Japanese Temple Buddhism during COVID-19

Tim Graf
Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture

Based on the observation that some Buddhist temples were able to profit from the COVID-19 epidemic while others suffered catastrophic losses in income, this article examines Buddhist responses to the novel coronavirus across an economic divide. In introducing case studies, I outline a broad spectrum of practices, soteriologies, and temple management styles. The first part on divine protection focuses on Banshōji, a popular prayer temple in downtown Nagoya. Banshōji experienced record sales in prayer rituals during the pandemic. I then situate these findings within the broader context of discourse on religion after the March 2011 disasters, which leads me into questions regarding post-pandemic religious innovation and Buddhism's role as a social contributor in times of epidemics and crises. The final part suggests that the priests most vulnerable to COVID-19 related disruptions, namely social distancing measures, are those who used to make a living by participating in larger funerals at various temples and sites without managing a temple or parish community of their own.

In exploring Buddhist responses to COVID-19 in Japan, this paper illustrates how the pandemic affected individual temples and practitioners in different ways. While prayer temples recorded a thirty to forty percent increase in sales of *kitō* 祈祷 (prayer rituals) for good health, a long life, and the extraction of evil, the majority of Japan's 70,000 to 75,000 *danka* 檀家 (parish) temples that derive their income mainly from participation in funerals and ancestor veneration expect a significant dip in revenue. Based on interviews, I suggest that the priests most vulnerable to societal change in the wake of COVID-19 are those who primarily made a living by participating in larger funerals at various temples and sites without managing a temple or parish community of their own. The Japanese term *yakusō* 役僧 describes priests who function as assistants under the leadership of officiating clergy during rituals. Due to the downsizing of funerals and participant limitations in mortuary rituals, both occasioned by social distancing measures, some of the priests who previously

relied on income as *yakusō* now depend on the support of their families, monetary loans by fellow priests, and even food donations to survive.

The novel coronavirus epidemic has both accelerated and otherwise altered the ongoing simplification and individualization of funerals and their postwar transformation into private events (see Rowe 2000). It also brings our attention back to densely populated areas as they are the centers of the outbreak. Recent economic struggles and problems of temple succession are most visible in depopulated regions, where it is not uncommon for priests to administer two or more temples to prevent them from closure. But urban temples are also undergoing change. To date, little is known about the phenomenon of urban priests that work primarily as *yakusō* at various temples and sites. Studies of urban prayer temples and their means of providing and mediating the promise of divine protection in response to the pandemic are also virtually non-existent.

By introducing several case studies at different ends of this economic divide, I aim to outline the broad spectrum of practices, soteriologies, materialities, and management styles in contemporary Japanese temple Buddhism, research on which is still often focused on historic monuments in Kyoto and Nara. Tōdaiji in Nara was arguably the most frequently featured temple in discussions of divine aid since the first wave of the coronavirus epidemic swept Japan in 2020. While the study of these sites is important, for this essay, I chose to interview priests representing different Buddhist sects at less well-known temples in different urban and rural regions instead.[1]

The first part of this article focuses on divine protection through the lens of Banshōji 万松寺, a popular local prayer temple in downtown Nagoya that, in the wake of the pandemic, recorded an unprecedented demand for prayer rituals for certain worldly benefits.[2] In exploring Banshōji's adaptation to COVID-19, I ask a rather straight-forward question: What is it that makes prayer temples attractive? And how portable or adaptable are the rituals utilized to evoke and mediate the sensation of divine protection found in these sites?[3] Based on a

1. I interviewed clergy of different genders and age groups in rural and urban parts of the Tokai and Tohoku areas, who were affiliated with Sōtō Zen, Pure Land Buddhism, True Pure Land Buddhism, and non-denominational (formerly Sōtō Zen). At this stage, my study is still only partial and a work in progress. Funding for this research has been granted by the Promotion and Mutual Aid Corporation for Private Schools of Japan (日本私立学校振興·共済事業団). Content presented in this article also draws on findings of a research project on disaster prevention among temples and shrines in the Tokai area, sponsored by the Shikishima Foundation for the Promotion of Science and Culture (シキシマ学術·文化振興財団の研究助成). Most interviews for this project were conducted in the spring of 2021.

2. A short documentary film on Banshōji's response to COVID-19 is available for free via vimeo.com/598900412.

3. The concept of religious sensation draws on Birgit Meyer's idea of sensational forms as "relatively fixed authorized modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental" (Meyer 2008: 707 (quoted in Prohl 2015: 12). See also Meyer 2006.

decade of research on Buddhist prayer monasteries, this part of the article emphasizes that prayer rituals enable a dialogue with the gods that involves the body and the senses. The promise of divine aid draws our attention to the material culture of prayer temples, the training of priests, as well as spatial and logistic concerns that may explain why some temples are successful in offering worldly benefits while others are not.

Following the discussion of *kitō* at Banshōji, the second part of this essay situates recent discourse on divine protection and COVID-19 within the broader context of religion after the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disasters in Japan. Here I suggest that the sustained interest in cases of ghost possession in post-2011 media reports, novels, and academic studies may have set a precedent for the notably curious reportage on "folk belief" during the pandemic, which I briefly summarize. In so doing, I aim to show how this take on "folk belief" works to justify *kitō* against the backdrop of modern criticisms of these rituals as "superstition" or "magic."

The latter half of the article examines Buddhism's role as a social contributor, the impact of COVID-19 on Buddhist volunteer initiatives in care for the elderly and their families, and the question of religious innovation. In Japan, religious innovations in response to COVID-19 made headlines. The novel coronavirus motivated religious groups to reach out to their communities and new followers online. I detail this trend and further explore the amalgam of practices temples will need to adapt even in the post-pandemic world. However, I emphasize that these practices and their marketing are founded in developments that preceded the pandemic and that the enthusiasm to develop innovative practices overshadows social realities of priests who are unable to utilize these innovations for various reasons.

The importance of voluntary and experimental practices in response to modern epidemics and disasters can hardly be overstated, regardless of whether we consider the means of outreach and activism as "new" or "established." To illustrate Buddhist responses to outbreaks of epidemics in past and present, I turn to Unjōji 雲上寺, a local temple near Sendai in northeast Japan. Unjōji's priests were successful in modeling grass-roots disaster aid initiatives into important platforms for multi-religious volunteering and interfaith dialogue. However, COVID-19 put many of these activities on hold, and it is yet unclear as to how clergy will be able to continue their services.

As a work in progress, this article focuses on temple responses and initiatives, but it also calls for further research and investigation to be done on the sub-group of priests who do not have temples or parishioners of their own. In closing this essay with a preliminary reflection on these former *yakusō* priests, I question the feasibility of volunteering for all priests. Whether in the flesh or

online, volunteer practices and free services are a privilege that not all priests can afford. Acknowledging and observing the economic divide in Japanese Buddhism through the lens of the unfolding coronavirus pandemic promises to contribute to theories of religion and religious practice, the recent history of Japanese temple Buddhism and interreligious dialogue, and the role of Buddhism as a social contributor.

