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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*

MURAKAMI Aki is a lecturer in the faculty of Buddhism at Komazawa University.

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).

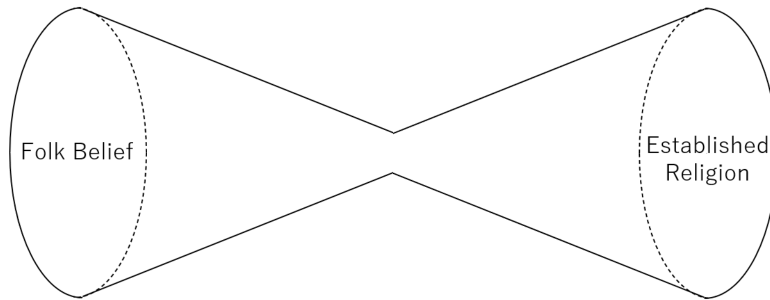

FIGURE 1. Diagram of the relationship between folk beliefs and established religions. Drawn by the author and based on SAKURAI (1973, 709).

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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