

# NEW RELIGIONS THROUGH THE EYES OF ŌYA SŌICHI, “EMPEROR” OF THE MASS MEDIA

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*This essay, which concentrates on the work and legacy of the journalist Ōya Sōichi 大宅壮一 (1900–1970), is part of an ongoing study of print media representations of new religions during the immediate postwar period in Japan. Ōya, who remains a highly regarded figure within Japan’s media industry, wrote extensively on new religions during the prewar and postwar periods. He played an important role in perpetuating and reformulating negative “media frames” about new religions that had been developing since the Meiji period. Despite the dismantling of State Shinto, the introduction of complete religious freedom, and the fundamental changes concerning the relationship between the authorities and religions introduced by the Allied Occupation, a highly negative campaign by journalists against new religions continued unabated. Ōya was at the forefront of this campaign and his perspectives on new religions continue to have an impact on “media frames” to this day.*

**O**n 10 October 1948, the journalist Ōya Sōichi wrote the following in the *Asahi shinbun*:<sup>1</sup>

After the incident involving Jikōson, which created a sensation immediately following the end of the war, has been all but forgotten by the public, a “dancing religion” has appeared in the city and is the subject of much discussion. Postwar society is a real hotbed in which pseudo-religions flourish. They feed on the ignorance of the public, who, in the postwar mayhem, do not have the power to judge what is right. The causes for this lie in the breakdown of feudalistic traditions, the purge of the bureaucracy, and fears of another world war. A speciality of [this

1. The article was entitled 「踊る宗教の実態」 [The actual circumstances behind “the dancing religion”] (p. 3). All translations are my own.

dancing religion] however, is singing and dancing. A question of concern is that intelligentsia are joining the group. Dealing with these types of people is a major problem facing the authorities.

The article referred specifically to two new religions, Jiu 璽宇<sup>2</sup> and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō 天照皇大神宮教, which were the first to receive widespread media attention in the immediate postwar period. Both groups were led by women—Jiu’s leader at the time, Nagaoka Naka 長岡ナカ, was known to her followers and others as Jikōson, while Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō’s founder, Kitamura Sayo 北村サヨ, who became famous through press reports as the “dancing goddess” of the “dancing religion” (踊る宗教). Jiu became the subject of intense media scrutiny in January 1947 in a series of events that culminated in the arrests of various members of the group in Kanazawa. The press reporting of Jiu influenced subsequent reporting of other new religions during the immediate postwar period, including Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō. Ōya’s article was indicative of the kind of harsh criticism of new religions in the print media by journalists and other commentators that was common during the Allied Occupation period. In the article, Ōya attempted to link the two new religions and their activities in a general critique of religious and social policy.

This essay is a brief introduction to Ōya Sōichi and his role in establishing dominant ideas in the press about new religions in the prewar and postwar periods. Ōya’s career spanned five decades and he was highly prolific, writing on a wide variety of subjects in newspapers, magazines, and books. At the time of his death, he was widely praised by his media colleagues as an iconoclast and hailed for the “heckling spirit” (野次馬精神) he had cultivated throughout his career. One of his protégés, Ōkuma Hideo, christened Ōya “the emperor of the mass media.”<sup>3</sup> Ōya’s “heckling spirit” is perhaps no more apparent than in his relentless pursuit of new religions in both the prewar and postwar periods.<sup>4</sup>

2. For information on Jiu’s early period see Tsushima Michihito 対馬路人, 「敗戦と世直し—璽宇の千年王国思想と運動 1」 [Defeat and world renewal: Jiu’s millennial ideas and activities, pt. 1], 関西学園大学社会学部紀要 (Bulletin of Sociology Department of Kwansai Gakuen University), 63 (1991): 337–71. For more on the relationships between the postwar Occupation and Japanese authorities and Jiu, see Benjamin Dorman “SCAP’s Scapegoat? The Authorities, New Religions, and a Postwar Taboo,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 31 (2004): 105–40.

3. Ōkuma Hideo 大隈秀夫, 『裸の自宅——マスコミの帝王』 [The naked Ōya Sōichi: Emperor of the mass media] (1996, Tokyo: Sanseidō).

