

## Attacks on the New Religions Risshō Kōseikai and the “Yomiuri Affair”

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*The Risshō Kōseikai, one of the most successful of the modern Japanese New Religions, faced a crisis in the mid-1950s with what is known as the “Yomiuri Affair.” In only one of many forms through which the Risshō Kōseikai faced conflict, the Yomiuri Shinbun published a series of articles critical of the Kōseikai and its activities. The present essay examines the circumstances of the affair, analyzes the Kōseikai’s response, and investigates how the incident conditioned the society’s later development.*

FEW INCIDENTS HAVE so endangered the existence of the Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, and so influenced its subsequent development, as the so-called “Yomiuri Affair” (*Yomiuri jiken* 読売事件) of the mid-1950s. Hence any analysis of the recent history of the society must take this event into account.

In political systems that do not recognize the principle of separation of church and state, those creeds identified as inimical to the interests of the nation are subject to severe persecution; only if the offending ideas are “corrected” is the belief system permitted to exist. Examples of this type of religious persecution under the imperial system in prewar Japan are so well known as to require no special mention here. Although such government-directed suppression is seldom seen in systems that *do* separate the realms of government and religion, persecution (especially against new religious movements) is still likely due to prejudice, envy, and misunderstanding. The Yomiuri Affair provides an excellent example of this type of persecution. The present essay examines the circumstances of the affair, analyzes the Kōseikai’s response, and investigates how the incident conditioned the society’s later development.

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*The Background of the Yomiuri Affair*

THE ZŌSHIKI INCIDENT

The New Religions attracted an increasing amount of media attention in the immediate postwar years following a number of scandals in some of the largest of these organizations. In 1949, for example, the Reiyūkai 霊友会, flush from a period of rapid postwar growth, was rumored to have collected large quantities of gold bullion and cocaine and to have evaded taxes on a massive scale; later, in 1953, the president of the organization was charged with having physically abused his maid. Similarly, in 1950 the founder of Sekai Kyūseikyō 世界救世教 was arrested on multiple charges including bribery and tax evasion.

It is hardly surprising that the Risshō Kōseikai would attract the interest of the media: the society grew out of the Reiyūkai, it shared many of its practices, and it showed evidence of great recent wealth, with a newly constructed headquarters complex and growing flocks of believers. In January 1951 the society counted 60,000 households among its believers; by the same time the following year the figure was 90,000. During this one-year period, the Kōseikai's official daily *Nippō* 日報 noted visits by at least eighty representatives of the mass media. Although most of these visits may have been for the express purpose of news-gathering, the image is nevertheless one of birds of prey gathering around a potential meal.

Among the representatives were those of the NHK, the government-sponsored broadcasting corporation. Using materials gathered on 4 February 1952, NHK put together a half-hour radio program for its series *Shakai no mado* 社会の窓 [Window on society]. Broadcast on 7 February 1952 from 9:15 PM, the program, entitled "Can a Person's Life-span Be Foretold?", concerned the case of Kondō Toki 近藤トキ, a housewife in the village of Zōshiki 蔵敷 in Kita Tama 北多摩 west of Tokyo. According to the broadcast, Kondō was told by a Kōseikai fortuneteller that her twelve-year-old son would die when he reached fourteen; shocked and depressed, Kondō committed double suicide with her son in August 1951, using potassium cyanide.

The Kōseikai, which had been anticipating some free and favorable publicity from the NHK broadcast, was understandably surprised by the unexpected contents of the program. Fearing that the broadcast would lead to misunderstandings of their organization, they decided to ask the *Fujin Shinbun* 婦人新聞, a woman's newspaper with which they had close ties, to put out a special issue explaining the true character of the Risshō Kōseikai. For this purpose they held a round-table discussion on 13 February 1952, attended by four reporters of the *Fujin Shinbun* and seven members of the Kōseikai, including several of the

top leaders. The discussion featured sermons by President Niwano Nikkyō 庭野日敬 (1906– ) and Vice-president Naganuma Myōkō 長沼妙俊 (1889–1957), a message from the deputy general director, and a contribution from the official in charge of religious affairs at the Ministry of Education.

In spite of this, and as the leadership had feared, the NHK broadcast generated a wave of negative publicity in the popular press. Articles with headlines such as the *Mainichi Shinbun*'s “Risshō Kōseikai—A Bogus Religion,” and the *Tōkyō Shinbun*'s “What Can We Learn from This Murder-by-Suggestion?” strengthened the public impression that the Kondō suicides were the responsibility of the Kōseikai.

In an attempt to clarify the situation, the Shin Nihon Shūkyō Dantai Rengōkai 新日本宗教団体連合会 (The New Japan Federation of Religious Organizations [Shinshūren]), of which the Kōseikai was a prominent member, launched an investigation of its own. Its report, released in February 1952, pointed out that Kondō's suicide had been attributed by the police to a nervous breakdown; four contributing factors to this breakdown had been identified, but none of them had anything to do with the Risshō Kōseikai. The Shinshūren lodged a strong protest with NHK, which it accused of failing in its obligation as a public corporation to present a fair and impartial account of the facts. It also ran a feature in the 25 May 1952 issue of its bulletin, the *Shinshūkyō Shinbun* 新宗教新聞, headlined “The Truth about the Zōshiki Incident.”

The Kōseikai, for its part, issued an open letter at about the same time that the Shinshūren's report was released, protesting its innocence in the matter of the Kondō suicides and claiming that the NHK broadcast was a deliberate distortion of the facts. It also transcribed a talk given on 15 February 1952 by a society member who lived in the same apartment building as the Kondō family, and printed it in the March issue of the journal *Kōsei* 交成 under the title, “Impressions of a Tama Member on the False Report of NHK.”

#### PRESS COMMENTS ON THE KŌSEIKAI

At the same time as the above events were unfolding, the Nihon Bengoshi Rengōkai 日本弁護士連合会 (The Japan Federation of Bar Associations [Nichibenren]) was pursuing an investigation of its own. In September 1951, one month after Kondō Toki's suicide, her husband had contacted the federation about filing charges against the Kōseikai for human rights violations. The case had been accepted and responsibility for looking into the evidence assigned to the fifth section of the federation's Committee on Human Rights.

The NHK program on the Zōshiki Incident was broadcast around

the time that the Nichibenren came to its conclusions following nearly six months of investigation; considering the climate of the times, it is quite possible that the NHK program was influenced by the committee's findings. In any event, the committee's report not only cited the Kōseikai for violations of human rights, but directed them to refrain in the future from all irregularities in its proselytization activities and from all physical and psychological violations of its believers' rights. On 26 June 1952 the Nichibenren submitted this report to the Ministry of Education official in charge of overseeing religious organizations, and other government agencies dealing with human rights issues. Nichibenren's conclusions were based largely upon the testimony of the plaintiff and did not meet even those standards of impartiality employed by the police; the Ministry of Education expressed surprise at the report, commenting that they "found it difficult to understand why an authoritative organization like the Nichibenren would issue a warning of this nature." Nevertheless, the federation's warning carried weight with the public, and strengthened the impression among the mass media that the Kōseikai was indeed at fault in the Zōshiki Incident.

From April to November 1952 the *Shūkan Asahi* 週刊朝日 journal serialized a novel by the popular novelist Niwa Fumio 丹羽文雄 entitled *Hebi to hato* 蛇と鳩 [The snake and the dove]; the novel featured a New Religion called the Shiun Gensekai 紫雲現世会 that was widely believed to be modeled on the Risshō Kōseikai. This was followed by more pieces on the society in the popular press, some pro but mostly con. Even excluding religious publications, there were altogether ninety-eight newspaper articles and eleven magazine articles in 1953, followed by more coverage in 1954. The trend in most of these reports was to portray the Risshō Kōseikai as a bogus religion out to bilk people of their money.

