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From *Karuto* or "Cult" to the Mainstream:
The Reconstruction of Public Images by a Japanese Religious Group

by

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ABSTRACT

Aum Shinrikyo, a religious sect generally seen as a *karuto* or "cult" in Japanese society, carried out sarin gas attacks in 1995. Today, a successor group called *Aleph* has successfully recruited numerous converts, despite the negative profile of *Aum* in the Japanese media. This study seeks to understand this phenomenon. It first investigates Japanese public representations of new religious movements. Then, it examines discourses presented by *Aleph* on its official website and studies its recruitment strategies, paying attention to its use of symbols and images. It finds that *Aleph* highlights certain cultural themes that have meaning and value to many Japanese people, which contrasts with the hostile public depictions of *Aum* and other such groups. In particular, I argue that *Aleph*'s use of symbols and images plays a significant role in the recent, rapid increase of new converts because the symbols and images rehabilitate its reputation in the Japanese public.

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In Japan, there appears to be a growing number of *shin(ko) shukyo* (新[興]宗教)–new religious movements, many of them shadowy, whose behavior is increasingly seen as harmful to society. This does not, however, seem to reduce their appeal to believers. In the following figure of a top ten ranking of believers of religious organizations[1] in Japan, the new religious movements (or NRMs) are highlighted to demonstrate their great popularity in contemporary Japanese society.

Rank	Name of Religious Organizations	Number of Believers (people)
1	*Jinja Honcho* (神社本庁)	68,053,757
2	***Kofuku no Kagaku* (幸福の科学)**	**11,000,000**
3	***Soga Gakkai* (創価学会)**	**8,270,000 (households)**
4	*Jodoshinshu Honganjiha* (浄土真宗本願寺派)	6,940,967
5	*Jodoshu* (浄土宗)	6,060,900
6	***Rissho Koseikai* (立正佼成会)**	**4,288,466**
7	*Koyasan Shingonshu* (高野山真言宗)	4,108,500
8	*Nichirenshu* (日蓮宗)	3,853,592
9	***Tenrikyo* (天理教)**	**1,635,486**
10	***Reiyukai* (霊友会)**	**1,577,086**

FIGURE 1. A Ranking of Believers of Religious Organizations in Japan[2] by Diamond Weekly, September 12, 2009. [*The boldface shows new religious movements.]

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[1] The main objectives of these groups are to propagate doctrines, administer ceremonies, and enhance their believers' development (*Chiezo* 2007).

[2] *Jinja Honcho* (The Association of Shinto Shrines) is Japan's native religion. Buddhist denominations are ranked 4th, 5th, 7th, and 8th.

One of these groups, *Aum Shinrikyo* (or *Aum* オウム真理教, *Aum* Supreme

Truth), carried out a toxic sarin gas attack on a Tokyo subway system in March

1995. Since then, the Japanese people appear to have become more sensitive to

issues related to these NRMs. This anxiety was most recently reflected in May

2007, when Jung Myung-Seok, the founder of *Setsuri* (摂理, Christian Gospel

Mission (or CGM)), was arrested for sexually assaulting female members. Jung

had fled from Korea in 1999 and was arrested after hiding abroad for eight years.

Originally founded in South Korea, *Setsuri* has over two thousand members in

Japan in addition to other members around the world.

The involvement by several Japanese youth in the *Setsuri*'s case became a

public reminder of the NRMs' negative memories that mainstream Japanese

society has been dealing with. Even before the arrest of its leader, *Setsuri* was

already treated as a serious social problem in Japan. For example, for three weeks

in July and August 2006, the *Asahi Shimbun*, one of the major newspapers in

Japan, published a critical report about the leader of *Setsuri*, a suspected rapist,

and the organization's recruitment practices on college campuses (*Asahi Shimbun*

2006). Thus, in addition to the *Aum* incident, the *Setsuri* incidents appear to have

led to further severe tensions between NRMs and the victim and advocacy groups

opposing them (known as anti-NRMs). Consequently, an increasing number of

discourses about how to represent and understand NRMs and anti-NRMs began to

be used in the Japanese public and news media.

This study focuses on a particular NRM group, an *Aum*-derived religious

group named *Aleph* (アレフ), which has successfully navigated the tension

between NRMs and anti-NRMs. In this thesis, I examine the ways that *Aleph*

seeks to rehabilitate its image and attract followers. I consider how these

strategies are linked to contemporary Japanese values and concerns, and how they

are connected to the ways in which *Aum* is perceived by the public. For instance,

one of *Aleph*'s methods of distancing itself from *Aum* is to deliberately create

"*dami sakuru*" (ダミーサークル, "camouflage club") and to approach university

students without revealing the organization's name (Zakzak 2013). This behavior

suggests that *Aleph* members know it might be too risky to inform the students

that they belong to *Aleph*, since their image has been tainted by its frightening

associations with *Aum*. In short, *Aleph* members recognize that the way the public

views their organization is partly connected to the negative image of their

predecessor group, *Aum Shinrikyo*.

Of the various recruitment and propagation strategies deployed by the

religious group, this study focuses on the group's use of images and discourses

represented in the public media, including the internet, as these seem to play a

central role in attracting potential converts. This study thus analyzes *Aleph*'s

images and discourses by specifically focusing on their meaning. Despite the rise

of the anti-NRMs and also the increased police control over *Aleph*, there has been

a rapid increase in the number of converts to the group in recent years (Public

Security Intelligence Agency 2012). This might suggest that *Aleph* has been

selective about its recruiting methodologies and adopted effective deployment

techniques. More specifically, I consider whether and how symbols and images

used in *Aleph*'s media artifacts play an important role in the recent, rapid increase

of new converts because such symbols and images have meaning and value to many Japanese people.

In this thesis, I thus consider the following main questions:

(1) Why is *Aleph* so successful in recruiting new converts despite the substantial negative representations of NRMs circulating in the larger Japanese public?

(2) What types of recruitment strategies, if any, does *Aleph* incorporate into its discourses?
-What kinds of elements does *Aleph* highlight in its media artifacts?
-How do these elements contrast with the public representations of NRMs?

(3) Do *Aleph*'s media artifacts appear to target a specific audience? If so, who is this audience?

1.1 Significance

This study contributes to the existing research and addresses key gaps in the literature. Researchers such as Ihara (1995), Arita (1995), Tomino (1995), and Gardner (2008) have examined the influence on *Aleph*'s predecessor, *Aum*, of popular Japanese cartoons featuring catastrophically destructive battles. These scholars and specialists point out that the Japanese subcultures significantly affected many *Aum* members who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s when the subcultures became popular in Japan for the first time. There are also scholarly studies on contemporary Japanese NRMs including *Aleph.* These studies introduce the NRMs' central tenets, mind-control and solicitation methods, and describe the NRMs as extremist, marginal religious groups that are harmful to Japanese society (Inose 2009; Sakurai 2006; Sakurai 2009; Watanabe 2009a; Watanabe 2009b).

However, as far as I am aware, there have not been any empirical studies focusing on the discourses used by the Japanese NRMs and their impact on the groups' missionary works or on the relation of such discourses to mainstream Japanese culture. I examined the relationships between the self-representation discourses produced by *Aleph* on the one hand and mainstream Japanese cultural values on the other. My contribution thus focuses on this dynamic relationship, which I argue is partly influenced by social and economic changes affecting contemporary Japanese society. Specifically, in this project, I examine the ways in which *Aleph* attempts to dissociate itself from the negative publicity linked to NRMs by projecting various counter-strategies aimed at encouraging the Japanese public to reanalyze its profiles in a more positive light (Agha 2006).

Analyzing various artifacts created by *Aleph* allows me to examine the group's discursive strategies and evaluate the impact of these efforts in reframing and making its image acceptable to a larger, wider-range, mainstream Japanese public. Studying a Japanese NRM's strategic use of culturally normative signs, symbols, and rhetoric is therefore very important as it reflects the NRM's attempts to re-adjust its discourses as well as a larger trend among Japanese religious groups, to be more appealing to mainstream Japanese cultural values. Examining the discourses used by NRMs will offer new insights into their strategic use of culturally normative discourses that carry meaning and value in mainstream Japanese society.

1.2 Methodology

I began my research on *Aleph* in the summer of 2012. My main data consist of discourses from *Aleph* as reflected in the group's various media artifacts from its official website. The group's official website was selected as a reliable source to analyze *Aleph*'s self-representations based on the following criteria: 1) it was designed to serve as a portal to the general public, and 2) its contents are monitored by the group.

Analyzing media portrayals is an important component of much work in anthropology for an analysis of the socially constructed nature of cultural concepts and values (Inoue 2003; Lippi-Green 1997). Therefore, to investigate the media images about *Aleph* and its predecessor (*Aum Shinrikyo*), I used news clips of special programs aired by Japan's public broadcaster, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), and private broadcasters, the *Nippon* Television Network Corporation (日本テレビ), *Asahi* Broadcasting Corporation (ABC, 朝日放送), TV *Asahi* Corporation (テレビ朝日), and *Fuji* Television Network Incorporated (フジテレビ). In order to further analyze representations by the news media, I looked into articles from the nationally-circulating newspapers, *Asahi*, *Sankei*, and *Yomiuri Shimbun.* Because they are the most representative media sources in Japan, *Aum*'s public profiles conveyed through these media are generalizable.

Moreover, for further analysis on the public representations of NRMs, I also explored articles about *Aum* from a newspaper published by the Karasuyama Area Residents' Council on *Aum Shinrikyo* Countermeasures (烏山地域オウム 対策住民協議会), and a special edition of *Shukan Asahi*, a weekly general-interest magazine. In order to study the public discourses about the religious

group, I observed online discussion boards on Komeya's website following relevant internet news articles and clips.

In addition, data from the official website of Hokkaido University were mainly investigated to better understand institutional representations of NRMs. This institution was selected for two main reasons: 1) the recent number of new converts to *Aleph* in Hokkaido stands out, so that the national university would display some sort of response towards this phenomenon for its students and their parents, and 2) Dr. Yoshihide Sakurai, who is both a well-known anti-NRM activist and a religious studies scholar, teaches in this university, so that the information about NRMs would be available to the campus community. I provide an analysis and translation for most of the examples in the thesis.

1.3 Overview

In Chapter 1, I will describe the mass media's stereotypical portrayals of and discourses about *Aum Shinrikyo* (the predecessor of *Aleph*) in Japan. In Chapter 2, I will situate *Aleph* within this discourse and examine the ways in which *Aum*-linked images are reflected in public discourses about *Aleph*, continuously carrying negative representations closely associated with *Aum*. In Chapter 3, I will analyze *Aleph*'s attempt to dissociate itself from the negative reputations of *Aum* by comparing and contrasting in more detail the religious precepts and informational cartoons of both groups. In Chapter 4, I will explore *Aleph*'s strategies of reconstructing public images by examining discourses used in various media artifacts created by *Aleph*. Finally, I will end with a discussion of the implications of the use of certain symbols and images in *Aleph*'s media

artifacts by connecting them to mainstream cultural values in contemporary

Japanese society.

Chapter 2: *Aum Shinrikyo* and Its Two Derived Groups

A Japanese NRM *Aum Shinrikyo*–founded in 1986 by Chizuo Matsumoto (also known as Shoko Asahara)–committed what has been described as a mass, indiscriminate murder by releasing the sarin gas at various points in the Tokyo subway system on March 20, 1995. Twelve people were killed and more than 5,500 people were injured. Asahara and several followers were arrested. The Japanese legislature considered regulating *Aum* under a law called the Anti-Subversive Activities Act (破壊活動防止法), but eventually decided against this idea.

Five years after the sarin gas incident, former members of *Aum Shirikyo* established *Aleph*. In the same year, 2000, a law to restrict their activities was established, allowing the police to monitor their daily activities. Then, in 2007, Fumihiro Joyu, who served as a public spokesperson for *Aum* and later a religious representative for *Aleph*, left *Aleph* with a number of fellow members and established *Hikari no Wa* (光の輪, the Circle of Rainbow Light). They strongly oppose *Aleph*'s policy of worshipping the convicted Asahara and his doctrines, and seek to separate themselves from both *Aum Shinrikyo* and *Aleph*. Although both *Aleph* and *Hikari no Wa* were originally derived from *Aum Shinrikyo*, they have adopted slightly different disciplines. This study focuses on the practices of one of these groups, *Aleph*.

2.1 Religious Practices and Precepts of *Aleph*

Buddhist and yoga practices are highlighted in *Aleph*. Yoga refers to traditional physical, mental, and spiritual practices, originating in ancient India. While there are many different types of yoga being practiced today around the world (such as *hatha*, *vinyasa*, *ashtanga*, power, and *bikram*) for many purposes, *kundalini* yoga is the central practice of *Aleph* since it is considered as the means of "awakening *kudalini* (or life energy)" by activating the *chakras* (the human spiritual centers) (*Aleph* 2001). *Kundalini* yoga is unique and differs from other styles of yoga in the sense that it aims to practice mantra (Buddhist chants) recitation, meditation, pausing, and breathing techniques in addition to the use of *kundalini* energy (*Aleph* 2001). *Aleph* teaches its believers that instructors who have mastered *kundalini* yoga are saints[3] (*seija*, 聖者たち) who landed in this modern era because the group believes the *kundalini* power helps to push up the human spirit to a higher state of consciousness.

The saints (achievers of *kundalini* yoga) reside in *Aleph* facilities located across Japan and wear white garments called *samana*, especially during their practices. Each saint is given a holy name and serves to train as well as counsel members and guide their training for spiritual fulfillment (*Aleph* 2001). *Aleph*'s training system is mainly composed of individual guidance, intensive seminars, and various "initiations" (mystery teachings of empowerment) that allow believers to achieve enlightenment and liberation. One of the initiations is called an "initiation of fire" (火のイニシエーション). This is a teaching intended to

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[3] *Aleph* uses different terms for "achievers of *kundalini yoga*" (成就者): 1) *seija* (saints, 聖者たち), and 2) *shi* (priests, 師).

purify and strengthen the fire element of practitioners, by converting the sacred

mantra (Buddhist sacred texts) to electrical signals. An "initiation of sound" (音の

イニシエーション) aims to purify and strengthen the practitioners' air element.

During the initiation, *Aleph* increases its effect by precisely reproducing the

sacred mantra along with dynamic sound changes. According to the official *Aleph*

website's introduction page, spiritual stone-filled holy energy is given at the time

of the enrollment. The web page also explains that holy water-filled energy is

effective in stabilizing the mind and healing disease.

2.2 Increase in the Number of Converts

In June 2012, the final remaining member of *Aum Shinrikyo* was arrested

for his involvement in the sarin gas attack. Thirteen people connected to *Aum*-

related incidents received death sentences. One might expect membership in *Aum*-

linked religious movements to have declined since the sarin gas attack; in fact, the

number of new converts to these movements has been steadily increasing. The

Public Security Intelligence Agency (公安調査庁, PSIA hereafter) is the national

intelligence agency governed by Japan's Ministry of Justice. Its task is to collect

and analyze domestic and international threats to Japan's national security. It is

also responsible for conducting research about the trends of particular

organizations and the laws to regulate such groups. According to the PSIA (2012),

Aleph and *Hikari no Wa* had a combined total of 1500 believers in 2007, and this

number has increased subsequent years. New converts to *Aleph* and *Hikari no Wa*

have exceeded 200 people per year for two consecutive years (2011 and 2012).

