

Reactions to the Aum Affair

The Rise of the “Anti-cult” Movement in Japan

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The following essay is based on a paper presented at the annual meeting of American Academy of Religion held in New Orleans on November 25, 1996. The occasion was a joint session of groups studying Japanese religions and new religious movements under the general theme, “The Aum Shinrikyō Affair: Its Implications and Repercussions for Religion in Modern Society.”

NEW RELIGIONS WHOSE views contrast with prevailing social norms typically generate conflict with the society in which they take shape and develop. While new religions in Japan have for some time been regarded in many circles as a source of social problems, none can match the impact of Aum Shinrikyō in generating discussions about new religions as a form of social deviance. Aum Shinrikyō was regarded by many journalists as a dangerous movement from early on, due to its apparent connection with the disappearance of a lawyer and his family, and several anti-Aum groups were established in the years before the sarin attack. Aum’s apparent involvement in the attack has become common knowledge, resulting in a significant development of what might be called the “anti-cult movement” in Japan, accompanied by an increasingly negative portrayal of religions in the mass media.¹

This paper discusses the main characteristics of the emergent anti-cult movement and its manifestations in the media, and examines its impact on

¹ Cf. Anson Shupe and David G. Bromley, “The Modern Anti-Cult Movement 1971–91: A Twenty-Year Retrospective,” in A. Shupe and D. G. Bromley, *Anti-Cult Movement in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Garland, 1994), 3–31; Nakano Tsuyoshi 中野 毅, アメリカにおける反カルト運動—展開と特徴 [Anti-cult movements in America: Their development and characteristics], 『東洋哲学研究所紀要』 [Bulletin of the Institute for Oriental Philosophy] 10 (1994):185–208.

new religions—and on the study of new religions—in a pluralistic modern society.

Phases of the Aum Affair

What is the “Aum Affair”? In a strict sense it refers to the series of incidents beginning with the release of sarin gas in the Tokyo subway system on 20 March 1995. In a broader sense, however, it refers to the series of incidents that began around the time Aum Shinrikyō was approved as a religious corporation (*shūkyō hōjin*) by the Tokyo metropolitan government on 29 August 1989. In terms of criminal cases alone, Matsumoto Chizuo 松本智津夫, also known as Asahara Shōkō 麻原彰晃, the founder of Aum Shinrikyō, has been arrested and accused of masterminding seventeen crimes in which twenty-six people were killed and nearly five thousand people were injured. Most of the high-ranking members of Aum who participated in these incidents have admitted their crimes, and some of them have taken the witness stand in their founder’s trial.²

The development of Aum can be divided into four phases. The first phase began with the establishment of *Aum Shinsen no Kai* オウム神仙の会, the antecedent of Aum Shinrikyō, which continued until the approval of Aum Shinrikyō as a religious corporation. At this phase Aum was not yet regarded as a source of social problems. It was during the second phase, soon after it was officially approved as a religious corporation, that the mass media began to portray Aum as dangerous and antisocial, and that there arose the first stirrings of movements against Aum in various places where it tried to build its facilities. The third phase consisted of the period when intellectuals reevaluated Aum after its founder and executive members, in response to the avalanche of criticism against it, appeared on a four-hour-long late-night live TV program for a debate on the topic of young people and religion. Discussions between Asahara and scholars of religion, journalists, and TV personalities were covered on TV and in weekly journals. The fourth phase consisted of the period when Aum’s secrets, dangerous tendencies, and antisocial tendencies were exposed after the release of sarin in the Tokyo subway system. During this period the police raided Aum facilities, and arrested many followers, especially executive members, many of whom were brought to trial. For several months after the sarin gas incident there was an intense interest among people in general con-

² A broader picture of the Aum affair has become available only recently. See Shimazono Susumu, “In the Wake of Aum: The Formation and Transformation of a Universe of Belief,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22:3–4 (1995):343–415; Ian Reader, *A Poisonous Cocktail? Aum Shinrikyō’s Path to Violence*. (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1996).

cerning the circumstances surrounding Aum. During this phase the Tokyo District Court ordered Aum Shinrikyō to disband as a religious corporation, and the Japanese government attempted to apply the Antisubversive Activities Law, a process that continues today.³

The reactions and criticisms against Aum Shinrikyō were severe from the beginning. However, they surfaced only after it was approved as a religious corporation. The main reasons for the criticisms were: 1) the complete isolation of its *shukke* (monk) believers, including minors, from their families after 1986; 2) the coerced offerings of large amounts of money from believers, including minors; 3) extremely expensive initiations, some of which were falsely advertised; and 4) disregard for, and even hostile attitudes toward, the residents who lived in areas where Aum built its new facilities after 1990.

Let us consider the rise of anti-Aum movements in each phase.

THE FIRST PHASE: 1984–1989

For three years Matsumoto Chizuo was a member of Agonshū, a new religion based on esoteric Buddhism. Eventually he renamed himself “Asahara Shōkō” and opened a yoga school called Aum Shinsen no Kai in 1984. In transforming the yoga school into a religious corporation, he adopted a system in 1986 that required his followers to offer everything they owned to the group and to abandon their secular lives. In 1987 he changed the group’s name to Aum Shinrikyō, which was approved in 1989 as a religious corporation (juridical person) by the Tokyo metropolitan government.

