Yanagita Kunio 柳田国男 (1875–1962) and Orikuchi Shinobu 折口信夫 (1887–1953), was to reveal the ancient form of the Japanese people's beliefs. Religious scholars such as Hori followed them and focused on Japanese folk beliefs in order to understand the influence of established religions at the folk level. They believed that the study of folk beliefs would lead to clarifying the structure and history of religion in Japan (MIYAKE 2000).

Their aim is not the same as that of contemporary studies of lived religion, which seek to rethink the conventional understandings of religion through people's practices. Japanese religious studies, which has a relatively long history of studying folk beliefs, deeply considered the relationship between the ordinary and the doctrinal, a relationship that, in the field of lived religion, is currently presented as fragmented. However, Japanese folklorist Sakurai Tokutarō 桜井徳太郎 proposes, for example, that folk beliefs are placed on one pole and established religion on another pole, with cones extending from both poles toward the middle (FIGURE 1). The two cones intersect in the middle, meaning that the areas of folk belief and established religion are joined and become indistinguishable in the middle of the diagram. He argued that this is an appropriate understanding of actual Japanese religion (SAKURAI 1973, 709). Later, Sasaki Kōkan developed the argument of the relationship between established religions and folk beliefs in more detail, and introduced the concept of lived Buddhism (*seikatsu Bukkyō*

生活仏教). In the following, I will first describe Sasaki's discussion of lived Buddhism and then consider the contributions a lived Buddhism perspective can provide to the study of lived religion.

Lived Buddhism

Sasaki Kōkan is an anthropologist of religion and is well known for his studies on shamanism. In his books, he repeatedly expounds on the concept of *seikatsu Bukkyō* (Sasaki 2004; Sasaki 2012). Sasaki, who grew up in a Sōtō Zen temple and says that he was well acquainted with the scenes where religion is actually lived (Sasaki 2010), writes that he developed the concept of lived Buddhism in order to bridge the gap between the study of doctrinal Buddhism and that of folk religion, two domains that had traditionally been clearly divided (Sasaki 2001, 25). He goes on to say that trying to combine the two is a "tremendous challenge" but a necessary one for understanding religion in everyday life, because the doctrinal and folk levels are continuous at the level of practice.

The distinction between doctrinal Buddhism and folk religion is made only at the ideological level, and in actual religious life, these two are completely compounded. To illustrate this, Sasaki turns his attention to Buddhist priests who work with laypeople on a daily basis, and to shamanistic practitioners in Japan. Both of these professionals are "mediators" through whom the doctrinal aspects of Buddhism and folk practices intermingle. He identifies three levels in Japanese Buddhism: (a) doctrinal Buddhism, (b) mediators, and (c) laypeople (Sasaki 1996, 17; Sasaki 2002, 51). The novelty of this argument lies in the fact that he tries to view religion not in terms of a binary opposition (a vs. c) but in terms of the relationship among the three levels. Here, the mediators (b) play an important role. Sasaki insists that one should not get caught up in the rigid dichotomy of doctrine versus folklore but rather focus on the ambiguous and elastic realm of the relationship between the two (Sasaki 2001, 32). The mediators (b), such as shamans, ascetics, and priests, belong to this "ambiguous and elastic realm."

Before providing a specific example of a shaman in the following sections, I want to briefly consider the question of why Buddhist priests are assigned to the b domain of Sasaki's schema. This is because Sasaki's argument stems from a practical concern for the daily lives of Buddhist priests. In Japan, funerals and memorial services for the dead are central to temple activities and income. For this reason, temple Buddhism is sometimes derogatorily referred to as "funeral Buddhism." What parishioners expect from priests is not doctrinal teachings, but rather rituals for their deceased relatives and ancestors. However, the preoccupation with the whereabouts of the souls of the dead contradicts Buddhist beliefs such as "impermanence," "non-self," and "emptiness" (Sasaki 2012, 268).

Although Buddhist priests are the bearers of the doctrine, in their daily lives they must respond to the expectations of their followers to care for the souls of the dead. In Sasaki's discussion of lived Buddhism, Buddhist priests, who are usually positioned as religious elites in previous studies of folk beliefs and in recent studies of lived religion, are repositioned as mediators between A and C, constantly wavering between the two.

It also should be noted that Sasaki does not consider these three ideal levels (A, B, C) as fixed, independent categories. He suggests that this is a fluid framework where the levels can partially overlap (Sasaki 1996, 18). A Buddhist priest can be very close to A at a certain moment, but the same person may sometimes become an important part of a local religious ritual (C). People live through these three levels without experiencing any borders. What Sasaki calls lived Buddhism is the synthesis of all three levels. And this is where I believe that scholarship on lived religion can learn from Sasaki's argument: (1) lived religion studies started to fall into an either/or categorization, namely religious elite versus ordinary people or institutionalized religion versus lived religion; Sasaki's argument of lived Buddhism shows us that lived religion should have a comprehensive view that includes all three inseparable levels since they are all experienced by individuals; and (2) by focusing on the mediators (B), we can see the actual intermingling of the teachings and practices. This can lead us to a more comprehensive understanding of lived religion as a dynamic interaction between doctrinal level and daily practices. The study of mediators can provide us with a deeper understanding of how and from what religion is formed at the individual level.

Shamans as Mediators

When we follow Sasaki's argument, the mediators are the key to understanding Buddhism as lived religion. In this section I consider an example of a shamanistic practitioner, Ms. Kasai,[5] from my field research in the Tsugaru area in Japan. Ms. Kasai was born in 1942 in Hirosaki 弘前 City in Aomori Prefecture. She is referred to as a *kamisama* カミサマ, the local term used to refer to a shaman. Clients contact her for advice on a variety of matters, including domestic problems, illness, work, and marriage. She responds to these requests with what she calls her "psychic gifts" (*reikan* 霊感), conveying to the client voices and the will of the deities. Most of the *kamisama* are women. After suffering

5. This name is a pseudonym. The author has continuously observed her rituals from 2012 to the present. The main interview was conducted in 2012, but she and I have had many conversations on other occasions. Her biography in this article is based on those interviews and conversations. For a detailed discussion of Ms. Kasai's identity formation as a shaman, see Murakami (2021).

from an illness of unknown cause, the future *kamisama* undertakes a spiritual quest or ascetic training in search of a cure for her illness, and in that process, she acquires the ability to communicate with the deities. Gradually, she begins consulting with clients as a profession, and when her abilities are recognized by others, she becomes a *kamisama*. Ms. Kasai's initiation process is similar to that of other *kamisama* in this area in the northern part of Japan's main island of Honshū. She suffered from a sudden illness of unknown cause in her twenties and started experiencing and seeing supernatural phenomena. She then followed the steps of a few *kamisama* and learned their practices. In addition, she studied under a Shingon priest in Hirosaki City. She completed a short training course at Kōyasan 高野山 in 1992, the center of the Shingon school of Buddhism, and obtained a teaching license.

In general, the status of a *kamisama* is determined by her reputation among clients. There is no specific license to become a *kamisama*. However, *kamisama* generally prefer to obtain a license as a priest from a temple or shrine. One reason for this is that, during the Meiji 明治 period (1868–1912), religious activities conducted without affiliation to a religious order could be subject to restrictions by officials. This was because the Meiji government was tightening religious control, including the regulation of folk religious practices. Today, such restrictive measures have ceased, but there is still a loosely shared perception among *kamisama* that they should have a license. Therefore, many *kamisama* undergo short-term training at a Buddhist temple (often Shingon, which widely accepts folk religious practitioners such as *kamisama*) or a Shinto shrine to obtain a license as a priest. Ms. Kasai is no exception. She happened to meet a local priest and took him as her teacher. Under his guidance, she qualified as a priest of Shingon Buddhism. However, her relationship with the priest and the temple was not a permanent one. After obtaining the license, she has kept little connection with the temple.

An established Buddhist school, such as Shingon, does not teach how to practice the local rituals of divination or *kuchiyose* 口寄せ. Ms. Kasai's training under the priest and her license are not substantial in her daily practice. Upon closely observing her rituals, one can see that they somewhat resemble how the other *kamisama* in the area perform. This is because she learned under senior local *kamisama*, and many of her clients are local people who know about what *kamisama* normally do. The importance of Ms. Kasai's role in the local religious culture can be most clearly illustrated by her participation in the great festival of *Sainokawara jizōson* 賽の河原地蔵尊. This festival is held in Goshogawara 五所川原 City, in June of the lunar calendar (FIGURES 2 and 3). It is well known in the community as a place for rituals and offerings for the dead, especially deceased children. Although the festival is run by local people and does not belong to any particular Buddhist denomination, it is priests from nearby temples who are in

charge of the rituals. Currently, the priests are from a Tendai temple, but in the past, there were priests from a Sōtō Zen temple. Local people call upon priests with whom they have developed a relationship of trust. It is interesting that people do not care about the differences between Buddhist denominations. As Sasaki's discussion pointed out, for laypeople, Buddhist priests are the ones who perform rituals for the dead, and this is what they expect from Buddhism. Their disinterest in the differences between Buddhist sects in *Sainokawara* exemplifies that the core of the connection between people and Buddhism is not doctrinal but rituals for the dead.

Ms. Kasai is usually invited to perform at the festival.[6] In the temple building, there are priests who perform Buddhist rituals for the dead, and outside, just behind the building, Ms. Kasai is called to practice *kuchiyose* (a ritual to summon the dead spirits and listen to their voices) for visitors. Visitors often attend both rituals.

That Ms. Kasai performs the *kuchiyose* ritual is proof of a remarkable change in shamanism in this area. *Kuchiyose* is a ritual that, for many decades, was performed exclusively by *itako* イタコ, a different type of shaman from *kamisama*. *Itako* refers to a shaman who is blind. To become an *itako*, one must undergo long training under a senior *itako*.[7] In the past, women with impaired vision living in this region became an *itako* in order to acquire financial independence. The *kuchiyose* was once the monopoly of the *itako*, and *kamisama* were not allowed to practice it because the manner and sutras employed during the ritual were only inherited by the *itako*. Recently, however, the *itako* tradition has been dying out. The number of people who choose to become *itako* through rigorous training is gradually decreasing and the number of *itako* active in the Tsugaru region is almost zero.

Some people in the Tsugaru area say that the dead go to a better place by performing *kuchiyose* every year, and therefore, they cannot miss the annual *kuchiyose* ritual. In addition, clients who, for personal reasons, have a desire to hear the voices of the dead, still make requests for a *kuchiyose* for consolation. Someone, therefore, needs to make up for the loss of the *itako* and their *kuchiyose* ritual. *Kamisama* such as Ms. Kasai have thus obtained a chance to practice the *kuchiyose* ritual, otherwise no one else would be able to answer the demands of those

6. She started to participate in the festival in the 1990s (SUZUKI 2014, 342–43). In the beginning, she did not have many clients because *itako* still participated in the festivals. Local people knew that she was not an *itako* and preferred the conventional way of *kuchiyose* by *itako*, not by *kamisama*. However, as she continued to participate in the festival, she became the only one who could perform *kuchiyose* in the 2010s.

7. The name *itako* is used mainly in Aomori Prefecture, but similar religious practitioners who were blind and performed *kuchiyose* rituals existed throughout the Tōhoku region.

FIGURE 2. *Sainokawara Jizōson* (photo by author).

FIGURE 3. *Kuchiyose* ritual during the festival (photo by author, 24 July 2019).

who want to hear the voices of the dead. Ms. Kasai is not the only *kamisama* who practices the ritual, but she is the most active. The grand festival used to be attended by dozens of *itako* to perform the *kuchiyose* ritual, but now Ms. Kasai, a *kamisama*, is the only one who attends it. Without her, the two rituals of the grand festival, Buddhist rituals and *kuchiyose*, will no longer be possible.

The same situation is occuring at the spring prayer (*harukitō* 春祈禱) held in each community of the Tsugaru area in March. *Itako* used to visit the community and provide divination rituals for the local people, but again, since the *itako* are no longer available, it is *kamisama* like Ms. Kasai who perform the ritual.[8] After the prayer, a meal is served, and the participants listen to Ms. Kasai's story. Ms. Kasai likes to boast that her *kuchiyose* ritual is popular even among people outside the community and that she receives requests from all over Japan. Overall, she is an important part of the local religious practices and her life as a *kamisama* is deeply embedded in the local shamanic traditions, but we can also discern some innovative aspects of her practices.

Today, Ms. Kasai is constantly exposed to the influence of travel agents and the mass media. She has transformed her rituals in response to different environments and different clients. These influences from outside the local community are important to consider in lived Buddhism and lived religion. Many clients from Tokyo or other areas outside of the Tsugaru area visit her for the *kuchiyose* ritual. Some tourist companies sell package tours offering the "*itako* experience," and she joins them as an *itako*.[9] Despite the very small number of *itako*, the name of *itako* and their *kuchiyose* ritual are now well known throughout the country. Many tourists come to visit Aomori Prefecture for this quite rare experience of speaking to the dead. Ms. Kasai does not use the Tsugaru dialect when she performs the ritual for tourists, and the dead she summons speak in standard Japanese. Tourists and tourism agencies like her way of performing the ritual because it is quite easy to understand for people who are not

8. When I began my research in 2012, there was only one *itako* in the Tsugaru region who performed the spring prayer. She retired in 2014, and since then there have been no *itako* performing the spring prayer. In one of the earliest reports on the spring prayers, Shinomiya Haruko 篠宮はる子 wrote that "people call for *kamisama* only when they cannot get *itako* to perform the spring prayer" (SHINOMIYA 1967, 25). This shows that although there were instances of the spring prayer being performed by *kamisama* from that time, they were exceptional. Over time, the spring prayer gradually became a ritual of the *kamisama*.

