

Scholarship, Aum Shinrikyô, and Academic Integrity

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In a volume about the criminal activities of the Japanese new religious movement (NRM) Aum Shinrikyô, the Japanese lawyer and social activist Takimoto Tarô¹ expressed his contempt for the conduct of scholars of religion during the Aum affair by putting the Japanese word *shûkyôgakusha* (“scholar of religion”) in quotation marks to suggest that this was a misnomer rather than a valid title or profession. Moreover, he asserted that such scholars had operated as a “support team” for Aum Shinrikyô in its activities. Takimoto’s criticisms were directed most particularly at Shimada Hiromi and Nakazawa Shin’ichi, two Japanese scholars of religion who had made positive statements about Aum prior to the Tokyo subway attack of March 1995 that brought Aum to international notice. They had, Takimoto claimed, failed to produce an accurate analysis (by which Takimoto meant a critical and condemnatory account) of the movement. Instead they had whitewashed it, thereby contributing to Aum’s criminality and subjecting many people in Aum to what Takimoto called “mind control.”² It was not only Japanese scholars of religion who came under fire, however, for although Takimoto did not state it in so many words, the activities of a group of scholars who visited Japan from the U.S. soon after the subway attack also received immense criticism in Japan.

Takimoto was not a detached observer of the Aum affair, for he had for some time prior to the subway attack been a prominent campaigner against Aum Shinrikyô, acting as an advocate for the parents of young people who had severed family relationships and joined Aum’s communes. He also organized support groups whose aim was to persuade Aum members to defect and to renounce their faith, and he repeatedly issued criticisms in the press about Aum, reserving particular scorn for its leader and founder Asahara Shôkô and his claims to have acquired the power of levitation through his ascetic practices.³ Takimoto publicly ridiculed such claims by publishing photographs of himself leaping in the air as if levitating, thereby suggesting that Asahara’s levitation was nothing but a fraud.⁴

Takimoto's attitude towards, and charges against, Aum were not dissimilar to those voiced against other NRMs by "anti-cult" campaigners in other parts of the world. In his attacks on Aum one finds the usual roster of charges, from trickery, manipulation, financial abuse, and snatching "children" (usually of adult age) from their parents, to brainwashing, mind control, and sundry criminal activities. However, what gave Takimoto's campaign against Aum a particular resonance was that it was driven by his belief that the movement had been involved in the disappearance of another lawyer, Sakamoto Tsutsumi, along with his wife and child, in November 1989. At the time, Sakamoto had been prominent in a campaign against Aum and was acting as the legal representative for a number of people, including families who had voiced complaints after their sons and daughters had joined Aum. Takimoto's suspicions on this score were proven correct in September 1995, when senior Aum members arrested after the sarin attack confessed that they had killed the Sakamoto family on Asahara's orders and disposed of the bodies. Takimoto had in many respects taken over Sakamoto's anti-Aum campaign after his disappearance. He also had reason to fear for his own life in the months prior to the Tokyo sarin attack and had been put under police protection in November 1994 because of concerns that the movement harbored aggressive intentions towards him. Indeed, as various accounts of the Aum affair have shown, by this time the movement had become locked into an escalating cycle of violence directed at external enemies and at suspected defectors. Eventually this violence claimed at least twenty-five lives outside the movement (as well as numerous deaths within it), culminating in the subway attack and other atrocities in the spring of 1995.⁵

Takimoto was therefore not a detached observer of events, and his criticisms of scholars of religion were by no means impartial. Nonetheless, they broadly reflected the public mood in Japan after the full horror of the Aum affair had come to light in 1995, and they particularly illustrate how the integrity of scholars of religion came to be publicly questioned in its aftermath. This public questioning and criticism, albeit from highly partial sources, is important for a number of reasons. While it demonstrates a misunderstanding of the role of scholars of religion (who, Takimoto clearly thinks, should criticize rather than analyze NRMs), it brings to light the problems that arise when scholars of religion are perceived by the public to be sympathetic to movements that are in conflict with mainstream society. Indeed, Takimoto's criticisms go right to the heart of the issues raised in a recent symposium in *Nova Religio* (*Nova Religio* 2, no. 1 [1998]) that examined questions of academic integrity in the study of NRMs. One of the issues that was highlighted in the symposium related to the problems that arise when scholars appear to get too close to the movements they study. For example, by accepting

a NRM's hospitality or making public statements of support, scholars open themselves to charges of partiality.