4. The public was once again reminded of his name and its association with religion when the 1995 Ōya Sōichi Prize for Non-Fiction was awarded to Egawa Shōkō. Egawa was an independent journalist whose exposés on the religious group Aum Shinrikyō highlighted not only the group’s activities but also Japanese government ineptitude well before the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system early in 1995. Considering Ōya’s long-standing interest in religion and his work on new religions in particular, Egawa appears to have been a highly suitable recipient of the award.

## Japan's Secular Religion

Ōya is not without his critics. Murakami Naoyuki 村上直之, a sociologist who has studied the role of the media in different societies, posits that the mass media is actually Japan's "secular religion" (現世教) and that journalists are its priests.<sup>5</sup> He claims that the reason journalists despise ordinary religion is that they are blind and fanatical followers of this media "religion." As he sees it, the themes pursued in the reporting of incidents involving religious groups are analogous to sermons, and the journalists who write about various "crimes"—real or imagined—that religious groups commit are analogous to prison chaplains admonishing sinners.

According to Murakami, Ōya is best considered as "the founder of Japan's religion of the mass media." He argues that Ōya and other Japanese journalists who cooperated with the military government in the prewar and wartime periods made a sudden about-face after the war. They launched a campaign against the feudalistic ideas of the past, waving the new banner of democracy in accordance with the demands of the Allied Occupation. Murakami claims that a "necessary scapegoat" for this journalistic campaign to build a civil society was religion. Established religions struggled in the postwar environment to gain credibility, as most Buddhist and Shinto groups were seen as supporting the wartime regime. Journalists, he asserts, used this wartime connection initially to hail a new era of freedom and to severely criticize established religions and their leaders for their wartime associations with war criminals, for being involved in corruption, and for being too distant from the people and their suffering.

He claims that Ōya was at the forefront of this effort to expel the irrational ideas and illusions espoused by religionists. Ōya's contribution to the campaign of journalists against religions in general, according to Murakami, was to single out new religions. Playing on the idea that "religions are out to make money"—a theme that would attract the public's attention (and thus sell papers and books)—Ōya launched his campaign with gusto.

Murakami's characterization of the media as "secular religion" is somewhat exaggerated. It implies that all journalists are fundamentally opposed to religion and are always critical of religious groups. The idea that all journalists despise religion and always pursue a single "doctrine" of criticizing them is unreasonable. Ōishi Shūten claims that although most journalists during the years immediately after the war attacked new religions, some began to report them in a

5. Murakami Naoyuki, 「戦後日本の宗教報道を検証する」, *Seikyō shinbun*, 13 March 1999, p. 6. Murakami's ideas were published in *Seikyō shinbun*, an organ of Sōka Gakkai, a religious organization that has received substantial press criticism throughout its postwar history. Ōya was a strong critic of the Sōka Gakkai during the 1950s and 1960s.

more balanced light in the early 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Ōya's work, at least in the initial postwar years, was consistently critical of new religions, and his stance toward them helped cement his reputation.

### “Framing” New Religions since the Meiji Period

To describe the groups in the *Asahi shinbun* article mentioned above, Ōya used particular “frames” that were recognizable to his readers, ones which had been developing since the Meiji period. Framing, which considers how events in everyday life are organized or made sense of in coherent ways,<sup>7</sup> is one way of looking at how the mass media shape understandings of religion. There is growing scholarly interest in “the role of the media in constructing narratives that accentuate a particularly sinister picture of new religious groups, as if these innovations are intrinsically pathological or harmful to both their own members and society.”<sup>8</sup> While this interest often concentrates on contemporary religion and society, a consideration of historical narratives is also worthwhile. The media can be said to play a major role in developing the “cultural conversations” surrounding new religions. The reason the work of Ōya is worth considering is that he reported on religions, and particularly new religions, during both the prewar and postwar periods, and played a role in constructing the narratives that helped form a picture of new religions in society.

As Inoue Nobutaka states, media reporting on new religions in Japan since the Meiji period has generally been negative.<sup>9</sup> From that time until Japan's sur-

6. Ōishi is a former representative of the Union of New Religious Organizations of Japan (新日本宗教団体連合会, also known as the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan and often abbreviated as Shinshūren 新宗連. Cited in Taki Taizō 滝泰三, 『神々多忙』 [The gods are busy] (Tokyo: Yūkan Shinchōsha, 1956), 1.