9. The *kuchiyose* ritual has had a commercial aspect since the time *itako* were performing it. *Itako* travelled to places where many people gathered, such as shrines and temple festivals, for *kuchiyose*. It is therefore not surprising that "*itako* experience" package tours are marketed in this way. In Ms. Kasai's case, she started doing *kuchiyose* in a hotel at the request of a local hotel owner she knew several decades ago. Then her *kuchiyose* in the hotel became known to a major travel agency in Tokyo and they began asking her to join their tours.

used to the conventional way of *kuchiyose*. *Kuchiyose* performed by *itako*, not *kamisama*, had a unique rhythm, and the *itako* used terms that were specific to the ritual. Clients had to be trained to understand the words of the dead spoken by the *itako*. For tourist agencies, the conventional way of an *itako*'s *kuchiyose* carries the risk of complaints from clients who may not understand what the dead are saying. However, Ms. Kasai's *kuchiyose* performed in standard Japanese resembles a normal conversation. Clients do not need to be trained to understand the words of the dead. Ms. Kasai knows that her way is preferred by tourists. Her practices are exposed to negotiation as a result of the expectations of the people from the tourism agencies.

For the locals, Ms. Kasai is a typical *kamisama*, not an *itako*. She does not actively call herself an *itako*, but says that she does not mind being called as such. For clients who come from outside the community, it does not matter if she is a traditional *itako* or not. What they are interested in is whether the content of the *kuchiyose* is real or not. Ms. Kasai is well aware of this and has a passive attitude toward being called an *itako*. However, her daily exposure to the expectations of people outside the community has a significant impact on her practice and self-perception. Her *kuchiyose* has been transformed into something more easily understood. And the positive feedback from the tourists has given her confidence in her new way of doing *kuchiyose*. She sometimes appears as an *itako* on television and other media. She repeatedly tells local clients that her style has attracted attention from tourists and the mass media. In doing so, she has successfully legitimized her rituals and herself.

The Scope of Lived Buddhism

As discussed above Sasaki argued that lived Buddhism is the synthesis of three realms: (A) doctrinal Buddhism, (B) the mediators, and (C) laypeople. In order to avoid the dichotomy between A and C, Sasaki emphasized the realm of B, that is, the priests and shamans who bridge A and C. If we follow Sasaki's argument of lived Buddhism, Ms. Kasai is a mediator who acts as a bridge between the Shingon teachings and local people, since she has studied and obtained a qualification in the Shingon Buddhist tradition. However, Buddhism is only a small part of what comprises Ms. Kasai's everyday practices. To her local clients, she is a *kamisama,* not a Buddhist priest. On the other hand, she becomes an *itako* in front of tourists. She knows well what people want from her, and she knows how to meet their expectations. What is important here is that her rituals and self-understanding are greatly influenced not only by Buddhism and local shamanistic traditions but also by the tourism industry and the mass media.

It has already been pointed out that the *itako* became popular in the mass media, especially during the so-called "occult boom" from the 1970s onwards.

The mass media created a simple stereotype of the *itako* as specialists in spirit possession, *kuchiyose*, and became widely known through TV programs, magazines, manga, or films (ŌMICHI 2016; ŌMICHI 2017). Such an image did not include the details of the *kuchiyose* ritual. It did not convey the fact that the *kuchiyose* of *itako* has a particular rhythm and terminology that is completely different from a normal conversation. *Kuchiyose* was only associated with the practice of talking with the dead. It is precisely these stereotypical *itako* and *kuchiyose* images that tourists are seeking. Hence, Ms. Kasai constantly faces the expectations of the people who have gained an understanding of *itako* through mass media representation. Thus, her practices are also a response to these expectations.

No matter how remote from Buddhism it may seem, this kind of Japanese shamanistic practitioner is an important part of lived Buddhism in Sasaki's schema. He actually takes up shamans in the Tōhoku area when he explains "lived Buddhism" (SASAKI 2010). These mediators are constantly serving the everyday religious needs of the people while also relating to the doctrinal aspects of religion. Again, lived Buddhism is made up of the whole tripartite dynamic of doctrine, mediators, and laypeople (SASAKI 2012). The flexibility of the framework is noteworthy here. As we have seen in the above example, Ms. Kasai's practices are a mixture of various elements, and many of them have nothing to do with Buddhism. However, by regarding her as a bridge between the different levels in Sasaki's ABC schema, even these seemingly unrelated things can be considered part of lived Buddhism. In fact, the more diverse factors her practices have, the more conceptual flexibility lived Buddhism can gain by including them in the discussion.

The Contribution of Lived Buddhism to Lived Religion Studies

Lived Buddhism offers the possibility to incorporate the seemingly non-Buddhist and even nonreligious elements in Buddhism. The strength of Sasaki's argument lies in the fact that by focusing on the mediator, the scope of Buddhist studies can be widely expanded. Whatever it is, if it is related to a mediator, it can be included in lived Buddhism, because lived Buddhism is the sum total of the three domains of A, B, and C.

Now, I would like to return for a moment to the discussion of lived religions. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of studies that consider the case of Buddhism from the perspective of lived religion. Although many of them do not explicitly advocate the expansion of the understanding of "Buddhism" as Sasaki does, they do contribute to it. For example, Brooke Schedneck discusses the connection between Theravāda Buddhist temples and the market economy in Thailand. By following the lived religion argument,

she is able to discuss the relationship between Buddhism and the economy in ways that differ from normative analyses that consider economic practices by Buddhist priests to be a deviation from Buddha's teachings (Schedneck 2019). Another example is Jessica Starling's study. She uses "domestic religion" as a key concept in her case study of the wives of the Jōdo Shinshū temples in Japan to shed light on their "backstage" practices, which have been overlooked for a long time. The lived religion perspective allows the author to discuss how these women's informal activities, such as child-rearing and daily interactions with the local community shape their religious dispositions (Starling 2020). These two studies show that by discussing Buddhism from the perspective of lived religion, it is possible to incorporate elements other than "Buddhism," such as economics in the case of Schedneck and gendered domestic work in the case of Starling. And the same can be argued for the case of Ms. Kasai.

Ms. Kasai's example shows that both local and supra-regional contexts have been deeply involved in her self-understanding and her practices as a *kamisama*. Here, "local context" means, for example, the influence of other *kamisama* under whom she studied during the initiation process and the expectations of local clients who know what a *kamisama* should be. "Supra-regional context" means the tourist agencies and the clients who come to visit for the *kuchiyose* ritual and who call her *itako*. These two contexts seem to contradict each other, but in Ms. Kasai's mind and practices, they coexist. She is deeply embedded in the local context, but also lives under the lingering influence of the "occult boom." Furthermore, she brings her *kuchiyose* ritual, which she has transformed in response to visitors' expectations, back to local communities on occasions such as spring prayers. She then tells the local people about the constant visits of clients from all over Japan and about her appearances on television. By doing so, she is legitimizing her own practice and making the local people accept her new style of rituals. Following Sasaki's argument, a shaman like her is a mediator bridging Buddhist doctrine and people, but Ms. Kasai is also a mediator between the media image of *itako* or the "occult boom" and local religious practices. The components of her lived religion cannot be completely divided into religious and nonreligious, because the occultic knowledge popularized in the 1970s erodes our prescriptive boundary between "religion" and "non-religion" (Han 2021; see also Han's article in this issue). It is significant that such influence was observed even in the case of Ms. Kasai, a shaman embedded in the local context.

Lived religion studies are often criticized for targeting only ordinary people and minimizing the significance of the doctrinal or institutional aspects of religion. In response to this criticism, Ammerman attempts to correct this bias by reasserting the importance of the institution. Ammerman insists on having "a wider institutional focus that might bring the religious settings and traditions back in" (Ammerman 2016, 95). This appeal has a point; however, it threatens

to pull the diversity of lived religion back into a limited, institutional-religion-centered perspective. What Ms. Kasai's case reveals is the diversity of elements that make up her religious practice. These include institutional religion (Buddhism), local traditions, and the travel industry. These do not exist individually but are mixed all together, both in her mind and her practices.

Conclusion

Lived religion studies are criticized for their tendency to avoid the "definitional problem by blurring the boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary" and "risk creating a meaningless category that fails to identify their subject of study and is unable to distinguish what is not religious" (Tweeed 2015, 374). However, lived religion studies should not make assumptions in advance about what is religion and what is not because as we saw in the case study discussed in this article, the elements that constitute lived religion are diverse. Rather, if we depict the diversity of people's practices in detail, the boundaries between religion and non-religion will disappear. It is only then that we can begin to reconsider what is a more appropriate understanding of religion.

People are surrounded by a diversity of knowledge and authority in their daily lives, not only institutional religions but also nonestablished ones, that are often categorized as occultism, or as in Ms. Kasai's case, mass media and local traditions. Paying attention to these would teach us that institutional religion is only one component of an individual's religious practice. For some people, esoteric knowledge is accepted as being more authoritative than institutional religion. In such cases, the claim to reevaluate the importance of institutional religion in lived religion studies would be worthless. Lived Buddhism and lived religion show that each individual has a nuanced religious map that is constituted in relation to various authorities and knowledge available in society. In order to foster the discussions of lived religion further, it is necessary to unpack each map without taking the influence of institutional religions for granted.

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Religious Studies in Japan VOLUME 7: 63–84

Stephen CHRISTOPHER

Alien Astronauts, Underwater Civilizations, and Radioactive Volcanos

A Global Esoteric Business Imagines Japan

This article analyzes how the Modern Mystery School (MMS), a transnational business specializing in Western esotericism, has adapted to Japan's spiritual landscape over the past two decades. Specific beliefs, practices, and social structures have been dialectically constructed at the West/East interface. Secret teachings in the lineage of King Salomon and Jesus Christ, closely aligned with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the Theosophical Society, are now innovated in Tokyo and adapted to the Japanese marketplace of spiritual therapies. Although developed in Scandinavia and North America by the Icelandic founder Gudni Gudnason, the transnationalism of MMS calls into question the strict reification of Western esotericism. While MMS teachings promote a diffusionist model of Western esotericism as radiating to the East, the ethnographic picture is more complex. The innovations made by Founder Gudni to localize MMS cosmology in Japanese geography, and the agentive role of Japanese followers, are placed in the context of a group that is irreducibly both a for-profit business and a "spiritual path." MMS remains one of the largest and most stable spiritual seminar companies in Japan. This article draws on fieldwork conducted between 2021–2023 with the permission of MMS leaders and consent from all interviewees in accordance with ethical standards for qualitative research.

KEYWORDS: "Western" esotericism—spirituality—hermenutics—sacred geography—transnational diffusion

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The Modern Mystery School (MMS) is a global business selling initiation into a three-thousand-year-old esoteric lineage of King Salomon that includes Western cultural luminaries such as Leonardo Di Vinci and David Bowie. The teachings and mytho-biographical claims of Icelandic Founder Gudni Gudanson are closely tied to Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Golden Dawn, Universal Kabbalah, Nordic mythology, and diverse occultist ideas that have often been studied under the label of Western esotericism.[1] MMS's business model is adapted from multilevel marketing techniques developed in the USA in the early twentieth century: financialized oral transmission of teachings, copyright-protected credentializing of spiritual therapies, and the marketing of top-performing Guides[2] to encourage recruitment.

Generalizing about MMS is complicated by its global membership. There are four active headquarters in Toronto, London, Florianópolis (Brazil), and Tokyo; initiates come from dozens of countries; and those initiates who strive to earn income (called energy exchange) as Healers or Guides work in diverse cultural milieus. MMS social organization begins with the three men who constitute the Third Order: Founder Gudni, whose business savvy, spiritual opportunism, and playful non-linearity has been the driving force in the expansion of MMS from "the West" (including North America, some European countries, South Africa, and Brazil) to "the East" (including Japan and recently spreading to South Korea and possibly Vietnam); Sovereign Ipsissimus (SI) Hideto Nakagome, who has a background in Tibetan and Japanese tantric Buddhism and who is responsible for the daily operations and teachings in the Tokyo headquarters; and SI Dave Lanyon, the Canadian leader of the North American headquarters who mixes showmanship with hardboiled realism. Beneath the Third Order, with their

* This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101025661.

1. This article maintains the emic terms of respect given to the Third Order (the main key holders of the lineage) and top leadership. Mr. Gudnason is most often referred to as Founder Gudni and, since May 2023, as Hierophant. Mr. Nakagome and Mr. Lanyon are referred to as Sovereign Ipsissimuses and top leaders have recently been awarded the title of Ipsissimus, which derives from the nineteenth-century British secret society the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

2. MMS is a "path of progression" that hierarchically categorizes Adepts, Healers, Ritual Masters, and Guides based on degree of esoteric credentials. For a chart, see: https://modernmysteryschoolint.com/path-of-progression/ (accessed 20 July 2023).

specialized regional and theological expertise, is the "Council of 12" women, six from "the West" and six from "the East," who "execute the directives of the Hierarchy of Light," host equinox events and a Beauty Council related to sacred femininity, and are deeply involved with the daily operations of MMS.

Based on fieldwork with MMS in Tokyo (2021), London (2022), Huddersfield (2022), and Toronto (2023), this article explores the hermeneutic strategies of localizing MMS (as Western esotericism developed in Euro-America) in the cultural milieu of Japan. The analysis is limited to how MMS leadership, and especially Founder Gudni himself, reinscribes Japanese geography with esoteric sacrality. This includes Mount Kurama 鞍馬, Mount Aso 阿蘇, Yonaguni 与那国島, and Japan as the Third Eye Chakra with a unique eschatological mission.