During this phase various complaints against Aum Shinrikyō were brought to the attention of the Tokyo metropolitan government, but there were no provisions in the law to prevent it from being approved as a religious corporation. There was no general consensus to regard Aum as a cause of social problems during this phase.

THE SECOND PHASE: 1989–1990

It was during the second phase that major criticisms and movements against Aum Shinrikyō arose. There were two aspects to the anti-Aum movements of this phase. The first consisted of the grass-roots movement among parents whose children had become Aum Shinrikyō monks and as a result totally secluded themselves from their families. The mass media became involved, leading to a major public-relations scandal for Aum Shinrikyō. The second

³ See the following books on the legal aspects of the Aum affair: Takimoto Tarō 滝本太郎 and Fukushima Mizuho 福島瑞穂, 『破防法とオウム真理教』 [The Anti-Subversive Activities Law and Aum Shinrikyō]. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996); オウム問題を考える議員の会 [Diet commission on Aum Shinrikyō], ed., 『オウム事件は終わらない』 [No end to the Aum affair] (Tokyo: Tatsukaze Shobō, 1996).

aspect consisted of movements among the residents of the remote and relatively unpopulated areas where Aum tried to build its facilities. Aum was seen as a major threat because of the considerable number of members who moved to these areas as new residents. In both cases the movements against Aum gained the attention of the mass media, which spread negative images of Aum.

The first scandal for Aum Shinrikyō was the seven-week series of critical articles in the weekly magazine *Sunday Mainichi* entitled “The Insanity of Aum Shinrikyō.” This series began in September 1989, just after Aum’s approval as a religious corporation,⁴ and consisted of discussions among parents of Aum *shukke* believers, the disclosure of Matsumoto Chizuo’s criminal records, and the revelation of concrete problems associated with Aum. *Sunday Mainichi* took the stand that the parents’ demand that Aum “give back their children” should not be ignored. They criticized Aum’s practice of requiring the payment of large amounts of money and such antisocial activities as the so-called blood initiation, although they also admitted that religious freedom should be respected. They also disclosed that Matsumoto was arrested in the past for selling fake medicine. This series of critical articles reached a large audience and provoked a general outcry among the public.

During this time certain parents of Aum *shukke* believers banded together to form the Association of Aum Shinrikyō Victims. An attorney named Sakamoto Tsutsumi 坂本 堤 became its legal advisor. He had previously organized the Defense Counsel for Countermeasures to Damages from Aum Shinrikyō after meeting one of the parents several months earlier. Sakamoto became a conduit for parents wishing to make contact with Aum. However, in early November 1989 he and his family suddenly disappeared. (In September 1995 it was discovered that they had been killed by Aum believers, and their bodies were subsequently recovered.⁵)

Furthermore, in 1990 Aum Shinrikyō bought a huge amount of land in the small villages of Kamikuishiki-mura in Yamanashi Prefecture and Namino-son in Kumamoto Prefecture. They constructed large facilities, and a significant number of Aum believers moved to these depopulated areas. Intense anti-Aum movements arose there; not only did Aum avoid establishing social contact with the long-term residents, but it also took an actively hostile attitude toward them. In addition, it is noteworthy that members of the

⁴ オウム真理教の狂気 [The insanity of Aum Shinrikyō], *Sunday Mainichi*, 10/15, 10/22, 10/29, 11/5, 11/5, 11/12, 11/19, 11/26, 12/3, 12/10, 12/17 (1989). A written response was prepared by Aum Shinrikyō. See *Kyokuchi Shinbun* 極智新聞, ed., 『オウム真理教は狂気か』 [Is Aum Shinrikyo insane?] (Tokyo: Aum Co., 1989).

⁵ Aum executive members have confessed to murdering Sakamoto Tsutsumi, his wife, and their two-year-old son, and burying their bodies at scattered locales in the Hokuriku region.

Association of Aum Shinrikyō Victims and the Defense Counsel for Countermeasures to Damages from Aum Shinrikyō made contact with the residents in those areas and notified them of Aum's dangerous and antisocial characteristics. The villages officially rejected the applications of Aum believers to register as local residents, leading to heated arguments among the village chiefs and assemblies. As a result, Aum believers were excluded from receiving public services, including public education for their school-age children.⁶

In the case of Namino-son several executive members of Aum Shinrikyō (including its legal advisor) were arrested and charged with illegal acquisition of land. This encouraged the anti-Aum movement. Eventually, Namino-son decided to pay ¥920,000,000 to Aum Shinrikyō as the condition for its evacuation. Aum agreed to Namino-son's terms, and as a result Aum's *shukke* believers moved and became concentrated in Kamikuishiki-mura.

In the case of Kamikuishiki-mura, the village chief decided at a relatively early stage to accept twenty-seven applications by Aum believers to register as local residents. However, later in 1994 when Aum tried to submit several hundred residential applications, the village assembly decided to refuse them. The population of the village was only 1,700, and such a large number of new residents posed a real threat.

Another anti-Aum movement arose in Tomizawa-mura, Yamanashi Prefecture, where Aum built a factory named Seiryū-shōja 清流精舎, which later turned out to have produced machine guns and bullets.

