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Conflict Between Aum Critics and Human-Rights Advocates in Japan

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Abstract

Japanese society has experienced two phases of cult controversy over the past decade. The public reacted to the Aum incidents in the 1990s with avoidance, declining belief in religion, and moral revulsion. As a result, criticism of cults in the mass media by academics and laypersons grew markedly. However, excessive criticism of cult members who had not faced criminal charges provoked a human-rights backlash in Japan. Human-rights advocates and intellectuals who were protective of Aum (which had changed its name to Aleph) declared cults to be "religious minorities" and "ordinary people"; hence, they should not be subjected to discrimination. The refusal by some municipalities to permit residence to Aum members or entrance of their children into school was judged unconstitutional by courts. Although security police have kept Aleph under surveillance and have sought to prevent them from recruiting new members and engaging in illegal fund-raising, the Japanese people remain unconvinced that the approximately 1,500 members of Aleph do not still pose a threat. This study examines the disparity between Japanese intellectuals' arguments in support of Aleph and the common-sense views of ordinary people concerning recent cult controversies by examining chronological data of the Aum/Aleph movement and social responses to it.

The decade following the 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system witnessed a shift in the way the cult issue was handled as a social problem in Japan. In the period between 1995 and 2000, the Japanese public reacted defensively toward any religious group with which it had come into conflict, most notably against the Aum Supreme Truth Cult (Lifton, 1999; Reader, 2002; Watanabe, 1998). Irrespective of how social conformity and civil order are maintained in Japanese society, situations provoking panicked reactions against outsiders or groups that may disrupt the social order certainly emerged in this period. The media also fueled negative impressions, as in the phrases "'cults' are scary" and "mind control can manipulate you like a slave" (Kimiaki, 1995). Fear-mongers exploited and stoked uneasy feelings. Specific measures were taken against religious groups deemed "cults," such as the Unification Church (known for the fraudulent sales of spiritual goods), Three Practices of Dharmic Flower (known for fortunetelling by the soles of the feet), and the Life Space Group (known for the case of mummified bodies). As with the Aum cult, religiously motivated donations and monetary offerings, the sales of spiritual goods, and the abuse of fellow members and followers were punished as illegal activities.

Three Practices of Dharmic Flower and Life Space Group leaders declared bankruptcy and their followers dispersed; yet other groups, such as the Unification Church, still flourish as religious corporations. The Aum leader was convicted and jailed, the organization's license was revoked, the group declared bankruptcy, and the authorities disposed of its assets, using the proceeds to compensate its victims. Yet, the group, now renamed "Aleph," still continues its activities as a religious organization. The court was able to punish the members who had been directly involved in illegal activities of the group, but it could not punish the religious entity that had spawned those illegal activities. As a result, the problem of how society should deal with the existing group and its former members, who were not criminally charged, remains unresolved.

From 2001 through 2005, the local communities and educational institutions that had to face this problem dealt with it by campaigning against the residency of former members or by rejecting their enrollment in local schools—as if to say these communities and institutions could not coexist

with "cults." Local authorities initially refused to accept the former members' registration of residence under the pretext of safeguarding the area's "public welfare." That such measures were taken is not surprising, given the anxiety of local residents and the public's anti-cult sentiment in the late 1990s. Indeed, new laws had been enacted to monitor the Aum cult. However, at the insistence of Aleph members and their supporters, the courts demanded that local communities and schools comply with the law. In other words, the courts reaffirmed the right of any Japanese citizen to enjoy freedom of residence and the right to education, even if he or she was a "cult" member. At that time, human-rights groups strongly supported those related to Aleph; critics and media pundits admonished the "morally panicked" Japanese and went on to criticize the logic of banishing "cults" as an emotional reaction that was not in line with "the public good" (Shimizu, 2004). Journalists, writers, and the general public, who, since the late 1990s, have grown tired of the endless "Aum bashing," now tend to share the view that "cult" followers are ordinary people. At this point, those who have campaigned against the residency or college enrollment of Aleph-related persons and members in the local community are considered obstinate, even socially isolated.

In this paper, the author explores the conflict between Aum and local communities—in particular, cases that occurred between 1999 and 2001. Aleph members, the children of the Aum leader and related persons, and a number of other members moved into the local communities of Fujioka City, Gunma Prefecture, Ryugasaki City, Ibaraki Prefecture, and Karasuyama, Setagaya Ward, Tokyo. In these areas, authorities refused to allow these individuals to register as residents and to permit their children to enroll in school, and local residents conducted a campaign urging Aleph members to leave the community.

Before discussing these cases, however, let me comment on the conflict between the anti-"cult" movement and the logic of supporting human rights.