In these examples, MMS extends the sacralizing practices of Japanese new religions. Mount Aso has been associated with sacrality since at least the ninth century AD, when it "manifested the anger of the kami" and was appeased by promoting the local deity's court ranking by Imperial Decree (JAMES [1951] 2010, 22). More recently, it is revered by new religions such as the Christian group Makuya ("Tabernacle"), founded by Teshima Abraham Ikurō 手島アブラハム郁郎 after receiving divine communication while hiding from American Occupation Forces at Mount Aso (EARHART and MITA 1999, 402). Likewise, Mount Kurama is the site where Usui Mikao 臼井甕男 (1865–1926) acquired Reiki therapy and later began teaching it in nationwide branches of the Usui Association. Contemporary reiki practitioners and groups, often syncretically mixing elements of Tibetan Buddhism, Hinduism, and Western esotericism, continue their pilgrimages to Mount Kurama (STEIN 2023, 200–201)—as do Founder Gudni and some MMS followers. And the new religion Mahikari ("True Light"), founded by Okada Yoshikazu 岡田良一 (1901–1974) in 1959 and with over a million converts, teaches advanced members that Yonaguni is the past remnant of Mu and reflects an imperial line much older than that recorded in the *Kojiki* 古事記 (Account of Ancient Matters) (WILKINSON 2018, 182). It is unclear, however, if the popularity of these sites in Japanese new religions directly influenced their elevation in Founder Gudni's teachings or if he adapted them from popular culture.

Elsewhere, I explore the role of Japanese initiates in co-creating MMS, and how MMS in Japan offers unique classes and hermeneutics that, in contrast to MMS in "the West" (here denoting both the Western Gate, described below, and those countries in Euro-America and including Brazil) emphasize individualization and self-branding, women's economic independence, confidence, aesthetics, and showbusiness (CHRISTOPHER forthcoming). The adaptation (and innovation) of Western esotericism into Japan engages with 1990s debates about indigenization (*dochakuka* 土着化), Japanization, creolizing the West, and how intercultural knowledge emerges from amorphous negotiation and difference (BEFU 2003; BHABHA 1994). These scholarly debates emerged around the

same time as MMS spread from Utah (USA) to Tokyo in the late 1990s. Studies of esotericism are often grounded in textual analyses, Western provenance, and a focus on charismatic leadership—dynamics that can obscure the subaltern agency of practitioners from diverse backgrounds to shape the category of Western esotericism. While it is empirically accurate that esotericism primarily diffuses from Euro-America, it is also meaningfully constituted through "multilateral exchanges that are best grasped from a global perspective" (STRUBE 2021, 46). Long-term critical ethnographies of esoteric movements, especially ones like MMS that are transnational and have an evolving leadership, provide the best methodological tool for analyzing these complex social formations.

In the analysis that follows, we see how MMS is a "globally entangled subject" (STRUBE 2021, 47). Founder Gudni imagines Japan through an esoteric lens and his own mytho-biographical experiences and transmits such imaginings to ardent Japanese initiates as revelatory truth about Japan's mission in the coming Shambhala.[3] Spoken by a Westerner who fashions himself as an authentic Viking, MMS taps into a continued fetishization of foreign whiteness, especially Western men, which "functions in Japan as the transparent and free-floating signifier of upward mobility and assimilation in 'world culture'; it is the primary sign of the modern, the universal subject, the 'citizen of the world'" (KELSKY 2001, 421). Founder Gudni is aware of his status as a white *gaijin*; part of his perceived charisma is to consciously embody and affectively display the self-confidence, individuality, and cosmopolitanism that marks Western men in the Japanese cultural imaginary. The MMS's esotericism that this article considers developed under specific sociocultural and historical factors, including whiteness.[4]

This esotericism simultaneously taps into a "collective formation" that constructs and affirms Japanese cultural homogeneity and vanished enchantment (IVY 1995, 20). It engages a modern preoccupation with disappearance, hiddenness, and enchantment in a world purportedly laid bare by scientific materialism (RAMASWAMY 2004). It recenters Japanese spiritual geographies within the capacious MMS narrative of alien astronauts living in a lost Shambhala that will be reclaimed through the exceptional spiritual character of the Japanese. It is an interesting tension that the imaginings of a Western spiritualist help Japanese initiates on their unspoken quest for an authentic, pre-Western past. Although not "core lineage teachings," placing Japan in a framework of spiritual

3. Shambhala, a capacious MMS signifier meaning a future peace and a specific geographical locality, was officially anchored to Earth on 21 September 2021, although it remains an aspirational goal and not a fait accompli. For more about Shambhala's role in MMS teachings, see CHRISTOPHER (2022).

4. See BAKKER (2021) for a discussion of whiteness in shaping Western esotericism studies and practices.

exceptionalism, practically speaking, helps to familiarize Japanese initiates with Western ideas (such as being part of the lineage of King Salomon) that otherwise weakly register in the cultural imaginary. It has given agency to Japanese initiates to put some localizing topspin (interpretive practices, hermeneutic emphases, and subversive one-upmanship) on Founder Gudni's often elliptical oral teachings, thereby increasing a sense of social belonging in an interpretive community that has taken "Western" esotericism and given it a local flavor. In some instances, Japanese interpretive practices have even ended up being informally circulated in Western MMS centers, shuffling the assumed unidirectional spread of Western occultism (BOGDAN and DJURDJEVIC 2014, 5). Where possible, I describe how Japanese initiates are not "merely carriers for the 'mutations' of Western ideas" but actively constructing MMS on a global stage (STRUBE 2021, 53).

The important but occasional symbiotic back-and-forth creation of esoteric beliefs and practices should not elide the central role of charismatic Western leadership in spreading MMS's brand of business esotericism into new cultural milieus. Undoubtedly, Founder Gudni's imaginative centering of Japan in MMS cosmology (itself rooted in Western esotericism) is the starting point for understanding how it is further shaped by Japanese leadership, many of whom are stakeholders in spiritual centers (*saron* サロン) that provide clients with MMS-copyrighted healing modalities. Because of space constraints, this article does not elaborate on how MMS localization practices factor into the business model, which sells spiritual initiation into an esoteric lineage.[5]

In the past decade, there has been a call for the critical study of esotericism to augment historical approaches with ethnography (ASPREM and GRANHOLM 2013). This recognizes that sociocultural analyses of the production and practice of contemporary esotericism does not necessarily need to be overly reductionist, devalue the subject, or rely on outmoded models of deviance and wastebasket knowledge. The authors caution against unfavorably pitting elite representations of intellectual esotericism of the past against contemporary expressions of everyday esotericism found in digital mediums, popular culture, and for-profit business models (ASPREM and GRANHOLM 2013, 4–5). In this sense, MMS represents an important test case. It has weathered sustained criticisms of being inauthentic and harmful in the mainstream and social media, from across the ideological spectrum, including VICE magazine and independent trusts which monitor cultism through public donations.[6] However, presentations about MMS

5. See GAITANIDIS (2011) for an analysis of the MMS business model as it existed fifteen years ago.

6. For example: https://www.vice.com/en/article/k78ay3/inside-the-bizarre-cult-whose-members-allege-sexual-and-financial-exploitation; https://dialogueireland.wordpress.com/?s=modern+mystery+school (both accessed 17 August 2023).

in academic forums, including the 2023 Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism at Malmö University, have been positively received as a new direction in the utilization of ethnographic methods to study highly financialized contemporary esotericism.

I view my role as an anthropologist to render the experiences of MMS initiates with humane fidelity, respect the secrecy of esoteric knowledge, and redescribe and analyze from a scholarly perspective. Fieldwork was conducted with the full consent of the Third Order and all interviews with initiates were granted with an understanding of my outsider status as an anthropologist. I attended fourteen MMS seminars and events, and interviewed Founder Gudni for eighteen hours over six sessions. I completed the full Empower Thyself seminar for first-step initiation but did not participate in or witness the final initiation ceremony. Similarly, I attended parts of the Healer's Academy without paying the course fees, receiving the energy transfer, or witnessing the final second-step initiation. Based on an agreement with Founder Gudni, I have never paid for a seminar at the Tokyo headquarters, although I have paid individual Guides and Life Activation Practitioners for spiritual services. This allowed me to maintain the necessary distance during participant observation; according to MMS teachings about value exchange, it also meant that I did not receive the energy transfer paying clients received. While below I analyze several aspects of MMS in Japan that have never received scholarly or media attention, my hope is that it does not reveal esoteric knowledge safeguarded by lineage practitioners.

Eastern Destiny

At the directive of the Hierarchy of Light,[7] Founder Gudni first visited Japan in 1997 and permanently resettled in 2005—one of several Western mediums competing with domestic spirituality companies.[8]

He originally initiated ten people in four adept classes staggered within a month. During the past twenty-four years, three cohorts of Japanese initiates have been foundational to MMS expansion. In the early years, the initiates were more New Age curiosity seekers dabbling in marketplace spirituality. After SI Nakagome took a formal leadership role in 2000, MMS began hosting Healing Fairs (*iyashi fes* 癒しフェス) in Ebisu, Tokyo. These events, called Visak

7. The Hierarchy of Light includes En-Sof and the entire pantheon of deities, angels, and intergalactic beings that humans can call upon for support in their mission.

8. For a discussion about Western mediums in Japan, which includes an interview with Founder Gundi, see Alec Jordan, 25 November 2015 (updated 26 April 2021), How Big Are Western Mediums in Japan?, *Tokyo Weekender*. https://www.tokyoweekender.com/art_and_culture/how-big-are-western-mediums-in-japan/ (accessed 22 July 2023).

Festivals, attracted primarily women who were explicitly seeking self-transformation through spiritual healing.

The second wave of initiates added celebrities (including a famous movie director and the emperor's granddaughter, according to Founder Gudni). These two cohorts grew in tandem throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century and into the early 2010s. MMS advertising from this time emphasized healing and encouraged initiates who felt broken by Japanese work culture, social pressures, personal addiction, or abusive family dynamics to join. Events were more playful and socially transgressive, including cosplay, hippie attire, and temple constructions about music, beauty, and eroticism.[9] This culminated with a series of Shambhala Tribal Community celebrations until they were unexpectedly dissolved by MMS leadership in 2011.[10]

The third wave began around 2016. It signaled a change in recruitment strategy toward mainstream high achievers, often highly educated or beautiful, who described feeling spiritually vacuous despite normative success.[11] Recruitment videos, both in English and Japanese, began to emphasize stories of winners (having won the genetic lottery, working at top companies, making it in Hollywood, becoming rich entrepreneurs) who felt a nagging sense of incompleteness. This is evident in marketing strategies and the fusion with parallel entertainment ventures such as NEW LIFE Magazine, Eiko's World, and Aurora Borealis Entertainment, Inc., which strive to produce lifestyle content, bespoke fashion branding, and television entertainment that integrates MMS teachings with popular consumption. Founder Gudni described to me how using popular entertainment to promote spiritual progression *is* the mission.[12]

While the first initiates have mostly left, the more recent cohorts remain foundational to the MMS community in Japan. These different subcommunities of initiates were encouraged by incremental changes to the recruitment model toward an image of mainstream popularization. This was probably the result of several factors, including Founder Gudni's long-standing passion for showbusiness (extending back to his role of Slaver in the 1984 Icelandic film

9. For a clip from a 2010 cosplay dance party that typified the jubilant Shambhala Tribal Community events, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5hs-N2XPP4; and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQk1Oye3vMw (both accessed 22 July 2023).

10. For the defunct Shambhala Tribal Community Japan website, see: http://www.shamballahjapan.com/.

11. The MaiLove duo, who graduated from top universities and boast normative success in industry and personal physical beauty, are emblematic of the shift within MMS circa 2016. For their personal interviews, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xd_V55u6Kes (accessed 22 July 2023).

12. After receiving consent to publish research articles, I interviewed Founder Gudni six times, totaling eighteen hours, between May and November 2021.

When the Raven Flies) and an adaptive business model that revolves around the changing demographics of clientele.[13] Tracking the changing cultural ethos of MMS in Japan, from attracting emotionally-broken social misfits to highlighting paragons of normative success, provides a unique ethnographic lens into ongoing scholarly debates. To what extent is contemporary esotericism a marginalized critique of the mainstream *and* a "desired commodity" because of the cultural desirability of the verboten (Hanegraaff 2012, 360)? To what extent are contemporary esoteric groups struggling to find effective business models and in gradual decline, such as the Theosophical Society (Rudbøg 2013, 55) *and* positioning themselves in a niche marketing around spiritual alternativity locating "small, profitable homogeneous market segments… ignored or neglected by others" (Dalgic and Leeuw 1994, 42)?

The debate about how esotericism can be contextually mainstream or alternative, dominant or subaltern, is mirrored in MMS's crisscrossing currents of spiritual libertarianism and institutional victimization. Like most spiritual alternativity, MMS critiques dominant paradigms and scientific expertise while shrouding their pronouncements in alchemical formulations. As Crockford (2021, 211–12) aptly phrased it, the power of esoteric knowledge is "in claiming that most other people do not know it, and are therefore inferior because of this lack of knowledge." Likewise, MMS cultivates and monetizes affective membership in a taboo, suppressed lineage, one which is superior to but censured by the deluded mainstream (who live in the Matrix). Founder Gudni clearly made this point at a seminar in Las Vegas when he described how the secret teaching he was publicly revealing had caused the death of heretical Mystery School initiates during the Catholic Inquisition. This subversive framework is belied, however, by their corporate panache that highlights financial winners and spotlights inspirational initiates—an outcome of placing the hierarchical gradients of spiritual knowledge in Golden Dawn and Theosophy into a multilevel marketing framework that promises to transform secrecy into social and financial capital.

