Introduction

In 1934, the journalist and critic Ōya Sōichi (1900–1970) wrote an article that depicted leaders of new religions that were active at that time as “star gods” (kamisama sutā). Ōya’s caustic wit runs throughout the piece, which focuses on groups like Ōmoto and Hito no Michi. Despite their popularity, he claimed, these new religions were mere flashes in the pan of modern Japanese society. They looked to their predecessors, the new religions of the Meiji period, to gain their inspiration while promising the public something new. Their leaders enjoyed mass adulation at the time, and were soon to experience widespread opprobrium. Within a short time these two groups were harshly suppressed by the authorities.

Throughout his long career, Ōya displayed an uncanny knack for producing catchy phrases that summed up his cynicism while neatly capturing moods that resonated with his readers. Ōya eventually became one of Japan’s most famous journalists, and his name is associated with an eponymous and prestigious literary award, the Ōya Sōichi Prize for Nonfiction (Ōya Sōichi Nonfikushon Shō). In 1995 the prize was awarded to Egawa Shōko. Egawa was the independent journalist whose exposés on the religious group Aum Shinrikyō highlighted its nefarious activities well before the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system perpetrated by members of the group earlier that year. Considering Ōya’s long-standing interest in religion, she was a highly suitable choice as recipient of the award.

Ōya’s prewar work on “star gods” was not his first or last foray into reporting on new religions. He contributed the following observation to the major newspaper Asahi Shinbun on 10 October 1948 when Japan was still under the Allied Occupation (1945–1952):

Although the public has forgotten about Jikōson, who caused a stir immediately after the termination of the war, a “dancing religion” has appeared in the city and is the subject of much discussion. Postwar society is a veritable hotbed in which pseudo religions flourish. They feed on the ignorance of the public who, in the postwar chaos, lack the power to judge right from wrong. The causes for this lie in the breakdown of feudalistic
traditions, the purge of the bureaucracy, and fears of another world war. Singing and dancing is a feature of this new group. The fact that some intelligentsia has joined the religion is of concern. Dealing with these types of groups is a major problem facing the authorities.

Jikōson (born Nagaoka Nagako, 1903–1984) was a woman who led a small religion called Jiu, whereas the “dancing religion” (odoru shūkyō) referred to Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō, a group led by another woman named Kitamura Sayo (1900–1967). Kitamura was labeled “the dancing god” (odoru kamisama) by the press, although most of her supporters referred to her as Ōgamisama, “great god.” Their groups were the first of many new religions to be covered by the Japanese print media during the Occupation into the early 1950s. While these women are no longer household names in Japan, for a brief period they were known nationally and widely portrayed through a variety of print media. Most of the media coverage was highly critical. These two leaders are the “celebrity gods” of this book.

This book examines the cases of these two women and the media representation—through print media in general, including newspapers, magazines, and books—that coincided and contributed to their brief period of celebrity and notoriety during a crucial time in Japan’s religious and social history, the Allied Occupation and the postwar period up until the early 1950s. In order to explain their cases, which involve complex interactions between new religions, media workers, Japanese government and Occupation authorities, religious authorities, intellectuals, and ordinary people, I take a historical approach in explaining the relationships between these various parties.

In considering the leaders and followers of the groups themselves, and the impact of press reporting, it does not focus on issues concerning audience reception, such as how readers of the media reacted to the representations. Furthermore, it does not focus in detail on individual journalists’ ideological motivations for reporting religious leaders in particular ways, but rather considers the trends of reporting that existed, and the social circumstances that influenced those trends. It is primarily concerned with media representation and its impact, and also with the development of themes from the Meiji period within media that have affected new religions at different periods in Japan. While media reporting can have a powerful influence on how a group is perceived, the reactions of the groups to press reports also play a significant role in their eventual trajectories. The behavior and attitudes of the groups
themselves, and the decisions they make with regard to their interactions with “outside society” impact on media representations.

Finally, the purpose of this book is not to present an argument about unfair media treatment of minority religious groups resulting in a tale about social inequities that goes back to the Meiji period. Nor is it to expose the stories of little-known groups whose behavior was widely reported as being deviant and socially abnormal for a time. It is primarily to explore the historical reasons concerning why certain representations of new religions developed, and how and why images were produced, reproduced, altered, and perpetuated in the print media. Examining these issues from a historical perspective can provide clues concerning contemporary circumstances and events, such as the case of the new religion Aum Shinrikyō in the 1990s.

NEW RELIGIONS AND SCHOLARSHIP

Jiu and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō are generally described as new religions (shinshūkyō) in Japanese scholarship. The beginnings of Japanese new religions are usually located around the middle of the nineteenth century when popular religious groups began to appear as the feudal system of the Tokugawa period began to disintegrate. The groups were essentially “new” in an institutional or organizational sense compared to the established religions of Buddhism, Shinto, and Christianity. In many cases, the doctrines of the new religions of this period were mixed with Buddhist, Shinto, folk, and in some cases Christian beliefs. While there are a number of issues and debates associated with the actual term “new religions,” this book will not dwell on them. Hayashi Makoto indicates that there are significant “blanks” in the sociological study of new religions in Japan from the 1910s to the 1960s. He concludes that the “study of modern new religions as a whole has passionately discussed the ‘beginning’ and the ‘end’ of the history of new religions” but has left a major gap. This book aims at addressing this lacuna for part of this period.

