Jessica Starling
Lewis & Clark College

"This Is Truly My Favorite Place to Be"

Buddhist Family Atmospheres in Secular Spaces

Since the triple disaster of 2011, parents in Fukushima Prefecture have been raising their children under a cloud of uncertainty about possible radiation in their environment. This article explores Buddhist responses to the precarity of these families as well as former Hansen's disease patients. Ethnographic research at a weeklong retreat for Fukushima families that Jōdo Shinshū clerics host each summer at a former national leprosarium in Western Japan provides a ground-level view of the complex interaction between Buddhism, the state, and the suffering of its citizens. I argue that Buddhism provides the human and liturgical resources to create an environment of ease, joy, and comfort, giving participants a temporary "home." In addition, the retreat is intentionally cast as a space to criticize and recuperate power from a Japanese government that is not to be trusted.

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Seventy-four-year-old Adachi's face showed only faint signs of paralysis from the effects of the *mycobacterium leprae*.[1] Nonetheless, his diagnosis with Hansen's disease in 1974 had meant that he was forced to leave his home in Osaka and live here at Kōmyōen, a state-run sanatorium on an island off the coast of Okayama, for several decades. As the current head of the neighborhood council (*jichikai*) at Kōmyōen, Adachi now stood at the podium at the front of the banquet room and took the mic to deliver a welcome message to roughly one hundred people who had gathered here for the weeklong "Exciting Retreat Tour" (*Waku waku hoyō tsuā*). The welcome party's guests included a dozen or so other residents of the sanatorium, six mothers and their young children from Fukushima Prefecture, and a number of Jōdo Shinshū Buddhist clerics and their families. His welcome speech for the Fukushima families who would spend a week of leisure on the island concluded: "Welcome [*yōkoso*] to Kōmyōen! We hope you enjoy your retreat here this week. What a fine feast has been prepared. Please enjoy the Yebisu beer that my wife sent along, since she couldn't be here herself. Everyone, welcome home [*okaeri nasai*]! *Kanpai*!" Each guest and host raised their glasses of beer, juice, or cold tea, and responded in unison, "*Kanpai*!"

The two different expressions translating to "welcome" that Adachi used in his brief toast signal the practice of reconstructing home that takes place at the yearly retreat for families from Fukushima. "*Yōkoso*," on the one hand, is a hospitable greeting offered to someone visiting a place that is not their home. It is used by innkeepers to welcome guests, for instance, or tourist bureaus to welcome visitors to their town. "*Okaeri nasai*," on the other hand, is the greeting given by someone who has remained at home to those who are returning. It is the "welcome back" uttered by mothers when their children return from school every afternoon. The shift from one to the other in Adachi's speech evinces a deliberate invitation for the young families from Fukushima to make themselves at home in this most unlikely place: a national sanatorium (*kokuritsu ryōyōsho*) housing around one hundred Hansen's disease patients with an average age of eighty-six, located on a remote island in Okayama Prefecture (Shinshū Ōtaniha Kaihō Suishin Honbu 2018, 191).

After the toast, I turned to the Fukushima parent next to me, a stout and outgoing woman named Maki, and asked how she heard about this retreat. She explained that her family doctor had advised her to take her children out of Fukushima for at least one month out of the year because of radiation concerns, so she had searched the internet for "retreats" (*hoyō*). "There are lots of them. We go to several different

Figure 1. Children peering inside the costume of Komyo-tan, Kōmyōen's mascot, at the welcome party. Photograph by Jessica Starling (2019).

ones during the school break. But the atmosphere at each is different. This one is the warmest." She told me that when she first attended four years ago, her son had been shy and resistant. Reluctant to go off and play with the other kids, he had preferred to cling to her side. "But now he's gotten more comfortable," she said, nodding at her son, who, now nine years old, was happily sitting at another table with a boy his age who he had met last year (see children playing at the welcome dinner in figure 1).

How are we to make sense of the coming together of these two seemingly unrelated groups of people, and their restructured relationship to each other and to the space of the island sanatorium into one that resembles home-like familiarity—all at the invitation of Buddhist "hosts" whose own temples are hours away? I argue that it is a form of low-frequency Buddhism, an understated and elusive incarnation of a religion whose institutional dominance and public presence in Japan has been waning for most of the modern period. Buddhist doctrine, personnel, and institutional histories and networks are the very reason for the existence of this retreat, and yet the presence of the religion can be nearly imperceptible to those participants who are not tuned in to the "Buddhist frequency."

This article draws on participant observation and interviews to present a detailed snapshot of what Buddhist mobilization in response to suffering looks like in a culture known for being inhospitable to public demonstrations of religious faith. Buddhist clerics act here in a mode that defies categorization as spiritual, clinical, or even religious (at least as it is conventionally conceived). Buddhist actors work to fill in the gaps of family, society, and government by making intergenerational connections and creating space for articulating critical views of government policy. They do this work in secular spaces—in community halls, dormitories, and hospital rooms—as well as, briefly, in the small Buddhist chapel and interdenominational ossuary on the island. And for the most part, they do it not through formal liturgy or preaching, but through joviality and hospitality. Explicit discussions of doctrine are absent, in favor

of creating an easygoing atmosphere for participants, to reclaim a space for "humane living" (*ningen rashiku ikiru*).

Taking up recent calls to attend to the aesthetics and emotions of Buddhist belonging (Baffelli et al., 2021), this study complements previous scholars' focus on media, politics, and the clinical aspects of religious mobilization in post-3/11 Japan by bringing emotions and relationships into view. Detailed ethnographic vignettes allow a focus on feeling and atmosphere as instruments of place- and family-making, highlighting "the highly personal relations that constitute the very threads with which the fabrics of communities are woven" (Baffelli and Schröer 2021, 453)—even communities that are as spatially and temporally circumscribed as the one formed at this retreat. While some theories of emotions emphasize their systemization into "regimes" or rulebooks that operate on a hegemonic level (Reddy 2001), for the participants in the retreat, feelings of belonging—or of not belonging—defy such regimentation. Instead, the shared experience of "feeling differently" (Gammerl, Hutta, and Scheer 2017) creates a space in which the participants from Fukushima can restructure their relationships to their hometowns and government, and gain knowledge that empowers them to feel more confident in their critical-outsider position even after returning home to Fukushima. By participating in this familial yet ephemeral community, participants are "moved by feelings into a different relationship to the norms" of their family, neighborhood, and national government (Ahmed 2014, 201).