7. The idea of media framing developed from the research of Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

8. Stuart A. Wright, “Media Coverage of Unconventional Religion: Any ‘Good News’ for Minority Faiths?” *Review of Religious Research* 39, no. 2 (1997): 101.

9. Inoue Nobutaka 井上信孝, 「マスコミと新宗教」 [Mass media and new religions]. In 『新宗教辞典—縮刷版』 [Dictionary of new religions: Abbreviated edition], Inoue Nobutaka et al., eds., (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1994), 516–18. For an example of print media criticism of a new religion in the Meiji period see Takeda Dōshō, “The Fall of Renmonkyō, and its place in the History of Meiji-period Religions,” in *New Religious Movements: Contemporary Papers in Japanese Religion* 2, Inoue Nobutaka, ed., (Tokyo: Kokugakuin University, 1991), 25–57; see also Oku Takenori 奥武則, 『蓮門教衰亡史—近代日本民衆宗教の行く末』 [History of the decline of Renmonkyō: The path of a popular religion in modern Japan] (Tokyo: Gendai Kikaku Shitsu, 1988), and 『キャンダルの明治—国民を作るためのレッスン』 [Meiji scandals: Lessons in creating citizens] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho, 1997), 143–80; Inoue Nobutaka, 『新宗教の解説』 [Reading new religions] (Tokyo: Chikuma Gakugei Bunkō, 1996), 53–81. For arguments about the mostly negative print media criticism of new religious movements in the immediate post war period, see Kishimoto Hideo 岸本秀夫, 『戦後の宗教と社会』 [Postwar religion and society] (Tokyo: Keisei Sha, 1976), 211–12; Morioka Kiyomi, “Attacks on the New Religions: Rishō Kōseikai and the ‘Yomiuri Affair.’” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21: 281–310 (1994).

render in 1945, the dominant view of religions gradually developed under State Shinto, which held the emperor to be a supreme being and the country “divine.” Orthodoxy was related to ideas of social order, morality, and modernity, and movements deemed unorthodox were persecuted by the state. Official terms, such as *ruiji shukyō* 類似宗教 (“pseudo-religion”) or the more derogatory *jakyō* 邪教 (“heretical religion”), were used to describe and categorize new religions that the authorities deemed problematic. Such terms were repeated in the press.

During the Meiji period, newspapers often took the lead in criticizing new religions, partly because journalists viewed these groups as superstitious and dangerous in an era when Western science and rationalism was equated with modernity. According to James Huffman, journalists perceived themselves and the press in general as being defenders of the public interest.<sup>10</sup> Journalists of the day, under such slogans as “neutrality and fairness” (中立公正) and “without prejudice or bias” (不偏不党), attempted to establish their independence from the authorities and to engage in criticism of the actions of officials. While they criticized new religious groups that were not recognized officially by the authorities, they also criticized government policy regarding religion. In other words, the press used criticisms of new religions as another means to demonstrate to the public that their members were not merely government lackeys who were unwilling to point out the supposed failings of the authorities. They could then blame the authorities for allowing new religions to flourish unchecked, thus causing a problem for public safety.<sup>11</sup>

For example, Renmonkyō 蓮門教, a new religion affiliated with a Sect Shinto organization, was one group that came into conflict with the press, the public, and the authorities concerning the emerging myths of State Shinto.<sup>12</sup> Renmonkyō grew rapidly in a very short period of time, and promoted its own cure (“holy water”) for cholera.<sup>13</sup> *Yorozu chōhō* 萬朝報, a newspaper that specialized in scandals and also strove to appear independent of government influence, generated stories about the group that were taken up by other newspapers. The “media event” generated by *Yorozu chōhō* led to public protests. The paper

10. James L. Huffman, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 371.

11. John Pierson argues that during the Meiji period journalists and media workers were seen as government critics who were true to their profession only when they were “registering dissent, decrying abuse, and awakening people to alternative, and generally more liberal, policies and programs for modernization.” John Pierson, *Tokutomi Sohō, 1863-1957: A Journalist for Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 265.

