

SEEING STARS

Celebrities and Spiritual Secrets in Occupied Japan

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The following short essay is part of a larger project on print media representations of new religions during Japan's immediate postwar period. In addition to the case of Jiu, it considers Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō ("the dancing religion"). The advent of these two groups marked the beginning of Japan's "rush hour of the gods." The project makes extensive use of Allied Occupation records and investigates the changes in relationships between new religions, media, and the authorities in the prewar and postwar periods.

WHEN PERCIVAL LOWELL, the Bostonian seeker of adventure, esoteric practices, and, eventually, Martians, published *Occult Japan* in 1894, he discussed the "miracles" he had observed on Ontake and other places.¹ He claimed that these were "performed largely with an eye, at least one eye, to the public."² Lowell's acute observation acknowledged that the practitioners could not separate the esoteric nature of the practices and the "spiritual secrets" from the need to present them, at least partially, in some public manner through performance. After Lowell wrote his book he began observing stars and dedicated the rest of his remarkable life to the study of astronomy. This essay considers stars of a different variety; celebrities who were associated with a new religion called Jiu 璽宇, which achieved brief notoriety in the first years of the Allied Occupation. Jiu was the first of a significant number of new religions in the Occupation period that received substantial print media attention, mainly in national newspapers, albeit for a brief time. Followers of the founder, Nagaoka Nagako 長岡良子 (1903–1984)

1. The research for this paper was supported by a grant for the academic year 2009 by the Nanzan University Pache Research Subsidy II-A-2.

2. See Percival Lowell, *Occult Japan or the Way of the Gods* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1894), 97.

or Jikōson 靈光尊 as she was more commonly known, believed she had miraculous powers of prediction. As with Lowell's observations on *shugenja* on Ontake, it could be said that Jikōson and Jiu also performed their actions with an eye to the public. As a new religion that was attempting to maintain a level of secrecy that only insiders or supporters could access, and at the same time fulfilling the need to promote its message and gain support from the public, Jiu took the risky path of using a major celebrity with broad public appeal as a spokesperson. The resulting clash with the authorities that occurred under the lights of media cameras in which the group's main figures were arrested left the group "seeing stars": it never fully recovered from this incident to become a significant player amongst the so-called new religions in the postwar period.

Celebrities and Spiritualists

In his work on celebrity, sociologist Chris Rojek argues that media representation, which is the basis of celebrity, "is at the heart of both the question of the mysterious tenacity of celebrity power and the peculiar fragility of celebrity presence."³ He defines the phenomenon of celebrity as "the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere." This position recognizes that the dual aspects of "glamour" and "notoriety" are usually thought of in polarized terms.⁴ Glamour, or positive attributes of fame, might be associated with, for example, a well-known model or sports star, whereas notoriety would be linked to a mass murderer. Apart from any moral considerations, Rojek suggests that those who become glamorous or notorious are linked together by the impact they have on the public consciousness and culture. The negative and positive aspects of celebrity are not necessarily fixed: the once-feted model may suddenly be represented in media as a terrible and demanding diva, or a murderer may be portrayed as a victim of an oppressive system and become a folk hero. The change from a positive image to a negative one can be rapid, as occurred with the case of Jiu.

In early 1947, when Jiu hit the national newspapers, there were three celebrities of significance involved in the group. The first was the great sumo champion Futabayama 双葉山 (1912–1968), whose remarkable record of sixty-nine consecutive victories has yet to be matched. The second was Go Seigen 呉清源 (1914–), a Chinese-born genius in the game of *i go* 囲碁 (Japanese chess) who is considered by some to be one of the greatest players of all time. In Rojek's terms, these individuals represented "achieved celebrity" in that their professional accomplishments endowed them with celebrity status. The third figure was the

3. Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 16.

4. *Ibid.*, 10.

leader of Jiu, Jikōson, whose celebrity was “attributed,” in that her notoriety derived from what the papers wrote about her. As the person who stood accused in the press of having influenced Futabayama, a public hero, to give up his career and join in a millennial mission to save the world from calamity, Jikōson was eventually portrayed in the press variously as a “mad woman,” “a schemer,” “a fanatic,” and a danger to society in general.