Despite this treatment the Kōseikai continued to cooperate with media representatives in an attempt to express its side of the story; it remained open even to NHK, whose story had given rise to the problems. He also carried out a public relations initiative of their own, running special features on the Risshō Kōseikai in the 15 October 1952 and 16 September 1953 issues of the *Shin Shūkyō Shinbun*. On 15 April 1954 Niwano participated in an NHK-sponsored debate entitled "Is the present state of Japanese religion satisfactory?" The debate, broadcast on 18 April, provided Niwano with an opportunity to explain to the public the aims of the New Religions. Another active supporter was Kamomiya Jōkai 鴨宮成介, a Nichiren Buddhist who entered the Kōseikai and later headed its doctrinal research institute; Kamomiya

contributed numerous articles explaining the society’s position to such publications as the Buddhist newspaper *Chūgai Nippō* 中外日報.

A few supportive articles were also written by people outside the society who understood its aims and attempted to explain them to the general public. Among these was *Risshō Kōseikai no shinkō* [The faith of Risshō Kōseikai] by TSURUFUJI Ikuta (1954).

“THE RISSHŌ KŌSEIKAI SHOULD BE ORDERED TO DISBAND”

1954 was a year that saw many triumphs for the Risshō Kōseikai. Its membership reached 200,000 households, and construction was under way or completed on many important headquarters buildings, including the Second Training Hall, the administration building, and the hospital. Numerous local training halls had also been built, or were being built, in outlying areas like Kita Ibaragi, Mito, and Kominato. But perhaps for these very reasons the Kōseikai continued to be viewed with suspicion by much of the public, and it became ever harder to rectify the organization’s mass-media-fostered image as a bogus religion that lured some people with promises of this-worldly benefits and intimidated others with rigged fortune-telling.

On 9 February 1954 legal action was brought against the Risshō Kōseikai by Shiraishi Shigeru 白石重, a recent convert who had formerly worked as a reporter for the *Yomiuri Shinbun*. Shiraishi initiated legal action with the Tokyo District Court, asking that the Kōseikai be legally required to disband, basing his request on the following arguments:

- 1 The Kōseikai claims, in paragraph 3 of its legal charter, to base its teachings upon the threefold *Lotus Sūtra*. In fact, it promulgates teachings opposed to those of the *Lotus Sūtra* and Nichiren Shōnin, thereby misrepresenting Buddhist doctrine and misleading the society’s believers. This is in clear violation of Article 2 of the Religious Corporation Act, which states that the purpose of a religious group is to spread its doctrines and educate its believers.
- 2 The Kōseikai employs prophesy and fortune-telling to influence or coerce its believers, causing them confusion and disrupting the public welfare.
- 3 The Kōseikai has illegally extracted immeasurable amounts of material wealth and labor from its followers, commercial activities that disqualify it as a religious organization.

Shiraishi thus claimed that the Kōseikai could be cited under the Religious Corporation Act, which provides for the dissolution of any religious group that “engages in clear-cut activities which seriously dis-

rupt the public welfare” (Article 81, paragraph 1, section 1) or “conspicuously deviates from the purposes of a religious organization” (Article 81, paragraph 1, section 2). As witnesses to testify to the inaccuracy of the Kōseikai’s teachings in the framework of *Lotus Sūtra* and Nichirenist doctrine, Shiraishi called Hongō Takakichi 本江 隆吉 (Shiraishi’s teacher and priest of the Nichiren sect temple Hon’in-ji 本因寺) and Matsudaira Toshiko 松平 俊子 (another of Hongō’s disciples and a former professor at Shōwa Women’s University); further witnesses were called to testify to the Kōseikai’s “disruption of the public welfare,” and various critical articles were culled from the popular press to serve as evidence.

Shiraishi’s action came a mere two months after he had joined the Kōseikai. One cannot help wondering if his suit was motivated not by doctrinal considerations but by something more personal, such as unpleasant experiences at the Kōseikai’s *hōza* 法座 discussion groups. His joining the society may even have been in the nature of a “fact-finding mission” designed to uncover information useful for discrediting it. Whatever reasons Shiraishi may have had for his suit, his action was quite a blow to the Kōseikai. The society asked Kamomiya, an expert in doctrinal issues, to prepare a legal defense.

One factor in this incident that must be taken into consideration is the possible involvement of the Nichiren sect headquarters at Minobu-san 身延山. In its early days the Kōseikai had had a close association with the sect, taking groups of its believers to worship at Minobu-san from 1940 and actively promoting an amalgamation of major sects among Nichiren believers around 1950. The narrow sectarianism of the Nichiren establishment led to a cooling of the relationship, however, and ties were completely severed in January 1952 (an occurrence not unrelated, in the Kōseikai’s opinion, to the NHK’s Zōshiki Incident broadcast the following month). A settlement was reached between the two parties in June of that same year, leading to a resumption of the Kōseikai visits to Minobu-san, but relations soured again in 1953. In another strange “coincidence,” soon after this second break an article appeared in the journal *Shinsō* 真相 about a purported Kōseikai plot to take over the Nichiren headquarters. Shiraishi may have taken his legal action under the influence of Minobu-san. We will return to Shiraishi and his lawsuit later.

#### LEGAL DIFFICULTIES WITH THE WADABORI PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

In 1952 the Kōseikai purchased a piece of land in the Sugunami area of Tokyo for its Seinenbu 青年部 [Youth Division] to use as a baseball field. This brought the society into contact with Wadabori Property

Development Association in 1953. Later the Kōseikai altered its plans for the land, deciding to use it as the site of a school to be called the Kōsei Gakuen 倭成学園. The society cooperated a great deal with the property development association in making arrangements to have the property—formerly registered as agricultural land—reclassified as residential land, and in securing funds for the project. Part of the development required the relocation of eight high-voltage-line pylons to a new site over the Zenpuku-ji River on the Wadabori property.

In May 1955 the Kōseikai’s difficulties with the Wadabori Property Development Association began when a member of the association physically obstructed the pylon construction work. In December of the same year three association members charged the former association head and two officers of the Kōseikai (who were also deputy leaders of the association) with forging signatures and personal seals and using these in the commission of an illegal act. As it was this charge that ultimately gave rise to the Yomiuri Affair, it deserves to be examined in some detail.

The three plaintiffs were all landholders in the Wadabori property development area; one was the association’s largest landowner, while the sizes of the others’ holdings are unknown. The substance of their charge was as follows.

The Wadabori Property Development Association was formed in 1941. Because of wartime food-production policies and postwar land reform the association was unable to carry out its development plans, and was finally forced to dissolve. Beginning in 1953 the Risshō Kōseikai attempted to buy up large properties in the area at extremely low prices and to have them rezoned as residential land; in order to expedite these moves the society decided to utilize the association’s name. A general meeting of the association was called to make it appear that proper procedures had been followed and that all decisions had been made in accordance with the law. This meeting, held on 20 December 1953 in a room owned by the Kōseikai, was attended by the society’s leaders and by a portion of the association’s membership. Notice of the meeting was not given to those members of the association who were opposed to the Kōseikai’s designs. For the sake of appearances, however, an attendance record and an account of the proceedings were produced. Plaintiff A’s signature was forged on the account of the proceedings, and the personal seals of plaintiffs B and C (both of whom were not present at the meeting) were forged and affixed to the attendance record. As these acts violate paragraph 167, section 1 of the criminal code, regulating

forgery of personal seals, we request that, following thorough investigation, the perpetrators receive the full penalty of the law (up to three years' imprisonment if guilty).

The following note was also appended

As involvement in the above affair by President Niwano, Chairman Naganuma, and board member Okano is suspected, we ask that these three also be included in the investigation.

The plaintiffs' charge had questionable features from the very beginning. As the *Kōseikai* saw it, the accusation that it had used the association's name for its own purposes was utterly groundless. The *Risshō Kōseikai* learned that its new property—a low-lying marshy area of about 3.3 hectares on the floodplain of the *Zenpuku-ji* River—had been partially under the management of the *Wadabori* Property Development Association only in the spring of 1953, after representatives of the association sought the *Kōseikai*'s help in rezoning the area from agricultural to residential use. In response to the association's request, the *Kōseikai* approached Tokyo's Department of City Planning and was informed that if the purpose of the rezoning was the construction of a school then there would be no complications with the agricultural land-use laws. This opened the way for the adjacent lands managed by the association to be reclassified as well, resulting in an enormous increase in their development potential. Thus in the *Kōseikai*'s view it had actually helped the association (NIWANO 1956, p. 17).

