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Editors' Introduction

Impact and Ramifications: The Aftermath of the Aum Affair in the Japanese Religious Context

IT IS NOW seventeen years since the Tokyo subway attack that made Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教 and its leader Asahara Shōkō 麻原彰晃 (1955–, born Matsumoto Chizuo 松本智津夫) household names in Japan and beyond. The subway attack was swiftly labeled by the media and government alike as “indiscriminate terror” (*musabetsu tero* 無差別テロ) and was the most dramatic act of public violence engaged in by Aum. In the ensuing weeks evidence emerged of numerous other crimes committed by Aum members, and Aum became the biggest news story in Japan, with Aum-related stories (often sensationalist in nature) filling the front pages of the newspapers and being lead items on national television news for weeks on end, as well as dominating the weekly magazine media (READER 2000a; HARDACRE 2007; KUMAMOTO 2011; HIRANO 2011; KOJIMA 2011).

The Aum Affair (*Oumu jiken* オウム事件, as it is commonly referred to in Japan) has remained a matter of public concern ever since. While the immediate maelstrom around Aum lasted through the summer and autumn of 1995, the movement has remained partially in the public eye ever since, through such things as the numerous trials, sentences (often invoking the death penalty), and appeals (most notably that of Asahara Shōkō) that have taken place, and the continued presence of devotees who continue to follow aspects of Aum's teachings. The massive Aum-related publishing industry that developed immediately after the subway attack has continued to produce new books and articles on a

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regular basis. In this context it is worth mentioning a number of publications by senior Aum figures who have been convicted of major crimes such as murder and involvement in the subway attack, in which they have reflected on why they became involved in Aum and took part in its criminal acts.¹

In addition, a number of films and documentaries relating to the affair helped keep aspects of the affair in the public eye. These include the films of Mori Tatsuya that focused on Aum followers and their attempts to handle the aftermath of the affair (*A and A2*) (GARDNER 2001, 2005; MORI 2010), and a recent documentary of interviews with victims of Aum's crimes made by Takahashi Shizue, the widow of one of those killed on 20 March 1995, who has been a prominent spokesperson for the victims of the Aum Affair ever since.² Aum even became a central staple, too, in the worlds of literature and popular culture, which found a source of creative inspiration in the activities of Aum and the associations thrown up by the affair (and which we introduce below) between religion, danger, manipulation, "cults," "mind control," and horror. In literature, manga, and film Aum became a template for such dangerous themes. One of the country's best-known authors, Murakami Haruki 村上春樹, for example, published the nonfiction book *Underground* (*Andōguraundo* アンダーグラウンド) in 1997 that included interviews with sixty victims of the sarin gas attack and with eight members of Aum, and in 2009–2010 produced a novel in three volumes, *1Q84*, which featured a mysterious and violent religious group, Sakigake, that shared similarities with Aum. Manga artists, too, produced various works in which dangerous cultic groups, often with disciples who were so heavily controlled by their manipulative and charismatic leaders that they readily carried out horrific acts without thinking, as Jolyon Baraka Thomas discusses in his article in this volume. The sarin attack has even been related to the rise of the J-Horror genre, which includes popular and influential films such as *Ringu*

* We would like to thank Axel Klein and The Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien (Tokyo) for hosting a workshop in Tokyo from 31 August to 1 September 2011 that enabled us to discuss earlier versions of the articles that make up this issue.

1. Notable amongst these are the books by HAYASHI Ikuo (1998) and HAYAKAWA Kiyohide (2005). Both were convicted of murder and their books provide important insights into how critical Aum's beliefs and doctrines were in its violence, showing us how these men were, at the time of their deeds, acting in the sincere belief that they were carrying out acts of salvation to further what they saw as the mission of their religion. Both have subsequently renounced Aum and expressed repentance for their deeds (WATANABE 2011).

2. TAKAHASHI (2008), who has also published books on the affair focusing on its victims and the bereaved, interviewed not just those hit by sarin on the subway but also Kunimatsu Takaji, the then National Police Agency chief, who was seriously wounded when shot outside his home on 30 March 1995, in an attack widely believed to have been carried out by Aum. See <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20100309fi.html> (accessed 19 December 2011) and PENDLETON (2009) for further information on Takahashi's activities.

リング and *Ju-on* 呪怨 (The Grudge). As David KALAT (2007) shows, prominent figures in the development of psychological forms of horror films that produced J-Horror, such as Tsuruta Norio 鶴田法男, considered that the sarin attack was an important influence in this movie, especially through showing how sudden death and horrific acts could be part of everyday life.

The images of horror, danger, and disturbance created by Aum have thus been a factor in Japanese life since 1995. They were brought back into the spotlight in November 2011 when the Supreme Court rejected Endō Seiichi's 遠藤誠一 appeal against his death sentence—Endō was a former Aum member accused of playing a central role in the sarin attacks in Nagano and Tokyo.³ This decision prompted a fresh wave of media articles and television news items, since it brought to an end the numerous Aum-related trials that had been going on in Japan ever since 1995.⁴ As such it marked a distinct end point in legal terms in the affair—while simultaneously placing the events of 1995 back in the public eye—and reopened the discussion about ex-members and their relationship with the leader⁵ and (given that thirteen members of Aum, including Endō, have been sentenced to death) the debate over the death penalty in Japan.⁶ All of this showed that the affair is still an “open wound” in Japan, that is often presented in such ways in the media—as an unresolved problem with unanswered questions. In the mass media, for example, the question of why young, highly educated people joined the group and gave up everything for it continues to be a matter of concern and bewilderment.⁷

Nonetheless, there are several reasons why one could suggest 2011 marks a significant end point to what in Japan has been called “the post-Aum era” (*posuto Oumu jidai* ポストオウム時代) (READER 2004; WILKINSON 2009, 3). The completion

3. See, for example, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T111121005989.htm>; <http://mainichi.jp/select/jiken/news/20111121ddm041040066000c.html>; <http://www.asahi.com/national/jiji/JJT20111210018.html> (all accessed 22 November 2011).

4. In all, 189 people have been tried and all their trial processes have now been completed, including final appeals. Thirteen, including Asahara, have been sentenced to death (though none had been executed at the time of writing this overview), five received full life sentences, another eighty were sent to prison, eighty-seven received suspended sentences, five were fined, and one person was found not guilty. See <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T111121005989.htm> (accessed 22 November 2011).

5. See http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201111210082 and <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/affairs/news/111120/trl1112022170002-n1.htm> (both accessed 22 November 2011).

6. See <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/national/news/20111122-OYT1T00589.htm> (accessed 22 November 2011).

7. Although the media declared that the Endō decision marked the end of the Aum Affair in legal terms, the subsequent surrender of Hirata Makoto, who was wanted on suspicion of being connected with some of Aum's criminal activities, on 31 December 2011, might now lead to further legal developments and court cases.

of all the trials marks a clear historical end point to the criminal investigations of the affair. This has occurred at a time when, for a new generation of Japanese, the affair itself has become increasingly more likely to be seen as history than as a contemporary event; as Mark Mullins reminded us in a discussion on this issue, those who are now entering university in Japan would have only been two or so years old at the time of the events, and have no contemporary memories thereof. Furthermore, the tragic events of March 2011, when the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear crisis impacted in ways that may well define much of Japanese social history and, conceivably, also its religious situation, for some years to come,⁸ serve as another major watershed moment in contemporary Japanese history, one that moves us on historically from the post-Aum era.