Scholars who study new religions in Japan have noted the conflicted relationships these groups have with the authorities, the public, and the media in their quest to promote themselves and their aims. Some have observed that from the Meiji period (1868–1912) onward, media reporting on new religions in Japan has been predominantly negative. While the reasons for this are complex, patterns and trends relating to profit, ideologies, and social control can be distinguished from historical cases.
Groups that either caused or were represented as being the cause of social conflict often stimulated the public’s interest in newspapers and magazines.

In the case of the new religion Renmonkyō in the Meiji period, which will be discussed further, a popular newspaper called Yorozu Chōhō increased its circulation partly through rumor and salacious tales concerning the group. But the explanation of profit seeking is only part of the story behind the intensity of the negative reports. Developing ideas of ideology, gender, and identity in the Meiji period played a significant role in the Renmonkyō case. The group’s leader, a woman, was rumored to have engaged in “immoral” practices, an unacceptable image compared to “traditional” roles of women. Furthermore, she and her followers were accused of promoting “superstitions” and spurious healing techniques at a time when the state was emphasizing loyalty to emperor and nation, adherence to Confucian, patriarchal morality, and Western, scientific “rationality.” Bureaucrats and the media employed terminology derived from Confucian discourses on religion and morality whereby practices that were perceived to be inconsistent with the state or “rational” Confucian interests were proscribed. They used terms such as jakyō (the English equivalent used in Western media is the pejorative term “cult”) that reflected broader social and official attitudes, and the Yorozu Chōhō used such negative terms to describe Renmonkyō. Newspapers at that time saw part of their role as educating the public and protecting the interests of the nation.

In the Meiji period, press criticisms of government actions, or lack thereof, toward “dangerous” new religions could be used to show the public that the press was acting to protect the purity of Shinto at the same time as showing how the bureaucracy was failing in its duty to protect the ideals of emperor and nation. New religions were eventually classified as “pseudo religions” (ruiji shūkyō) in government documents, and this was also picked up by the press to indicate groups that attempted to claim legitimate status as recognized religions, yet were highly questionable in doctrine and methods. By the 1920s, another new religion, Ōmoto, had achieved spectacular growth in a short time, just as Renmonkyō had some thirty years before. By this stage, other terms such as “newly arisen religions” (shinkō shūkyō), which carried a highly negative meaning, appeared in the 1930s and became a common journalistic catchphrase applied to new religions.

These issues, including the motivation of the press, had an influence in the cases of Jiu and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō in the immediate
postwar period. However, compared to groups such as Ōmoto, Sōka Gakkai, or Aum Shinrīkyō, Japanese and Western scholars have paid relatively little attention to these two small groups. While it may seem that their impact on Japan’s religious and social history is minor, investigating these cases helps in understanding the issues other new religions faced at the time and can also provide clues with regard to the relationship of new religions, media, and authority in general.

After Japan’s surrender in 1945, the Occupation authorities, collectively known as SCAP, introduced unprecedented freedom of religion. Under SCAP’s new regime, Japanese government authorities could no longer interfere in the affairs of religious groups. SCAP’s liberal religious policies encouraged an efflorescence of new religions, which included some that were completely new, others that had existed since the Meiji period, and a number that had been suppressed by the Japanese authorities before the Occupation began. H. Neill McFarland titled his 1967 work on Japanese postwar new religions in a phrase that originally came from the media—“the rush hour of the gods” (kamigami no rasshu awā)—although other journalistic phrases such as “sprouting like bamboo shoots after the rain” (ugo no takenoko no yō ni) were also popular at the time.

JIU AND TENSHŌ KŌTAI JINGŪ KYŌ

Jiu began in the early 1940s and was a Shinto-based group that had loose ties to Ōmoto, which had been comprehensively suppressed by the authorities in 1935. Jiu had a problematic relationship with the Japanese authorities before the end of the war because its doctrines conflicted with the orthodoxy of state-imposed Shinto. In January 1945 police arrested Jikōson but released her soon after due to lack of evidence. After the Occupation began, Jiu’s problems with the Japanese police continued. The group was somewhat inept at public relations, or at least at negotiating compromises with those who were not part of its inner circle. Jikōson was inaccessible to most ordinary people and her followers worked to protect her from what they perceived as negative forces. The group’s fortunes changed significantly after some famous followers of Jikōson—Go Seigen (1914–), a champion of the strategic board game of go, and Futabayama (1912–1968), a sumo champion and national hero—began to promote her teachings and millennial predictions.
Go and Futabayama embodied what sociologist Chris Rojek describes as “achieved celebrity,” which derives from the perceived accomplishments of the individual in open competition. In contrast, Jikōson’s eventual notoriety was “attributed celebrity,” which is not related to someone’s particular talents or skills but is “largely the result of the concentrated representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional by cultural intermediaries.”

Journalists played a major role in the case of Jiu as cultural intermediaries—those who develop and manipulate the public presentation of celebrity personalities in ways that can elicit positive or negative reactions from the audience. The participation of Go and Futabayama in the group triggered an explosion of press interest, predominantly from major newspapers and their local subsidiaries. Jiu and Jikōson suddenly became the focus of national attention. The group moved to the town of Kanazawa where it attempted to gain popular support. Naturally this drew the press to the town. Jikōson made various predictions about calamities that would befall the country, and Go and Futabayama marched through the streets with banners, calling for townspeople to take up Jikōson’s teachings. The police, however, were concerned that Jikōson’s millennial predictions might have a negative effect on social stability. Key members of the group, including Jikōson and Futabayama, were arrested under the lights of press cameras and taken to the police station. The charges included possession of weapons (ceremonial swords) and illegal hoarding of food, but the main purpose of these public arrests was to prevent Jiu from continuing its activities. Most of the press condemned Jikōson as a mad woman, whereas they portrayed Futabayama as a hapless buffoon who had been duped.

