

D.W. BRACKETT, *Holy Terror: Armageddon in Tokyo*. New York: Weatherhill, Inc., 1996. 232 pp. \$24.95 ISBN 0-8348-0353-4.

David. E. KAPLAN & Andrew MARSHALL, *The Cult at the End of the World: The Incredible Story of Aum*. London: Arrow Books Ltd. (Random House UK Ltd.), 1996. 310 pp. UK£ 5.99, ISBN 0-09-972351-6.

THE JAPAN TIMES, Special Report, *Terror in the Heart of Tokyo: The Aum Shinrikyo Doomsday Cult*. Tokyo: The Japan Times, Ltd., 1995. 39 pp. ¥1,000 ISBN 4-7890-0789-8.

Ian READER, *A Poisonous Cocktail: Aum Shinrikyo's Path to Violence*. Copenhagen, Denmark : Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), 1996. 116 pp. DKK 90, ISBN 87-87062-55-0.

THE SHOCKING ATTACK allegedly made by Aum Shinrikyo assailants on three Tokyo subway lines in March 1995 that killed twelve commuters and injured nearly 6,000 others shocked the world. Aum also stands accused of a lethal sarin gas attack in Matsumoto City that claimed seven victims, the murder of Yokohama lawyer Sakamoto Tsutsumi and his family, the kidnapping and murder of Kariya Kiyoshi, a Tokyo notary official, and several Aum members, as well as a host of other serious crimes. Aum Shinrikyo, "a seemingly idealistic new religion which preached the virtues of ascetism and renunciation, became a murderous movement" (Reader, pp. 8–9) that sought to wage war on Japan, fleeced millions of dollars from its followers, produced illegal poisonous gasses and drugs, and murdered over twenty innocent citizens. Paradoxically, Aum attracted thousands of young Japanese seeking direction in life, as well as a group of promising young scientists and engineers who abandoned traditional career tracks to serve a charismatic and shamanistic leader, Asahara Shōkō.

The Aum affair is a highly complex matter with implications that radiate far wider than the criminality and terror tactics of one particular group. A truly scholarly study of Aum must explore the popular appeal of contemporary New Religions in Japan and the growing alienation of many younger Japanese today. There are the constitutional issues of how much autonomy Japanese society is willing to accord religious groups and how much protection individuals and organizations can receive from arbitrary arrest and suppression. What is the balance between the right of individuals and religious associations to practice religion freely, and the right of society to protect itself from terrorism and potential abuse by individuals belonging to these groups. There is also the question of the role of the Japanese media in society. Is there a truly free press that gathers information without implicit government censorship and that reports it in a critical manner?

Whenever there is a "newsworthy" event as Aum, there are the inevitable "instant books" that are rushed out to satisfy public curiosity. There soon follow more reflective and occasionally scholarly works that offer a greater perspective. One must wait for several years or even decades to gain a truly comprehensive analysis of what occurred.

The four works reviewed here suffer from the immediacy of their publication. Inevitably they will be surpassed in years to come by more reflective works that have greater perspective and better access to information. The most that one can ask of these more “instant” books is that they provide the best scholarly analysis available at the time and raise broad questions concerning the meaning and impact of the event on Japanese society.

Ian Reader's *A Poisonous Cocktail* offers the best early scholarly analysis of the Aum affair. Reader is a distinguished scholar of Japanese religions whose previous publications provide comprehensive analytic studies of the role of religion in Japanese society. His balanced presentation on Aum places the group within the context of New Religions and “New Age” thought and activity in Japan. He provides a superb overview of Aum's history, leadership, ideology, tactics and its millennialist views while recognizing that “it may be many years before any detailed and balanced analysis can be written that is not influenced by the traumas of the present” (p. 8).

Reader concludes that Aum's violent incidents were responses to specific situations rather than a coordinated plan to overthrow society although it is clear that Aum intended to commit further and greater attacks. In tracing Aum's “path to violence” Reader draws special attention to

Aum's basic stance as a world-rejecting religion, i.e. a religious movement that strongly criticised the mores of contemporary society and sought truth in the creation of an alternative, ideal(ised) society. This led Aum to an apocalyptic vision in which it looked forward to the time when the corrupt world of the present would be rightfully destroyed and when a utopia would emerge. It also led Aum to establish a system of renunciates and communes, processes that inevitably drew the movement into conflict with mainstream society, and caused Aum to feel it was being oppressed, rejected and betrayed by society at large. This sense of betrayal was produced through the apparent rejection of Aum by the wider world on a number of levels.... These conflicts with the outside world...all added to Aum's feeling (which was implicit in its world-rejectionist stance) that the outside world was corrupt, blind and headed to disasters of its own making.

This mixture of isolation and conflict fuelled the conspiracy theories that became increasingly important to Aum.... By 1994 those fears and paranoid ideas had escalated to the level that Aum could announce the formation of an alternative government, state that it needed to take measures to defend itself against the Japanese government, and even talk of the importance of striking at the wider society before it struck Aum. (READER, pp. 90-91)

Reader's conclusions, which are clearly analyzed throughout his text, are the most reasoned of any explanation of what Aum is all about. The other works under review here fail to approach his scholarly analysis and in-depth research.

The next most worthy work is the *Japan Times*' special report, *Terror in the Heart of Tokyo*. This booklet is a collection of articles that appeared in the *Japan Times* and the *Japan Times Weekly* between April and July 1995. There is

no attempt to link any of the articles together through a common text and there is no introduction or conclusion. But each of the articles has considerable depth and there is ample breadth in the topics covered. There are, for example, excellent profiles of two ordinary members and an interesting analysis of Aum's surprising ability to recruit an army of ardent followers from some of Japan's leading universities. Some of the important topics in the *Japan Times* special report receive less coverage in Reader's book, which makes the Report a useful supplement to Reader.

David E. KAPLAN and Andrew MARSHALL's *The Cult at the End of the World* is a very carefully crafted in-depth journalistic presentation. The writers give a very detailed account of Aum's day-to-day activities and actions of its leaders. We learn a great deal about the planning for all of Aum's attacks that the authors, in full agreement with Reader, feel were reactive rather than part of a well-planned conspiracy. The most original research deals with Aum's neglected but fascinating forays into Russia and the United States. Those sections are worthy supplements to Reader's study. Kaplan and Marshall, however, have little understanding of the role of religion in Japanese history and of the complexity of the environment of Japan's New Religions. There is virtually no scholarly analysis of the religious ideology and motivations of Asahara and Aum and no context for Aum's ideas about armageddon. The authors give a brilliant presentation of *what* happened, but no clue as to *why*. The authors' failure to cite any of their sources is also a crucial scholarly fault.

D.W. Brackett's work is the least worthy of the Aum books published to date. A former newspaper editor and foreign correspondent, Brackett lacks any in-depth appreciation of Japanese culture. His strength is his strong background in international terrorism and the weapons of terrorists, including sarin gas, but we learn nothing about the religious side of Aum. There is no real discussion of the growth of New Religions and Aum's part in this picture. Brackett also fails to cite his sources.

The scholar in search of the best early published studies of Aum in English should turn to Reader's *A Poisonous Cocktail*, SHIMAZONO Susumu's article, "In the Wake of Aum," and ISHII Kenji's chapter on Aum (1996) in the recently published *Religion in Japanese Culture*. Helen HARDACRE's critique (1995) of the role of the Japanese press' coverage of the Aum affair, "Aum Shinrikyo and the Japanese Media" is also informative.

#### REFERENCES

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ISHII Kenji

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SHIMAZONO Susumu

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