As such this is an appropriate time to consider the affair again, and this is the aim of this special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*. In the aftermath of March 1995 the questions that were naturally central to academic studies were concerned with how and why a registered religious movement turned to violence, and what factors precipitated and facilitated this path (SHIMAZONO 1997; LIFTON 1999; READER 2000a; KISALA and MULLINS 2001). There remains much to be done in such respects, and as new materials continue to emerge (such as new accounts and reflections by people who were in Aum at the time of the affair) scope for reassessing and rethinking Aum's path to violence will increase.⁹ However, our intention here is not to reexamine Aum in such terms but to look at the ramifications of the affair in a variety of contexts, especially in connection with its impact and implications in terms of religion, in Japan and beyond, in which there has been a discernible "Aum effect."

The seven articles that follow this Introduction, and whose contents we outline later, demonstrate just how widespread those repercussions and Aum's impact were, showing how the affair intruded, amongst other things, on political dynamics, on the world of popular culture, on the academic community, on international concepts of terrorism, and on people who had been devotees of Aum and who, after March 1995, were left to deal with the aftermath of events

8. It was widely argued (see YAMAORI 1995) that the January 1995 Hanshin earthquake, only a few weeks before the Aum sarin attack, had negative effects on public images of religion, with religious organizations being accused of being unable to respond to the tragedy or to offer solace in a time of crisis. There is some evidence that the response of religious organizations to this later, much greater tragedy, was better than to the Hanshin one (INABA 2011). Certainly, how religions have responded and how the public views religious responses to this tragedy could have a very significant bearing on their future situation.

9. Here, for example, we would like to draw attention to the recent publication of an edited volume based on research materials gathered by the Religious Information Research Center (RIRC) in Tokyo, which discusses Aum and the Aum Affair especially in the context of media and Japanese society (INOUE 2011).

they had been involved in. First, however, we will make some general points to contextualize the articles that follow and also to highlight some key issues that were brought to the fore as a result of the subway attack, the police investigations, and the revelations that Aum devotees under the guidance of their guru had committed a litany of crimes, including murders and the manufacture of all manner of weapons, stretching back to 1988.

Destroying an Image: Aum, Public Crisis, and the Problem of Religion

An immediate result of the subway attack was a loss of confidence in the public image Japanese people had held of their society; as KISALA and MULLINS commented, until Aum's activities "most Japanese assumed that they lived in one of the most well-ordered and safest societies, a model that had much to offer the chaotic Western world" (2001, 3). The Japanese may have been accustomed to reading about violence in the public sphere elsewhere, but in Japan it (apart from cases of individual crimes and murders) was largely contained within a controlled subculture centered on the yakuza. The events of 20 March 1995 shattered that assumption, and further violence linked to Aum, such as the shooting of the National Police Agency Chief Kunimatsu Takaji 国松孝次 on 30 March 1995, the murder by a man with yakuza connections of one of Aum's leading figures, Murai Hideo 村井秀夫, in broad daylight in front of journalists and cameramen on 23 April 1995, and the attempt by Aum members to unleash cyanide at Shinjuku station on 5 May 1995, further exacerbated the extent to which a sense of public safety had been swept aside by fears of public danger. This was compounded by a sense of crisis in Japan at large, coming as it did at a time when the country was already in a state of unease after the Hanshin Earthquake of 17 January 1995 that killed over five thousand people and troubled by the apparent and perceived failures of the government and other public agencies to respond adequately to that crisis. Japan in March 1995 was thus already in a period of apprehension, in which various social problems—from the economic stagnation that was leading to "restructuring" and rising unemployment, to rising concerns about individuals who withdraw from social engagement (*hikikomori* ひきこもり)—were becoming widely discussed. Public loss of confidence in the political establishment and with its seemingly recurrent inability to provide leadership or come up with answers to the problems previously mentioned further increased public concern.

The Aum Affair brought public unease to a new level. The fact that the devotees of Aum had, in many cases, graduated from elite universities, played into ongoing discussions about the values of the Japanese education system and spurred many critics to question whether the system itself was to blame, for failing to instill critical values or independent thinking in the graduates it produced—a viewpoint grounded, in part, in the assumption that those who joined

Aum had been beguiled or hoodwinked by Asahara (quickly portrayed in media discourse as a manipulator and power-centered charlatan), and that they were ill-equipped to critically evaluate what he was saying. Similarly, the apparent failure of the police and other civil authorities to investigate Aum adequately, even after suspicions of its involvement in a variety of crimes prior to March 1995, raised questions about the efficacy of law and order in Japan, including questions about whether the authorities had failed to intervene over Aum because they feared, for historical reasons, engaging in investigations of religious movements in general (HUGHES 2001).

On some levels the problems seemingly posed by Aum may have been exaggerated, and there was certainly some degree of what Stanley COHEN (1972) has called a “moral panic” about responses to Aum in Japan. It was, after all, a small movement and could hardly be seen as an exemplar of all that was wrong with Japanese society. Indeed, the very fact that Aum failed to attract many followers—a failure that contributed to its turn against Japanese society (READER 2000a; 2011)—rather than suggesting that young Japanese were particularly vulnerable to deviant religious groups, could be seen as the reverse: that they were in fact circumspect about such groups and were not taken in by them. The rapid police response to the subway attack, the seizure of Aum’s assets, and the arrest of most of Aum’s senior leaders—coupled with the successful prosecution of cases against them and the subsequent declaration by the Public Security Examination Commission (Kōan Shinsa Inkaï 公安審査委員会) in January 1997 (MULLINS 2001, 76) that Aum did not pose a future public threat that warranted its proscription under the Subversive Activities Prevention Law (*hakai katsudō bōshi hō* 破壊活動防止法, frequently abbreviated to *habōhō*) indicated that the threat of Aum to public safety had passed and that Japanese perceptions of public safety could be restored. Some religious leaders, such as Ōkawa Ryūhō 大川隆法 of Kōfuku no Kagaku 幸福の科学, even claimed that the affair was evidence that a turning point had been achieved in Japan, with the removal of a threat to social well-being, and that this had opened up the possibility for the emergence of a new and more spiritually aware society to emerge (BAFFELLI and READER 2011, 22–23).

Such perceptions, however, were far less widespread, especially in the turbulent period after the attack when Aum dominated the mass media, than the general feeling that Aum had heightened a sense of crisis in Japan and had added a new dimension to it. One central element in this wider public sense of crisis was the fact that Aum was legally registered as a religious organization (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人), enabling it to benefit from the favorable tax status accorded to religions in such contexts, and that its activities had been carried out underpinned by Aum’s doctrines and teachings. This placed the question of religion—always a fraught topic in public and legal arenas in postwar Japan—very much at the heart of the responses to and impact of the affair. This is the issue that we par-

ticularly look at from hereafter in this Introduction, with a special focus on the image of religion as it was seen in the public sphere after 20 March 1995, since this in essence forms the framework and provides the context within which many other of the affair's repercussions and ramifications played out.