Furthermore, if the forgeries had indeed taken place, why had the plaintiffs not pressed charges in 1953 (the time of the alleged crime) but waited instead until December 1955, after the *Zenpuku-ji* River had been contained, the marshland filled, bridges constructed, the power cable pylons erected, and the society's *Kōsei Gakuen* built? Why, in other words, had they waited until the property was fully developed and its value had vastly increased? The plaintiffs' appended request that the *Kōseikai* leadership be included in the investigation seemed an act of pure spite against the society, which the plaintiffs apparently regarded as being the biggest winners in the land deal. They may also have been influenced by the popular press's continuing campaign against the *Kōseikai*, which had created a public atmosphere critical of the society.

The plaintiffs further complicated the legal situation in February 1956 when they launched a civil suit calling into question the legal status of the *Wadabori* Property Development Association at the time of the alleged crime. Proceedings actually commenced the preceding December, when the plaintiffs sought a provisional court injunction

against use of the association name by the association’s officers, claiming that the association had legally ceased to exist as of 3 August 1952 in accordance with provisions of the Land Improvement Act. The court recognized the action and issued a temporary injunction forbidding the association to engage in further activities until such time as the case could be settled in court. In response the officers of the association submitted a joint petition to the court protesting the injunction and claiming that the plaintiffs’ interpretation of the Land Improvement Act was in error.

Thus the stage was set for the Yomiuri Affair. On the one hand the Risshō Kōseikai was facing a crisis brought about by the continuing attacks in the popular press and the various legal actions initiated by Shiraishi and the three plaintiffs from the Wadabori Property Development Association. On the other hand, the Kōseikai remained a vigorous and growing organization. Approximately 100,000 believers attended the annual New Year’s celebration at the headquarters on 5 January 1956; five days later at a board of directors’ meeting plans were unanimously approved for the Daiseidō 大聖堂 (Great Sacred Hall), a five- to six-story ferroconcrete structure of approximately 13,000 m<sup>2</sup>, to be built on a site in the Wadabori area north of the Kōsei Gakuen in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Kōseikai’s founding. The society’s leaders remained confident of the society’s continuing success.

### *The Circumstances of the Yomiuri Affair*

#### ATTACKS ON THE KŌSEIKAI BY THE YOMIURI SHINBUN

The *Yomiuri Shinbun*, one of Japan’s major national newspapers, was something of a specialist in exposing various of the New Religions, having considerably raised its circulation with series on Ōmoto, Tenrikyō, Sekai Kyūseikyō, and the Reiyūkai. The Kōseikai could not escape the paper’s attention for long, given the society’s negative public image since the 1952 NHK broadcast and its various legal difficulties. Sensing a story, the newspaper began looking into the Risshō Kōseikai in October 1955, increasing its activities later that year after the Metropolitan Police Headquarters’ Criminal Affairs Division started investigating the various complaints against the society. A “Kōseikai Squad” was organized, composed of about ten *Yomiuri* reporters on the police beat (*ZENBOSHA* 1956, p. 62). This squad launched a nationwide information-gathering effort, aided by reporters assigned to the various government ministries. The newspaper launched its campaign on 25 January 1956 with a six-column headline proclaiming, “The

Risshō Kōseikai Exposed! Three Hectares of Land Illegally Purchased Through Land Development Association in Suginami Ward.”

At the time the Kōseikai was engaged in its regular winter practice of chanting the title of the *Lotus Sūtra*, using for this purpose nearly all of its various headquarters buildings. Despite the unusual state of tension that gripped the society following the appearance of the *Yomiuri* article, the operations of the Kōseikai continued uninterrupted as the board of directors went ahead as scheduled with the land purchases and other activities associated with construction of the Great Sacred Hall.

Yet there were many signs that the various legal actions directed against the society were picking up momentum. The Kōseikai leaders paid frequent visits to the Tokyo District Court, the Suginami Police Headquarters, and the Tokyo District Attorney's Office, and received callers from the various police agencies. On 11 February not only were the leaders of the Wadabori Property Development Association arrested and placed under detention, but the entire Wadabori land issue was brought up in the Construction Committee of the House of Councilors by Tanaka Hajime 田中 一 of the Socialist Party. On 28 February simultaneous police searches were carried out on the Kōseikai's executive office, the Wadabori Property Development Association's office, and the Kōsei Gakuen's administrative section. According to the *Nippō* for that day, the searches continued for approximately three hours. Two officers of the Kōseikai, both of them also assistant heads of the Wadabori Property Development Association, were arrested; one was kept under police custody for twenty days and the other for thirty. They were charged with malfeasance and violation of the Town Planning and Zoning Act, and their case sent to the Tokyo District Attorney.

After investigating the case, however, the Tokyo District Attorney's office was unable to find sufficient evidence to bring the case to court. Nor was there any indication that the alleged financial improprieties connected with the Wadabori Property Development Association had actually occurred. Quite the contrary—the investigation suggested that the Kōseikai was innocent of any wrongdoing.

As this became increasingly clear the *Yomiuri Shinbun* shifted the focus of its continuing attacks to the Kōseikai's methods of proselytization. On 2 March, for example, the newspaper ran articles on the Kōseikai with such headlines as “My Livelihood Was Taken from Me,” “Kōseikai Prophecies That My House Would Burn within Three Years,” and “Even after Quitting the Kōseikai, Unwelcome Solicitations”; also printed was a statement from the Ministry of Education head-

lined “Religious Rituals to Be Controlled.” Similar articles appeared on 6 March, when Shiraishi’s lawsuit against the Kōseikai was taken up in detail, and 8 March, when various stories by supposed victims of the Kōseikai’s “fanaticism” and “coercive prophesying” were run.

As mentioned above, there were about ten reporters on the *Yomiuri*’s Kōseikai Squad, yet, according to the Kōseikai, only once did someone identifying himself as a *Yomiuri* reporter come to the headquarters. The society was secretly visited, however, by two reporters who posed as believers in an attempt to expose its internal workings. The reports of these “spies” appeared in the 17 March issue of the *Yomiuri* under such headings as “Two Weeks in the Disguise of Kōseikai Believers,” “The Morning *Hōza*: A Place of Intimidation,” “How the Kōseikai Extorts Contributions,” etc. Interestingly, one of the reporters, Mita Kazuo 三田和夫, later wrote a “confession” entitled “Risshō Kōseikai sennyū ki” 立正交成会潜入記 [A record of the Kōseikai infiltration], in which he comments, “Although the Risshō Kōseikai campaign should logically have commenced only after we had investigated the organization from the inside, we were sent in as spies when things were already under way,” and, “Frankly speaking, the [anti]-Risshō Kōseikai campaign was unable either to reveal it as a bogus religion or to weaken it and cause its collapse.”

The *Yomiuri*’s attacks continued on an almost daily basis. Although the subsequent stories were by and large the same in content as those mentioned above, several developments deserve mention. First, a series of stories appeared directly attacking Naganuma Myōkō, the cofounder of the Kōseikai: on 7 April an article was run suggesting her complicity in the death of a seriously ill person, and on 11 April another claiming that a Diet probe had revealed her to have once been a prostitute. Second, completely groundless intimations of tax irregularities were made against the Kōseikai, with an article on 11 April suggesting that certain of the society’s earnings were under official suspicion, and another on 2 May claiming that the society had used its proselytization work to evade taxes.<sup>1</sup> Deprived of the Wadabori land issue, the *Yomiuri* appeared to be beating the bushes for new targets of attack.

<sup>1</sup> The tax charge emerged in connection with income that the Kōseikai gained from the sale of such objects as rosaries, posthumous name booklets, and publications. The society had contacted the tax bureau about the status of this income, but had received no reply at the time the Yomiuri Affair started. Moved to action by the publicity surrounding the affair, the tax bureau levied a total of approximately ¥20,000,000 in back taxes on the Kōseikai. The incident attracted the attention of other religious organizations since it was the first case in which income of this type had been taxed. The Kōseikai filed an objection with the Tokyo tax office to no avail.