Despite the polemical ways in which they have been expressed, Takimoto's criticisms are of interest because they illustrate that the types of discussions, debates, and polarities indicated by the various articles in that edition of *Nova Religio* are, like the incidence of cult controversies themselves, not confined to the Western world. They are also the subject of major debate in non-Western countries such as Japan. Takimoto's comments alert us further to the ways in which the activities of scholars can at times inadvertently compromise not only their own position but also that of their colleagues in the field. As such it is worth exploring the background to these criticisms for the lessons the Aum case has for those who study new religions in any part of the world.

AUM AND SCHOLASTIC MISADVENTURES

Aum Shinrikyô had, for a number of years prior to March 1995, received very critical press coverage in Japan. It had been widely accused of civil rights violations and infringements of Japanese law, and was suspected of involvement in the disappearance of noted opponents of the movement. Although all these charges have subsequently proven to be accurate, the movement adamantly denied them, aggressively dismissing any accusation against it as religious persecution and as the product of a corrupt media.⁶ In its counter-offensive against the media, Aum gained the support of academics as well as public personalities. Asahara gave interviews to a small number of Japanese scholars and television personalities in the early 1990s, winning them over with his charm and impressing them with the strength of his convictions and the dedication of his followers. The fact that Aum's followers engaged in strict ascetic disciplines of a level rarely found in modern Japan impressed some observers and convinced them that Aum was a benign and sincere religious movement. As a result, Aum was able to use the supportive comments of scholars such as Nakazawa Shin'ichi, a specialist in Tibetan Buddhism who had met Asahara on occasion, to counteract critical media reports.⁷

Another scholar who developed contacts with Aum was Shimada Hiromi, a professor at Nihon Women's University in Tokyo. Shimada, who specialized in the study of modern Japanese religion, wrote widely about the types of religious groups that attracted contemporary Japanese youth and paid particular attention to Aum. In these writings he compared Aum favorably with some other new religions and in particular with Kôfuku no Kagaku, a similarly Buddhist-oriented new religion established in 1986. Kôfuku no Kagaku had been involved in various conflicts with Aum and was regarded as a bitter rival. Shimada

contrasted the austerities performed by Aum members and the levels of knowledge of Buddhism they appeared to have with what he saw as the lack of ascetic practice and a weaker understanding of Buddhism among followers of Kōfuku no Kagaku. His work, in effect, favored Aum.⁸ Moreover, he encouraged some of his seminar students to conduct fieldwork at Aum centers, met Asahara on a number of occasions, and allowed photographs to be taken of himself smiling alongside Aum's leader. These were used by the movement—as were similar photographs of Asahara with Nakazawa and various religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama—as proof of its legitimacy. Shimada's public support was also used by Aum in publications aimed at raising the movement's profile and prestige.

In January 1995, when hints were made in the Japanese press that Aum had been responsible for a sarin gas attack in the town of Matsumoto in June 1994 and that one of the buildings at its commune might house a laboratory for making chemical weapons, the movement invited Shimada to inspect the facility. He did so, proclaiming that it was in fact a temple whose sole purpose was for worship. Shown a newly constructed statue and told that behind it was a temple open only to initiates, he had not demanded access but had posed by the statue for photographs. Besides giving the movement a public endorsement, he hinted that another group might have been responsible for the earlier Matsumoto poison attack.⁹ Shimada was wrong—it was later revealed that the statue had been hastily constructed and placed there to conceal the entrance to the laboratory which was used to make Aum's chemical weapons. He had committed the arch folly of trusting in the sincerity of his informants and believing that his guides were telling him the unvarnished truth. As a result of this incident Takimoto later accused Shimada of “not even trying to know” what was going on in Aum.¹⁰

After the sarin attack, Shimada appeared on television programs discussing the Aum affair and was widely criticized as a defender of the movement. Eventually, he came under pressure from his own university and was forced to resign his position. Shimada has since responded to these criticisms by admitting some errors of judgment, criticizing other scholars in Japan for their failures in the affair, and claiming that he had been deceived by Aum and hence was something of a victim himself.¹¹

The apparent complicity, at least in the public mind, of Shimada and Nakazawa with Aum was damaging to the general reputation of scholars of religion in Japan. This problem was further compounded when two scholars of NRMs, accompanied by a scientist and a human rights lawyer—all four American—visited Japan in April 1995 at Aum's invitation and expense. At the time, Aum was protesting the charges leveled against it and claiming this was yet another part of a massive conspiracy against the movement that involved the Japanese and U.S. governments, the Japanese Imperial family, the Freemasons, the Jews,

and numerous other groups and individuals.¹² Besieged by the authorities and with hundreds of its members being arrested and held without charge, Aum appealed for help to the Association of World Academics for Religious Education (AWARE), an American organization established “to serve as a kind of religious Amnesty International.”¹³