Although Jikōson and Jiu’s attitudes were not the only factors that led to this situation, they were certainly crucial. Thus, a combination of bad press and official intervention by the police effectively curtailed Jiu’s activities, the celebrity followers renounced Jikōson, and the group gradually disappeared from the public eye.

Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō developed from the visions of Kitamura Sayo, a farmer’s wife from a small town in Yamaguchi prefecture, who openly attacked the existing social structures, including the government, all other religions, and almost anyone who opposed her views after the surrender. Kitamura claimed that the “absolute god of the universe” resided in her stomach, and she began to attract attention in her hometown and surrounding areas before the surrender. But it was
only in the postwar environment of freedom of religion that she began to attract significant media attention.

Unlike the case of Jiu, where national papers seized on the story, a local newspaper in her prefecture of Yamaguchi first reported on Kitamura. As her influence began to grow Kitamura started to travel across the country to spread her millennial predictions of disaster and salvation under a “kingdom of god.” By mid-1947 the major newspapers had begun to take notice, although most of the reporting referenced the incidents surrounding Jiu, which were still circulating in media texts. As time passed, however, Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō developed its own identity within the media. The group’s practice of *muga no mai* (often translated as “dance of ecstasy”), in which participants swayed about in a seemingly random fashion, was mocked by many journalists, and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō was attacked in many media reports. Despite significant and sustained criticism in the press, Kitamura and her group displayed quite remarkable growth in the first few years of the Occupation. She attempted to turn the media criticism to her advantage, and called the media attention she received “god’s strategy.”

Kitamura’s confrontational and dynamic style of leadership, together with her relative openness, contributed to significantly different relationships with the press. If she felt any disappointment over the negative press she eventually received she barely showed it, at least in public. She appeared to revel in the attention the press gave her and welcomed journalists who wanted to investigate her. In her public sermons and other activities in Tokyo and other cities and areas, she harangued passersby, she demanded her photograph be printed, and she disrupted proceedings at events to which she had not been invited. Inspired by her example, some of her followers took a strident stand on occasion. Under her guidance, the group managed to grow and eventually establish branches overseas but media attention dwindled significantly after Kitamura’s death in 1967.

The reactions of the leaders and followers to the press coverage they received were significantly different. Jikōson avoided contact with the public and while Jiu’s insularity was a significant factor in generating press suspicions, the involvement of Go and Futabayama also contributed to Jiu’s problems. The famous followers left the group and it gradually disappeared from the public eye. On the other hand, Kitamura Sayo proved to be a master of self-promotion, and *Seisho*, the written record of her teachings, boldly states that bad rumors others spread can be used as a means of proselytization. Kitamura’s confrontational and
dynamic style of leadership, together with her relative openness, contributed to the significantly different relationships Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō had with the press compared to Jiu.

Both leaders advocated radical, albeit quite different, millennial teachings that presented grave predictions of disaster followed by their own versions of restructuring or renewing society. Catherine Wessinger has pointed out that the concept of “millennium” in scholarly discourse has changed from its original meaning of a period lasting one thousand years to become a synonym for belief in a collective terrestrial salvation. Michael Barkun argues that the combination of disaster and the millennium, the first suggesting death and desolation while the second offers salvation and fulfillment, are themes that intertwine again and again in different societies. While Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō and Jiu advocated their own understandings of millennial world renewal (yonaoshi), such ideas of disaster and renewal have long been recognized in Japan. Although yonaoshi ideas varied in the details, they generally involved a sense that people were living in a time of crisis that would be resolved by some kind of divine intervention, resulting in a utopian world that promised better conditions for those who had faith. Forms of world renewal played a part in a number of different social protests in the early modern period, such as peasant uprisings and some new religions. For example, Yasumaru Yoshio has considered the cases of Fujikō, Maruyamakyō, and Ōmoto and their ideas of yonaoshi and investigated how their founders deviated from emperor ideology.

AUM SHINRIKYŌ AND ITS AFTERMATH

While this book takes a historical approach in examining the interrelationships between new religions and media since the Meiji period and specifically during the Allied Occupation, any consideration of the relationship between media and religion must take into account the case of Aum Shinrikyō of the 1980s and 1990s. Although Aum-related incidents occurred some fifty years after the Occupation began and the media and social landscape was vastly different, the Aum affair provides a useful reference point to reflect on the historical cases raised in this book.

On 20 March 1995, members of Aum Shinrikyō perpetrated the most serious case of domestic terrorism in postwar Japan. The poisonous sarin gas they released in a series of coordinated attacks on the Tokyo subway system killed twelve people and injured thousands of
others. Televised images of the aftermath of the horrific incident that showed victims lying prone on the subway floors or stumbling around in a daze gasping for air were broadcast around the world.

The “Aum incident” marked a turning point for Japan in terms of religion, media, and society. Just as the cases in Western countries of the People’s Temple, the Branch Davidians, and the Order of the Solar Temple marked critical junctures in public understandings of religious movements, the name Aum Shinrikyō has become synonymous with a number of issues including religious violence, “cult behavior,” social deviance, relations with religious groups and the state, media responsibility, and academic responsibility. It has had a deep effect on Japanese society. It is not surprising that in the years since the Aum affair the image of religion in Japan in general has become more negative, particularly among young people.13

Helen Hardacre has discussed the case of Aum in terms of print and broadcast media. In this analysis, Hardacre points out that after the sarin attack scholars and the general public alike depended heavily on media representations and information received through print and broadcast media. In discussing “manipulative techniques” and “sinister pictures” of religion these media used in the case, she calls for more scholarly understanding concerning “the processes by which the media produce meanings and attempt to control and market them, appreciating simultaneously that the ‘semiotic excess’ created by media technology, especially on television, means that readers and viewers play central roles in the creation of the meanings attributed to the news.”14

This is not an issue that only affects Japan, and over the past few decades there has been more scholarly attention concerning the role that media play in shaping understandings of religion in general. Stuart Wright contends that scholars who have studied mass media coverage of new or nontraditional religions in other countries have been concerned with “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.”15 Underlying these concerns is the serious problem that faces religious groups that do not resort to violence or abhorrent behavior yet are effectively tarred with the same brush in certain media as groups that do. In general, the image of religion worsened in the wake of the Aum case.