Public Perceptions of Religion after Aum: Dangerous and in Need of Control

The Aum Affair rent asunder notions about the relationship between religious groups and the state that had been central to the organization of Japanese society since 1945. It was a turning point in Japanese attitudes to religion and, more specifically, to religious organizations, and raised questions about the very nature, presence, and standing of religions in Japan. The scholar of religion YAMAORI Tetsuo (1995) indicated as such when he claimed, in an article published not long after the attack, that we were witnessing the “death of religion” in Japan. Shortly after he modified this to the “suicide of religion” (*shūkyō no jisatsu* 宗教の自殺) in a book coauthored with Umehara Takeshi (UMEHARA and YAMAORI 1995). Yamaori based his comments on the impact of two seismic events that struck Japan in the first half of 1995: the catastrophic Hanshin earthquake of 17 January 1995 and the Aum Shinrikyō affair. In Yamaori's view, the Hanshin earthquake portrayed the established religious traditions in a bad light because they had appeared to be unable to cope with the mass tragedy and had failed to provide solace and support for the bereaved and homeless. Long considered by many (especially the young as well as many intellectuals) to be outdated, irrelevant, and concerned only with archaic customs, the older established religions, when faced with this huge catastrophe, appeared to confirm this perception by appearing, in Yamaori's view, to be unable to respond to the immediate needs of vast numbers of bereaved, shocked, and homeless people. The Aum Affair, according to Yamaori, compounded this negative view, with Aum's violence and its use of religious justifications to back up and legitimate its murderous behavior seemingly highlighting the potential dangers of religion. Moreover Aum showed how religion, when it emphasized “irrational” and fanatical elements such as its interest in the supernatural and the attainment of mystical powers, did not sit well with the forces of modernity so prominent in the contemporary world (YAMAORI 1995).

If religious organizations had responded rather weakly to the Hanshin earthquake, however, the negative impact of that affair was in no way comparable in terms of the image and public position of religion to what happened because of Aum. And while Yamaori's suggestions of suicide or death have as yet not come to pass—at least in that religious organizations continue to function and surveys show that a small but identifiable minority continue to support religions and describe themselves as being religious (ISHII 2007)—there is no doubt that after

Aum “religion” as a category or concept in Japan became tainted with fears, worries, and perceptions of danger and public disdain.

Certainly one could not say that the image of religion was universally positive prior to 1995 for many reasons, including enduring memories of the ways in which State Shinto had been a pillar of prewar militarism, negative feelings towards Buddhism as a religion of death, criticisms of new religions, and campaigns by public pressure groups against particular groups and practices (such as the campaigns by Japanese lawyers’ groups against “spiritual sales,” *reikan shōhō* 靈感商法). New religions in particular had long been attacked in the media by political ideologues and others from the Meiji era onwards as potentially deviant threats to public order (see McLaughlin in this volume for further discussion). Yet there was, in the public sphere, a general recognition and consensus that, even if religions could be annoying and intrusive and even if they sometimes produced scandals, they nonetheless merited protection from state interference. The shadow of what happened in prewar Japan, when nationalistic Shinto was promoted by the state and dissident religious groups were suppressed, remained potent here, and it had been a causal factor in the enshrinement, in the Constitution that was promulgated in 1946 and came into effect in 1947, of the principle that there should be freedom of religious worship and belonging, and no state interference in or control of religion. In the period from 1946 until 1995 it is fair to say that the guiding principle governing the relationship of religion and society in Japan in legal and public terms, had been based on the view that religious groups needed legal safeguards, rights, and protection from the state—safeguards that appeared to be intrinsic to the very nature of Japan as a modern, liberal, democratic state. The public, legal position was also reinforced by the 1952 Religious Corporations Law (*shūkyō hōjinhō* 宗教法人法) that afforded religious organizations various protections and tax advantages, grounded in the view that religions operated in terms of the “public good” (*kōeki* 公益).

Aum’s activities changed such perspectives radically, precipitating a paradigm shift in public and political attitudes and a general turn away from the notion that religions should be protected from state interference, towards the view that religious organizations could be potentially dangerous to society as well as to individuals who fell under their sway, and that henceforth more weight should be placed on protecting state and society from religion (READER 2004). Studies of public attitudes in the years after the subway attack have emphasized these points and indicated widespread views that “religion” was potentially dangerous and in need of public control and restrictions. In nationwide surveys into the attitudes of university students in 1998 and 1999 conducted by researchers based at Kokugakuin University, for example, 65 percent of student respondents stated that religion was “dangerous” (*abunai*) and 66 percent that religious proselytization in public spaces should be restricted by law (INOUE 1999, 35; 2003, 28).

So widespread did this image of “danger” associated with religion become that in 2007–2008 Japanese phone companies and cell phone service providers including NTT Docomo, KDDI, and Softbank Mobile adopted a “harmful website filtering service” for mobile phones to protect children from dangerous influences. This service was produced in response to a government law on safe internet usage for young people that was to be implemented in 2009, and it blocked access to sites related to terrorism, adult activities, gambling, the occult, lifestyle (gay and lesbian), cults (*karuto*), and religion (*shūkyō*) (TSUJIMURA 2008, 53–54; BAF-FELLI, READER, and STAEMMLER 2011, 17). An ironic result of this blocking service was that children on school trips to cultural centers such as Kyoto were unable to access the websites of temples they were visiting, since they were designated as “religious” and hence were blocked by the filtering system (TSUJIMURA 2008, 54).

This spectre of danger created as a result of Aum’s criminality also led to calls for revisions of the Religious Corporations Law in order to allow for closer scrutiny of religions and make it harder for groups to acquire legal registration as a religious movement (LO BREGLIO 1997; WILKINSON 2009, 193). Such calls were strongly promoted in the media, as well as by some political parties, which to an extent also saw moves to revise the law as a way of trimming the influence of a rival political party, Kōmeitō 公明党, which was closely associated with the religious organization Sōka Gakkai 創価学会 (WILKINSON 2009; see also the articles by Klein and McLaughlin in this issue). The revisions were adopted in December 1995 and affected several articles in the law (LO BREGLIO 1997). In particular the revisions included jurisdictional changes for groups operating in more than one prefecture and made it significantly easier for the authorities to access internal documents relating to particular religious organizations in cases where the authorities felt there was a cause for concern and to require the groups and their leaders to prove, if requested, that their activities were “religious” in nature (WILKINSON 2009, 111).