Clearly, MMS is not only teaching the "rejected knowledge" of occult science as often anathema (or even superior) to scientific rationalism and academic knowledge (Hanegraaff 2012, 221). MMS also leverages rejected status for financial gain. There is a tension between what is taught and how it is marketed. The Third Order strongly inculcates a sense of self-responsibility: how you think so it shall be, and the poor are enslaved to a victimization mindset. In Japan, normatively successful Guides, self-branded as showbusiness elites, medical doctors, and beauty counselors, are offered up as exemplars of wielders of magic and positive thinking. Meanwhile, the Third Order leans into being victimized

13. For Gudni's IMDB page, see: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1866102/?ref_=ttfc_fc_cl_t23 (accessed 20 July 2023).

by outside critics and beleaguered by ignorant outsiders clinging to the agenda of the uninitiated. While these dynamics are more pronounced in the West, and especially in the teachings of SI Dave Lanyon, Japanese initiates are similarly suspended in the unresolvable paradoxes facing similar esoteric groups: on the one hand, between internalizing (through alchemical self-transformation) and externalizing (through combative exchanges with ignorant outsiders) locus of control; and on the other hand, shouldering the responsibilities of protecting esoteric secrets while advertising the transformative effects of those very secrets in laudatory social media posts to attract clientele and activate the spiritual DNA of neophyte adepts.

East/West Dichotomy

Founder Gudni described to me how MMS strives toward universalism. "It's very important to raise the teachings above it being hermetic or Western esoteric, so it's just above it, and just teach the tools as they are." In many contexts, this is a correct assessment. For example, Japanese initiates in the Ritual Master program use Tibetan phurba (an Indo-Tibetan ritual object of transformative power associated with the deity Vajrakīlaya) as apotropaic personal objects able to manipulate energy, largely untethered from the Tibetan ritual usage. It is taught to initiates not as a Tibetan tool but as a universal technology. However, at tension with this spiritual universalism are many teachings that emphasize dichotomous but complimentary directions, elements, gates, and watchtowers. An initiate gradually learns this system in seminars including Angelic/Enochian Magick, Wiccan/Druid Teachings, Universal Kabbalah, the Ritual Master program, Warriors of Light martial arts practice, and advanced seminars taught by Founder Gudni as Hierophant. Everything with physical density is part of this system and can be plotted on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life diagram and the Four Elements, similar to many Western esoteric currents, notably Golden Dawn and Aleister Crowley's later innovations in Thelema (BOGDAN 2012).[14] Each direction has nearly infinite spiritual hosts (angels, guardians, Bodhisattvas, teachers, and protectors).

The Four Gates, taken together, are a spiritual compass that guides self-awareness and life decisions. Integral to this system of complimentary directional Gates are the day-to-day operations of MMS as a global spiritual business. Canada (with a headquarters in Toronto's west-end of Etobicoke) is the Northern Gate, representing Divine Masculinity and knowledge (embodied by the

14. To learn more about the ten-month "Ascension Program" in Universal Hermetic Ray Kabbalah, see: https://modernmysteryschoolint.com/class/universal-kabbalah/ (accessed 20 July 2023).

martial artist Dave Lanyon, who frequently teaches about the modern assault on traditional masculinity); Brazil (established by Eric Thompson) is the Southern Gate, representing the unbridled passion of Divine Femininity; USA (and especially the West Coast) is the Western Gate, representing future and destiny; and Japan is the Eastern Gate, representing enlightenment. These representations closely correspond to stereotypes of national identity that circulate as global cultural power, such as passionate Brazilians (REZENDE 2008), Manifest Destiny Americans, and otherworldly Japanese (WINFIELD and HEINE 2017, xvi).

MMS teaches that all Four Gates must be strong and held in the light so that humans can make enlightened choices. The distinct character of each directional gate has guided the evolution of human and human-like sentient beings on earth and explains perceived cultural differences. For example, initiates who complete the Channeling School (only available in Japan) will discover their "channeling contract" with a specific deity that often overlaps with their cultural background (Amaterasu, Susanoo, Miroku Bostatsu, and Fudō Myōō are popular among Japanese initiates, for example, but are largely unknown among initiates from other Gates). Moreover, initiates who complete the Ritual Master (RM) program will receive a secret name. The Third Order makes the determination and may select names befitting the initiate's Gate (for example, Northern Gate initiates may receive Nordic and Viking names).

This has three points of importance. First, the scholarly debate about non-Western esotericism is interestingly complicated by MMS's emic distinctions between Eastern and Western Gates. As we will see, the Eastern Gate is both the symbol of personal enlightenment and is the frontline of a cosmic struggle for liberating Tibet. Second, MMS leadership incorporates esoteric directions into a broader narrative of global expansion that fits the multilevel marketing ethos of projecting constant growth. The success of any one Gate is energetically predicated on the balanced spread of MMS around the world. This both reflects cosmological views of raising the vibration of humanity 3 percent to usher in Shambhala and is a marketing-driven technique to encourage recruitment. Last, the perceived cultural and theological differences between the Eastern and Western Gates are emphasized as part of a patchwork of emotional and energetic differences that are the product of cultural evolution. By appealing to the longue durée of cultural evolution shaping Japanese spiritual exceptionalism, Founder Gudni's imaginings may synchronize with the desire of Japanese followers to discover wonderment about themselves as Japanese and their homeland that is perceived as part of the vanished past (pre-Westernization, post-Meiji Restoration, or pre-economic bubble affluence). In these ways, the East/West dichotomy is a central emic discourse that is grounded in specific teachings, contributes to Japanese uniqueness, and advances a business narrative of global expansion.

It also suffuses specific teachings about the sacred geography of Japan and outlying areas. I focus on four examples: Mount Kurama as Japan's Mystery School, Mount Aso as the first landing spot of the alien Adamic Seed,[15] Yonaguni as the first Shambhala, and Japan as the liberators of Tibet. Western initiates take an introductory seminar called "The Seven Mystery Schools" that provide an overview of the seven earthly schools (Tibet, Japan, England, North America, Australia, Romania, Africa) and their associated magical and energetical components. In this class, they learn about Mount Kurama as the location of Japan's secret Mystery School. However, Japanese initiates will have likely absorbed deeper teachings about their own Mystery School directly through the imaginings of Founder Gudni. Teachings about Yonaguni and Mount Aso (with its associated healing modality that is only practiced by Japanese) arguably increase Japanese familiarity with concepts rooted in Western esotericism.

Mount Kurama

Mount Kurama is to the north of Kyoto and known to many Japanese as the birthplace of Reiki and home of Sōjōbō, the Goblin King. It is a popular getaway spot for tourists to hike the 3.9 km trail uphill past Kuramadera 鞍馬寺 and take a bath in idyllic hot springs. What is largely unknown to the public, however, is that Mount Kurama is the physical location of the secret Japanese Mystery School. Founder Gudni, who was not invited to Japan via the Japanese Mystery School, has nevertheless been "called" several times to Mount Kurama by officiaries. His description to me closely followed a written account he posted in the comments section of Japan Today (18 March 2012), reproduced below:

> Mount Kurama, outside Kyoto. Walking up the whole mountain takes a little bit of a hike but oh boy is it worth it. You can sometimes even see some real-life Ninjas in the trees, there is a Ninja school up there. It [touts] some of the most ancient iconic sculptures in Japan if you slip into the basement of the temple, that is half way up the mountain and slowly make your way, in the dark, behind all the urns with the remains of dead monks, then way in the back are three ancient statues and an old well coming straight out from the cliff. It is said that if the water is still running then the world is ok, so the monks go every day back there to check.[16]

15. This is common MMS terminology for proto-human form within the Cloud of Intelligence which had close contact with En-Sof and serves as a reminder to contemporary MMS followers of their Galactic natures, as especially taught in the Galactic Activation seminar series.

16. Founder Gudni has written many public responses to articles between 2012–2019, available here: https://japantoday.com/member/gudni-gudnason (accessed 20 July 2023).

Founder Gudni said to me in an interview that at Mount Kurama he described seeing "real life ninjas in the trees" and a reptiloid nature spirit (*kappa* 河童). In a Quora response to a question about unexplainable things seen in the forest while hunting, he wrote: "In Japan I was hiking in the mountains and I saw what they call a Kappa (look it up) and I thought I was looking at an ape but then it got closer and I realized it was not an ape. I collected ground samples of the feet, to make sure I was not imagining this, and I presented these to the local Fish & Wildlife for preservation and hopefully to make them aware of it but... they already knew!"[17]

Such visits to Mount Kurama, real or astral, alone or with small groups of students, contributed to Founder Gudni handing down an MMS seminar called Ensofic Reiki.™ It is advertised as the most authentic version of Mikao Usui's reiki system as he discovered it through his twenty-one-day practice on Mount Kurama. In the West, it is taught as a three-part seminar series and in Japan it is branded as Ensofic Ray Healing Modality™ and bundled into a six-day course for 352,000 yen (2,500 USD). There are thirty-nine Japanese Guides and Healers permitted to hand down the teaching modality, which "is source energy that awakens the 'I am' presence within you. It is the first ray of creation. Clients/patients feel more connected to the oneness of all that is.… The Ensofic Ray is the panacea (cure-all) of all illness that heals at root-cause levels. It is an excellent modality for those in need of physical, mental, or emotional healing and balance or those wanting to experience more passion for life…"[18] Kimura Tsukiko, the indefatigable administrator of the Tokyo headquarters, is the chairperson of the Ensofic Ray Research Institute and her name joins the Third Order on printed certificates of completion from the Ensofic Ray Association.[19]

I spoke with some initiates who claimed to have established direct contact with Japan's Mystery School. It is significant to note how Founder Gudni's mytho-biographical experiences, often transmitted as oral teachings, are in some cases expanded upon by initiates. For example, this Top Performing Guide described to me taking personal initiation at Mount Kurama.

> I have contact with the Mystery School in Kurama. I have never heard of other Guides [doing this]; it must be rare. I found the contact information to a master of the Mystery School by accident while checking out an old online BBS [bulletin board]. I followed the information and found the contact address. When I went to Kurama, I met a person who took me to a secret place to

17. See https://www.quora.com/profile/Gudni-Gudnason.

18. For a description of the Ensofic Ray Healing Modality,™ see: https://www.lightyourway.center/ensofic-ray-healing-modality (accessed 20 July 2023).

19. For a scanned copy of an Ensofic Reiki certification, see: https://theandygrant.com/category/modern-mystery-school/ (accessed 20 July 2023).

> explain and take initiation. It was in the basement of a Japanese temple. There was a statue of Sanat Kumara, not in his human shape, but his galactic shape with wings and a human face.

Mount Aso

Mount Aso is the largest volcano in Japan and one of the largest in the world. MMS teaches in the Galactic Activation (GA) seminar series that when the first alien species came to Earth, the spaceship landed on Mount Aso in Kyushu and turned the mountain radioactive. The aim of GA 1 is to take the Adam Kadmon initiation, which increases initiates' capacity to hold light and to communicate with the Galactic Federation (loosely derived from Jewish Kabbalah). The GA techniques were created on other planets, tested by other alien races, and brought to Founder Gudni on Earth on 5 May 1998. The spiritual objective is to advance "human evolution" by activating our forgotten divinity. Despite this aim of backwards evolution, MMS is forward looking. Initiates progress through a hierarchically ranked syllabus of esoteric initiations that are spiritually teleological and correspond to the ever-expanding model of multilevel marketing. GA initiates are taught esoteric tools to undertake the multiyear "Great Work" of unifying body and spirit and to become "God Humans."

This project is the combined result of developments in the USA and Japan. It rests on the imaginative fusion of spaceships, Theosophy, and Tibet that harks back to George Adamski's ufology (Bennett 2008) and toward more contemporary phenomena (Roth 2005). First, Founder Gudni was contacted by the Nathor alien tribe at Bear Lake, on the border of Utah and Idaho. Bear Lake has a long association with monsters due to the repackaging of Native American lore by Joseph Rich, a local who wanted to attract tourism (Dunning 2007, 72–73). From this encounter, Founder Gudni learned the DNA Activation technique, first created by King Salomon some three thousand years ago, that has become the foundational ritual for MMS recruitment. The GA seminar, originally called Adam Kadmon (AK), taught alien edicts (about nutrition, biorhythm, and spatial design, among others) that help initiates gain mastery over our illusory human bodies and develop superhuman physical abilities (the Jewish idea of Kefitzat Haderech probably funneled through Frank Herbert's *Dune* to describe the coming messiah). The Nathor instructions for "adapting to new Galactic energy" are essentially a combination of self-help tips, business strategies, dietary changes, and relationship advice that would be equally well-received in a California New Age seminar on self-transformation. Second, due to the "ritual work" done by Japanese initiates on Mount Aso, which confirmed that humans (as aliens) originally touched down on Earth in Japan, the GA syllabus

was expanded. The GA seminar series was again expanded after Founder Gudni contacted aliens at the Museum of Alien Studies in Taichung (Taiwan).

When I asked Founder Gudni about this teaching, he explained that while spaceships have landed in various places on Earth, and will land in other places in the future, Japanese initiates are transfixed by the idea of the first alien landing in Kyushu.

> The thing is that Japanese are not interested in dry facts. They get bored. They want to know structure, lineage and the history they like. They don't want to go into deep details about why things are the way they are. Like when I talk about the beginning, five million years ago, when we came in spaceships and the first one landed on Mount Aso. It's an amazing place, proven to be the first landing. That mountain is radioactive, so a spaceship landed there for sure. [I ask if this narrative appeals to Japanese initiates] Absolutely. I must always be careful. In my online class the other day, there were also people from Vietnam and Korea. I can't be too Japan focused. But the interesting thing is that I tell Japanese people the story—here lies the spaceship on the mountain, and then then they landed in other places as well. But this was the first landing. They don't ask where they landed in other places.