Various intellectuals—lawyers, scholars of religion, and representatives of citizens' movements—criticized the actions of both villages, claiming that these were violations of human rights and the suppression of religion.⁷ Ikeda Akira 池田昭 of Chūkyō University, for example, who studied the government's suppression of the pre-WWII new religious group Ōmoto-kyō, claimed that the suppression of Aum Shinrikyō was the worst case of the suppression of religion since World War II.⁸ Ashida Tetsurō 芦田徹郎 of Kumamoto Univer-

⁶ See the following books on the anti-Aum movements in those villages: *Kumamoto Nichinichi Shinbun* 熊本日日新聞, ed., 『オウム真理教とムラの論理』 [Aum Shinrikyō and village logic] (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun, 1995). Takeuchi Seiichi 竹内精一, 『オウム 2000 日戦争—富士山麓の戦い』 [The 2,000 days war against Aum: The battle at the foot of Mt. Fuji] (Tokyo: K. K. Bestsellers, 1995).

⁷ Nakajima Shin'ichirō 中島眞一郎 (representative of a group opposed to nuclear power), Suzuki Akio 鈴木明郎 (Kumamoto University), Rev. Harada Toshiyuki 原田敏幸 (pastor of Japan Christ Church), and five others organized the Citizens' Society Demanding Respect for Civil Rights, and pointed out such violations of basic human rights as Hatano-son's rejection of residential applications by Aum members; the police raid at Aum facilities and the arrest of Aum's executive members; and the annulment of permission to use public facilities in Kumamoto. The society requested that these violations of human rights by public authorities be stopped, and that discussions be held for the resolution of problems between the residents and the religious group. Cf. *Kumamoto nichinichi shimbun*, 27 November 1990.

⁸ Quoted in 『理想社会』 [Ideal Society] 18 (1993):2. This is one of Aum Shinrikyō's journals.

sity also pointed out that the villages' rejection of residential applications was a violation of human rights.⁹ Shimada Hiromi 島田裕巳 (formerly professor at Nippon Women's University) commented, "Although the mass media regards religious groups that threaten the social order as dangerous movements, intellectuals seek to understand their criticism of the present society."¹⁰

On the whole, critics of the anti-Aum movements were in the minority, the general feeling among the Japanese public being that Aum Shinrikyō was a dangerous organization.

THE THIRD PHASE: 1991–1994

Two significant anti-Aum documents were published in the beginning of 1991. One was a pamphlet titled *The "Religion" of Insanity: The Dreadful Realities of Aum Shinrikyō* published and privately distributed by the Defense Counsel for Countermeasures to Damages from Aum Shinrikyō. Another was Egawa Shōko's 江川紹子 *Messianic Ambitions: In Pursuit of Aum Shinrikyō*, which has turned out to be the classic anti-Aum document. Egawa quoted the testimonies of ex-members and gathered materials on Aum Shinrikyō to picture Asahara as an ambitious man:

We can see through his personality that Mr. Asahara has a desire for power, as reflected in his desire to increase the numbers of his disciples and to expand his influence. He has a conspicuous tendency toward destroying the current framework of society rather than leading people and society in a better direction. This might appeal to some young people who have grown up within the value system of our present society.¹¹

Through such writings over the past years Egawa has consistently pointed out that Asahara is a vulgar philistine filled with worldly desires, and that he has antisocial tendencies.

The influence of those publications were not as influential as one might think. It is quite ironic that those years were the period when Aum experienced a relatively positive reevaluation. It was at this time that Aum Shinrikyō entered into a rivalry with another new religious movement called Kōfuku no Kagaku 幸福の科学 (Science of Happiness). Representatives of both movements, including Asahara Shōkō himself, appeared on the program "Asa made nama terebi" (Live until Morning), which began at midnight on 28 Sep-

⁹ Ashida Tetsurō 芦田徹郎, オウム真理教と波野村 [Aum Shinrikyō and Hatano-son], *Aum Shinrikyō and village-logic*, 230.

¹⁰ Shimada Hiromi 島田裕巳, オウム真理教をめぐる [Concerning Aum Shinrikyō], 234.

¹¹ Egawa Shōko 江川紹子, 『救世主の野望—オウム真理教を追って』 [Messianic ambitions: In pursuit of Aum Shinrikyō] (Tokyo: Kyōiku Shiryō Shuppan, 1991), 252.

tember 1991 and lasted for more than four hours. The title of the discussion was “Young people, religion, and the age.” The impression received by most people through this program was that Kōfuku no Kagaku lacked appeal, that there was almost no difference between the common Japanese ethos and its teachings, and that although it claimed to be faithful to the Buddhist teachings its believers were quit ignorant of them. On the other hand, Aum Shinrikyō came across as presenting a deeper understanding of Buddhism, even though it had been regarded as an antisocial group. It was quite obvious that Aum Shinrikyō had won this round in its rivalry against Kōfuku no Kagaku.