Throughout the retreat, Buddhist clerics move through and redefine secular spaces, their activities rooted in a sectarian cosmology and Buddhist moral vocabulary. Rather than operating as a normative emotional program or regime, Buddhism plays here on a very low frequency, primarily discernable to those trained in the tradition.[2] Buddhism is the animating factor for a network of actors whose religious backgrounds enable them to produce a familial atmosphere even in the most institutional of spaces. In what follows, I overview the historical relationship between Jōdo Shinshū Buddhists and Hansen's disease sanatoriums, highlighting the motivations of the organizers for pairing these two groups, who are connected by having been alienated from their natal hometowns as a result of political failures. I then explore the affective practices of placemaking in the examples of a roundtable discussion, a welcome party, and a Buddhist ritual. Throughout my analysis of the weeklong retreat, a sense of both the political and the familial nature of this low-frequency Buddhism clearly emerges.

Buddhism, Hansen's disease, and radiation

The founding organizers of the Exciting Retreat Tour, which premiered less than six months after the nuclear disaster of 2011, are two Jōdo Shinshū clerics (*sōryo*): Mori, a woman in her fifties who is co-priest with her husband of a tiny temple in Kyoto Prefecture, and Nishi, a man in his forties who is the resident priest of a temple in Okayama Prefecture.[3] Nishi and Mori have long-running ties to the sanatorium at Nagashima Kōmyōen and the one on the adjacent island of Aiseien, because of their

sect's historical involvement in ministering to Hansen's disease patients quarantined there since before World War II.

Those diagnosed with Hansen's disease have been one of the most stigmatized populations in modern Japanese history, a stigma that has been supported by a variety of biological, social, and religious factors. As Susan Burns has written, in the early twentieth century, attitudes about leprosy were characterized by a combination of "fear of infection, hereditary transmission, and the still potent idea of karmic retribution" (2019, 162). As a result, medical victims became social victims: they were isolated in remote sanatoriums, some of which were built by the government. The government's official "leprosy prevention policy," which mandated the relocation and quarantine of those diagnosed, has been blamed in a series of lawsuits for the trauma patients experienced, but families and neighbors also participated in the treatment of patients as objects of avoidance and shame (Hosoda 2010; Hirokawa 2011). As they endured relocation, many patients were also compelled to change their names to alleviate possible discrimination against their natal families, and sterilization was a common practice (Fujino 2001). As a result, residents became mostly cut off from their hometowns and natal households.

Susan Burns has argued that the sanatoriums established by the government as "Japan's first effort at building social welfare institutions on a national scale" were "not 'total institutions,'" in the sense described by Erving Goffman, but were in fact "complex communities that defy easy characterization as prison, hospital, village, colony, or sanctuary" (2019, 132–33). After World War II, the drug Promin, which was effective at killing the bacteria and therefore obviated the need for isolation of patients, became widely available. Patients who were cured were technically allowed to leave the sanitaria, and some were able to receive job training and be resettled, especially if they bore no visible marks of the disease. But reintegration into a society that so stigmatized their disease was difficult if not impossible for most. By the late 1960s, most of those who were able to return to society and live among other healthy citizens had done so. The population of the nation's sanatoriums thereafter became stabilized with mostly life-long residents. A 2001 poll conducted by the National Association of Residents in Hansen's Disease Sanatoriums found that less than 2% of the 4,388 people living in sanatoriums were interested in returning to society (Dessi 2007, 176).

For most of the twentieth century, Buddhist institutions were supportive of the state's policy toward Hansen's disease patients, just as they supported other imperial projects.[4] Emblematic of the Jōdo Shinshū's involvement was the formation of a group within the Ōtani denomination called Kōmyōkai, named after the Buddhist heroine Empress Kōmyō (701–760) who was said to have practiced charity to lepers. The abbess of Higashi Honganji, Ōtani Satoko (1906–1989), was made the general secretary of the association, whose position was to fully support the quarantining of patients away from the rest of the society for "the benefit of the nation" (Hishiki 1996, 30). Today, progressive Jōdo Shinshū Buddhists look back with shame at the "consolation sermons" (*imon fukyō*) preached by their institutional predecessors to residents of the sanatorium.[5] The Ōtani institution even issued an official apology in 1996 for its role in past discrimination (Dessi 2007, 178). The shift in the Shin Buddhist

doctrinal stance toward leprosy is clear from the abundance of publications over the past several decades with titles such as *Hansen's Disease and Shinshū: From Isolation to Liberation* (Shinshū Ōtaniha 1996), and *Now, Walking Together Side by Side: Through Our Encounters with Hansen's Disease Survivors* (Shinshū Ōtaniha Hansenbyō Mondai ni kansuru Kondankai 2003).

This historical entanglement with Hansen's disease has led to Jōdo Shinshū clerics' continued presence at the various national sanitaria throughout Japan, where around one-third of residents belong to a Jōdo Shinshū–related group (Dessi 2007, 174, citing a 2004 census). A small but active network of volunteers have been visiting residents of various sanatoriums, including Kōmyōen, since the 1990s. Volunteers are temple priests, wives, or both; most of their relationships to residents of the sanitaria go back decades. Higashi Honganji's district office in Okayama City supports these activities, with officials often shuttling volunteers from the train station in Okayama to Kōmyōen and Aiseien, both island sanatoriums about forty-five minutes away.

The long-running relationship between the Ōtani institution and the residents, staff, and administrators at the public sanatorium laid the groundwork for stalwart volunteers like Mori and Nishi to persuade Kōmyōen's administration to agree to host the retreat for Fukushima families. Given the natural beauty and spaciousness of the island sanatorium—related to its original function as a rehabilitation facility for Hansen's disease patients—they reasoned that an intergenerational week of hospitality and fun here would be healing both for the Kōmyōen residents and the Fukushima families. They swiftly mobilized their fellow Jōdo Shinshū clerics to act as volunteer staff at the retreat, which was first held in August of 2011.

Mori, Nishi, and their Jōdo Shinshū Ōtani-ha network were among many groups—some religious and others secular, some ad hoc and others more established—that moved to organize retreats to elicit the refreshment (*rifuresshu*), recovery (*kaifuku*), and smiles (*egao*) of young children who could not play freely outdoors in Fukushima (Nishimura 2014). The families who attend the Exciting Retreat Tour mainly hail from Fukushima City, which is about 40 miles from the Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Although they have not been completely displaced like those who lived inside the exclusion zone immediately proximate to the power plant, they experience stress and alienation from the land around them as a result of contamination (*osen*) from the 2011 nuclear disaster. This is the major reason for their attendance at out-of-prefecture retreats during their children's summer vacation: to enjoy a respite from the anxiety of unknown risk in their surroundings, and to enjoy clean air and fresh local vegetables.

While there are many retreats for Fukushima families, the Exciting Retreat Tour is unique in its location, and the combination of causes and populations that it intentionally brings together. Nishi, the temple priest from Okayama prefecture who co-founded the event, connects the Fukushima families and those diagnosed with Hansen's disease by emphasizing the sanctity of life (*inochi*) and its violation in both cases. In Nishi's mind, the suffering of both groups is directly linked to the Japanese state's failures:

> The people from Fukushima are connected to the sanatorium residents by sharing the same hardship of having had the government's policies rob them of being able

> to live a humane life [*ningen rashiku ikiru*], so that's why we host the retreat at the sanatorium. What it means to have a "humane life," what it means to have one's life [*inochi*] protected—I want the retreat to be a time and space for all of the people who participate to come together to [discuss] what this means.