Based on the ritual work done on Mount Aso, a seminar was developed to credentialize initiates in the Mount Aso Point Healing Modality.[20] This modality reenergizes passion by exposing clients to the energy of the Adamic Seed when we first landed on Earth on Mount Aso. It is available in select Japanese salons but unheard of among Western initiates. This Japanese innovation, and the appeal it has to a Japanese clientele, may be rooted in the popular imagining of Mount Aso. The five mountain peaks of Aso attract nature enthusiasts, those seeking energy emanating from power spots (*pawāsupotto* パワースポット) (CARTER 2018), and "dark tourists" with a fascination for deadly volcanic eruption sites (SKINNER 2018, 132). It is also the fictional home of the monster Rodan in the Godzilla franchise, the site of the final battle in the *shōjo* 少女 manga *Magical Girl Spec-Ops Asuka* and the inspiration for Mt. Chimney in *Pokémon*, where challenges and trainers do battle. Very much on point, a 2021 Kumamoto tourism TV advertisement showed an alien affectionately named *Aliaso* (a portmanteau of "alien" and "Aso") crash landing on top of a simmering Mount Aso.[21]

20. To learn more about the Mount Aso Point Healing Modality, which is only offered in Japan, see: https://celestialbride-en.jimdofree.com/healing-sessions/mt-aso-point-healing-modality/ (accessed 20 July 2023).

21. To watch the TV advertisement, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqFQmX3vLpM (accessed 20 July 2023).

Yonaguni

In MMS cosmology, humans left the Cloud of Intelligence as disembodied perfected spirits and gathered density as we ventured into the universe. Slowly we took human-like forms and traveled intergalactically on spaceships. To achieve our goal of joining Ein Sof (the Kabbalistic "infinity"), we roamed space having adventurous trials to upgrade our spiritual and physical form. Founder Gudni often uses sci-fi language to teach these concepts: "A long time ago" (Star Wars) we left the Cloud of Intelligence, aboard spaceships we "boldly went where no man has gone before" (Star Trek). Five million years ago, Ein Sof explained that Earth would be our final trial before we "graduate" and join it. An Earth was created in seven days that matched the requirements of our alien bodies.

The Adamic Seed's first landing spot was atop Mount Aso, which was part of an earthly Shambhala, a geographic area designed by the angel Sanat Kumara. The location accommodated countless human-like forms, which organized into twelve tribes according to the energy they needed on planet Earth. We happily lived in Shambhala for two million years, without money and in full self-sufficiency, harnessing energy from a magnetic grid and absorbing light particles from the air. During that time, Earth was occupied by three other races, Lemurians, Atlanteans, and the people of Mu. When their missions ended, humans helped them to leave Earth. Their genetic traces are still observable among the Ainu, Maori, Aboriginal Australians, and Tamilians; but their civilizations were lost in the depths of the oceans. Only then humans "broke the walls of the First Shambhala" and colonized the Earth, gaining knowledge and the ability to choose evil akin to Adam and Eve's ejection from the Garden of Eden. Each of the twelve tribes founded a Mystery School in a different region of the world (Tibet was first; Sumerians arrived later and founded the thirteenth Mystery School). Since 7 July 1997 MMS has provided teachings to usher in the New Shambhala of perfect peace, health, and compassion to restore what was lost in the First Shambhala. Eventually we too will return to intergalactic travel aboard spaceships.

Founder Gudni draws on alternative histories, urban legends, and minority views within marine geology that popularly circulate in the Japanese media to locate Shambhala in Japan itself. Accordingly, remnants of the earthly Shambhala are currently visible as an underwater ruin off the coast of Yonaguni, the most westernmost inhabited Japanese island. It is part of the Yaeyama Islands in Okinawa Prefecture, 108 kilometers from Taiwan and straddling the Pacific Ocean and East China Sea. The central temple of the first Shambhala—a rock monolith with terraced staircases, ninety-degree angles and flat surfaces—was discovered by divers in 1986. Dubbed the Yonaguni Monument, it received national attention after the marine biologist KIMURA Masaaki (2004) hypothesized that it is a human-made structure, perhaps part of the lost continent of Mu. He identified

a vast habitation of monolithic structures interlocked with crisscrossing roads.[22] The new religion Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku 幸福の科学) similarly imagines Yonaguni as central to their "ancient astronauts theory" of human existence (WINTER 2021). While theories of the artificial design of Yonaguni have some backers, they are largely considered pseudoscientific by marine geologists. However, they resonate widely with the cultural imagination of Japanese initiates, who expressed wonderment at the symbolic sacredness of Shambhala submerged off their coastline and speculated about in popular media.

Founder Gudni Imagines Japan

Among the thirteen Mystery Schools, Tibet is preeminent, the global Crown Chakra. Japanese initiates are taught that their mission as the Third Eye, sometimes called the Sixth Chakra, is to free Tibet. While Western initiates are taught that Japan is the Third Eye (in the Seven Mystery Schools seminar), most are unaware of their cosmic mission to free Tibet. However, Founder Gudni's directive from the Hierarchy of Light was to open the Japanese spirit, to usher them into recognition of their eschatological responsibilities. "The main reason I am here in Japan is to bring a spiritual awakening to free Tibet," he told me in an early interview. "Japan is a big part of the story. They will lead it."

Accordingly, Japanese initiates are taught not only the sacrality of Mount Kurama, Mount Aso, and Yonaguni as integral to the original Shambhala but also that their spiritual purity is the key to freeing Tibet and manifesting the next Shambhala. It is important to note that SI Hideto, Founder Gudni's Japanese translator and the primary seminar instructor in the MMS headquarters in Tokyo, often *de-emphasizes* Founder Gudni's tendency to exceptionalize the Japanese people. His role in mediating Founder Gudni's teachings, as both translator and Sovereign Ipsissimus, cannot be overstated. On the whole, however, the process of reframing "Western esotericism" in a Japanese spiritual milieu is an an adaptive strategy that heightened local familiarity with concepts that may appear foreign (such as imaginings about mesmerism, theosophy, and anthroposophy) but have been available in Japan since the late nineteenth century. Certainly, for followers at lower stages of initiation who try to culturally triangulate into MMS via patchy knowledge of Egyptian mythology, the Nordic pantheon, Mikkyō, and Tibetan Buddhism, Madame Blavatsky and Star Trek, teaching Japanese geographical and spiritual touchpoints amplified a feeling of familiarity—and expanded the seminar content.

22. "Scientists Say Yonaguni is Man-Made," 12 September 2012. *Earth's International Research Society*. https://internationalresearchsociety.wordpress.com/2012/09/14/japanese-underwater-mega-structures/ (accessed 20 July 2023).

Let us consider some of Founder Gudni's orientalisms collected from eighteen hours of personal interviews, online research, and fieldwork observations. The information below is intentionally pastiche and decontextualized to reflect the way initiates sporadically engage with such ideas. While MMS teachings are formalized into a syllabus of seminars, Japanese initiates are likely to come across Founder Gudni's more impressionistic stylizations of Japanese spirituality and culture through post-seminar Q&As, his frequent social media posts, extensive posting on the Japan Today website, or through banter with each other during seminar breaks.

In a Facebook post from 3 August 2022, Founder Gudni's five thousand followers read how he is "getting closer to understanding these 'aliens' we call Japanese… lol… but in some seriousness, they are sometimes like aliens. Much like Jane Goodall observing the primates in Africa, I am here in Japan, married to a Japanese and I am observing, so look for future reports on my findings. I partially live in the floating world now, so if you can't reach me, well, you know where I am." Elsewhere, he described *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 as the "mystical secret soul" of Japan that "is a dreaming world of wit, stylishness, and extravagance—with overtones of naughtiness, hedonism, and transgression but at the same time innocent and beautiful."

Such language permeated the 2010 celebration of United Nations Water Day, when MMS teamed up with the controversial "scientist" and businessman Emoto Masaru 江本勝 to spiritually clean Lake Biwa based on his theory that spoken prayers and human cognition (*kotodama* 言霊) transform water molecules. His conjecture evolved over the years, and his early work revolved around pseudoscientific hypotheses that water could react to positive thoughts and words and that polluted water could be cleaned through prayer and positive visualization.

Founder Gudni's constructions of Japan tend toward an "aesthetics of shadows" (*kage no bigaku* 影の美学) that suggestively amplifies the dark unseen to enhance spiritual mystery (Miyao 2013). Mytho-biographical stories, both in personal and public dialogue, tend toward the mysterious fictionalization of this shadow world. In personal interviews, he described to me several such mytho-biographical events. I reproduce them here without having tried to verify them, which is arguably outside the scope of an anthropologist's role. He declined a multi-million-dollar donation from the sixth leader of the Yamaguchi-gumi, Japan's largest *yakuza* syndicate often portrayed in popular culture. At an *iyashi* festival, he was contacted by government security forces, blindfolded, and taken to a secure location where he taught Kabbalah to an eminent government leader (who remained behind a curtain). He has publicly described the emperor's secret society as an ancient fraternity of men who flout conventions, live by their own code, and exact violence on those who interfere with their objectives. In a personal interview, he described a secret underground empire under Osaka Castle

that is a "whole different underworld with an empress and a whole society that has nothing to do with this world." This belief may come from a real locked tunnel on the grounds of the Sankō Shrine or from the anime *Princess Toyotomi*, which depicts a tunnel under the Osaka Castle that facilitated the continuation of the Toyotomi lineage.

Points of perceived symmetry between European and Japanese courtly culture are emphasized, which manifests as cultural refinement. He compared Iceland and Japan as both being island countries with intrinsic shyness to outside influence (*shimaguni konjō* 島国根性). "Japan has a far superior culture over so many countries and specially that of America." He often gently ribbed my Yankee anti-royalism as antithetical to the critical importance of emphasizing courtly refinement as an aspect of divinity. A core teaching is to recognize one's identity as eternal gods or goddesses and adopt a befitting royal lifestyle. To Western audiences, Founder Gudni is likely to praise the British monarchy (in a Facebook memorialization of Queen Elizabeth II from 8 September 2022 he wrote about meeting her on several occasions). In Japan, the focus is on emperor deification as aspirational embodiments of royalty. In a personal interview, Founder Gudni said:

> I always [wish the emperor] hadn't been forced to sign the Potsdam Declaration where he said: "I'm not a god; I'm a man." That was huge. The soul of Japan died that day.... The emperor was forced by the Allied nations. It was very sad. We need a symbol for God in human form. The organized religions have some invisible force called God—Jesus was not a God; he was the son of God; his father Elohim is the God; but what is that? They show him with a beard on the cloud with a harp. It is an elusive image. Same with Allah. But in Shinto there is a man containing God. God is within this man and all of us can attain this. Living in the Shinto spirit and with the emperor means that you are reaching godliness. When he said: "I am not a God anymore" the whole system crashed.

Although Founder Gudni is largely apolitical while teaching, he has publicly doubted the death toll of the Nanjing massacre and Japanese wartime atrocities; lionized the emperor system (*tennō seido* 天皇制度) as reflecting a spiritual hierarchy to be harnessed and emulated as part of living royally; and strongly criticized the Potsdam Declaration and the loss of imperial divinity. His forays into the political arena are often to boast about his social network or to link cultural innovations of the Genroku 元禄 period (1688–1704) and divine emperor worship with the imperative to "be royal" and materially upgrade through MMS techniques of channeling energy and manifesting wealth.

Conclusion

There have been many recent changes to MMS leadership. In May 2023, Founder Gudni retired from MMS administration and teaching lower-level courses. He

is now the Hierophant and will continue innovating new seminar material and teaching a small coterie of advanced students. Anthropology is not a predictive science, but with the reduced role of Founder Gudni at lower-level initiations, I expect SI Hideto to continue de-emphasizing the teachings of Japanese spiritual exceptionalism; it simply does not suit his temperament or cosmopolitan life experiences. The same holds for SI Dave in Toronto, who is eagerly relegating some of the above-described teachings about Japan and Shambhala to "Gudni-isms" that are not "core lineage teachings." Part of MMS's organizational durability has been their ability to adapt their lineage teachings to the cultural zeitgeist of the moment, which manifests differently in Toronto, London, and Tokyo. While these adaptions are often top-down, efforts are made to cede power to Japanese leadership through monthly Guide Quorums, during which stakeholders can suggest or critique innovations (usually based on cultural appropriateness or financial value).

In this article, I analyzed the localizing strategies of MMS. I focused on Founder Gudni's cultural innovations and esoteric imaginings about Japan and the Japanese people to highlight adaptive strategies of transnational diffusion. Such strategies have historical precedent in various Japanese new religions, although it remains unclear if the overlap is intentional or the byproduct of circulating pop cultural references being innovated upon. It is clear, however, that localizing strategies are central to generating revenue in a multilevel-marketing framework that combines commodified spirituality with status-signifying investment benchmarks. Based on one's position on the "path of progression" through the MMS syllabus, a follower may be more or less attuned to these localizations. However, their strategic totality, sprinkled into paid seminars, social media posts, *saron* websites, guide blogs, promotional material, and personal interactions with leadership, helps MMS to maintain a profitable business for leadership that has retained cultural relevance over several decades. It also provides a matrix of spiritual entertainment that points toward the vanished, the shadowy unseen, the reenchanted orientalisms of an Icelander fusing "Western esotericism" with Japan-centric divine cosmologies and spiritual geographies. MMS's tendency to reify "Western" and "Japanese" occult practices leans into cultural essentialisms that are destabilized by their own syncretistic seminar packages. Because teachings mix so many entangled strands of esoteric knowledge, their recombined totality is of greater lived importance for followers then teasing apart their supposedly discrete historical development. As such, MMS is an important case study for the ongoing debate about whether "Western esotericism" is being "mutated" through globalization or if it is an intrinsically globally-entangled field importantly constituted by non-Western practitioners and ideas.