## INCREASING POLITICIZATION

As the focus of the campaign against the Kōseikai shifted from alleged irregularities in the Wadabori land purchases to possible human rights violations, a concomitant politicization took place. On 9 March 1956 the *Yomiuri*, citing the 1952 Zōshiki Incident, reported that the Japan Bar Association intended to investigate possible excesses in the Kōseikai's proselytization activities. On 23 March Inomata Kōzō 猪俣浩三 of the Socialist Party, a member of the House of Representatives Committee on Judicial Affairs and the person who had exposed the misdeeds of the Reiyūkai, brought up the "Risshō Kōseikai Affair" as a possible case of human rights violations; the same issue was raised on 29 March by Takada Naoko 高田なほ子, a Socialist on the House of Councilors' Committee on Judicial Affairs. The following day Nohara Satoru 野原 覚, a Socialist member of the House of Representatives Committee on Education, demanded that the Ministry of Education come to a quick decision on whether or not to call upon the court for the legal dissolution of the Kōseikai.<sup>2</sup> On 6 April the Kōsei Hospital was investigated on suspicion of "illegal activities in the area of public health" by the House of Councilors Committee on Social and Labor Affairs.

The Committee on Social and Labor Affairs also initiated an investigation of faith healing, sending inquiries to the various government agencies concerned with health care. On 12 April the Ministry of Health and Welfare asked the prefectural governments to look into possible pharmaceutical and medical irregularities in the areas under their jurisdiction, and to examine trends in faith healing and the solicitation of religious offerings (the *Yomiuri* [13 April] reported this under "Ministry of Health and Welfare Investigates Bogus Religions"). On 19 April the Ministry of Education sent out inquiries regarding misconduct in the areas of faith healing and such practices as massage, acupuncture, and chiropractic. Finally, on 25 April the Criminal Affairs Department of the National Police Agency requested the prefectural police departments to investigate the proselytization activities of the New Religions.

Of the various government groups mentioned above, the one most persistent in its probes of the Risshō Kōseikai was the House of Representatives Committee on Judicial Affairs. On 11 April Representative Inomata spoke on cases that he had read about in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* or heard of from, apparently, *Yomiuri* reporters, and sought clarifi-

<sup>2</sup> Kiyose Ichirō 清瀬一郎, the Minister of Education, responded that the case would be pursued when, and if, evidence of "serious disruption of the public welfare" was found (*Dai-nijūyonkai kokkaishūgin bunkyō ūinkai giroku* 第二四回国会衆議院文教委員会議録 23, pp. 7-8).

cation from the head of the Ministry of Justice Bureau for the Protection of Human Rights and a representation of its Criminal Affairs Bureau. Several special meetings of the Committee on Judicial Affairs were also convened at the request of Inomata to discuss the Risshō Kōseikai Affair. On 20 April a variety of witnesses against the Kōseikai were called to testify; on 30 April many of the principal figures of the entire affair, including Shiraishi and Kōseikai president Niwano, were summoned and subjected to questioning. In the course of this latter meeting Niwano had the opportunity to explain the Kōseikai’s position with regard to many of the accusations that had been brought against it, but he was ill-prepared to answer some of the negative (and largely unsubstantiated) testimony that the House of Representatives Judicial Affairs Research Section had secretly gathered from people opposed to the society.

#### THE RESPONSE OF THE KŌSEIKAI

The Risshō Kōseikai Affair was reported on by several other papers in addition to the *Yomiuri*, including the *Mainichi Shinbun*, the *Tokyo Shinbun*, and the *Asahi Shinbun*. Primarily because of the ambiguous nature of the entire story, however, none pursued it with any great enthusiasm—the *Asahi* had published only three articles by June 1956, and the *Mainichi* only two. Two papers, the *Nippon Shūhō* 日本週報 (no. 360) and the *Zenbō* (no. 42), saw the affair as a showdown between the *Yomiuri Shinbun* and the Risshō Kōseikai. Other “media” did follow the *Yomiuri*’s lead, however: a number of soapbox speeches were made in Tokyo, posters calling for the dissolution of the Kōseikai were put up near the society’s headquarters, and Kōseikai members were exhorted to quit the organization by a right-wing group called the Daitōsha 大踏社.

The fact that the Daitōsha also distributed the transcript of a round-table discussion held by a group named the Minobukai 身延会 suggested once again the influence of the Nichiren sect headquarters at Minobu-san. As mentioned above, relations between Minobu-san and the Kōseikai had long been poor, since the Nichiren sect had expelled the Kōseikai in September 1953. Public accusations against the Kōseikai encouraged the antagonistic attitude of Minobu-san, and on 14 March 1956 it declared that the society bore no connection whatsoever with the Nichiren tradition (*Yomiuri Shinbun*, 15 March 1956, p. 7).

The *Yomiuri* continued its sensationalist campaign against the society, printing over forty stories between 15 January and 30 April 1956, many under banner headlines. The response of Kōseikai president Niwano to the often biased or unfounded reporting was restrained.

He counseled believers to accept the *Yomiuri* articles as a form of teaching, even going so far as to refer to the paper as “*Yomiuri Bodhisattva*.” On the occasion of the nineteenth annual celebration of the founding of the society (5 March 1956), Niwano made the following points in the course of his address:

- 1 Members seem to be taking the recent criticism of the society quite seriously, but if we constantly devote our attention to achieving true faith then there is no need for worry.
- 2 Giving rise to anger over unfounded news reports is not a response worthy of a bodhisattva. Times of trouble are the best occasion to examine oneself and determine whether or not one is truly free of selfish desire. Proselytization for the sake of helping others is fine, but are we certain our activities are not motivated in part by a desire to promote the growth of the organization to which we belong?
- 3 When the financial accounts of the Risshō Kōseikai have been thoroughly examined and it becomes known that we have engaged in no wrongdoing, then the true worth of the society will come to the attention of a large number of nonmembers. This is a wonderful opportunity to have just now, with the Great Sacred Hall project before us.

(*Kōsei* [April] 1956, pp. 6–12)

Niwano’s refusal to bring legal action against the *Yomiuri* for obviously fallacious reporting was an expression of much the same viewpoint: a religious organization should not, he believed, engage in such acts of reprisal (*Kōsei* [June] 1956, p. 7).

Naganuma Myōkō took a similar approach, seeing the *Yomiuri*’s campaign primarily as an inner problem. During her sermon on the occasion of the Buddha’s birthday (8 April), for example, she commented, “The Buddha is flaying us with the *Yomiuri Shinbun*.... This is the trial he is subjecting us to so that our feelings of self-importance might be rooted out and our desire for recognition destroyed” (*Kōsei* [May] 1956, pp. 14–17).

The fundamental posture of the Kōseikai was of course determined by the attitude of Niwano and Myōkō, but many of the society’s members were unable to suppress their indignation at the *Yomiuri*’s attacks. To accept the newspaper’s unfounded reports with patience and forbearance was fine, many felt, but it did little to divest the general public of the mistaken view it was gaining of the New Religions and contributed nothing to protecting the freedom of religion. The Wadabori land issue could be cleared up in the courts, they believed, but the

groundless rumors being spread by the paper could only be discredited through an objective and impartial examination of the facts.

To this end a fact-finding group was organized under the auspices of the Kōseikai's Youth Division. In conjunction with a similar group set up by the Shinshūren, this group commenced a detailed examination of the various accusations against the society, particularly those under review by the House of Representatives Committee on Judicial Affairs, the House Committee on Education, and the Japan Federation of Bar Association Committee on Human Rights. The results of the fact-finding group's examination were published and, on 19 April, distributed to the Diet, the appropriate government agencies, the newspapers, and various religious organizations. When the *Yomiuri* articles accusing Myōkō of prostitution and the Kōseikai of tax evasion appeared shortly after the completion of the initial investigation, the group looked into the new charges and published their findings in a supplementary report on 17 May.

Meanwhile, other parties were coming out in support of the Kōseikai. The Shinshūren's organ *Shinshūkyō Shinbun* ran several articles giving the society's side of the story, including a report on the Kōseikai fact-finding mission (20 April), pieces on Niwano's responses to the Committee on Judicial Affairs (5 May and again on 20 May), an exposé of the *Yomiuri*'s fabrications, and a transcript of a discussion between Niwano, Myōkō, and Ōishi Shūten 大石秀典 (administrative director of the Shinshūren; 20 May). A quite positive portrait of Niwano and Myōkō was presented in a book entitled *Kamigami tabō* 神々多忙 [The gods are busy], written by TAKI Taizō 滝 泰三 and published on 10 May 1956. On 28 May a special issue of the newspaper *Jiyūminron Shinbun* 自由民論新聞 appeared, featuring stories on the Kōseikai under the headline, “The Truth Will Prevail.” On 31 May the Kōseikai's Great Sacred Hall construction project was positively reported on in the *Tōkyō Yorozu Chōhō* 東京売朝報.