Aum’s extremely violent tendencies appeared early in its life and escalated as the group became more isolated from society. Furthermore, the
social circumstances of Japan during the Allied Occupation were vastly different to the 1980s and 1990s leading up to the sarin gas incident. But the key issue of public understandings of religion based on media representation, and Hardacre’s call for more scholarly understanding regarding media production, control, and marketing of “meaning” is significant. Rather than trying to place “new religions” on one side and “the media” on the other, this study calls for a closer examination of the factors that surround incidents involving new religions and the media representation that affects not only the groups concerned but media consumers in general.

AUM AND THE MEDIA

One way of considering Aum Shinrikyō is to investigate its relationship with the media that reported its activities and the dominant themes of representation that developed. Aum was one of a number of groups that appeared in the 1970s and 1980s which appropriated ideas that were outside of mainstream thought. It nevertheless attracted the interest of young people and benefited from a general mass media interest in groups that were active in this milieu. Aum grew at a time when there was increasing dissatisfaction particularly among young people with the Japanese education system and the work ethic, and a sense that spiritual satisfaction may exist outside the traditional structures of religion. Esoteric practices related to Tibetan Buddhism, psychic powers promoted by entertainers such as Uri Geller, prophecies by Nostradamus, New Age ideas imported from the West—these elements of spirituality and philosophy were introduced to people through various media.

Aum first came to public attention through a confrontation with the weekly magazine Sandē Mainichi in the late 1980s. The magazine ran interviews with families who claimed that Aum had “stolen their children,” which were charges that had previously been leveled at the Unification Church (Tōitsu Kyōkai) and Jesus Ark (Iesu no Hakobune) in the 1970s and 1980s. The confrontation pitted traditional parental concerns with the constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of religion. Aum Shinrikyō reacted against the Sandē Mainichi and launched a campaign to embarrass the editor, Maki Tarō. While television, radio, and other tabloids criticized Aum for its stance, the group’s strategy of going on the offensive gave its leaders the opportunity to appear on television and present their case. Helen Hardacre notes that Aum leaders in media interviews effectively managed to counter the charges
leveled at the group by simply denying them. Not only did the group use the confrontation as an opportunity for self-promotion, “the media lost all authority in live interviews with Aum leaders.” Nevertheless, the group was committing crimes by this stage, and launched a failed election bid in 1990.

A significant aspect of Aum’s media strategy involved Asahara Shōkō, its leader. According to Ian Reader, in order to counter his negative image and that of the group in other media, Asahara launched a “charm offensive” and met various well-known personalities, such as Beat Takeshi, and various scholars. Aum’s own media published interviews that indicated they were apparently impressed by Asahara. Similarly, the Dalai Lama was reported as speaking positively about Asahara’s efforts to promote Buddhism in Japan. The group’s publications presented Asahara and senior leaders as being spiritually advanced beings, performing feats of levitation and pursuing ascetic practices. While it is not surprising that its own media would attempt to present a positive face, Aum Shinrikyō’s public relations division attempted to improve its public image and appear to be open to scrutiny by facing its critics and opponents in the mainstream media.

On 28 September 1991 representatives of the group, including Asahara, appeared on Asa made nama terebi, a live four-hour-long television program on the major Asahi network. The main theme of the program addressed the question of why young people appeared to be turning to religion. It included a panel of academics and critics, and featured a debate between Aum representatives and those of its rival, Kōfuku no Kagaku. Each party had the opportunity to present their philosophies and social contributions.

The Aum representatives came prepared, and they showed a well-constructed visual presentation that advertised the group’s cultural exchanges with countries such as Laos, and included shots of Asahara meeting various dignitaries, such as the Dalai Lama and Buddhist leaders from Sri Lanka. Watanabe Manabu holds that Aum Shinrikyō representatives fared better than those from Kōfuku no Kagaku. Another important factor, according to Nishide Takeshi, one of the few Japanese journalists with extensive experience in reporting religion, was that Asahara himself appeared on the program and left many commentators with a somewhat favorable impression. Kōfuku no Kagaku’s leader, Ōkawa Ryūhō, did not appear and this had a negative effect on the group’s image. After the program aired, some academics made favorable comments on Aum Shinrikyō. This successful performance on
television gave Aum Shinrikyō and Asahara a degree of authority in the public sphere within some circles relative to its major rival. Aum managed to assert itself as an authoritative voice among the new religious groups that young people were turning to, partly because of its claims to tradition. It also managed to stave off concerns among some that it was an unsavory religion.