Though "precarity" is somewhat amorphous and perhaps overused as an analytical concept, it has resonance here. Nishi identifies a precariousness in the sense given by Judith Butler as living a "damaged life" (Butler 2016, 201; see also Butler 2020), one with its roots in failed government policy. What's more, both groups' relationships to their hometowns have been cut off or contaminated, a mark of "the ontological disembedding of people from distinctively place-based associations" that Melinda Hinkson identifies as a feature of precarity (Hinkson 2017, 58). The rectification of this "disembedding" of the participants' relationship to place is part of the aim of the retreat. Rather than re-embedding participants in their native land, however, a family-like atmosphere is created at the island sanatorium—a place where no one is from. As I discuss below, many aspects of the emotionally charged notion of a *furusato*—a term that literally means hometown or "native place," but which also evokes "a warm, fuzzy, familial and ultimately maternal aura" (Robertson 1997, 103)—are deployed throughout the retreat to accomplish this.

The political dimension of Nishi's diagnosis of the cause of both groups' suffering is striking: he lays the blame squarely at the government's feet. A number of successful lawsuits have established the Japanese government's culpability in enacting discriminatory policies toward Hansen's disease patients and permitting human rights abuses to take place in sanitaria for many years (Hosoda 2010). The state is also seen as culpable for the Fukushima families' suffering in a number of ways, including insufficient regulation of nuclear energy and obfuscation of radiation levels in the surrounding areas after the nuclear disaster. An investigation commissioned by Japan's National Diet found that the nuclear devastation in Fukushima was the result of "a multitude of errors and willful negligence" on the part of the government (National Diet of Japan 2012, 9).

Even after the disaster, the state actively enjoined the population to move on from lingering fears about radiation exposure. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries enacted an emotional program, via a national advertising campaign, to calm growing concerns about food contamination and to lessen the impact of what they called "harmful rumors" (*fūhyōhigai*), as consumer avoidance was reducing sales of food products from the affected area. The voice-over of the advertisements said, "Today, all of Japan is closely connected through our good food and our pleasure in eating together, *Itadakimasu*!" (Kimura 2016, 7). Many citizens' groups reacted to the government's radiation policy with skepticism and anger (Oudheusden 2020; Ogawa 2023). Nicolas Sternsdorff-Cisterna has documented the resulting rise of "scientific citizenship," through which individual citizens acquired scientific literacy in order to "challenge the government narratives of safety after the disaster" (2019, 3). Most mothers who sign up to attend this and other retreats are seeking to become such citizen scientists, gaining empowerment through knowledge of the actual, rather than government-reported, radiation levels in the environment and the accompanying risk to their children. Thus food, hometown, scientific knowledge, and politics are

intertwined in the experience of Fukushima residents after 2011, a connection that is seen clearly in the ethnographic descriptions of the retreat that follow.

In characterizing this multifaceted suffering and the need to respond to it, the Buddhist organizers usually employ an ecumenical and humanistic rhetoric of respecting human life. This is in accord with accounts of secularization that describe "the appearance of a type of public religion focused on suffering and compassion" (Berman 2018, 229, citing Isomae 2014) rather than doctrinal specificity. Religions acting in the public sphere tend to mostly adopt and reproduce the values and ethical vocabularies of the secular mainstream. Michael Berman has even argued, with Junichi Isomae, that the work of Buddhist clerics as spiritual chaplains in disaster areas is an example of "religion against religions." By this they mean that religionists' public spiritual work "weakens their particular religion" by pulling them away from their duties as resident priests of their home temples (2018, 238). This line of argument reflects a certain understanding of religion, and specifically Buddhism, as properly existing in its most common institutional form.

However, we should not mistake the act of code-switching, or as Isaac Gagne calls it, "reflexive secularization" (2017), for the abandonment of religious means and motivations entirely. If we dig more deeply into the thought process of the Buddhist organizers and the atmosphere that they work to produce at the retreat, we can discern a more diffuse form of Buddhism, one that is animated by enduring institutional networks, sectarian doctrine, and religious professionals who are equipped precisely by their identities as Buddhist clerics to do this kind of public work.[6] Further, as I demonstrate in the next section, rather than mere conformity to and reproduction of dominant political and cultural frameworks, Buddhist actors actually create a space for challenging them.

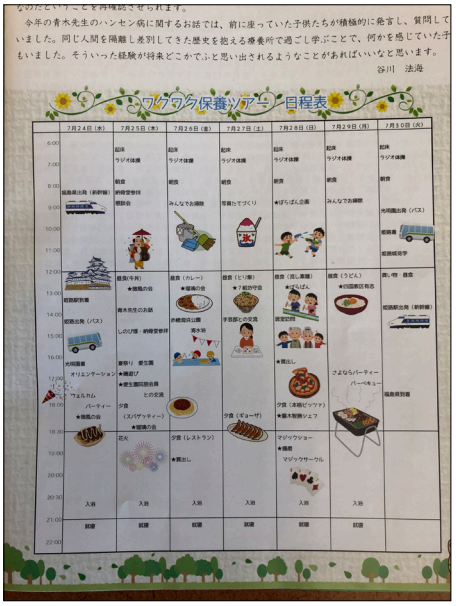

Figure 2. The schedule for the 2019 Exciting Retreat Tour, primarily featuring recreational activities and opportunities to gather and eat. Photograph by Jessica Starling (2019).

Feeling differently: Gender, family, and politics at the retreat

Rather than making Buddhism an explicit aspect of the retreat, the organizers focus on creating a time and place for the mothers and their children from Fukushima, none of whom identify as Buddhist, to be at ease (figure 2). From the organizers' perspective, the attainment of true relief from their damaged lives in Fukushima requires coming to terms with the causes of their suffering. The retreat therefore included a carefully curated opportunity for the mothers to recount the ways in which they felt uneasy and out of sync with others in their community in Fukushima, including their husbands, because of their continued fear of the possibility of radiation exposure.

The hosts made no move to introduce a Buddhist framing, either to the suffering or its resolution, and were instead intent on affirming the women's experiences and connecting their situations to that of the Hansen's disease patients, as people whose lives have been damaged by misinformation and government failures. Through the externalization and affirmation of these feelings against a backdrop of familial ease, women connected their narratives of feeling differently than the government expected them to feel about radiation risk in Fukushima with those of their peers, and sought empowerment through community and knowledge about radiation and risk that they could bring back home with them.