In early twentieth-century Japan, despite the popularity of Western spiritualism, there were also combinations of nativism and nationalism that began to gain adherents, as was the case of the new religion Ōmoto. Under the leadership of the remarkable Onisaburō Deguchi, this group developed a version of emperor-centered nationalism combined with *chinkon kishin*, an esoteric technique for gaining knowledge by interacting and communicating with spirits and deities. Onisaburō was a master manipulator of media who launched into the publishing world by purchasing a newspaper that was used to promote Ōmoto philosophy.

As Nancy Stalker points out, he was also a savvy entrepreneur who had a knack of picking the popular mood and gathering support from sometimes surprising quarters, like influential politicians and high-ranking military officials.⁵ Yet while his idiosyncratic style and tendency to speak out appealed to some people, he faced stiff opposition from the authorities, particularly when his statements seemed to conflict with state aims. Ōmoto was heavily criticized by psychologists, journalists, and representatives of established religions for promoting superstitions, and the group became the target of a massive state-directed persecution in 1935, from which it never recovered.

Until 1945 any religious groups with ideas that deviated from official state views struggled to survive. Takeda Dōshō has argued that in prewar Japan the media played the role of supporting the established authorities in the cases of groups whose practices were at variance with “the implicit assumptions of the State Shinto institution.”⁶ In the case of Ōmoto, most major newspapers supported the authorities in suppressing the group. But while this may be the case, the media also loved a good story. The scandalous fall of the high-flying “living god” Onisaburō and his minions made for excellent copy. Although Ōmoto disintegrated, founders and key members of a number of groups that appeared in the postwar period, such as Sekai Kyūseikyō, Seichō no Ie, and Jiu, were directly associated with Onisaburō or his disciples at some stage.

5. Nancy K. Stalker, *Prophet Motive: Deguchi Onisaburō, Oomoto, and the Rise of New Religions in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 3.

6. Takeda Dōshō, “The Fall of Renmonkyō, and its Place in the History of Meiji-Period Religions,” Norman Havens, trans., in Inoue Nobutaka, ed. *New Religions: Contemporary Papers in Japanese Religion 2* (Tokyo: Kokugakuin University, 1991), 26.

Jiu's Beginnings

When Go Seigen first came to Japan in 1928 at the age of 14, he was hailed as a child genius of *i go*. He became an active member of Kōmanjikai Dōin 紅卍字会道院, a Chinese-based religious and philanthropic organization with links to Ōmoto. This group advocated a form of “spirit-writing” whereby messages from spirits are communicated through mediums and then recorded on paper. Given its Chinese base and links to Ōmoto, this group had difficulty carrying out activities because of the watchful eyes of the authorities. Nevertheless, they managed to form an alliance with a small nationalistic Shinto group run by a businessman during the mid-1930s. This group, Kōdō Daikyō, was eventually led by Nagaoka Nagako, a medium of some reputation who combined fervent emperor worship with apparently remarkable powers of prediction. Kōdō Daikyō apparently emphasized unity with the emperor and service toward him, and followers worshipped the sun goddess, Amaterasu Ōmikami. After receiving a vision from the gods, she called herself Jikōson, and the group Jiu. Using the technique of “spirit-writing,” the group would act in absolute accordance with instructions from the gods.⁷

The authorities were aware of Jiu's existence but did not investigate the group closely until early 1945, when questions arose over the group's business operations. The police raided the group's house and found a pamphlet that contained references to a “holy war under the emperor.” Jikōson was placed under arrest for some weeks. Katsugi Tokujirō 勝木徳次郎, who was one of Jikōson's close followers and eventually succeeded her in leading the group, maintained that the police kept a close watch on them from this point.⁸

The Occupation period marked a new era of freedom of religion and expression. The Occupation authorities (SCAP) dismantled the instruments of State Shinto. The police no longer had the authority to investigate religions on suspicion of disrespect to the emperor and the imperial family. Certainly there was a marked change from state-enforced religious nationalism to imposed democracy. But this did not stop the police from carrying out investigations into reli-