Thus, there were relatively positive appraisals of Asahara after Aum applied its media strategy, and they were certainly more favorable compared to those after Aum’s crimes and his personal involvement in them came to light. Asahara became, according to Ian Reader, “a figure of immense notoriety, portrayed in the media not simply as the main villain of the affair but as a personification of evil, a fraud and manipulator who beguiled idealistic young people into following him and into carrying out fanatical deeds on his behalf.” Reader continues, making the salient point that these images became a convenient way of explaining Asahara and the affair because after the gas attack, in the media’s eyes, “[Asahara] was always evil, hence the affair was a manifestation of evil. He was always a fraud, hence Aum Shinrikyō was not a real religion.” This image of the fraudulent religious leader remains powerful, and the facts that have been revealed so far about Asahara’s deeds serve to justify the image.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND MEDIA

Focusing on “the media” on the one hand and “religion” on the other tends to draw a sharp line between media that report religious groups or represent them in certain ways and the groups themselves. This is particularly so when considering a striking incident such as the Aum Shinrikyō case. According to Stewart M. Hoover, while early considerations of media and religion viewed them as separate entities that could be considered as acting independently, in reality “[a] good deal of what goes on in the multiple relationships between religion and the media involves layered interconnections between religious symbols, interests, and meanings and the modern media sphere within which much of contemporary culture is made and known.” This suggests that interactions between religious groups and their leaders and the media are crucial in the formation of narratives and images. These images will change over time depending on the circumstances. Hoover’s perspective acknowledges the role that religious groups have in affecting the media, and vice versa.
Borrowing from the work of William Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld, new religions can be considered as social movements that present “a sustained and self-conscious challenge to authorities or cultural codes by a field of actors.” They argue that the relationship between the media and social movements is greatly imbalanced given their respective needs. From the media’s perspective, stories about a social movement may provide photo opportunities, even drama, action, and conflict, which are the essential ingredients for promoting circulation.

Ultimately the media have far greater power because social movements are more dependent on the media. For example, social movements are generally concerned with engaging in public discourse or spreading their message, and the media can act as a promotional tool. The media have access to an audience that the group may not normally access through its own efforts, such as proselytizing in public or relying on word of mouth to spread the teachings. Also, a social movement may attempt to use the news media to validate its position. Once a movement is reported in the media, influential individuals or groups may then recognize it, be attracted to its message, and possibly lend support. Furthermore, media coverage may validate a movement in terms of public perception. If a group is reported in the media, there is a chance that the publicity will provide it the opportunity to be taken more seriously. Finally, media coverage presents an opportunity to broaden the scope of conflict. A public conflict could allow the movement to gain some sympathy, as it were, or to improve its public standing. While this may be one way for new religions to challenge “the authorities and cultural codes,” in reality Japanese new religions have rarely gained public support through the media in this way. Rather, the publicity has the potential to backfire against the movement if there is a broad perception that the messages the group espouses run counter to cultural norms.

One exception is the case of the new religion Kōfuku no Kagaku, which embarked on a high-profile propagation campaign at the beginning of 1991. Although the group made skillful use of the mass media in advertising its name, after an event in July criticism, primarily in the print media, began to build against the group. *Friday*, a weekly magazine published by the Kōdansha company, ran a critical article on the group’s founder, Ōkawa Ryūhō. In response, Kōfuku no Kagaku members bombarded the Kōdansha office with complaints by fax and telephone, the group mounted legal challenges, and a National Associa-
tion of Kōdansha *Friday* Victims, which included prominent celebrities, organized public rallies.

Although, as Trevor Astley indicates, these actions indicated a shift of Kōfuku no Kagaku’s focus from study to “aggressive activism,” the group did gain public support for its campaign to change the ethical standards of the Japanese press. In the autumn of 1994 Kōfuku no Kagaku instigated a campaign to stop publishers violating a law forbidding the display of pubic hair (referred to in Japan as *hea nūdo*, “hair nudes”). Demonstrations were held in Osaka and Tokyo, with a reported 70,000 participants, and in November 1994 the Media Ethics Research Group (Masukomi Rinri Kenkyūkai) was set up to tackle the problem of loose ethics in the mass media. However, the public support in this case for Kōfuku no Kagaku was due to this ethical stance rather than its reactions to the criticisms against Kōdansha. In fact, from this point on, Kōfuku no Kagaku developed a reputation as a confrontational organization. After the Aum affair, the group was all but ignored by the mass media, and it was only when it began fielding candidates for the general elections of 2009 that the group began to appear in the news again.

KYŌSO AS MODELS

Scholars sometimes look at the cases of the founders of groups of new religions, including examining personal histories, to uncover the motivations of the activities of the groups they lead. Investigating the veneration of the founders or leaders of new religions has long been an important theme in sociological studies of religion in Japan. The study of kyōso, a term that can refer to the founders or leaders of groups, was particularly strong during the 1970s and 1980s when new religions including Aum Shinrikyō, Agonshū, and GLA (God Light Association) appeared to be attracting young adherents.

In her examination of Ōmoto’s Deguchi Onisaburō, Nancy Stalker points to the importance of charismatic leadership in new religions, particularly in their initial stages of growth. She reiterates the need for such leaders to have the ability to develop three specific areas. First, they need to command loyalty from followers and display a talent for prophecy or healing, and assume spiritual authority through revelations. Second, the leaders would need to be able to empathize with many people and establish a large following. Third, as described through the work of theorists such as Max Weber and Jean Comaroff,
there is a revolutionary component of religious charisma that involves challenging established religious and secular authorities at various levels. Stalker presents the idea of charismatic entrepreneurship, which is “a combination of spiritual authority, innovative use of technology and the mass media, and flexible accommodation of social concerns not addressed by the state or mainstream religions.” She argues that Deguchi Onisaburō’s entrepreneurial flair was critical to the success of Ōmoto in many ventures. In showing how Onisaburō epitomized charismatic entrepreneurship, Stalker holds that Ōmoto effectively provided an important model and legacy for new religions that followed in the postwar period, including Jiu and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō. She also demonstrates how Onisaburō cultivated and developed his own image in order to maximize his exposure through a variety of media and public appearances.