This roundtable testimonial session took place on the first morning of the retreat. After an outdoor stretching (*taisō*) session and breakfast at the dormitory where the families were staying, the children put on water gear and everyone walked together to the community hall. Several priests wearing athletic clothes and towels around their necks set up tent canopies out front to protect from the blazing sun, and began blowing up a giant pool and filling it with water. While the younger male volunteers played outside with the children, the mothers entered the air-conditioned community hall, where they sat around a large circle of tables and were served tea and snacks by some female volunteers. The two lead organizers of the retreat, Nishi and Mori, introduced the session and then passed a mic around for the mothers to tell their individual stories of hardship. Two other Buddhist volunteers sat outside the circle and took notes about the mothers' stories, as did I.

Maki, who I had sat next to at the welcome party, went first:

> I guess the two main issues with raising kids in Fukushima are the questions about the safety of local vegetables, and the potential dangers of letting our kids play outside. These two problems present a challenge for mothers: how can we raise our kids in a healthy way? . . . I often end up just letting my children play video games all day. I don't usually talk about this, but when I look at my younger daughter and I look at my son, I think, the younger one has more body strength than the older one. That's because of how they were raised, and how he was made to stay inside all the time and just played video games. Basically, we have to make a lot of judgment calls as we raise our children, which is really stressful.

She reported facing a moral dilemma, echoed by others, about whether to allow her children to eat locally grown vegetables. Maki teared up several times during her talk, before finishing and passing the mic on to the next woman.

Chie, a diminutive and stylish young mother, gave a similar account of uncertainty and relentless caution about allowing her children to walk to school, eat the prepared school lunch offered there, or even play in the park next to their home where there sat numerous large garbage bags of collected soil, presumably contaminated with radiation. Unlike Maki, however, Chie also had a story of empowerment to share. She had started a mother's circle to exchange information and support with other mothers, who now numbered twenty. Chie reported that "some members are just so scared they are paralyzed. They're just scared, period. There's nothing that can be done about it." However, leading this group of women, bonded by their experience of fear and unease, had given Chie a sense of purpose amidst such uncertainty: "My efforts in this circle are really my salvation now." Like Maki, Chie became tearful during her time holding the mic.

The other mothers reiterated the themes that these two raised of distrusting the government's information about radiation risks in the land around their homes, and in the foods grown nearby. They expressed the heavy burden of a constant, low-grade anxiety that attends the constant weighing of safety and risk as they rear their children. Many have made the painful choice to deprive their children of some of the most quintessential Japanese childhood experiences, such as playing at neighborhood playgrounds, swimming in the school pool, eating school lunch, and enjoying vegetables from nearby farms.

When each of the mothers had finished talking, the mic returned to Nishi, the male organizer of the retreat. He asked whether the children's fathers were supportive of their concerns, and of their choice to bring their children to these retreats. Maki answered:

> My husband thinks completely differently about the issue of radiation than I do. He thinks, if the government says it's fine, it's fine. He doesn't see the need for me to take the kids away from Fukushima, or get them tested. But I have to get his permission to come to these things, right? So, usually I say, "We need to get [our son] away from the video games" as a reason to come, and he can't help but agree with that. I actually fight with my husband all the time, we don't get along at all. I have thought many times about getting a divorce, but in the end, I don't want my children to grow up without a dad, so I have stayed with him.

The other women similarly expressed the wish that their own husbands would show more concern about the risks of radiation, a trend that's in keeping with Kimura's findings about the gendered politics of food and its sphere of concern in Japan (Kimura 2016).

Nishi and his younger brother, who sat next to him, each took the mic to respond to the women's stories. The two men were in their forties and thirties, respectively, and both were husbands, fathers, and resident priests at Jōdo Shinshū temples in Okayama Prefecture. The older brother expressed sympathy for the women's burden of worrying for their children and having to constantly second-guess information they get from the government about environmental safety. He pointed out the added burden of carrying that worry alone without friends or spouses who they could share it with. The younger brother offered an explanation of where the fathers might be coming from: perhaps women just have a more intuitive concern for their kids, and

fathers are more distant from those emotions. He quickly followed that insight with the declaration that, "Of course, these differences are not inevitable," suggesting that he understood such differences to be socially conditioned to some extent, rather than innate.[7]

As the roundtable came to a close, mics were powered down, but informal conversations continued as everyone helped to rearrange the room in preparation for the children to rejoin and the volunteers to serve lunch (figure 3). While carrying chairs to the front of the room, Maki turned to Mori and commented how much she appreciated the opportunity to speak about these things with others who understood. It just wasn't comfortable to bring them up in public back in Fukushima, where most people now preferred to act as if things were back to normal.

Figure 3. Temple wife volunteers from Kyoto serving curry to participants. Photograph by Jessica Starling (2019).

The public yet intimate disclosures by the participants, as well as tears and even catharsis, are a perennial feature of the retreat. The women's emotional vulnerability is met with care and sympathy by the Buddhist volunteers, in the manner of surrogate family members. The compassionate, attentive masculinity modeled by the male priests contrasted starkly with the distanced lack of concern displayed by the women's own husbands. Meanwhile, the younger, unmarried priests outside served as avuncular babysitters for the women's children, splashing in the wading pools and playing catch, getting wet and sunburnt so that the mothers could talk and drink tea in peace inside. Before and after meals, some male volunteers took an active role in cooking and cleaning up, which is still extremely rare in married Japanese households (although on balance, the female volunteers performed a greater proportion of the kitchen work). The roundtable—and the entire retreat—thus became a space for critiquing the gendered division of labor that they carry out within their own families, and even for articulating and performing alternatives to those gender norms.

In addition to gender relations, alternative sources of knowledge and scientific authority were also discussed. Chie, the petite woman who had created a food safety circle for other mothers, was especially eager to share her scientific research and discoveries surrounding "detox" methods with the other mothers and priests.

When Chie described her self-made mastery of detoxification in defiance of official government information, Buddhist volunteers quickly make the connection to Hansen's disease. Ogawa, a female priest in her sixties from Osaka, advised Chie to get a nutritionist's license, so that people would believe her when she taught them about this method. She warned, "If you don't have credentials, they'll just go on trusting whatever their doctor told them. That's what happened in the case of Hansen's disease. Doctors gave inaccurate information about what caused it and how it spread, but people believed it, just because they were doctors!"

This exchange reflects how the Buddhist volunteers position themselves as critics of the unquestioned hegemony of the government and the medical establishment. They encourage the participants to claim that authority for themselves through scientific education and credentialing. It also underscores the throughline between the two groups, from the Buddhists' perspective: they both have suffered harm due to government failure. This subtext of the retreat became explicit twice in the schedule: on day two, the children listened to a lecture by the chief administrator of the sanatorium about the history of Hansen's disease in Japan; and on day five, the families walked around to visit individual residents' rooms to hear more about their stories.