7. For details of Kōdō Daikyō, see 対馬路人 Tsushima Michihito, 敗戦と世直し—靈宇の千年王国思想と運動 (1) [Defeat and world renewal: Jiu's millennial thought and activities 1] (1991), 339–40. Tsushima, using written oracles recorded by Jiu and interviews with members, places the date of Jiu's founding sometime in 1941. Jikōson and Go Seigen were also interviewed by SCAP's Religions Division in 1947, and these interviews contain information about Jiu's world view and Jikōson's experiences. Religions Research—Jiu or “the Mansion Jewel”: Interviews with Mr Go Seigen on September 16, and with Jikōson on September 20 1946; Folder 68: Other Religions Jiu-kyo; Religious Data Research; Special Projects Branch. Religion and Cultural Resources Division. Civil Information and Education Section. The original SCAP documents cited in this essay can be found at the National Archives II Building, College Park, Maryland, USA. Microfilmed versions are available at the National Diet Library, Tokyo.

8. Interview, Yokohama, 28 February 1999.

gious groups, which was something that concerned the Occupation's Religions Division throughout the period of occupation.⁹

Jiu clung to a belief of world renewal centering on the emperor, and the oracles Jikōson received warned of the dangers facing the world if the emperor or members of the imperial family did not realize their mission. Her supporters viewed her as a visionary who could interpret messages from various deities that would guide the world through a predicted period of crisis. On the one hand, the group was extremely secretive and insular. When outsiders came close to Jikōson, such as landlords, she would suddenly become ill. On the other hand, while her followers attempted to maintain a cloistered existence and tried to avoid outside contact, the oracles commanded them to venture into the outside world and get support for their cause. While they needed to protect her they also realized that the messages she was receiving needed to be propagated. The group experienced constant tension between protecting spiritual secrets and promoting their ideas.¹⁰

Go Seigen had put his brilliant *go*-playing career on hold for a period of time in order to be with Jikōson. But he was a star attraction for major newspapers like the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, which ran sensationalized reporting of *i go* matches during the 1930s, thus raising its circulation. The *Yomiuri* tried on a number of occasions to lure him out of his self-imposed retirement but was successful only after Jikōson agreed to allow Go to recommence his profession. In May 1946 the newspaper ran an interview with Go in which he discussed the forthcoming match and also articulated Jikōson's vision and Jiu's message of world reform.¹¹ Until then Go's celebrity was associated purely with his playing abilities. Although this newspaper report did not make any particularly negative judgment about his activities with Jikōson, this marked the beginning of a two-year period in which reporting about this man focused on his professional and spiritual pursuits.

How did the authorities react to Jiu's activities? The police kept a watch on the group's movements and submitted reports to SCAP's Public Safety Division, which was part of the Occupation's Intelligence structure. SCAP's Religions Division, which was connected to the Occupation's Civil Information and Education section, took an interest in the case after a staff member read the interview with Go. SCAP records show that this Division was concerned that

9. William P. Woodard, *The Allied Occupation of Japan 1945–1952 and Japanese Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 181–2.

10. Go Seigen 吳清源, 吳清源回想録 [Reminiscences of Go Seigen] (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1984), 127–8. See also Tsushima, 351.

11. See SCAP document: General Information Concerning Jiu (undated): Buddhist Sector to Other Religions; Folder 68: Other Religions Jiu-kyō. Religious Data Research; Special Projects Branch. Religion and Cultural Resources Division. Civil Information and Education Section.

the police may try to overstep their powers in the case.¹² Meanwhile, a *Mainichi Shinbun* article of May 1946 used police sources to report how the authorities were carrying out “quiet investigations into a strange religion.” Due to the censorship that was imposed on the media at the time by SCAP, the paper could not mention what the Occupation authorities were doing.

Although Jikōson was barely mentioned in Go’s *Yomiuri Shinbun* interview, her own celebrity status began to develop after journalists from the pictorial magazine *Asahi Gurafu* visited Jiu’s living quarters in Tokyo in October 1946. Although Katsugi initially refused to allow them to meet her, they eventually persuaded him to let them into her inner sanctuary where they interviewed her and took her photo without her permission. The resulting article, which appeared in the *Asahi Gurafu* the following January, depicted her as a mysterious figure who had control over her followers. Nevertheless, this minor media interest in Jiu and Jikōson paled into insignificance compared to the press the group received after Futabayama joined in November 1946.