Providing the Religious Sensation of Divine Protection

Considering the causal relationship between disasters and "stabilizing" rituals designed to overcome the upheaval caused by them, it is not surprising that Banshōji registered a thirty to forty percent increase in sales of wooden *goma* 護摩 plaques for a long life, health, protection, and the extraction of evil since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. This pattern seems to hold true for other prestigious sites concerned with divine protection. Citing an *Asahi shimbun digital* article of 1 May 2020, Bryan Lowe (2020) reported that Yakushiji in Nara "has seen a threefold increase in requests to send sutra copying materials for in-home transcription."

Two findings of my previous research on divine protection may explain why I was nonetheless surprised about this increase:[4] First, no data available to me proved a substantial increase in prayer rituals for disaster prevention or related worldly benefits in the wake of the 2011 disasters in Japan. The 3.11 tsunami put a spotlight on exorcisms and *kitō* in response to ghost possession, and otherwise altered discourse on religion and "folk belief," as I will outline below in light of more recent reportage on the novel coronavirus. However, sustained media attention and a newfound interest by scholars do not necessarily reflect an increase in prayer practices or amulet sales in the disaster-affected areas. The second reason is that in most situations, *kitō* works independently from an actual crisis. As my book will show, *kitō* also functions as a means of crisis evocation. In other words, the sensation of prayer as found in prayer monasteries evokes a sense of crisis, danger, and urgency, even when there is no crisis to speak of. Judging by my informants' reactions, Banshōji did not expect such a substantial increase in *kitō* sales either.

4. I have been researching the promise of divine protection in Japan for more than ten years. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork on the subject at multiple sites in Japan before, during, and after the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disasters. Only weeks ago, I submitted a book manuscript on the subject to the editors of an academic press. *Zen at Prayer: Meditation and Disaster Prevention at a Contemporary Japanese Prayer Monastery* is under review with the University of Hawai'i Press. The monograph covers new ground in showing how meditation, prayer rituals, and monastic training work together in the making of worldly benefits (*genze riyaku* 現世利益) at Kasuisai, a prayer monastery (*kitō jiin* 祈祷寺院) noted for promising fire protection.

For temples that represent a contested religious promise, idea, or practice like *kitō*, success in times of crisis may become a source of legitimacy. My study on Buddhist responses to previous disasters found that priests were discouraged from promoting rituals for divine aid in times of crisis. This was especially the case after the Hanshin Awaji Earthquake disaster of 1995, as my forthcoming book will discuss. By contrast, religious professionals are often among the first to offer "mundane" help within and beyond their affiliated communities in times of disaster (McLaughlin 2011). The case study of Unjōji below in this essay will illustrate this point in the context of epidemics.

But disasters nonetheless alter how priests see themselves and their role in society more broadly. Many if not all priests that I interviewed after the March 2011 disasters found new purpose and meaning in their everyday actions as priests. The Sōtō Zen priest Kaneta Taiō from Kurihara in Miyagi Prefecture, for example, was surprised that a prayer ritual, along with a counseling session, showed the intended effect of curing a parishioner who suffered from guilt after visiting the March 2011 tsunami zone out of curiosity.[5] Ten years later, the pandemic put a spotlight on aspects of prayer that were not apparent before, not even to experienced ritual specialists. The same undertone of responsibility for the general public that I noticed during interviews in 2011 echoed in conversations about prayer at Banshōji in 2021.

When visitors to Banshōji purchase *goma* plaques for protection, health, or wealth, priests take note of these wishes. Then, priests with the necessary training burn the wooden plaques in prayer rituals dedicated to the god Fudō Myōō, a sword-wielding protector of the dharma, whose potentially dangerous powers are negotiated for worldly benefits. The interviews presented in my forthcoming book reveal a broad range of interpretations of these prayer rituals that act as a means to dialogue with different gods involved in these rituals. Some consider *kitō* and its surrounding activities as a form of civic-religious volunteering. Others understand *kitō* as a petition to the priests or to the gods directly. The defining characteristic of *kitō* as found in prayer temples, however, is that it is a formalized ritual involving one or more priests. The notion of prayer is thus different from a personal dialogue with God in the Christian sense, although distinct understandings of prayer as a ritual, dialogue, or petition coexist in Christianity, too, notably in the Roman Catholic church.

In Japan, patronage by those wishing for protection, success, and good fortune have sustained temples like Banshōji for centuries. Prayer rituals typically take place within dedicated prayer halls, where five to fifteen priests embody

5. I recorded this conversation with Kaneta on video for a documentary film on *Buddhism after the Tsunami* (Graf 2013). On the same case discussed in greater detail, see Parry 2014.

the concept of divine aid in elaborate ritual performances. Describing these rituals as cognitive endeavors would only downplay the involvement of the body and the senses in evoking the religious sensation of prayer as found in temples that specialize in these rituals. Limitations on space, a lack of environmental characteristics and special buildings, and a dearth of both ritual artifacts and participating clergy may explain why most ordinary family temples are unable to become popular prayer temples, as my forthcoming book will discuss. Banshōji's prayer hall, for example, is equipped with a ventilation system designed to burn *goma* indoors.

Ritual accoutrements for the burning of *goma* at Banshōji. Photo by the author.

Banshōji's main entrance under the arcades of Ōsu. Photo by the author.

Banshōji stands out on many levels. With its main entrance located under the roof of a bustling historical shopping arcade in Nagoya's popular Ōsu district, the independent, formerly Sōtō Zen-affiliated facility is surrounded by shops, cafés, and eateries. The front resembles an ordinary temple—save for the digital screen where one would expect the roof to be. Guarded by water-spitting dragon gods (*ryūjin* 竜神), Banshōji extends into a multistory building behind the arcade. Large basements and four upper floors accommodate prayer rooms, meditation halls, and high-tech indoor graves (access to which is controlled via facial recognition); offices and a bar are located in a neighboring building.

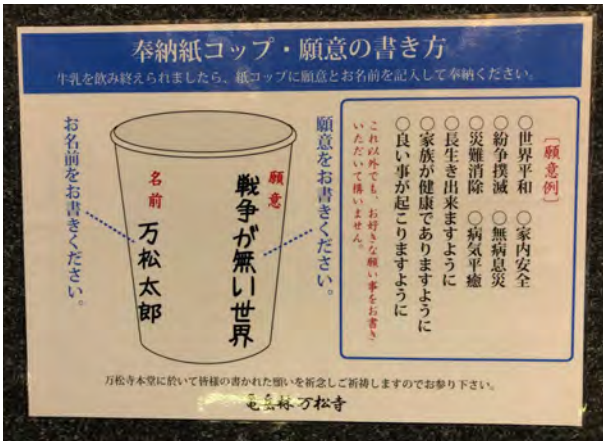
For prayer temples that are local tourist attractions like Banshōji, most visitors are coming as a recreationalists simply looking for ludic entertainment, and this leads many to interact with prayers and divine aid in playful ways.[6] Banshōji's best-known event, the annual Sujāta festival, illustrates this point. The unique festival is held in combination with a *jōdōe* 成道会 ritual commonly practiced at Buddhist temples in commemorating Buddha Shakyamunis' great awakening on 8 December, otherwise known as Bodhi Day. What stands out in Banshōji's rendering of Shakyamunis' great awakening is its focus on the princess Sujāta, who reportedly gave milk to the fasting Shakyamuni. Legend has it that Sujāta's intervention marked a watershed moment in Shakyamuni's life, as he gave up on austere asceticism to develop the middle way, which according to the Buddha legend led him to his great awakening.[7]

6. Jolyon Baraka Thomas (2015) uses the term "just in case religion" to describe "ritual activity that is performed on the off chance that it might have efficacy even though the practitioner acknowledges that the action itself is inherently irrational."