Naturally an immediate focus of public and legal responses centered on Aum, and the fact that it had been granted legal accreditation as a religious corporation—with the resultant tax benefits that came with that status—and led to demands for special measures to be taken to strip Aum of such legal standing and even for the movement to be proscribed under the aforementioned Subversive Activities Prevention Law. Although this latter step was opposed by various civil liberties’ groups and was eventually deemed, as noted above, to be unnecessary, Aum’s status as a registered religious organization was revoked in 1995, while in 1999 two new laws were introduced, the Victims Compensation Law (*higaisha kyūsaihō* 被害者救済法) and the Organizational Control Law (*dantai kiseihō* 団体規制法) that were directed against the movement. According to the laws, Aum is required to allow inspection of its facilities and to submit lists of its assets and membership every three months (WILKINSON

2009, 98). The surveillance was applied also to Aum's offshoots, Aleph アレフ and Hikari no Wa ひかりの輪, which emerged out of the original movement in the aftermath of the affair. Although initially the laws were planned to be in force for only three years, they were extended in 2003, 2006, and 2009, and most recently again in January 2012. The Public Security Intelligence Agency (*kōan chōsachō* 公安調査庁; hereafter, PSIA) charged with monitoring Aum under these laws has helped maintain tension surrounding Aum via regular reports and actions through which it continues to posit Aum as a potential public danger even years after the attack and arrest of its main leaders.¹⁰

While these revisions naturally had an impact on Aum, other religious organizations also felt the force of public, media, and legal disapproval. The revisions to the Religious Corporations Law affected all religions, not just Aum. After its perceived reluctance to intervene in the affairs of Aum, perhaps cowed by its legal status as a religious organization, the police and other public authorities appeared much quicker to act and intervene in the affairs of other religious groups, as was the case when criticisms of illegality and fraud were voiced by former members in 1996 about another legally registered religious movement, Hōhohana Sanpōgyō 法の華三法行 and its leader Fukunaga Hōgen 福永法源. After a number of dissatisfied former members complained they had been manipulated by Fukunaga into paying large sums for divinations and spiritual treatments, and journalists took up the case, the authorities' response led to the arrest of Fukunaga and other senior figures in the movement. Subsequently the movement was legally dissolved and Fukunaga was tried, convicted, and sentenced to twelve years imprisonment (FUJITA 2008, 78–88; YONEMOTO 2000, 9–54).

Other incidents in which religious groups whose leaders claimed spiritual powers (including raising the dead back to life) and which appeared to engage in strange practices were also highlighted by the mass media in ways that heightened public concerns (FUJITA 2008). Overall, the image of “religion” was damaged primarily by Aum but also by the fallout from other incidents such as these, and it made religious groups throughout Japan feel vulnerable. A study carried out in 1998 by scholars led by Robert Kisala at Nanzan University based on the European Values Study that has been conducted regularly in Europe since 1981, showed just how poor an image religion had, three years after the subway attack, in Japan. While most sets of values in the Nanzan

10. See for example <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn19990212a4.html> which cites a PSIA report from 1999 that suggests that the remnants of Aum were regrouping and planning for armageddon at the end of that year, and <http://the-diplomat.com/2011/08/27/cult-shadow-still-looms-over-japan/>, which details PSIA raids on groups linked to Aum in August 2011, seemingly linked to the agency's wish to extend its surveillance of Aum after January 2012 (both sites accessed 30 November 2011).

study correlated with similar phenomena in Europe, religion scored far worse, getting only an 18 percent approval rating in Japan compared to 48 percent in Europe. Religious organizations had the lowest level of trust of any institutions or groups in Japan at 13 percent—lower even than politicians and the media—and far lower than in Europe (KISALA 1999, 60–65). The Kokugakuin surveys of student attitudes mentioned above that showed high numbers of respondents thinking that religion was dangerous and that public proselytizing should be restricted by law, also showed strong levels of distrust in religious organizations and especially in religious leaders, with a mere 4.3 percent of respondents indicating trust in the latter and 65 percent expressing strong distrust in 2000 (INOUE 2003, 31–35). Surveys of public attitudes regularly carried out by various organizations such as NHK, the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, and the *Asahi Shinbun*, showed both a decline in the numbers who said that they had religious faith and the numbers who said that they regarded religion as an “important” (*taisetsu*) facet of public life. In 1994, 26.1 percent of respondents in the *Yomiuri* survey said they had religious faith and 34 percent said religion was important; in 1995 the numbers were 20.3 percent and 25.6 percent respectively, the lowest figures since the surveys had begun to be carried out from the 1950s, and they remained similarly low in the years that followed (ISHII 2007, 24–25; INOUE 1999, 25–26).

Looking for the “Next Aum”: The “Religious Problem” and the Mass Media

Compounding this sense of “danger” and the notion that religion was a problem area that needed to be closely monitored by the state, were continuing media interests not just in investigating Aum itself but also in identifying or predicting where the “next Aum” would come from (WILKINSON 2009, 156–57; READER 2004, 197). Prior to the Aum Affair, the media in general and sections of the popular book market had long been interested in exposing religious scandals, especially in the context of new religions, which had faced a long history of being treated as if they were fraudulent or somehow not legitimate (MORIOKA 1994; DORMAN 2012). Certainly one cannot say that prior to Aum there had been no scandals relating to the new religions that came into prominence from the 1980s and onwards; the acrimonious dispute between *Kōfuku no Kagaku* and the publishing house *Kōdansha* (the so-called “Friday Affair” フライデー事件), for example, was widely reported in news and magazines during the early 1990s and Aum itself had faced widespread criticism in the media.¹¹ However, the predominant focus of such scandals and media attacks prior to 1995 was on money and on misleading or tricking naïve people. New religious leaders might be portrayed as

11. One should note, for example, the attacks in the *Sunday Mainichi* in 1988 on Aum, and the writings of the journalist EGAWA Shōko (1991) criticizing Aum and Asahara.

mentally unstable charlatans out to aggrandize themselves through selling false hopes to naïve and misled people, while relieving them of their money.¹² After the Aum Affair, however, new religions were no longer portrayed or seen as just money-making enterprises fleecing their supposedly naïve and uneducated followers: they were dangerous entities whose activities could pose a threat to public safety. In the wake of Aum numerous books, articles, and the like built on the fears aroused by Aum to suggest that other groups with similarly dangerous implications for public safety and society might be active in Japan. Some bookshops developed extensive sections on “religious problems” (*shūkyō mondai* 宗教問題), which featured numerous volumes not just on Aum but on a number of other groups that were seemingly linked together with it under the rubric of the religious problem; in a recent survey one of us conducted in September 2011 at a major bookstore, Kinokuniya, in Shinjuku, Tokyo, fifty-five books were grouped under this category, focusing on groups such as Aum and the Jehovah’s Witnesses (commonly seen as a problem in Japan because of their beliefs related to medical care, in particular the refusal of blood transfusion); Yamagishikai ヤマギシ会, an agrarian communal movement that has been accused frequently of being a “cult” (a term we will discuss further shortly) and of manipulating its members (YONEMOTO 2007); the Unification Church (the focus of criticisms are its mass weddings and because of its perceptions of the family); and, strikingly, Soka Gakkai. Indeed, twenty of the fifty-five books focused on Soka Gakkai, with recurrent accusations about its focus on its leader Ikeda Daisaku 池田大作 and claims that it is in effect an “Ikeda cult” (FURUKAWA 2000). While Soka Gakkai had faced such criticisms before the Aum Affair, in its wake it seemingly was elevated to an even greater level of concern, even becoming flagged up as a potential example of the “next Aum.” This appears especially remarkable given that Soka Gakkai had, via its links to Kōmeitō, been close to the heart of the Japanese political arena and that Kōmeitō was a partner in the democratically elected Japanese government for a decade between 1999–2009.