These publications not only helped increase public understanding of the society's activities but also served as a form of “internal PR,” with tens of thousands of issues of the newspaper specials being bought by the society and distributed to its members. The Kōseikai still lacked a newspaper of its own, however, and thus had no efficient means of getting news to its membership, answering charges brought against it in the media, or presenting its position to the public at large. Hence at the forty-seventh meeting of the board of trustees, held on 30 April 1956, it was decided to form a special committee to produce pamphlets and lay the groundwork for publication of a regular newspaper (this committee absorbed the earlier fact-finding group

associated with the Youth Division). This plan was approved at the eighty-sixth board of directors' meeting on 25 May. A staff of eighteen commenced work, and the first issue of the new *Kōsei Shinbun* was published on 15 June 1956 with a run of 200,000 copies. The newspaper was published thrice monthly and was initially distributed without charge. As the paper got under way the original production committee was reorganized into the *Kōsei Shinbun Company*, attached to the Dissemination Section of the society's Teaching and Training Department.

#### GOVERNMENT ACTION ON THE RISSHŌ KŌSEIKAI AFFAIR

Meanwhile, the National Diet's investigation of the Rishshō Kōseikai was finally coming to a conclusion. The first body to conclude its hearings was the House of Councilors Committee on Judicial Affairs, which on 31 May 1956 requested the attendance of the Minister of Justice and made the following representation to the government:

It appears that among the so-called New Religions, not a few have been guilty of violating fundamental human rights, breaking the laws of the nation, severely disrupting the public welfare, and deviating from the true purposes of a religious organization. It is incumbent upon the government to eliminate such violations of human rights and of the law, to make greater efforts in the proper application of the relevant statutes, and to revise said statutes when they are found to be inadequate.

Though strongly worded, the representation refrained from making any direct mention of the Rishshō Kōseikai.

The House of Representatives Committee on Judicial Affairs drew out its investigations a bit longer. On 1 June it held more hearings with testimony from a number of witnesses, including Kōseikai president Niwano. In the course of the questioning Representative Inomata, while admitting that his understanding of the Kōseikai was limited, took the society to task for its construction of large-scale buildings and its alleged use of fortune-telling as a tool of intimidation (*Dainijūyon kokkaigiin bunkyō iinkai giroku* 40, pp. 10, 11, 13, 14). For his part Niwano suggested that most of the criticism of the society had come from former believers who, not having participated in the society's training methods, misunderstood the true intent of its teachings; he also commented that, because of its explosive growth since the war, the society may have named a few people to leadership positions who were still lacking in maturity, and that this was cause for self-reflection (*Dainijūyon kokkaigiin bunkyō iinkai giroku* 40, pp. 13-14).

At this stage the Ministry of Education’s position was pretty much what it had been when, on 30 March, Minister of Education Kiyose had commented that action would be taken against the Kōseikai when and if evidence of harm to the public welfare was ever found (see above). In the materials it had prepared for the 1 June meeting of the Committee on Judicial Affairs, the ministry’s Section for Religious Affairs noted that it had to date obtained no corroborative evidence of legal violations or activities severely disruptive of the public welfare on the part of the Kōseikai, but that, since the results of investigations by Nichibenren’s Committee on Human Rights, the Ministry of Justice, the criminal investigation authorities, and other agencies should enable an accurate and objective assessment of the situation, it would like to postpone a final decision until then. Underlying this cautious position was the prospect that under the provisions of the existing Religious Corporation Act it would be impossible to obtain a court order to dissolve the Kōseikai. Meanwhile the respective investigations were no closer to obtaining conclusive evidence of wrongdoing by the Kōseikai. The head of the Ministry of Justice Bureau for the Protection of Human Rights, for example, made a guarded report stating that, as they had merely interviewed the supposedly injured parties in the incidents reported by the *Yomiuri Shinbun* and had not progressed to the point of assembling corroborative evidence, he was not yet in a position to reach any conclusions.

On 3 June the Committee on Judicial Affairs held its final meeting on the Kōseikai Affair. This time no witnesses were called, as further testimony seemed unlikely to result in any further damage against the Kōseikai. Representative Inomata made the following comment:

The control of religious freedom being necessary for the sake of public welfare, it is necessary that the relevant government agencies possess discretionary powers. It is necessary that background checks be run on the officials of religious organizations. It doesn’t make sense that we lack powers of investigation when such powers are necessary in seeking the dissolution of a religious group. I think that the Risshō Kōseikai is a bogus religion. With a man like Niwano Nikkyō on the board of the Religious Corporation Council,<sup>3</sup> I don’t see how that committee can fulfill its duties as an impartial consultative agency.

(*Dainijūyon kokkaigūin bunkyō ūinkai giroku* 42, pp. 1–3)

<sup>3</sup> This is a reference to Niwano’s appointment to the board of the Religious Corporation Council as the representative of the Shinshūren for the period from March 1954 to February 1956. After his term was completed his place was taken by Miki Tokuchika 御木徳近 of the PL Kyōdan.

Inomata's cavalier views regarding the freedom of belief and his calls for the strengthening of government supervision over religious organizations are especially surprising in view of the fact that he himself was a Christian. Be that as it may, the Committee on Judicial Affairs closed its hearings on the alleged human rights violations of the Risshō Kōseikai by unanimously adopting a "resolution against improper activities by religious organizations" (see below).

The *Yomiuri Shinbun* reported both the 1 June and the 3 June committee meetings with close-up treatment of only those parts that would lend support to its own position. However, with the close of the hearings the newspaper campaign appears to have exhausted its sources of information. Thus for its 6 June issue it printed the transcript of a round-table discussion entitled "The Future of the New Religions: A Discussion on the Occasion of the National Diet's Recommendations Regarding the Risshō Kōseikai," with discussants including some of the Kōseikai's strongest critics.

#### THE RESOLUTION OF THE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIAL AFFAIRS

The resolution unanimously approved at the 3 June meeting of the Committee on Judicial Affairs centered on the following two points.

- 1 The committee's investigation of human rights violations relating to the Risshō Kōseikai revealed various excesses and numerous activities that can be regarded as disruptive of the public welfare, particularly acts of deception, coercion, and superstition connected with joining and leaving the organization, collecting money and valuables, and treating disease.
- 2 In view of the openly improper/illegal activities of the Risshō Kōseikai and other religious organizations including the so-called New Religions, the government should take the following steps in order to protect the human rights of the citizenry:
  - a strive to expose proselytization activities that are criminal in nature or that involve violations of human rights;
  - b conduct a thoroughgoing investigation of whether or not there is cause to invoke Article 81 of the Religious Corporation Act authorizing the dissolution of religious organizations;
  - c as a prerequisite to point b), study the matters of powers of investigation and increased punishments, particularly with regard to provisions in the article relating to certification, the disqualification of officers, and the authority to examine documents;

d direct the Public Prosecutor’s Office, as the representative of the public interest and the agency authorized to order dissolution of religious corporations, to take appropriate steps with regard to investigations of said organizations.

(*Dainijūyon kokkaigiin bunkyō iinkai giroku* 42, p. 12)

Point 1 of this resolution comprises a condemnation of the Kōseikai for “activities that can be thought of as disruptive of the public welfare.” This ambiguous and subjective wording was adopted by the Committee on Judicial Affairs in spite of testimony by the Minister of Education that no supporting evidence for this charge had been found, and in spite of the fact that the committee itself had not been able to come up with any telling points against the Kōseikai during the course of its hearings.

Point 2 was an attempt to get relevant government agencies to move into action. It brought about several results. The first was a communication, dated 21 June, from the head of the Ministry of Education Bureau of Investigation to various religious organizations on the matter of “improper religious activities.” In response to the conclusions reached by the respective committees on judicial affairs of the House of Councilors and the House of Representatives, the communication urged the organizations to avoid activities that might invite misunderstanding in the areas of human rights and the public welfare.