In 2011, the PSIA reported, the number of new converts to *Aleph* and *Hikari no Wa* was 255 people, the highest number since 2000, as illustrated in the following figure.

(people)

2008   2009   2010   2011   2012   (year)
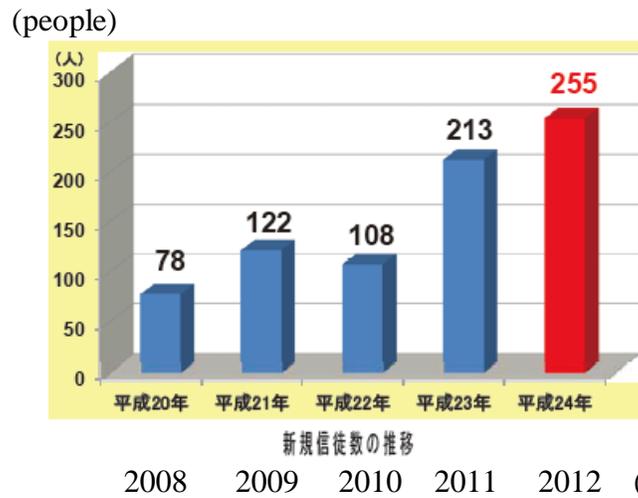
FIGURE 2. A Change in Number of New Converts to *Aleph & Hikari no Wa* by Public Security Intelligence Agency, 2012.

In 2012, Fumihiro Joyu, a religious representative for *Hikari no Wa,* announced that only a few new enrollees joined his religious group in 2011 and 2012. The group has around 150 members. Therefore, one can infer that almost all the 255 new converts reported by the PSIA converted to *Aleph*. Although it is difficult to determine the exact number of new converts, *Aleph*'s public exposure has been significant, characterized by the public media's continuing association of the movement with stereotypes linked to its *Aum* predecessor. It will be useful next to explore these stereotypical media images and discourses.

2.3 Stereotypical Images of *Aum Shinrikyo*

The mass media plays an important role in creating and circulating images through visual images along with messages through texts. Miyamoto (2010), for

example, analyzes the circulation of racially offensive language in the media in the United States (US) and describes how derogatory images of people of color circulate through language use in US public space. The author points out that the repetition of the language in the media ultimately contributes to keeping the language alive and also to keeping the stigmatized images of people of color accessible through language, even if the initial intention in the use of the language was to raise public awareness of the pejorative use of racial slurs (Miyamoto 2010). This suggests that circulating images through loaded language in the media contributes to reinforcing stereotypes, by reproducing and sustaining the public's opinion, from both older and younger generations, about the targeted groups. This is true even when some people are unaware of the historical origins of those ideas–origins such as *Aum*'s sarin gas attack.

Using image and discourse examples, I will show the ways in which *Aum* has been depicted by the media. A Japanese weekly general-interest magazine, *Shukan Asahi*, published a special edition about *Aum Shinrikyo* shortly after the final remaining member of *Aum* wanted for the sarin gas attacks was arrested in June 2012. Its cover page featured images of the leader of the group with blood dripping on the subtitle (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. Cover of *Shukan Asahi* (Weekly Magazine) by *Shukan Asahi*, June 2012.

> [All Records about *Aum Shinrikyo*. Criminals Wanted, All Arrested! **Are Their Uncontrollable Actions Really Over?** The Truth Revealed Now. Cold Case Files. The True Face of the Religious Officials.] [emphasis added]

The texts represent *Aum Shinrikyo* as a violent, dangerous religious group. A rhetorical question in the caption carries the implied message that we should continuously monitor the *Aum* group. The question is written in solid white text over a background of the same lurid, red color associated with *Aum*'s violent crimes and its victims.

Similarly, the Special Investigation News Project (報道特捜プロジェクト) of the Nippon Television Network Corporation broadcast a program, *Trace for Inspection! Madness and Delusion of* Asahara *Aum* (追跡検証！麻原オウムの狂気と妄想), in 1995. In the program, the host presented a board to demonstrate a simplified diagram of a structure of *Aum Shinrikyo* as seen in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4. Trace for Inspection! Madness and Delusion of Asahara, *Aum* by Nippon Television Network Corporation, 1995c.[4]

The sketch shows that Asahara's authority was absolutized, which became the basis of the religious system. His insane illusions allowed him to turn his followers into robots by making them blindly follow his doctrine. Figure 4 contains a list of representative practices of *Aum* that were said to be used as a tool to control the minds of followers and also to justify killing outsiders via *kyusai satsujin* (救済殺人, salvation murders) on behalf of the religious group. In addition to using drugs, four primary approaches for mind-control were described: 1) the sharing of DNA between the leader and members of the group (血のイニシエーション, Initiation of Blood); 2) attempts to transfer the leader's brain waves to the minds of the people through the use of headgear (Perfect Salvation Initiation [PSI]); 3) the use of the voice in mind control (Mantra); 4) attempts to reproduce the leader in the form of costumes (Election). In the following sections, this thesis will examine in more detail how the Japanese media portrays representative figures of *Aum* by addressing the four approaches introduced here.

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[4] All online multimedia sources are in the List of Online Multimedia Sources by titles.

2.3.1 DNA (Initiations)

Several media sources focus in dramatic ways on the methods used to exchange the leader's blood with that of the members–for a price. For example, a resident council aiming to dissolve the *Aum Shinrikyo* (オウム対策住民協議会) is active in the Karasuyama, Setagaya-ku area in Tokyo, where the headquarters of *Aum* (currently *Hikari no Wa*) are located. In September 2006, the resident council published a newspaper, entitled *Bloody Satian* (血のサティアン, Bloody Religious Facilities of *Aum*), for the purpose of preventing the *Aum* crimes from being forgotten with the passage of time. This was the first in a series of articles called "*Recall the Misdeeds of Aum Shinrikyo*" (オウム真理教の悪行を思い起こす), which reiterated the activities taking place in the religious facilities run by *Aum.*

"Initiation" is described in the article as practices that physically transfer the leader's power, energy, and physical DNA to the believers. The article includes a list of various types of initiations along with short descriptions and rental fees (called as "donations") for each initiation (Figure 5).

血のイニシエーション **Initiation of Blood**	麻原の血液を飲む Drink Asahara's blood	布施 100 万円以上 Donations of more than one million yen
愛のイニシエーション **Initiation of Love**	麻原の DNA を使用 Use (drink) Asahara's cultured DNA	布施 100 万円以上 Donations of more than one million yen
シークレット・イニシエーション **Initiation of Secret**	麻原のリンパ球を使用 Use (drink) Asahara's lymphocyte (cultured DNA)	布施 100 万円以上 Donations of more than one million yen
パーフェクト・サーベーション・イニシエーション **Perfect Salvation Initiation**	麻原の脳波をヘッドギアを通して頭部に流し込む Pour Asahara's brain waves into the head through headgear	100 万円と 1000 万の 2 コース Two courses: one million yen and ten million yen

FIGURE 5. Bloody *Satian* by the Karasuyama Area Residents' Council on *Aum Shinrikyo* Countermeasures, September 2006. [English translation added]

The blindness of the believers was indexed by the program's quality exposed in the figure, which indirectly characterizes *Aum*'s training methods and system of collecting "donations" as dubious and bizarre. For example, members using a device for the Perfect Salvation Initiation were required to pay around one million yen a month, which could increase to around ten million yen in total device rental fees (Figure 5; NHK 1995).

2.3.2 Headgear

As already observed in Figure 5, the media have likewise focused on the outlandish headgear worn by members of the group–equipment thought to allow for the transfer of the leader's "brain waves" into the minds of his adherents. The headgear is an invention of Hideo Murai, Science and Technology Agency Minister of *Aum*, and used as a tool for the *Aum* practice known as Perfect Salvation Initiation (PSI, 完全救済イニシエーション). Wearing the headgear became one of the principal requirements for members of *Aum Shinrikyo*.

During criminal investigations of *Aum* facilities across Japan in April 1995, one month after the sarin gas attacks, various news media, such as the TV *Asahi* Corporation (テレビ朝日), captured an image of *Aum* members wearing the headgear as shown in Figure 6. The image aired in April 1995.

FIGURE 6. News Station by TV *Asahi* Corporation, April 1995.

Adults were not the only *Aum* members featured in the media wearing the headgear. Children were also shown on a large scale throughout the news media. For instance, an image of a child wearing the headgear was broadcast in April 1995 by the *Fuji* Television Network Incorporated (フジテレビ) when its reporter visited an *Aum* facility in Naminoson in Kumamoto. While an *Aum* member was answering the reporter's question about whether children were visiting from other *Aum* facilities, a car passed in front of the camera. In the car, there was a child wearing the headgear (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7. News Japan by *Fuji* Television Network Incorporated, April 1995.

The shocking discovery and images of the children wearing the headgear had a major impact on viewers at the time, embedding in their minds the abysmal aspects of the religious group. The intensive criminal investigation of the main *Aum* facilities in Kamikuishiki village (上九一色村) took place in April 1995, and as a result a total of 53 children between the ages of three and fourteen were eventually transferred to a County Central Child Consultation Center. Contrary to the painful images of parents who appealed to the police officers to return their children, negative profiles of *Aum* adults prevailed in the media as being bad influences on their children. Thus, separating children from their parents was depicted in the media as a necessary step in order to protect innocent children from "brainwashed" adults.

A special TV program, *Aum Shinrikyo: Trace of an Uncovered 'Kingdom'* (暴かれた'王国'の軌跡) was aired nation-wide by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) in April 1995, immediately after the criminal investigations of the *Aum* religious facilities. The program captured an image of headgear that was said to supply brain waves of Asahara by sending an electric current, which allows the believers to advance their training faster. The headgear originally had been considered as just a tool for collecting donations, but another special TV program, aired in 1995 by Nippon Television Network Corporation, *A Thorough Recapitulation!! The Horrible Demise of the Aum Empire!* (徹底総括！！オウム帝国戦慄の終焉！), pointed out that the primary use of the headgear was to control the members' minds. The program televised a reproduced scene of a

practice in a cell where a member, wearing the headgear attached to a computer, stayed in a very small room with a portable toilet (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8. The Horrible Demise of the *Aum* Empire! (1) by Nippon Television Network Corporation, 1995a.

A former believer explained that the believers in the cell were usually handcuffed, so that they were not able to remove their headgear. The room was locked, and a meal was delivered once a day through a small window.

According to the former believer, a strong current flowed through the body at intervals, so much that the body became numb. The former believer commented that he was able to see the brain wave of Asahara on the computer screen and knew beforehand that he was soon going to receive the next strong current. It was very painful when receiving the strong current, which made him feel very frightened. All believers had to follow a new policy, implemented about a year before the sarin gas attacks, making them wear the headgear for 24 hours. They even had to sleep with the headgear attached to a computer. A cognitive scientist, Dr. Hideto Tomabechi, estimated in the above-mentioned Nippon Television Network program in 1995 that the true purpose of the PSI was to transform the treated members' memories and personalities, since the intense electric currents could cause partial memory loss. The TV program proposed that *Aum* may have aimed to create a different personality for enslavement by erasing

the old memories and creating the new ones, along with inculcating fear (*Nippon Television Network Corporation* 1995a). In sum, the descriptions of *Aum* practices and visual images circulated by the mainstream Japanese public media purported to convey to the viewers the frightening "truth" of *Aum*'s mind-control.

In 2004, nine years after the sarin gas attacks, in an article about what happened to the *Aum* children, the *Asahi Shimbun* (one of the largest national daily newspapers in Japan), featured an image of a director of the child consultation center at that time looking back on those days carrying the headgear that one of the *Aum* kids left behind (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9. The "Past" Which Obstructs Children's Future by the *Asahi Shimbun*, 24/2/2004.

> 子どもらは毒ガス攻撃を受けていると信じて外に出ようとせず、オ
> ウムに戻せとぐずった。頭をなでようとすると「エネルギーが下が
> る」と拒む。
> [Children (living in the child consultation center) believed that they were
> under a gas attack from the outside, so they did not try to go out, and they
> were fretful, insisting that they should be allowed to go back to *Aum*. If (I)
> tried to touch their heads, they refused, saying, "energy goes down."]
> (*Asahi Shimbun*, 24/2/2004)

According to him, the *Aum* children regained their childlike behaviors little by little. Within four months of arriving at the child consultation center, they had all moved to communities where their relatives lived. The image of the headgear

functions in this article as a symbol of extreme mind-control by *Aum Shinrikyo*.

The headgear that was left behind tells the readers that the children are currently

free from mind-control.

2.3.3 Sermon Tapes & Songs

In the media, the use of leader, Asahara's voice as a tool for mind-control

was also revealed. An NHK program that was aired in April 1995, *Aum*

Shinrikyo: Trace of an Uncovered 'Kingdom' (暴かれた '王国' の軌跡),

introduced a sermon tape that it seized, entitled *Words of Jewel that Fulfill the*

Wishes of the New Members (新会員の願いをかなえる宝石の言葉). The

program explained that once they join *Aum*, all believers are required to listen to

this tape for one thousand hours. By looking at the partial quotes from the tape

below, one can easily notice that repetition techniques are frequently used. The

voice also creates a simple equation that joining *Aum* makes you happy, and thus

one's dreams will come true.

> *Watashi wa Aum Shinrikyo ni nyukaishite ureshii-na. Ureshii-na.*
>   I   SM *Aum Shinrikyo* to   joined   happy-FP happy-FP
> [I am glad that I joined *Aum Shinrikyo*. I am glad.]
>
> *Kore de watashi no subete no ganbo ga kanau-zo.*
> This by my   all   desires PRT come-true-FP
> [By this, all my desires will come true.]
>
> *Kore de subete no watashi no ganbo ga kanau-zo.*
> This by all   my   desires PRT come-true-FP
> [By this, all my desires will come true.]
>
> *Kore de subete no watashi no ganbo ga kanau-zo.*
> This by all   my   desires PRT come-true-FP
> [By this, all my desires will come true.]
>
>   (NHK 1995)

[Symbols used: FP (final particle), PRT (particle), SM (subject marker)]

Aum is also known as a religious group that uses songs for its public advertisements. A Japanese composer, Shigeaki Saegusa, analyzed various songs produced by *Aum Shinrikyo* in *A Thorough Recapitulation!! The Horrible Demise of the Aum Empire!* (徹底総括！！オウム帝国戦慄の終焉！), aired in 1995 by the Nippon Television Network Corporation. He pointed out that *Aum*'s songs contain some of the favorite melodies of Japanese people, which makes them feel a sense of familiarity with the song (and, by extension, with the organization), making them think that they can relate to *Aum*. In the same show, Suzuki Matsumi, a criminal investigator who specializes in the study of acoustics, concluded that the *Aum* songs had a mind-control function through the following three aspects: 1) The melodies are aligned to the rhythm of the pulse. 2) The songs use the rhythm and melody of repetition. 3) The songs contain melodies that people have heard somewhere (Nippon Television Network Corporation 1995b). According to Suzuki, repeating the same rhythm in a song gives rise to a hypnotic effect and may inculcate thoughts about *Aum* into the brain through lyrics. As such, mainstream media discourses raise the issue that the audience may be unknowingly "brainwashed" by *Aum*'s hypnotic voices.