The Anti-"Cult" Movement and the Human-Rights Movement

The phrase "anti-cult movement" refers to a variety of social activities promoted by those who are critical of certain groups deemed "cults," as well as to experts working to educate the public about the "cult" issue (Shupe and Bromley, 1994). The term "anti-cult movement" was coined by sociologists of religion who took issue with the concept of "cult" and preferred the term "new religious movement." However, to understand how the term "cult" became so widespread in public discourse, it is necessary to explain who created the concept and who has used the term to promote their own interests with the public (Barker, 2002). The Japan De-Cult Council (later The Japan Society for Cult Prevention and Recovery) was founded in 1995 and consists of Aum victims and their families, former members who support defectors from cults, lawyers and counselors, and clinical psychologists. The council has devoted its time to educating the public on the issue. The author, as a board member of this organization, has been involved in working to resolve the cult issue in a practical and realistic manner. Thus, the cult issue was initially formulated as a social problem by the anti-cult movement.

In recent years, criticism of the anti-cult movement has begun to dominate scholarly, if not public, discourse. This trend has been particularly conspicuous in local anti-Aleph movements, the leaders of which are local municipalities, councilpersons, city officials, and local residents, all nonprofessionals who confronted the Aum cult with great determination despite the ominous "cult" images purveyed by the media. Those leaders were emotionally distressed, not only by the "aliens" who appeared suddenly in their midst, but also by the media who besieged their homes, city offices, and schools in search of live coverage. In spite of that, Fujioka City and Ryugasaki City campaigned against Aum only for a limited period of time. Chitose-Karasuyama in Setagaya Ward, conversely, has kept up its anti-Aum activities for the past five years. Although they organized their movement by founding a prevention council and continue to publish newsletters on a regular basis, they have not proven adept at promoting themselves to the general public and utilizing the media effectively. Therefore, with the

exception of those directly involved and local residents, people in general know the realities of the anti-cult movement only from books written by supporters of human rights (Tezuka, Aiichiro; Matsui, Takeshi; Yamagiwa, Eizo; and Fukami, Fumi. 2001).

Since 2002 I have regularly interviewed the condominium residents and municipality officials in Karasuyama who oppose the residency of Aleph members. I also visited Fujioka and Ryugasaki in 2004. Based on government data and survey findings, I have striven to identify the realities of the anti-cult movement and how it differed by region. Apart from the regional differences in each movement, the typical image of anti-cult movements has been characterized by outside sources in a monolithic, stereotypical manner as residents who stubbornly oppose religious cults such as Aleph.

A typical example is the argument of Iwamoto (2001) and Mori (2002), who criticized the Japanese attitude of moral alarmism toward Aum/Aleph, pointing out that Aleph members and local residents, supposedly locked in conflict, have actually been reconciling. Miyadai and Ohsawa, both well-known sociologists and social critics, have suggested the future possibility of harmonious coexistence between residents and Aleph members in Japan (Miyadai, 2002:259; Ohsawa, 2005:213). However, it is fallacious to generalize the one example reported by Iwamoto and Mori to other cases. In point of fact, their contention rested solely upon the exchange of farewell greetings by several residents and two Aleph members in the last phase of a four-month conflict in Fujioka City, as will be described later. At that time, residents did not worry about Aleph, since the Maebashi District Court had ordered Aleph members to vacate the property they were renting, whose owner was bankrupt and whose residence was sealed.

Another common argument was that of Asano (1999) and Tezuka (1999), who asserted that the resident movement was a government-sponsored movement that the Public Security Investigation Agency and police set up so that new anti-Aum laws could be passed. The mainstream media have not officially picked up this contention of a human-rights activist. Let us examine the theory of the resident movement as a government-sponsored movement.

Asano and Tezuka belong to the Liaison Committee on Human Rights and Mass Media Conduct (JIMPOREN). They did not join forces simply to protect the rights of Aleph-related persons and members, for they have long handled human-rights cases in which they believe the constitution, democracy, and freedom were threatened. They perceive the spread of the anti-cult movement as a sign that conservative political forces, while calling for the restoration of social risk management and social order, took advantage of the Aum problem in an attempt to assert control over civil society. Thus, they criticize the Public Security Investigation Agency's excessive interference with the Aum cult and the media's biased "Aum-bashing" reporting.

Looking at the anti-Aum movements by local residents from the establishment viewpoint, Asano and Tezuka claim that it is not a coincidence that those movements simultaneously emerged in 1999 in several locations, including areas where Aum members had already resided. Tezuka cites the following locations as suspect areas:

Kita-Mimaki Town, Nagano (Aum members began to reside in Nov. '98; anti-Aum movement began in Jan. '99); Takane Town, Yamanashi (Sep. '98 → Jan. '99); Miwa Town, Ibaraki (Apr. '98 → Apr. '99); Asahi Village, Ibaraki (Nov. '96 → Apr. '99); Tokigawa Village, Saitama (Mar. '97 → May '99); Kosei Town, Shiga (May '97 → May '99); Fukiage Town, Saitama (Dec. '97 → May, '99); and Otawara Town, Tochigi (simultaneously in June '99) (Tezuka, 1999:6-10).