12. See Oku, *Meiji Scandals*, 143–79, and Oku, *History of the Decline of Renmonkyō*.

13. Western medicine was both expensive and ultimately ineffective in preventing cholera, and the cure Renmonkyō promoted presented an alternative for many of the urban and rural poor. Takeda suggests that this was the major reason for its popularity. Takeda, “The Fall of Renmonkyō,” 37–9.

accused Renmonkyō of corrupting public morals, of being a “high-class harlot” who promoted superstition. It also criticized the authorities for allowing a group like Renmonkyō to sully the “pure” image of Shinto. After other papers took up *Yorozu chōhō*’s charges and members of the public protested, the government eventually took steps to censure the group.

Takeda Dōshō suggests that Renmonkyō stood apart from the national aims and that the incident probably marks the first example of “that comprehensive, organic mobilization of the entire society which would become a hallmark of later persecutions of Hito no Michi and Ōmotokyō” under State Shinto.<sup>14</sup> *Yorozu chōhō*’s campaign against Renmonkyō served to define for its readers both what was acceptable and what was not. These frames influenced other media and, in turn, the public. Press accusations against new religions, which can be considered as frames upon which narratives about new religions and wider society were constructed, included financial misappropriation, the promotion of illicit sexual practices, adherence to irrational and unscientific ideas that were not in line with those of a modernizing state, and—perhaps the most damaging charge—violating the dignity of the emperor (*lèse majesté*) through promoting “heretical” religious practices. Scandals generated in the press about new religions stimulated public concern, and this in turn triggered action by the authorities.

## Ōya’s Prewar Career

Ōya became interested in religion at a young age. As a youth he attended a church, although this was apparently to take advantage of the English conversation lessons that were offered there.<sup>15</sup> By the time he began his career as a journalist, after dropping out of Tokyo University in 1925, he had come under the influence of Marxist ideas. Gradually his view toward all religions became critical, and he eventually declared that belief in any religion was irrational and unscientific.<sup>16</sup> He became convinced of the need for social change through political means, and this perspective is likely to have informed his view of religion.

Japan experienced a period of phenomenal growth of new religions during the late 1920s and 1930s. This was to prove a fertile field for the press. The frames used by the press during the Meiji period were picked up in the 1930s. For example, the magazine *Bungei shunjū* 文芸春秋 published an article in July 1931 describing how “weird heretical cults” (*jakyō kaikyō* 邪教怪教) were causing

14. Takeda, “The Fall of Renmonkyō,” 26.

15. Ōkuma Hideo, *The Naked Ōya Sōichi*, 223.

16. Ōya Sōichi, 『大宅壯一全集 4』 [Complete works of Ōya Sōichi 4] (Tokyo: Sōyō Sha, 1975), 41. This section (21–44) is called 「類似宗教と既成宗教」 [Pseudo-religions and established religions].

problems for the Home Ministry and the Education Ministry. In 1931 Ōya began to write of an “age of great inflation of newly-arisen religions” (*shinkō shūkyō no dai infure jidai* 新興宗教の大インフレ時代).<sup>17</sup>

In using the term “newly-arisen religions” (*shinkō shūkyō* 新興宗教), he was implying that the apparent faddish nature of new religions was potentially dangerous for society.<sup>18</sup> Ōya was also critical of established religions. He argued that the established religions themselves were all “pseudo-religions” at the time of their forming. Questioning whether established religions were qualified to apply the term “heretical cults” to “pseudo-religions,” he viewed the history of all religions with suspicion. In 1934 he wrote:

Of course it is clear that pseudo-religions are complete fakes, but it goes without saying that all established religions are not exactly paragons of virtue.... If we look at religions from another angle, they are all irrational and unscientific.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, it was the new religions that bore the greatest brunt of his criticism. By the mid-1930s, he had developed a fair degree of familiarity with the subject and tried to educate his readers on the nuances of the different terminology associated with new religions. In October 1935 he wrote that Tenrikyō and Ōmoto were the models that influenced other “pseudo-religions.” He observed that while the followers of “newly-arisen religions” had tended to be farmers and people of lower classes, by 1935 the situation had changed in that these “questionable groups” were attracting middle-class people such as soldiers, educators, government officials, company workers, and quasi-intellectuals.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, he was using the frame of the potential dangers society faced because of the participation of educated people, the same frame *Yorozu chōhō* had to Renmonkyō some forty years earlier. He also questioned the validity of groups like Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō. Although these officially-recognized religious bodies could no longer be called “pseudo-religions” as such, they continued to display a pseudo-religious flavor (類似宗教的). He concluded that the populace, and particularly intellectuals, lost the power to criticize and that this was a major factor in the rise of “pseudo-religions.”