2.3.4 Dolls (Clones)

In addition to depicting forms of "mind-control" related to sounds and electric signals, the media captured images of *Aum* that attempted to reproduce the leader in the form of Asahara-character costume. *Shinrito* (真理党), a political

party that Asahara founded and headed up, submitted candidates for the Japanese

general elections in 1990. During the election campaigns, *Aum* members wore

Asahara masks and white clothes and sang theme songs honoring their leader

(Figure 10).

FIGURE 10. *Aum* Song: The Hidden Trap in *A Thorough Recapitulation!! The Horrible Demise of the Aum Empire!* by Nippon Television Network Corporation, 1995b.

At that time (before the sarin gas attacks), the images were more likely perceived

as comical, especially due to the group's unique performances. Over time,

however, such comical images were transformed into dangerous ones in the media,

as shown in the following paragraphs.

The media uses the caricatures of innumerable human robots to describe

the leader's "slave" followers and the "creepy" system of *Aum*. In 1995, the

Special Investigation News Project (報道特捜プロジェクト) produced by the

Nippon Television Network Corporation depicted robotized believers who looked

exactly like the leader, Asahara (Figure 11).

FIGURE 11. Madness and Delusion of Asahara *Aum* in *The Special Investigation News Project* by the *Nippon* Television Network Corporation, 1995c.

The TV program explained the *Aum* rule that anyone who criticized Asahara's prophecy and attempted to destroy his ambitions was subject to "salvation murder" (Nippon Television Network Corporation 1995c) The *Aum* members who became Asahara's "slaves" through various training carried out frightening plans for the salvation murders on behalf of their leader. Thus the text, *robotto ningen* (ロボット人間, human robot), appearing on the screen, seems to have a meaning similar to "clones of Asahara" that were created to blindly serve the leader by following any orders given by him.

The media also focuses on the inhuman aspects of *Aum*'s training and the system for cloning Asahara. This was most reflected in the Nippon Television Network Corporation's TV program, *A Thorough Recapitulation!! The Horrible Demise of the Aum Empire!* (徹底総括！！オウム帝国戦慄の終焉！), broadcast in 1995. In the program, the large-scale cloning of Asahara was conveyed through the graphically modeled image of beds that are lined up in an orderly fashion without any gap (Figure 12).
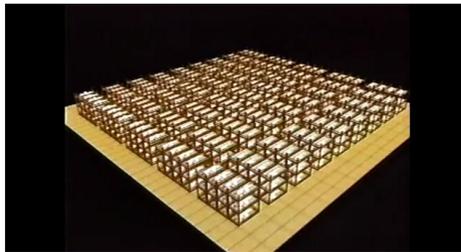
FIGURE 12. The Horrible Demise of the *Aum* Empire! (2) by the Nippon Television Network Corporation, 1995a.

The narrator added that this graphic image was like a giant robot factory, as more than 500 believers were connected to a computer through headgear attached to the beds (Nippon Television Network Corporation 1995a).

Delusional, robotic believers, and *Aum*'s anger towards Japanese society became the group's representative media images. In a headline of an article about *Aum*, published by the *Asahi Shimbun* in June 2012, the *Aum* members are referred to as "soldiers."

なぜ彼らは「兵士」となったのか
[Why did they (the believers) become (Asahara's) 'soldiers'?]
(*Asahi Shimbun*, 16/6/2012)

The headline refers to the idea that soldiers have to follow a superior's command without questioning its logic. The superior in the religious group was the leader, Asahara, and the command was to release sarin gas and conduct many other crimes such as kidnapping or murdering on his behalf. The blind acceptance of what Asahara told the members of *Aum* was well-known to the public. Therefore, the iconic practices of listening to Asahara's sermon tapes or worshipping his photograph could trigger the public's fears that *Aum* might repeat the same crimes. After the group's involvement in various crimes became clearer, the name *Aum* itself became like an icon meaning for a troublesome and dangerous entity. This contrasts with the group's initial, comical image which is from around the time of the election campaign in 1990. In particular, Japanese people have felt scared about *Aum*'s brainwashing techniques and "brainwashed" members with their blind loyalty for their religious leader, Asahara.

As observed in the above examples of media portrayals of *Aum Shinrikyo*, the religious group appears to be mostly depicted negatively in the media, strengthening the stereotypes associated with the group. Furthermore, these negative impressions conveyed by the media appear to further intensify viewers' fearful feelings towards people who believe in NRMs. In the next chapter, I will show the public's views on *Aum* and other NRMs.

Chapter 3: Discourses Related to "Cults"

3.1 Public Discourses about *Aleph*

Chapter 2 first considers the extent to which public discourses about *Aleph* are influenced by the media images of *Aum*, as shown in the previous chapter. It then demonstrates the ways in which the Japanese public views *Aleph* by providing definitions of the term "cult." Next, it reports on the consequences of labeling a particular religious group as a cult in order to illustrate the impact of the "cult" label. Finally, it examines "anti-cult" activism to demonstrate the gaps between the public and *Aleph*, which is labeled as a cult group.

In 2012, *Aleph* filed a complaint against the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, claiming that the department falsely accused *Aleph* of being involved in the shooting of a chief police officer. The judge decided in favor of *Aleph*, and the chief judge ordered the department to pay reparations for defamation in the amount of one million yen (or 10,000 dollars) (Komeya 2012). Beginning one minute after the police report was issued, and for the next hour and 55 minutes, about one hundred people left their comments on Komeya's (2012) opinion-sharing board on the internet. This seems to be a clear indication of how Japanese people are still interested in and sensitive to issues related to *Aum* and other such groups. The comments on the online message boards contained negative descriptions of the group, characterizing it as idiotic, strange, troublesome, violent, murderous, frightening, and lacking common sense.

> 世間に大迷惑をかけ、人まで殺しておいてさら
> に100万円もらえるのか？世の中本当に狂って

いる。[Putting society in a great deal of trouble, even committing murders, and they can still receive a million yen (or $10,000)? Our society is really crazy.]

アレフに限らず変な宗教に金出したらあかん。人生めちゃくちゃになるから。[You should not provide money to strange religions–this is not limited to *Aleph*–as your life will be ruined.]

人殺しの集団に名誉も人権もあるもんか。周りに迷惑。[The murderers' group has neither honor nor rights.]

結局、オウムの麻原を信仰してる、凶悪団体じゃね！？[In the end, they are a violent group that still believes in Asahara (the leader of the *Aum*), aren't they!?]

ボケ信者、布施でなく納税しろ。[Idiot believers, pay tax instead of making an offer to *Aleph*.]

テロを企てる人は、やはり、通常の常識はかけらもないな。[Those who plan terrorism do not have any single usual common sense.]

カルト教団は怖いね〜。
[Cult religious community is scary.]

[Komeya 2012]

Responses to an internet news article about *Aleph* show that the religious group is identical to *Aum Shinrikyo* as far as the public is concerned. Negative evaluations of *Aleph* specifically revolve around beliefs and practices associated with *karuto* (カルト, cult) entities. A *karuto* entity represents "a religion that became an object of public concern and criticism" (社会問題化した宗教), a concept developed by a Japanese scholar of religion, Sakurai (2006). These responses indicate that there is still a significant gap, influenced by the *Aum* stereotypes,

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between the images reflected in *Aleph*'s self-representation discourses and its discursive uptake by the larger Japanese public.

3.2 *Karuto*

Originally denoting "ceremony and worship," the term "cult" today refers to three types of religions in the United States (US): 1) minor religions originated in the US, 2) Christian heretical sects, and 3) destructive religious groups seen as a societal problem (Sakurai 2006:77). In Japan, the idea that New Religious Movements (NRMs hereafter) were "cults" spread as a result of the *Aum* sarin gas incident in March 1995. Soon after the incident, the Kyodo News (共同通信社) published a talk given by Margaret Singer, an American clinical psychologist and expert on cults and mind control, who referred to *Aum* as a "doomsday cult." This association became widespread as the original news article was republished in local newspapers across the nation (Sakurai 2006). After *Aum* became a suspect in the sarin gas attacks, the Japanese media thus began to address the group as a *karuto* group. Sakurai (2006) concludes that this label, *karuto*, then came into more general use as a descriptor for groups that are considered socially problematic due to their group characteristics and activities.

3.3 Consequences of the *Karuto* Label

Before examining what is going on in colleges and local communities, it is important to understand what it means to be labeled a *karuto* in Japanese society. At first, the impact of the *karuto* labeling is reflected in cases of the so-called

"*Aum* kids" (オウムの子, children of the members of *Aum*). The *Asahi Shimbun*
reported in February 24, 2004 on the cases in which the "*Aum* kids" were treated
unfairly by Japanese society (*Asahi Shimbun* 2004:12). For example, one of the
leader's children was once accepted by a private university in Tokyo but was
subsequently rejected without receiving any reasonable explanation.

In another case, the child of a former *Aum* executive was enrolled in a
kindergarten where employees and administrators knew that the child was an
"*Aum* kid" and accepted the child anyway, overcoming the objections raised by
some parents (*Asahi Shimbun* 2004:12). However, the number of applicants for
the kindergarten in the following year decreased due to the presence of the "*Aum*
kid." Thus, the kindergarten administrators requested the child to transfer to a
different kindergarten due to the financial difficulties that apparently resulted. At
the next kindergarten, some parents argued that their children might be "abducted,"
making implicit references to the religious group. However, the child was finally
allowed to stay at the new kindergarten and continue in elementary school in this
next community, but only after numerous discussions with the kindergarten
representatives and other parents. These two examples reveal the public's overt
rejection of children who were once labeled as "*Aum* kids" (or *karuto* children). In
short, "*Aum* kids" is the same as labeling them harmful; it stigmatizes them
unfairly.

The religious studies scholar, Sakurai (2009), describes the impact of
labeling a specific religious group as *karuto* by explaining that this is almost equal
to stigmatizing the group as "committed social deviations" (社会的逸脱を犯し

た宗教). He lists two reasons that the national newspaper, *Asahi*, addressed *Setsuri* as *karuto* in a series of articles published between July and August 2006, one year before the arrest of the leader of *Setsuri*: 1) the leader of *Setsuri* had escaped abroad in 1999 and remained at large for eight years; 2) *Setsuri* recruits students at college campuses without giving them any information about the leader, doctrine, or activities of the group (Sakurai 2009:36-37). As Sakurai points out, national, daily newspapers are usually more careful about their language use than weekly or monthly magazines in general. However, for the above reasons, *Asahi* judged it appropriate to label the *Setsuri* as *karuto* in the series of articles.

The label of *karuto* also creates the nationalistic-paternalistic sense that adult members of Japanese society should confront *karuto* groups, to protect Japanese youth. In an article with the following headline, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* (newspaper) reported the methods used by a *karuto* group (most likely *Setsuri*) to communicate with high school students.

> 洗脳「メールが一番」：カルト勧誘　狙われる高校生
> [Mind control "the email (text message) is the best": the recruitment of the *karuto*, high school students targeted] (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2009)

The article explains what *karuto* actually does by showing some cell phone text messages with *emoji* (絵文字, pictograms) sent by a member of *karuto*. The text messages serve as "coded messages." For example, the icon of an elephant is interpreted as a leader, the sun as a god, and a rice ball as sacred language. The article warns that the pictographic characters can be used as a tool for controlling the mind of the youth while their parents are not aware. The title of the article

convey a strong message that Japanese youth, a subject of *karuto*, should be protected from falling prey to group mind control.

Similarly, the title of the online news article below appears to strengthen the unity of the Japanese public in order to confront a *karuto* by describing the ways in which *karuto* groups try to recruit freshmen as well as preparatory school students. (Zakzak 2013).

> 新入生がカルト集団の餌食に・・・大学や駅で声かけ　予備校生も標的に[Freshman is the prey of a *karuto*—talking to (them) at the station and university. Preparatory school students are also the target.][News article, Zakzak 2013]

As we can see, in the titles, the phrase "prey of *karuto*" (カルト集団の餌食) appears. *Prey* (餌食) has a meaning of "victim" in general, but in this article the word appears to imply a more literal meaning of "becoming the prey of a carnivore." In this way, the article seems to create the image of *karuto* as more violent and dangerous, and even like a carnivorous animal-predator.

As the previous examples show, the *karuto* labels are applied to a particular person or group to highlight their "otherness." Also, the *Aum* kids's suffering demonstrates that if the group is recognized as a *karuto*, its members are also automatically categorized as belonging to the *karuto* without considering the differences of individual behaviors. The following sections examine the firm convictions and sensitive reactions of Japanese society towards *Aum* and other such groups.

3.4 Anti-*Karuto* Activism

The tensions between *karuto* and anti-*karuto* have become severe once again, especially during the past decade, around the time of the *Setsuri* leader's arrest. It is almost like the time right after the *Aum* attack. The anti-*karuto* groups target *karuto*–the Japanese new religions–which they think are harmful to Japanese society. Since *karuto* attempt to recruit the youth who are not familiar with the sarin incident, the recent anti-*karuto* movements have been active, especially on Japanese university campuses as well as in the neighboring areas of the religious facilities. The anti-*karuto* movements have influenced negative images of *karuto*-labeled groups since their voices of objection are ubiquitous in modern Japanese society. In other words, public depictions portraying *Aleph* as a group of murderers to a great extent reflect anti-*karuto* discourses. Thus, in the following sections, I highlight two types of anti-*karuto* activism: 1) universities versus the *karuto* groups and 2) local residents versus the *karuto* groups.

3.4.1 Japanese Universities vs. the *Karuto* Groups

College discourse is a major institutional source in the production and circulation of anti-*karuto* discourses. For the purpose of decreasing the number of students damaged by *karuto* activity, university staff members, counselors and professors specializing in *karuto* issues voluntarily established and organized a network group called the National Anti-Cult University Network (全国カルト対策大学ネットワーク, NAUN hereafter) in 2009 (NAUN 2013; Sakurai 2012; Zakzak 2013). Representatives of approximately 160 universities, or about 20 percent of the total number of public and private universities in Japan, currently

participate in the network, to exchange information about *karuto* organizations (NAUN 2009; *Sankei* 2009; Kawashima 2012).

According to a student support division representative at the Yokohama University, the university has considered various proposals to address students' solicitation-related issues (Zakzak2013). Kubouchi introduces four major countermeasures on *karuto* groups that have taken place on college campuses: 1) distributing or posting notices to alert students about *karuto*, 2) holding lectures such as orientation sessions about *karuto*, 3) interviewing students who are *karuto* members, and 4) contacting guardians of students who belong to *karuto* groups (year:66). In fact, many Japanese universities such as Hokkaido University have specific policies in relation to the *karuto* groups, such as distributing a leaflet entitled "Beware of Solicitation" to students during orientation (Hokkaido University [2013]). Other state universities such as Kobe University also sought to prevent student involvement in *karuto* groups through various methods, including publishing information about *karuto* organizations in their school website (Kobe University [2013]).