AWARE’s founder, James R. Lewis, was one of the group that visited Japan under the association’s auspices. The visit was well-intentioned, and the participants were genuinely concerned about possible violations of civil rights in the wake of the extensive police investigations and detentions of followers. At the time, while there was widespread public certainty about Aum’s guilt in the subway attack and other crimes, there was no absolute proof, and Aum’s vociferous protestations of innocence might have suggested to an outsider that it had been set up. The visit, however, had the unfortunate effect of simply reinforcing the public view that scholars of religion were naïve support teams for dangerous religious groups.¹⁴

Moreover, the scholars’ defense of a movement that had been linked to a number of terrible crimes offended Japanese sensibilities and suggested a lack of judgment on the part of the visitors. The public was concerned about its safety, and yet—so it appeared to many Japanese—the Americans had come to protest possible violations of the civil rights of a movement that had committed mass murder.¹⁵

J. Gordon Melton, one of the NRM specialists involved, shortly afterwards concluded that Aum had in fact been involved in the attack and other crimes.¹⁶ Lewis, however, was clearly impressed by his hosts and their allegations of conspiracy. He went so far as to publish an article that suggested that the Aum affair was “Japan’s Waco,” an attempt by the authorities to crush a problematic religious movement. In suggesting that Aum had been framed, Lewis outlined his hypothesis that it “was being made to play the role of scapegoat for the incompetence of the authorities at the highest levels of the Japanese government.”¹⁷

Lewis’s misjudgment and the scholars’ ill-fated visit compounded the mistakes that had been made by Japanese specialists in the field. They appeared to further reinforce the impression that scholars of religion lacked critical judgment or, indeed, any real knowledge of the subject about which they were speaking. As Watanabe Manabu, a noted scholar of Aum, commented, the scholars from outside Japan “had no prior knowledge of the Aum Affair, nor of the incidents prior to the Tokyo sarin gas attack.”¹⁸ According to Watanabe, the visit, along with the Shimada affair,

served to make scholars of religion 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 naïve to the dangers of “destructive cults.” Thus it is no wonder that scholars of religion consider the Aum Affair as a crisis for religious studies at large.¹⁹

MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Why, one should ask, were such basic mistakes made in this matter? How did scholars give an apparent seal of approval and a clean bill of health to a movement that had committed a number of appalling crimes? While space does not allow for a detailed and thorough analysis of the reasons why a number of scholars from different backgrounds were misled by Aum, I think that one point needs to be stressed. This is that none of those who appeared to speak up for Aum had sufficient knowledge of the movement at its grassroots to gain a thorough recognition of how the movement functioned. Without close and lengthy contact with its members, time spent in its commune observing day to day life, or discussions with former members, they were unable to see beyond the surface veneer that Aum presented to the outside world. They were speaking from superficial knowledge gleaned from stage-managed interactions and contacts with specific highly-placed figures in Aum's hierarchy—precisely the people who were involved in Aum's criminality and cover-up.

This is where the importance of fieldwork needs to be stressed along with the shortcomings of scholarly attempts to deal with large numbers of NRMs. General overviews tend to create a mind-set in which all NRMs are seen in a similar light and their problems as universal. Put another way, they create the assumption that if some new religions are being harassed or oppressed, then any new religion might be. In a sense, this parallels the assumptions made by anti-cultists that if one NRM commits crimes or indiscretions, then all do. It is equally fallacious, of course, to assume that just because one new religion may be falsely accused of atrocities then all new religions suspected of criminal behavior must be falsely accused.

In the case of Japanese scholars the tendency has been to study new religions through a range of general contacts with high-ranking movement officials. Conversely, they have focused far less on intensive fieldwork and close observations of a particular group, or on gaining knowledge of a specific movement by living for lengthy periods with its members. This situation has arisen partly because of the small number of specialists of new religions in Japan relative to the large number of movements that are active there. On that score alone it is perhaps more striking that some scholars had at least looked at Aum than that none of them had done any in-depth studies of the movement.

The situation is also a product of the Japanese academic system, which rarely provides the opportunity for scholars to spend long periods of time conducting fieldwork. This in turn means that contacts tend to be transitory and located at the upper echelons of movements. Scholars

who looked at Aum encountered senior officials skilled in handling outsiders or were introduced to Asahara, who met them under controlled circumstances in which he was at his most charming.²⁰ While such an approach allows scholars to have a broad knowledge of a number of movements and to develop some overviews of the field in general, it is too “top down” in focus to probe adequately the inner dynamics of such movements. Nor, of course, does it provide the opportunities or even the skills to look beyond the picture that is presented to scholars by the movements in question. Looking at the upper echelons and talking to the senior figures in a movement without longer-term observations and close contacts with the ordinary members, as the Aum case shows, is not a formula for developing a deep understanding of the workings of NRMs.