The second result of the committee’s resolution was a liaison meeting held at the Ministry of Justice Bureau of Criminal Affairs on 8 September and attended by representatives of the Ministry of Justice Bureau for the Protection of Human Rights, the Supreme Court Bureau of Criminal Affairs, the Ministry of Education Bureau of Investigation, the National Police Agency, the Metropolitan Police Department, the Supreme Public Prosecutor’s Office, and the Tokyo High Public Prosecutor’s Office. The participants discussed ways of controlling the excesses of the New Religions, and decided to strengthen supervision by the Ministry of Justice Bureau for the Protection of Human Rights and the Ministry of Education Bureau of Investigation (*Tokyo Shinbun*, 9 September 1956). As a result of this decision the Bureau of Investigation, acting upon point 1 of the Committee on Judicial Affairs’ resolution, sent another communication to the Risshō Kōseikai on 21 September, stating, “Regrettably, incidents suspected of violating human rights have been brought to our attention. We ask that you devote serious reflection to the cause of said incidents and act in such a manner as not to disrupt the public welfare.” This warning may also have been issued partially in response

to a statement by Inomata at an 11 September meeting of the Committee on Judicial Affairs to the effect that the Ministry of Education's Section for Religious Affairs was partial to the Kōseikai (*Asahi Shinbun* 11 September 1956).

The Ministry of Education's communications were taken up at meetings of the Kōseikai's board of directors and board of trustees, where it was decided to increase education at the grassroots level regarding "activities that might invite misunderstanding." A strong reaction against the government was seen in the *Shinshūkyō Shinbun* (5 October 1956), however, which condemned the Committee on Judicial Affairs and the Ministry of Education for violating the principles of freedom of religion and the separation of church and state, and protested against the government on the grounds that the suppression of vital new religious movements was seriously detrimental to the long-term interests of the nation.

*Effects of the Yomiuri Affair upon the Risshō Kōseikai*

EFFECT ON THE SIZE OF THE MEMBERSHIP

The Yomiuri Affair, as might be expected, left its mark upon the Risshō Kōseikai. Before looking into how the society was affected, however, let us first briefly examine the effects of the incident upon its initiator, the *Yomiuri Shinbun*. Kōseikai members, many of whom subscribed to the *Yomiuri*, were of course offended by the nature of the paper's reporting. As a result a movement got under way in the society to switch to the *Sankei Shinbun* 産経新聞, the editorial policy of which was much more favorable to the Kōseikai. The consequence was a drop in circulation of 200,000 for the *Yomiuri*, an ironic outcome for the paper in light of the fact that it had embarked upon its campaign in the hope of increasing its readership. The paper also found itself on the defensive when influential lawyers connected with the Kōseikai began to apply pressure. It thus set about reaching a settlement with the society (according to one account the owners offered a settlement fee of ¥20,000,000, but Niwano would have nothing to do with it). The huge losses associated with the campaign led to a reshuffling of the paper's management: the editor of the local news section—the man in charge of the story—was transferred, and the reporters assigned to the case were demoted.

How did the campaign affect the Kōseikai? The *Yomiuri*, in the same issue (17 March 1956) that ran stories by its two reporters posing as believers, noted a "precipitous decline in the [Kōseikai's] membership." A check of the membership figures for that period shows that

there was indeed a drop in the number of believers for 1956 totaling 23,000. The number of those entering the society that year was 44,000 (less than half the figure for 1955), while the number of those leaving was 69,000 (double 1955's figure). Hence the influence of the *Yomiuri* campaign can be discerned in both the reduced number of those entering and the increased number of those leaving. The decrease in membership was reflected in a corresponding drop in the circulation of the society's journal, *Kōsei*, which fell from 185,000–188,000 a month during the period from January to April 1956 to 170,000 a month for the months of May to July (further drops were recorded for August and thereafter, but these can be attributed to the appearance of the society's newspaper, *Kōsei Shinbun*).

Thus the society's growth, which had continued at record-breaking levels since 1945, was for a time reversed. Although from one point of view this drop in membership can be seen as a constructive “sifting out” of uncommitted followers, it cannot be denied that the Yomiuri Affair dealt a severe blow to the Kōseikai.

One positive result was that on 25 September 1956 the board of directors named a full-time director of proselytization activities, charged with overseeing propagation activities throughout the country and with handling liaison between the society's headquarters and the local chapters. In addition to this, large-scale proselytization drives were held across the nation in August and November 1956, aiming at encouraging those believers whose faith had been shaken by the events of the Yomiuri Affair.

#### DEVELOPMENTS IN THE KŌSEIKAI DISSOLUTION SUIT

Shiraishi's legal action against the Risshō Kōseikai had meanwhile taken a new direction. Following the hearings by the House of Representative Committee on Judicial Affairs on 30 April, Shiraishi, having apparently decided that it would be to his advantage to settle out of court, opened negotiations with the Kōseikai under the mediation of Ono Katsura 小野 桂. The two parties met first on 29 June and again on 19 July. For the latter meeting Shiraishi prepared a letter of reconciliation and the Kōseikai representatives prepared a memorandum, to which the respective parties affixed their official seals. Shiraishi's letter stated: that he accepted the sincerity of Niwano's “self-reflection” expressed at the time of the 1 June hearings of the Committee on Judicial Affairs; that he had not sufficiently recognized the nature of the Risshō Kōseikai as a true religious organization that had significantly contributed to the alleviation of human suffering; that he would withdraw his lawsuit against the Kōseikai on the condi-

tion that the society established an advisory board to help clarify and redress its past excesses; and that the Kōseikai promised to take his desires into consideration in their future actions. The Kōseikai's memorandum, which in large measure reflected the contents of Shiraishi's letter, stated: that it sincerely regretted having received criticism with regard to its earlier proselytization activities; that it would reaffirm its character as an organization based on the *Lotus Sūtra* and the teachings of Nichiren; that it would establish an advisory board for advice in doctrinal research and propagation; and that on the basis of the above Shiraishi would withdraw his lawsuit against the society.

As noted above Shiraishi's letter ended with a statement that "the Kōseikai promised to take his desires into consideration in their future actions," implied in this was a payment to Shiraishi of six million yen, enough at the time to guarantee his livelihood for the rest of his days. The two parties agreed to reach a final decision on both the withdrawal of the lawsuit and this "other matter" at a meeting scheduled for 28 July. Shiraishi did not appear at this meeting, however, claiming in a contents-certified letter that he had been deceived by Ono and that the agreement to end the lawsuit was therefore void.<sup>4</sup>

Shiraishi had apparently been expecting about ¥4,500,000 from the Kōseikai at the time the out-of-court settlement was announced on 19 July, as a form of down payment to cover court costs and other expenses. When this "deposit" had not been forthcoming he decided to claim deception on the part of Ono, abandon the current negotiations, and try a new tack. This much can be surmised from the fact that on the day after the meeting, 20 July, Shiraishi filed additional reasons for his suit against the Kōseikai with the Tokyo District Court. Then, with a new mediator, he reopened negotiations with the society. At a meeting on 16 August between Shiraishi and Niwano the 19 July letter of reconciliation was approved, opening the way for a final settlement of the entire affair. However, Shiraishi's conditions now included a demand that he be named head of the above-mentioned advisory board, a provision that led to complications at the Kōseikai board of directors' meeting held the next day, 17 August. Niwano, along with Kamomiya and Shibata, the other Kōseikai leaders involved in the negotiations with Shiraishi, came under intense attack for supposedly undermining the position of Naganuma Myōkō, who had

<sup>4</sup> According to SHIRAISHI (1957, p. 44), the reason for this was that, in spite of the fact that his sole precondition for holding negotiations was that he be allowed to set up the new advisory board, he learned that Ono had not communicated this precondition to the Kōseikai. Moreover, Ono started bringing up numerous issues, including financial matters such as who was to pay for the legal expenses, against his wishes.

come to be regarded as the very symbol of the Risshō Kōseikai. Only when the three explained that there was no other solution did the board finally consent to the agreement.