Volume 139 of *erumu* (えるむ)–a newsletter of the Student Affairs Council at Hokkaido University (北海道大学学生委員会)–published in 2012, listed four different student counseling offices to aid freshmen adjust to their new college life. The listed offices were: 1) Student Counseling Room, 2) Health Center, 3) Consultation on *Karuto* Related Issues, and 4) Career Center. This suggests that consulting college students on the threat of *karuto* groups is treated at the same level of priority as career related concerns at this institution.

Furthermore, when we take into account the considerable numbers of Japanese universities participating in NAUN, this is not something limited to Hokkaido University but is likely to be a trend in many universities across Japan.

Karuto organizations tend to visit college campuses to try to contact freshmen, especially during the club solicitation (サークル勧誘) period during orientation. Belonging to a club is considered an essential component of the university experience in Japan and a foundation for membership in Japanese society. This is because through various club activities and events, university students are able to build a wide range of relations with other students including alumni or other university students. Thus, club solicitation activities are prominent on Japanese university campuses during the freshman orientation period. Usually, upperclassmen recruit the freshmen to join their clubs by explaining about their activities or inviting the freshmen to a welcome party and so on.

At Hokkaido University, in order to reduce the anxiety of college students, particularly freshmen, student representatives of accredited organizations wear official university armbands (Hokkaido University Student Affairs Council 2008). As university patrols of *karuto* recruitment activities have strengthened, the president of Keisen University as well as a religious studies scholar, Kenji Kawashima, has pointed out that the "dangerous spot" for being contacted by *karuto* members has shifted from campuses to cafeterias or fast food restaurants frequented by college students (Zakzak 2013). Kawashima also warned that a generation of college students who do not really remember *Aum Shinrikyo* are

more likely to be the current target of solicitation by new religious groups

(*Mainichi Shimbun* 2012).

By looking at the anti-*karuto* movements, one can tell that *Aum Shinrikyo* is used as the representative figure in modern Japanese society when it comes to *karuto* groups. The anti-*karuto* movements that have taken place on campuses have an impact similar to that of the circulation of media portrayals: once universities label a group a *karuto*, the group and its members are immediately associated with being dangerous and harmful.

3.4.2 Local Communities vs. the *Karuto* Groups

In this section, I will introduce local residents' strong objections to *Aum* (including *Aleph* and *Hikari no Wa*) presence in their community. In November 2011, *CAST*, a Japanese news program produced by the *Asahi* Broadcasting Corporation, broadcast the end of the *Aum* trials, which lasted for 16 years after the sarin gas attack. The program captures the present circumstances of a neighborhood in Tokyo that contains a religious building belonging to *Hikari no Wa* (derived from *Aum*). The neighborhood is also home to a number of residents who have united in their opposition to the religious group.

One of the more memorable scenes depicts "hate slogans" hanging on an apartment across from a religious facility belonging to *Hikari no Wa* in Setagaya-

ku, Tokyo. The use of the first-person plural pronoun *wareware*[5] (我々, we) in the

first slogan in Figure 13 creates a sense of solidarity.

[1] We Will Not Forget About The **Sarin Incident**!
[2] Even After Changing (Your) Name, *Aum* Is ***Aum***.
[3] Do Not Make Your Parents Cry! Let's Return Home After **Leaving The Group Behind**."

FIGURE 13. Conclusion of the Trials: What was *Aum*? (1) by Asahi Broadcasting
Corporation, 2011a. [Red letters in bold]

It seems reasonable to suggest that *wareware* indicates not only the residents

living in the apartment with the slogans but also the entire community where

Hikari no Wa resides. Furthermore, the meaning of *wareware* here can be

understood to extend to the entire Japanese society. In other words, the text

appears to create the framework of *wareware* versus an Other-*Aum*. The text

implies that "we" as Japanese people will remember and will never forgive what

Aum (or *Aleph* or *Hikari no Wa*) has done. Then, the second slogan shows that

even though *Hikari no Wa* changed its name from *Aum*, people will not change

their opinions about the group since it is derived from *Aum*.

In contrast to the first and second slogans expressing criticism, the third

slogan uses persuasive, suggestive tones. In Japanese society, adults making their

parents cry is considered an extremely immature and inappropriate behavior. This

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[5] The literary and formal expression *wareware* (我々) is less commonly used than
watashitachi (私達), today.

attitude derives from the Confucian moral value of *xiao* (孝 "filial piety"),[6] prescribing that children should appreciate, respect, and take care of their parents (Goldin 2011). In this case, the concept seems to be used in the slogan to convince the *karuto* members to leave the group. The imperative form *nakaseruna* (泣かせるな, do not make [someone] cry) should be interpreted as a suggestion rather than a command, by considering the presence of the volitional form *kaero* (帰ろう, let's return) in the following sentence.

The red texts[7] in the slogan in Figure 13 deliver the profound, vivid message for viewers of this news. Included in the message is the statement that *Aum* (or *Aleph* or *Hikari no Wa*) is equivalent to the sarin incident, so members have to leave the group. As the members of *Aleph* are known for living together in their facilities, the *ie* (家, home) contained in the slogan can be translated to the literal meaning of "home"–a sense of belonging. However, "home" is not just a place of abode but it can also be interpreted as a place where one's parents live as well as symbolizing Japanese society as a whole. Thus, one can infer that the text message "let's return home" is used to encourage *Aum* members to rejoin Japanese society. The text carries a message that the local people (or Japanese people in general) believe that the members of *Aum* or other such groups can change and do the "right" thing. All three slogans appear to contain emotive messages and connotations. Although the slogans begin with accusative messages,

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[6] It is called *koukou* (孝行 "filial piety") in Japanese society.

[7] In Japan, the red text is often used to signify and emphasize important matters, such as caution (including a danger and a warning), prohibition, and opposition.

they end with a sense of optimism and hope for the future. This appears to reflect local people's (or Japanese people's) attitudes that they are willing to reconcile with members who resign from *karuto*.

The next slogan in Figure 14 televised by ABC contains messages critical of *Hikari no Wa*.
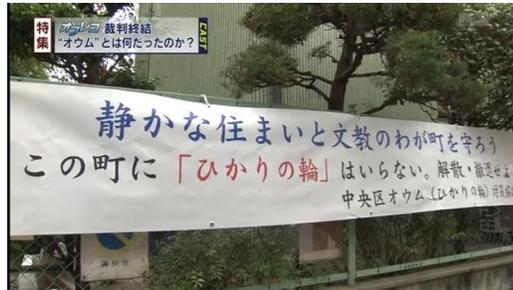
FIGURE 14. Conclusion of the Trials: What was *Aum*? (2) by *Asahi* Broadcasting Corporation, 2011a.

> "Let's protect the quiet (peaceful) residence and my town.
> No need for "*Hikari no Wa*" in this town. Dissolve and withdraw!"
> [Chuo-ku Residents' Council on *Aum Shinrikyo* (*Hikari no Wa*)
> Countermeasures]

The possessive form used in *wa ga*[8] *machi* (わが町, my or our town) serves to create a clear boundary separating "others" (members of *Aum* and other such groups) who are not expected to belong there. Moreover, *wa ga* precedes a (proper) noun and implies that a speaker feels familiar with and proud of the person or the thing (Goo Dictionary 2014) being addressed. Hence, along with the use of the verb *mamoro* (守ろう, protect), the slogan appears to inspire the residents with nationalistic-paternalistic spirit.

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[8] It is a possessive pronoun and means "my" or "our." *Waga* is a very formal speech style and is used less frequently than *watashi no* (my) or *watashitachi no* (our).

The text reflects the residents' firm and uncompromising attitudes of not welcoming the religious group and considering it as a harmful entity that could possibly destroy the peaceful community. The slogan ends with a strict tone by the use of the imperative form in *kaisan, tettai-seyo* (解散・撤退せよ, dissolve and withdraw). The imperative tone not only helps demonstrate local people's firm attitudes toward *Hikari no Wa* (and other such groups) but also intensifies tensions between the group and residents.

Once a month, the leader of *Hikari no Wa*, Fumihiro Joyu, has a gathering to deliver the teachings of Buddhism in the Osaka branch. At the time of the monthly gatherings, local residents in the Chuo-ku area in Osaka consistently protested against *Hikari no Wa*, as shown in Figure 15.

FIGURE 15. Mr. Joyu Is…Believers' Present Situation by Asahi Broadcasting Corporation, 2011b.

["*Hikarino Wa*, stop the teachings! Stop the teachings!"]

Their images and voices were aired with a caption, "*Hikarino Wa*, stop the teachings! Stop the teachings!" This captured image conveys the desperation of the local people. It is important to consider why the local residents so desperately reject the *Hikari no Wa*, which had officially separated from the *Aum* (and *Aleph*) group. In order to understand the basis of the conflict between the *karuto* and the

anti-*karuto* movements, it is necessary to examine the stance taken by the local people with regards to NRMs.

Below is a comment from the president of Chuo-ku Residents' Council on *Aum Shinrikyo* (or *Hikari no Wa*) Countermeasures (中央区オウム真理教対策協議会) in Osaka, indicating why the local people protest.

> "オウム＝無差別（テロ）と頭において行動している。どういう理由でどういう形で我々に被害があるかわからないので。" ["As we take action by regarding *Aum* as equivalent to indiscriminate terrorists. As there might be any damage to us in any form and in any reason."] (by Hirokichi Yamane, the President of Chuo-ku Residents' Council on *Aum Shinrikyo* (or *Hikari no Wa*) Countermeasures, Osaka, 2011)

When asked if the complaints were noise-related[9], he immediately said no. The captured image in Figure 14 and his comment demonstrate the vague anxieties of local people who are still suffering from the traumatic aftershock from the sarin incident, in the sense that they fear the tragedy might be repeated. These strong symbolic residues are frequently evoked to become the basis of the massive gap between the Japanese public and the groups labeled *karuto*.

In sum, this chapter analyzed various discourses related to *karuto* organizations. For the most part, the media's stereotypical portrayals of *Aum*, introduced in Chapter 1, are directly reflected in the ways through which public perceives *Aleph*. Although *Aleph* publicly apologized to the victims of the sarin gas attacks and also announced its change in doctrine at a press conference[10] after

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[9] *Aum Shinrikyo* has received several complaints about noise (in Kamikuishiki village, Yamanashi) and stench (in Kameido, Tokyo) from local residents in the past.

[10] More details about the press conference are found in the next chapter (4.3.1).

the group was established (*Aleph* 2000), its continuing bad reputation appears to have facilitated anti-*karuto* activism. In order to analyze confrontations between the Japanese public and *Aleph* and other such groups, this chapter focused on two types of anti-*karuto* activism: 1) universities versus the *karuto* groups and 2) local residents versus the *karuto* groups. This analysis demonstrated that people generally do not make fine distinctions between *Aum* and other such groups and view them categorically as a whole, as socially harmful *karuto* groups. The following chapter describes *Aleph*'s attempt to present itself as a group that is not a *karuto*, most likely expecting that the public will figure out that *Aum* and *Aleph* are two different entities.

Chapter 4: Shifting Images Away from *Karuto* Associations

Chapter 3 describes *Aleph*'s effort to present itself as a non-*karuto*
organization, hoping that the public will not associate it with the bad reputation of
Aum. The first section illustrates the ways in which *Aleph* is recognized by the
Japanese public, by examining people's use of *Aum* terms. Then, the concept of
the "frame" is employed to examine the overall strategy of *Aleph* to shift the
public's conception of *Aleph* from that of a problematic group to a harmless one.
In the end, discourses from *Aum* and *Aleph* are compared to and contrasted
against each other in order to examine the terms in which *Aleph* has redefined
itself to be accepted by the mainstream Japanese public.

4.1 Public Representations of *Aleph*

News reports about incidents involving *Aum Shinrikyo* have contributed to
the spread of *Aum* terms across Japanese society. Due to the way these terms have
circulated in the mass media, Japanese people not only became familiar with but
also gained access to the unique terms originally used by *Aum* members. By
examining the ways in which the *Aum* terms are used by Japanese people, this
section illustrates the connection between language use and public representations
of *Aleph*.

One of the *Aum* terms, *satian* (サティアン, satyam)–derived from the
Sanskrit word for "supreme truth"–refers to the religious facilities of *Aum
Shinrikyo* located around the Kamikuishiki village in Yamanashi prefecture, an

Aum base at the time of the 1995 sarin gas attacks. *Aum* members including the leader, Asahara, lived in the *satian* and trained there. Each *satian* had its own function. For example, inside the seventh *satian* (第七サティアン) in the Kamikuishiki village, some of the *Aum* members produced the toxic sarin gas. In addition, inside the *satian* buildings, large quantities of chemicals and drugs were found during police investigations after the *Aum* incident. It was also reported that in 1993 *Aum* began to conduct research on nuclear weapons in the *satian*, in addition to producing automatic rifles and chemical weapons (*Hikari no Wa* 2009). Consequently, the term *satian* tends to have negative and dangerous impressions for the Japanese public.

Speakers' thoughts are often reflected in their use of words. Therefore, studying the use of *Aum* terms in the public helps clarify the public's value judgments about *Aum* and other *karuto* religious groups. For example, on September 14, 2012, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* published some comments made by a politician, Nobuteru Ishihara, during a live morning show, *Mino Monta no Asa Zuba!* (みのもんたの朝ズバッ！), which the Tokyo Broadcasting System Television, Incorporated (TBS テレビ) had aired the day before. On the TV show, Ishihara commented on dealing with contaminated soil, created by Fukushima's nuclear power plant disaster, which was being piled up in the corner of the schoolyard in Koriyama city in the Fukushima prefecture. (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2012).

「もう運ぶところは、福島原発の第１**サティアン**のとこ
ろしかないと思う」["I think the first ***satian*** of the
Fukushima nuclear power plant is the only place to carry the

contaminated soils."] [Bold, added] (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 14, 2012)

Ishihara later explained to reporters that he intended to say, *fukushima daiichi genpatsu* (福島第一原発, Fukushima's first nuclear power plant) and that using the wrong word was his mistake. He seems to have explained his comment to reporters because the public could perceive his comments as lacking consideration for both the victims of the sarin gas attacks and the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. (*Yomiuri* 2012; *Sankei* 2012; J-Cast 2012).

Three months after his comment, in December 2012, Ishihara apologized again. He explained that it was inappropriate, and that he should have said *saito* (サイト, site) rather than *satian* (*Sankei* 2012). Although he appeared to try to clarify the misuse of *satian* as simply his mistake due to the first consonant and vowel "sa" rhyme which is shared between the two words, this slip-of-the-tongue does not appear to be a mere accident. Regardless of his intentions, his particular word choice shows that the term *satian* might imply "something dangerous." This is similar to the case of the word "nuclear power plant" that can index the harmful radioactive material leak during the natural disaster in March 2011. More specifically, his "simple" word choice mistake might have come from the fact that *Aum* created the toxic sarin gas inside its religious facilities–*satian*.