The Americans who visited Japan at Aum’s request were even more hampered in their activities. Linguistic barriers prevented them from gaining access to the rank and file and from ascertaining what really was happening in Japan at the time. The scholars were, in effect, dependent on the English-speaking members of the movement’s elite who had invited them. This clearly appears to have affected Lewis’ judgment. Invited by a movement that was denying that it had committed any crimes, he appears to have been swayed by impressionistic feelings towards his hosts and their talk of conspiracies. He exonerated them because, it would appear, they were simply too nice to be mass murderers.²¹ They may indeed have come across as nice, decent people, but they were also lying rather skillfully. In April as in January 1995 (when it invited Shimada to speak up for them), Aum Shinrikyô was engaged in a process of deception, denying responsibility for crimes it had committed, playing on the sympathies of scholars, and using them as a defense against its accusers. It was, however, not long before the façade cracked. By early May 1995, senior members of Aum had begun to confess in great detail, admitting involvement in the subway attack and leading the police to all manner of evidence that demonstrated how wrong Lewis and Shimada had been. As further details of Aum’s criminality emerged throughout the summer of 1995, the errors committed by those who spoke up for Aum became increasingly obvious, adding further to the crisis that, as Watanabe has noted, surrounded religious studies in Japan.

THEMES AND CONSEQUENCES

The above is a very brief outline of problems that have arisen as a result of interventions in the Aum affair by academics from Japan and from the West. Some of the lessons to be learned are fairly obvious.

The experiences of the scholars discussed here alert us again to the necessity for caution in how one relates to a movement and how one conducts research into them. Whatever the reasons for their misjudgments, the fact that these scholars had some form of association with Aum—in the one case receiving expenses and an airfare—clearly compromised them in the eyes of public critics for whom any positive comment on Aum, or any acceptance of gifts from them, was taken as a sign of complicity in the movement's crimes. Although, as Massimo Introvigne has argued, receiving funding from religious groups “may *influence* but does not necessarily *control* the results of research,”²² this point is rarely going to be acknowledged by critics of new religions or by the general public in a crisis atmosphere such as that of Japan in 1995.

The problems encountered by the Japanese and American scholars mentioned above also came about because they appear to have accepted in a trusting way the assurances of their guides who, while acting as *public relations officers* for the movement, were treated as *informants*. These scholars were not skeptical enough about what they were being told: Shimada was too willing to accept Aum's assurances that the building was not a chemical weapons laboratory, and Lewis similarly was too willing to accept Aum's claims of oppression. As I have noted earlier, this type of problem may be linked to the ways in which scholarly investigations of movements occur. If one works only at the higher levels of a movement and deals too much in their *generalities*, the potential for misreading what is happening is liable to be increased. And, as Stephen A. Kent and Theresa Krebs have commented, “superficial research can have very real and harmful effects.”²³

Scholars also need to question whether and to what extent the conflicts that have raged between scholars and anti-cult activists have led them to abandon a properly objective position for one that is implicitly partial. Put another way, is there not a danger that, in responding to appeals from religious movements, academics might unwittingly assume the mantle of a defender of religious freedoms—a mantle that might not sit easily with the objectivity that is presumed to be an academic's chief tool of trade? It is, of course, important for scholars to speak out when the civil rights of religious movements are in danger. However, the importance (and necessity) of such activities should not lead scholars into the assumption that new religions against which accusations have been made are always or necessarily *victims*. Researchers need to remind themselves that, as the Aum case shows, religious groups might also be skilled at knowing how to construct a cover-up for their activities.

Michael Pye, a leading scholar of the religions of Japan, has addressed these questions in an article entitled “Aum Shinrikyô: Can Religious Studies Cope?”²⁴ Pye's basic point is that religious studies scholars need

to adopt a more analytical and critical stance towards the interpretation of religions and towards the religious movements they study.²⁵ He argues that the Aum affair demonstrated a basic failure by scholars to penetrate beneath the surface of religions and develop adequate critiques of them, especially when they made extravagant claims—as, he argues, Aum Shinrikyô did when it claimed to be a movement striving to revive what it called “original Buddhism”—or behaved in anti-social ways. He is also critical of religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama for their apparent readiness to allow themselves to be co-opted by other religious movements and to provide them with positive endorsements without a closer investigation of their activities.²⁶

This echoes the argument made by Kent and Krebs when they point out the problems posed to objective scholarship when money comes into the equation and when they assert that scholars can compromise their work by not taking adequately critical stances towards the religions they study.²⁷ Religious movements that seek positive press coverage can be adept at using academics for their ends and may utilize their public relations skills and their hospitality to create a good feeling in the minds of the scholars they invite. If scholars fail to consider the intentions of their hosts, then errors of the sort made in the Aum affair may well proliferate.