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Religious Studies in Japan volume 7 (special issue): 85–106

Han Sangyun

Historicizing the (Oc)cultic Milieu: Mikkyō in 1970s Japan

The term "cultic milieu," first proposed by British sociologist Colin Campbell in 1972, has become established in the European and American academic study of religion to refer to culturally "underground" groups or systems of "deviant" beliefs. The concept, however, has also faced criticism throughout the years for its overemphasis on dichotomies like orthodox versus unorthodox, or mainstream versus underground, an issue that Campbell himself has more recently acknowledged. In order to contribute to this discussion this article focuses on Mikkyō (esoteric Buddhism) discourses developed during the 1970s in Japan, a period when the purported "parapsychological" aspects of Mikkyō received positive attention from the Japanese public and media. By presenting the Mikkyō theories of three individuals with different backgrounds—Nakaoka Toshiya (1926–2001), Kiriyama Seiyū (1921–2016), and Yamasaki Taikō (b. 1929)—this article problematizes the boundaries of "orthodoxy," showing how their ideas intermingled and influenced each other, right in the middle of a heightened popular interest in "the occult."

keywords: esoteric Buddhism—occult boom—Mikkyō boom—Nakaoka Toshiya—Kiriyama Seiyū—Yamasaki Taikō

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The term "cultic milieu" was first suggested by British sociologist Colin Campbell in a well-known article from 1972.[1] Drawing from the German theologian Ernst Troeltsch's tripartite division of religious phenomena into church religion, sect religion, and mysticism (1931), the term "cult" became established in scholarship—especially in American sociology—mainly to refer to relatively unstable groups closely associated with mysticism, as well as to deviant and heterodox beliefs.[2] By the time Campbell wrote his article, the influence of non-Christian religious ideas that could be categorized as "cultic beliefs" had been growing since the 1960s, especially among youth cultures in North America and the United Kingdom in the context of the so-called "New Age" (Hammer 2006). This trend gave scholars the impression that "cultic beliefs like astrology and witchcraft have 'hitched a ride' on the developing counterculture and spread themselves more widely throughout society" (Campbell 2002, 12). As a result, these beliefs began to attract scholarly interest.

Nevertheless, according to Campbell, "cults" still remained a sub-discipline of the sociology of religion despite their perceived importance. There was no appropriate theory in the field that could identify the highly ephemeral and fluctuating "cultic" groups that were behind the increased interest and popularization of such non-Christian religious ideas. From this point of view, he proposed the notion of "cultic milieu," to provide a legitimate domain for "cultic" groups within the sociology of religion. By definition, "cultic milieu" is the "cultural underground of society" that includes "all deviant belief systems and their associated practices," which implies what can be called "occult culture": "the worlds of the occult and the magical, of spiritualism and psychic phenomena, of mysticism and new thought, of alien intelligences and lost civilisations, of faith healing and nature cure" (Campbell 2002, 14). Whereas the term "cult" typically describes the emergence of deviant groups or individuals as transient

* I would like to thank my doctoral studies advisor, Orion Klautau, and fellow EANASE coordinator Ioannis Gaitanidis for their precious support when writing this article.

1. Originally published in issue 5 of *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, Campbell's "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization" was recently reprinted in Kaplan and Lööw (2002).

2. As Campbell informs us, there are mainly two views on "cults." While some scholars understand the distinctive characteristics of a "cult" in connection with the nature of mystical religion, others define it by a certain "deviant" position toward dominant culture. For more details, see Campbell (2002, 12–13).

phenomena, the concept of the "cultic milieu" conceives of their existence (and the repeated process of the emergence and disappearance of such groups) as a persistent aspect of society.

The concept has been widely applied and developed by later scholars. For example, Jeffrey KAPLAN and Heléne LÖÖW's edited volume (2002) revisited the concept and discussed it in relation to more recent anti-globalisation protests and associated ideas. At the same time, however, the concept raised questions about whether it is reasonable to assume a boundary between orthodoxy and unorthodoxy or between mainstream and underground culture. As a recent example, following Raymond Williams's thesis that "culture is ordinary" (WILLIAMS, 1993) Christopher PARTRIDGE criticized the concept for its implication of deviancy and marginality while suggesting the new scholarly term "Occulture" (2013). While focusing on the role of media and popular culture, he claimed that "something more ubiquitous, ordinary, and less oppositional is happening" (PARTRIDGE 2013, 119) in the realm of what has been categorized as the "cultic milieu." Moreover, even Campbell himself mentioned the limitations of the "cultic milieu" in another article titled "The Cultic Milieu Revisited," based on a lecture he gave at the University of Leipzig in 2012, about forty years after first coining the term. Although Campbell still seems to believe in the concept's usefulness, he does agree that "identifying it relationally—that is as deviant or heterodox in relation to an established orthodox mainstream—runs into another set of problems, such as whether a single homogenous mainstream culture actually exists, and if it does whether its content could be said to qualify as orthodox" (CAMPBELL 2015, 35). The idea of a "cultic milieu" has therefore lived on even beyond the field of the sociology of religion, and despite numerous revisions—including, as we saw above, by its original proponent—continues to influence the field in many ways.

However, although the concept was for a long time used to frame discussions on "esoteric" and "occult" groups, in the past two decades, we have seen the emergence of additional terms. The most important and perhaps influential of these came from the study of Western esotericism and was coined by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, one of the most important names in the field. By defining "esotericism" as a conceptual wastebasket for "rejected knowledge" in Western culture since the period of the Enlightenment (HANEGRAAFF 2012, 152), Hanegraaff developed a new approach to considering "heretical" or "deviant" religious ideas, insisting that the realm of "esotericism" was constructed through a history of polemics, and not simply derived from essential differences to "orthodox" religion. In other words, and despite the limitations pointed out by later scholars to his "rejected knowledge" thesis, the seemingly obvious suggestion by Hanegraaff to look at "esotericism" from a historical perspective did have important repercussions in the field, and even contributed to reframing the usability of "cultic

milieu" as an analytic concept. For instance, also inspired by HANEGRAAFF's work on the New Age Movement (1996), Egil Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal have, in their recent studies on "conspirituality," emphasized the contribution of this perspective to current sociological approaches framed by Campbell's idea:

> The historical, diachronic study of Western esotericism tells us something about the specific content and thematic concerns of the (Western) cultic milieu, while Campbell's theory helps us account for the *synchronic* aspects of how these "deviant" representations and practices tend to be produced, shared, and structured in small-scale groups, and how they relate to society at large. In short, the study of Western esotericism *historicises* the cultic milieu in the European history of religion. (ASPREM and DYRENDAL 2018, 209)[3]

The debate on the effectiveness of "cultic milieu" as a scholarly concept is by no means a simple one, as it reflects, ultimately, our present-day reconsideration of the boundaries between "religion" and "esotericism." However, despite the copious use of the term "Western" by the authors above, this is obviously a discussion that goes far beyond the scope of European or North-American scholarship. As noted in the introduction to this special issue of *Religious Studies in Japan*, the boundaries between categories such as "new religions" and "spirituality" have also been problematized, sometimes in ways very similar to Euro-American discussions on "religion" and "esotericism."

Informed by the approach proposed by Asprem and Dyrendal, this article is an exercise into the historicization of a stage in Japanese postwar religious history that Campbell-inspired scholars might have referred to as an example of "cultic milieu": the so-called 1970s "occult boom." What defines a "boom," or whether such a phenomenon indeed took place, is, of course, up for debate; nevertheless, the term appears repeatedly in both contemporary media and scholarly works, revealing that, at least in terms of *discourse*, we can indeed speak about an "occult boom" having taken place in 1970s Japan (HAN 2021a).[4] This article will focus on how ideas about Mikkyō 密教, or esoteric Buddhism, developed in such a context. More specifically, this article will compare works on Mikkyō published around the early 1970s by three individuals from very

3. This argument is also developed by the same authors in an earlier article. See ASPREM and DYRENDAL (2015).

4. Ioannis Gaitanidis has suggested in a personal communication that the popularity of the concept of "boom" in Japanese scholarly exegeses has perhaps rendered the adoption of the concept of "cultic milieu" to talk about religion in Japan unnecessary. Yoshinaga Shin'ichi has been one of the few scholars to employ the term and particularly the idea of a "milieu" (*karutoteki ba* カルト的場, *shūkyōteki ba* 宗教的場) in relation to the popularization of *seishin ryōhō* 精神療法 (spiritual therapies) in the late Meiji and Taishō eras (see YOSHINAGA 2010, 79, n. 1).

different backgrounds: Nakaoka Toshiya 中岡俊哉 (1926–2001),[5] one of the most popular writers and "paranormal investigator" of postwar Japan; Kiriyama Seiyū 桐山靖雄 (1921–2016), founder of Agonshū 阿含宗, one of the more successful post-1970s "new religions" of Japan; and Yamasaki Taikō 山崎泰廣 (b. 1929), a Buddhist priest and instructor at many important educational institutions connected to the Shingon sect, such as Shuchiin and Kōyasan universities.

As I will explain below, while Mikkyō is indeed connected to some of the most traditional forms of Japanese Buddhism, the 1970s saw the rise of many new—and sometimes competing—understandings of the term. By comparing the three individuals above, this article aims to both illustrate the entanglement of their ideas despite their different backgrounds and to emphasize that it is only by *historicizing* these ideas that we can ultimately achieve a more complete understanding of the shared context that led them to draft popular works on Mikkyō in the first place. Their experience reveals that, if a "cultic milieu" in 1970s Japan existed at all, it was not a realm secluded from more orthodox religious ideas but was rather constructed in relation to it.

Before the "Boom": A Very Short History of Mikkyō in Modern Japan

Often translated into English as "Esoteric Buddhism," the term "Mikkyō" has been defined in many ways: the recent *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, a more scholarly resource, describes it as "the large body of texts, liturgies, implements, and rituals that were imported from China to Japan during the Heian Period;" the "[c]oncrete goals" of such esoteric practices including "maintaining power, attaining good fortune, warding off evil, and becoming a buddha in one's very body" (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 540). Meanwhile *Wikipedia* emphasizes its aspect as a "lineage tradition," which means that its practice requires "initiatorial empowerment-transmissions" from a master of the discipline.[6]

Both popular and more academic resources emphasize the *secrecy* aspect of Mikkyō, and its position vis-à-vis other more exoteric doctrines. Historically represented mostly—but not exclusively—by the Tendai and Shingon traditions, Mikkyō's practices played a central role in premodern Japanese politics and culture. Especially in the case of Shingon, the incantations (*kaji kitō* 加持祈祷) and fire-burning ceremonies (*goma* 護摩) performed by its priests functioned to legitimate the ascension of many a premodern Japanese emperor to the throne.

5. Japanese personal names have been ordered according to the Japanese convention of placing the surname before the first name.

6. Mikkyō (English version). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikkyō (accessed 30 March 2023).

However, these more traditional aspects—secret transmission, emphasis on incantations, and so on—ended up clashing with mainstream Buddhist discourses after the imperial restoration of 1868. During the early years of the Meiji 明治 period (1868–1912), the new government strove to end the amalgamation between Shinto and Buddhism that had defined the mainstream of Japanese religion thus far; in 1873, it also ultimately lifted the ban on the practice of Christianity that had been in place since the early seventeenth century. Even before that, however, the presence of foreign missionaries was already impacting the ways people in the archipelago understood their own religious practices. In fact, *shūkyō* 宗教, the very Japanese term now used to translate "religion," was coined precisely during this time, amid attempts to appropriate new discursive frameworks.

In this context, as recent scholarship in both Japanese and English has described in detail, the new discourse on "religion" was informed largely by Euro-American Protestant currents that prioritized the role of aspects such as "doctrine" and "faith" over other ritual practices that sometimes found no base in scripture.[7] Japanese Buddhist sects thus entered a significant process of "Protestantization" (Ōtani 2013) that involved the establishment of a unified Buddhist canon; Buddhism had to become "rational," "civilized," and "scientific," which included, of course, also the creation of a strong anti-superstition movement. Here, the position of the heavily ritualistic Mikkyō became quite problematic: note, for instance, the role of Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919), one of the most representative leaders of the Buddhist modernization campaigns who well into the Taishō 大正 period (1912–1926) associated Shingon's prayer rituals with "superstition" (Josephson 2006, 154).

As pointed out by Ōmi Toshihiro, while Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 became regarded as the sect that most perfectly represented this Buddhist struggle for modernization, Mikkyō-related schools such as Shingon were faced, despite exceptions, with a negative image of their main practices as "superstitions" (2020, 105–10). For example, the Meiji government, which promoted the importation of modern medical science from the West, issued several notices prohibiting the disruption of medical care by the performance of religious prayers (*kaji kitō*) (Ōmi 2020, 107). Also, the failure of the healing rituals conducted in front of the Imperial Palace bridge in 1912 aimed at saving Mutsuhito from illness led more people to talk about the perceived "irrationality" of such routines (Ōmi 2020, 109–10). In addition to the abovementioned work by Inoue Enryō,

7. For works in Japanese, see for instance Hoshino (2012) and Klautau (2014); in English, see Josephson (2012), Isomae (2014), Maxey (2014), and Krämer (2015). Although these works focus mainly on the Meiji period, Gaitanidis (2022) shows the compelling ways in which the concept of religion in Japan continues to shift today.

these cases explicitly show that a negative discourse on prayer and incantations was widespread in early twentieth-century Japan. Of course, this does not directly mean that Shingon or Mikkyō-related schools themselves simply became "superstition" in the general sense. However, although further research is needed, it seems obvious that the modern way of understanding "religion," which is less tolerant of "magic" and more focused on inner-worldly asceticism, was not one favorable to Mikkyō.