In addition to the harmful, negative connotation of *satian*, the term is also used in a semantically reanalyzed, expanded way (Agha 2006). For example, in the question-and-answer boards on Japan's first Q&A community site, OKWave[11],

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[11] <http://okwave.jp/>

which two million people participate in, a user mentioned *satian* as a term that had become the center of attention at that time.

> 『サティアン』・・・修行場。（極限にひどい職場も、そう呼称された。）["*Satian*… The place for ascetic training. (An egregious workplace was also referred to as "*satian*.")] (OKWave 2012)

The user invoked not only the original meaning of *satian*, but also the ways in which the Japanese people had adapted the term to daily life situations. Introducing the *Aum* term online is also an example of the ways in which languages and associated impressions circulate through the media. More specifically, the generations who are familiar with *Aum* pass on their views and impressions on *Aum*-related issues to newer generations who do not know about the group. Only the selected views are in circulation, and this selectivity ends up creating stereotypical images of *Aum* devoid of historical context. In other words, non-denotational, contextual meanings ultimately come to define the word.

In summary, the above examples indicate that through semantic analysis, the term *satian* can be used to describe a place in dreadful, contaminated, or at least less favorable environments. Furthermore, the language use reflects public depictions and beliefs about *Aum* and other such groups in mainstream Japanese society. Circulation of *Aum*'s bad reputation, reflected in the use of images and languages in mainstream Japanese society, appears to have become *Aleph*'s motivation to endeavor to change the way the public perceives the group. By using the concept of the frame, the following sections explain the dynamic shift of *Aleph* from a *karuto* group to an ordinary one.

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4.2 Frame

The following section describes the *karuto* frame by referring to a caricature in volume 127 of *erumu* (えるむ), a newsletter published in 2008 by the Student Affairs Council (学生委員会), an officially recognized group at Hokkaido University, which essentially warns students about solicitation by *karuto* groups. The concept of the *frame* was introduced by anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972 [1955]) to illustrate contexts in which social interaction takes place. His analysis helps us understand that depending on the frame, meanings and understandings of religious activities and practices can vary.

4.2.1 *Karuto* Frame

The title of the leaflet below, "'Beware!' of Solicitations by '*Karuto*' Organizations!" (「カルト」団体の勧誘に‘ご注意’！) (Figure 16) indicates that this is an interaction between *karuto* members and the non-*karuto* person and that the university firmly opposes religious solicitation on campus.

FIGURE 16. 'Beware!' of Solicitations by '*Karuto*' Organizations! (「カルト」団体の勧誘に"ご注意"！）by *Erumu* vol.127, Student Affairs Council at Hokkaido University, 2008.

This sets up the *karuto* frame and shares this frame with participants (or readers). Meta-messages indicating that "this is the *karuto*'s solicitation" have been sent and exchanged among the participants. This guides the participants to interpret and understand all other verbal and non-verbal messages, within the limits of the *karuto* frame (Bateson 1972 [1955]).

The contrast between the barrage of questions from the *karuto* solicitor and the speechless female, most likely representing the university students, creates and strengthens the striking, stereotypical images of *karuto* groups versus non-*karuto* groups. As noticed, the eyeballs of all *karuto* members were omitted as if an important part of them, such as their own inner feelings, was missing. Through a multitude of eyeless faces, the caricature depicts a suspicious, uneasy mood, suggesting that the real purpose and feelings of the *karuto* members are concealed. Also, the fact that the female student does not talk appears to demonstrate that the *karuto* members practice a pushy, one-way form of communication. Furthermore, in the caricature two people are holding the female's arms. Considering that physically touching is rare, especially during first-time encounters in Japan, *karuto* members are being portrayed as unusual and lacking in common sense.

This leaflet was mainly created for university students, but the *karuto* figures seem to include presentations of some non-traditional university students. For instance, a middle-aged woman, holding the female's arm, might represent a neighbor. Similarly, a man wearing a suit could represent a non-student adult in general or an alumnus, since wearing a suit on campus is uncommon among

university students. The university might have included such non-traditional figures to alert readers that *karuto* members can be everywhere including in the students' neighborhoods or work environments, in addition to the campus community.

In the caricature, various, one-sided questions and comments are directed to the female as shown below.

[Comments begin from the right side top and continue clockwise.]

1.　世界は滅びるっ。君は何も思わないのか。
[The world will be ruined. Don't you feel anything?]

2.　背後霊が見えるわヨ。今すぐお祓いに行きましょ。
[I can see evil spirits behind you. Let's go to exorcise them immediately.]

3.　正直さーこんな時代じゃん？不安とかない？
[Honestly, it is such a (precarious) time. Don't you have any uneasy feeling?]

4.　無料よ!今回だけ!
[No charge! This time only!]

5.　マジかわいい子しか入れないサークルでえす。
[This is a club that only seriously cute girls can join.]

6.　よりよい生き方研究会
[A study group for the better life.]

7.　あなた見所あるわよ!うちのセミナー受ければ伸びるって。
[You are a promising (youth). If you come to our seminar, you will progress.]

[*Erumu* vol.127, Student Affairs Council at Hokkaido University, 2008]

Typical or direct, religion-related words such as "dogma" or "practices" do not appear in the questions and comments from the *karuto* members. Discourses in the *karuto* frame attempt to extend ideas of what religious solicitation is like in

the real world, by inserting keywords and concepts that the creators of such caricatures consider to be frequent, such as eschatology (#1 in the above example), spiritualism (#2), and group activities (#4-7).

The facial expressions of the female depict that she is too overwhelmed to say anything. The background has two contrasting colors. The black color is used on the right side and the white color on the left. On the right side, *karuto* members attempt to appeal to the female by playing up her insecurity and negative feelings (#1-3 in the above example). In contrast, on the left side, the positive attitudes are used to recruit her (#4-7). This illustration establishes the genre (the forms and characteristics) of discourses related to "*karuto*'s solicitation" by listing what might be considered "typical" phrases uttered by the *karuto* members. Furthermore, it alerts the students that both negative and positive approaches can be used during the "*karuto*'s solicitation."

In addition to the positive and negative approaches depicted in Figure 16, the university appears to extend the concept of the *karuto* frame by including what might be called a typical, "friendly talk" uttered during the "*karuto*'s solicitation" in the campus areas. The text below shows up right after Figure 16 in the original leaflet.

Daigaku no konai de "Dono kamoku o rishu suru ka <u>kime-ta</u>? Bokutachi,
                                                                                    decide-PT.PLAIN

Hokkaido no shizen hogo no katsudo o <u>yatterun-da</u> kedo issho ni
                                                                    doing-COP.PLAIN

<u>*yar-anai*</u>*? Issho ni sakka o <u>shi-yo-yo</u>" nado to shitashige ni sasowaretara,*
 do-will you.PLAIN   *do-let's*.PLAIN-FP.PLAIN

toriaezu kaito wa horyu.

[Symbols used: COP (copula), FP (final particle), PT (past tense), PLAIN (plain form)]

"Sakuru no dantaimei・daihyosha wa? Hiyo wa? Basho wa? Gutaiteki ni donna katsudo?" to toikaeshite kudasai. Moshi, aite no kotae ga yoryo o enai mono da ttara tadachi ni NO! Saisho no setsumei to chigattekita ra, shitashiku natteite mo, sugu ni NO!

["Did you decide which classes to register for? We are doing the activities for nature conservation in Hokkaido. Why don't we do it together? Let's play soccer together." At a college campus if you are invited in such friendly ways, you should reserve your replies for the time being.

Please ask him or her back, "What's the organization name? Who is the representative of the club? Approximate cost, place, and what kinds of activities do they involve?" If you find the answers are not so clear, then your reply should immediately be "no"! Even if you are already getting closer to them, if you find something is different from what you heard at first, then your answer should immediately be "no"!]

[*Erumu* vol.127, Student Affairs Council at Hokkaido University, 2008]

One of the noteworthy features of this exchange is its informal character, as evidenced by the fact that it does not use the *desu/masu*[12] style. The choice of *desu/masu* styles in Japanese discourse depends on the formality of the situation. For instance, the *desu/masu* style is commonly seen during interactions with casual acquaintances, such as when interactants are not especially intimate or their hierarchical relationship is not clear (Maynard 1993). Maynard points out that during daily conversations between close friends or college students, the non-use of *desu/masu* is preferred because for the most part, daily conversations emphasize intimacy, and thus the speakers consistently avoid the use of *desu/masu*.

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[12] *desu*=the polite form of a copula da; *masu*=the polite suffix for verbs

Similarly, in the leaflet example, the language is exclusively in the non-*desu/masu* style, which helps create an intimate mood to more easily establish a close relationship between the interactants. As the above example of what might be called a "friendly talk" shows, the discourses cannot be comprehended separately from their framing. That is, the social meaning of discourses should be considered within the flowing contexts of their utterance. For instance, the above "friendly talk" might just sound like an ordinary conversation between university students in other frames, but within the *karuto* frame, it is portrayed as one of the "*karuto*'s solicitation" techniques for creating intimate friendships without overtly presenting religious aspects.

4.2.2 *Aum* Frame

In the same way as *satian*, many other *Aum* terms are in circulation in contemporary Japanese society, and their meaning has expanded. By using another well-known term, *poa* (ポア), this section further illustrates the ways in which the interpretation of words depends on the frame shared with participants. In esoteric Tibetan Buddhism, *poa* refers to moving the soul from one's own flesh into Buddha in order to accomplish a peaceful death (Masaki 2001). However, the leader, Asahara, twisted its meanings and taught his followers that to kill those who commit misdeeds allows them (those who are killed) to go to heaven, so that killing them ultimately helps them be reincarnated in heaven–"salvation murder" (救済殺人). Consequently, *poa* in *Aum Shinrikyo* meant "to kill for salvation,"

which was used to justify committing murder under the name of the "salvation murder."

The example below indicates that this term is also part of non-*Aum* members' active vocabulary, even 17 years after the sarin gas attacks. After the arrest of an *Aum* member in January 6, 2012, the *Sankei Shimbun* quoted the governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, commenting on the *Aum* leader's ordering of an executive to kill him.

> Headline: 平田容疑者逮捕　石原知事　「私もポアされかかった」
> [An arrest of the suspect, Hirata. Governor, Ishihara, said "I was almost *poa*-ed (the passive form of *poa*)."]
>
> Text: 「私も殺されかかった。　"ポアしろ"って言われて」
> [I was almost killed (by an *Aum* executive). [As] the executive was ordered "to *poa*" (me by the leader).] (*Sankei Shimbun*, January 6, 2012) [Quotation marks, added]

Technically speaking, this is a "voicing" (Bakhtin 1981): by uttering "to *poa*" (ポアしろ) in the comment, the governor might simply be indirectly quoting the leader by reproducing his voice. However, the fact that the word *poa* stands alone in the article without any further explanation about its significance, and even appears in the news headline, indicates that the governor and the news media employed *poa*, assuming that the Japanese public would recognize the term and its concept.

The suspect's name, "Hirata," in the headline above, also helps create the frame because Japanese people recognize this name as the wanted *Aum* member, Makoto Hirata. Although the readers of this article receive messages that this is an *Aum* frame, non-members would not interpret *poa* exactly the same way as the

Aum members. For instance, for non-members, *poa* comes with some negative

connotations, such as harmful and illegal conduct, rather than being associated

with accumulating good deeds. In other words, the term *poa* developed a negative

meaning and is being used and perceived pejoratively in the public.

As already observed in the above example, the term *poa* has been

reanalyzed semantically over time (Agha 2006) and has eventually developed

different meanings, in addition to the *Aum*-linked meaning of "to kill for

salvation." For example, *poa* in the subtitle of a clip of *Aum*'s animated

propaganda cartoon posted on the You Tube website is used in a broad sense.

> オウム真理教布教アニメ（吹いたらポア）
> Missionary Cartoons of *Aum Shinrikyo* (If you happen to
> laugh, you will be poa-ed [or you are not allowed to
> laugh.]) [You Tube, 2012]

This example shows that *poa* does not necessarily refer to "actually killing

someone," but in this context, it can be interpreted as "to hurt" or "to give a hard

time" in this context. Hence, the overall meaning of the title is that you are not

allowed to laugh by watching this "interesting" clip. By looking at its title and the

content of the clip, the viewers agree and accept "this is the *Aum* frame" and also

exchange the meta-message that this is more likely a joke by mocking the *Aum*

term. This twisted, mock use of *poa* has a somewhat comical, non-serious tone.

Therefore, *poa* in this article does not appear to carry any memories of the violent

or dangerous associations of *Aum*, but rather is intended to ridicule the You Tube

clip as well as its creator, *Aum Shinrikyo*.

Besides, *poa* can also appear in contexts entirely unrelated to *Aum* as

shown in the following example. In the question and answer boards on Japan's

Q&A community site–OKWave, an explanatory comment of *poa* presented the expanded use of *poa* in the past.

> 以前職場で失敗した同僚に対して
> 「お前はポアだなｗ、うむポアだｗ、ぎゃーポアされるｗ」
> といった感じのやりとりが流行ったことがある。
> [To colleagues who failed in a workplace, this type of exchange
> was popular before, "you will be *poa*-ed LOL. Right, it is *poa* LOL.
> Oh my, you will be *poa*-ed."] (OKWave 2012)

The above phrases including *poa* can be translated into, "You are dead LOL. You will be kicked out LOL. Oh my, you are going to be dead LOL." Within the frame of the "workplace," *poa* is translatable into something like "to be dead" or "to be kicked out." Examples used in this section show that meanings of words are not fixed and can be expanded and change through time. In summary, words can go through semantic reanalysis over time and have different meanings, depending on the framing of situations.

Tannen cited the concept of *structures of expectations* by Ross (1975) and explains that "on the basis of one's experience of the world in a given culture (or combination of cultures), one organizes knowledge about the world and uses this knowledge to predict interpretations and relationships regarding new information, events and experiences" (Tannen 1993:16). Different ideas of what is going on in *Aleph* (or what *Aleph* does) exist in Japanese society, and it appears to only make sense for the public to refer to the closest, most familiar aspect of these practices–those stereotypically linked to *Aum Shinrikyo*. The previous frame analysis shows that the public tends to understand *Aleph* within the *karuto* (or *Aum*) frame without making clear distinctions between *Aum* and other such groups. In response, *Aleph* appears to have sought to shift public discourses from the *karuto*

frame to a mainstream frame in order to dispel the *Aum* images. In the larger

picture, *Aleph* seems to aim to influence the mainstream public to reanalyze (Agha

2006) its group identity and practices.

4.3 Dispelling Negative Associations

As shown in the previous sections, through the eyes of the Japanese public,

Aleph tends to be categorized as a *karuto* group and understood within the *karuto*

frame. However, the recent, rapid increase in the number of converts might

suggest that *Aleph* has been successfully shifting its image from *karuto*

associations and reconstructing its self-images, attracting more people.

The following sections examine the ways in which *Aleph* attempts to

induce the Japanese public to reinterpret or reanalyze (Agha 2006) its religious

practices and precepts, in order to shift public discourses on the group from an

illicit *karuto* frame to more acceptable, mainstream socio-cultural frames

(Bateson 1972 [1955]; Goffman 1974, 1981; Tannen 1993).