I am not saying that adopting a critical stance means taking the line Takimoto and others would like—a condemnatory one. However, I do emphasize how important it is for scholars to recognize that, as well as having the potential for activities that are honest, law abiding, and respectful of individual rights, NRMs may engage in criminal activities.²⁸ Problems occur when those who respond to the appeal of a religious movement for a clean bill of health overlook this point. Equally, a critical understanding of religions demands a wider recognition that NRMs in dispute with the law need not only be victims; as Aum has shown, they can also be perpetrators of crimes.

CONCLUSION

I have discussed here a few of the ramifications of a case in which scholars have unwittingly compromised themselves and their colleagues. In so doing I have amplified the charges made by activists campaigning against NRMs—that scholars of religion in general may be lacking in objectivity. This aspect of the Aum affair is not something of only marginal relevance to scholars apart from those who specialize in Japanese NRMs or who work in Japan. Its messages should resonate throughout the field. Just as the Waco tragedy has rightly impinged on the consciousness of every NRM scholar, so too should the Aum affair

and what it has to say about academic integrity. In Japan, as Watanabe has shown, scholarship on new religions has been very much thrown into question, and this has strengthened the hand of those who would like to see all “deviant” new religions (I use this term as it is used by campaigners such as Takimoto) proscribed or restricted.²⁹

What makes the Aum affair especially worth considering is that it was—almost from the moment the sarin gas was released on the Tokyo subway—an open and shut case, in which direct evidence existed to link the movement to a number of related crimes. Unlike so many of the controversial issues that have been at the epicenter of debate over NRMs, there was little possible doubt about what had transpired in this case. Police raids on Aum had already been prepared prior to the subway attack as a result of earlier Aum violence.³⁰ As the evidence uncovered by the Japanese police in its raids and the confessions of many of its leading figures have shown, Aum Shinrikyô had committed numerous criminal acts.³¹ In other words, this is a case in which scholars have spoken out on behalf of a religious movement or portrayed it as a victim of governmental conspiracies at a time when it was engaged in criminal activities and when substantial evidence was already available to confirm this fact.

It is a case in which scholars who studied and wrote about Aum prior to 1995 failed to detect or give credence to alleged evidence indicating that the movement might have committed atrocities. This undermines any assumptions that scholars can be necessarily trusted to report more accurately about new religions than can journalists. Even allowing for media excess, there was more accuracy in the reports on Aum by journalists such as Egawa Shôko³² prior to the sarin attack or in the partial accounts of anti-cultists such as Takimoto than in the scholarly denials of Aum’s involvement.

An important lesson that should be learned from the Aum affair is that scholarly examinations of NRMs must be more thorough. As academics we take pride in what we see as the scientific objectivity of our profession, especially when compared with that of journalists whose primary concern is whether the story will sell rather than with the long-term analysis of events. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear scholars talking about the necessity of prodding journalists to publish more solid information about new religions, but also bemoaning the difficulties of this task because of the mind-set that prevails in the media about new religions.³³ While it is important to educate journalists, it is also worth reflecting that the implicit assumptions that guide many scholarly attitudes towards the media—they are wrong and need educating, and we can teach them—may not always stand up to scrutiny.

After Waco much was said about how law enforcement agencies listened to the wrong set of “experts.” That affair might well have alerted law enforcement officials to the dangers of listening to one particularly

opinionated group of experts and helped to persuade them to take more notice of the analyses and perspectives provided by NRM scholars. There is a danger, however, that due to the miscommunication and resulting overreaction by the authorities at Waco, a form of scholastic triumphalism—“if you had listened to us, Waco would not have happened”—has developed in the field. I believe that scholars of religion have valuable things to say to law enforcement agencies and that we can be of use in helping to broaden their understandings of key issues in the study of NRMs.³⁴ However, I also feel that if scholars of religion are to play such a role they need to exhibit a note of caution by taking stock of the lessons of the Aum affair and the academic failings that it exposed.

The Aum affair should at the very least temper any sense of triumphalism that Waco may have engendered by reminding us that scholars do not always display accurate understandings of religious phenomena. Flying to the defense of religious movements is an exercise fraught with danger, especially when one is not in full possession of the data surrounding such groups. These are actions that can have disastrous consequences for one’s colleagues and the field in general, especially if those who make errors of judgment are slow to acknowledge them. We need to recognize that when scholars operate primarily as defenders of religious movements they are following a particular agenda and as such run the risk of compromising their position as objective scholars. Moreover, they are handing ammunition to those who demand that scholars take a condemnatory rather than an analytically objective tack on religious movements.