In addition to Ōmi, other scholars have also explored this attitude toward Mikkyō in detail. For example, in a recent monograph, Kameyama Mitsuhiro examines how Shingon priest Shaku Unshō 釈雲照 (1827–1909) developed reformist ideas. These ideas emerged partly as a reaction to younger scholars who viewed him as representative of a form of an "Old Buddhism" that needed to be transcended (2022, 188–214). Kameyama's argument suggests that Unshō's Mikkyō-inspired ideas were as much an expression of modernity as those of his counterparts in the "New Buddhist" movement. In fact, this type of reaction seems to have been quite common throughout twentieth-century Shingon history, even into the postwar era. For instance, in the early 1950s, the Shingon school commissioned Hirai Tatsumi 平井巽 (1903–1989), a lay Buddhist scholar, to create a work that explained the efficacy of prayer in contemporary "scientific" terms. This was prompted by the emergence of new religious groups that promoted prayer rituals similar to those of Mikkyō. Consequently, members of the Shingon school found themselves in a position where they had to actively emphasize the "orthodoxy" of their practices (Han 2021b). This unfavorable perception of Mikkyō continued well into the later Shōwa years. In a 1968 volume that significantly contributed to the postwar trend of reevaluating Kūkai, one of the editors, the renowned Umehara Takeshi 梅原猛 (1925–2019), justified his focus on the founder by stating that, up to that point, Shingon had been regarded as nothing more than a prayer-centered form of Buddhism (*tan naru kitō no Bukkyō* 単なる祈祷の仏教) (Umehara 2014, 12). These examples demonstrate that modern attempts to (re)position Shingon within the broader Japanese religious context were largely shaped by a negative perception of the school.

While during the Taishō period the founder of Shin Buddhism was at the center of a cultural phenomenon now referred to by scholars as the "Shinran boom" (Ōsawa 2019, 147–83), and Nichiren became the axis of one of the most popular Buddhist movements between the Meiji and early Shōwa days (Ōtani 2019), interest in the Shingon founder was limited due mostly to the above circumstances. Although this situation continued for some time into the postwar days, in the early 1970s, it slowly began to shift. For instance, the 1994 *Encyclopedia of Popular Culture* describes a "Mikkyō boom" taking place at that time. According to this, the "boom" was mostly connected to the activities of Kiriyama

Seiyū (Tsushima 1994), who I will be focusing on in one of the following sections.

Nevertheless, as explained by Erica Baffelli and Ian Reader, "whether Kiriyama really did start this 'boom' is neither clear nor the point; in Agonshū's narrative," however, "he did and this forms part of its image construction of Kiriyama as someone who shaped the religious culture of the age" (2019, 48–49). That is, while the narrative of Kiriyama as the center of the 1970s "Mikkyō boom" seems to inform most of our understanding of the phenomenon today, contemporary sources tell us a different story: from the late 1960s, there appears to be a renewed interest in the figure of the Shingon founder, which culminates with the publication, from 1973, of Shiba Ryōtarō's 司馬遼太郎 (1923–1996) bestselling novel *The Landscape of Kūkai* (*Kūkai no fūkei* 空海の風景). At the same time, one also observes orthodox Shingon scholars discussing the meaning of this "boom" in Kōyasan 高野山 official publications (Han 2021a, 14–16), which indicates that, in contemporary historical terms at least, the phenomenon was spread far beyond the scope of Kiriyama's activities.

Whereas the term "Mikkyō boom" as it appeared in the 1970s deserves further consideration (Han 2023), the case studies below may already be enough to illustrate that the term was used rather ambiguously; still, it reveals, as we will see, a significant amount about 1970s expectations toward both science and religion, much more than it does, perhaps, about some essential aspect of the ideas of Saichō or Kūkai. In other words, this article provides some answers to the questions of what made people in the 1970s so attracted to Mikkyō and what Mikkyō, in turn, had to offer to such audiences.

Mikkyō and Psychic Powers: Nakaoka Toshiya

One of the main aspects of the rise of interest in Mikkyō was the popularity of "psychic powers." Although people often refer to 1974—the year of Uri Geller's visit to Japan—as the most significant moment in the popularization of this aspect (Yoshida 2006), this interest had been gradually increasing in Japanese society long before this.

In 1961, a translation of the American novel *Man from Tomorrow* (1954) by Wilson Tucker was published in Japan. This book is a science fiction novel about Paul Breen, an individual with "extrasensory perception" (ESP), a term coined by American psychologist Joseph Banks Rhine (1895–1980) in 1934 to describe the psychic abilities of human beings. The Japanese version was titled *Chōnōryoku ējento* 超能力エージェント (The Supernatural-Power Agent), and it appears that, from around this time, *chōnōryoku* started to become further

established as a term referring to abilities such as telepathy and psychokinesis.[8] The spread of the term itself denotes the increasing attention, especially from the mid-1960s, given to psychic powers within the context of popular culture.

At first, these themes became popular among young adults. For instance, an article in the September 1964 issue of the magazine *King of Adventures* (*Bōken-ō* 冒険王) explained the meaning of *chōnōryoku* while introducing the story of Dr. Thompson, a magician who was allegedly able to levitate microphones on stage and summon the spirit of President John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) (Maki and Maemura 1964). Alongside such cases, many SF novels, manga, and animated films started dealing with the themes of telepathy and other psychic abilities. However, the popularity of these topics extended beyond teenage cultures. Soon, books on psychic powers were published for adults as well, offering more detailed "scientific" explanations (Hatsumi 2012, 110–11). Nakaoka Toshiya's 1971 *Introduction to Telepathy* (*Terepashī nyūmon* テレパシー入門) is a representative example that cannot be overlooked in terms of its impact. Hatsumi Ken'ichi 初見健一, a popular writer and researcher of 1970s children's culture, asserts as follows:

> Perhaps *Introduction to Telepathy*… was the first bestseller on the topic of psychic powers in the history of Japanese publishing. Although it appeared before Uri Geller was even a topic of conversation [in Japan], the book had, in less than a year [after first being published], already been reprinted twelve times.
> (Hatsumi 2012, 147)

While referring to Western parapsychology, Nakaoka's *Introduction to Telepathy* insists that psychic powers can be examined and explained in a scientific way. It also claims that everyone can be a psychic, and that one can develop this ability through training. Although similar motifs have appeared

8. At this point, we can recall the famous Fukurai affair (or "clairvoyance affair," Senrigan Jiken) that took place in the late Meiji period. There was a sensational controversy surrounding the (self-proclaimed) clairvoyants Mifune Chizuko 御船千鶴子 (1886–1911) and Nagao Ikuko 長尾郁子 (1871–1911), and their supporter Fukurai Tomokichi 福来友吉 (1869–1952). Fukurai was an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Tokyo who believed in the psychic abilities of Mifune and Nagao, and attempted to prove them through experiments. However, while not completely denying the existence of parapsychological abilities, many other scholars were critical of Fukurai's approach. Eventually, with the deaths of Mihune and Nagao in 1911, Fukurai's experiments came to an end, leading to Fukurai's resignation from the university; for more information about the Fukurai affair, see Ichiyanagi 1994 and Takasuna 2012). As can seen by the Fukurai affair, similar concepts such as clairvoyance, thoughtography, and prophecy had already been discussed. However, the term *chōnōryoku* itself, as a broad concept encompassing these abilities, seems to have gained popularity in the context of popular culture around the 1960s.

in other books,[9] it was with the publication of *Introduction to Telepathy* that such discourses on psychic powers gained recognition among a wider audience; it is, furthermore, under these circumstances that several works on Mikkyō in connection with the notion of psychic powers were published. For example, Nakaoka himself went on to publish *Introduction to the Psychokinesis of Esoteric Buddhism* (*Mikkyō nenriki nyūmon* 密教念力入門) in 1972.

As an example of an interpretation of Mikkyō by someone not affiliated with any specific religious organization, this section delves into Nakaoka Toshiya's understanding of the term, focusing mainly on his abovementioned work from 1972. Originally named Okamoto Toshio, Nakaoka was born in 1926. In 1942, he moved to Manchuria where he started working at a steel factory the following year. After the end of World War II, he decided not to return to Japan, but remained in China and joined the pro-Communist Eighth Route Army. In 1951, he started working at a broadcasting station as an announcer in Beijing. However, he returned to Japan in 1958 and from 1962, began his career as a writer under the pen name Nakaoka Toshiya (Okamoto and Tsujidō 2017, 21–56).

Soon, he became a popular writer of boys' and girls' magazines. The main theme he dealt with was ghost stories and supernatural phenomena he had gathered from articles around the world and his own travels.[10] As an extension of his interest in supernatural phenomena, he became enthused with mystic religious rites. It is also important to point out that he considered himself a nonfiction writer since he only introduced stories that he claimed to have seen or heard. While dealing with supernatural phenomena, he developed a strong interest in psychic powers and related theories such as parapsychology. Thus, he also considered himself a "researcher" of psychic phenomena (Okamoto and Tsujidō 2017, 74–76).

It is evident, therefore, that Nakaoka's publication on esoteric Buddhism is part of his exploration into psychic phenomena. His 1972 *Introduction to the Psychokinesis of Esoteric Buddhism* is a sequel to his bestselling work published in the previous year. In the introduction, Nakaoka raises the question of whether or not the supranormal faculties (*jintsūriki* 神通力) spoken of in

9. Similar discourses on psychic powers can be found in several books for an adult audience authored by Hashimoto Ken, including *Introduction to Psychic Abilities: You Too Can Become a Psychic* (Hashimoto 1968) and *Introduction to ESP: Easy Methods for Developing Psychic Powers* (Hashimoto and Motoyama 1972)

10. At first, he mainly introduced Chinese folklore and ghost stories that he gathered during his stay in China, but soon thereafter he broadened his interests to include other countries such as his native Japan as well as Brazil and other areas of Latin America, where he traveled to collect materials. For more details, see Okamoto and Tsujidō (2017, 56–66).

Mikkyō contexts are nonscientific, stating that, with this book, he aims at providing a proper explanation for this (NAKAOKA 1972, 5–7).

To achieve this goal, Nakaoka discusses the principles and rituals of Mikkyō in relation to parapsychology. He employs "Mikkyō" as a broader concept that includes not only Shugendō 修験道, but also Ōdōkyō 黄道教, which is, according to him, a Taoism-derived Chinese "esoteric religion" (*himitsu shūkyō* 秘密宗教). However, Nakaoka primarily focuses on Japanese Shingon: he links the magical abilities of Mikkyō monks with the secular concept of psychic powers, explicitly stating that the supranormal faculties exhibited by esoteric monks are a type of psychic phenomenon.

More specifically, Nakaoka reinterpreted the Buddhist notion of *sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏, which emphasizes that even ordinary people can attain Buddhahood in their very body. While highlighting the significance of Mikkyō in contemporary society, Nakaoka expressed his views as follows: "Other Buddhist sects have preached that not every person can become a Buddha because the nature of ordinary people is inherently discriminatory. However, Shingon Mikkyō preaches that even ordinary people can attain Buddhahood in their lifetime if they practice hard (NAKAOKA 1972, 53)."[11]

Based on this perspective, he drew parallels between this Buddhist teaching of *sokushin jōbutsu* and the contemporary idea that anyone can develop psychic abilities by nurturing their latent talents. Nakaoka directly refers to the founder of Japanese Shingon as a psychic: he emphasizes Kūkai as "the founder of a system dedicated to developing esoteric supernatural powers" (*mikkyō chōnōryoku* 密教超能力), claiming that he "was not only a pioneer" in this area, "but also a remarkable psychic himself" (NAKAOKA 1972, 47). In other words, Nakaoka equated Mikkyō's ultimate doctrinal goals with the acquisition of psychic powers. For example, he described the supranormal abilities of esoteric monks in terms of the type of psychic skills discussed in parapsychological theories:

> The difference in the effects of psychic abilities when utilized by practitioners of esoteric Buddhism and ESP users lies in the variation of the energy used for psychic powers. While many ESP users rely on their innate talent, the distinction arises from the fact that practitioners of esoteric Buddhism consistently cultivate and develop their psychic powers through training and discipline.
> (NAKAOKA 1972, 178)

11. Although Nakaoka focuses on Shingon, the Buddhist notion of *sokushin jōbutsu* is not a concept exclusive to this sect. For instance, similar teachings are found in the equally esoteric-inspired Tendai, and in Nichiren Buddhism. See, for instance, NISHIKATA (1983) and KAMEYAMA (2013).

From this perspective, Nakaoka paid attention to the developmental effects of the Mikkyō training system. As one example, he briefly introduced the use of mudras—a series of symbolic hand gestures employed in Buddhism as well as other Indian religious traditions—as one way to cultivate one's psychic abilities. According to his book, reciting the Heart Sutra (Jp. *Hannya shingyō* 般若心経) while performing symbolic signs would help develop one's latent skills. In this way, Nakaoka, who played a significant role in popularizing the parapsychological notion of *chōnōryoku*, recontextualised Mikkyō's supranormal faculties within the framework of psychicism.

"Kiriyama Mikkyō" and Popular Trends

Nakaoka's *Introduction to the Psychokinesis of Esoteric Buddhism* reflects mostly his personal interpretation of Mikkyō. However, it is important to note that similar ideas can also be found in the writings of Kiriyama Seiyū, who a few years later would found Agonshū.

Kiriyama was born in Yokohama in 1921. In search of a way to cure his own illness, he explored various shrines and temples but found no satisfaction. In 1954, he established a group named Kannon Jiekai 観音慈恵会, thus beginning his activities as a religious leader. From around this time, he undertook various ascetic practices, including those of Shingon Buddhism and Shugendō, while searching for his own path, eventually founding his own Agonshū group in 1978 (Baffelli and Reader 2019, 45–51).

However, even before the founding of Agonshū, he had already achieved a certain level of popularity. It was, in fact, with the release in 1971 of his *The Principle of Transformation: Esoteric Buddhism and its Secret Supranormal Powers* (Kiriyama 1971) that he began to receive attention. While positioning Mikkyō as not merely a religion but also a great training system based on scientific principles, Kiriyama asserted in this work that anyone could develop their psychic abilities through proper Mikkyō-based training. According to his explanation, only the practices of Mikkyō could influence the depths of the human mind, specifically the "deep subconscious," and activate the inherent transcendent power within the human body and mind. He claimed that this activation leads to the state of *sokushin jōbutsu*, enabling individuals to become psychics.