4.3.1 Symbolic Images and Discourses

At the press conference for the establishment of *Aleph* (2000), the group

officially announced its separation from the former leader and his dangerous

preaching. On the other hand, Fumihiro Joyu (2009), the former representative for

Aleph and also the current representative for *Hikari no Wa*, argued that *Aleph*'s

declaration of being completely divorced from Asahara's preaching was not true.

Hikari no Wa (2008; 2011) feels strongly responsible for what *Aum* (and *Aleph*)

has been doing and has declared that the group strives to solve many existing

Aleph (or *Aum*) related problems, by summarizing and reflecting on *Aum*'s past

conduct.

By referring to descriptions of *Aum Shinrikyo* posted on the official

website of the *Aum*-derived religious group *Hikari no Wa* (2010; 2012), this

section examines features of *Aleph*'s discourses, removed and inserted since the

Aum era. The reason for using the *Hikari no Wa* website is based on a judgment

that of *Aum*'s primary doctrines are described more concretely than the original

source produced by *Aum*. This is because *Hikari no Wa* (2008; 2011) has

attempted to clarify the errors of the doctrines of *Aleph* (or *Aum*) in order to

prevent people from converting to *Aleph* without knowing the group's activities

and also to promote the withdrawal of *Aleph* believers from the group. I excerpted

and summarized *Aum Shinrikyo*'s primary doctrines and precepts and translated

them into English, below:

1) Under the "deification" (神格化) of the leader, Asahara was the absolute
   leader, like god incarnate, to his followers.

2) *Shi* (priests, 師) who mastered the *kundalini* yoga, give lectures to the *Aum*
   members and guide them.

3) Various initiations empower *Aum* members, and hard training will purify
   their bad *karma* built from their *akugo* (悪業, bad conducts).

4) *Aum* members' control of their desires by following Buddhist philosophy
   was considered important.

5) Under *harumagedon* (ハルマゲドン, Armageddon), the end of the world
   caused by destructive war, *Aum*'s leader sought to recruit young followers
   by making public his apocalyptic thoughts.

   [*Hikari no Wa* 2009, 2012]

In contrast to *Aum*, the hard training required during the *Aum* era is not emphasized in *Aleph*, and the official *Aleph* website's introduction page described the group's training method to be as effective (効果的な修行法). Furthermore, *Aleph*'s separation from Asahara's dangerous preaching is reflected in the fact that along with some doctrinal statements inherited from *Aum*, particular portrayals associated with *Aum*, such as the headgear; high-priced, enigmatic initiations; and the *Aum* term, are not published (at least on its official website[13]). The following section further examines the ways in which *Aleph* inserts or removes certain elements, most likely aiming to attract the mainstream population.

4.3.2 Propaganda Cartoons

Goffman's concept of the "frame" (1974, 1981) will enable me to examine *Aleph*'s discourse strategies. Goffman shows that frames are fundamental cognitive structures that are consciously or unconsciously adopted by participants to help them understand discourse and representations of reality. By comparing features from *Aleph*'s comic strips with *Aum*'s animated propaganda cartoons, this section examines the ways in which *Aleph* tries to lead the public to understand its language, symbols, bodily practices, and rituals within a mainstream frame.

Aleph comic strips presented on its official website have adopted the *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu* (起承転結, beginning-development-twist-conclusion) narrative

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[13] During on-site inspections in 2012, portraits of Asahara as well as many teaching materials incorporating his preaching were found in all of the *Aleph*'s facilities (Public Security Intelligence Agency 2012).

structure with which Japanese people are familiar. Hinds (1980) quoted Takemata

(1976) to describe the concept of *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu*, structures and developments

of contemporary Japanese writing, which originated in classical Chinese poetry

(Hinds 1980):

> (*ki*) First, begin one's argument.
>
> (*shoo*) Next, develop that.
>
> (*ten*) At the point where this development is finished, turn the idea to a subtheme where there is a connection, but not a directly connected association (to the major theme).
>
> (*ketsu*) Last, bring all of this together and reach a conclusion.
>
> [Hinds 1980: 132]

The protagonist of the following story is a female. This is the narrative

stage of *ki* where an event happens, which leads to the beginning of a story.

FIGURE 17. Narrative Stage of *Ki* (1) by *Aleph*.
[I had a partner. I believed our good relationship would last.]
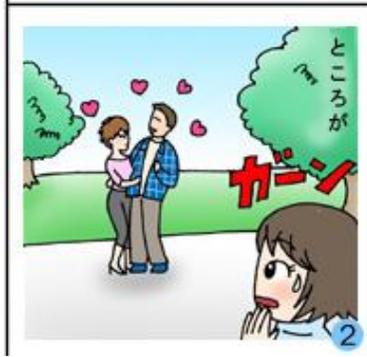
FIGURE 18. Narrative Stage of *Ki* (2) by *Aleph*.
[However…]

The readers can easily deduce the plot by looking at the title, "After

overcoming suffering from a broken heart, my destiny changed for the better"

(Figure 17). The protagonist experiences a significant event at the beginning of

the story. In this story, witnessing her boyfriend with another female leads her to a

bad future. She narrates, "I had a partner" and "I believed our good relationship

would last" (Figure 17) and continues "However …" (Figure 18).

The second narrative stage is *shoo*, in which the event in the *ki* stage is

further developed.

FIGURE 19. Narrative Stage of *Sho* (1) by *Aleph*.
[Who is this girl!]

FIGURE 20. Narrative Stage of *Sho* (2) by *Aleph.*
["Going out with you was a rehearsal as I've never been with a woman before. Your face is not my type. You don't have a good figure. I'll break up with you as now I can date the favorite woman."]

FIGURE 21. Narrative Stage of *Sho* (3) by *Aleph.*
[Then, he left her. "See you!"] [Onomatopoeia expressing her shock used]

FIGURE 22. Narrative Stage of *Sho* (4) by *Aleph.*
[Everyday, I quaffed liquor until almost becoming an alcoholic and played games. "Go!" Speaking frankly, I have had a nervous breakdown.]

She is very upset at her boyfriend (Figure 19). Her boyfriend throws a series of

serious critiques at her and leaves her (Figure 20, 21). In the next segment, some

changes take place in her life (Figure 22). This shows that she drinks too much

liquor, plays video games everyday, uses vulgar language, and has a nervous

breakdown.

The following strip illustrates the third narrative stage, *ten*, where the life

twist further devolves.

FIGURE 23. Narrative Stage of *Ten* (1) by *Aleph*.
[One day, I have neither dream nor hope, and even thinking about
committing suicide…"huh? This book is?"] [The book entitled *Aleph*]

FIGURE 24. Narrative Stage of *Ten* (2) by *Aleph*.
[I want to get out of my current condition! I began to practice with the
feeling that a drowning man will catch at a straw.]

She is carrying a bag of liquor, has neither dreams nor hope, and is even thinking

about committing suicide (Figure 23). One day, however, she has a fateful

encounter with a book called *Aleph* (Figure 23). Wanting to escape her bad

situation, she begins to practice (Figure 24).

In the final stage of *ketsu*, the narrative usually reaches a result or conclusion. This thesis describes this stage as "resolution."

FIGURE 25. Narrative Stage of *Ketsu* (1) by *Aleph.*
[Then, my broken heart calmed little by little and became lighter and brighter as I have never experienced before.]

FIGURE 26. Narrative Stage of *Ketsu* (2) by *Aleph*
[I changed my perspective on the world by learning the teachings. "The cause of pain… I see now, it's that kind of thing."]

FIGURE 27. Narrative Stage of *Ketsu* (3) by *Aleph.*
[I received an award of a million yen (or 10,000 dollars) in return for my volunteer work. "Really! I received a million yen!"]

FIGURE 28. Narrative Stage of *Ketsu* (4) by *Aleph.*
[Besides, I got a kind, nice boyfriend who leads me. Now, I train together with him.]

FIGURE 29. Narrative Stage of *Ketsu* (5) by *Aleph.*
[No matter what sorts of tragedy happens, you will be able to become happy as long as you do practice.]

After the fateful encounter with *Aleph* and its Buddhist practices, the protagonist's mental status stabilizes (Figure 25). She also changes her perspective on the world and begins to understand the cause of her pain (Figure 26). In addition, the protagonist receives an award of a million yen (or 10,000 dollars) in return for her volunteer work (Figure 27). She gets a new, kind, and handsome boyfriend who understands her, and now she trains together with him (Figure 28). In the last segment, the protagonist states her opinion about her life and practices: "No matter what sort of tragedy happens, you will be able to become happy as long as you do practice" (Figure 29). In the stage of *ketsu*, her achievements are described

as the natural outcome of her religious practices, rather than the outcome of her active pursuit of individual good and happiness.

By comparing and contrasting *Aleph* with features from *Aum*, the rest of this section analyzes the ways in which *Aleph* tries to shift public discourses from the *karuto* frame to a mainstream frame in order to seek public acceptance as well as new converts. For example, in cartoon clips produced by *Aum Shirikyo*, an idealized Asahara is usually either the protagonist or the narrator. Even when a cartoon gives the first impression that an *Aum* member is the protagonist, Asahara frequently appears inside the plot and plays an important role to save the protagonist, such as in the episode of *Divine Hearing* (天耳通) in *Transcendent Divine Power* (超越神力). In short, he is depicted as the Savior who has preternatural powers and leads *Aum* believers to happiness. Thus, the stories emphasize his preternatural powers, such as images of the leader floating in air (Figure 30) or his skills to make himself invisible (Figure 31), such as in the episodes in *This is the Transcendent Divine Power of the Holy Master* (これが尊師の超越神力).

FIGURE 30. This is the Transcendent Divine Power of the Holy Master (1) by *Aum Shinrikyo.*

FIGURE 31. This is the Transcendent Divine Power of the Holy Master (2) by *Aum Shinrikyo.*

As shown in the previous examples, most *Aum* cartoons appear to be designed to display Asahara's superhuman, divine powers–"transcendent divine power" (超越神力)–from the members' perspectives.

The "transcendent divine power" tends to be demonstrated through uncommon events in the stories. For example, in episode Part 5, entitled *Farewell* (別れ), in *This is the Transcendent Divine Power of the Holy Master* (これが尊師の超越神力) (2012), the leader hears "thank you," in the voice of his friend Kalu Rinpoche, a Buddhist monk. Asahara and his followers fly to India to see Rinpoche because they think the Buddhist monk might be dying. When they arrive, they find that Rinpoche has already passed away. To the local monks surprised at their quick visit, the leader explains that he knew about the loss of his friend because he has "transcendent divine power."

In the animated cartoons made by *Aum Shinrikyo*, the *Aum* theme songs are often used either before or after the plots. Also, many Buddhist terminologies frequently appear in both the songs and the plots, such as *jinsokutsu* (神足通, unimpeded bodily function) and *tennitsu* (天耳通, divine hearing)–two of the six supernatural powers in Buddhism (六神通). As a result, in some cases,

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understanding certain speeches, narrations, or lyrics seems to be difficult due to their frequent use of esoteric Buddhist terminologies.

By contrast, features seen in *Aleph*'s online comic strips differ from *Aum* cartoons in that they feature ordinary people as principal characters. These ordinary people deal with mundane issues and include a young female suffering from a broken heart (shown in the above example) and a mother of an infant who developed mastitis.[14] More specifically, *Aleph*'s discourses are characterized by very common, simple life-success stories of converts. The comic strips put less emphasis on the preternatural powers of its *shi* (priests, 師). The portions presenting Asahara as the leader and glorifying his powers have completely vanished from *Aleph*'s media artifacts.[15] In addition, the discourses that have a tendency to be easily put into the *karuto* or *Aum* frame have also disappeared. Phrases appearing in the *Aum* cartoon clips such as "the soul (of the god) of *shinri* (真理, supreme truth), the most holy, holy master, Shoko Asahara" (真理の御魂, 最聖, 麻原彰晃尊師), previously used to deify Asahara during the *Aum* era, do not appear in the discourses presented on the *Aleph* official website. *Aleph*'s use of the cartoon images and the basic structures of Japanese narratives, *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu*, allows readers to easily predict the story development and also understand the overall plots even after skipping over a few texts.

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[14] I will discuss more about *Aleph*'s cartoons and other multimedia artifacts in the next chapter.

[15] The Public Security Intelligence Agency (2012) reported that *Aleph* has strengthened the guidance of absolute devotion to Asahara.

In summary, this chapter first demonstrated public representations of *Aleph* that are reflected through the public's use of *Aum* terms. Then, it introduced the concept of "frame" to explain *Aleph*'s motivations and methods to encourage the public to reinterpret its images. *Aleph*'s re-imagining activities appear to be motivated by the group's need to dispel the anxiety of potential converts afraid of devoting themselves to a religious group with a dark past. Because *Aleph* is often associated with *Aum*'s past conduct, it seems like a natural reaction to remove from its website the discourses associated with *Aum*. In short, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the discourses that have been wiped from the *Aum* era were assessed by members of *Aleph* as a disadvantage for the group. However, dispelling *Aum*'s negative image seems not enough. In order to actually acquire new converts, it seems desirable to offer something more appealing to the mainstream people. The next chapter will further examine the ways in which *Aleph* actively reconstructs its public image.

Chapter 5: Reconstruction of Public Images

The research on *Aleph*'s reconstruction of images was derived from three major sources of media artifacts present on the official *Aleph* website: (1) an introduction section, (2) informational cartoons, (3) and converts' testimonials. This chapter further explores *Aleph*'s distinctive features by specifically focusing on the group's techniques of rehabilitating its public image by encouraging the public to reevaluate it and its activities. As already observed in Chapters 1 to 3, the Japanese public tends to have a negative impression of *Aleph*, associating the group with its predecessor, *Aum Shinrikyo*, which has often been described as a religious terrorist group. At the end of the previous chapter, the stark differences between *Aum* and *Aleph*'s uses of symbolic images and discourses were presented. In this chapter, I will further analyze the symbols and discourses used by *Aleph* to understand and interpret the underlying meanings and messages conveyed, by placing them within a larger Japanese context. The chapter first introduces the primary objectives of *Aleph*'s preaching. Then, it analyzes the outcomes of the group's training. Finally, it examines the distinctive features of *Aleph*'s religious discourses.

5.1 Three Objectives

This thesis examines the articulations of the goals and benefits of *Aleph*'s training programs found in sample discourses from the official *Aleph* website. As already observed in Chapter 3, *Aleph* appears to be moving away from one kind

of frame, that is, the *karuto* frame. More specifically, I propose that *Aleph* is

shifting its discourses and representations towards some specific socio-cultural

frames with defining themes such as "health," "success," and "wealth," which are

widely accepted by mainstream Japanese audiences. This thematic shift is

reflected in the themes and objectives dealt with on the official *Aleph* website.