The Waco affair was an important and traumatic milestone in the development of the field and in the interactions between scholars and authorities. It has influenced the debates about the role of scholars and will continue to do so for a long time. However, there is a danger that it may remain too dominant a marker in these areas. I suggest it is time to move on from Waco with regard to the ways in which scholars interact with law enforcement agencies and to reassess how Waco has colored opinions about the relationships between scholars, the media, and law enforcement agencies. History moves on, and in a sense we are no longer in the post-Waco era so much as the post-Aum era of the study of NRMs. Aum, I would suggest, serves as a potential counterweight to the conclusions many of us had drawn from Waco. While that affair may serve as a reminder to the authorities about the ways *not* to deal with religious movements and of the importance of listening to scholars, the Aum affair issues a cautionary warning to scholars about the dangers of making hasty conclusions about the nature of NRM controversies. It is essential that we take a critical stance towards the movements we study so that we can maintain the degree of objectivity that will be most beneficial to all concerned—from the media we so

often criticize, to the new religions we study, to the civil authorities who may seek our advice from time to time. Otherwise there remains the danger that scholars of religion will continue to be seen more as apologists than as analysts of the movements they study.

ENDNOTES

¹ All Japanese names given in this article are in standard Japanese form, with the family name preceding the given name.

² Takimoto's comments are found in a dialogue between himself and a former member of Aum, Nagaoka Tatsuya, with whom Takimoto has worked on anti-Aum campaigns, in Takimoto Tarô and Nagaoka Tatsuya, *Maindo kontorôru kara nigerete: Oumu Shinrikyô dakkaihashatachi no taiken* [*Escape from Mind Control: The Experiences of Former Members of Aum*] (Tokyo: Kôyû Shuppan, 1995), especially 205–208. All the translations of Japanese titles given in this and subsequent endnotes are my own.

³ Asahara first made this claim in 1985 and was photographed at that time in a popular Japanese magazine, *Twilight Zone*, which was concerned with spiritual and occult matters. His claims relating to levitation and the acquisition of other such powers played a part in first attracting an audience to his movement and featured prominently in his early writings, such as Asahara Shôkô, *Chônôryoku himitsu no kaihatsuhô* [*The Secret Way to Develop Psychic Powers*] (1986; reprint, Tokyo: Oumu Shuppan, 1993).

⁴ See, for example, the photograph in Takimoto and Nagoka, *Maindo kontorôru kara nigerete*, 61 and also Takimoto Tarô and Fukushima Mizuho, *Habôhō to Oumu Shinrikyô* [*The Anti-Subversives Prevention Law and Aum Shinrikyô*] (Tokyo: Iwanami Booklets, 1996); see also Asahara, *Chônôryoku himitsu no kaihatsuhô*, 16–21, where Asahara denies these accusations.

⁵ For overviews of the Aum affair see, in English, Ian Reader, *A Poisonous Cocktail? Aum Shinrikyô's Path to Violence* (Copenhagen: NIAS Books, 1996) and Ian Reader, *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyô* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2000, and Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), and, in Japanese, Shimazono Susumu, *Gendai shûkyô no kanôsei: Oumu Shinrikyô to bôryoku* [*The Potential of Contemporary Religion: Aum Shinrikyô and Violence*] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1997).

⁶ In its rejection of the ethos and mores of the present material world, Aum was especially critical of the mass media, which it portrayed as a corrupt force of evil that perverted and manipulated the minds of the public by reporting masses of incorrect data. Aum regarded the mass media and journalists as special enemies engaged in a conspiracy to destroy it. These comments were made by Asahara Shôkô in numerous books as well as in various sermons to his disciples: see, for example, Asahara Shôkô, *Vajrayâna Kôsu kyôgaku shisutemu kyôhon* [*The Vajrayâna Course: A Systematic Teaching Manual*] (Aum Shinrikyô: unpublished Xeroxed collection of Asahara's sermons to Aum initiates between 1988–1994), especially Sermon 41 (p. 271), which claims Aum was prevented from gaining converts due to what Asahara called “Aum bashing by the media,” and Sermon 49 (p. 315), which claims that the mass media had swamped the country with bad data that affected everyone, destroying their spiritual balance and leading them to ruin.

⁷ An account of a discussion (originally published in a popular Japanese youth magazine entitled *Brutus* in 1991) between Nakazawa and Asahara in which Nakazawa is complimentary to Asahara is published by Aum in Oumu Shinrikyô, ed., *Risô shakai* [*The Ideal World*], special supplement No. 20, and Oumu Shinrikyô, ed., *Sonshi taidanshû* [*Collected Conversations with the Master*], 1993, 12–20.