The most striking example, however, of a movement that became portrayed as the “next Aum” was Pana Wave パナウエーブ, a small religious group usually referred to in the Japanese media as “the white-clad group” (*shirozukume shūdan* 白ずくめ集団, DORMAN 2005, 99) which became the focus of a massive media campaign in 2003. Founded in 1977 by Chino Yūko 千乃裕子 the group started appearing in the news at the end of 2002 because of escalating hostility with local residents and authorities in Fukui and Gifu prefectures, the region where the itinerant members of the group chose to locate themselves. Several characteristics of the group, with members wearing only white clothes, their living together apart

12. For a detailed chronology of scandals involving religious organizations in Japan from the late 1970s onward see FUJITA 2008.

from society in a communal group, their leader's emphasis on prophecy and her prediction of environmental disasters in May 2003, were presented in the mass media as being very similar to the early stages of Aum Shinrikyō. The group's refusal to allow access to their leader (whom, they claimed, was vulnerable to attempts to harm her via the use of electromagnetic waves) caused concern, as did their refusal to move on from encampments in the mountains, where they believed they would be safe from such external threats. The episode sparked a widespread media circus as reporters followed the itinerant group and monitored its progress along with the stand-off with the police, and repeated comments that Pana Wave could be the "new Aum."¹³ The head of the National Police Agency, Satō Hidehiko 佐藤英彦, contributed to this furor at the beginning of May 2003 when he declared that the group not only resembled Aum in its early phases but commented on how, as the Aum case had demonstrated, religious groups could become terrorist groups.¹⁴ It became clear in due course that Pana Wave was not a threat to public safety and at no stage did it engage in terrorist activities; eventually the media furor died down as it became clear that while Pana Wave might appear to outsiders to be a strange group acting in ways not commonly seen in Japan, it was in essence eccentric rather than a threat to public well-being. However, the initial response to the group was indicative of the degree to which a group that behaved oddly, according to public and media perceptions, could immediately be labeled as potentially dangerous and transformed into a terrorist threat.

"Mind Control," "Cults," and Anti-Cult Movements

A further factor that exacerbated the image of religion as dangerous was the development of a high profile and active "anti-cult movement" in Japan. As we have noted, there has been a long history of critical comments being leveled against new religions in which aspersions have been cast on their validity as religions; after the subway attack these took on a new dimension. From immediately after Aum's involvement in various crimes became public knowledge, the Japanese media began to draw attention to other cases beyond Japan in which small religious groups had become involved in violence, such as the Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas, in 1993 and the mass suicide murders of the

13. For a detailed account on Pana Wave and moral panic see DORMAN 2005. For an indication of the sensational treatment of the group, see *Pana Wave: Shiroshōzoku no nazo to ronri* (PANA WAVE TO TAMACHAN O KANGAERUKAI 2003), a potboiler book rapidly produced in September 2003, shortly after the incident that asked questions such as "is this the rebirth of Aum?" (Oumu no saisei ka? オウムの再生か, 28).

14. Satō's comments were reported on 5 May 2003 in the *Asahi Shinbun* (online) at <http://www.asahi.com/special/shiro/TKY200305010220.html> (no longer accessible; downloaded 5 May 2003).

Peoples Temple in Guyana in 1978. Prominent “anti-cult” campaigners from the US such as Steve Hassan visited Japan shortly after the subway attack to link up with fellow-minded activists in Japan, and with people who had been engaged in disputes and campaigns against Aum prior to 1995.

There were already various campaigning groups in Japan that targeted specific religious groups for perceived wrongdoings. Aum itself had been beset by numerous problems and conflicts with such groups, such as the Aum Shinrikyō Higaisha no Kai オウム真理教被害者の会, a group consisting mainly of parents whose offspring had joined Aum, by local residents’ pressure groups in the areas where it had built its communes, and by various journalists and lawyers (READER 2000a, 148–53, 163–69). As Baffelli discusses later in this volume, anti-Aum committees organized by local residents are still active and become especially vocal when Aum members move into their neighborhoods. Other religious groups had also faced similar difficulties because of pressure groups involving parents, disgruntled former members and others, including lawyers and journalists interested in depicting either certain types of groups, or religion in general, as involved in deviant practices and financial wrongdoing.

The Aum Affair proved a catalyst that galvanized such groups and produced a much broader network of activists, including also a number of religious professionals ranging from Lutheran priests based in Japan (some of whom had been involved previously in campaigns against the Unification Church in Japan), to Buddhist priests (WATANABE 2001). One organization that emerged from this process was the Nihon Datsu Karuto Kenkyūkai 日本脱カルト研究会 (with the English title of “Japan De-culting Council”), founded in the aftermath of Aum in November 1995 by a group including lawyers, psychologists, academics, and others who had previous links to such opposition groups. In April 2004 it changed its Japanese name to the Nihon Datsu Karuto Kyōkai 日本脱カルト協会, along with a new English title, the Japan Society for Cult Prevention and Recovery. While not the only such group that has become highly active since 1995—they are collectively referred to under the rubric of the Anti-Cult Movement (WATANABE 2001)—it has been perhaps the most high profile and active of such groups, with numerous links to other “anti-cult” organizations in Japan and abroad (especially the United States), and it has helped reinforce and spur media and public worries about problematic groups in Japan. The Nihon Datsu Karuto Kyōkai argues that groups such as Aum engage in strange, deviant behavior because of the manipulative activities of their leaders, and it (along with other groups with “anti-cult” agendas) particularly emphasizes two terms that have become important in the public sphere and that are frequently cited in the media: “cult” (*karuto* カルト) and “mind control” (*maindo kontororu* マインド・コントロール). Both have highly pejorative implications. The first is used to suggest that a movement is deviant, destructive, and run by an elite group intent on manipulating and con-

trolling their followers and inducing strange and abnormal behavior in them. As such “cults” are inherently dangerous—Aum being often cited in this respect in anti-cult literature—and hence in need of monitoring and intervention from outside. The term “mind control” implies that followers do not act out of their own free will or with any sense of reason, but that they are somehow induced to fall under the control and sway of “cult” leaders, abandoning as they do all common sense, with the result that they and the groups they are in become destructive. The notion of “mind control” (which is clearly rather contiguous with the notion of “brainwashing” that has been generally discredited in academic terms but that has in the past been leveled against various religious groups in Western contexts) has been used to support activities such as seeking to extricate followers against their will from certain groups and to “de-program” them. One senior activist associated with anti-cult activities in Japan stated, in an interview with one of us, that it was reasonable to use such methods to “rescue” members from “cults” since they could not, in effect, be in control of their own minds if they had joined a cult.¹⁵ The aim of the Nihon Datsu Karuto Kyōkai is to produce and coordinate information on groups it labels as “cults” and to encourage practices and activities such as “exit counseling” aimed at getting members of the groups it targets to become apostates.¹⁶

Such activities and concepts have become part of the wider pattern, in post-Aum Japan, of projecting an aura of danger and unease and of creating doubts about the validity of groups that had previously been included under the rubric of religion. By using the term “cult” those pursuing “anti-cult” agendas have managed to emphasize the notion that only some groups that lay claim to the label of “religious organization” are really validly considered as such. Thus one finds links on the Nihon Datsu Karuto Kyōkai website to groups campaigning against religious groups such as Shinrankai (親鸞会, the lay Buddhist group with Pure Land Buddhist orientations), the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others. While such terminology may not be widely accepted in academic contexts, and while notions such as “mind control” may be questioned in academic terms, in wider public contexts they have become part of a general public discourse. They are used widely in the mass media, featured in books about “cult” problems, and heavily promoted by groups that emphasise that they are pursuing “anti-cult” and anti-“mind control” agendas in order to protect the wider public and to “save” those who, in joining certain groups, become the victims of the movements they espouse and of the leaders they follow.

15. Ian Reader interview with Takimoto Tarō, 20 November 2002.

16. For fuller details of the aims and agenda of the Nihon Datsu Karuto Kyōkai see its website at <http://www.jsopr.org/index.htm>.

Aum and Academia

In the context of both the rise of “anti-cult” agendas and the concepts and terminologies they embrace, and of the problematic image acquired by religion in general after Aum, it is worth briefly mentioning that academics in the field were themselves caught up in this web of negative perceptions. Indeed, a further impact of the affair was that, at a time when terms such as “cult” and concepts such as “mind control” were being bandied about in the media and by anti-cult groups, those whose professional standing and expertise could have provided an alternative voice were instead placed on the defensive. The problems that the general field of the study of religion, along with particular scholars of religion, experienced in Japan have been discussed elsewhere (READER 2000b, ITŌ 2004, and see also Dorman in this issue) and we will only briefly allude to them here. One initial problem was that, while some journalists had, prior to March 1995, identified Aum as a potential public threat, the same had not been true of academics in the field. One scholar who was perceived as having been supportive of Aum (and who had seemingly given it a clean bill of health at a time when it was already engaged, unbeknownst to him, in criminal acts) lost his job at a Japanese university as a result, while another was also seen as having been positively disposed to Aum prior to public awareness of its crimes.¹⁷ The ill-advised visit in April 1995 by a group of American academics who, invited by Aum under the guise that the movement was being falsely accused of crimes, thought they were coming to Japan to help support a religious group under siege and who found themselves widely pilloried for their apparent lack of awareness of the situation, merely served to compound the perception that academics were out of touch. To some extent the scholars involved made the basic flaw of assuming that religions are naturally good, and hence dismissed the possibility that a religious group such as Aum could have committed such crimes (BEIT-HALLAHMI 2002, 137). As WATANABE (2001, 100) stated, these affairs made scholars of religion “look like credulous fools,” while anti-cult activists cast aspersions on the sociology of religion in general and accused scholars in the field of acting as a support group for Aum (READER 2000b).

While some of the media opprobrium was harsh—notably the extent to which all scholars in the field appeared to be labeled in this way because of the actions of a very few—it is hard to avoid feeling that the field in general had been taken unawares by what was going on in Aum, and was ill-prepared to respond to mass media demands for immediate explanations of the affair and to

17. We refer here to Shimada Hiromi 島田裕巳 and to Nakazawa Shin'ichi 中沢新一, both of whom faced criticism after the sarin attack for perceived associations with and positive evaluations of Aum. Shimada, who lost his job in the wake of the affair, later launched an attack on Nakazawa, claiming that Nakazawa bore some responsibility for what had happened because (according to Shimada) his writings and ideas had influenced Aum (SHIMADA 2007).

claims that academics had turned a blind eye to problems in Aum, or to engage in debates with those in the mass media over what had occurred.

The repercussions have been significant, ranging from a general withdrawal of academics from fieldwork studies on new religions to a lack of academic voices in the debates that developed over the “cult” issue. This allowed the mass media, critics, and anti-cult activists to dominate public discussions and to establish the aforementioned images of danger, cults, and mind control without any countervailing voice of the sort that in the US and elsewhere, had challenged notions such as brainwashing and the claims of anti-cult groups. Thus there has been a weakening of the field and a seeming reduction in studies of new religions—a point made in a recent interview by Inoue Nobutaka¹⁸—not only related to the number of research projects focusing on the topic, but also in the quality of research (Inoue uses the word “atrophy,” *ishuku* 萎縮 to define the state of the field) which has become less based on fieldwork (seen now as a dangerous and compromising activity for researchers, especially in the early state of their careers) and more on secondhand reports.

There have also been indications that some scholars in the field have now adopted the notion of “cults,” not in the traditional sociological sense, but more in line with the image of danger and deviance prevalent in anti-cult and media rhetoric. In so doing they have begun to posit a “religion-cult” division, not in classical sociological terms but in terms of a qualitative value judgment difference between religion as “good” and “cult” as bad. This is a position that is evident in recent work by SAKURAI Yoshihide (2006), for example; Sakurai, indeed, is actively involved in “anti-cult” activities as a director of the aforementioned Nihon Datsu Karuto Kyōkai. He has also been at the forefront of moves, along with other scholars of religion such as Inaba Keishin, to argue for the social value of religion and to engage in social networks to this effect (INABA and SAKURAI 2009) in ways that appear to be trying to restore some of the more positive images of religion as a potential agency for “public good” that were prevalent prior to 1995. This is an area that requires further study, but it signifies a development in the study of religion in which apparent notions of qualitative differences between types of movements, along with public stances that move away from the seemingly objective position of religious studies towards a more overt stance of supporting certain types of movement and activity, may be becoming embraced within the field of the study of religion in Japan. That such stances are emerging cannot be separated from the background of the Aum Affair and the impact it has had on the study of religion and the position of scholars in Japan. It is another example of how the shadow of Aum continues to be an influence in the present day.

18. See <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/affairs/news/111119/trl1111921230000-n1.htm> (accessed 5 December 2011).

Religious Groups on the Defensive: Fear, Withdrawal, and Changing Teachings

All these developments had a significant impact on other religious groups, and especially new religions, and on groups that found themselves labeled as “cults.” We discussed earlier how new religious organizations had to deal with legal changes and with a greater readiness for state agencies and the police to intervene in their affairs in the post-Aum era. Perhaps more problematic still, they also had to face widespread public criticism and opposition to their activities, while finding themselves seemingly all in some way or other tarred with the same brush as Aum. The general mood after Aum, fuelled by Aum’s murderous activities and exacerbated by the media, by popular culture, and by talk of “cults” and mind control, clearly created an aura of fear and danger around the notion of religion and around religious groups. The examples of Pana Wave and Soka Gakkai cited earlier are indicative of how very different groups—one a small communal group seeking to retreat to what it hoped would be a safe haven, the other a major lay Buddhist movement with close ties to the centers of power—could come under threat and be placed on the defensive.

Such perceptions were so widespread that simply belonging to a religious organization could be portrayed as something problematic, worrisome, and potentially dangerous, and few religious organizations were able to fully divorce themselves from such stigma. Even some of the oldest and (in postwar times) seemingly least active in proselytizing terms—new religions, found themselves harassed by the mass media,¹⁹ while priests from established Buddhist sects also reported that they felt similar levels of distrust, commenting that there was a general public sense of “guilt by association” held against them in some quarters.²⁰ Clark CHILSON (2004, 123) tells a story that exemplifies the levels of worry that many religious groups around the country felt in the wake of Aum. It relates to a small secretive lay Pure Land Buddhist confraternity in rural Japan, whose members were by and large elderly. Basically the only element in their religious behavior that was in any way different from other faith-based rural Buddhist confraternities was that they were secretive in not displaying their membership openly. Yet, after the 1995 Aum attack, the confraternity leader, aware that people in the community probably knew of the group, went to

19. Oomoto 大本, which had faced state intervention in the 1920s and 1930s but which by the 1990s was basically a very quiet, dwindling group with little public presence, found itself under media siege in the wake of Aum, as if its travails of over sixty years earlier made it somehow linked to Aum (information communicated by Oomoto officials to Ian Reader when he visited Oomoto’s headquarters at Kameoka in Kyoto prefecture in June 1995).

20. Various Buddhist priests interviewed by one of the authors commented that the Aum Affair had created an image of “guilt by association” for all religious organizations.

the local authorities to inform them of the group's existence and to assure them that it was not associated with nefarious activities.

The situation was not helped by the confused initial reaction by other religious organizations to the Aum Affair (KISALA 2001, 108). While some of them tried to understand what happened and why a religious group could commit such a violent action, most religious groups were cautious in expressing their public judgments on Aum (KISALA 2001, 110). Such reticence did not help their position in the long run, and it did not take long for many religious organizations to feel the need to change their public image and the ways in which they operated in public, causing them in general to take on a more defensive stance and to be increasingly cautious about public proselytizing. Levi McLaughlin (in this issue) outlines how Soka Gakkai was put so much on the defensive in this respect that it has drawn back from many of its earlier conversion campaigns and activities, and he suggests that the Aum Affair sounded the death knell for Soka Gakkai's previous profile as a mass movement seeking to conduct mass proselytization and conversion activities. Other groups have similarly felt this need to lower their public profiles and conversion campaigns. Many movements that prior to 1995 had held high profile events (such as mass rallies in stadia and large arenas) aimed at attracting new converts and publicizing movements now abandoned or downplayed such activities, as well as abandoning the high profile and expensive advertising campaigns that a number of groups had used prior to the affair. Some groups decided to "withdraw from the scene" and take on a low public profile in order to avoid criticism.

The problem was especially acute for religious groups that had previously espoused millennial teachings that suggested that the world was entering a turning point or facing a crisis at the end of the twentieth century, or that some form of upheaval might be necessary in order to bring a spiritual transformation in an overly materialistic world. Such positions were quite common in the latter part of the last century in Japan (READER 2000a, 47–52) but after Aum had, in effect, given millennialism a bad name and helped associate it in the public mind with violence and danger, they were no longer publicly easy to uphold. It was not surprising, in such terms, to find other groups amending their teachings accordingly, for example by shifting away from cataclysmic prophecies or through claiming, as was the case with Kōfuku no Kagaku, that Aum's demise itself opened up a new and more positive era (BAFFELLI and READER 2011).

Besides causing many movements, and notably new religions, to lower their public profiles and amend their teachings, the Aum Affair represented a significant turning point in the use of media by new religious organizations (BAFFELLI 2010). As we have discussed elsewhere (BAFFELLI, READER, and STAEMMLER 2011), it impacted, for example, on how new religious organizations in Japan used the Internet. The affair erupted as the Internet was really starting to come into its own

in mid-1990s Japan and it offered a new medium of representation and a potential new avenue for publicity and proselytization. Yet new religions, which had long had a reputation for being media-savvy and very much at the cutting edge in using mass media techniques to spread their word, were extremely reluctant, in the mid-1990s, to expose themselves in such a potentially open way. Rather, they tended to view the Internet as an environment too vulnerable and difficult to control and decided to open their websites later than other organizations (Kōfuku no Kagaku, for example, opened an official website only in 2003; BAFFELLI 2010). Indeed, the onset of the Internet has posed problems for religious organizations because it allows a variety of means whereby hostile forces and critics can attack both the sites and the reputations of religions.²¹ The repercussions of the affair have thus not only tarnished the image of religion in general in Japan; they have also made religious organizations more defensive and cautious in the public sphere.

The Articles

Having outlined some of the areas in which Aum has had an impact, especially in terms of the image of religion, we now turn in closer detail to the articles that follow and that examine further the ramifications of Aum. As the key player in the affair, Aum Shinrikyō was naturally badly affected by the revelations of its crimes, the arrests, trials, and subsequent sentencing of much of its senior leadership, and by the continuing revelations that emerged in the media. Yet although many of its members left the movement, it did not disappear. It did, however, split into different factions as different groups of devotees sought ways to interpret and adjust to the past events (including their relationship with Asahara), and in her article Erica Baffelli looks at the emergence of one such group, Hikari no Wa, examining it in the wider context of how religious organizations react to disasters and deal with a painful past. Although still in a transitory phase, Hikari no Wa represents a unique example of how a group can restructure itself (or at least attempt to) by reorganizing its religious practices (for example discontinuing practices considered dangerous, such as extreme physical practices and end of the world prophecies) and renegotiating the relationship between leader and members.

We have mentioned already the effects the Aum Affair had on other religions, and Levi McLaughlin takes up this point, showing how the largest religious organization in Japan, Soka Gakkai, was affected by the Aum Affair. McLaughlin makes the point (reiterated in other articles) that the anti-new religions rhetoric that permeated much of the discourse after Aum was not new and that many new religions, including Soka Gakkai, had struggled with hostility prior to 1995.

21. See, for example, FUKAMIZU (2011, 48–51) for the problems an older Buddhist sect has had in this regard, and TAMURA and TAMURA (2011) for an example of the attacks mounted against Soka Gakkai through this medium.

Yet the aftermath of the affair still hit the Gakkai hard, resulting in reorientations to the ways it presented itself, and affecting its standing in Japan, while the turn against religion after 1995 discussed above also undermined Soka Gakkai and was a factor in its waning support levels; a result of the Aum Affair, McLaughlin argues, is that Soka Gakkai recognized it was no longer able to expand, ceased to be an actively proselytizing movement in Japan, and became more concerned with trying to retain the loyalty of existing members than to convert new ones.

If the affair thus undermined even the most prominent and largest religious organization in Japan, it also affected severely an area in which that movement had blazed a trail—namely involvement in politics—an area that Aum had also, disastrously, tried to emulate (READER 2000a, 153–56). The relationship between new religions (several of which prior to Aum had often been engaged behind the scenes as well as more overtly in some cases) and the political world thus became highly fraught as a result of Aum. In many ways the affair played into the hands of political groups such as the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), at the time the ruling party, and in his article Axel Klein looks at how the affair impacted on the political sphere. In it he discusses how the LDP took advantage of the situation not just to seek stricter controls on religion but also to use the situation to undermine a then-political rival (Kōmeitō, associated with Soka Gakkai), and how religious groups seeking to have a voice in the political arena dealt with the situation, while suggesting that much of the relationship between religious groups and politics remained reliant on the extent to which religious groups could continue to deliver electoral support to politicians.

The Aum Affair thus created space for political groups to redefine and revise links with religion. It also, as the next article by Mark Mullins indicates, opened up new spaces for those who sought to advance nationalistic agendas. The Aum Affair had raised public concerns about the state of Japanese society and as Mullins shows, this afforded neo-nationalist groups the scope to speak of the need to “restore” moral order to Japan—a restoration that revolved around the institutionalization of key nationalist themes, from state support of Yasukuni Shrine, to the use of a national flag and anthem. As Mullins (like McLaughlin and Klein) notes, the Aum Affair did not create a sudden rupture with the past, since attempts to promote such agendas had been ongoing for some time. However, it offered neo-nationalist interest groups an opportunity—to some extent taken successfully—to increase their activities and advance national statist agendas, particularly in the light of apparent public wishes for more protection against problematic groups.

In the next article, Jolyon Baraka Thomas looks at how Aum was portrayed in Japanese popular cultural terms after the sarin attack. He looks at the world of manga—one of Japan's most prominent media and publishing arenas as well as a major cultural export—and picks up not only on the theme of how Aum became

a media-ised event, but also on the theme of religion as dangerous sources of manipulation and violence that were projected in public discussions of Aum. By showing how prominent manga artists used Aum as a template for images of deviance and violence, he indicates how “religion” after Aum became projected as a severe social problem in this milieu. Yet he also argues that recently a more benign depiction of religion is starting to appear in manga, thereby suggesting that in popular cultural terms at least, manga artists have moved on beyond an “evil cult” trope that portrays religion wholly negatively, and that we might now be beyond the “post-Aum” era in religious terms.

Aum, as we noted earlier, affected academic studies of religion in Japan, and we highlighted some issues that were particularly important in this respect, including attacks on scholars of religion who were accused of having been naïve or having failed to spot Aum’s violent tendencies or to have turned a blind eye to them. In his article Benjamin Dorman builds on such issues by examining how Japanese scholars reacted to and dealt with the affair, and in so doing he uses, as a comparative example, how scholars in the USA dealt with a tragic and violent episode—the Waco Affair, in which eighty-three members of the Branch Davidian movement were killed after a stand-off with American government agencies. Dorman shows how different approaches to the affairs in each country, linked to different modes of study as well as professional contexts, produced very different dynamics in the study of religious violence and tragedies, while indicating also how the Aum Affair in particular had longer-term implications for the Japanese academy and how major disasters can impact on academia.

Dorman thus takes the “Aum story” beyond the immediate confines of Japan, and in our final article Ian Reader continues in this by noting that Aum was not just a Japanese affair but could be seen as a global event. He examines how Aum impacted on counterterrorism, strategic studies, and security and law enforcement communities, which were universally taken aback both by the attack, because it involved the first major use of chemical weapons by a non-government agency, and because it involved a religious group wholly unknown to the security community, in a country, Japan, they assumed to be a model of public safety. The event, as Reader shows, changed the thinking of security services globally, and was seen to have ushered in a new era of terrorism—a conceptualization that had repercussions also for the events of 9/11.

Concluding Comments

We do not suggest that the topic areas covered in these articles constitute the sole extent of the repercussions or aftermath of the affair. We recognize, for example, that the suffering of Aum’s victims and the responses of many ex-Aum members, who after the sarin attack felt shocked and betrayed by their leaders and became

involved in many self-help groups, have not been covered here, although these groups have produced a sizable literature reflecting on their views about Aum. This is clearly a topic requiring further academic consideration. Nor have we been able to examine how different security and public order agencies in Japan have sought in more recent years to monitor Aum and its offshoots, as well as other groups that it might identify, in the wake of public experiences with Aum, as potentially “deviant,” or to look at the various local campaigns that have arisen against groups of Aum believers who have tried to establish residences or centers in different parts of Japan. Space and much else impose limitations in such terms. Nor do we argue that the Aum Affair alone caused a complete and radical single turning point in relation to religion or to all the topic areas discussed in this volume. As our Introduction has noted, the image of religion was not pristine prior to March 1995, with new religions in particular the focus of much criticism and negative portrayals in the media (a point emphasized also in the article by McLaughlin), and many “incidents” or scandals relating to new religions had been reported prior to 1995 as well as afterwards (FUJITA 2008). As Klein and Mullins both indicate, many of the issues they discuss about new religions and politics, and the rise of neo-nationalism, did not start because of the Aum Affair, even if it was a causal factor in intensifying existing patterns. In all the cases cited, however, Aum was clearly a highly significant factor in exacerbating existing trends and currents as well as in producing new contexts and criteria that have greatly affected—and no doubt will continue to affect—the Japanese social, political, cultural, and religious worlds in many ways.

There is one final note we wish to add. While the period from 1995 onwards could be described as the “post-Aum era” in which the religious sphere in particular existed in the shadow of Aum’s violence and was influenced by the paradigm shift that occurred in its wake, there have been suggestions and signs that perhaps some change is underfoot. The attempts by Hikari no Wa may represent a first attempt by former Aum members to engage with their religiosity while trying to break away from the problematic teachings of Aum, while the attempts by Kōfuku no Kagaku to re-engage with the public sphere (the leader, who had remained out of public sight for some time, began making public appearances again, while in 2009 the group founded a new political party) suggest that some movements might think that enough time has passed since Aum for them to try to re-engage in broader public discourse. In his article Jolyon Thomas points to a recent turn in religiously-oriented manga, moving away from depicting religion as dangerous and sinister, towards a more light-hearted treatment tinged with humor and in which religion becomes benign. How much these phenomena indicate a mood change in Japan is unclear, but it should be noted that for many in Japan, the affair now is entering the realms of history rather than the immediate present; we earlier noted the comment by Mark Mullins about how

Japanese students now entering university were only two or three years old when the affair occurred and are too young to remember it as a contemporary event. Seventeen years afterwards, for many, apart from its immediate victims (and those who became immersed in the affair because of academic or other interests), the affair has largely passed from being a contemporary event, into an affair of history, and while its shadows and influences may continue to affect the present, perhaps in becoming history its impact on the state of religion in Japan and on public perceptions of religion may be fading. The tragic events of March 2011, too, serve as a significant new watershed in contemporary Japan, influencing public sensibilities, politics, policies, the sense of community, and much else. They may—although this is not something scholars will be able to comment on in any analytical terms for some time yet—influence the public standing of religion (based, for example, on the ways in which religious groups have thus far responded to the tragedy and crisis) and the degree to which people in general may turn to (or away from) religious engagement and practice. Yet, even if we are possibly moving beyond the immediate aftermath of Aum, and even if the affair is shifting from being a contemporary to a recent historical event, the shadow the movement has cast remains extensive. It has certainly shaped the past decade and a half and the standing of religion in that period, and stands as a, if not the, most significant event in the postwar religious sphere in Japan.

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