These circumstances provided an “ideal hotbed” for “pseudo-religions” to flourish. Ōya also wrote about the changes he perceived in the methods of

17. This phrase appeared in Ōya’s book 『宗教をののしる』 [Scolding religions] (Tokyo: Shinchō Sha, 1937), Ōya included a section called 「宗教インフレの時代」 [The age of religious inflation].

18. “Newly arisen religions” was a term that was used occasionally in the press in the prewar period. It was picked up again during the Occupation period.

19. Ōya, *Complete Works of Ōya Sōichi* 4, 41–42.

20. Ōya, *Complete Works of Ōya Sōichi* 4, 37–41.

“pseudo-religions” in the mid-1930s. Before this period, he claimed, most new religions attracted ignorant people through primitive superstitions or by visiting the houses of sick people to sell healing potions. The new religions that had appeared recently, however, particularly Ōmoto and Hito no Michi, had begun to use the print media with great effectiveness. Some of them had “caught” the public attention by playing on the popular reverence for the written word.

By this stage, the state had also strengthened its legal arsenal to deal with new religions like Ōmoto and Hito no Michi. These groups, as was the case with Tenrikyō and Renmonkyō in the Meiji period, demonstrated the ability to garner huge popularity outside the state-sanctioned religious system, which was authorized to monitor religious activities. After the introduction of the repressive Peace Preservation Law in 1925 and the subsequent advent in the early 1930s of the “religions police,” a force that developed from the feared Special Higher Police (特高警察) and was charged with the mission to stamp out “heretical cults,” the authorities became much more proactive in targeting groups. After the Ōmoto incident of 1935,<sup>21</sup> Ōya wrote an article entitled “The Flood of Pseudo-Religions,” which appeared in three separate magazines. The article elicited a significant response from the public. Based on the reaction, he decided to continue his pursuit of new religions. His attacks, however, drew criticism from members of Hito no Michi who wrote letters to *Mainichi shinbun* demanding that the paper refuse Ōya’s articles.<sup>22</sup> Hito no Michi itself was to become a target of the authorities in 1937.

Morioka Kiyomi argues that in the persecutions of Ōmoto and Hito no Michi the press, for the most part, printed the charges of the police as fact without question, and labeled these groups as anti-social, criminal, and representative of new religions in general.<sup>23</sup> These comments should not be taken to suggest that there was complete agreement between the authorities and the press regarding new religions. In the magazine *Nippon hyōron* 日本評論 in January 1936, for example, Ōya wrote that the charges against Ōmoto were rather vague and nonsensical, and that while many newspapers had published articles on the Ōmoto incident, the actual details of the crimes reportedly committed by the group were abstract and unclear.

21. On 8 December 1935, around 550 police cordoned off Ōmoto’s sacred grounds (in the Kyoto areas of Ayabe and Kameoka) and then launched raids in other branches around the country. 987 adherents were arrested, 51 leaders received sentences for allegedly aiming to overturn imperial rule. Not only were Ōmoto’s buildings burnt and the land sold off by the authorities for a pittance, to add insult to injury the authorities forced the group to pay for the costs of the destruction.

22. Ōya, *Complete works of Ōya Sōichi* 4, 240. Originally published in *Serupan* magazine in November 1936.

23. Morioka, “Attacks on the New Religions,” 309.

Furthermore, in his opinion, the claims that the group was guilty of *lèse majesté* seemed extreme and the application of the Peace Preservation Law unnecessary. “One gets the feeling, however, that the arrests were carefully planned and politically motivated. It seems clear that the aim of the authorities was to use this opportunity to suppress completely this evil cult.” He argued that the nation could have used Ōmoto as a political tool in order to achieve its expansionist aims. Furthermore, he complained, if the authorities were serious about uncovering “evil cults,” there were plenty of others to go after. He advised the police to dispense with them quickly without imposing an extra burden on the public.<sup>24</sup> Ōya was not alone in his criticism of the authorities in terms of the way they handled the Ōmoto incident. In 1936, the year after the second suppression of Ōmoto, the author of an article in the *Yomiuri shinbun* agreed in principle with the actions of the authorities and hailed them as successful, but he complained that the government had not acted quickly enough to deal with the situation.<sup>25</sup>