The pairing of these two groups in the retreat achieves more than critical political awareness, however: it also produces affective, intergenerational connections. With an average age of eighty-six among sanatorium residents, the majority of whom are childless, the presence of youth is rare. Indeed, family visitors of any kind are uncommon; a 1996 a survey conducted by the Kyushu Federation of Bar Associations found that 23.8 percent of residents had absolutely no relationship with their birth families. Many of those who do have some relationship are limited to a few phone calls per year (Araragi 2017, 115). Sociologist Araragi Yukiko, who conducted oral histories of Hansen's disease patients at sanatoriums in Kyushu, argues that entering into the social world of residents forces us to think differently about the very concept of family (2017, 114–15). The Buddhist volunteers, whose own family lives have always been entangled with a religious institution and its stakeholders, are well positioned to do just that. The presence of children at the sanatorium, when the first retreat was held in 2011, had a profound emotional impact on the elderly residents. A member of the Kyoto-based group of Jōdo Shinshū volunteers called Rūri no Kai recounted to me the first year the event took place. Tears welled in the volunteer's eyes as she described the surprise with which the elderly residents had responded to being called "*jīchan*" or "*bāchan*" ("grandpa" or "grandma," affectionate terms for the elderly) for the first time in their lives. "They didn't even know that the children were talking to them," she explained.

These familial and political aspects of the retreat are in fact inseparable. The construction of a home away from home is only made necessary because the citizens' relationship to the land of their upbringing has been contaminated or completely severed by political and societal failures. The Buddhist organizers are aware that the context for participants' alienation is fundamentally structural. By pointing out a longer-running trend of discriminatory and untrustworthy behavior by the state and urging participants to develop their own expertise in risk assessment, they aim

to foster individual empowerment very much in line with neoliberal realities. By inhabiting the secular, public space of the sanatorium's dormitories and community halls in this way, Buddhist volunteers remake those places into spaces for articulating and offloading the burden that mothers bear as a result of the Fukushima disaster, and equipping them with alternative relational and scientific practices that they can bring back with them to Fukushima. In the next section I consider how food, drawing on regional identity, and an atmosphere of familial fun are instruments for helping to "rehumanize" the lives of participants at the retreat.

A time and space to feel human

At the strained edges of marriages, among women who are raising children in a state of fear of radiation and distrust of the government, the felt absence of comfort and normalcy creates an emotional vacuum—a vacuum in which a new kind of atmosphere can be created. During this week, suspended in the summer vacation period during the month of August when children are freed from the regular routine of school attendance, Buddhist volunteers transform the clinical spaces of the sanatorium into a place that has the "warm, fuzzy, familial" aura of a *furusato* (Robertson 1997, 103). This work of creating a family atmosphere in some ways resembles the efforts of the Shinto-derived Japanese NGO studied by Chika Watanabe, whose mission includes "making *furusato*" (*furusato-zukuri*) in its development work in Myanmar, as part of its environmentalist vision of reconstituting human relationships with the natural world (2019, 87–118). Similar affective associations, including a sense of loss and nostalgia, are at play here. While the social world of the retreat is certainly a product of the organizers' Buddhist "moral imagination" (as I discuss in the final section), there is nothing explicitly or formally Buddhist about the sense of belonging that is created.

The social ritual that kicked off this process was the welcome banquet (*kangeikai*). On the first night of the retreat, I sat at one of a dozen or so tables on which had been arranged a staggering number of homemade dishes, including roast beef and hand-smoked cheeses, spaghetti, wieners and various fried foods, a variety of pickled vegetables (*tsukemono*), pizza, and *takoyaki*. The feast must have taken all day for a team of at least ten cooks, all Jōdo Shinshū temple wives or female priests from the Kansai region of Japan, to prepare. There was also a wrapped store-bought box of sushi at each of our seats, and a large supply of beer, sake, wine, and *shōchū* at the back of the room waiting to be poured.

After his welcoming toast, quoted at the top of this article, Adachi, the town council president, returned to his seat at the end of our table and immediately dug into the *takoyaki*. "I love *takoyaki* because I'm an Osakan," he explained to me between bites. When he finished one plateful, we passed him down another. Ogawa, a temple wife also from Osaka who was flitting around the room delivering food, filling drinks, and introducing people to each other, approached Adachi, put her hand affectionately on his shoulder and lowered herself so that their heads were level with one another. "Do you like the takoyaki? I made it!" Adachi asked if there was any *shōchū*, and Ogawa ran back to the kitchen to fetch it. She came back and poured *shōchū* mixed with water for

Figure 4. Menu at the sanatorium highlighting local food from residents' respective hometowns featured in the cafeteria menu. Photograph by Jessica Starling (2019).

both him and the other sanatorium resident at the table, a man in a wheelchair with dyed black hair and thick opaque glasses covering his failing eyes. When the pickled vegetables (*tsukemono*) were passed around the table later, the man in the wheelchair informed us that he was an expert on pickles, because he was from Kyoto.

Although resonant in many ways with Paulina Kolata and Gwendolyn Gillson's observation about the power of food currency and food consumption to inculcate Buddhist belonging in Japan (Kolata and Gillson 2021), the belonging effected here is not particularly Buddhist. Rather than the traditional Buddhist vegetarian fare (*shōjin ryōri*) that would be served after a Jōdo Shinshū ritual, the dishes are generalized Japanese party fare, with regional associations. This is a key component of the "rehumanizing" that the Buddhist organizers aimed to effect. Even though most of the residents had not actually lived in their hometowns for many decades, they continued to identify with those places in ways as minute as food preferences and expertise in regional dishes. In the hallway outside of this banquet hall (which is on most days a cafeteria for residents), a poster on the bulletin board indicated that the nutritionists at the sanatorium reinforced the regional identification of residents with the dishes that their hometowns were known for (figure 4).

Identifying with a particular regional food, and bonding over that identification with others from that region, serves as a way of reasserting a patient's claim to their natal home and identity. For Fukushima families as well, the loss of the ability to comfortably consume local food due to contamination concerns was a key aspect of their precarity. For this reason, the Buddhist organizers always schedule a stop at a local produce stand on the last day of the retreat so that the mothers can stock up on uncontaminated, fresh vegetables to take home with them.

Over the course of two hours at the welcome party, we packed as much food and drink into ourselves as we could while listening to several more speeches from the organizers, other residents, and the chief administrator of the sanatorium. Eventually, the mic was passed around for everyone else to give their self-introductions, including the children, who nervously obliged. When it was Maki's turn, she described how

much she and her children enjoyed returning here every year. Her throat tightened with emotion as she concluded, "This is truly my favorite place to be." At a time when Japanese people increasingly complain of having no "*ibasho*" or place where they can be themselves—and considering how very arbitrary this physical place is with regards to Maki's biography—this is a remarkable statement.