⁸ Among Shimada's publications on Aum are Shimada Hiromi, “Oumu Shinrikyô: sonshi to shukkeshatachi” (“Aum Shinrikyô: the Master and his Disciples”), in *Shinshûkyô jidai*

[*The Age of New Religions*], ed. Shimizu Masato, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan, 1996), 99–160, and Shimada Hiromi, *Shinjiyasui kokoro* [*Minds that Find it Easy to Believe*] (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūsha, 1992).

⁹ This suggestion was contained in Shimada's article "Sarin seizō kōjō ka? Giwaku no shisetsu dai nana satian" ["Is it a factory for making sarin? Satian Number Seven, the facility in question"] in the magazine *Takarajima Sâti* 3 (1995). See Watanabe Manabu, "Reactions to the Aum affair: the rise of the 'anti-cult' movement," *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 21 (1997): 32–48.

¹⁰ Takimoto and Nagaoka, *Maindo kontorōru kara nigerete*, 208.

¹¹ Shimada Hiromi, *Shūkyō no jidai to wa nan datta ka* [*What is meant by the "religious age"*] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1997), 9–33.

¹² For discussions of Aum's conspiracy theories, see Reader, *A Poisonous Cocktail?*, 54–70 and Fujita Shōichi, *Oumu Shinrikyō jiken* [*The Aum Shinrikyō Affair*] (Tokyo: Asahi News Shop, 1995), 60–64.

¹³ James R. Lewis, "Japan's Waco: Aum Shinrikyo and the Eclipse of Freedom in the Land of the Rising Sun," *Prevailing Winds* 2 (1995): 52–58.

¹⁴ One should note here that, in the immediate aftermath of the Tokyo sarin attack, much of the public discussion, media, and rhetoric relating to new religious movements centered on the notion that religious movements with differing agendas from the mainstream were either potentially or inherently dangerous. See Watanabe, "Reactions to the Aum affair."

¹⁵ As Massimo Introvigne ("Blackmailing or Greenlisting? A European Perspective on the New Cult Wars," *Nova Religio* 2, no. 1 [1998]: 16–23) notes, both of the scholars of religion on this trip denounced the human rights violations that appeared to have occurred after the sarin attack, when hundreds of Aum members were rounded up and held for long periods without charge even though (in Introvigne's words) they, "unlike the leaders, were certainly neither guilty nor aware of any criminal activity." A number of points are worth noting here. One is simply that the Japanese police, despite their massive raids and mass arrests, acted within the law in Japan which allows them to hold people for up to twenty-eight days without charge. I do not want to engage here in a discussion of a legal structure that I find oppressive and more concerned with social norms than with individual human rights. However, in pragmatic terms—as many Japanese friends have said to me subsequently—it was through the extensive questioning of Aum members in this way that the police were able to bring the perpetrators to court and to find out the extent of Aum's weapons stockpiling.

A second point is that the situation in April 1995 was an extreme one. To put it into some perspective, the chemical weapon attack right at the heart of Japan (the subway trains attacked were converging on the station beneath some of the main government ministries) caused many deaths and injuries, and the public wanted the perpetrators caught as soon as possible, especially as they clearly had the means to cause further destruction. It should be noted that barely veiled threats that further atrocities would occur had emanated from Asahara after the attack, and that a series of other violent acts, including the attempted murder of the Japanese chief of police and various other failed uses of chemical weapons, took place in the immediate aftermath of the sarin attack and raids on Aum. A number of those believed responsible for Aum's atrocities (such as Inoue Yoshihiro, one of Asahara's chief lieutenants) had evaded arrest and were on the run. There were serious public fears that further atrocities might be committed, a fear that materialized most potently when an attempt to release cyanide into the ventilation system of a major station in May 1995 was only just foiled (if it had been successful, many thousands might have perished), and when a bomb was sent to the Tokyo governor's office on the day that Asahara was arrested in May 1995. Both these attacks were committed by Inoue and other fugitive members of Aum. In such contexts the message that American scholars brought relating to human rights' violations had little positive impact on a public more concerned about the dangers posited to its

basic freedoms—including the freedom to go about its daily business and ride its capital's transport networks without fear or constraint. It was perhaps unsurprising, then, that the basic public reaction was of some annoyance. The Americans were seen as defending a movement that posed a severe public danger and that appeared to be placing the individual rights of the members of that organization, which had been responsible for numerous atrocities, above the needs and security of the public in general.

Balancing the needs of the general public as compared to the demands of individual civil rights is, of course, a very difficult issue, and it is an especially difficult one at a time of social danger and crisis such as that which existed in Japan in April–May 1995. While I agree that the behavior of the Japanese police at that time—and the laws of detention of suspects in Japan in general—raise serious concerns, it is also important to note that, from the perspective of Japanese public opinion, the voicing of such concerns over the rights of Aum members at this point was probably the wrong complaint at the wrong time.