After this TV program specialists in the study of religions, such as Shimada Hiromi and Ikeda Akira, made favorable comments concerning Aum Shinrikyō. Asahara’s discussions with Nakazawa Shin’ichi 中澤新一 (scholar of religion), Aramata Hiroshi 荒俣 宏 (naturalist), Beat Takeshi (comedian/critic), and others were published. These people showed a high regard for Asahara. A famous critic named Yoshimoto Takaaki 吉本隆明 also gave a rather favorable evaluation of Asahara’s writings.¹²

These events left the anti-Aum people with a strong grudge against these intellectuals. Scholars of religions like Shimada Hiromi and Nakazawa Shin’ichi in particular, who were regarded as “poster columns” for Aum Shinrikyō, were heavily criticized by various people after it became clear that Aum was involved in releasing sarin gas in the Tokyo subway system.

It should be noted that Egawa Shōko consistently published anti-Aum articles in weekly magazines during all these years.¹³

THE FOURTH PHASE: 1995–1996

A fourth phase represents the second period in which Aum Shinrikyō was regarded as a source of social problems. In the strict sense, this is the core of what is referred to the Aum Affair. The opening statements of the public prosecutors at the trials of Aum believers make it clear that in an attempt to distract attention and avoid the police raid around the time of the sarin incident in Tokyo subway, Aum Shinrikyō members bombed the apartment of a scholar of religions who was regarded as sympathetic to Aum, threw a Molotov cocktail or petrol bomb at one of its own facilities, placed a time bomb to

¹² These discussions were collected in one volume and used for Aum’s propaganda. 尊師対談集 [A collection of the master’s talks] *Lion’s Roar I* (n.d., presumably published around 1992.) Comments by the Dalai Lama and Karu Rimpoché were also included.

¹³ These articles were collected in one volume and published as 『オウム真理教』追跡 2200 日 [2200 days in pursuit of Aum Shinrikyō]. Egawa received the 1995 Ōya Sōichi Prize in journalism for her work.

release hydrocyanic acid gas in a public place, and sent a mail bomb to the newly elected governor of the Tokyo metropolitan government.

Police authorities raided Aum facilities all over Japan at dawn on 22 March 1995 and arrested a number of Aum believers, including some of its executive members. There is a high probability that those people's rights were violated by the police. The approach of the police was quite unusual, and many people concluded that extraordinary means were used on the presupposition that they were facing systematic terrorism.¹⁴

Reactions to the Aum Affair: The Rise of Anti-Cult Movements

Following the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system, the mass media, in particular television, gave the story virtually constant coverage. This extraordinary coverage included TV stations that broadcast stories on Aum for 40 to 50 hours every week.¹⁵ This flood of information continued until early July. Journalists and lawyers of the anti-Aum movement, as well as the executive members of Aum Shinrikyō, appeared on TV consistently on an almost daily basis.

It is remarkable that the anti-cult journalists and the lawyers of the Defense Counsel for Countermeasures to Damages from Aum Shinrikyō were quite successful in molding public opinion. They repeatedly urged that although a small number of the executive members of Aum Shinrikyō might have committed horrible deeds, the run-of-the-mill Aum members are sincere and innocent, and that people should not drive them into a corner and make it difficult for them to readapt to ordinary society.¹⁶ Journalists, lawyers, and other critics have chosen to use the terms “cult” and “mind control” as the grounds for

¹⁴ There are many materials concerning these incidents. Various newspapers compiled articles on Aum and published many books. See Asahi Shinbun Shuppan Kikakushitsu 朝日新聞出版企画室, ed., 『日本を揺るがしたサリンとオウム』 [Sarin and Aum: a shock for Japan] (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun, 1995); Mainichi Shinbun Shakaibu 毎日新聞社会部, ed., 『オウム事件取材全報道』 [Complete coverage on the Aum affair] (Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbun, 1995), and 『冥い祈り』 [Dark prayers] (Mainichi Shinbun, 1995); Tokyo Shinbun Shakaibu 東京新聞社会部, ed., 『オウム組織犯罪の謎』 [Aum: the Enigma of Organized Crimes] (Tokyo: Tokyo Shinbun Shuppanyoku, 1995).

¹⁵ See Ishii Kenji 石井研上, 『情報化と宗教』 [Religion and the information society], in Shimazono Susumu 島岡進, and Ishii Kenji, 『消費される宗教』 [Religion for consumption] (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1996), 187. The TV coverage of the Aum Affair received ratings as high as 39.4%.

¹⁶ The lawyer Takimoto Tarō and journalist Egawa Shōko are two representatives of such an opinion. Takimoto is highly critical of Asahara: “Matsumoto Chizuo a.k.a. Asahara Shōkō is a con man who was dominated by the desire for power and destruction and by resentment, but he leaves his name in history. His hope was to put Japan as a whole in the grips of a ‘destructive cult.’ He is responsible for inviting fascism.” See Takimoto and Fukushima, *The Anti-Subversive Activities Law and Aum Shinrikyō*, 56.

the innocence of these members. I would like to discuss how those concepts spread and gained currency.¹⁷

First, Steven Hassan, an ex-Moonie who wrote *Combatting Cult Mind Control* in 1988, and Asami Sadao 浅見定雄, who translated it into Japanese, appeared on TV and advocated the notions of “destructive cults” and “mind control.”¹⁸ Asami is a Harvard graduate, a biblical scholar, and anti-Moonie activist of more than twenty years. The original purpose for publishing the translation of Hassan’s book in 1993 was to educate Japanese people about what the author perceived as the danger of the Unification Church. Instead of giving a clear definition of the term “cult,” Hassan lists “religious cults,” “political cults,” “psychotherapy/educational cults,” and “commercial cults” under the category of “destructive cults.”¹⁹ According to Hassan, a destructive cult is “any group that engages in outright deception to pursue its ends, whether religious or secular in its apparent orientation.”²⁰ The cult is characterized by its use of “mind control,” which is “a system of influences that disrupts an individual’s identity (beliefs, behavior, thinking, and emotions) and replaces it with a new identity.”²¹ Hassan hopes that his book “will create a new and powerful public consumer awareness about mind control and destructive cults.”²² He also claims that it is the parents’ responsibility to protect and keep their children away from such destructive cults.