Why 1999? In December of 1995, the Public Security Investigation Agency made a proposal to collectively apply the Subversive Activities Prevention Law to Aum. The request was dismissed by the Public Security Examination Commission (PSEC) in January, 1997. According to Asano, the Public Security Investigation Agency, reborn in the wake of the Aum incidents after overcoming potentially fatal restructuring, was determined once again to have new anti-Aum legislation passed. Accordingly, the agency intentionally leaked information to local municipalities and fueled fears of a possible Aum revival, thereby increasing its workload and preserving itself (Asano, 2000:34-37).

While this insight is both penetrating and interesting, it overlooks the shock and fear of ordinary Japanese. At that time, Japanese society had no effective control over Aum,

which still had approximately 1,500 members. Although the founder Asahara and his top disciples were on trial, and 187 members have been convicted since 1995, the Aum Board of Directors did not officially admit criminal activities by the founder and top disciples until 1999, and consequently no apology was given to victims. Instead, they believed Asahara's prediction that Armageddon would come in 1997 or 1999, as a result of which some members searched for land and houses for collective residence. Moreover, at the end of 1999, influential leader Fumihiro Jouyu was released from prison (Fumihiro, 2007). Security police monitored Aum's movements and kept local municipalities informed of them. Locals who encountered Aum directly or were informed by local municipalities could not understand Aum's beliefs and attitudes. Because of court decisions, they had no way of opposing Aum's entry into their communities and their collective living arrangements. In addition to the Public Security Investigation Agency, politicians also struggled to legislate alternative security regulations against Aum.

In November 1999, new anti-Aum laws (the Organization Restriction Act and the Victim Relief Act) were passed in an extraordinary Diet session (Japan's legislature). Based on the Organization Restriction Act, the Public Security Investigation Agency asked to place Aum "Under Surveillance," and the agency set the Aum facilities off limits in February 2000.

This law has been criticized as establishing a contingency framework and as being a steppingstone to fascism. Members of the Organization Restriction Act Claimee Group Defense Counsel remarked that the way the Public Security Investigation Agency had gathered evidence regarding the danger of Aum as a religious cult was extremely sloppy, thus rendering the application procedure problematic. This notion was supported by Mizuho Fukushima (Fukushima, 2000:22-25), a House of Councilors member and president of the Social Democratic Party.

This argument might be attractive to those who are sensitive to human-rights issues. Although I respect human rights, I reject their conspiracy argument. First of all, the anti-Aum residents felt weak and would naturally feel emboldened by events that supported their position. The discussions that surely preceded the passage of the new anti-Aum laws in

November 1999 certainly would have energized anti-Aum residents and increased the likelihood of their communicating and cooperating with each other.

Secondly, the human-rights activists who simply asserted that anti-Aum residents, or "mobs" (Kitsuki, 2000:47), were manipulated by the Japanese government ignored the fact that the activists' support of Aum activities, including their opposition to the new anti-Aum laws of 1999, would tend to inflame and amplify the resistance of the anti-Aum movements. Let us examine how the activities of human-rights activists inflamed and ultimately defeated the anti-Aum movements.

Eizo Yamagiwa, who alleged that the entire Aum incident, including the trials, was a conspiracy (Yamagiwa, 1999:32), set up a computer-related company for Aum members who had lost their jobs after the name of an Aum-owned shop and its activities were disclosed by newspapers. He also took care of Asahara's second daughter and younger son, and some Aum-related persons who had been forced to leave Ohtawara Town in Tochigi in 1999. He located a piece of property in Ryugasaki, Ibaraki, which his company lent to Aum and which Aum then developed. Since the Ryugasaki municipality and residents knew that Asahara's son was the temporal successor to Asahara, and had been carefully groomed by Aum, they strongly opposed Aum's entry and refused their moving-in notification and their children's entry into elementary school. Since just one municipality could not deal with this issue, the municipal assembly requested that the mayor liaise with other municipalities and call for strong support from the prefectural and central governments. Even an assembly member of the Japan Communist Party expressed concern that Ryugasaki would become Aum's headquarters (Ryugasaki Assembly, 2001), and an anti-Aum residential group collected signatures from 12,570 citizens against the school enrollment of Asahara's children.

However, human-rights activists continued to support the children and their caregivers, and Takeshi Matsui, an attorney and supporter, filed a lawsuit against Ryugasaki municipality to accept Aum's moving-in notification and school enrollment. In 2000, Ryugasaki municipality finally settled with Matsui and conducted all the necessary procedures. As a result, the anti-Aum movement there lost

its most influential tool—namely, administrative support, and was forced to dissolve since it could not win the legal and human-rights battle.

The above-mentioned Jinporen sometimes organized tours for human-rights activists to the sites of anti-Aum movements in order to confront them. They visited Fujioka City and criticized the split among anti-Aum residential groups. One of the anti-Aum residents asked if they would accept Aum members living next door, to which they replied, "Yes." The residents then said, 'Well, could you bring Aum members home with you? You say Aum members have human rights. We also have human rights." At that time, Jinporen tour-group members threw off their inhibitions and brought two Aum members to live with them (Iwamoto, 2001:154-158).