Some insights from recent scholarship on the aesthetics of religious belonging can help us tune in to the Buddhist elements of placemaking here. We might count this retreat among the "alternative Buddhist moral space-making processes" identified by Yasmin Cho in contemporary suburban China. Cho's study focuses on the eclectic activities of lay devotees of a Tibetan lama, centered at a Buddhist-themed organic goods store where vegetarian dinners and public events on social issues are hosted. The objects, incense, music, and conversation that take place in the store "spatially charged the shop" in such a way that a visitor felt "something Buddhist hanging in the air" (2023, 8). In Cho's study, the "sense" of Buddhism conveyed to clients at a suburban Buddhist-themed organic products shop is as a "brand of wholesome products to consume, a well-being lifestyle to follow, and a superior morality to uphold" (ibid., 4). Indeed, most scholarship on Buddhist atmospheres in capitalist contexts has emphasized the charisma or brand value wielded by Buddhist semantics, objects, rituals, or individuals (for instance, Prohl 2020; Williams-Oerberg 2021; Brown 2022).

However, the presence and value of Buddhism at the Exciting Retreat Tour are somewhat different than this. Rather than an explicitly Buddhist atmosphere, what is created is a *familial* atmosphere, made by Buddhists for Buddhist reasons. The various participants, including Hansen's disease patients, Fukushima families, and Jōdo Shinshū priests, do not all share a Buddhist cosmology, vocabulary, or identity. Instead, they share a sense of what a *furusato* should be like, and what it should feel like. On a ritual level, rather than explicitly Buddhist forms, the organizers primarily rely on more universal social rituals such as the welcome party, along with local food practices and the labor of hospitality, to generate the feeling of a home away from home. As I explore in the next section, the Buddhist ritual and doctrinal notes of the emotional program of the retreat are deliberately muted for the sake of the participants, who mostly do not identify as Buddhist.

"The very image of the Pure Land": Low-frequency Buddhism at the retreat

When I asked Mori whether she makes an effort to insert the teachings into the retreat, she replied:

> This isn't an activity we do in order to attract Jōdo Shinshū adherents, so we don't purposefully create situations to deliver Buddhist teachings. However, the [retreat] staff are all somehow in contact with the teachings of Buddhism and the Jōdo Shinshū, so they are participating in their own ways of living [Buddhism]. . . . The Shinshū has a teaching that the existence of everyone, everywhere, and at all times is equally valuable.

Figure 5. Mori hands out prayer beads for use in the Buddhist service. Photograph by Jessica Starling (2019).

Mori is careful to distinguish between propagation activities intended to spread the Buddhist teachings and this retreat, which has a more secular aim. However, she maintains that the motivation and connections—institutional, interpersonal, and karmic—that draw the staff to participate are inevitably Buddhist.

Mori asserts a trimmed-down version of Shin Buddhist ethics to underpin the retreat: "the existence of everyone, everywhere, and at all times is equally valuable." Nishi explained the minimal, unobtrusive presence of Buddhism: "As for Buddhist-related materials, we do put a leaflet in their take-home bags that explains the teachings in simple terms." He also pointed out that they always made sure to include memorial services at both Kōmyōen and Aiseien (a sanatorium on an adjoining island) at some point during the week. The memorial service I attended at the Jōdo Shinshū temple on Kōmyōen, it turned out, was extraordinarily brief, and whatever explicit lessons it communicated were focused more on history and the loneliness of those Hansen's disease patients who were shipped off to and then passed away on the island, than on Buddhist teachings. This was in line with the focus of the organizers on highlighting the existence of suffering in the form of isolation and alienation from one's home, as part of a program of returning participants to a more "humane life."

After lunch on the second day, everyone walked to the "temple street" (*teramachi*) on the island, where small chapels belonging to the Nichiren, Jōdo Shinshū, Shingon, Tenrikyō, and Kongōkyō traditions were clustered around a short cul-de-sac, with the island's communal ossuary across the street. Most of the chapels are no longer in use; only the Jōdo Shinshū temple has a relatively active lay group of residents and a group of clerics who visit the temple monthly.

Before we entered the temple, Mori gave each Fukushima child a prayer bracelet made of plastic beads, which they would later take home with them (figure 5). We removed our shoes and stepped up into a narrow hallway before entering the modest main hall, with tatami floors and about a dozen low chairs set up for the Fukushima children. Some of their mothers sat with them, others knelt in the back. The priests

Figure 6. Nishi explains the connection between Jōdo Shinshū priests and the sanatorium. Photograph by Jessica Starling (2019).

Figure 7. Two children listen to the priest's chanting. Photograph by Jessica Starling (2019).

and their families knelt on the floor. The Fukushima children looked at each other as they tried to figure out how to correctly hold their beads.

Nishi, a towel wrapped around his neck to absorb summer sweat, face tanned from a summer full of outdoor activities, gave some opening remarks in a voice directed at the elementary school children in front of him: "This is a Jōdo Shinshū temple. It's a very important place, because it's the reason all of us staff members first came to this island. Now Mr. Akamatsu is going to perform a service. Please chant along if you want" (figure 6). Nishi framed the significance of the temple in terms of its having provided the connection—historical, and implicitly karmic—between the Shinshū priests and the sanatorium. No more substantial content about Buddhism, or the Jōdo Shinshū specifically, was offered.

Akamatsu, tall and slim with a cleanly shaven head and a thin goatee, wearing sheer black summer robes and a stole over his athletic wear, nodded and took his

place at the front of the hall, facing the altar to Amida. As soon as he sounded the bell and settled into his initial *nembutsu*,[8] the two boys in front looked nervously at each other, glancing behind them to see what everyone else was doing. They were obviously unfamiliar with Buddhist ceremonies. The children of the Buddhist volunteers, though, had their beads in place and were sitting at attention while Akamatsu, whose children sat in the back, faced the Buddhist image in the inner altar and began chanting a Jōdo Shinshū scripture. The Buddhist volunteers, both children and parents, chanted along, as if they did this every day. Indeed, they may have: it is common for temple families to hold a short service in the main hall each morning, likely before breakfast. One boy from Fukushima, a confident and clever nine-year-old, kept turning around to look at me and the staff members, to see what we were doing, and then looking at his friend with a nervous smile (figure 7). Close to the end of the brief liturgy, the boy joined in. He remembered this part. The adults cooed with admiration, and his mom, who was sitting next to me, smiled. I ask her later how he knew the words, and she said that they go to so many of these retreats, year after year, two of which are hosted by Buddhist organizations, that he had memorized how to chant some of the *Shōshinge* (Hymn of Right Faith).[9] When I asked if they ever went to their Buddhist temple back home, she said that coming to this retreat a few years ago was actually her son's first encounter with Buddhism.