7. See Auerback (2016) on the legend of Buddha Shakyamuni's biography in Japanese history.

Every year as part of the festival, Banshōji offers one thousand free cups of hot milk to festival visitors waiting outside in the cold. First, participants are given empty cups and are told to write their names and wishes on the cups. Then, on the yard near the front gate, local schoolgirls dressed in colorful kimonos pour milk into the cups. Once the milk is consumed, participants hand their cups over to members of a local girl idol group who collect them for a wish-fulfilling prayer ritual to be performed by the priests.

Participants in the 2018 Sujāta festival return their milk cups with wishes. Photo by the author.



A poster showing participants how to write their names and wishes on the milk cups. Photo by the author.

I attended Banshōji's Sujāta festival in 2018, but as one would expect, the spread of COVID-19 rendered the public staging of Banshōji's 2020 Sujāta festival impossible.[8] Following the spread of COVID-19, Banshōji was quick to digitize many of its services, activities, and products online. Some of these that ended up on the news included the distribution of free digital templates for sutra copying (*shakyō* 写経) of the *Lotus Sūtra* and for the coloring of buddha images (*shabutsu* 写仏). Banshōji offered these materials to help those cope with isolation during lockdowns, particularly to make up for temple visits that had to be canceled or restricted.[9] Access to the Banshōji grave remained open to registered members by appointment at all times during the pandemic. But lecture series, Buddhist study groups, sutra copying, *shabutsu*, and *zazen* (ritual sitting, also understood as meditation) were briefly cancelled between March and May of 2020. The priests rushed to move these practices online.

Around the same time, prayer rituals began to include practices that people could perform at home. A news report in the *Asahi shimbun digital* of 29 April 2020, goes into detail about the option of submitting the sutra copies and colored buddha images to Banshōji, where priests would burn them in a *kitō*. In return, participants may receive a special amulet after the ritual is over. Talismans and other material objects designed to protect from COVID-19 have since been offered for sale on the temple's website.[10]

The increase in the demand for wishes and the resulting increase in wooden *goma* being burned in response to COVID-19, along with the burning of sutra copies and buddha images has increased the time Banshōji's priests spend in performing prayer rituals by three, when compared to their pre-pandemic days. In the words of temple staff:

> A prayer ritual that priests were previously able to finish in thirty minutes now takes them 1.5 hours, perhaps even longer.… Our priests are quite exhausted afterwards [laughs]. Not to mention that the fire gets really hot.… I think that Buddhism and religion are changing. Compared to before the spread of the coronavirus, it seems that the number of people who want to be able to rely on and hold on to something, like Buddha, have increased.

The ritual's length magnifies the sense of urgency that the performance conveys. Underlining this urgency, Banshōji has also placed a statue of Fudō

8. The festival's cancellation was announced on the temple's public Facebook page on 20 November 2020, see www.facebook.com/banshoji.temple/.

9. See Banshōji's website, https://www.banshoji.or.jp/sen-dl.

10. See *Asahi shimbun digital* of 29 April 2020. See also Banshōji's website: https://www.banshoji.or.jp/, accessed 9 June 2021.

Myōō on the altar in the prayer hall, open to public view. Under normal circumstances, no statue is shown, as is also common practice at prayer monasteries only displaying their "hidden Buddhas" (*hibutsu* 秘仏) on exceedingly special occasions, during public exhibitions (*kaichō* 開帳), or in response to a crisis. This proximity is key, as exposure to the gods is what gives prayers their sense of seriousness and even danger. Contrary to what the above description of the Sujāta festival might suggest, interactions with local gods are not always playful or humorous. This is not to say that practitioners of prayer rituals would describe themselves as believers in divine punishment, but to many devotees, the promise of divine protection is a serious matter that demands an earnest religious commitment and respect for the gods.

Banshōji's statue of Fudō Myōō for display. The god is hidden under normal circumstances. Photo by the author.

Reimagining "Folk Belief"

Prayers for divine aid have a long-standing history in Japan (Reader 1991; Reader and Tanabe 1998; Williams 2005; Lowe 2017). Because of the backdrop of modern criticisms of *kitō* and that generations of scholars and intellectuals tried to separate *kitō* from "real" Buddhism, research and discussion on prayers for divine aid is not necessarily neutral or unbiased.[11] The involvement of local dragons, mountain ghosts, and other "unmodern" creatures elicited in attaining worldly benefits has long been downplayed by sectarian elites, particularly in True Pure Land Buddhism, where *kitō* is officially forbidden, but also in Sōtō Zen, where *kitō* is neither prohibited nor accepted as orthodox practice.

The legitimacy of *kitō* thus remains contested within Japan's Buddhist institutions, even today. Prayer temples are also frequently judged by the particular benefits they promise, and by their business and marketing acumen. While many visitors understand a temple's material success as a marker of ritual efficacy, sectarian scholars have criticized prayer temples as money-making machines. The more altruistic a prayer, and the less rooted in desire for individual success, the more easily it will be acknowledged by those that aim to separate Buddhism from practices like *kitō* that are seen as symptoms of decline and degeneration, or even superstition.[12]

A crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic offers an opportunity to reexamine the boundaries set around current prayer practices. Divine protection was initially met with increased public interest. An influx of media reports and scholarly essays on Buddhist means of protection and on "folk belief" emerged in response to COVID-19.[13] In 2020, NHK launched a series of documentaries

11. For studies of the negotiation of categories like religion in modern Japan, see Josephson (2012) and Krämer (2015). Belief in magic did not disappear in the modern West either, as Josephson Storm (2017) explores in *The Myth of Disenchantment*.

12. On the rhetoric of Buddhist decline, see Klautau 2012. Japanese Sōtō Zen intellectuals tend to assert or reject the legitimacy of prayer based on its underlying cause or need. Nakano Tōzen (2003: 1), for example, argued that a prayer ritual must be motivated by "genuine suffering." However, we have to consider the difficult circumstances that scholars like Nakano were facing in pioneering the study of prayer amidst criticisms by fellow scholars and priest. Legitimizations of prayer purposes should be read with this difficult context in mind.

13. For academic essays, see Kozic 2021 on Amabie and Ryōgen; Lowe 2020 on Buddhism and divine aid; Cavaliere 2021 on Amabie and folk belief. The Tendai monk Ryōgen 良源, otherwise known as Tsuno daishi 角大師, was widely reported as a Buddhist guardian promising protection from disease. Local folk-related responses to the pandemic were also covered by the media. The *Asahi shimbun* of 14 December 2021, for example, featured an article entitled "'Demons' taking steps to prevent spread of virus at Akita festival." See https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13964448?fbclid=IwAR100H2brAofHXKymqDfS1wgnwBbUTURq421677IYCMVRwLLMS_LYojEgZI, accessed 10 July 2021.