While Ōya’s criticism of the authorities in regard to the Ōmoto incident may appear to be representative of his “heckling spirit,” he nevertheless upheld the dominant frames that new religions were inherently problematic and deserved particularly close scrutiny. The authorities continued their investigations into new religions and by the late 1930s many more groups had been targeted, leading to arrests and imprisonment for dissenters. By the late 1930s, Ōya ceased direct condemnation of state policy. Some of his journalist colleagues had done so and had died in prison. He himself managed to avoid persecution but was sent to the war front in Manchuria to report on the war effort.

## Ōya Resurrects His Career

After the war ended, Ōya lay low for a few years and published very little. When he returned to the subject of new religions in 1948, he drew on his pre-surrender experience of reporting new religions. He made a major “comeback” in 1950, contributing articles to a variety of newspapers and magazines as an independent journalist for the rest of his career.<sup>26</sup>

Ōkuma states that Ōya’s prewar journalism (and his purported “heckling spirit” in fearlessly challenging the authorities) was familiar to many readers in the

24. Ōya Sōichi, 「大本教弾圧是非」 [The Ōmotokyō suppression: Right or wrong?], reprinted in *Complete Works of Ōya Sōichi* 4, 223–35.

25. Cited in Inoue, *Reading New Religions*, 130–31.

26. Matsuura Sōzō 松浦総三津, 「大宅壮一——一本のペンを武器に昭和の世相をナデ斬りして縦横無尽」 in 『人物昭和史—マスコミ旗手』 [Historical figures of the Shōwa period: Standard bearers of the mass media] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shōbō, 1978), 4: 126–27; See also Kawamoto Saburō 川本三郎, 「大宅壮一」 in 『コラムで批判する』 [Criticism through columns], (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1985), 244.

postwar period.<sup>27</sup> It was for this reason, he holds, that Ōya was able to resurrect his career. It is not unreasonable to assume that the public were already familiar with the images of new religions that Ōya and the press in general projected in the prewar era. This public familiarity with the notions that new religions were suspect, potentially dangerous, often criminal, and generally socially unacceptable meant that Ōya's postwar presentation of new religions were easy to digest.

His postwar comeback coincided with the rise of Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō in the first years after the surrender. This group began to receive media attention for two main reasons: (1) there was a great deal of attention focused on the Kanazawa incident involving Jiu in early 1947 mentioned above; and (2) Kitamura, its founder, began to make trips with her followers to Tokyo from her hometown in Tabuse, Yamaguchi prefecture, to proselytize. Her presence generated significant media attention because of her penchant for radical statements such as “Tokyo is a nest of maggot beggars,” and for uncompromising criticism of all other religions, Japanese society in general, and even the emperor.<sup>28</sup> She held rallies around the city, lecturing audiences that included journalists.<sup>29</sup> Ōya attended some of these rallies and began to write articles on the group, including one for *Tokyo nichichi shinbun* on 9 January 1949.<sup>30</sup>

This article appeared as part of a series on the sudden explosion of new religions. In the article he drew inspiration from the postwar trend of social dancing clubs that were proliferating in the city, describing “the dancing religion” as being like a dance club that did not charge admission. On a more serious note, he argued that it was an “irony of modern culture” that “a barbarous peasant woman” was leading the group. Although he claimed that the “dancing religion” did not have “the foulness of Kannonkyō and PL Kyōdan,”<sup>31</sup> his description of Kitamura was harsh, stating that she was built “like a cow” and was a “filthy farmer.” He did concede that Kitamura and her group did not appear to be part of what he termed the “religions business,” like other groups that followed either

27. Ōkuma, *The Naked Ōya Sōichi*, 320–21.

28. See Fujii Takeshi 藤井武志, 「天照皇大神宮教」 in Inoue Nobutaka et. al., eds., *Dictionary of New Religions*, 540–43.

29. A report by SCAP's (the Allied Occupation's) Religions Division contains descriptions of some of these rallies. “Other Religions—Tensho Kotai Jingu Kyo”; Folder 25: Shinto Sector; CIE: Analysis and Research Division Research Unit (Religions); Religious Data Research; Special Projects Branch. Religion and Cultural Resources Division. Civil Information and Education Section. Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers; Record Group 331; National Archives at College Park MD.