In addition to that, Jinporen also assisted James Lewis to visit several anti-Aum movement sites and contributed to a special issue (SYZYGY 8:Nos 1-2) of his journal of new religions, titled *Aum Sinrikyo and Human Rights* (Japanese version issued by SYZYGY publishing committee, 2000). James Lewis and Gordon Melton are well-known scholars of new religions, as well as controversial researchers who received grants from Aum for a trip to proclaim Aum's innocence following the sarin gas incident of March 20, 1995 (Reid, 1995; Beit-Hallahmi, 2001:35-37; Watanabe, 2005:50-51). Lewis came back to Japan to support Aum members' human rights in 1999 and to work together with Japanese human-rights activists.

In these cases, the human-rights activists, who played an active role in criticizing anti-Aum movements, actually contributed to the creation and maintenance of these movements. Security police and local police simply informed the municipalities of Aum's entry, and then they administratively dealt with Aum members' moving-in notification and/or financially supported local residents' anti-Aum movement. On this point, anti-Aum movements might be considered partially administratively created, and they did continue to receive support until Aum/Aleph members left their communities in Ryugasaki city and the Chitose-Karasuyama area mentioned in the following section. The relationship between Aum and the anti-Aum movement, both of which were supported by human-rights activists,

government, and police, was very complicated. A conspiracy theory is not necessary to explain the facts, especially since there is no direct evidence of government manipulation of anti-Aum residents.

Regional Case

Chitose-Karasuyama

Chitose-Karasuyama, a quiet residential area in Setagaya Ward in Tokyo, is a 15-minute ride from Shinjuku Station. If you pass the Setagaya Karasuyama Community Center in front of the station, cross the old Koshu Highway, and follow a side street for about 20 meters, you will find more than 100 Aleph members residing together under Fumihiro Joyu in the five-story Chitose-Karasuyama GS Heim condominium and the two 2-story apartments across from it. Located in front of the Heim condo is a police box where the police officers maintain order by monitoring Aleph's movements till late at night. During the day, two people from the Council for Countermeasures stand guard.

Ever since the Aleph members moved into Karasuyama, an anti-Aleph movement consisting of local residents has been active. This period, between late 2000 and 2005, can be divided into three shorter periods. Period One was when Setagaya Ward was campaigning as a municipality against the residence registration of Aleph members in 2001 and 2002 (Note 1). In Period Two, Setagaya Ward exchanged information with municipalities engaged in similar disputes with Aum and switched its strategy to urging relevant agencies and the federal government to carry out anti-Aum countermeasures. At the same time, the Council for Countermeasures explored various options by regularly holding study group meetings on the cult issue. Period Three was the era of the "fight against the fading of the movement," according to the Council for Countermeasures. Although a very small number of ward councilmen and officials still maintain a strong interest in their local residents, local administrators can do little but conduct surveillance. The morale of the condominium residents is still high, yet there is a slight inconsistency in their principles; one is willing to accept a "soft-landing" approach, while the other insists that all Aleph members in the area must leave. In November 2003, the condominium residents launched the

"Citizens' Group to Protect Setagaya Ward from Aum," apart from the existing Council for Countermeasures. While the Council's goal is to bring about comprehensive anti-Aleph legislation, the condominium residents want to see more direct, short-term anti-Aleph movements and measures.

Period One

On December 19, 2000, thirteen followers of Aleph separately presented their moving-in notification to twelve branch offices of Setagaya Ward simultaneously, apparently to conceal that it was a group relocation. The ward office became aware that they were Aleph followers on the 21st, proceeded to cancel their newly created resident cards, and deleted them from the resident register. Nonetheless, followers were able to move into the first and second floor of GS Heim on the 20th, because the owner of those floors made a direct lease to Aleph without notifying his condominium neighbors. Anxious condominium residents gave followers a written request to leave the building.

Aleph members, however, claimed their presence to be lawful and conducted reconstruction work on the 1st floor for a seminary hall and on the 2nd floor for Fumihiro Joyu, a new leader of Aleph. On January 4th, 2001, a right-wing organization member who hated Aleph, fired four bullets at the first floor and was subsequently arrested. While condo residents anxiously consulted with the ward office and police, Aleph members moved into two apartments on the opposite side of GS Heim owned by the same person. As of 2006, there are more than one hundred members of Aleph in the condominium and two apartments.

The Karasuyama area Aum Shinrikyo Measures resident council was formed on January 9, 2001 and consisted of the condominium residents, neighborhood and storekeepers' association, PTA members, and volunteers who were concerned about Aleph's activities. This group conducted protest rallies and monitored and filed a petition against Aleph members with the Setagaya Ward office. Its risk-management office offered consultation for residents and study meetings, and advised school route changes for children.

The reason the ward directly opposed Aleph was that Aleph demanded that the deletion of their resident cards be

suspended via the Tokyo District Court on December 25, 2000, claiming that the deletions violated a basic resident registry law and infringed their freedom of movement and right to vote, which was guaranteed by the Constitution. The court ruled in favor of Aleph, although the ward immediately filed an appeal. In April, the Tokyo High Court overruled the District Court decision and rejected Aleph's petition, on the grounds that the ward had the authority to investigate concerning the acceptance of resident cards and Aleph had interfered with its investigation by applying for the movement of resident cards separately. Aleph then made a special appeal. In June, the Supreme Court overruled the High Court decision on the grounds that the ward did not have the authority to investigate concerning the acceptance of resident-card movement and that the deletion had caused serious damage to Aleph members. By this decision, the ward was compelled to recover the resident cards. Furthermore, at the trial in which Aleph claimed damages from the ward office, the Tokyo District Court ruled in favor of Aleph and ordered the ward to pay compensation. The ward office appealed, however, but this was rejected by the Tokyo High Court in May 2002, and the ward office finally renounced an appellate procedure to the Supreme Court. As a result, the ward had to pay a fifteen million yen settlement to Aleph. The Tokyo District Court also admitted other claims of Aleph concerning the case of the moving-in notification, which had been rejected in March and April 2002.

Period Two

In the activity of the second period, while the residential council also held another study meeting on the "cult" problem and sought countermeasures, the ward communicated mutually with local governments that had the same problem and formulated a strategy in conjunction with concerned government agencies in quest of measures against Aleph.

The ward had to change the policy of direct opposition to Aleph, which had resulted in the verdict of unlawful rejection of resident card moving. The ward set up a task force on the Aleph problem in Congress and hosted town and village liaison meetings for Aum Shinrikyo countermeasures in May, 2003 and requested action of the Prime Minister, Minister of Public Management, Home Affairs, Minister of Justice,

Director-General of Public Security Investigation, and Director-General of the National Police Agency. The ward also enforced "the Setagaya Ward safe and sound community building" regulation from June 2003.

Although the activity of the ward and the residential council was well-known in the Karasuyama area, as seen in the example of the banner "opposition to Aum" on the ward office building, not all residents of Setagaya Ward shared the same sense of crisis. This holds true for residents in the Karasuyama area. The anxiety of the condominium residents who lived by the headquarters of Aleph was different from that of local residents in general, which caused the differences in their struggles for opposition measures. The menace of Aleph for Setagaya Ward and its residents was so abstract that they just wanted to protect their ideal community. In contrast, for residents compelled to share a condominium with Aleph members, their living environment changed completely, since daily they had to face Aleph members and were beset with troubles.

From my in-depth interviews with condominium residents, the following grievances came to the fore: 1) chanting and voices leaking out from the ceremony hall on the first floor, and sounds of more than one hundred followers, who practiced there night and day and went in and out from their part-time jobs, which they were obliged to do for fundraising; 2) the stench of the special Aum diet rises from the kitchen because of a lack of proper ventilation to the loft; 3) the noise of special instruments and vibrations from downstairs, and so on. Dealing with such matters, the residents used to make written complaints demanding action by a specified time, because Aleph did not immediately respond and improve the situation. The residents argued with Aleph many times over whether such complaints had even been made in these matters. This ongoing process wasted time and exhausted the residents.

Consequently, a number of families left this condominium because they felt they could not live in peace due to the comings and goings of Aleph members, the media, and police. Naturally, they wish to sell their condominiums at a reasonable price; yet real estate agents say that people will not buy condominiums with Aleph neighbors, although the units are quiet and convenient. As a result, these residents

bear the heavy financial burden of continuing to own their condominium and rent a new one for their family. The residents' most urgent request is that Aleph leave the condominium, and their second choice would be to have the government provide the concerned residents with new living arrangements.

Period Three

The opposition movement of the third period was engaged in "the struggle against the flagging of the movement," in the words of the council members. The small number of ward assembly members and ward staff has not lost interest in the residential opposition movement, yet they can do little more than watch Aleph. A sign of this current status appeared at the 3rd regular meeting on September 2nd, 2001. One member, Mr. Kawakami, stated, "Since Aum Shinrikyo, presently Aleph, moved into Setagaya Ward late last year, I took up this problem at the regular meeting of the budget special committee. In former times, there were many members of Parliament who did so, but now it is just me" (Setagaya Ward, 2001). Kawakami also asked whether the ward could take budgetary steps for the residential council. The Karasuyama general branch office head replied,

> Including our ward, many municipalities were sued by Aleph and/or subjected to an audit by citizens who supported the minority and formulated countermeasures. The residential council recognized this situation and, subsequently, they neither relied on the ward's budget nor directly requested it (Setagaya Ward, 2001).

The ward committee concerned with this problem was called the "special committee of the Aum problem and leaving bicycle measure and so on." Compared to other municipalities that faced an influx of Aleph members, the ward Congress did not address this issue so often, despite the size of the collective residence and its influence on local residents. Although a few Congress members and staff in the risk-management office of Setagaya Ward have been engaged in watching Aleph, they are not appreciated by the local people.

There was a difference of opinion between the residential council that sought the complete removal of Aleph from the Karasuyama area and condo residents. On January 2nd, 2003, they set up a new meeting, separate from the residential council, called "the Meeting Defending Setagaya Ward against Aum," because they were discouraged by the deadlocked situation and hoped for even a conditional compromise. Although the council continued to request action aimed at comprehensive legislation against Aleph, they demanded a short-term and direct opposition movement, and actions such as complete public disclosure of Aleph's religious practice and study meetings held in the downstairs ceremony hall. They insisted that they felt anxiety because they were not informed of what went on there. If Aleph guaranteed to show their activities to anyone concerned, that would help reassure residents. Incidentally, I was nominated by the residents to be one of the visitors. However, Aleph insisted that visitors be selected cautiously, according to their understanding of religion. Aleph favored advocates of human rights and religious tolerance.

On April 24th, 2002, a meeting entitled "*Dialog with Aleph and viewing of the second documentary film of Aum 'A2'"* was scheduled to be held at the court of GS Heim and to include the film producer, social critics, and the owner of the Aum residence. But residents strongly opposed it because they were offended by a phrase in the organizers' commercial leaflet that contained part of the ruling by the Tokyo District Court in the resident card suit, which stated, "The dialog between Aleph and residents should aim at securing public safety and promoting mutual understanding—simply regarding Aleph with hostility not only robs everybody of an opportunity for mutual understanding, but makes the solution of the problem more difficult." This pronouncement of the Tokyo District Court to Setagaya Ward referring to the municipality's duty was intentionally distorted by the meeting organizers who pointed out that local residents should do the same.

Surely, dialogue is necessary, and the intention of the organizers to create such an opportunity is laudable. However, to what extent did they conduct this meeting to sway public opinion, rather than to address the concerns of the condo residents? And what sort of dialog did they intend to undertake with Aleph rather than the residents? They

seemed to overlook the fact that after two years of arguing over residential problems with Aleph, condo residents had given up on building mutual trust. Familiarity toward individual Aleph followers and anger toward a religious body that had responded to the residents in an inconsistent and remote manner must be distinguished. Frank conversations between Aleph followers and local opponents are frequently observed, as, for example, "You should go back to your parents' home. If you defected from Aum, we would take care of you." Yet, we should also not overlook the fact that the condo residential area is watched by security police at all hours.

The difficulties faced by the opposition movements of condo residents and locals mirror the limitations of legal redress and public authority. They have no choice but to follow the dictates of social ethics and learn to deal with the drawbacks of the situation, what is called consideration of the rights of a religious minority. Although the construction of a condominium might be stopped by local residents' right to sunlight, the infringement on quality of life by a specific organization is not regarded as a human-rights violation.

Condominium residents reported that they were closely united by the opposition movement and sometimes enjoyed small parties and excursions together for a change of pace. The council members, who included the old chairman, shop owners, housewives, and ward staff, also valued their relationship. Without the Aleph incidents, they would not have communicated deeply. Yet, in fairness, despite the deadlock with Aleph, they have reaped some advantage from the disaster, and they encourage each other so as not to be isolated individually and see their opposition movement forgotten by the general public.

Recent Aleph

According to several newspapers issued on May 5th, 2006, conflict within Aleph's inner factions was in full swing and would result in its split. This fact was not uncovered by reporters, but preemptively disclosed by the security police agency, which was concerned about Aum/Aleph's fake dissolution and revival as a new religious group. Responding to this analysis, the Aum bankruptcy administrator pronounced that even new groups would assume liability indemnity to the sarin case injured parties.

In recent years, since a leader of Aleph, Fumihiro Joyu, was released, he has vied for power with higher-ranking disciples of Asahara who were not arrested in the sarin gas attack and other criminal incidents. He has been seeking to reestablish a new religious group that breaks with the spiritual tradition of the founder of Aum because the notoriety of Aum and Asahara would be an obstacle to group survival in Japan, even if Aleph members made a monumental effort. Meanwhile, old members who truly believed in Asahara and his mystical power regarded this idea as disloyal to Aum conventions and formed an anti-Joyu faction. This is known as the A (Asahara) faction, in contrast to the Joyu faction, the M (Maitreya, Joyu's holy name) faction. Between them there are some believers who have not committed to either side.

On May 18th, the security police agency disclosed that the M and A factions had each held spring seminars, and that as a result the M faction had collected approximately $70,000 in donations from 80 participants, while the A faction had collected $400,000 from 220 participants. Joyu declared, "We should think about the direction of the Aleph after the execution of Asahara," which could be scheduled within the next few years because of the dismissal of Asahara's appeal in the Tokyo High Court and his capital punishment was fixed in September 15, 2006. Some members believe Asahara will not die, even by hanging; however, such a thought is a by-product of shut-in persons who do not accept the real world. It will be too late to start a new version of Aleph after the death of its founder. M and A factions were expected to divide their assets and accounts respectively by July 2006. In May 2007, Joyu separated his faction from Aleph and made a new religion, "Hikari no wa" (Ring of Light), with approximately 200 members (*Asahi News*, 2007).

Discussions

Resource Mobilization and Cultural Framing

In this section, we discuss the resident movement from the perspective of social movement theory, which focuses on the mobilization of resources, cultural framing, and political opportunity (Tarrow, 1998).

The mobilization of resources means how funds and human resources are procured and utilized in order to have

successful social movements. The municipalities took urgent budgetary steps by allocating approximately $100,000 for residents' anti-Aleph movements in 1999 and 2000, because the Japanese public had already become aware of the treatment of Aleph members as a social issue after a series of Aum-related incidents. But because this budget was spent on lawsuits, the residents in Karasuyama were forced to raise funds for their own activities.

Cultural framing is composed of a social appeal made by a movement, which convinces the general public of, and enlists them in, the movement's cause. What values and interests did anti-Aleph residents attempt to protect? Of course, mere dislike or fear of a "cult" does not convince other people who are not directly affected. They need more convincing reasons. Sometimes that justification is presented by outside parties. Human-rights advocates provided conflicting abstract arguments, such as "public well-being for locals," and Aleph members' "freedom of religion," and "the freedom and the right to have residence and education." But did the local people really participate in the movement because of those ideas? This question must be addressed.

Some municipalities refused to accept Aleph members' residence registration on the grounds of "uneasy feelings of local residents." They believed that what local residents demanded was a guarantee of local security, and thus responding to that plea would correspond to "public welfare." In response to the claims by the cult and its supporters, as well as human-rights activists, the municipality insisted, "(the community's) fears are not gone." Since dialogue was not working, they had no choice but to turn to the legal process. The rationale of "public welfare" was merely an expression of the municipality's view; on the local side, "fear" was the reason for the anti-Aum movement.

It is easy to attribute a disdain for human rights to residents chanting "Aum, Get Out!" or voicing other hostile expressions and attitudes. For this reason, human-rights advocates formulated the standard framing by raising the question: "Is it acceptable to limit individual human rights due to abstract fears based on insufficient evidence and emotional loathing?" That is how the logic of fairness was introduced. In fact, at that time, the point in dispute was not denying the human rights of Aleph members (discriminating

against them) or weighing those rights on a scale. And it was not about respecting the human rights of local residents more than the human rights of Aleph members from the standpoint of public welfare.

The local residents' fear was directed toward nothing other than the security threat posed by Aleph (Aum). Unless the cult group disbanded, that fear would not disappear, so the residents thought they had no incentive for meeting the cult members face-to-face. This mindset was sustained by the memories of the sarin gas attack and media reports that Aum followers are mentally controlled by the cult group. Naturally, there were individual differences in their fears and degree of loathing, not to mention differences in residential styles.

Aleph's supporters maintained that "fear" would be reduced if residents recognized that they were not really in danger. But residents' fears prevented them from engaging in dialogue that might lead to a reduction of their fear. The residents' reluctance was, ironically, strengthened by the condescending and disdainful way in which human-rights advocates treated them. Thus, the Aleph supporters were able to gain a decided advantage in framing the issue for the public by portraying the anti-Aum residents as obstinately and irrationally afraid. Even had the residents successfully communicated their "fear" to society in general, the distance between their situation and that of the observing public would have made the public's empathy low. Hence, it was easier for society to acknowledge the more normative argument that there would be no exception in protecting human rights of minority people. In terms of framing strategy, then, human-rights advocates defeated the residents.

Structure of Political Opportunity

The structure of political opportunities, the background of this verbal strategy, also turned out to be a blessing for human-rights advocates. The structure of political opportunities hinges on whether or not the national government would tolerate social movements. When an anti-Aum movement was launched in Namino Village in Kumamoto, other local anti-Aum movements were tolerated. This is because the municipality cooperated fully with the local residents, and the national government also gave

consideration to the Aum issue. In 1999, the municipalities submitted a request to concerned government ministries and agencies, in which they urged the government to crack down on Aum. This request gave some momentum to the enactment of new anti-Aum laws. The framing from the local communities was successful—"We cannot live in peace as long as cult activity is tolerated."

Because of court decisions, however, it became difficult after the year 2000 to take judicial and administrative measures that go beyond surveillance (supervision by the Security Police Agency) in regard to the residence of Aleph members. In other words, now there are no special reasons to prevent Aum members' freedom of residence. In that respect, the refusal of residence registration in municipalities was a countermeasure that lacked legitimacy. The municipalities were aware of this and patiently waited until the Aum-related persons finally left the municipality, and then switched the anti-Aum slogan from "Get out!" to "Break Up!" They proposed a fundamental resolution of the problem so that no one could accuse them of local egoism or of avoiding the problem.

In spite of all this, some Japanese, especially some intellectuals and young people, began to show empathy for the *A* and *A2* instead of the anti-Aum movement (Miyadai, 2002; Ohsawa, 2005; Gardner, 2001). Those films were produced by Tatsuya Mori, who documented Aum from within and tried to break its typical "cult" image. They slowly began to accept the argument that the new religious group (Aleph, not Aum) was not dangerous and its members were just ordinary people. In addition, the continuance of those anti-Aleph movements appeared more oppressive than before, since anti-Aum movements of local communities had all ended in reconciliation, although they were close to defeats. Thus, Japan's structure of political opportunities on the "cult" issue has changed so much that, sometimes, even those statements accusing the Japanese public of Aum-bashing seem refreshing.

Conclusions

The "cult" problem described in this paper was a living world that stood paralyzed before the law and the human-rights movement. The honest and unsatisfied part of residents was

saying, "Why must we deal with such intractable problems and be forced to listen to those who argue as if it were none of our business?" Such voices must be heard and understood, for it is not realistic to expect society to accept Aleph members, whose positions have been preserved simply by the letter of the law and arguments of fairness. Without fully understanding the fear behind these anti-Aum voices, Aleph members might face tacit "discrimination" in academic enrollment (Mihashi, 2005), employment, and everyday life, even if they continue to enjoy the protection of law.

To better understand the position of the anti-Aum residents and the implications of that position for Japanese society, I think it is useful to consider an analogy with the world's current reaction to Japanese atrocities from the Second World War.

Ever since Prime Minister Nakasone made an official visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in the 1980s, Asian nations have harshly criticized Japan. Furthermore, South Korea has criticized the history textbook issue centering on the forced transfer of Koreans and comfort women (sex slaves for soldiers), as well as Japan's interpretation of the war. In contrast, the reparations issue has been politically settled within Japanese-North Korean and Japanese-South Korean relations. Can we simply dismiss the way those countries express their anger or frustration over Japanese attitudes? Can we repeatedly insist that reflection on Japan's actions 60 long years ago is an unreasonable interference or political strategy? Can we erase the invasion by Japanese soldiers from the memories of war victims in Asia? We perpetrated certain things in the war that deserve current criticism, and Japan cannot escape that responsibility. Legally it is possible, but on a moral level it is not. As long as we are Japanese, we all have to share the burden of Japan's history. If that is so, we have no choice but to listen to other countries' criticisms about the remnants of state Shintoism, which became a breeding ground for militarism, as manifested in history textbooks with a strong nationalistic tinge and a political climate reminiscent of the National Mobilization Law. The international community will not accept the brazen attitude of Japan demanding proof.

Just as the passage of time and legal details do not morally exonerate Japan from its past actions, so too do current

Aleph members bear some responsibility for the heinous crimes their group perpetrated. And just as Japan is morally bound to listen respectfully to the criticisms of those whom it once victimized, so too do current Aleph members and their supporters have an obligation to respect the fears of those for whom the memories of Aum's attacks are still vivid.

Current Aleph members should know what their former leader and some of their fellow members did, and they should answer why and how the Aum dogma, training methods, and organizational structure at the core of their faith managed to generate such an unprecedented level of violence. They should conduct their current activities in a positive manner by reflecting on their responsibility. Unfortunately, their behavior and pronouncements seem to be irresponsible and indifferent to the expectations of the general public. Therefore, people judge them to be human beings lacking in ordinary moral sense. Human-rights activists who consider such views to be merely discrimination are locked in a world of legal debates and distorted views of fundamental social and ethical issues. They are blind to the moral dimension that has to do with Aleph's responsibility to the public.

Only twelve years have passed since the Aum sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system. Although the media may have forgotten the incident, the general public and victims have never allowed their memories to fade.

Note

1. In Japan, the family registration law takes account of individuals with family lineage by recording the acquisition and renunciation of nationality (jus sanguinis), birth, marriage, and death. For the Japanese, the basic residential register law controls notarization of residence and electoral register. To receive public services, Japanese must undertake both family and residential registration.

Based on article 22 of the Constitution of Japan, any Japanese can move, reside, and choose their occupation in Japan. And according to the 22nd and 24th articles of the basic residential register, people who move must file moving-out notification at their present municipality and moving-in notification at their new municipality. Municipalities, based on the 5th article, must accept the

notification and record the residence. When the entries did not agree with someone's records, municipalities, based on article 34, could suspend and investigate the notification. And if someone had a complaint about the municipalities' action, they could request reconsideration based on article 31.

Under the Constitution of Japan and the basic residential register law, municipalities can investigate whether entries such as the name and the family register ("religion" is not included in entries) are true. However, they cannot legally refuse to accept the moving-in notification by Aleph members, even if they concealed their religious identity. Therefore, it is certain that the judges gave a sentence that fully accepted the plaintiffs' appeal to register their moving in.

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