On 16 October 2020, NHK reported on children in Kumomoto who had decorated a two-meter tall statue of Amabie with wooden plates, on which they wrote messages and wishes. See https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20201016/k10012665751000.html, accessed 10 July 2021.

Amabie by Tsuzuki Kazuaki 都築数明 (artist and restorer of Buddhist household altars).

on the role of amulets and gods noted for promising to ward off epidemics in its series *Core Kyoto*.[14] Bryan Lowe's article "Protection without punishment: Turning to Buddhist gods during COVID-19" (Lowe 2020) ranked fifth in a list of most-read essays in the journal *The Immanent Frame* in 2020.[15]

Spearheading the wave of disease-fighting gods was Amabie, a three-legged monster (*yōkai* 妖怪) noted for promising protection from plagues to those who share its image. Most contemporary Japanese had never heard of the half-human, half-fish creature that emerged from the depths of late Edo-period mythology and marketing. The point that Edo-period depictions of Amabie

14. The NHK documentaries on religion and COVID-19 have the following titles: "Warding off Epidemics: Heartfelt Prayers for Safety;" "Fudo Myo-o: The Enduring Power of a Wrathful Deity;" and "Kyoto Amulets: The Embodiment of Prayers for Happiness." See https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/tv/corekyoto/, accessed 7 July 2021.

15. Lowe, a specialist on ancient Japanese Buddhism, poignantly shows how political leaders today make use of the pandemic to justify drastic action without apologizing to the public, whereas in the Nara and Heian periods, disasters were seen as divine punishment for a failed leadership which politicians needed to answer for. As Lowe (2020) explains: "The celestial realm was itself a moral surveillance state patrolled by the four heavenly kings."

make the monster look cute rather than frightening has arguably helped its rise to social media stardom, which started in the spring of 2020.[16] Since then, images of Amabie have graced posters, masks, and other objects designed to raise awareness of the three "Cs," or *mittsu no mitsu* 3つの密 that are to be avoided during the pandemic: confined (poorly ventilated) spaces (*mippei* 密閉), crowded places (*misshū* 密集), and close-contact settings (*missetsu* 密接). Japan Airlines even painted an image of Amabie on its aircraft, effectively turning its plane into a flying *fuda* 札 amulet.

A large part of Amabie's success can be attributed to social media. Newspapers like *Asahi shinbun* picked up the story only after the monster had trended on Twitter. However, the overall media's interest in divine aid cannot be explained through Amabie alone, nor should its resurgence be taken for granted. Open discourse on any form of religious care by "magical" means, including prayer rituals, was all but muted after the Hanshin Awaji Earthquake of 1995. It was only after the March 2011 tsunami that such rituals in response to disasters were reported on favorably on a broader scale in newspapers and on television. A major reason for this shift was the widely shared reports of ghost possession, to which Japanese Buddhist priests responded by offering prayer rituals and exorcisms (*kaji kitō* 加持祈祷; incantations) along with counseling services, and how these cases were discussed by scholars and the media.[17]

It is well-known that the rise of spiritual care from multi-religious disaster relief initiatives has shaped a new public image of religion as a social contributor in post-2011 Japan. As Levi McLaughlin (2016) has shown, the positive image of religion in the media balanced suspicion against religions and their representation as dangerous cults after the Aum Shinrikyō attacks of 1995.[18]

16. The idea of sharing Amabie images for protection facilitated a global Amabie drawing competition by social media users who shared their Amabie images online. The *Asahi shimbun* of 13 June 2020, picked up on this trend by featuring an article on Amabie titled "Plague-fighting monster Amabie goes viral amid COVID-19 crisis."

17. *Sankei shinbun* published one of the first media reports on January 18, 2012, but the topic did not reach an international audience until 2014 with Richard Lloyd Parry's article "Ghosts of the Tsunami Dead" in the *London Review of Books* (Parry 2014) and his subsequent best-selling monograph *Ghosts of the Tsunami: Death and Life in Japan* (Parry 2017). The new interest in ghosts is not only evident in journalistic works and academic research (see Takahashi 2016; Rambelli, ed. 2019) but also in fictional writing and novels. Itō Seikō (2013) emerged as an early prominent author of post-2011 literature concerned with ghosts. His book *Sōzō rajio* 想像ラジオ ("Imagination Radio") earned him the Noma Prize for New Writers. Itō was also short-listed for the Mishima Yukio Prize and the Akutagawa Prize for *Sōzō rajio*. Scholarly works include a 2016 article by sociologist Kanebishi Kiyoshi (2016). Journalist and writer Udagawa Keisuke (2016) also authored a monograph about "Curious Post-Disaster Stories," including widely publicized tales by taxi drivers, who claim that ghosts of the tsunami – often unaware that they have died – requested to be taken home.

18. In 1995, members of the New Religion Aum Shinrikyō committed a series of crimes that peaked in the sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway (see Reader 2000; Kisala and Mullins, eds. 2001). The attacks resulted in a lasting suspicion against religions in Japan, targeting modern religious

It is less well-known that the de-stigmatization of ghosts (*yūrei* 幽霊) and the practices in response to ghost possession were carefully negotiated and framed within the same networks of teachers and practitioners that first enabled the success of clinical religion in post-2011 Japan. Here I suggest that clinic-inspired religious care and "folk belief" form two interactive components of a working definition of religion in post-2011 Japan.

In any case, it is safe to say that an interest in supernatural means of healing and protection, prayer rituals, and local gods under the vague category of "folk belief" was already present by the time COVID-19 first spread around the world. It is therefore likely that media representatives anticipated the coming interest in folk religious activities in relationship to the pandemic, and that journalists had ready-made templates to draw on and informants to turn to.

Questioning Innovation

Innovation is a concept often tied to religion in popular culture, and religious innovation made headlines during COVID-19.[19] Facing government lockdowns and social distancing restrictions, religious professionals employed digital technology to reach their communities remotely (see Cavaliere 2021). My preliminary findings suggest that live-streams of religious services and other hybrid forms of religious participation promise to outlive the pandemic. One interesting effect of this change is the highly visible and searchable traces these services now leave online. By showing how some of these pandemic-related innovations actually have a long-standing history, I aim to demonstrate that these changes have not spread across all practices equally. This raises a more important question: Which practices and social realities are not represented online? And how representative are the responses that we find online for Japanese temple Buddhism more broadly?

The coronavirus epidemic changes the context and significance of digital technologies. But prayer monasteries, for example, have offered application forms for their rituals via the internet, postal services, and phone for many years.[20] My previous research conducted at prayer monasteries before the pandemic finds that almost all individual prayers, as opposed to group-based requests by temple support associations (*kō* 講), are requested by actors who

organizations in particular.

19. An article in the Japan Times of 20 March 2021, for example, was titled "Leap of faith: Japan's religious institutions get innovative in pandemic." See https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/03/20/national/social-issues/religious-institutions-get-innovative-amid-covid-19/, accessed 10 July 2021.