30. The article was entitled 「目をつぶり陶酔境—チケツトいらぬ〈踊る宗教〉」 [Falling into rapture with eyes closed: “Dancing religion” charges no admission].

31. Kannonkyō was another name for Seikai Kyūseikyō and PL Kyōdan was the postwar incarnation of Hito no Michi.

a fraudulent leader or a sinister group of string-pullers who swindled the people out of their possessions.

Although the “dancing religion,” by virtue of the fact that it did not require material goods from followers, could claim to be different, Ōya left his readers with a warning not to be too complacent about the group. After all, he reasoned, it was ridiculous for rational people in a modern democratic age to be following such a woman.

By 1949 many newspapers and magazines had already reported on Jiu, and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō and Kannonkyō were receiving wide publicity. Ōya’s article for *Shūkan asahi* magazine in March 1949 titled “Postwar Versions of Newly Arisen Religions” was part of a series on new religions including Jiu, Kannonkyō, PL Kyōdan, and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō. In this article, Ōya labeled Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō a “Newly Arisen Potsdam Religion,” referring to the treaty signed at Potsdam in July 1945 where the seeds of religious freedom for Japan were sown. He noted that although the group refused to have professional preachers or leaders as such, and did not require membership fees, there was no guarantee that it would not make the change from being an “amateur religion” into a professional one, just as an amateur sportsman might turn professional. Even if the founder were opposed to such a move, he argued, the group around her might want to start demanding money. He warned that if this religion were to become more successful it could easily turn into a “professional religion” and present a problem for society later on.

He was particularly concerned with the people “such groups” were attracting:

As I have written before, these types of religions are quite clearly out to swindle people. In times of social unrest, they play on ignorance and emotional instability, and engage in the most insidious type of exploitation by trying to extract all the money from people’s wallets. Rather than actually helping people, intellectuals who are mobilized to contribute to these swindles are criminals together with the founders, and are very often the main instigators.

Ōya ended his critique with a prediction that despite a number of young people and intellectuals joining the group, Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō and other “newly-arisen religions” would be judged as mere aberrations and would disappear in time.<sup>32</sup>

Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō was one of the first groups Ōya focused on in the postwar period. He also covered in detail many of the larger new religions

32. Copy of article cited in Ōya, *Complete Works of Ōya Sōichi* 4, 296–303.

of the period, such as Sekai Kyūseikyō, Risshō Kōseikai, Reiyūkai, and Soka Gakkai, as well as smaller, less known groups. In 1950, fifteen years after Ōya had announced a “great inflation of newly-arisen religions” in the prewar period, he proclaimed that the postwar period was experiencing the same phenomenon. He argued that the reason for this second period of inflation occurred was that after the oppression of Marxism in the 1930s, nothing had appeared to take its place. Therefore, he argued, people lacked spiritual leadership. The reason people turned to “newly-arisen religions” during this period was that the established religions had lost their effectiveness and the medical system had become profit-driven. People turned to those religions that promised a mystical cure to their problems.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

Ōya Sōichi was certainly a harsh critic of new religions, both in the prewar and postwar period. Why was he so critical and his attacks so sustained? In the first place, from the time he began to publish articles on religion in the early 1930s, he felt that all religions contained some element of superstition and irrationality, the new religions being particularly pernicious in this regard. These ideas no doubt reflected the influence of Marxism at the time.

Secondly, in the prewar period, Ōya was critical of social policy and the actions of the government regarding religion, at least up until the persecutions of Ōmoto and Hito no Michi. In this sense, he was declaring to the reading public his detachment, independence, and critical stance toward authority, which reflected the self-perceptions of journalist as described by the slogans of the Meiji era—“neutrality and fairness” and “without prejudice or bias.” His comments about lack of government coordination in regard to the second Ōmoto persecution fell into the range of acceptable criticism, but he could not sustain such criticism for fear of being arrested himself. Thirdly, as described in the case of Renmonkyō above, stories about new religions had a certain shock value insofar as the behavior of founders and followers could easily be depicted as breaking social norms. This made for titillating reading, thus raising the potential for sales and a higher profile for writers and their publications. Fourthly, with the structure of State Shinto demolished in the postwar period, journalists had to work within a new framework, that of democracy and religious freedom.