For instance, in the Questions and Answers section on *Aleph*'s official

website, the ultimate objectives of *Aleph*'s training programs are described as

follows:

> Q: Aleph の教えを実践する最終目標とは何でしょうか？
> A: それは、私たちが正しい生活と修行によって豊かな心身を形成
> し、最終的には解脱・悟りという"本当の自由と幸福"を得ることで
> す。
> [Q: What are the final objectives for people who practice what *Aleph*
> preaches?
> A: We form rich minds and bodies through right living and practices, and
> eventually gain "true freedom and happiness," termed emancipation and
> spiritual enlightenment.]

Similarly, the three primary roles of *Aleph* are explained on the official website

using the simple questions-and-answer form as shown below:

> [Q: Aleph の役割とは何だと考えていますか？
> A: それは、まず、できるだけ多くの方々に、(1) 病からの解放、
> (2) この世の幸福、(3) 解脱・悟りを得ていただくことです。
> Q: What are the roles of *Aleph*?
> A: The purpose is to enable as many people as possible to obtain these
> things: 1) relief of sickness, 2) happiness (of all people) in this world, and
> 3) emancipation and spiritual enlightenment.]

It seems safe to say, the ultimate goals listed above–health, happiness, and

emancipation and spiritual enlightenment–are not confined to a specified or

limited social group but appeal to a general audience presumed to share basic

human conditions. In the following sections, this thesis will examine in more

detail the ways in which *Aleph* propaganda cartoons and other multimedia artifacts on the group's website illustrate the three objectives introduced above.

5.2 Socially Acceptable Outcomes

On the official *Aleph* website, the media artifacts include two comic strips, nine animated cartoons, and a large number of converts' testimonials. These artifacts recreate the life experiences of converts, focusing on how their life has changed after going through Buddhism and yoga training provided by *Aleph*. These media artifacts appear to be designed to recruit new believers. The principal characters in these artifacts are generic, ordinary people. Moreover, the various protagonists in these artifacts are carefully constructed to meet the needs of members from diverse demographic backgrounds representing a cross-section of age, gender, occupation, socio-economic achievement (economic status), academic level (education), and family structure. These characters include the young, the elderly, men, women, office workers, temporary workers, doctors, students, juvenile delinquents, and several family roles (nuclear or extended).

Each clip covers various common concerns in modern Japanese society. For example, the main themes and topics in the clips concern health, family, school, and work. The specific issues addressed under these larger themes are similarly varied, covering such things as failing exams, feeling unfulfilled, communication difficulties, truancy, unemployment, family difficulties, skin problems, and incurable diseases. Since they have covered many different types of mundane issues commonly understood by ordinary people, it is possible to say

that most Japanese people would identify with some of the problems introduced in these multimedia artifacts.

The stories introduced in the media artifacts are very simple, life-success stories of *Aleph* converts. All the stories share the same plot development. In the beginning, the main characters are shown to suffer from their circumstances. However, after going through the practices introduced by *Aleph*, they are able to not only solve their initial problems but also attain higher skills that lead them to greater luck. Finally, they gain good social skills, higher concentration skills, and even miraculous powers, which become the key turning points that lead the main characters to meaningful lives.

Aleph's selection of media artifacts thus not only reflects its own ideology but also reflects and reinforces mainstream socio-cultural values in contemporary Japanese society. Conceptions and behaviors associated with a healthy, happy, and meaningful life are influenced by specific social and historical contexts within 21st century Japan. Thus, this study will help researchers think critically about the idea of the better life as a socio-cultural construct and the ways that *Aleph*'s media artifacts articulate various elements of "the better life." The following sections will investigate the ways in which *Aleph*'s discourses represent its training objectives and outcomes as socially acceptable desires.

5.2.1 Health and Interpersonal Relationships

In seeking to understand the types of "constraints" on *Aleph*'s discourses derived from Japanese native cosmology[16] as these are mediated by mainstream socio-cultural frames, it will be useful first to consider one of the most important mainstream Japanese values: physical and mental health. Below I will analyze animated informational cartoons created by *Aleph* and the converts' voices that are introduced on the *Aleph* website. Both speak to this frame.

In one animated clip, a 92-year-old woman is the oldest character appearing in the *Aleph*'s media artifacts. In the beginning of the animated cartoon, entitled "修行でどんどん若返る-92歳の奇跡" ("Rapidly rejuvenated by devotional practices: miracle of 92 year-old woman"), she has a bent back and cannot walk without a stick. When friendly young girls greet her in a park, the elderly woman just stares at them with a sinister face and ignores them as shown in Figures 32 and 33.

FIGURE 32. 92 Year-Old Woman by *Aleph.*

FIGURE 33. Friendly Young Girls by *Aleph.*

A short time later, she suffers from severe back pain (Figure 34) and, following her son's advice, decides to join yoga and meditation classes offered by *Aleph*.

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[16] In this thesis, cosmology refers to knowledge and beliefs of cultural and social systems shared by a group of people.

FIGURE 34. Old Woman Suffering from Back Pain *by Aleph.*

Her enrollment in *Aleph* eventually brings her back to a healthier life, which is shown as her back becomes straight and she can walk without a stick, as depicted in Figure 35.

FIGURE 35. Recovery by *Aleph.*

After she solves the physical health issue, there is a change in the elderly woman's attitudes as well, reflecting, perhaps, an improvement in her emotional health. She begins to open her heart to strangers, which is shown through the image of her welcoming smile towards the youth at the end of the story (Figure 35). As depicted in Figure 35, through *Aleph* training, the elderly woman in the end fully recovers from her severe back pain and attains happiness. Her happiness is signaled through images of good health and friendly relations with neighbors.

The images shown in Figures 32 to 35 have meaning and value because they are inverse representations of the fears of loneliness and varieties of social difficulties suffered by many elderly Japanese today. Japan is an aging society, and currently more than 20 percent of the Japanese population is over the age of 65. This proportion is expected to increase to about 40 percent by 2050 (International Longevity Center, Japan 2012). The traditional Japanese family, consisting of three generations living under one roof, has vanished in recent decades. According to Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare data (2012), while 53 percent of the elderly lived with their children in 1980, the percentage went down to only 18 percent in 2010. Similarly, the bond of family, relatives, and neighbors has grown thin (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2005); it is possible to say that this cartoon reflects the uncertain future of elderly Japanese.

Just as the discourses appearing in the animated clips reflect many normative conditions specific to the Japanese context, online testimonials given by *Aleph* converts also reinforce these ideas. These testimonials often stress simple success stories of solving health-related, daily life problems, which will be the subject of detailed examination in subsequent paragraphs.

The introductory portion of the converts' testimonial pages on the *Aleph* website describes modern society as a hotbed of stress, with mental and physical healing as a very important concept to appreciate. Moreover, *Aleph* points out that maintaining mental and physical health can be challenging and states that its

training can help people recover from their mental and physical illnesses as well as overcome the pressures and difficulties imposed by modern Japanese society.

> Alephには、これらの心身の病から解放されるための様々な修行法
> があります。アトピー、喘息、精神病、そして難病指定の不治の病
> まで、Alephの修行によって克服し、健康体を得た方たちの体験談
> をご紹介しましょう。[Various training methods in *Aleph* can help
> relieve the suffering of mental and physical illnesses. We will introduce
> you to some experiences of believers, who obtained healthy bodies
> through *Aleph* training, by overcoming atopic dermatitis, asthma, mental
> illness, and even incurable illnesses designated as intractable diseases.]

All sorts of illnesses that appear in the introductory description on the converts'

testimonial pages apply to a general population. This suggests that converts'

testimonial discourse is designed to appeal to a broad audience.

In doing this, the *Aleph* testimonials focus on three central concepts

derived from Japanese culture: 1) mental and physical well-being, 2) a sense of

belonging, and 3) stability of mind. The following figures represent the

testimonials of *Aleph* converts who have successfully overcome various life issues

from which they used to suffer.

> 不治の病である重症筋無力症にかかり、一人ではトイレにも行けな
> かったわたしが、Alephの修行によって、バリバリ働けるまでにな
> ったのです。これはもう奇跡の回復としか言いようがありません。
> [I who suffered from an incurable illness called myasthenia gravis, was
> not able to go to even the restroom by myself, but is able to work
> productively through *Aleph* training. This can only be described as a
> miraculous recovery.] (By Ms. J.T (Saitama, tailor))

Being able to work and look after oneself are often fundamental expectations for

members of Japanese society. As Lebra (1976) elaborates, a sense of belonging

plays an important role in understanding such Japanese behavior. Japanese

workers tend to cultivate a sense of satisfaction by recognizing their full

participation and significant contributions to a group they belong to, such as a

company as well as society (Lebra 1974). Consequently, being left out of a group

due to unemployment can be a source of worry because this can prohibit people

from fully appreciating the benefits of giving to and receiving from the group.

Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that the convert's story above contains

underlying meanings, that *Aleph* has the ability to assist people in recovering from

such illnesses, as well as successfully assisting them in rejoining society.

Member's voices
Y.Yさん（福岡県・会社員）

10 年間苦しんできた精神病が、Aleph の道場に４日間泊まり込んで教学修行を続けた結果、消えてなくなるように治ってしまいました。この教団にある素晴らしい仏教の法則を、多くの精神病で悩む人々に伝えたいと思っています。［As a result of staying for four days at the training hall of *Aleph* and continuously having education training, the mental illness which I suffered from for ten years has been cured, as if it has disappeared. I would like to tell many people worrying about mental illness the wonderful Buddhist law that this religious group has.] (By Mr. Y.Y (Fukuoka, office worker))

This example reflects the reality of modern Japanese people, who

frequently suffer from mental illnesses. In seeking to understand the background

of the spread of mental disorders, the contexts of social change are often taken

into account. For example, Japanese society became economically rich as a result

of economic growth after World War II. This social change has brought diversity

to Japanese values and lifestyles. Consequently, finding out the purpose in life

appears to be more difficult than ever, which seems to have increased the number

of people who suffer from the symptoms of mental illnesses, including depression.

Another possible factor for the perceived increase of people suffering from mental

illness is that it has become much easier to make mental illness public, which is

why people hear about it more.

This member's devotional practices for only four days cured him

completely, after ten years of suffering. With the popularization of mental illness

in mind, this point appears to attract many other people who share the same

situation and serves to give them hope. The four-days training sounds like a

realistic schedule since an individual is probably able to make the time, although

taking an arranged vacation for more than a week is relatively hard in Japan

compared with Europe or North America.

Member's voices
Y.Sさん（大阪府・会社員）

Alephに入り、適切な指導のもと修行を行なううち、身体が軽快に
なっていくのを感じています。それまで季節ごとに患っていた、く
しゃみや鼻炎などのアレルギー症状も止まってしまいました。薬に
頼ることなく修行により自然に完治することで、Alephの修行の正
しさを実感しました。[After enrolling in *Aleph* and while training
myself under suitable instructions, I am feeling lighter than before.
Seasonal allergy symptoms that I suffered from until then, such as
sneezing and nasitis, have also stopped. I realized the appropriateness of
Aleph training <u>by recovering completely and naturally through these
training, without depending on medicine</u>.] (By Mr. Y.S (Osaka, office
worker)) [emphasis added]

In *Aleph*'s context, while natural healing appears to be more valued than

medication, modernization is not treated in a completely negative light. It is safe

to say that the message conveyed through the above examples is that the everyday

illnesses and sufferings, such as allergies, which are characteristic of modern life,

may not be the result of modernity per se, but originate in people's alienation from spiritual life.

Current converts appear to explain outcomes in a way that is socially acceptable for the target audience who might find the converts' experiences interesting. Namely, the converts' testimonials above appear to reproduce and re-circulate the basic outcomes that are also introduced in the propaganda cartoons, and vice versa. Compared with the above cartoon clip about the 92-year-old elder, which is 11 minutes and 11 seconds long, in the above three testimonial examples, the benefits of converting and the efficiencies of *Aleph*'s training are summarized and presented using only a few sentences. Although the converts' full names are not provided, presenting each convert's occupation, gender, residence, and initials as well as their caricatures appears to help readers easily associate with the converts. Also, including a variety of information about the authors in the converts' discourses seem to increase *Aleph*'s credibility as well.

5.2.2 Happiness

This section examines the second objective, the specific nature of "happiness" promoted through *Aleph* practices, by analyzing a cartoon clip, a convert's testimonial, and a survey questionnaire given to *Aleph* converts. As an example of a convert's testimonial below shows, positive outcomes are common as well as material and tangible; they may include receiving an increased salary, quitting smoking, and curing allergies.

> 財運が良くなりました。収入が増えるような仕事の担当となり、年収がアップしました。（大阪　Ｍさん）[My luck with money improved. I

became in charge of a higher paying job, and my annual income went up. (Osaka, By M)]

While it promotes these material and tangible benefits, however, the Converts'

Testimonials (5) (会員の声) section on the *Aleph* website stresses that the most

important personal benefit is gaining happiness–that is, peace of mind. It states:

> どんなに物質的に豊かでも、心の解放なしには本当の幸福を得ることはできません。[Even if you are materially rich, you cannot obtain true happiness unless you release your heart.] [emphasis added]

The use of the term of "true" happiness implies that there is a "false"

happiness. For our purposes, it will be important to identify the representation of

"true" happiness, as conveyed by *Aleph*'s media artifacts. Illustrations of iconic

success, such as bigger house, people in business suit, signs of the University of

Tokyo, and graphs showing higher achievement in academics or employment

(Figure 36), are frequently used to represent happiness in the propaganda cartoons.

FIGURE 36. Business Performance Displayed on a Graph by *Aleph*

I argue that these images directly correspond to current social trends in Japan. For

instance, the last three decades were a pivotal time in Japan's history. The

economic crisis has led to an increase in the population of people living in poverty.

Increasing social stratification has compelled people to classify themselves and

others into two opposing, widely known social categories defined by their

perceived level of socio-economic achievement: *kachigumi* (winners, 勝ち組) or

makegumi (losers, 負け組み). The *Aleph* cartoon uses polarizing images of

winners and losers, and shows how one's life can move from one to the other.

Furthermore, the illustrations of typical iconic achievements seem to be used

mainly when showing the temporary (or "false") happiness of the main characters

in the cartoons, in contrast with the "true" happiness which *Aleph* proposes.

This distinction between temporary and permanent happiness is further

reinforced in an animated clip entitled, "本物の修行で得た心の安らぎ" ("Peace

of mind acquired by real training"). In this clip, the protagonist, a young man,

lives a typical winner's life. However, after admission to the University of Tokyo,

he experiences a decrease in his confidence level and motivation. This reflects a

real trend among Japanese students; because of the severity of the entrance exams,

many students tend to be already fed up with studying by the time they enter

university in Japan. By the end of their 3rd year or even earlier, students are, in

general, expected to begin to look for jobs. If they fail to land proper jobs by this

time (i.e., a full-time job that offers a bona fide career), their lives are considered

to be at an end. Interestingly, this expectation only applies to young men and not

young women in Japanese society.

In the cartoon clip, the character's friend finds a job before graduating

from school. The image of the suit represents a mature and socially acceptable

man as depicted in Figure 37.

FIGURE 37. Winners vs. Losers by *Aleph.*

In contrast, the main character, who has yet to find a job, is shown wearing jeans and a hoodie and looking dejected. He eventually stops attending classes. This is not unusual among Japanese university students. As opposed to university systems in North America, class attendance is generally very low in Japan due to lenient graduation requirements.