The *Asahi Shinbun*, one of the major newspaper companies in Japan, then published a Japanese translation of the basic anti-cult book, *Cults: What Parents Should Know* (1988), and invited one of its authors, Michael D. Langone, executive director of American Family Foundation, to visit Japan.²³

¹⁷ It is quite interesting that Aum Shinrikyō was defined as a “cult” by its own founder, that is, Asahara Shōkō: “The truth is, there *are* religions that should be called ‘cults.’ By definition a cult is a small religious group with a charismatic founder. This kind of religious group does not blend with social organizations. This is what they call a cult.... The founder of Aum Shinrikyō, Asahara Shōkō, is the person who represents the horrible characters of a cultic religion.” ヴァジラヤーナコース—教学システム教本 [The Vajrayāna course: The systematic textbook of doctrine], a talk delivered on 15 March 1994 at the Sugunami Asylum, 321–2. And Aum Shinrikyō itself was in the forefront of those using terms like “brainwashing” and “mind control,” except that they applied them to the mass media and the state. ヴァジラヤーナサッチャー—悪魔のマインドコントロール 人権洗計画を暴く [The devil’s mind control: Revealing the plan to brainwash humanity], *Vajrayana Sacca* 7 (1995). This publication is one of Aum’s journals.

¹⁸ Steven Hassan, *Combatting Cult Mind Control* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1988).

¹⁹ Hassan, *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, 39–40.

²⁰ Hassan, *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, 5.

²¹ Hassan, *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, 7.

²² Hassan, *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, 198.

²³ J. C. Ross and M. D. Langone, カルト教団からわが子を守る法 (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun, 1995), 39. The original was published under the title *Cults: What Parents Should Know* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1988).

This book points out that “destructive cults” convert and educate people with extremely unethical methods, and control their thinking, emotions, and behavior in order to accomplish their founders’ goals.²⁴ This shows the clear relationship between the anti-cult activists in the U. S. and their Japanese counterparts after the Aum Affair.

As early as 6 June 1995 Kainaka Tatsuo 甲斐中辰夫, assistant chief of the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office, met the press and stated that the sarin incident in the Tokyo subway system was a systematic plan carried out by Aum Shinrikyō as a highly closed group, and that there were a number of obstacles to prosecution as Aum members were under “mind control.”²⁵ Namely, at an early stage even a member of the judiciary authorities accepted the notion of “mind control,” though he did not admit that “mind control” had anything to do with the legal responsibility of the accused.

It was under these circumstances that specialists in psychiatry and social psychology such as Takahashi Shingo 高橋紳吾 (Tōhō University, psychiatry) and Nishida Kimiaki 西田公昭 (Shizuoka Prefectural University, social psychology) appeared on the scene.

First, Takahashi claimed that brainwashing was intended “to force somebody’s ideology, assertions, and thinking to change drastically,” and that “mind control is a psychological manipulation performed without the subject taking notice, and without his/her psychological resistance,” and that this was a “sophisticated form of brainwashing.”²⁶ He went so far as to say, “I dare say, adherence to a ‘destructive cult’ is the same kind of social pathological phenomenon as drug addiction.”²⁷ He expressed his concern about the present situation in Japan, and suggested that Japanese readers learn from Western intellectuals:

On the one hand, there are many in Japan who advocate “religious freedom” to the extreme of allowing cults to exist; on the other, in the West there are many, including psychiatrists, who keep a keen eye on the ethical issues related to religious freedom and who are active in discussing cult problems.²⁸

That is to say, Takahashi urged Japanese intellectuals to participate in the anti-cult movement. It is no wonder that Takahashi became a representative of the Japan De-culting Council, an equivalent of the American Family Foundation.

²⁴ Ross and Langone, *Cults*, 8 (Japanese translation).

²⁵ *Dark prayers*, 12–13.

²⁶ Takahashi Shingo 高橋紳吾, 宗教の自由とマインドコントロール [Religious freedom and mind control], *Imago* 6–8 (1995), 12.

²⁷ Takahashi, “Religious Freedom,” 13.

²⁸ Takahashi, “Religious Freedom,” 13.

Second, Nishida studied about “cult mind control” under Phillip Zimbardo at Stanford University. It was quite timely that he published a book titled *What is Mind Control?* only four months after the release of sarin gas on the subways.²⁹ He defines a cult as “a group that shares a certain set of firm beliefs (thoughts) and which is organized to fanatically practice the activities based on these beliefs.”³⁰ According to Nishida, “destructive cults” are “anti-socially organized groups with some characteristics that we must regard as dangerous and that require caution.”³¹ Further, he adds that mind control is the method cults use to manage and control their own members. Nishida defines mind control as “manipulating or influencing another person’s mental processes (recognition, emotions) and behavior temporarily or permanently without letting him/her notice it, in order to accomplish the objectives of one’s own organization.”³² Based on these notions, Nishida points out that “destructive cults” present a real threat to “our treasured social order.”