20. I was able to observe remote forms of prayer applications since 2009, although the history of this practice is likely much older.

choose to experience a prayer ritual in person. In other words, ordering a ritual from afar without attending it in person has never been popular for these practitioners. One reason for this preference for on-site participation is found in the material culture, architecture, and sacred space of prayer temples, as outlined above. It is within the designated prayer halls that performances evoke the religious sensation of prayer and protection.

In the new age of COVID-19, requesting prayer rituals online has become increasingly popular at Banshōji. However, Banshōji's rituals are still not streamed beyond the temple's system of indoor speakers. The material and conversational aspects of ritual practice are not easily mediated online. Conversations with priests and temple staff before and after the ritual are also limited. Under normal circumstances, casual encounters with temple staff before and after a ritual provide important moments for emotional exchange.[21] The consideration of these moments of emotional care before, during, and after a ritual motivated Banshōji to keep its doors open, even if only on a limited basis and for a limited number of visitors by appointment. On-site participation was temporarily canceled during government-ordered lockdowns but is currently back in full swing, albeit with restrictions. Moreover, at no point during the pandemic did Banshōji shut its doors completely, but, as mentioned above, they remained open for visitors by appointment. In the words of a Banshōji employee:

> We believe that a temple must be accessible in times of insecurity. A temple is a place for people to find peace of mind and reassurance. These are difficult circumstances, and restrictions apply for visitors, but as a temple we still want to make people feel warm and relieved. That's what Buddhism and the Buddhist teaching is about, so we didn't completely close our temple to visitors at any time.

While stressing the importance of leaving its doors open, Banshōji also emphasized the need for safety measures and the need to open new doors, online. Enabling a pluralization of access to the temple, the employee described, reflected the head priest's preferred solution to a complex problem: different expectations and interpretations of risk.

21. My forthcoming monograph on the prayer monastery Kasuisai will elaborate on the significance of these interactions through the lens of participants who requested prayer rituals in response to (or expectation of) accidents and crises. Conversations with female temple staff in particular are often ignored in studies on prayer temples that tend to focus on specific prayer categories or benefits that a temple is best known for, like fire protection at Kasuisai.

> Understandings of the coronavirus differ between age groups, families, and individuals. Some people cannot leave their homes, due to pre-existing conditions. Some people are very concerned [about COVID-19]. Others don't think about it so much. Some people even oppose vaccination. There are many different opinions, and there is not one way of responding to everyone's needs. We therefore give people a choice whether to participate on site or online. Many troubles can be solved via the internet indeed…. This is not a time for a temple to make all the decisions for all visitors; we want our visitors to have a choice.

Considering that access to prayer rituals on site had to be limited, and considering that prayer rituals were not streamed online, Banshōji's increase in *kitō* described above in this essay is even more remarkable. Here it is important to repeat how Banshōji combined its prayer rituals on site with practices for people to perform at home. Practitioners may send their copies to Banshōji, where priests burn them as part of a prayer ritual.

Contrary to what *Asahi Shimbun digital*'s news article on Banshōji's online innovations might suggest, the combination of *kitō* and sutra copying is not new nor unique to Banshōji. The prayer monastery Kasuisai, where I conducted extensive fieldwork in 2010–11, integrated sutra copying as a means of introducing prayer rituals to guests who did not visit the monastery for *kitō* but for other reasons. Banshōji had also offered sutra copying, *shabutsu*, and Buddhist lecture series before the pandemic, albeit on site at the temple. Yet it was only after the pandemic that these practices were reported on in the news, and only after social distancing measures facilitated the displacement of sutra copying to practitioners' homes.[22]

In opening this section, I questioned how representative these online responses are to Buddhist practice in general. The Sōtō Zen sect, for instance, was quick to promote *zazen* as a means of stress reduction in times of social distancing and self-isolation on its official website on 3 April 2020.[23] Yet the sect struggled to move beyond mere promotion. Reverend Tanaka,[24] a male priest in his mid-fifties and member of the Sōtō Zen sect informed me that, with the

22. One could assume that the certainty of knowing that one's copy of a sutra or colored buddha image will be presented to the gods, along with one's wishes, creates a new mode of participation in the ritual from afar. Such a bond might help some participants overcome feelings of isolation. But field research and practitioner-focused approaches are needed to answer how these combinations between sutra copying and prayer rituals across different spaces are perceived and described by those who requested these services.

23. See https://www.sotozen-net.or.jp/syumucyo/20200403_2.html, accessed 10 July 2021.

24. I am using a pseudonym here.

exception of some temples, his sect was behind the times. Our conversation took place in June of 2021:

> There are many priests who cannot use a computer. Us younger priests are fine with computers, but many local district officers (*kyōkuchō* 教区長) in their sixties, seventies and older have only had in-person meetings—never online. Only this year [2021] did we decide to move forward with the plan to build a framework for meetings on the internet. I myself had experienced online meetings through different associations, so they asked me for help…. As a matter of fact, there are still many priests who do not know that this online conference software even exists. In summary, it is still far from common to use such applications in our sect. I first started using Zoom in November of 2020, so I'm also relatively late.

There also was never a real need for administrative meetings to take place online, as Mr. Tanaka continued to explain. Following the death of a priest due to COVID-19 in Tokyo, the Sōtō Zen sect was among the first to launch far-reaching countermeasures in the spring of 2020. Sectarian headquarters in Tokyo urged priests to cancel local trainings, meetings, and temple events, including areas that were not initially affected by the spread of the novel coronavirus. The Sōtō Zen headquarter in Tokyo had practically shut down by April 2020, which put a halt on the sect's administration and communications with local districts.[25]

My informants in rural Japan would often respond with a wry smile and long sigh when I asked about recent innovations in Buddhist temple practice in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They had read the news articles and knew about the many exciting developments in prayer practices, sermons delivered via YouTube, and online meditation sessions. But the realities they faced in their parish were often incomparable to those in urban communities. A Pure Land Buddhist priest in rural Tohoku stressed that most parishioners of her temple were elderly people who did not have smartphones. Offering sermons or conversations online was simply not an option for her to engage with her community. Another Pure Land priest rediscovered the significance of letters and photos that he sent to parishioners via postal services.

Reverend Tanaka's first encounter with online streaming of a ritual service happened during a funeral in the wake of the pandemic at his temple, west of

25. See McLaughlin 2020 for details on the initial countermeasures by the Sōtō Zen sect, and for a discussion on religious responses to the coronavirus in Japanese religions more broadly, including so-called New Religions.

Tokyo. The deceased's granddaughter in Tokyo could not attend the funeral due to travel restrictions. Another younger family member then asked if she could live-stream the thirty-minute ceremony for the granddaughter via Line. A smartphone was placed on a chair next to other attendants. Witnessing the granddaughter's attendance from afar, along with her participation in the subsequent sermon, marked a moment of reflection for Tanaka:

> What I felt in that moment was that sharing the same time, even if we are in different places, might still elicit legitimate feelings of mourning and ancestor veneration. I have experienced the effect of sharing the same space during a funeral, but this was new to me.