The first meeting of the advisory board was held on 22 August 1956, with six representatives (including Niwano) from the Risshō Kōseikai side and six from the Shiraishi side, and, as agreed, with Shiraishi himself serving as head. When, on 24 August, Shiraishi formally withdrew his lawsuit from the Tokyo District Court, it appeared that the entire affair had finally reached a conclusion. In fact it was merely the beginning of a new chapter.

The first problems associated with Shiraishi’s new position in the Risshō Kōseikai were not long in appearing. On 28 August the society held its regular meeting on the teachings, and Shiraishi demanded permission to attend. The society leadership, afraid that the sermon might contain elements that Shiraishi could point to as heretical, decided to have the Nichiren scholar Kamomiya go over its contents beforehand. This, however, infuriated the local chapter heads, who looked down on Kamomiya as a mere scholar lacking in true religious experience. Nor were they happy about the fact that Shiraishi—whom they regarded as a disruptive intruder—sat in a chair during the meeting while the ordinary faithful had to kneel on the floor. Resentment against Shiraishi—and against Niwano, who received the blame for his presence—was further inflamed by rumors that found their way around the headquarters. When, for example, Shiraishi was guided around the second floor of the Second Training Hall later on 28 August and shown the membership cards, word got around that he had been taken to the accounting office and shown the financial books.

This resentment was in part an expression of the directors’ and chapter heads’ dissatisfaction with the conciliatory stance adopted by Niwano during the Yomiuri Affair and its various related incidents. Those close to Myōkō tended to regard such tribulations as part of practicing the True Law and as evidence of the unity of Myōkō’s teachings with those of Śākyamuni and Nichiren; the time of persecution, they held, was the very time to uphold the true doctrine of the Law (*Kōsei* May 1956, pp. 24–26). From their point of view, Niwano’s compromises betrayed a lack of faith. The discontent with Niwano that surfaced on 28 August erupted two days later in the so-called *renpanjō jiken* 連判状事件 [Joint compact incident].

#### THE *RENPANJŌ* INCIDENT

The *renpanjō*, a joint statement issued by all the society’s leaders from chapter heads up, criticized Niwano’s performance in the Yomiuri

Affair and praised the role of Myōkō. Its immediate cause was the situation surrounding the new advisory board, but its deeper roots can be traced to the tension and imbalance inherent in the Kōseikai's "dual-sensei system," in which both President Niwano and Vice-president Myōkō were revered as founders and leaders of the organization. Because of this imbalance, a shift toward a more stable "single-sensei system" was almost inevitable, and from the late 1940s the system's center of gravity began to move in the direction of Myōkō. Signs of this can already be seen in the 1951 *Myōkō sensei hōwashū* [Collected sermons of Myōkō sensei] and the 1952 "Risshō Kōseikai Regulations."

The move toward Myōkō picked up momentum as time passed, and found open expression at Niwano's fiftieth birthday celebration on 15 November 1955. The party itself was a restrained affair attended only by the society's top leadership, in contrast to the lavish celebration held the following month in honor of Naganuma's birthday, with over 1,300 guests. Niwano's opening remarks contained a "statement of faith" that was prominently reported in the journal *Kōsei* as follows.

The president said that of this day he will be as one reborn, and will be brought up once again with Myōkō Sensei as his mother in the Dharma. Thus we followers too must make a fundamental shift in consciousness, firmly grasp the meaning of the Kōseikai, and undertake a new departure.

(*Kōsei* [December] 1955, pp. 26-27)

Whereas previously both Niwano and Myōkō had been regarded as the spiritual leaders of the society, now Myōkō was the "mother" and Niwano the "child." The journal's handling of the story reflects the growing movement within the upper echelons of the society to place Myōkō in the position of sole, supreme leader; the article indicates a significant shift already in the respective statuses of the two heads, with a concomitant shift in the society's very way of being.

Myōkō also began to speak for the Kōseikai on central matters of administration and faith. It was she, for example, who on behalf of the entire leadership proposed construction of the Great Sacred Hall in January 1956. Similarly, when Shiraishi in the course of his lawsuit claimed that Niwano and Myōkō served as the Kōseikai's de facto main objects of worship, it was Myōkō who in the *Kōsei* declared the Great Beneficent Teacher and Lord Śākyamuni, the Eternal Buddha, to be the society's central religious figure (June 1956, pp. 15-21). Myōkō was also held up before the ordinary membership as the guiding spirit of the society. Students at the Kōsei Gakuen, for example, were imported to follow the teachings of Myōkō Sensei; the teachings of Niwano were never mentioned (*Kōsei* [January] 1956, pp. 37-39).

This sentiment was further fueled by many of the events surrounding the Yomiuri Affair, and found expression in the above-mentioned *renpanjō*. The document spared nothing in its praise of Myōkō: “[During the tribulations of the Yomiuri Affair] it was our faith in the clear leadership of Myōkō Sensei that enabled us to don the robes of forbearance.... Frankly speaking, we have devoted our trust and our effort entirely to the sharp compassion of Myōkō Sensei.” This stood in stark contrast to its treatment of Niwano, whom it castigated for allowing a “Dharma-enemy” like Shiraishi to assume leadership of the new advisory board. Granted that this had been an “expedient means” to end Shiraishi’s lawsuit, the move, according to the *renpanjō*, revealed a lack of resolution on Niwano’s part: “The recent words and actions of the President are utterly lacking in firmness and conviction. His actions, prettified though they may be by characterizing them as ‘Mahayanistic,’ have cast a shadow on our faith, and we have lost all trust in him.”<sup>5</sup>

Much of this rancor sprang from a continuing belief that, in the words of the *renpanjō*, “there is absolutely nothing in the sacred doctrines and teaching methods of the Kōseikai that has to be amended.” The “sacred doctrines and teaching methods” referred to were, of course, largely identified with Myōkō; since the advisory board proposed by Shiraishi and acceded to by Niwano was designed to look into those very doctrines and teaching methods, it threatened the Myōkō-centered structure that the Kōseikai leadership was attempting to implement. It was only to be expected that these leaders would oppose not only the advisory board but the man who made it possible.

Ironically, this much-hated advisory board ended up opening the way for many important developments in the society’s later growth. Its primary contribution was to sharpen the Kōseikai’s doctrinal focus. The reason for Shiraishi’s original lawsuit was the Kōseikai’s alleged misrepresentation of the *Lotus Sūtra*’s teachings; hence the advisory board’s principal activity became the discussion of *Lotus* doctrine for the purpose of rectifying such misrepresentations as might exist. To this end a series of meetings were held at which the Shiraishi side and Kōseikai side took turns presenting their interpretations of the teachings. The first talk was by Kamomiya of the Kōseikai side, who explained the society’s doctrinal standpoint; this was followed by a series entitled “A Definition of the Religion of the Eternal Original

<sup>5</sup> Soon after the *renpanjō* incident, a movement got under way to designate Myōkō as the originator of the Kōseikai teachings. When Niwano was approached for his approval, he rejected the idea outright on the grounds that Śākyamuni, not Myōkō, was the source of Kōseikai doctrine (NIWANO 1976, pp. 297–98).

Buddha” by Hongō of the Shiraishi side, with responses by Kamomiya. The meetings continued for some time on a variety of topics, including Nichiren’s teachings and the fundamental principles of religion. Motoe was the only member of the Shiraishi side truly versed in Nichirenist doctrine, however, so when he died in 1957 Shiraishi lost his only real doctrinal weapon against the Kōseikai. Shiraishi’s interest in his other Kōseikai activities (such as visiting various of the local chapters) began to wane at this time; finally, in 1958, the year in which the Kōseikai began a reform of its practice and teaching based on Niwano’s “Manifestation of Truth,” Shiraishi asked that the advisory board be dissolved.

During the time that the board was active its meetings were attended by Niwano and the members of the board of directors. As a result the society leadership increasingly came to see the necessity of doctrinal reorganization. Niwano, with his lifelong desire to clarify the foundations of the Kōseikai teachings within the framework of *Lotus* doctrine, was especially aware of the pressing need to increase the level of doctrinal study among the membership. The fruit of this growing awareness can be seen in the affirmation of the Eternal Original Buddha Śākyamuni as the Kōseikai’s central object of worship at the 23 December 1957 session of the advisory board. Another crucial result was the promulgation at the beginning of 1958 of the above-mentioned “Manifestation of Truth,” in accordance with which the Kōseikai was reorganized on a more doctrinally oriented basis.

#### CONTINUING MOVES TOWARD A MYOKŌ-CENTERED SYSTEM

After receiving the resolution of the Committee on Judicial Affairs, the Ministry of Education opened deliberations on reform of the Religious Corporation Act, with a primary focus on whether to strengthen the existing controls on the nation’s religious organizations. The religious groups, for their part, paid careful attention to the course of the deliberations in an effort to insure that any proposed “improvements” to the law did not have a deleterious effect. The Risshō Kōseikai was no exception. At a meeting of the board of directors on 16 November 1956 the chairman explained the activities of the Ministry of Education, the response of the other New Religions, and possible initiatives that might be taken through Diet members supported by the Kōseikai. The board then agreed to commence studies for the purpose of clarifying the organizational relationship between the headquarters and the Kōseikai as a sect. Discussion continued at the next meeting on 28 November, with further explanations by the chairman. About this time the society was contacted by the Tokyo government about reorganizing its legal structure into two

incorporated subordinate bodies, so as to better represent its actual structure (comprised of many local chapters under the headquarters). The society used this as an opportunity to propose a number of organizational reforms, patterned on the head-temple/subtemple relationships found in Tenrikyō and the established Buddhist sects.

The reforms that were eventually considered by the society’s leadership went far beyond the organizational adjustments requested by the government. At a meeting of the board of trustees on 28 December 1956 the chairman suggested “a full-scale review of the society’s structure for the purpose of laying a permanent and immutable foundation” for the future; this was agreed upon by all present. The fundamental reorganization proposed for the society was spelled out in three documents outlining new regulation codes. The intent of the proposed changes was clear, as the following examples show:

Article 7: Founding Teacher Naganuma Myōkō is the head of the society.

Article 8: The head of the society has the nature of the Buddha, and as the symbol of our society is to be eternally revered and protected.

Article 9: Founding Teacher Niwano Nikkyō is the supervisor of the society.

Article 10: The supervisor of the society is another symbol of our society, and is subject to the general will of its membership.

Article 12: The president (*sōsai* 総裁) serves as the society’s representative.

Article 20: The chief director, who takes the office of the president, serves as representative of the society’s headquarters, oversees its operation in compliance with the head of the society, and determines policy for proselytization.

The chief director was Myōkō’s nephew and adopted son. The intent to legally reorganize the Kōseikai around the person of Myōkō is clear. It is no coincidence that at the same board of trustees meeting a proposal was passed in which Myōkō’s former residence was declared a memorial hall commemorating the birth of the Risshō Kōseikai. In telling contrast, Niwano’s former residence—the Former Main Worship Hall, if anything the Kōseikai’s true birthplace—was moved to a Tokyo suburb to serve as chapel for the Kōsei Cemetery.

The movement to install Myōkō as the sole head of the Kōseikai continued through the early part of 1957, but received a sharp setback when Myōkō was taken ill in late February and was subsequently bedridden. With her death on 10 September the movement withered away. A simultaneous reevaluation of Niwano’s leadership qualities

took place in the society's top echelon, and this, plus Niwano's magnanimous attitude regarding the sentiments expressed in the *renpanjō*, hastened a reconsolidation of the Kōseikai around the person of the president. The "Manifestation of the Truth" initiative implemented by Niwano at the start of 1958 may be regarded as a sign that the power structure of the society was by then unified around Niwano.

The year 1957 saw a continuation of the previous year's animated propagation activity, with a total of twelve mass rallies being held in various parts of the nation. This not only helped to strengthen the commitment of believers whose faith had been shaken by the Yomiuri Affair, but contributed to an overall membership gain of over 30,000 households, reversing the downward trend seen in 1956.

The various legal actions connected with the Wadabori Property Development Association moved toward resolution during 1957. With the advice of the Tokyo District Attorney's Office, the criminal case involving breach of trust and forgery was settled out of court on 20 August 1957. On this occasion the Kōseikai also made a payment to the association (minus members belonging to the Kōseikai) of five million yen as a supplementary payment to the original ten million yen it had disbursed for the 6,600 m<sup>2</sup> of land under the association's management; this was in response to accusations that it had acquired the land at an unfairly low price. On 20 April the following year, the civil suits relating to the legal status of the Wadabori Property Development Association and use of the association's name were also settled out of court, with the Kōseikai paying the three plaintiffs, plus nine other plaintiffs who later brought suit for fraud, a total of ¥6,760,000. With this the Kōseikai was able to embark unburdened on the various activities associated with Niwano's "Manifestation of the Truth" initiative in 1958.

#### *Conclusion: Legacy of the Yomiuri Affair*

The origins of the Yomiuri Affair can ultimately be traced back to the resentment and envy that arise whenever the fortunes of a person or an organization rise too far, too fast. Niwano's understanding of this fact found expression in his talk commemorating the nineteenth anniversary of the Kōseikai's founding in 1956, a time when no end to the Yomiuri Affair was in sight.

Things have been going so well for the Kōseikai, with major projects like the hospital, the library, the cemetery, and the school being completed one after another, that certain people on the outside have begun to wonder if there isn't perhaps a

magic secret to it all. These people, lacking any understanding of the society’s inner workings, agitate for an investigation of the headquarters in the hope of uncovering a major problem or, perhaps, a kilogram of diamonds.

(*Kōsei* [April] 1956, p. 10)

Before and during WW II any new religious group that grew too fast attracted the notice of the government authorities, who, fearing disturbances to the public order, would arrest the leaders for *lèse majesté* and force them to abandon their activities; or they would demand sweeping changes in the group’s doctrine and ritual. Tenrikyō, Ōmoto, and Hito no Michi are cases in point. The press, for its part, would print as fact the fabricated charges of the police, thereby helping to justify the government’s actions. The press profited, of course, but on the whole the initiative was with the government, which was driven by a desire to promote the de facto state religion Shinto.

With the separation of church and state after the war, however, the government has been much more careful about actively interfering in the affairs of any religious group. Thus it has been the mass media that has tended to initiate such attacks, usually operating in the name of “freedom of speech” (which, unfortunately, has often degenerated into a form of violence of its own). From there the government has often moved in to impose controls on the religious groups, supported by an intelligentsia with little patience for the freedom of belief when this principle is applied to the New Religions. This pattern is clearly visible in the events of the Yomiuri Affair.

The various events relating to the Yomiuri Affair constituted a major crisis for the Kōseikai: its image was damaged by the negative publicity, its very existence threatened by the dissolution suit, and its inner stability shaken by the *renpanjō*. Because of attacks on its methods of propagation it had to institute various reforms, including reduction of its use of fortune-telling (primarily onomancy, divination from the characters of a person’s name). And yet the Kōseikai was not forced to fundamentally rewrite its teachings (like pre-1945 Tenrikyō), nor was it dissolved and its leaders thrown into prison (like Hito no Michi). Though its growth was halted for a time, the organization itself remained sound. Most importantly, Niwano was only fifty at the time, in good health, and in full possession of his considerable intellectual and organizational skills. This, above all, was what allowed the Kōseikai not only to recover but to actually use the Yomiuri Affair as an opportunity for further development. It must also be recognized that the unexpected death of Myōkō was an essential factor in making this development possible.

As it was, the Yomiuri Affair came at a fortuitous time in the life cycle of the rapidly growing Kōseikai, forcing it to radically reassess the doctrinal and organizational structures that had evolved more or less naturally during the time the society was small, and to come up with new structures more suitable for the large religious movement it had become. It is quite likely that without this strong outside threat the configuration of the Kōseikai would have solidified within its outmoded framework, hastening its move to a rigid institutionalization. Thanks to the reassessment forced by the Yomiuri Affair, however, the Kōseikai rejuvenated itself in a manner that enabled it to maintain maximum efficiency even as a large organization. In this sense the *Yomiuri Shinbun* was indeed the Yomiuri Bodhisattva. But it must not be forgotten that what made this possible was a way of thinking that could see the activity of the Dharma even in the most violent of attacks.

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