Despite the fact that SCAP introduced fundamental legal changes to religious administration, its policies were not designed to subvert discourses and

33. Ōya Sōichi 大宅壯一, 「明治・大正・昭和新興宗教の frontline」 [On the frontlines of newly-arisen religions of Meiji, Shōwa, and Taishō] in 『新興宗教』, Nakanishi Kiyoshi, ed. (Tokyo: Jeep Sha, 1950), 1–3.

prejudices about new religions through the media that continued to circulate in society. Members of the press remained self-appointed protectors of society against the potential evils of irrational thought and destructive behavior that new religions were alleged to promote. Ōya used his not insignificant experience of the prewar period to continue his attacks in the postwar period. Murakami Naoyuki's view of the postwar campaign of journalists to build a civil society harks back to the beginnings of the modern press in the Meiji period, a time when journalists took on the role of public defenders, government critics, and social barometers. Ōya's tendency to categorize certain new religions as "models" of other groups and his descriptions of the "characteristics" that new religions shared tended to create the impression for readers that postwar new religions were virtually indistinguishable from one another. Other journalists followed suit, thus helping to establish "frames" about new religions.

Such attitudes were strongly criticized in 1950 by Walter Nichols, an American working in the position of Religious Adviser with SCAP's Religions Division. Nichols was essentially working at the coalface of Occupation religious policy, and as such had to deal with a number of religions. In an essay that appeared in the religious journal *Shūkyō kōron*<sup>34</sup> and based on a longer essay written in English and entitled "The New Religions" Nichols argued:

No other postwar religious development in Japan has received so much publicity as the appearance of numerous so-called "new religions" following the removal of restrictions on religious liberty. Unfortunately, however, and in spite of extensive treatment by both religious and secular journals, very little reliable information about the new cults is available to the public.<sup>35</sup>

The main thrust of Nichols's argument was that Japanese religious and secular newspapers and journals at the time were severely biased against new religions and that this bias was reflected in the public's negative attitude towards them. On the one hand, Nichols noted that insofar as religious journals were subservient to sectarian purposes, their attacks on new religions represented an attempt by established religions to protect themselves by pointing out the perceived faults of new religions. On the other hand, he argued, secular newspapers and journals only reported sensational incidents and were mainly concerned with "unsavory aspects" of the new religions. He claimed that the religious and secular press

34. Walter Nichols, 「日本の新興宗教」 [Japan's newly-arisen religions], 『宗教公論』, 20 (1950): 2-7.

35. Walter Nichols, "Report on New Religions, 29 November 1950"; Folder 3—New Religions General Comment; New Religions to Sectarian Shinto; Religious Data Research; Special Projects Branch. Religion and Cultural Resources Division. Civil Information and Education Section. Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers; Record Group 331; National Archives at College Park MD, 1.

were largely responsible for the widespread (and, in his view, mistaken) opinion that the new religions were “nothing more than heretical doctrines or mystic cults of a voluptuous character foisted on a gullible public by religious psychopaths, fraudulent faith healers, or shrewd entrepreneurs.”<sup>36</sup> In characterizing the public’s general reaction to the new religions as unfortunate, he argued that the new religions had legitimate roots in Japanese society, and stated that his real concern was that newspaper reporters were creating problems for all new religions by claiming they were all involved in criminal activity.<sup>37</sup>

Despite Nichols’s spirited defense of new religions and the actions of new religions themselves to try and counter the negative press, the work of journalists like Ōya helped establish frames within media texts that tended to condemn movements because they appeared to promote ideas that countered “correct” social norms. This raises deeper questions about how social norms are developed, for what reasons they develop in particular ways, and who has the right to develop them. There is the added question of audience receptivity: for example, why, in the face of negative media reports about new religions, would people want to join them in the first place? These questions affect how interested observers consider new religions and their position in society not just in the immediate postwar period, but today as well, in the post-Aum era.

36. Nichols, “Report on New Religions,” 1.

37. He acknowledged that some unscrupulous individuals and groups did try to take advantage of the postwar freedoms for financial benefit. Nichols, “Report on New Religions,” 2.