As this quote illustrates, the "feelings of mourning and ancestor veneration" (*tomurau kimochi, kuyō suru kimochi* 弔う気持ち、供養する気持ち) as desired by Tanaka relate to logistic, spatial, and temporal concerns. To him, live-streaming—not on-demand solutions—was key to enabling a religious sensation of memorial. Drawing from this experience, the priest now plans to use streaming technology to allow remote participation for events going on at his temple. The inspiration for this innovation, however, was first suggested by participants in the funeral, not by the priest. Further, he only considers it viable for communicating with parishioners, not to reach out to new groups of followers, as if often presumed in discussing religious response to COVID-19 online.

Buddhism as a Social Contributor

Reverend Shōji died battling the outbreak of an epidemic disease for his local community. When overcrowded hospitals turned patients away at the door, the Pure Land Buddhist priest prepared beds to accommodate the sick at his temple Unjōji near Sendai. In making these arrangements, he accepted the risk of contracting the illness at home, and did so without asking whether or not those in need of a bed were members of Unjōji.

Local family temples like Unjōji are mostly known as providers of mortuary rituals for affiliated *danka* households (see Rowe 2011). Their individual and practical responses to social crises have hardly been explored. Shōji's death occurred in 1886 in Shiogama, when a cholera wave took his life along with 100,000 others in Japan. When the March 2011 tsunami buried the streets below Unjōji's driveway in rubble 125 years later, Shōji's great-grandson Shōji Ryōshō mobilized aid just as decisively. Both priests aimed to support the local community within and beyond Unjōji's parish. Both priests' actions compensated for their government's inability to adequately handle the epidemics and disasters of their time.

Over the past ten years, I joined reverend Shōji on many of his tours to temples along the tsunami-stricken coast of Tohoku, where he delivered relief goods and helped coordinate the activities of clerical volunteers. Shōji was constantly on his phone when not driving or chanting, never losing sight of activities back home, where he organized funerals and memorial services for those lost during the tsunami (see Graf 2013). On several occasions we also met in Tokyo, where Shōji helped facilitate dialogue between religious leaders and scholars who collaborated to convince government officials that Japan's constitutional separation of religion and state should not bar temples, churches, or shrines from public recognition as disaster emergency shelters. One of the temples that I first visited with Shōji in the spring of 2011 functioned as a refuge center for several months. About 300 survivors found shelter at Jōnenji in Kesennuma, where 1,357 residents died (see Graf 2016). The temple provided shelter for families who lost their homes, but Jōnenji wasn't registered as a shelter, which delayed the delivery of disaster relief goods.

Disasters lead to change. Meiji-period cholera pandemics accelerated the urgent modernization of public health in Japan.[26] In recent times, Buddhist temples like Unjōji are no longer needed as makeshift hospitals, nor are priests allowed to officially make a declaration of death, as was common practice in premodern Japan. But while modernity marked the beginning of an ongoing de-professionalization of Buddhist priests (Horie 2006), Buddhism's potential as a social contributor has not gone unnoticed. Since the March 2011 disasters, the number of officially recognized religious facilities in Japan that secured agreements with local governments to function as emergency shelters has more than doubled.[27]

To keep intensive care beds vacant during the coronavirus epidemic, the Japanese government continues to rely on the private sector. Designated business hotels function as temporary healthcare units for asymptomatic coronavirus patients to self-isolate and heal. Social problems occasioned by a rapidly aging population, moreover, have long since necessitated the recognition and inclusion of non-political and non-governmental organizations in local policymaking. The Community-based Integrated Care System, which was first promulgated by the Japanese government in the early 2000s, relies heavily on home-based nursery care.

26. On the history of Cholera and the modernization of healthcare in Japan, see Suzuki and Suzuki 2008; Yamamoto 1987.

27. According to an article based on research by Inaba Keishin, published in the *Bukkyō taimuzu* (21 January 2021), 192 religious facilities were registered as long-term shelters in 2020, while 469 religious facilities were registered as temporary shelters. The article states that both numbers doubled within six years and are expected to continue to grow.

Since 2011, religious professionals like Shōji have expanded their disaster relief initiatives and networks into healthcare-related projects aimed at contributing to society at large. The most visible and widely reported-on projects prepare priests to embark on their missions as spiritual caregivers in hospitals, hospices, and other public venues (see McLaughlin 2013; Graf 2016). Other grassroots initiatives focus on temples as venues for civic-religious activism in care for the elderly. By 2020, I had long since started documenting a nationwide collaboration between medical doctors, care professionals, and Pure Land Buddhist priests—among them Shōji—who turned their temples into info care cafés for Alzheimer's patients' families, until the spread of COVID-19 put these activities on hold. The pandemic placed new health risks on the elderly in particular, causing challenges for religious and secular caregivers alike that have yet to be researched in full detail.

Up until 2020, when the spread of COVID-19 interrupted volunteer efforts, Shōji had frequently and increasingly engaged in interfaith dialogue. In 2015, I accompanied Shōji and other Buddhists to meet Catholic leaders in Cologne, Germany. In Wipperfürth, we attended an interreligious panel discussion at the Nichiren-Buddhist temple Daiseionji. He also traveled to the US to engage in conversations with religious leaders there. By 2017, Shōji had promoted dialogue between different Buddhist sects as the president of the All Japan Young Buddhist Association, and as an active participant in the World Fellowship of Buddhists. All this effort was rooted in his experience as a disaster volunteer. At the same time, he continued to visit parishioners and survivors on a regular basis, including on islands off the coast of Shiogama that could only be accessed by boat.

Priests without Temples or Parishioners

While temples throughout Japan resumed their core operations as funeral providers, the spread of the novel coronavirus necessitated restrictions of everyday Buddhist practices. Survey data shows a sharp decrease in attendance and a simplification of funeral ceremonies during the pandemic.[28] Unfortunately, no data shows the regional spread of priests that used to make a living by

28. A survey on temples of different sects all over Japan, conducted by Taishō University's Chiiki Kōsō Kenkyūsho (Research Institute for Regional Planning) in May 2020, shows that 458 out of 517 responding priests (88.6 percent) experienced a decrease in participation in funerals as a result of the coronavirus epidemic. The percentage is even higher (92.9 percent), if we exclude twenty-four respondents who had not yet conducted a funeral under COVID-19 at the time. See Ogawa Yūkan's research report online: https://chikouken.org/report/report_cat04/11296/, accessed 9 July 2021. https://chikouken.org/report/report_cat06/11572/, accessed 9 July 2021.

participating in funerals at multiple temples and sites. Some of my informants had family members who used to make a living by helping out in larger funerals at different temples and sites while others knew of such priests in their circles. All of my interlocutors agreed that the ongoing simplification of funerals in recent decades resulted in a decrease in the number of larger funerals much before the spread of COVID-19. It seems that the outbreak of the epidemic accelerated this trend.