In this way the concept of “mind control” has become one of the key phrases in connection with the Aum Affair. One of the major newspapers pointed this out and said, “Wasn’t Aum Shinrikyō a group exercising ‘mind control’ in the guise of religion, but in fact for raising money?”³³

It is worth noting that the defense counsel of an ex-Aum defendant requested that Takahashi and Nishida serve as expert opinions on the mental state of the defendant. Ironically, this meant that the defense counsel had decided to make use of anti-cult specialists in order to commute the sentence for an ex-Aum defendant. Thus one of the issues at stake in this trial is “whether the loss of free will of the accused under mind control is admitted as mental disability.”³⁴

We must keep a very close watch on the development of the Aum trials in this respect. It is also of interest whether or not the Japanese courts will consider the situations in the U. S., where the concept of “mind control” is considered invalid as a mitigating factor.³⁵ Here it must be noted that even

²⁹ Nishida Kimiaki 西川公昭, 『マインドコントロールとは何か』 [What is mind control?] (Tokyo: Kinokuniya Soten, 1995).

³⁰ Nishida, *What is Mind Control?*, 12.

³¹ Nishida, *What is Mind Control?*, 13.

³² Nishida, *What is Mind Control?*, 57.

³³ *Dark Prayers*, 211.

³⁴ *Mainichi shinbun Newsflash*, 12 October 1996.

³⁵ Fujita Takanori 藤田尚則, アメリカ合衆国における「新宗教運動」をめぐる法的諸問題 [Legal problems surrounding “new religious movements” in the United States], 『宗教法』 [Religious law] 13 (1994), 119–56; and アメリカ合衆国における「新宗教運動」と「信教の自由」 [“New religious movements” and “freedom of religion” in the United States], 『宗教法』 [Religious law] 14 (1994):133–64.

academic specialists in Japan, not to mention Japanese in general, are not aware of what kind of objective and academic evaluations concerning the concept of “mind control” are available in the West.³⁶

What, then, would be the result if there arose a social consensus that ordinary Aum members were the victims of “cult mind control”? The conclusion might be that the “salvation” of an Aum member consists of having them leave Aum by removing the “mind control” under which they suffer.

There is a group that advocates this kind of solution: the Network of Salvation for Aum Believers, an interreligious group consisting of Lutheran pastors who were active in the “rescue” of Moonies and of the priests of the Nichiren sect of Japanese Buddhism. “Rescue” in this context means counseling for purposes of effecting a religious conversion, and includes the forceful abduction and confinement of a “cultist.”³⁷ As far as I know this does not involve violence; nevertheless, it involves a kind of vigilante style of counseling that runs the risk of disregarding the rights of the person in question.

A self-help group consisting of ex-members of Aum, called the Circle of Canaries, has also appeared. The main representative of this group is the son of the chairperson of the Society of the Victims of Aum Shinrikyō, a group that shared its offices with the Defense Counsel for Countermeasures to the Damages from Aum Shinrikyō. From this fact it is easy to see how closely the two groups are related. Takimoto Tarō and Nagaoka Tatsuya, two members of the groups, have edited an anti-Aum book titled *Escape from Mind Control*,³⁸ which points out problems connected with Asahara Shōkō and Aum Shinrikyō, and also contains memoirs of ex-members. Its target is mainly present Aum members, and it aims at promoting their resignation from Aum Shinrikyō.

Furthermore, it is remarkable that the Buddhist Nichiren and Sōtō sects have been relatively responsive to the Aum Affair, and have both published booklets on this subject. The Nichiren sect in particular stressed the importance of care for ex-members of Aum Shinrikyō, and the need to assist them in a smooth return to ordinary society.³⁹ The Sōtō sect published a question-and-

³⁶ Cf. David Bromley and James T. Richardson, *The Brainwashing/Deprogramming Controversy: Sociological, Psychological, Legal and Historical Perspective* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983).

³⁷ Oumu Shinrikyō Shinto Kyūsai Nettowāku オウム真理教信徒救済ネットワーク, ed., 『マインドコントロールからの解放』 [Liberation from Mind Control] (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1995), 111.

³⁸ Takimoto Tarō 滝本太郎 and Nagaoka Tatsuya 永岡辰哉, ed., 『マインドコントロールから逃れて—オウム真理 教脱会者たちの体験』 [Escape from Mind Control: The Experience of the Ex-Aum Members] (Tokyo: Kōyū shuppan, 1995).

³⁹ Nichirenshū Gendai Shūkyō Kenkyūsho 日蓮宗現代宗教研究所, 宗教カルトの元メンバーに対するケア活動のために [For the Care for the Ex-members of a Religious Cult] (Tokyo: Nichirenshū, 1996).

answer-style booklet on Aum.⁴⁰ Its content was more intellectual compared to the publication of the Nichiren sect, which was more practical and geared to the rehabilitation of ex-members.