Kiriyama then published *Esoteric Buddhism: The Secret of Psychic Powers* (Kiriyama 1972). In this work, he basically reiterated the ideas found in his previous work, namely that practising esoteric techniques is the most effective way to become a psychic. However, by adopting the apocalyptic perspective popular among the Japanese public at the time (Hatsumi 2012, 22–23), he presented further radical claims. In *Esoteric Buddhism* he asserted that the power of science had already surpassed that of human beings. For instance, he mentions

the infamous insecticide DDT as a cause of serious illness in contemporary society. According to his explanation, DDT harms people's brains and nervous system, causing cancers and other unexplained ailments such as mental problems and bodily pain. Subsequently, he warned that DDT is not the only problem, as there are many other unknown poisonous substances threatening our lives. In other words, due to people's inability to properly address the consequences of scientific progress, as evidenced by numerous instances of disastrous pollution issues, human beings were now in danger (KIRIYAMA 1972, 62–92). Based on this idea, he argued that to survive human extinction, people must evolve into superior beings. For him, psychics formed a superior human species called "Homo excellens" (*chō-hito* 超・ヒト). Normal individuals, or Homo sapiens, could evolve into Homo excellens through Kiriyama's recommended training program (KIRIYAMA 1972, 130–90).

In this regard, he paid special attention to yoga practices. In *Esoteric Buddhism*, he offered detailed information about kundalini and chakras, famous yoga-related terms that refer to latent energies embedded in the human body. Using medical knowledge, he explained that yoga practices effectively awaken these latent energies by influencing the autonomic nervous system, helping to cure serious illnesses caused by disruptions of the nervous system. He even claimed that it could lead to changes in one's DNA. As a result, practitioners could attain a state superior to that of normal people, and acquire psychic powers. With this perspective, he attempted to establish a connection between the Shingon Esoteric tradition and yoga, thereby expanding the scope of his Mikkyō theories (KIRIYAMA 1972, 282–346).

Kiriyama insisted that his theory on Mikkyō, which is a mixture of yoga practices and Shingon Buddhism, is unique and offers better techniques for cultivating abilities compared to traditional Shingon Buddhism. However, it is interesting to note that Yamasaki Taikō, the Shingon priest I focus on in the next section, responded to Kiriyama's book with an article titled "Is Kiriyama's *Mikkyō* Truly Original?" (YAMASAKI 1972b). Here, he pointed out the similarities between Kiriyama's theories and his own, alluding to the possibility that Kiriyama may have copied ideas previously presented by him in a 1971 article titled "The Position and Function of Mental Concentration: A Comparison between Mikkyō, yoga, and Modern Medicine":

> [Kiriyama's *Esoteric Buddhism*] quotes from various sources and (a) its main idea lies in the fact that Shingon esoteric Buddhism will only be revived when it accepts yoga, one of its original sources, and (b) its contents are developed within the framework of the triad Mikkyō, yoga, and Medicine.... However, I had already in a previous paper discussed these ideas and framework in detail. (YAMASAKI 1972b, 2)

Kiriyama was certainly aware of Yamasaki's article, which is in fact briefly mentioned in *Esoteric Buddhism* (Kiriyama 1972, 357). However, since he did not clearly mention any influence from Yamasaki's article on his ideas presented in the book, it is uncertain to what extent Kiriyama was directly influenced by it. Regardless of who inspired whom, the similarity of their ideas, despite their different positions, implies their theories were developed within the context of a larger milieu where works connecting Mikkyō and science gained popularity. Furthermore, as mentioned by Yamasaki (1972b, 3), his and Kiriyama's theories also overlapped in terms of references. For example, they both quote from the famous yoga practitioner and postwar theosophist Miura Sekizō 三浦関造 (1883–1960), and refer to the scholar of Indian religion, Sahoda Tsuruji 佐保田鶴治 (1899–1986) and his yoga theories. This implies the existence of a broader cultural context that was shared beyond the boundaries of "orthodoxy" and "deviancy." Although it is interesting to see how this manifested in the Japanese archipelago, this was, in fact, not a trend limited to Japan: from the twentieth century, topics such as yoga (and tantra) were reevaluated by scholars of religion such as Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), Heinrich Zimmer (1890–1943), and Joseph Campbell (1904–1987), becoming fashionable in western popular culture especially from the 1960s onward (Urban 2003, 203). It is, nevertheless, still compelling to see how people such as Kiriyama and Yamasaki, who considered themselves practitioners of a religion traditionally connected to yoga, appropriated and reproduced this trend to non-Western audiences. With that in mind, in the following section, I will examine Yamasaki's ideas.

Reforming "Orthodox" Mikkyō: Yamasaki Taikō

Yamasaki Taikō was born in 1929 in Kobe, Hyōgo Prefecture. He entered Kōyasan University in 1947 and, after graduating in 1952, he continued into the university's postgraduate program. From the 1960s he held various academic positions, including assistant professor at Shingon-affiliated institutions such as Shuchiin—where he became a full professor in 1972—and Kōyasan University. He retired from teaching in 2000, and despite his advanced age, he is still resident priest at Jōkōin 常光院 temple in his hometown of Kobe. During his career, he held important roles in organizations such as the Association of Japanese Esoteric Buddhism (Nihon Mikkyō Gakkai 日本密教学会), Shuchiin University's Research Institute for Materials on Esoteric Buddhism (Mikkyō Shiryō Kenkyūjo 密教資料研究所), and at the International Exchange Center of Kōyasan Shingon (Kōyasan Shingonshū Kokusai Kōryū Sentā 高野山真言宗国際交流センター) (Ytr 1998, 7–10). In 1990 he was awarded the prestigious Mikkyō Gakugei Prize 密教学芸賞, and in 1999 rose to the highest rank of Daisōzu 大僧都 in the Kōyasan branch of the Shingon sect—his personal and academic lives

were, therefore, spent most exclusively in the context of what one would call proper Mikkyō orthodoxy.

As I explained in the first section of this article, Mikkyō, and Shingon Buddhism in particular, was long excluded from the mainstream modern discourse on religion in Japan. As early as the late Meiji period, Shingon scholars attempted to react to that, which meant, among other things, a discussion of the "secret" aspect of their doctrines (Yamano 2000). This process of the "modernization" of Shingon practices continued into the early postwar days (Han 2021b), and as we can see from the example of Yamasaki, developed further in the context of 1970s Japan. A very active priest, Yamasaki devoted himself to this undertaking, and conducted broad research on Mikkyō in connection to philosophy, psychology, physiology, and other fields, aiming to apply this knowledge to the advancement of a contemporary understanding of esoteric Buddhism. The rediscovery and reinterpretation of the *ajikan* 阿字観 meditation tradition of Shingon can be considered one of his significant achievements. He has published several works on Mikkyō meditation, some of which have been translated into English, Korean, German, and French.[12]

Despite a prolific career, *Secret Meditation Techniques of Esoteric Buddhism* is one of his most representative books. This book is primarily based on three articles published between 1970 and 1972: "Visiting the Origins of Esoteric Buddhism: Report on Returning Home" (Yamasaki 1970), "The Position and Function of Mental Concentration: A Comparison between Esoteric Buddhism, yoga, and Modern Medicine" (Yamasaki 1971), and "Esoteric *ajikan* for Modern Individuals" (Yamasaki 1972a). It also incorporates previously unpublished content, including the "Structure of Meditation Techniques," summaries of magazines and lectures, as well as photographs and illustrations. Yamazaki describes the meaning of this work thusly:

> Up until now, the faith of lay Shingon believers has mainly focused on, so to speak, other-power belief in [entities such as] Kannon, Fudō [Myōō], and [Kōbō] Daishi. However, considering the present-day rise in the intellectual level and increase in the human-centered desire for self-power (*jirikiteki yokkyū* 自力的欲求), and the growing interest by Westerners in Buddhism as a means of salvation, shouldn't the most urgent matter for contemporary Shingon Buddhism be to go through [its] system of practical methods and, finding those [practices] deemed appropriate, partly open them in modern form, thus

12. For example, his 1981 work *Mikkyō meisō to shinsō shinri* 密教瞑想と深層心理 was translated into Korean in 1983. *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism* (1988), perhaps the most popular English-language introduction to the topic, is a conflation of his *Mikkyō meisōhō* and *Mikkyō meisō to shinsō shinri*. This book was translated into German in 1990, and into French in 2015.

> responding to the demands of people sincere about the true practice of meditation? (YAMASAKI 1974, 5)

As evident from the quoted passage, he argues that in line with the contemporary public's desire for self improvement, Shingon Buddhism should disclose some of its secret practices to a wider audience. From this standpoint, Yamasaki especially emphasized the abovementioned practice of *ajikan* meditation. According to him, Ajikan was only rarely mentioned by traditional Shingon priests before the 1970s (YAMASAKI 1974, 65). However, he aimed at reviving this meditational practice, claiming it was an important method that could lead individuals to the world of harmony symbolized in esoteric mandalas. At the same time, Yamasaki also introduced *ajikan* as a simple yet fundamental practice that even lay beginners could engage in (YAMASAKI 1974, 58–80).

Similar to Kiriyama, Yamasaki also paid much attention to yoga theories and attempted to investigate the relationship between such practices and traditional Shingon Buddhism. For instance, claiming to approach the issue from a medical perspective, he compared the chakras with the points that get activated in the body when one conducts Shingon meditation and enters a stage of perfect concentration. He demonstrated that the position of these energy points largely coincide, and emphasized the profound connection between Mikkyō and yoga (YAMASAKI 1974, 108–35). In other words, he used yoga theories and physiological knowledge to explain the positive effects of Shingon as a self-cultivation system, establishing *ajikan* meditation as one of the most representative practices of his school.

However, he also argued that Shingon practice lacked an intensive physical training system capable of directly influencing the human subconscious, despite the founder Kūkai having preached the importance of the body alongside the mind. To remedy this, Yamasaki suggested that the effectiveness of *ajikan* meditation could be enhanced through the practice of Hatha yoga (YAMASAKI 1974, 136–55). Despite this being a somewhat progressive statement for an orthodox Kōyasan priest, Yamasaki's claims were not as radical as Kiriyama's—that is, he did not go as far as claiming, for instance, that Mikkyō-related practices could endow one with psychic powers.

Additionally, unlike Kiriyama, who actively attempted to merge certain practical elements of Mikkyō and yoga to develop a new system, Yamasaki maintained the framework of Shingon, while using the theories and practices of yoga as auxiliary tools for the modernization of his sectarian tradition. Also, it is important to understand that the relativization of the very *esoteric* aspect of Mikkyō is that which perhaps characterizes its development within the context of modernity: Yamasaki's attempt to reinterpret the *ajikan* tradition as a type of

self-improvement practice available to the wider lay public is yet another significant moment in the post-Meiji development of the Shingon sect.

Conclusion

Whether 1970s Japan indeed saw a type of "Mikkyō boom," or whether this was closer to a fabrication in the media is a future topic for both sociologists and historians of religion. However, perhaps these two questions cannot ultimately be separated: contemporary publishers were reacting to what was then certainly perceived as a marketable topic. Even if we leave aside the issue of the existence of any "boom," the examples above still show us that there was substantial concern on the more "practical" side of Mikkyō by the public, an interest that was addressed by individuals with very different backgrounds.

What, ultimately, can the ideas of Nakaoka Toshiya, Kiriyama Seiyū, and Yamasaki Taikō teach us about the 1970s "cultic milieu"? First, contrary to Campbell's claims in his 1972 article, the "worlds of the occult and the magical, of spiritualism and psychic phenomena" do not always belong exclusively to the "cultic milieu." What we see in the case of 1970s Japanese discourses on "Mikkyō" is in fact a negotiation process where traditional religious currents appropriate what he would deem "cultic" discourses, bringing a shift to orthodoxy itself.

This type of dynamic is, however, no longer overlooked by Campbell. In his more recent "The Cultic Milieu Revisited," he points out that "[i]t is quite remarkable how many of the beliefs and practices that, in 1972," he "identified as hallmarks of cultic religious groups are today generally regarded as part of a pluralistic mainstream culture" (Campbell 2015, 18). Despite this self-reflection, however, he still seems to depict things in terms of deviancy versus orthodoxy, and in this sense, it might be particularly complicated to use his ideas to explain the Shingon tradition. How do we apply his model when orthodoxy itself is, by definition, what he would have referred to as "cultic"? At the same time, when we look at the issue from a historical perspective, Campbell might have a point when we consider that it was specifically *because* of its perceived magical characteristics that Shingon became, from the Meiji period, a sort of outcast in the larger context of Japanese Buddhism. In this sense, perhaps the very place of Shingon in the 1970s "cultic milieu" can only be explained diachronically.

This brings us back to the approach suggested by Asprem and Dyrendal, and further, into the second aspect of this conclusion. If we do understand Shingon Mikkyō to have been part of a cultic milieu, this can only be explained through its proscription from the realm of "sound faith" during the Meiji period, and its subsequent struggle during the early Shōwa days to redefine itself in terms of religion and science. In the 1970s, however, it ultimately managed to reenter

the mainstream, with scholars from institutions like Kōyasan University now addressing the same issues as nonbelievers and "deviant" practitioners.

Reading the 1970s Japanese "cultic milieu" as but one chapter of this much larger narrative gives us insight not only into the period in question, but into the formation of what came to constitute, in the context of Japanese Buddhist history, "orthodoxy" itself. In other words, the entangled ideas of Nakaoka, Kiriyama, and Yamasaki are part of a far more comprehensive narrative that obviously does not end with them but continues into the 1980s and 1990s and then further into the twenty-first century.

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