The simplification of funerals is area specific. The same seems to hold true for priests that made a living as *yakusō.* By May 2020, the practice of limiting funerals to one-day events became most prominent in the Tokyo metropolitan area.[29] Funeral companies contributed to this trend, arguably due to fears of having to temporarily close in the event of an outbreak at their facilities. But not all urban areas are known to be working grounds for *yakusō*. For urban Pure Land priests in Kyoto, for example, it has long since been the norm to conduct funerals with only one priest, as one priest informed me; *yakusō* were uncommon. In Shizuoka Prefecture, by contrast, *yakusō* seem to be more common among Sōtō Zen funerals. It was also a Sōtō Zen priest who first brought the issue up during an interview regarding the downsizing of funerals. I asked how priests perceived of this change, to which the Sōtō Zen priest from Shizuoka Prefecture replied:

> In May last year [2020], we had a funeral during lockdown where only close family members were allowed to participate. Under normal circumstances, that funeral would have been attended by fifty to one hundred relatives and other guests. Yet it is actually difficult for families to say farewell at larger funerals. It struck me to see that with the funeral being limited to a small scale, the family members were actually able to take their time. Up until now, funerals like these were social events designed to be accessible not only to the families of the deceased but also other social circles and people. I found it important to see how beneficial it may be for families to be able to spend more time with the departed during a funeral in an intimate way, without rushing things.

As this interview reveals, smaller-than-usual funerals were not always viewed negatively. My following question was whether these smaller funerals resulted in less income for temples, to which the priest responded:

29. The aforementioned survey by Taishō University's Chiiki Kōsō Kenkyūsho shows that 79.4 percent of respondents in Tokyo noticed a simplification of funerals to one-day events during COVID-19. The national average was 41.0 percent. See https://chikouken.org/report/report_cat04/11296/, accessed 9 July 2021.

> At my temple, I did not experience any differences in income [as a result of the pandemic]. However, during a funeral with many guests, we are normally assisted by three to four other priests, called *yakusō*. These priests participate in other funerals when they don't have affiliated households to conduct funerals for. Some of these priests made a living by participating in larger funerals organized by various temples, but they are now losing their income and livelihood…. Moreover, if a memorial ceremony of a deceased gets canceled or postponed, that temple's income decreases. For these reasons, I think that there are various effects that the spread of the coronavirus has on Buddhist temples' income.

As the above conversation shows, not all parish temples suffered losses in income as a result of having fewer funeral guests. Rather, postponed and canceled funerals and memorial services place a heavy financial burden on temples.[30] When COVID-19 causes unemployment among parishioners, the temples suffer, too. But none of my interviewees reported critical losses in income as a result of the pandemic so far. In discussing the financial situation of Buddhist temples and monks in this current epidemic, I therefore suggest making a clear distinction between priests who rely on work as *yakusō*, considering that these priests are generally more vulnerable to the implications of social distancing measures than priest with a stable *danka* membership.[31]

All of my interviewees were to some extent aware of the unique problems facing specific subsets of priests: priests without temples; priests at temples with only few parishioners; priests working at sectarian head monasteries who were not born into temple families and did not have a temple to maintain; part-time priests; and what one priest termed "salary man-style priests" (*sararī man-teki na sōryo* サラリーマン的な僧侶). Yet there is no organized response to the problems that these and various other priests face under COVID-19. As the Sōtō priest quoted above explained:

30. The aforementioned survey by Taishō University's Chiiki Kōsō Kenkyūsho shows that 247 priests had received requests to discuss the effects of COVID-19. The great majority of these priests were asked if ancestor veneration rituals could be postponed or canceled. 373 priests expressed fears about the effects of the novel coronavirus on the discontinuation of monthly visits to the homes of parishioners, the cancellation of temple festivals and events, and losses in revenue, etc.

31. In this article, I only focus on temples and priests. Concerning funerals, grief centers (*saijō* 斎場), where most funerals are held in Japan, are also affected by COVID-19 in various ways. On one hand, grief centers were able to benefit from social distancing measures, as they could rent bigger rooms to smaller groups of guests. On the other hand, affiliated or in-house providers of meals and drinks for funeral guests suffered catastrophic losses. Future research should therefore clarify the impact of funeral providers more broadly.

> On the sectarian level, there is nothing that our sect can do as an organization. Of course, there are also regional differences and different understandings of and approaches to this problem. What I do is, I deliver pizza to the *yakusō* priests that are now really struggling. I also think of ways to support them financially.

Conclusion

The coronavirus epidemic affected temples in various, mostly negative, ways. Though, as the case of Banshōji showed, some temples made record profits in prayer ritual sales, most other temples, and particularly individual priests, suffered tremendous losses. Recent innovations and shifts in demands raise interesting questions regarding the place of divine protection and the role prayer rituals and Buddhist objects like talismans and amulets will play within different Buddhist sects. I am particularly interested to know if religious discourse on COVID-19 has any effect on Jōdo Shinshū, a sect that officially rejects such rituals and objects.

The case of Unjōji exhibited the important role Buddhist temples play as local hubs to coordinate volunteer activities in response to disasters—sometimes even as makeshift hospitals during epidemics, and this value can hardly be overstated. The question of what priests are doing to contribute to society, however, rarely (if ever) turns to intra-clerical support and ways that priests rely on help by each other and for each other, financially or otherwise.[32] Compared to outreach that promises to enhance the image of Buddhist sects by contributing to society at large, individual actions of priests in aid for fellow clergy are not likely to make the news. It is therefore important to provide on-the-ground perspectives on religion-related volunteering based on multi-methodological approaches.

Research on religion-related volunteering rarely considers that providing volunteer services is a privilege that not all priests can afford. As a result, the voices of practitioners that don't fit the framework of social engaged Buddhism are not likely to be heard by scholars concerned with civic-religious activism. The case of Shōji illustrated how the pandemic put many volunteer efforts on hold, but the situation of *yakusō* also makes me wonder about the costs and fea-

32. Extant research on civic-religious activism deepened understanding of Buddhism beyond the grave and beyond priests' involvement in temple-based communities in Japan (Nelson 2013; Watts and Okano 2012). More recently, Buddhist social activism was also explored in light of the coronavirus pandemic. In discussing a Pure Land Buddhism-based aid initiative in care for the homeless in Tokyo, Levi McLaughlin (2021: 25) points to a rise in homelessness among migrant workers in Tokyo. Yet little has been introduced about the significance of local temple networks in the care of unemployed priests.

sibility of volunteering more broadly. Whether in the context of the pandemic or beyond, in-person or online, free services and altruistic practices, like food deliveries or web-based meditation sessions, are time-consuming activities that require a specific set of skills and material resources. Who has access to these resources and networks? Who does not? And how representative are the case studies on volunteer initiatives for contemporary temple Buddhism?

The coronavirus epidemic gives us an opportunity to sharpen our understanding of the economic divide in Japanese religions, and of social inequalities more broadly. It also has the potential to establish long-lasting dialogue among religious leaders and scholars, and on the local level, between temples, churches, and shrines. Here I wonder how the pandemic will further change civic-religious volunteering, and also how dialogue between religions, as promoted by Shōji, will further change in times of travel restrictions during COVID-19. Future research should tell if or how the pandemic will be reflected in this dialogue on a theoretical level.