The above-mentioned Japan De-culting Council was organized on 11 November 1995. First called the “Circle for Devising Countermeasures” to the Aum Affair,⁴¹ its original membership consisted of around fifty people, which included psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, jurists, and lawyers, many of whom also belonged to other of the anti-Aum groups mentioned above. Its main purpose is to devise countermeasures to problems generated by the Aum Affair, and its members have decided not to deal with “other cults” for the time being. It went on record as opposing the application of the Anti-Subversive Activities Law to Aum Shinrikyō, because this could act as an obstacle to counseling Aum members and assisting them in the return to ordinary society. The Japan De-culting Council has requested that police officers learn the basics of counseling so that they may better handle Aum or ex-Aum members. It also published *The Handbook for the Cultivating Mental Health: Thinking on the Destructive Cult, Aum Shinrikyō*, of which almost half consists of an explanation of “destructive cults” and “mind control.”⁴²

There are now more than seventy books on Aum Shinrikyō and the Aum Affair, including special issues of monthly or weekly journals.

Conclusion

The Aum Affair, which involved a number of crimes and terrorist acts, was regarded as a social problem, not as a problem of religion or religious freedom. At the same time it was regarded as a problem relating to the welfare of civil society, and as an indication of a crisis in Japanese society as a whole. Its most grievous effect was the loss of a sense of peace and tranquility in ordinary life. Aum Shinrikyō proclaimed that Armageddon was near, but it was none other than Aum Shinrikyō itself that brought about the worst result, that is, the destruction of the “peaceful everyday life” of ordinary citizens. Aum Shinrikyō radically stimulated the survival instinct of Japanese people. It is not

⁴⁰ Sōtōshū Gendai Kyōgaku Kenkyū Sentā 曹洞宗現代教学研究センター, 『オウム真理教 Q & A—曹洞宗の立場から』 [Questions and Answers about Aum Shinrikyō: A View from Sōtō Zen] (Tokyo: Sōtōshū Shūmusho, 1996).

⁴¹ Takahashi Shingo, representative trustee of Japan De-culting Council, 記者会見要旨 [Press release summary], 18 January 1996.

⁴² Nihon Datsu-karuto Kenkyūkai 日本脱カルト研究会, 『心の健康づくりハンドブック』 [Handbook for Mental Health] (1996).

difficult to imagine why they reacted to it so excessively and with so much emotion.

The anti-cult movement in Japan developed in reaction to the Aum Affair and holds as its key concepts the notions of “destructive cults” and “mind control.” There is a clear tendency to try, through those two concepts, to resolve the social and intellectual confusion brought about by Aum Shinrikyō. They have become the central ideas for many people in the attempt to solve problem related to Aum.

From this perspective Aum believers are perceived as simply victims manipulated by a destructive cult and its mind control. They have therefore come to be regarded as proper objects for therapy and healing. People are now convinced that association with Aum is wrong, and that those who are already members should be saved from the group. These assumptions lead to the conclusion that even forceful measures such as “rescuing” should be allowed, and that Aum members are in need of counseling before they can readjust to “ordinary” society. In this way being an Aum believer has come to be regarded as a serious disorder in itself, with the result that has become more and more difficult for members to remain associated with the group.

At present, Aum Shinrikyō has been ordered to disband as a religious corporation. It has been deprived of its tax-exempt status, because it was judged to be contrary to the public welfare. In addition, the government continues to investigate whether or not it can apply the Anti-Subversive Activities Law to it. If this law were applied, Aum Shinrikyō would be regarded as an illegal and dangerous organization, and it is possible that its believers would go underground to continue their activities.

The question remains as to which new religious movements will be considered anti-social “destructive cults” that utilize “mind control,” since these concepts have now become established in Japanese society. The possible damage to religious freedom in the future remains an open question.

Finally, by way of supplementary explanation, I would add that it might be regarded as a social deviation in Japanese society today not to admit the validity of the concepts of “destructive cults” and “mind control,” since they have become part of conventional wisdom. In this sense, those who see through the invalidity of these concepts, including scholars of religion, may be in for hard times ahead. As reflected in the statement of Takahashi Shingo quoted above, for the present and for some time into the future it may well be considered a form of social deviation to advocate religious freedom for new movements that society at large to be considers destructive cults.

In closing we may note that two scholars of religions have already been

made scapegoats in the Aum Affair. One of them, Shimada Hiromi, was in effect, stripped of his tenured university post at Nippon Women's University.⁴³

There was an expectation among people in general that scholars of religion, as specialists on the subject, would recognize the dangers of “cults” and sound the alarm for innocent citizens. Most such scholars did not feel an obligation to do so, however, and many even tried to criticize modern Japanese society in general from the standpoint of the new religious movements. As Shimada Hiromi once remarked, “Although the mass media regards religious groups that threaten the social order as dangerous, intellectuals seek to understand their criticisms of present society.”⁴⁴ People in general and anti-cultists in particular consider such scholars possible accomplices of the “destructive cults.” In this sense, the Aum Affair gave rise to questions regarding the purpose of religious studies and the history of religions, as well as casting doubt on the role of scholars specializing in those fields.⁴⁵

Postscript: Repercussions for Academics in Japan

One of the most unsettling aspects of the Aum Affair was that certain scholars were used and deceived by Aum Shinrikyō. Such things have happened before, but this has proven to be the most obvious and intentional case of deception. This has exposed the tacit assumptions of scholars of religions that they must not treat religions too critically or harshly, and that believers of the latter would not deceive them tell them lies. It has also become obvious that scholars of religion can fall prey to the intentions of their subject of study. This should have been foreseeable, but no scholars of religion in Japan seemed aware of the possibility.

For example, early in 1995, before the sarin attack on the Tokyo subway system, Shimada Hiromi was invited to one of Aum's facilities in Kamikuishiki-mura. The building was supposed to be a temple dedicated to the great god Śiva. Shimada went away with a positive impression of the temple, and wrote that Aum Shinrikyō had matured as a religious organization over the past four years, and that it had been made a scapegoat for various unsolved

⁴³ Many people have criticized Shimada and Nakazawa. See, for example Kohama Itsurō 小浜逸郎, 『オウムと全共闘』 [Aum and the Student Movement] (Tokyo: Sōshisha, 1995), 122–48. It is remarkable that Shimada criticized Nakazawa recently in 私の「中澤新一論」 [My views on Nakawaza Shin'ichi], *Takarajima Sāitō* 6 (1996):14–25.

⁴⁴ See note 10 above.

⁴⁵ Fujiwara Satoko tries to rethink the themes of history of religion or religious studies in classifying all the remarks of scholars of religions on the Aum affairs into three categories. See Fujiwara Satoko 藤原聖子, 「鏡」と「擁護」 [“Mirrors” and “defenses”], 『東京大学宗教学年報』 13 (1995).

crimes like the sarin incident in Matsumoto or the abduction of the lawyer Sakamoto Tsutsumi and his family. He even ventured to claim that he had heard from an anonymous religious figure that the sarin incident in Matsumoto city was actually the work of another major new religious group (which I will refrain from naming to avoid further damage to its reputation). Later the supposed “temple” turned out to be a plant for the production of massive amounts of nerve gas.⁴⁶

Just before the sarin attack on the Tokyo subway system Shimada’s apartment in Tokyo was bombed by Aum members. They had hoped that this would be interpreted as an anti-Aum activity (and thus gain sympathy for Aum), since Shimada was regarded as an Aum sympathizer not only by anti-Aum activists but also by Aum Shinrikyō itself.

Thus Shimada became not only a victim of Aum’s deception and violence, but also a target of the anti-Aum activists and the mass media. He was roundly humiliated on a TV talk show by the other participants in a discussion on Aum that was aired throughout Japan. In September of 1995 Shimada was asked by his university to stay at home and keep silent on matters concerning Aum, but he chose to continue speaking out. In November he finally tendered his resignation to the university.

There were also several scholars of religions from the United States who were asked to visit Aum’s facilities and to defend Aum from the Japanese police and the mass media. They had no prior knowledge of the entire context of the Aum Affair, nor of the incidents prior to the Tokyo sarin gas attack. Since their press release was nothing but a repetition or summary of what Aum had claimed, it was ignored by the major newspapers. The only media to give them any coverage were the gossip columns in certain sports newspapers, as well as a number of television shows that regularly deal in scandal and gossip.

These incidents have served to make scholars of religions look like credulous fools, a negative image reinforced by the mass media and anti-cult activists who have portrayed the scholars as persons insensitive and naive to the dangers of “destructive cults.” Thus it is no wonder that scholars of religions consider the Aum Affair as a crisis for religious studies at large. Takashima Jun (1996) has said that the Aum Affair is an issue that scholars of religion cannot avoid, and I suppose that most scholars would agree.

Fujiwara Satoko (1995) classifies the attitude of scholars of religions toward the Aum Affair into three types: 1) the approach that inquires into the authen-

⁴⁶ Shimada Hiromi, サリン製造工場か? 疑惑の施設第7サティアン [Is it a plant to produce sarin gas?: The seventh satian, the facility under suspicion], *Takarajima Sati* 3 (1995).

⁴⁷ Fujiwara, “‘Mirrors’ and ‘Defenses,’” 17–18.

ticity of a religion tries to decide whether it is a “true religion” or a “false religion” from the standards of another belief system; 2) the approach that criticizes not only the religion in question but also the society that surrounds it; and 3) the approach that criticizes society rather than the religion itself.⁴⁷ Fujiwara refers to the first approach as one of “seeking the true and the false”; the second, that of “the way of enlightening”; and the last as that of “cultural criticism.” She also reviews the statements of scholars of religion on Aum and points out that after the Aum Affair there was an increase in statements of the “enlightening” type, and of approaches that combined the approach of “enlightenment” and “cultural criticism,” although Japanese scholars of religions in general tend to take the approach of “cultural criticism.” Her analysis has a certain clarity, but one can hardly assume that each of these approaches results in criticism. For example, the “cultural criticism” type results in an internal understanding of a belief system that does not of necessity lead to a critique of the wider social reality.

The Japanese public expects scholars of religions to be socially responsible, but the extent and nature of that responsibility is not clear. One thing is certain: there is an expectation among people in general that scholars should function to sound a warning against dangerous new religious groups, a responsibility that scholars themselves do not necessarily accept. Thus there is still a gap in perception between scholars and the general public. The responsibility of scholars, and their function with regard to possibly antisocial religions, is a matter of ongoing concern and heated debate.