Wrestling with Spirits

Futabayama Sadaji (1912–1968) was one of the greatest sumō wrestlers of the twentieth century, and he remains a household name in Japan. He entered the ring at fifteen years of age in 1927, and became the thirty-fifth *yokozuna* (grand champion) at twenty-five. His remarkable winning streak over the course of seven tournaments, which occurred from January 1936 until January 1939, coincided with a new and successful phase of Japan’s military push into China. Futabayama thus came to be “symbolically identified with the ‘invincible’ imperial army.”¹³ He did not merely represent greatness in the ring; he represented hope, power, and national pride. The scale of Futabayama’s celebrity and influence on the public consciousness during the 1930s and 1940s can be seen on display at Futabayama no Sato, his birthplace, which is now a museum located in Usa City, Oita Prefecture.¹⁴

The museum holds an impressive array of objects celebrating his achievements, including photographs of victories, *keshō mawashi* 化粧廻し (ceremonial

12. See SCAP document: Subject: The Rumour about Jikōson’s Arrest is Denied, 4 November 1946; Buddhist Sector to Other Religions, Folder 68: Other Religions Jiu-kyo; Religious Data Research; Special Projects Branch. Religion and Cultural Resources Division. Civil Information and Education Section.

13. Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson, *Japanese Sports: A History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001), 145.

14. I visited Futabayama no Sato on 7 August 2009 with Yamada Senta, who calls himself a disciple of Jikōson. Mr. Yamada, an eighty-six-year-old former Aikidō instructor, has been kind enough to grant me a series of interviews concerning his connection with Jikōson (he lived in the same house as her from the late 1950s until her death, apart from a five-year period when he lived in the United Kingdom).

silk belts worn by higher-ranked wrestlers), and a variety of trophies. A continuous video loop shows his career highlights and the crowds of adoring fans waving flags as he is shunted down the street in yet another victory parade. The footage provides a sense of his superstar status in his heyday. Eager fans are shown gathered around radios to listen to stark NHK broadcasts that discussed his brilliant moves in hushed and revered tones. But apart from more serious media that hailed his greatness, the museum displays more popular (and somewhat gauche) items like stamps, badges, playing cards, and posters that show the wrestler happily munching on caramels or chugging down beer.

In a similar way as major sports stars in Japan are used in advertising today, 1930s representations of Futabayama as a mighty conqueror of foes or a fun-loving and dapper dresser were powerful promotional tools for companies that could afford it. His image supported not only hopes for a strong victorious Japan but also a number of media-related ventures. He was important not only for advertisers, but also for journalists who had access to him and could build their careers on feeding the public tidbits of information on his training and progress.

Futabayama, an ardent nationalist during the war who worshipped the emperor, was said to be devastated by Japan's defeat. At the same time he sensed that his professional career was coming to an end during 1946. Although he participated in competitions that year, he was unable to make a significant impact and according to one commentator it was as if he had lost the will to fight. "The age of Futabayama" came to an end when he retired from active competition on 19 November 1946. Retirement, however, had little effect on his public impact and the hopes placed in him. Many expected him to remain involved in sumo after his retirement.¹⁵ As a prized jewel in the crown of the powerful Japan Sumo Association, the body that operates and controls professional sumō wrestling, many assumed that he would take up a position training young disciples in Kyushu.¹⁶ The path he immediately chose came as an unexpected shock for the Sumō Association, his fans, and his associates in the media.

When Futabayama met Jikōson through the introduction of one of her followers, she told him of his great mission of world renewal. Apparently he was so moved by her presence that he immediately dropped his secular responsibilities and joined the group. By this stage, Jikōson had begun making various predictions including earthquakes and typhoons that would befall the country if people did not take up her teachings. Following the instructions they received

15. Ishii Daizō 石井代蔵, 巨人の肖像—双葉山と力道山 [Images of sporting greats: Futabayama and Rikidōzan] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1980), 119–20.

16. Membership to this association is limited to former wrestlers who have achieved a certain rank. Members are the only ones allowed to train new sumo wrestlers. They receive a salary and are expected to assist in the running of the association.

from the oracles, key members of Jiu moved to Kanazawa. Futabayama briefly returned to Kyushu to get his worldly affairs in order before meeting up with the group in Kanazawa. Whereas the small group had been relatively cautious in its approach to spreading the teachings, with the addition of Futabayama among their ranks they placed him in front of the group with Go Seigen and marched the streets of the town, waving banners and exhorting the townspeople to save themselves from disaster by taking up her teachings. Jikōson did not take part in these proceedings; she remained ensconced in the group's lodgings that had been donated by a follower.

The presence of Futabayama had an immediate impact within the internal dynamics of the group. He became part of Jikōson's inner circle, and solemnly carried out various austerities to demonstrate his commitment. His presence had a major impact on the townspeople who saw him leading the marchers. By this stage, the police, the Occupation authorities, and the press were looking very closely at Jiu's activities. Quite apart from the press reports of Jiu being a "strange new religion," both the Japanese and Occupation authorities were concerned with questions of public safety, particularly when the group was claiming major terrestrial calamities. In order to quell public fears, the Kanazawa weather bureau even issued a statement that the chances of an earthquake as predicted by Jikōson were slim.¹⁷

Not surprisingly the Sumo Association and Futabayama's colleagues were not pleased that the star wrestler had taken up with a new religion. A journalist from the *Asahi Shinbun*, Fujii Tsuneo, who knew Futabayama well, took up the story. Fujii worked in the social affairs division (*shakaibu* 社会部) of the paper and his connection to Futabayama was important because the wrestler was a good source of information for his stories on sumō. Fujii infiltrated the group by using his friendship with the wrestler and stayed with them for two days. After he left he immediately went to the police and told them that the group had stockpiled large amounts of food (because of the forthcoming calamities). He later claimed that the Sumō Association asked him to use his relationship with the former wrestler to get him out of the group.¹⁸ After staying with the group for two days, he wrote a number of articles about Jiu and Jikōson that had an enormously negative effect on Jiu.

At this point the small group had both Go Seigen and Futabayama within its ranks actively promoting its beliefs. This raises the question of whether they were exploited by this group in order to further its cause, or whether they were genuinely taken by Jikōson's spiritual insights. The answer to this, of course, depends on the perspective taken. Celebrities can bring promotional opportu-

17. Tsushima, 365.

18. Ishii, 97–98.

nities that religions cannot access, and Jiu's treatment of Futabayama could be seen as exploiting these opportunities. Although he had just joined them, he was immediately promoted to an elevated status with close access to Jikōson, as opposed to ordinary outsiders who required significant vetting and were treated with suspicion. However, celebrities often have "cultural intermediaries" who act to develop the public presentation of celebrity personalities that will result in enduring appeal for fans.¹⁹ In Futabayama's case the intermediary was Fujii, the *Asahi* reporter. Fujii had a vested interest in seeing the former wrestler return to the sumō world. He wrote that Futabayama was like a "lost child" who had been captured by Jikōson in a moment of vulnerability.

The police used Fujii's information to justify a raid on the headquarters. The Public Safety Division of the Occupation raised no objections after the police argued that the group presented a threat to public safety. The arrests were made under the camera lights of the press. Futabayama, who tussled with police officers, was locked in a cell overnight, and Jikōson and others were subjected to a psychological test. The findings were that while Jikōson was suffering from delusions, she was not a danger to the public. The police ended up dropping the charges and releasing those arrested within days.