This essay introduced prayer and divine protection as topics to explore the theme of post-pandemic religion in Japan. Different approaches to understanding prayer as a dialogue, ritual, and petition form vital yet understudied aspects of contemporary religiosity that should be further explored through multi-methodological approaches and interdisciplinary collaborations. Future research should also investigate prayer and divine protection through the lens of space. As I have shown, the portability of prayer rituals is limited for various reasons, but the pandemic elicited a creative displacement of other religious practices, like sutra copying, to practitioners' homes. The idea of intersecting prayer rituals for divine aid with sutra copying is not new nor unique to responses to COVID-19, and the distribution of protective amulets for home-use has been a part of prayer rituals for centuries. Associating *kitō* at temples with people's homes is therefore not new. What stands out is rather the amalgam of temple-based prayer rituals with the temple-based distribution of materials for home-use, and the specific ways that utilizing these materials at home actively involves the body and the senses in physically demanding practices that require a certain amount of time, concentration, and dedication. Whether through the ritual consumption of milk at ludic pre-pandemic temple festivals or during physically demanding practices to be performed at home in times of isolation, it is within this context of active engagement that the Buddhist message and the promise of divine aid become tangible in bodily practices, across space and time.

References

Auerback, Micah. (2016). *A Storied Sage Canon and Creation in the Making of a Japanese Buddha*. University of Chicago Press.

Cavaliere, Paola. (2021). "Religious Institutions in Japan Responding to COVID-19-Induced Risk and Uncertainty." *Journal of Religion in Japan* 10: 31–63.

Graf, Tim. (2013). *Buddhism after the Tsunami: The Souls of Zen 3/11 Japan Special*. Documentary film. https://vimeo.com/158309233.

Graf, Tim. (2016). "Research Note: Documenting Religious Responses to 3.11 on Film." *Asian Ethnology* 75/1: 203–219.

Horii, Mitsutoshi. (2006): "Deprofessionalisation of Buddhist Priests in Contemporary Japan. A Socio-Industrial Study of a Religious Profession." *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*. http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2006/Horii.html.

Itō, Seikō. (2013). *Sōzō rajio*. Kawade Shobō Shinsha.

Josephson, Jason (2012). *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. The University of Chicago Press.

Josephson-Storm, Jason. (2017). *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of Human Sciences*. The University of Chicago Press.

Kanebishi, Kiyoshi. (2016). "*Naze, hisaichi de "yūrei" ga takusan deru ka*." *President* (December 2016). Kabushiki gaisha Purejidento: 11–13.

Kisala, Robert and Mark Mullins, eds. (2001). *Religion and Social Crisis in Japan: Understanding Japanese Society through the Aum Affair*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Klautau, Orion. (2012). *Kindai Nihon shisō toshite no Bukkyō shigaku*. Hōzōkan.

Kozic, Josco. (2021). "Japans gelebte Religiosität am Beispiel der Popularisierung apotropäischer Gottheiten und Figuren in Zeiten der Covid-19-Pandemie." *OAG Notizen* 2021/3: 10–30.

Krämer, Hans Martin. (2015). *Shimaji Mokurai and the Reconception of Religion and the Secular in Modern Japan*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Lowe, Bryan. (2017). *Ritualized Writing: Buddhist Practice and Scriptural Cultures in Ancient Japan*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Lowe, Bryan. (2020). "Protection without punishment: Turning to Buddhist gods during COVID-19." *The Immanent Frame*. https://tif.ssrc.org/2020/06/25/protection-without-punishment/.

McLaughlin, Levi. (2011). "In the Wake of the Tsunami. Religious Responses to the Great East Japan Earthquake." *Cross Currents* 61(3): 290–297.

McLaughlin, Levi. (2013). "What Have Religious Groups Done After 3.11? Part 2: From Religious Mobilization to 'Spiritual Care'." *Religion Compass* 7/8: 309–325.

McLaughlin, Levi. (2016). "Hard Lessons Learned: Tracking Changes in Media Presentations of Religion and Religious Aid Mobilization after the 1995 and 2011 Disasters in Japan." *Asian Ethnology* 75(1): 105–173.

McLaughlin, Levi. (2020). "Japanese Religious Responses to COVID-19: A Preliminary Report." *Japan Focus* 18(9): 1–22.

McLaughlin, Levi. (2021). "Prayer as Action: Buddhist Priests During COVID-19 in Japan." *Dharma World* 48: 22–25.

Meyer, Birgit. (2006). "Medium." *Material Religion* 7(1): 58–64.

Meyer, Birgit. (2008). "Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics, and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion." In *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed Hent de Vries, 704–723. Fordham University Press.

Nakano, Tōzen. (2003). "Maegaki." In *Sōtōshū kitō taikei dai-ni kan. Kitō no rekishi to hōwa. Kindai kitōron no kakuritsu ni mukete*, ed. Nakano Tōzen, 1–2. Shikisha:

Nelson, John. (2013). *Experimental Buddhism: Innovation and Activism in Contemporary Japan*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Parry, Richard Lloyd. (2014). "Ghosts of the Tsunami." *London Review of Books* 36: 13–17.

Parry, Richard Lloyd. (2017). *Ghosts of the Tsunami: Death and Life in Japan*. McD.

Prohl, Inken. (2015). "Aesthetics." In *Key Terms in Material Religion*, ed. Brent Plate, 9–15. Bloomsbury.

Rambelli, Fabio, ed. (2019). *Spirits and Animism in Contemporary Japan: The Invisible Empire.* Bloomsbury.

Reader, Ian. (2000). *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyō*. Curzon.

Reader, Ian and George Tanabe. (1998). *Practically Religious. Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Reader, Ian. (1991). *Religion in Contemporary Japan*. Palgrave.

Rowe, Mark. (2000). "Stickers for Nails. The Ongoing Transformation of Roles, Rites, and Symbols in Japanese Funerals." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27(3–4): 353–378.

Rowe, Mark. (2011). *Bonds of the Dead: Temples, Burial, and the Transformation of Contemporary Japanese Buddhism*. Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press.

Suzuki, Akihito and Suzuki Mika. (2008). "Cholera, Consumer and Citizenship: Modernisations of Medicine in Japan." In *The Development of Modern Medicine in Non-Western Countries: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Hormoz Ebrahimnejad, 184–203. Routledge.

Takahashi, Hara. (2016). "The Ghosts of Tsunami Dead and *Kokoro no kea* in Japan's Religious Landscape." *Journal of Religion in Japan* 5: 176–198.

Thomas, Jolyon Baraka. (2015). "Tongue in Cheek, Just in Case." *Sacred Matters*. Academic blog post, 13 June 2015. https://sacredmattersmagazine.com/tongue-in-cheek-just-in-case/.

Udagawa, Keisuke. (2016). *Shinsai-go no fushigi na hanashi*. Asuka Shinsha.

Watts, Jonathan and Masazumi Shojun Okano. (2012). "Reconstructing Priestly Identity and Roles and the Development of Socially Engaged Buddhism in Contemporary Japan." In *Handbook of Religions in Contemporary Japan*, eds. Inken Prohl and John Nelson, 345–372. Brill.

Williams, Duncan. (2005). *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan*. Princeton University Press.

Yamamoto, Shun'ichi. (1987). *Nihon Korera shi*. Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai.