

The Political and Legal Response to Aum-Related Violence in Japan

A Review Article

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FOR THE PAST TWO years religion has been the focus of sustained media attention and lively political debate in Japan. The sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system by Aum Shinrikyō members in March 1995 was the precipitating incident that put religion back in the limelight. In view of the many tragic deaths, thousands of injuries, and widespread sense of insecurity that followed the gas attack, it is perfectly understandable that all segments of Japanese society would become preoccupied with Aum and the larger issue of the role or place of religion in modern society.

The initial response following the gas attack was the mobilization of some 2,000 police officers in a nationwide investigation of Aum Shinrikyō centers. Between March 22 and May 16, the police arrested over 200 Aum members. After several months of police investigations, Asahara and over 100 followers were indicted on various charges, including the subway gas attack, illegal production of various drugs, as well as other acts of violence. The violent crimes committed by Asahara and/or some of his followers which have been confirmed by confessions and or evidence presented at trials include: the kidnapping and murder of Sakamoto Tsutsumi, a lawyer representing concerned parents of Aum members, along with his wife and son (November 1989); the lynching of Ochida Kotaro, an uncooperative Aum member (February

1994); a sarin gas attack in Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture, which killed seven and injured more than 200 people (June 1994); the kidnapping and murder of Kariya Kiyoshi, a Tokyo notary public clerk (February 1995); and the sarin gas attack on Tokyo subway lines that left twelve people dead and 5,000 injured (March 1995).

It will probably be some years before the dust settles and we will be able to accurately assess the consequences of the many events surrounding the so-called "Aum affair." In this article I will not even attempt to cover the ongoing police investigations or trials of Asahara and his cohorts. Rather, I will briefly review the basic legal response by the government to Aum Shinrikyō as a religious organization and consider the "fall-out" of this incident, which has included the Diet's approval of changes in the law governing all religious bodies in Japan. The literature on Aum and related legal issues has mushroomed since March 1995. In preparing this review article I have drawn on a number of these recent Japanese works and wish to acknowledge these resources in advance to avoid endless citation throughout the text. One particularly useful volume is *Ronsō: Shūkyō hōjinhō kaisei* [Debate: Revision of the Religious Corporations Law] (1995), edited by the Second Tokyo Lawyers' Association and Task Force Committee for Consumer Problems. This volume is an edited collection of debates and

discussions by lawyers and various academics regarding the revision of the 1951 Religious Corporations Law and has reproduced numerous documents and publications relevant to the legal debate. A second edited volume, *Shūkyō hōjinhō wa doko ga mondai ka* [What is the Problem with the Religious Corporation Law] (Inoue 1996), provides useful presentations and discussion by academics in religion, legal scholars, and representatives of several religious bodies. While both edited volumes contain “pro” and “con” positions regarding the revision of the law, most participants would agree that politicians have rushed the revisions through the Diet without adequate discussion and debate. The book by Kitō Masaki, *Nijuisseiki no shūkyō hōjinhō* [A Religious Corporation Law for the Twenty-first Century] (1995), a lawyer, is particularly helpful in understanding those who are decidedly in favor of tightening the laws that regulate religious organizations in Japan. Some of the legal issues and concerns regarding the government’s response to Aum and proposed revisions to the Religious Corporations Law are clarified by Kitano (1996) Tanamura (1996) and Torii (1996), in articles that appeared in law journals.¹

THE INITIAL RESPONSE

In order to deal with the Aum crisis, the most immediate response of the government was the movement to revoke Aum’s status as a religious corporation (*shūkyō hōjin*). Within days of Asahara’s arrest, Amano Ken, the governor of Yamanashi Prefecture, where Aum’s Kamikuishiki facilities were located, met with the Education Minister and Governor of Tokyo to urge them to obtain a court order to revoke Aum’s status as a religious corporation. With considerable public and political support, the Tokyo Public Prosecutor followed through on Amano’s plea and on June 30 petitioned the Tokyo District Court to order

the dissolution of Aum Shinrikyō as a religious corporation.

Aum Shinrikyō had gained its status as a religious corporation in 1989 (after considerable difficulty, I should add). Under the 1951 religious corporation law, Aum was permitted (like all other registered religious bodies) to own properties and buildings for worship and religious activities, as well as operate various business enterprises to support the religious aims of the organization. This law had been established as a part of the postwar constitutional reforms and, in light of the government suppression of religious groups during the 1930s and 1940s, was particularly concerned with the protection of religious freedom. A basic assumption behind this legislation was that registered religious organizations contribute to the public good (*kōeki*) and for this reason should be permitted to engage in economic activities to support their religious work and public welfare activities (*kōeki jigyō*).

It is fair to say that the general public supported the move to revoke Aum’s status as a religious corporation. The same can be said for most religious bodies, including Christian churches and denominations. On October 30, 1995, following four months of closed-court sessions, the Tokyo District Court ordered that Aum Shinrikyō’s status as a religious corporation be dissolved. According to the court, there was clear evidence that the leaders of Aum Shinrikyō had been involved in numerous illegal and violent acts and no longer qualified as a religious corporation. The court concluded that it was an organization working against the public good (*kōeki*) and should not enjoy the favorable treatment accorded such corporations. Representatives for Aum appealed the decision to the Tokyo High Court, but the earlier dissolution order was upheld and Aum Shinrikyō lost its legal status as a religious corporation on December 19.

Since there has been some confusion surrounding the meaning of this dissolu-

tion order, I should point out that it did not mean that Aum members were prohibited from carrying out their religious and commercial activities. Even without status as a religious corporation (*shūkyō hōjin*), groups are free to practice their religion and operate businesses; however, they cannot claim the special considerations and tax advantages accorded religious corporations and their businesses.

Even before the dissolution order was handed down by the court, Aum was already in serious financial trouble. Donations had obviously dropped off and Aum was facing numerous claims for compensation from victims and their relatives.² In response to the mounting claims, the court declared Aum Shinrikyō to be bankrupt on December 14 and ordered that all of its assets be frozen.³ At the same time, the court appointed an adjudicator to replace Asahara as the group's legal representative and supervise the liquidation of Aum's assets. With properties scattered across Japan and as far away as Moscow and Bonn, the task of liquidating Aum's assets is exceedingly complex and the processing of legal claims against Aum should tie up the court for some time to come.

THE "FINAL SOLUTION"

The dissolution order was a terrible financial blow to Aum Shinrikyō, but it did not prohibit the group from carrying on its various activities as a voluntary organization. With the arrest of Asahara and many key leaders and the loss of all properties and assets, some observers argued that Aum would very likely die a natural death without any other action being taken. There were others, however, who argued that many Aum members remain loyal to Asahara and could very well have hidden stockpiles of weapons and toxic chemicals for future use. In light of such a possibility, more stringent measures were called for in order

to put an end to the Aum affair and potential danger from this group in the future.

As a "final solution" to the dangers posed by Aum, some government officials proposed that the Anti-Subversive Activities Law (*Hakai katsudō bōshihō*) be given serious consideration. This law had been established in 1952 for national security reasons to deal with the potential threat of subversive activities by communists and other political deviants (it is worth remembering that this was shortly after the departure of the Allied Occupation Forces from Japan and in the midst of the Cold War). When the idea was first advanced to apply this law to Aum, Prime Minister Murayama initially said that he would not pursue this line of legal action. Within days of his first remark, however, he began back-pedaling and subsequently stated that whether or not to apply this law to Aum was a legal rather than a political issue, and he would leave the decision to the legal authorities. On May 5, 1995, the Public Security Agency indicated it would proceed with an investigation of Aum Shinrikyō to consider whether the law was applicable to its case.

In order to apply this law to Aum, the Public Security Agency is required to show that the violence committed by Aum was politically motivated and that there is a strong likelihood that future acts of violence will be committed. In a recent article, Torii (1996, 41) raised serious questions on both counts. First, he argues that the evidence indicates the violence perpetrated by Asahara and his closest associates was committed in an effort to prevent authorities from obtaining information that would lead to Aum's loss of status as a religious corporation; it was not subversive activity directed at the state or to undermine national security. Second, it is very difficult to substantiate the claim that Aum will likely commit future acts of violence. Both Asahara and his leading associates have been arrested and the organization is bankrupt.

Torii concludes that the application of this law is unnecessary and unjustified.

Kitō (1995, 157–59), a lawyer who is rather keen on taking a harder line on all religious organizations, also urges caution in his recent book and argues that the following points need to be considered before applying the Anti-Subversive Activities Law to Aum. First, all other legal means to deal with Aum need to be exhausted before applying this extreme measure. It is premature, he maintains, to seriously consider applying this law when investigations and trials are still underway. The authorities should wait until the consequences of the dissolution order and criminal prosecution become clear. Secondly, if applied to Aum, clauses 2 and 3 of this law state that in the case of application to an organization it can only be for a limited term of six months (not for an indefinite period). Kitō also points out that the concrete results of applying this law to Aum have not been seriously considered. Aum will have an opportunity to appeal and, because of the complex constitutional issues involved, the case could drag on and give Aum numerous opportunities to present its views and arguments. Also, the police authorities responsible for applying the law to Aum will face numerous difficulties as there are no precedents or clear guidelines for monitoring an organization under this law.

While the legal action to revoke Aum's status as a religious corporation received widespread support, the same cannot be said regarding application of the Anti-Subversive Activities Law to Aum. This is clearly a controversial law that has long been regarded as unconstitutional by many religious and civic organizations as well as the Japan Federation of Bar Associations. If applied to Aum, the law would prohibit members from engaging in numerous activities, which are usually understood as constitutional rights. While freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are protected

by the constitution, the law would prohibit Aum members from engaging in membership recruitment and fund-raising activities, training under religious leaders, and publishing materials that promote the teachings of Aum Shinrikyō. It would also permit ongoing surveillance and monitoring by the police.

In spite of the concern expressed by many legal authorities, the Public Security Agency proceeded with its investigation and held its first hearing on January 18, 1996. Defense lawyers for Aum argued that the law, when applied to an organization rather than an individual, allows for the organization's representative to respond to the arguments made by the authorities. The police and prosecutors denied this opportunity to Asahara, however, and maintained that he should not be allowed to make public statements while his trial was underway. The Public Security Agency completed its investigation and hearings on July 11, 1996, and formally asked the Public Security Commission to invoke the law against Aum Shinrikyō.

The most cynical critics of this decision are suggesting that the Public Security Agency resembles the Special Police (*Tokkō*) of wartime Japan: they are applying a law to religious deviants which was initially established to deal with political deviants in an effort to justify their continued existence in the post-Cold War situation.⁴ The Public Security Agency was established in 1952 during the Korean War, in order to monitor political organizations like the Japanese Communist Party, which were regarded as a potential threat to national security. Since the 1970s, the agency has had its personnel reduced from a high of 2,000 down to 1,750, and it is widely regarded as one of the targets of future downsizing. A number of critics have suggested that the Agency's concern to apply the Anti-Subversive Activities Law to a religious group like Aum is primarily an expression of self-

interest rather than actual need or relevance as this agency struggles for survival in the post-Cold War environment.

It is rather disconcerting to consider the parallels between the Public Security Agency's recent activities and the survival tactics of the Special Police just half a century ago. In the earlier instance, the critical issue was the application of the Peace Preservation Law (*Chianijihō*) to religious groups, a law which was initially designed in 1925 to control radical socialists and the communist movement. This law prohibited the organization of any association or group that denied the right to private property or sought to overthrow the national polity (*kokutai*). The law was revised in 1941 to address the subversive potential of various religious groups and extended to suppress a wide variety of dangerous ideas (*kiken shisō*) that showed disrespect toward the Imperial Household and its shrines or were in conflict with the national polity.

The important point here is that the Special Police did not begin as religious specialists. Until the 1930s, they had their hands full coping with communists and radical socialists. Only as this situation came under control did the authorities put their efforts into identifying and prosecuting religious deviants. In spite of widespread criticism from legal experts and protest from numerous organizations concerned with the protection of constitutional rights and freedoms, the "endangered" Public Security Agency appears to be repeating the survival tactics of the Special Police during wartime in its quest for a new *raison d'être* in the face of more drastic retrenchment.⁵

The widespread concerns and criticisms of the Agency's recommendation to apply this controversial law to Aum Shinrikyō over the past year seems to have been effective. On January 31, 1996, the Public Security Commission decided unanimously that it would not invoke the Anti-Subversive Activ-

ities Law against Aum since there was "insufficient evidence of future danger."

THE WIDER FALLOUT OF THE AUM AFFAIR

Even before the Aum incident occurred, there had been a number of lawyers and consumer advocates calling for tighter control of religious groups and their activities. Until the Aum-related violence generated wide-spread public concern, however, few politicians were willing to push very hard for revisions of the Religious Corporations Law. Surveys conducted by the major Japanese newspapers in the months following the subway gas attack indicated that the majority of the public was in favor of revising the law to give the authorities greater leeway in monitoring potentially dangerous religious organizations. In short, the time had come to be more concerned for the protection of the public from dangerous and abusive religious groups rather than be overly concerned about the protection of religious freedom.

In this new social climate, politicians could confidently argue that the laws regulating religion needed to be revised so that government officials would have the authority to follow the activities of religious groups more closely and prevent another "Aum-like incident." While prevention of violence by another dangerous "cult" was the "official" reason advanced for revising the law, discussions in the Diet quickly shifted to the unhealthy involvement of religious organizations in politics. Many observers argue that politicians, particularly those from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), have used the Aum crisis as an opportunity to tighten control of religious organizations in an effort to diminish the political power of Sōka Gakkai, the largest new religion in Japan. These are the same politicians who have for decades been seeking to re-nationalize Yasukuni Shrine, which was the center of Japan's civil religion during World War II. In other words, the movement to

revise the law governing religion has not been based on a deep conviction regarding the need for a clear separation of religion and state, but rather on an effort to control a religious group that challenges their position and values.

Sōka Gakkai has been a powerful political force in postwar Japan. It backed its own political party (the *Kōmeito* or Clean Government Party) for several decades. Although the party was dissolved in 1994, it still supported many of the same politicians who became a significant force in the new opposition party *Shinshinto* (New Frontier Party). It is for this reason, some observers argue, that LDP politicians have been so anxious to push through revisions of the Religious Corporations Law that might better prevent Sōka Gakkai's political involvements. In a speech to the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan (October 20, 1995), Akiya Einosuke, the President of Sōka Gakkai, maintained that:

In its current debate on the proposed revision of the Religious Corporations Law, the government is deceiving the public by using the Aum incident as a pretext to conceal its true intentions. Yoshinobu Shimamura, Minister of Education, and Koichi Katō, LDP Secretary-General, together with a number of LDP leaders have openly stated that the proposed revision of the legislation is intended to curtail the activities of Sōka Gakkai. Japanese newspapers have also reported that some Diet members are interested in making revisions which will inconvenience only Sōka Gakkai. This attempt to change the law as a part of a strategy to benefit a political party is an outrageous act that is reminiscent of past religious suppression.

On October 17, the ruling coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the New Party Sakigake, submitted a bill to the Diet for the revision

of the current law. Along with Sōka Gakkai, most religious groups (Buddhist, Christian and various New Religions) strongly opposed any revision and argued that there are civil and criminal laws that can be applied to religious organizations if they are involved in violent or illegal activities. In view of the government's suppression of religious organizations in wartime Japan, representatives of almost all religious organizations maintained that nothing should be done to jeopardize freedom of religious belief and practice.⁶ There was also strong opposition to the proposed revision by the Shinshinto, the opposition party in the Diet that is strongly supported by Sōka Gakkai. In spite of such opposition, on December 8, 1995 (less than year after the subway incident), the Diet passed a bill to amend the Religious Corporations Law. The major changes in the law may be summarized as follows:

- 1) Any religious corporation active in more than one prefecture must be registered under the Ministry of Education; in other words, jurisdiction under the revised law will shift from local authorities to a central or national authority for all incorporated religious bodies operating in more than one prefecture.⁷
- 2) Religious corporations will be required to prepare an annual report, which must include a copy of the approved constitution, a list of officers, an inventory of financial assets, a record of financial transactions (profit/loss), a balance sheet, a description of properties and buildings, and documents related to business enterprises under the corporation. These documents must be submitted to the Ministry of Education (if active in more than one prefecture) or local authorities within four months of the end of the fiscal year. Under the 1951 law, religious corporations were expected to prepare and keep most of these documents on file in the religious corporation office,

but there was no duty to submit the report to any authority.

3) Members of the religious body and other individuals with legitimate interests will have access to the report and documents submitted by the religious corporation.

4) If there are any questions or concerns about the report and activities of the religious corporation, government officials have the authority to request additional information and question the official representatives of the religious body.⁸

Most religious bodies maintain that the revised law represents a clear shift in government policy from a stance concerned with the protection of religious freedom to one concerned with the supervision of religion. In the same speech noted above, Akiya Einosuke argued that "to subject religious groups to routine government supervision *on the basis of an aberrant case* such as that of Aum Shinrikyō, infringes on religious freedom. For this reason, we are against the revision" [emphasis added]. Those who have spoken out in favor of the revision, however, insist that even more needs to be done to protect the public from religious organizations.

While Aum may be an extreme case, lawyers supporting the revision maintain that hundreds of religious bodies have misused the "freedoms" provided by the 1951 Religious Corporation Law. Over the past decade, suspicions of widespread abuse of the existing laws has led the tax authorities to increase their investigation of all public service corporations (*kōeki hōjin*). It should be remembered that 73 percent of these 250,000 registered corporations are religious organizations. The tax office carefully examined the records of 1,154 religious organizations in 1987 and discovered that 649 had inadequately reported their income and were subsequently required to pay additional taxes amounting to over eight hundred million yen (Nishio 1994, 2–10).

The results of a more recent investigation indicate that this is still a serious problem. According to the October 3, 1995 report by the National Tax Agency, 321 of 381 religious corporations investigated by the Agency (that is, 84.3 percent) had failed to report required information and forty-four had actually "hidden" income. The total income either omitted from reports or intentionally hidden amounted to over two billion seven hundred million yen. Since failure to report income or falsification of records is only punished by a fine of ¥10,000 (roughly US \$100), there is little incentive or pressure on these corporations to be more exact in their bookkeeping and reports (Kitō 1995, 86–87).

In addition to these cases of tax evasion, there have been numerous complaints regarding the deceptive and high pressure membership recruitment tactics and fund-raising methods used by certain religious organizations. According to a recent report, between 1987 and 1994 the Tokyo Lawyers Association and Consumer Centers across Japan received a total of 16,575 complaints of financial exploitation and misleading fund-raising activities by various religious organizations with claims for compensation reaching over six billion yen.⁹ A number of cases have been taken to court and religious bodies have been ordered to compensate the plaintiffs, but consumer advocates argue that the current law allows widespread abuse and provides no incentive for religious bodies to practice restraint and self-discipline in financial matters. Kitō (1995, 28–30) points out that most of the complaints are related to about twenty "problem" religious bodies, with the Unification Association at the top of the list. I mention these examples of abuse in order to point out that Aum is not the only "aberrant" case or problem, as suggested by the President of Sōka Gakkai, which the recently revised law is seeking to address.

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

As this brief review indicates, the "Aum Affair" has already had a significant impact on the Japanese understanding of religion and the role of the state in monitoring the activities of religious groups. While I regarded the recommendation by the Public Security Agency to apply the Anti-Subversive Activity Law to Aum as a cause for serious concern, the revisions of the Religious Corporation Law do not strike me as unreasonable (notwithstanding the rushed discussions and mixed motives of many politicians). It is evident that many of the politicians pushing the revisions through the Diet were politically motivated, that is, seeking a way to diminish Sōka Gakkai's political power under the guise of protecting the public from another wave of Aum-like violence. While this may have been the primary motivation for many LDP politicians, it remains a fact that under the 1951 Religious Corporation Law it has been difficult to prevent other forms of financial abuse by various religious organizations. Although most religious bodies protested the move to revise the Religious Corporation Law and claimed that the proposed changes represented a dangerous return to the state control and repression of religion, the actual revisions in the law do not appear unreasonable or excessive.

Under current tax law, donations to religious bodies are nontaxable and income from business enterprises are taxed at a lower rate (27 percent) than is the case for profit-making corporations (37 percent). Religious corporations are also allowed to donate as much as 30 percent of their business income to their religious work and therefore able to reduce the actual tax paid on business income to roughly half the rate paid by profit-making corporations (Nishio 1994; Kitō 1995, 10-11). Since religious corporations receive favorable treatment under the tax law because of their contribution to

the "public good" (*kōeki*), it seems only right to expect accountability to the public.

The debate and discussion regarding religious corporations is far from over. Kitano (1996, 46), Professor at Nihon University and one of the resource persons for the Diet's special committee on the Religious Corporations Law, explains that one of the main purposes of the revised law was to make the financial affairs of religious corporations more transparent. While Kitano argues that the revision was a step in the right direction, he suggests that other issues still need to be addressed. For example, under the present law it is difficult to put a stop to the activities of religious corporations that extend beyond religious activities. In order to increase the public trust in religious organizations, he proposes that any nonreligious activities (economic, political) undertaken by religious groups should be placed under separate corporations.¹⁰

Many others argue that it is unfair to profit-making corporations for religious corporations to receive special treatment under the tax law for income from business enterprises. These various concerns regarding the financial affairs of religious organizations are currently under review and a proposal for the revision of the tax laws is expected by the spring of 1997 (Kitō 1995, 11). I suspect that forthcoming changes in the tax law will have a greater impact on religious organizations than the recent revisions of the Religious Corporations Law.

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NOTES

¹See Hardacre (1996) and Kisala (1996) for discussion and review of these issues in English.

²Kitō (1995, 80) makes the important observation that even if a religious group loses its status as a religious corporation, as a voluntary organization income from donations would still be nontaxable.

³By July 1996, some 2,331 individuals (including some former members) had filed claims against Aum Shinrikyō for a total of over ¥10 billion.

⁴Kiramura Motoya reported this in his article, "Public Security Agency comes under fire," *The Japan Times* (Saturday, August 10, 1996), referring to the critical statements of Sakata Makoto.

⁵While the actions of this Agency are clearly problematic, this is hardly a surprising strategy, as Erikson (1966, 26) reminds us in his classic study of deviant behavior: "If the police should somehow learn to contain most of the crimes it now contends with...it is still improbable that the existing control machinery would go unused. More likely, the agencies of control would turn their attention to other forms of behavior, even to the point of *defining as deviant certain styles of conduct which were not regarded so earlier*" [emphasis added]. This seems to be what occurred as the Tokkō shifted their concerns from political to religious deviants during the war and what the Public Security Agency has just done. For additional discussion of the wartime situation, see Mullins (1994).

⁶See Kisala (1996) and Van Hyle and DeMello (1996) for review and discussion of responses of various religious bodies to these changes.

⁷Some critics of the amended law argue that this new requirement reflects an unhealthy authoritarianism and monitoring by the government. On this point, however, it is only fair to note that other nonreligious public service corporations (*kōeki hōjin*) operating in more than one prefecture have been under the jurisdiction of the national authority (*shumu daijin*) for some time. The revised law, therefore, is not targeting religious corporations so that they are treated as a special case under the jurisdiction of a national ministry; rather, the law concerning religious corporations is being brought into line with that already in effect for other nonreligious public service corporations. There are already several hundred religious corporations registered with the Ministry of Education and it would be difficult to make the case that such orga-

nizations have been treated differently from those registered with a prefectural office.

⁸The 1951 Religious Corporations Law is helpfully compared with the revised law in Inoue, ed., *Shūkyō hōjinhō wa doko ga mondai ka*, "Shiryō 2: Shūkyō hōjinhō taishō hyō," 1996, 179–80. Other helpful discussions and summaries may be found in Tanamura (1996), Kitano (1996), Kisala (1996), and the volume edited by the Second Tokyo Lawyers' Association and Task Force Committee for Consumer Problems (1996).

⁹For more detailed findings, see *Ronsō: Shūkyō hōjinhō kaisei* [Debate: Revision of the Religious Corporations Law] (1995, 149).

¹⁰Although Kitano does not mention Sōka Gakkai here, I imagine that he is particularly concerned about this movement. In the speech quoted above, Akiya Einosuke, President of Sōka Gakkai, concluded by defending the right of religious organizations to be actively involved in the political process: "a religious organization's participation in the political process through election-related activities and endorsements of political parties is a right guaranteed under the Constitution." While all individuals have a constitutional right to participate in the political process, the special treatment according religious corporations under the current tax law does raise some questions about the direct involvement of a religious organization in politics. Kitano and other critics would probably argue that the political activities of Sōka Gakkai should be undertaken through a separate corporation. As a religious corporation, for example, Sōka Gakkai is able to raise funds from donations or membership fees as well as business enterprises. The income from these businesses is taxed at a lower rate than the income of nonreligious corporations. If Sōka Gakkai is permitted to use these funds for both religious and political purposes, critics argue that the government is in effect subsidizing their political interests or party. While religious organizations are free to encourage their members to be politically active, critics maintain that it is fair to expect the funding for political purposes to be kept distinct from that of the religious organization.

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