Akamatsu completed his chanting with a bow of his head and a few final *nembutsu* recitations and then stood up, turned around, and addressed his small audience. "Thank you very much. That is all. I would normally deliver a sermon now, but I'm not going to today. I'm not very good at sermons anyway." He bowed, and then Nishi led everyone outside to visit the ossuary across the street. The families noticed as they left that there were photos of them from previous years printed out and posted in the back of the main hall and the outdoor corridor that encircled it. As they tried to work out which year the pictures were from, based on who was there and how old the kids seemed, a chatty temple wife from Osaka observed that there used to be more posted there, but some had been taken down. She leaned down to two girls and said conspiratorially, "Probably someone thought, 'Those kids are so cute, I'm going take this one home with me!'" The girls giggled. The photos in the back of the temple hall remain there all year, a reminder of the perennial return of these youthful families to the island.

After we crossed the street to the ossuary, Mori arranged a bouquet of flowers at the shrine (figure 8). Each family had paid a 2,000 yen (roughly US $19 in 2019) flower fee, one of the few things at the retreat that came with an expense, to fund the elaborate bouquet. The families lined up in the blazing heat to take their turn at offering incense, but the priests soon realized that no one had remembered to bring a lighter. One priest who smoked finally located one at the bottom of his bag. Nishi gave a short speech about how lonely it must have been for these people, whose families did not come to claim their remains when they passed away, to have lived out their lives on the island, far from home, only for their remains to be interred there as well. Then he showed everyone how to drop two pinches of incense sand on the fire and clasp their hands to pray for the deceased. According to Kōmyōen's website,

Figure 8. Mori arranges flowers that each participant has purchased for offering at the sanatorium's ossuary. Photograph by Jessica Starling (2019).

3,200 people's remains are housed in the island's ossuary (Kokuritsu Ryōyōsho Oku-Kōmyōen, n.d.).

This comprised the totality of the formal Buddhist components of the retreat. Participants spent less than an hour in an explicitly Buddhist space, and apart from the facility with Buddhist chanting that the boy acquired by virtue of his successive years at these Buddhist-sponsored camps, the Fukushima children were unlikely to learn anything resembling sectarian doctrine. The priest who performed the brief service outright declined to give a sermon. The material and bodily practices of praying for the deceased Hansen's disease patients drew from a Buddhist repertoire for memorializing the dead, which remains the culturally dominant one in Japan (Rowe 2011). And yet, the service appeared as a brief ritual interlude, a contrast to the otherwise recreational slate of activities. For the majority of the retreat Buddhist doctrine remains implicit, rather than explicit. It is so understated, in fact, that it may barely appear on the radar of anyone other than the clerics who organized it.

Most public Buddhist mobilization in response to death and disaster after 3/11 has been brought in line with prevailing secular, clinical discourses about trauma, healing, and care. In order to forestall concerns about the dangerous nature of religions as proselytizing cults, and to respect the constitutional divide between religion and the state, Buddhist clerics operating in secular spaces are usually reluctant to bring up anything resembling sectarian doctrine. They often opt instead to emphasize the "therapeutic" value of religion, such as by instituting programs that train Buddhist priests in clinical counseling (McLaughlin 2013, 314). Deliberately side-stepping the loaded language of religion and sectarian doctrine in favor of the more generic and globally palatable language of "spiritual care" or "mind care" (*kokoro no kea*, Benedict 2018, 185), as well as projecting fun-loving and humorous images of Buddhist priests to allay fears that they are only concerned with death or are seeking to recruit people for their religion, can be strategies for managing religion in such secular spaces as hospitals, sanatoriums, and community centers.

In his study of Buddhist chaplains responding to the triple disaster of 2011, Michael Berman observed that "When engaging with suffering in public spaces, [Buddhist priests] must shed signs of their respective religions and avoid appearing as if they are working to spread those religions" (2018, 238). Certainly, the Jōdo Shinshū priests' reticence about doctrine and their restraint from using the camp to proselytize in any way is striking. However, the evidence here does not support Berman's further assertion that "[clerics'] traditions become internal motives without external expression, and feeling like a human can sometimes interfere with feeling like a religious professional" (*ibid*).

In fact, Jōdo Shinshū semantics are specifically deployed in the explanations of the priests and temple wives of why they engage in this work. For instance, Nishi insists that despite the absence of explicit Jōdo Shinshū teachings in the content of the retreat, the gathering of human beings whose lights are shining, as he puts it, "in full radiance," is itself an enactment of an ideal Pure Land Buddhist world. He explains:

> We Shinshū Ōtani-ha adherents aspire to the Pure Land. The Pure Land is a world where all living things can live together in full radiance. However, we human beings can't help but become more and more alienated from that world. There is a teaching meant to save human beings who are in this state. I considered expressing that teaching concretely in the course of the retreat. But, when I look at the residents of the sanatorium and the Fukushima mothers and their children interacting together, I realized that even without our forcing the Buddhist teachings onto them, they are the very image of the Pure Land.

In Nishi's and Mori's vision, explicitly Buddhist liturgy and doctrine are almost superfluous. The religious outcome effected by the retreat—an ideal world where living beings of different backgrounds, ages, and experiences of suffering can "live together in full radiance," as in the Pure Land—is sufficiently realized through less formal means.

The organizers' emphasis on creating a family atmosphere stands in contrast to two more economically focused approaches that scholars have taken to highlight manifestations of Buddhism in Japan's neoliberal or late capitalist society: that of entrepreneurship and branding. In John Traphagan's study of "entrepreneurial ecosystems" in depopulated areas of Japan, one of the figures profiled is a twenty-second-generation Jōdo Shinshū priest named Kenyu. Traphagan introduces Kenyu as breaking the mold of traditional priests in Japan, by having long dyed hair and seeking to engage laypeople in activities other than traditional Buddhist mortuary rituals. However, like other scholars, Traphagan seems to take the stereotypical image of Buddhist priests, as portrayed in popular media like the Itami Jūzō film *The Funeral* (Itami 1986), as a baseline reality rather than a satirized stereotype. When compared to the stereotype, Kenyu's actions indeed seem cutting edge, creative, and "outside the box." But in fact, Jōdo Shinshū clerics have always described themselves as *zaikezō* (lay-monks), and since the sect does not require clean-shaven heads, most clerics grow their hair out. In these and other ways, Kenyu is well within the "mold" of contemporary Japanese priests. Traphagan's own analysis relies on the economic trope of entrepreneurship; however, he briefly allows Kenyu to speak to the reader of his own motivation:

> Kenyu wanted to make sure that we understood one important point. "The most joyous moment in my life now," he said emphatically, "is to be told that my temple has a family atmosphere." (Traphagan 2020, 222)

Kenyu's emphasis is on creating organic occasions for younger laity to connect with Buddhism and creating a "family atmosphere" at his temple. What this article has sought to demonstrate is that in fact, the Buddhist work of creating such an atmosphere is not confined to the temple itself. It is true that structurally, the performance of mortuary rituals is what binds laypeople ritually and economically to their family temples (*bodaiji*) across Japan. But that has never exhausted the presence or meaning of Buddhism in Japan. Kenyu's insistence on the priority of his work as a Buddhist is identical to Mori's assertion that "we want them to have fun." I believe we as scholars should take these assertions seriously.