The national newspapers, the *Asahi Shinbun*, *Mainichi Shinbun*, and *Yomiuri Shinbun*, all reported on the sensational arrests and the stories were repeated in local newspapers. The *Asahi* in particular devoted eight articles during January 1947 to the arrests in Kanazawa, which was a significant amount of newsprint, given severe paper shortages at the time. Jiu virtually withered under public criticism following intense media exposure and ridicule. Futabayama immediately left the group and published an apology for his behavior in the *Mainichi Shinbun*. This action constitutes, in Chris Rojek's terms, a "redemption" whereby the fans and public "are requested either to grant forgiveness in respect of personality weaknesses or negative behavior that contrasts with the idealized image of the celebrity, or acknowledge the vulnerability and weakness of celebrity." Futabayama renegotiated his public face, was reinstated into his former profession, and eventually served as the General Director of the Sumō Association. He never resumed contact with anyone from Jiu.

Futabayama's brief association with Jikōson and Jiu, which began just after his retirement and barely lasted two months, is recorded in most accounts of his life as a somewhat amusing lapse into temporary madness in an otherwise unblemished and stellar career. How did this major celebrity become involved in Jiu, and what immediate impact did his participation have for him and for the group? His involvement in Jiu had a remarkable impact on his public image and the group's. His image degenerated rapidly in the press from great sporting hero

19. Rojek, 10.

to deluded religious fanatic, and then was restored when he admitted the error of his ways. On the other hand, Jiu never recovered from the press criticism it sustained after his involvement was publicized.

Go Seigen stayed with the group until 1948, when he finally decided to leave, together with his wife. Jiu members saw this as a great betrayal. In a number of statements he has made since then, Go Seigen appears to take the view that life under Jikōson was extreme, and that he was under the group's spell. Through this process, Jiu gained an unsavory reputation as a new religion that tried to cheat the public through using public figures. The benefits of having Go Seigen and particularly Futabayama involved for the group were clear. This allowed the group to propagate its message and draw public attention to its cause. The risks were that the group was not actually in control of the images of these celebrities. The other risk was that the very power of the celebrities to attract potential believers was subverted by the police, who used the very convincing argument that the group presented a threat to public safety. Although the police appeared to be not so concerned about the group itself, they were certainly aware of the influence these celebrities had.

Ōya Sōichi 大宅壯一 (1900–1970), one of Japan's most famous journalists, wrote a few years later that a characteristic of “newly arisen religions” (*shinkō shūkyō*) is that they “need famous faces to work with [and] Futabayama and Go Seigen were the ‘poster boys’ for Jikōson.”²⁰ The consequences of celebrity involvement in this case were significant for the group. Jiu did continue its activities in a more subdued fashion. Although the press followed the group around for a few months, eventually interest faded as other new religions, such as “the dancing religion” (Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō), began to appear and attract press interest. Jikōson still impressed various famous people with her spiritual talents, including novelist Kawabata Yasunari and silent movie voiceover star Tokugawa Musei, but Jiu did not make any further significant public impact.

While Jikōson and some close followers lived in relative seclusion until her death in 1984, the story of Futabayama and Go Seigen's involvement in the group was occasionally picked up by weekly magazines (*shūkanshi*) in particular that were seeking to present retrospectives of postwar new religions. Although major newspapers reported new religions in the immediate postwar period, by the mid-1950s the newly established weekly magazines took up these kinds of stories.

Percival Lowell's observations on “occult Japan” concerning miracles being performed with the public, that is, potential supporters or participants have some resonance in the case of Jiu and other religious movements seeking to propagate their message. New religions seeking public approval face a dilemma

20. 大宅壯一全集 第四卷 [Collected works of Ōya Sōichi, vol. 4] (Tokyo: Sōyōsha, 1975), 26.

in balancing the need to protect certain aspects of the teachings that distinguish them from established religions and other groups. At the same time, they generally reach a point where they need to engage with the broader public in order to gain support. This is particularly the case for millennial groups such as Jiu, which attempt to use the visions of the founder as a kind of spiritual roadmap that will purportedly guide the nation from a period of crisis. The media provides an opportunity for a religious group to access audiences that it may not normally reach through its own efforts. Having famous faces join the cause can fast track this process but it can also quickly lead to trouble, as this case demonstrates. The conflict between the public face of a celebrity like Futabayama, public expectations, and his own spiritual concerns was played out in the press. The Jiu case highlights the crucial role that media representation can play in the social activities of religions.