¹⁶ See Introvigne, “Blackmailing or Greenlisting,” 19. At the 1996 SSSR conference in Nashville, Melton subsequently informed the author of this article that he had few doubts by the end of his visit to Japan of Aum's complicity.

¹⁷ Lewis, “Japan's Waco.”

¹⁸ Watanabe, “Reactions to the Aum Affair,” 47.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ On these issues see two review articles on the sociology of religion in Japan and the study of Japanese new religions (both focusing on Japanese scholarship): Ian Reader, “Review article: Recent Japanese Publications on Religion,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 16, no. 4 (1989): 299–315 and Ian Reader, “Recent Japanese publications on the New Religions: The Work of Shimazono Susumu,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 20, nos. 2–3 (1993): 101–120.

²¹ Lewis, “Japan's Waco,” 55.

²² Introvigne, “Blackmailing or Greenlisting,” 19. Introvigne uses the aforementioned case of Lewis and Melton in Japan as evidence. As he points out, the former published something saying Aum had been framed and the latter that it was involved. That two scholars paid by the same organization could produce wholly different results is, Introvigne suggests, evidence that the money paid does not necessarily condition the results produced. I do not find this argument especially plausible: the case in hand certainly shows that some scholars are capable of saying what those who call on them want them to say, even when the evidence points the other way.

²³ Stephen A. Kent and Theresa Krebs, “Academic Compromise in the Social Scientific Study of Alternative Religions,” *Nova Religio* 2, no. 1 (1998): 44–54.

²⁴ Michael Pye, “Aum Shinrikyô: Can Religious Studies Cope?” *Religion* 26 (1996): 261–70.

²⁵ One should note that Pye did not comment directly on the scholars discussed in this article, but the general tenor of his article suggests a general critical awareness of these cases.

²⁶ Pye, “Aum Shinrikyô: Can Religious Studies Cope?,” 268.

²⁷ Kent and Krebs, “Academic Compromise,” 47–49.

²⁸ See Mark Juergensmeyer, ed., *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World* (London: Frank Cass, 1991), especially David C. Rapoport, “Some General Observations on Religion and Violence,” 118–40, and Mark Juergensmeyer, “Sacrifice and Cosmic War,” 101–17, and Shimazono Susumu, *Gendai shûkyô no kanôsei*.

²⁹ For further discussion on this point see Watanabe, “Reactions to the Aum Affair.”

³⁰ This fact alone, widely known and reported in Japan at the time, blows Lewis' “conspiracy theory” out of the water. Lewis claims that the issuing of gas masks to the Japanese police prior to the subway attack meant that the authorities knew the attack was imminent and hence that they somehow were involved in it (Lewis, “Japan's Waco,”

54). In reality, the gas masks were issued because the raids on Aum had already been planned (as a result of earlier Aum crimes) and the authorities suspected that Aum possessed, and might possibly use, poison gases.

³¹ The overwhelming weight of evidence that has been presented in the various Aum trials currently still in progress, coupled with the confessions and guilty pleas of the large majority of those charged with such crimes, has been reported in numerous Japanese publications including Egawa Shôkô, *Oumu Shinrikyô saiban bôchôki* [*Record of Observations at the Aum Shinrikyô Trials*], vols. 1 and 2 (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjû, 1996–1997) and Kyôdô Tsûshin Shakaibu, ed., *Sabakareru Kyôso* [*The Religious Founder on Trial*] (Tokyo: Kyôdô Tsûshinsha, 1997).

³² Among such accounts by journalists one should especially cite the work of Egawa Shôkô, herself a friend of the murdered lawyer Sakamoto, who pursued Aum for several years and produced numerous criticisms and accounts of the movement that indicated her belief that it was dangerous. See Egawa Shôkô, *Kyûseishu no yabô* [*The Ambitions of a Messiah*], (1991; reprint, Tokyo: Kyôikushiryô Shuppankai, 1995).

³³ See, for example, James T. Richardson, “The Accidental Expert,” *Nova Religio* 2, no. 1 (1998): 31–43.

³⁴ The case of the Freemen in Montana might well be a case where the authorities not only sought but listened to the advice of specialists of new religions, with positive results.

³⁵ This has clearly been the case in the Aum affair. For this reason I remain unhappy not only about Shimada’s rather equivocal responses (see above, note 11), which seek to portray him as something of a victim of the affair, but also those of Lewis. While it is interesting to note (Introvigne, “Blackmailing or Greenlisting,” 23) that Lewis has informed several colleagues in private conversations that he has changed his mind on the affair subsequent to his article, it seems that some more open acknowledgment of this change—with a refutation of the article in question—might be in order.