The notion of charismatic entrepreneurship is appealing because it encapsulates characteristics that Onisaburō had in abundance: superb, if idiosyncratic, leadership skills; remarkable resilience; the ability to recover quickly from setbacks; an eye for new opportunities; and a willingness to change in the face of extreme pressure. Furthermore, the idea of applying business-model ideas to new religions that are seeking to make some impact in society can also be useful. One obvious area is the use of media to promote their activities, which Stalker presents in the case of Ōmoto. New religions make use of their own media to spread their message, and Japanese new religions have long produced media including newspapers, film, and *manga* to promote their leaders’ visions. The leaders are often presented as exemplary figures and this plays a vital role in connecting members of a religious group to a shared identity and shared vision.

But the idea of considering Ōmoto and Deguchi Onisaburō as models requires some caution. There were a number of groups such as Seichō no Ie, Sekai Kyūsei Kyō, Mahikari, and Jiu whose founders had some connections with Ōmoto. The idea of Ōmoto’s legacy might be reasonably applied in the sense that some ideas were shared between these groups. But Jiu had highly individualistic traits and methods that suggest problems with the new-religions-as-models notion. As Shimazono Susumu has shown, there are no archetypal founders or leaders. Part of the appeal of new religions and their founders lies in individualistic claims to legitimacy and charismatic authority. Just as scholars may be tempted to demonstrate how groups are “modeled”
on other groups from the past, journalists have sought to explain new
groups in similar ways based on historical cases.

The claims made in various media regarding new religions and their
leaders from the Meiji period through to the Occupation period shared
a number of traits. Most of the print media coverage of the activities
of Jiu and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō was highly critical. Religions were
generally perceived by journalists in the postwar period as incompatible
with the ideas of democracy, in addition to being “irrational.” However,
while both established religions and new religions were criticized, new
religions were singled out particularly for promoting superstitions, folk
remedies, and magic healing practices that were potentially hazardous
to society. Jiu and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō were touted in the media
as the first postwar “models” of problematic new religions. In describ-
ing them, journalists looked back to new religions of the past, such as
Renmonkyō and Ōmoto.

The patterns of negative reporting about new religions developed
from the Meiji period and eventually reflected the changing political
and social conditions of the periods that followed. Media represen-
tations were products of multiple voices—journalists, government
authorities, leaders of traditional religious institutions, psychologists,
social critics, scholars of religion—each promoting a particular social
vision or worldview concerning the new religions, which were often
described variously as superstitious and irrational, “pseudo religions”
or “evil cults.” Individuals often attempted to influence the representa-
tions in a way that privileged their own social vision or worldview of
new religions. While the following list is not exhaustive, new religions
were often described as sharing some or all of these characteristics: (1)
they advocated doctrines which were somehow suspect and dangerous
to the public; (2) they engaged in medical quackery and illicit sexual
practices; (3) they were involved in fraud of a material or financial
nature; (4) their founders were mentally unstable; and (5) the people
who followed the groups were either uneducated or they lacked the
ability to judge right from wrong.

These representations were disseminated through the media and
they influenced public opinion and general debates about new reli-
gions in society. After the Allied Occupation revoked the power of the
Japanese state authorities to determine the validity of religious groups,
the ideas about new religions continued to be reflected in the postwar
print media, and they had a significant effect on the way that Jiu and
Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō were portrayed. Print media descriptions of
the two groups during the postwar period reflected, and to a certain extent built upon, negative journalistic views about new religions that had been developing since the Meiji period. Journalists and other media commentators invariably returned to these issues in describing new religions, often citing the “models” from the past. One significant difference, however, was that religion was no longer controlled by the state. In the new era of imposed democracy, the media still drew on the past in describing new religions.

A key element of the “models of new religions” for media workers was the representation of the leaders and founders. As figureheads who were able to influence and attract followers from different walks of life, they were the focus of media attention. The representations often depended upon previous “models” of founders and leaders, and these models had an influence on the leaders and founders who followed them. In order to explain the term “celebrity gods” and how it applies to Kitamura Sayo and Jikōson, we now turn to contemporary ideas of celebrity, and the relationship between celebrity and religion.

**CELEBRITY AND REPRESENTATION**

The study of celebrity in Western scholarship includes considerations over the ephemeral nature of fame and the famous, and questions over “celebrity culture” and representation. Although Daniel Boorstin’s conception of a celebrity, defined in his classic work *The Image* as “a person who is well-known for their well-knownness”\(^3^1\) is probably the most widely known, it is not universally accepted. Graeme Turner argues that Boorstin’s dismissal of a celebrity as “human pseudo event,” someone who has become famous through the trivia of personality, developed from an elitist distaste for popular mass cultural practices.\(^3^2\) Recent scholarly work has tended to emphasize that celebrity is not “a property of specific individuals. Rather, it is constituted discursively, by the way in which the individual is represented.”\(^3^3\) P. David Marshall views celebrity as a phenomenon that is a form of cultural power through which meanings are negotiated and organized.\(^3^4\)

While certainly not being the only approaches on the subject, Boorstin and Marshall refer to the ubiquitous nature of fame, which is often described as “celebrity culture.” In attempting to describe this, scholars have sought to locate the historical roots of celebrity. Graeme Turner shows that the standard view is that the spread of the mass media, particularly the visual media, is attached to the growth of celeb-
Richard Schickel suggests that celebrity began with film contracts in Hollywood in the early years of the twentieth century, whereas Neil Gabler argues in his biography of gossip journalist Walter Winchell that the culture of celebrity began with representations of celebrities’ private lives in modern newspapers. On the other hand, Leo Braudy claims in his monumental work that fame has a history in Western societies that can be traced back to early Roman times. Tom Payne delves into examples of classical literature to argue that the process of exalting famous people and then tearing them down, which can be seen in the contemporary cases of Madonna and Britney Spears, for example, is part of human nature. Rather than attempting to define a version of celebrity culture native to Japan and its historical beginnings, this study is concerned with media representations related to celebrity that affect new religions.

Media representation, Chris Rojek argues, “is at the heart of both the question of the mysterious tenacity of celebrity power and the peculiar fragility of celebrity presence.” He defines the phenomenon of celebrity as “the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere.” This position recognizes that “glamour” and “notoriety” are usually thought of in polarized terms. Glamour, or positive attributes of fame, might be associated with, for example, a well-known model, whereas notoriety would be linked to a mass murderer. Apart from any moral considerations, Rojek suggests that those who become “glamorous” and those who become “notorious” are linked together by the impact they have on the public consciousness and culture. A common story that permeates media in all cultures is that of once great figures, for example movie stars or other performers, and even politicians and other public figures, who “fall from grace”; formerly positive representations are replaced by negative ones.

The “fragility of celebrity presence” recalls Max Weber’s idea that the important aspect of charismatic authority is not the individual traits of charismatic leaders so much as the interaction and physical proximity between the leaders and followers. A charismatic leader’s position is legitimized as long as the followers recognize their qualities. As such, charismatic authority is precarious and dependent on perceptions of followers and their connection to the leader.

The connections between religion and celebrity have been raised in a number of studies. Media scholar P. David Marshall argues that “charismatic leaders of religious cults may have been the early purveyors
of celebrity culture, where ideas moved through these individuals and their prophets who relayed stories of their unusual power and influence over the many.\textsuperscript{43} Chris Rojek discusses celebrity and religion in general terms in relation to shamanism, Durkheim’s idea of collective effervescence, and celebrity rituals of ascent and descent.\textsuperscript{44} John Frow, on the other hand, investigates the apotheosis of Elvis Presley among fans, thus focusing attention on the individual celebrity.\textsuperscript{45} In Stephen Prothero’s examination of the trajectory of the image of Jesus in the United States from the 1920s to the current day, he argues that the image transformed from “character to personality,” from “personality to celebrity,” and finally to a “national icon.”\textsuperscript{46} Questions concerning religion and celebrity raise the issue of the phrase “celebrity gods.”

\textbf{CELEBRITY GODS}

“Celebrity gods” appears in Malcolm Boyd’s \textit{Christ and Celebrity Gods: The Church in Mass Culture}, which was a theological examination of what he terms “the celebrity cult, outside and inside the Church.” As a Christian minister who had worked in the entertainment industry, Boyd described the dangers of people slavishly following celebrities. Fame in the wrong hands was a potentially troublesome social condition that required a theological cure. In Boyd’s eyes, the celebrity gods of the day were entertainers of the time, such as Liberace, Marilyn Monroe, and Elvis Presley. But they also included “church celebrities” like Norman Vincent Peale whose “system of techniques, of publicity, of preaching and writing seems to have accommodated biblical and theological considerations to the uninformed desires of the public.”\textsuperscript{47} He argued that celebrities are “symbols of various motifs of life” and that ordinary people “share vicariously in their obviously tragic-comic lives.”\textsuperscript{48} Although they write from different perspectives, Malcolm Boyd shares with Daniel Boorstin a distain of celebrity worship as inauthentic, and they both consider the phenomenon of celebrity as ephemeral yet potentially dangerous to the public.

“Celebrity gods” tends to be used in popular media to describe superstars such as Michael Jackson, who was the posthumous subject of an article published in the online version of \textit{USA Today} titled “Why do we have celebrity gods?” In this article, religious studies scholar Gary Laderman states that in the United States “celebrity culture can produce icons who become immortal [and can be] incorporated intimately into the lives of some fans and serve as pivotal, ultimate points of ref-
Michael Jackson also made an appearance in an article published by ReligionLink, an online source for the Religion Newswriters Association, on 4 January 2010 entitled “Celebrity gods: The religion of stardom,” which argued the following:

The secular culture has canonized any number of “saints,” from politicians like Abraham Lincoln to explicitly religious figures like Mother Teresa. But the bestowal upon an entertainment icon or pop culture celebrity, usually after his or her death, of a public reverence that rivals that of a religious figure appears to be a modern phenomenon.

In attempting to answer questions about the “cult of celebrity” and whether it is a religious phenomenon, the article suggests that “celebrity gods” are deceased figures from the entertainment world whose lives are far beyond the reach of ordinary people. In drawing on the case of Michael Jackson, these figures somehow achieve apotheosis irrespective of the notoriety they may have gained while alive. Laderman again appears in this article, arguing that Jackson achieved this status: “Like other saints, he will be forgiven by his public, and I expect, an inspiration and role model, in some ways, for those who want to make music, become famous, or leave a mark in this world.” This question of the public redemption of celebrities is extremely important, and it plays a role in the story of Jikōson’s famous follower, the sumo wrestler Futabayama.

The idea that a religious leader could be labelled a “god” (kamisama) in the Japanese context is not unusual. Jikōson and Kitamura Sayo were viewed as living gods (ikigami) by their followers and supporters. The media used terms such as “dancing god” or “god on the run” to refer to these individuals, but in most cases the intention was to subvert the idea that the special status they had somehow achieved would be a positive force for society.

For the purposes of this book, “celebrity gods” is used specifically to indicate two aspects relating to the images of these leaders and their representations. The first, which reflects Weber’s ideas of charismatic authority, concerns the ability of these religious leaders to attract attention to themselves and act in ways that made them appear special. In doing so, they also sustained supporters through their interactions with them. The second aspect involves a broader argument concerning media representation, referring to the ways in which media external to the founders and leaders of new religions represented them. These kyōso are discussed in relation to representations of religious figures of the
past, and in terms of the impact they have on contemporary society and the future. As such, representations often concentrate on a version of the past, present, and future, and often include a discussion of potential consequences. While there were isolated and minor examples of relatively positive reporting on Kitamura Sayo, for the most part it was highly negative; on the other hand, Jikōson was portrayed as a notorious figure in media reports.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book proceeds with two basic arguments—the first historical, the second sociological. With regards to the first, print media descriptions of Jiu and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō during the Occupation and postwar periods reflected primarily negative representations of new religions that had developed in the national media since the Meiji period. The main change in reporting involved the changing social and political conditions of the period of the Allied Occupation. The second argument considers the question of “celebrity gods” and the extent to which the new religions were active participants in the creation of their public image as it was represented in the media. “The media” refers primarily to print media sources, such as major newspapers or their local subsidiaries, and books that were published at the time. There are four main reasons why these media are considered in detail, as opposed to other media. First, the journalists who were linked with these groups, including Ōya Sōichi, presented their work in print media form. Second, the groups and their leaders reacted to what these journalists wrote in newspapers and magazines. Third, the Occupation authorities, and particularly SCAP’s Religions Division officers, relied on articles (or translations of articles) that appeared in the Japanese print media concerning new religions. Finally, by focusing on print media representations of these two groups, it is possible to trace the images of the predecessors of these individuals as they appeared in print.

Chapters 1 and 2 deal with the prewar cases of Shimamura Mitsu and Deguchi Onisaburō, the leaders of Renmonkyō and Ōmoto respectively. Renmonkyō was a mid-Meiji period new religion, and Shimamura began her career as a faith healer. As her reputation grew, she developed a substantial following and some trenchant critics within the media. Renmonkyō developed around the same time as the growth of Japan’s modern newspapers. Deguchi, on the other hand, was a flamboyant and apparently multitalented individual whose sometimes dazzling leader-
ship attracted trouble from the authorities and censure from the press. Both these individuals and the groups they led were later referred to in the postwar press as models for new religions that appeared in the postwar period, particularly Jiu and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō. These chapters focus less on the charismatic aspects of these leaders and more on the development of the media and the interactions between new religions, authorities, and society in the different periods. The rise of Renmonkyō coincided with the formation of the media’s dual roles of “watchdog” and “servant” at a time when issues of orthodoxy and heterodoxy were crucial in the development of ideas concerning the emerging nation. A quarter of a century after this, Onisaburō took over the leadership of Ōmoto, and effectively thumbed his nose at the authorities by engaging in public displays that challenged the status quo, including riding a white horse in public (something only the emperor was allowed to do). Nancy Stalker has already ably demonstrated his propensity for self-promotion through public exhibitions and the use of new image and media technologies, which enhanced his charisma and gained new audiences. Therefore, this chapter focuses on media criticisms and representations of Ōmoto and Onisaburō.

Chapter 3 traces the prewar beginnings of Jikōson and Kitamura Sayo and deals with the growth of their groups under their leadership. External media representation did not begin at this point but the chapter highlights key events in their lives, including interactions with the authorities and the public that eventually took on significance during the immediate postwar period when the publicity surrounding them was at a peak.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the major legal changes that occurred with regard to religion and the press. It considers the dilemmas and tensions that occurred in immediate postwar Japanese society, which suddenly changed from a period of strict government control and entered a new era of unfamiliar and uneasy democracy. With the newly introduced freedom of religion and freedom of expression, Occupation authorities and their Japanese counterparts experienced a number of conflicts that affected the “religious world” due to fundamental differences in attitudes. On the other hand, the press was allowed significant liberties compared to the strict prewar controls they experienced while being subjected to censorship by the Occupation authorities.

Chapter 5 concentrates on the case of Jiu in the postwar period leading up to the “Kanazawa incident,” which effectively left the group branded as a public threat. Although Jikōson was influenced by
Ōmoto in some ways, Onisaburō’s grand expressions and “exhibitionist tendencies,” to use Nancy Stalker’s phrase, were a far cry from Jikōson’s efforts to attract supporters to her cause. She gathered a group of fiercely protective individuals to take part in her vision of world renewal yet these activities, combined with her conflicted relationship with the press, contributed to the creation of her image as a notorious “celebrity god.” Jiu’s story is not only remarkable for its attempts to co-opt celebrities into its cause, it is also noteworthy because of its interactions between the authorities and the critical press.

Chapter 6 examines the postwar career of Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō’s Kitamura and her efforts at self-promotion. She had a very different relationship to the press than Jikōson and was very proactive in developing and maintaining contacts with the Occupation authorities. These interactions, combined with her own idiosyncratic efforts at getting her message across to the world, had an impact on her promotion as the next prominent “celebrity god” in media representations after Jikōson.

Finally, Chapter 7 considers the aftermath of the cases within the context of the Occupation period leading up to the promulgation of the Religious Corporations Law in 1951. The focus of media attention moved beyond the consideration of individual founders and leaders of new religions and broadened to cover debates about the impact of various issues, including the place of religion in a newly democratized society.