Moreover, Buddhists working to create a family atmosphere represents an even more subtle manifestation of the religion than the Buddhist atmosphere and brand values that scholars have thus far identified. Unlike Cho's suburban Chinese "atmospheric Buddhism," in which "morality" is branded as "uniquely Buddhist" (2023, 15), the Buddhist moral underpinning at this retreat remains mostly obscured to all but the initiated, those clerics whose efforts drive the transformation of this secular space, temporarily, into Amitabha's Pure Land. Neither the organizers nor the participants move to "brand" the retreat as especially Buddhist (Prohl 2020; Brown 2022). Instead, the Buddhist presence here is nonassertive, muted, and ephemeral: a temporary, family atmosphere is as concrete as Amida's light gets.

Conclusion: Recreation of home

Anne Allison has argued that in many sectors of Japanese society, "the soul"—by which she means "the meanings, desires, affects of social living"—is "on strike" (2013, 16). If the Japanese soul is on strike, then where is religion? The Exciting Retreat Tour offers a snapshot of the intersection of family, politics, and religion in the aftermath of the 2011 nuclear disaster, and in the long shadow of imperial Japan's dehumanization of its less useful subjects. Here, Buddhist actors patch the emotional holes left by failures of government and society, working to temporarily transform the government-run sanatorium into a place where participants can be themselves.

While questions of religious belief are largely bracketed, Buddhism still provides the liturgical resources for commemorating the loss of home and identity by Hansen's disease patients, and the social capital to recreate the temporary atmosphere of a *furusato* for the survivors of Hansen's disease and the "radiation brain" mothers and children from Fukushima. As Maki said in her speech at the welcome party, "This is my favorite place to be." The island sanatorium is the birthplace of no one involved—not the elderly residents, not the sanatorium staff, not the Buddhist organizers, nor the Fukushima families. The elderly residents of the sanatorium have lived in isolation from their natal homes for many decades as a result of their identification with a disease that is highly stigmatized. The Fukushima parents who are drawn to the retreat have found themselves out of sync with their neighbors and family members back home, in their uneasiness and distrust of official reports of radiation in

their environment. Finally, the Buddhist clerics themselves live a somewhat peculiar lifestyle in family-run temples, where their domestic lives belong to public religious institutions that, while often viewed cynically, are legally classified as "corporations for the public good" (*kōeki hōjin*) (Covell 2005, 152; Starling 2019, 63–80).

After the weeklong retreat, and increasing with each annual return visit to the sanatorium, the young Fukushima families join the long-running Buddhist volunteers there in embracing the phrase "*tadaima*" ("I'm home!") each summer they return to Kōmyōen. Thus, the atmosphere created by Buddhist actors at the retreat is, like much of Buddhist ritual in Japan, focused on family.[10] Just because it is familial, however, does not mean it is apolitical: contrary to scholarship that emphasizes Buddhist actors' roles as willing instruments of state policies (Lyons 2021), these Buddhists intentionally create a space for critique of the Japanese state and the scientific establishment.

This image of Buddhism as a source of familial feeling stands in contrast to the image found in most scholarship on Buddhism in Japan today. The reputational and material challenges faced by established Buddhism in Japan have been widely observed (Covell 2005; Reader 2012). Scholars looking for signs of life from traditional Buddhism within Japanese "late modernity" have emphasized entrepreneurial (Nelson 2013; Traphagan 2020) and clinical (Taniyama 2008; Berman 2018) roles for Buddhist clerics. I offer here an additional model for thinking about the presence of established religion in contemporary Japan, one in which Buddhist actors draw on their tradition's doctrine, networks, and social capital to operate in secular spaces, while remaining in some sense the familial religion that Buddhism has always tended to be from the laity's perspective.

Notably, the community that forms at the retreat is an evanescent one. At the end of the week, as the families board the sanatorium's shuttle van, headed to the Himeji train station and from there on to Fukushima, the atmosphere dissipates. But their presence leaves traces through commemorative group photos and the full-color magazine report that Mori produces every year, memories of hometown flavors and handmade dishes shared throughout the week, handicrafts taken home and displayed on bookshelves, prayer beads worn around wrists, and action shots of mothers and children that remain pinned to the back wall of the Jōdo Shinshū temple at Kōmyōen. With such physical and emotional traces of Buddhism in mind, I hope this study will serve as an invitation for scholars to think more expansively about where Buddhism can be found in contemporary Japan, with special attention to the role of emotions in Buddhist placemaking, even outside of traditional liturgical contexts.

Notes

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2. According to Riis and Woodhead, an emotional program is "a distinctive 'scale' of emotional notes"; "[c]omprehensive programs – like those of world religions – organize emotional notes

into sustainable harmonies" (2010, 47–48). Such harmonies in this case are produced and heard primarily by the Buddhist organizers.

3. I have used pseudonyms for research participants referred to in this article. Due to the ethical challenges of conducting research on vulnerable populations, any details I include regarding Hansen's disease patients and children at the retreat are based on my observations of public events.

4. See, for instance, Ives 1999; Victoria 2006; Lyons 2021.

5. For instance, Jōdo Shinshū clerics who visited the sanitaria would tell patients that their isolation was necessary for the good of the nation, and that they should feel gratitude for their blessings from the emperor and Amitabha Buddha (Shinshū Ōtaniha Kaihō Suishin Honbu 2018, 5).

6. For a study of the public domestic lives of Buddhist temple families, see Starling 2019.

7. Along with discrimination against Hansen's disease patients and other marginalized groups, the postwar Jōdo Shinshū Ōtani institution has grappled with issues of gender discrimination, and the Office for Women's Affairs (Josei Shitsu) at Higashi Honganji produces educational materials and supports programming on understanding gender inequality, from which the Nishi brothers have benefitted. See Starling 2019, 129–54.

8. The *nembutsu* is a short prayer ("*namu amida butsu*") that literally means, "I take refuge in the Buddha Amitabha."

9. The *Shōshinge* is a selection from the founder Shinran's (1173–1263) magnum opus the *Kyōgyōshinshō* that is frequently used in Jōdo Shinshū liturgies.

10. For a discussion of the centrality of family in laypeople's ritual participation and affiliation with Buddhist temples, see Covell 2005, 23–42; Kawano 2005, 21–37; and Williams 2005.

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