The protagonist begins to consume alcohol and drugs and even consider committing suicide. This reflects major societal problems circulating in Japanese discourse and mass media, such as an increase in video game addiction, truancy, alcoholism, drug addiction, and suicide. However, incorporating *Aleph*'s practices, based on Buddhism and yoga philosophy, ultimately saves the protagonist's life. His devotional practices in *Aleph* transform the young man's character drastically towards the end of the story, and he at last graduates from the University of Tokyo. The last image of him surrounded by academics signals that he has achieved his goal and happiness by overcoming his difficulties (Figure 38).

FIGURE 38. Happiness by *Aleph.*

Social change has taken place in multiple areas in Japan, especially during the last three decades. For instance, communal society used to be an individual's safety net in Japan (Lebra 1976). However, the nature of cooperation, cherished in one's own family, the neighborhood, and in the workplace, has been lost (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2005). Thus, individuals wander around seeking their identity and a sense of belonging. Joining *Aleph* might be attractive for people since it promises the spirit of cooperation and also the hope of changing one's life and society without leaving anybody behind.

As already observed in the previous example, the "false" happiness appears in the form of the main character's temporary happiness. Thus, the implications of the "true" happiness in *Aleph* discourse appear to be a long-term or endless happiness, not a transient one. Similarly, a concluding dialogue below is uttered by the main character in the final stage of the animated clip introduced above. The male protagonist concludes his story by summarizing his important life lessons and the concepts of happiness relating to his state of mind.

> これまでの悲惨な経験から学んだのは、結局人間、心を安定させないことには何も始まらないということです。人生、心の安定さえ得られれば、それでいい。仕事や名誉や財産や彼女は、それさえ得られれば後から自然についてくるものなんです。幸せを今苦しんでる人々に味わって欲しいと心から願っています。[What I have learned

from my miserable experiences is that nothing begins after all until a person stabilizes the mind. As for life, it is fine so long as one can obtain stability of mind. As long as he can obtain stability of mind, work, honor, property, and a girlfriend will come along naturally afterwards.]

In summary, the main message conveyed to the audience is that so long as the mind is stabilized, one will achieve happiness as a natural outcome. *Aleph* not only asserts this point through its propaganda cartoons, but it also elaborates on the principle of happiness, by providing converts' testimonials that reinforce the message, as in following examples.

Member's voices
E. Tさん（東京都・文筆業）

修行によって、いつも満ち足りた穏やかな気持ちで日々を送っています。人間が生活していく上で一番大切なのは、心の安定ではないでしょうか。<u>どんなにお金があっても、心が不安定では幸せとは言えません。</u>多くの人に、心の安定を得てもらいたいと思います。[Because of the training, I am spending every day with a peaceful feeling always being satisfied. Stability of mind is the most important thing when one lives, isn't it? <u>Even if one has a lot of money, it cannot be said to provide happiness if the mind is unstable</u>. I wish that many people obtain the peace of mind.] [By Ms. E.T., Tokyo, literary profession] [emphasis added]

Here, stability of mind is valued as the natural outcome of devotional practices, while money in the above example seems to represent the element of materialism, which is often seen as not enough for individuals to find satisfaction in life.

Member's voices
T. Yさん（群馬県・建築関係）

職場の<u>人間関係</u>が楽になりました。現場仕事なので、荒っぽい口調で文句を言われることもあるのですが、相手も苦しんでいるんだなと、自然に許せるようになったのです。Aleph の修行は、現実的にも多くの幸福をもたらしてくれるので、感謝の思いでいっぱいです。[The <u>human relations</u> in the work place were eased. Since I work on-site, sometimes I receive complaints in a rough tone, but I naturally am able to forgive

others by considering they are also in pain. Since practices of *Aleph* realistically brought me much happiness, I am full of thoughts of gratitude.] [emphasis added]

The idea that understanding a partner's characteristics or accepting one's own characteristics enables one to both improve one's human relationships and obtain luck, reflects a spiritualist perspective. As shown in the above examples, the central message of the discourse is explicit and consistent. The message can be interpreted that people need *Aleph*'s assistance to stabilize their minds and then gain "true" happiness. Similarly, questionnaires to *Aleph* converts also emphasize the importance of peace of mind, and *Aleph*'s contribution to the converts' happiness. Converts' opinions about their life-changing experiences are revealed through some of the answers to the questionnaires, given below.

アレフの実践で得られる本当の幸福
「素晴らしい人生を満喫しています」
──Aleph に入会して手にした幸福（会員 370 人大アンケートより）
[True happiness that you can obtain by *Aleph* training.
"I am fully enjoying the wonderful life."
--Happiness that was gained after entering into *Aleph*. (from a large scale questionnaire for 370 members)]

「真理に出合う前と比較して、自分のどういうところが大きく変わったと思いますか？（入会後の変化は？）」心が安定し広がった。（１８．８％）
1. 心の安定・広がり　８２
2. 法則にのっとった生き方　８０
3. 煩悩（怒り、貪り等）が減少　５１
4. 苦しみに強くなった　３４
5. 利他の心が強まった　３３
[Comparing yourself before and after meeting with the supreme truth (*Aleph*), what do you think has changed a lot? It has stabilized and broadened my mind. (18.8%)
1) Stabilized and broad mind 82
2) The way of life in accordance with a rule of life 80
3) Evil passions, such as anger and jealousy, decreased. 51
4) I can endure pain. 34
5) I became altruistic. 33]

The questionnaires' result suggests that the media artifacts, containing the discourses of *Aleph*'s converts, are effectively circulating common socio-cultural values. The questionnaire results listed above serve to demonstrate to potential converts that the outcomes of *Aleph*'s training are nothing more than the ordinary desires of the common people.

5.2.3 Enlightenment/Emancipation

The third outcome that *Aleph* promises for potential converts is to attain enlightenment–that is, to liberate oneself from all sorts of the restrictions and evil passions and uncover a form of energy that gives them special powers. Several examples from the *Aleph* literature speak to this promise. A comment made by a male doctor in a story entitled, "鳥が古巣に帰るように" ("As if I were a bird returning to an old nest") describes the experience of "awakening *kundalini* (life energy)" as being similar to gaining miraculous skills.

> **クンダリーニが覚醒**してからは、疲れ知らずで物凄くエネルギッシュになり、睡眠時間２，３時間で仕事や修行や奉仕活動をバリバリこなせるようになりました。そして直感も鋭くなり知性も向上しました。それにより患者さんに対する治療法などが直感でわかるようになったのです。（Ｓさん（男性））[After **awakening (my) kundalini**, I became extremely energetic, and turned out to be able to do my job and volunteer job effectively with only a few hours of sleep. Also, my intuition became sharp, and my intellect also improved. Thereby, I turned out to be able to find a remedy for patients on instinct.] (Mr. S, male) [emphasis added]

Mr. S's use of the original Indian term raises important questions about *Aleph*'s rhetorical strategies. Through his study of the roles of language in ritual practice, Keane (1997a) demonstrates relations among text, performance, and context in religious language. By analyzing various speech events, such as

Indonesian Christians adopting Arabic-inflected pronunciations to place an emphasis of their religious aspects, the author describes strong interrelations between linguistic form and social function. The use of religious language not only adds authority to texts and their speakers, but it also allows believers to defend ambiguous beliefs which the general populace often doubts, by giving them access to sources of authoritative power (Keane 1997a, 1997b). Keane's analysis helps me to appreciate the situations in which *Aleph* employs its religious language (more specifically, Indian-originated words and concepts), and its intended audiences (insiders or outsiders).

As shown in the following examples, descriptions of enlightenment are ubiquitous on the *Aleph* website. Many focus in particular on what the processes and natural outcomes of the enlightenment are like. The converts' testimonials also tend to include descriptions of their experiences when they felt the moment of reaching a higher stage in life.

Member's voices
R. T さん（東京都・会社員）

わたしは最初、Aleph の無料体験セミナーに申し込んでみました。師といわれる方の呼吸法の指導を受けると、頭の中でいくつもの光のフラッシュが輪になり、頭の中をグルグルと回転しました。「あっ、本当に体験した！」と驚き、修行を始める決心をしました。[At first, I booked myself for a free trial seminar by *Aleph*. When I received an instruction for the breathing method by a *shi* (priest, 師), flashes of light became rings in my mind, and they rotated inside my head. "I experienced this!" I was surprised and decided to begin the practice.] [emphasis added]

入会後、突然**クンダリーニが覚醒**したり、輝く光の粒を見たり等、多くの神秘体験をしました。また、読んでも意味のわからなかった仏典の内容を、寝入りばなに神々が教えてくれ、「そうだったのか！」と納得するという体験が毎日続き、信が深まっていきました。[After joining *Aleph*, I experienced many mystical experiences, such as that I **awakened my *kundalini*** suddenly and saw a shining bead of light. Moreover, when falling asleep, gods taught me the contents of Buddhist literature that I could not understand even after I read them. Everyday I continuously experienced and understood things like "Now, I understand!" Then I deepened my beliefs.] [emphasis added]

As these examples reveal, current *Aleph* believers explain their experiences of the "*kundalini* awakening" using step-by-step, sequential process descriptions. Thus, even average audiences, who have little technical knowledge about the yogic philosophy of ancient India, appear to be able to understand the benefits of the "*kundalini* awakening" and mysterious experiences of reaching the stage of enlightenment. This suggests that the target audience of converts' testimonial pages appears to be outsiders and converts who have not yet experienced their "*kundalini* awakening."

Aleph also appeals to these outsiders by using the Indian-originated terminology directly translated into Japanese (クンダリーニの覚醒, *kundalini* awakening) in the ordinary texts, which seems to add a more persuasive tone to the ambiguous concept that originated in ancient India. Furthermore, explaining the religious concepts from the converts' point of view, using their voices, seems to not only help build credibility but also give the audience a sense that everyone may be able to do such things. In the following section, I will analyze the

distinctive features of discourses used by *Aleph*, by analyzing the ideology

embedded in the group's language use.

5.3 Ideology and Rhetorical Strategies

Aleph's selection of discourses reflects the group's ideological beliefs. The

following statements come from the final frame of the informational comic strips.

The ideology is usually expressed clearly and directly, as shown below.

> 1. [No matter what sorts of tragedy happens, you will be able to become
> happy as long as you do practice.] (どんなに悲惨な状況になっても修
> 行をすれば幸せになれるのです) (Figure 29, P65)

> 2. [The practice not only enables you to cure illnesses but also reach the
> higher world beyond human beings–the transcendent world.] (Figure 39)

FIGURE 39. *Aleph*'s Ideology by *Aleph*.

Even as these ideas are expressed openly in *Aleph*'s texts, the group also makes

use of rhetorical strategies to reinforce them. Analyzing *Aleph*'s discourses in

more detail helps us identify the ways in which *Aleph* makes its offer appealing to

its target audience. The following comment is uttered by a female protagonist at

the end of an animated cartoon, entitled "壊れない幸福を求めて" ("Through

seeking permanent happiness"), to summarize what *Aleph* can provide as well as

its influence on her life.

> 弟の闘病生活と死、そして家庭の崩壊。この体験は今も私の修行に
> 対する<u>確信</u>に繋がっています。私は常々、自分も苦しいけど、皆も
> 苦しんでいる。だから、皆にも幸せになって欲しいと思ってきまし
> た。だけど、自分ではどうしていいかわからなかったのです。しか
> し、<u>壊れない幸福に至る道</u>がここにありました。アレフの説き示し
> ている真理の教えの中に。私は今<u>絶対の幸福</u>に至るための修行がで
> きることを、そして救済活動のお手伝いができることをとても嬉し
> く思っています。[(I went through) my younger brother's struggle
> against a disease, his death, and the collapse of my family. These
> experiences still have led me to the <u>firm</u> belief in my practice. I always
> thought that I want everyone to become happy since I am in pain, and
> everybody is also in pain. However, I did not know what to do. However,
> there was <u>a way to permanent happiness</u> in the instructions explained by
> *Aleph*. I feel very glad that I can practice to achieve the <u>permanent
> happiness,</u> and also help with rescue activities.] [emphasis added]

Similarly, in an animated cartoon, entitled "真理の実践で得た仕事の成功"

("Success of the work gained through *Aleph*'s practices"), a female protagonist

utters the following comments.

> <u>どんな悩みでも解決できる</u>教えがここにある。
> [Here, there is the instruction which can solve <u>any troubles</u>.] [emphasis
> added]

As observed in the examples above, members' unquestionable trust in *Aleph*'s

training is commonly emphasized in a rhetorically grandiloquent manner.

Similarly, the following example shows that *Aleph*'s instructional discourses on

the converts' testimonial pages seem to engage in rhetorical techniques to

increase the group's credibility by offering an absolute and unqualified guarantee

to the target audience.

> 小さい頃から一度は抱いてきた素朴な疑問や、今まで誰も答えてく
> れなかった行き場のない問いに、真理の教えは<u>明確な回答を与えて
> くれます</u>。[Supreme truth (*Aleph*) <u>gives a clear answer</u> to simple

questions that you have had since childhood or to your insoluble doubts that nobody gave you answers until now.] [emphasis added]

The point that *Aleph* assures everyone's happiness is reinforced in the converts' testimonials as well. The following three examples of members' voices give potential converts the impression that joining *Aleph* is the key to secure life choices, positive goals, and guaranteed happiness.

Member's voices
H. I さん（茨城県・主婦）

小さいときから無常観が強くあり、苦しんでいたわたしに、回答を与えてくれたのが Aleph でした。一切が無常であるがゆえに、いにしえの聖者方は、壊れない幸福である解脱を求めて修行してきたのだと知ったとき、わたしの苦しみは氷解し、安らぎを得たのです。
[I had a strong perception of the evanescence of life since childhood, and *Aleph* provided me with answers while I was in pain. When I learned that the saints of antiquity trained in pursuit of emancipation and permanent happiness due to the uncertainty of everything, it relieved my pain and brought me peace of mind.] [[By Ms. H.I, Ibaragi, housewife] [emphasis added]

Member's voices
E. Mさん（神奈川県・自営業）

以前はさまざまなことで心が動き、底知れぬ不安を感じ続けていました。Aleph の修行・法則に出合ったとき、その不安は解決しました。「わたしは、すべての魂が歩むべき絶対的な道の門前に立った」ということが理解できました。ここに"真理"があったのです。
[My heart used to be affected by various things, and I continuously felt unfathomable anxiety. The uneasiness was solved when I met with the training and law of *Aleph*. I was able to understand that "I stand in front of the gate for the perfect path that all the souls should walk through."] [[By Mr. E.M, Kanagawa, self employment] [emphasis added]

Aleph という存在は、行き先と答えを失った現代人の救世主的存在であると言えると思います。多くの方々が、"真理"を体得されることによって多くの恩恵を得られるよう心から祈り、わたくしも少しでもお役に立てるよう、修行に励んでいきたいと考えております。
[I think that it is possible to say the existence of *Aleph* is <u>an entity like the Messiah for people today, who lost the destination and answer</u>. I pray from the bottom of my heart that many people will benefit from mastering the "supreme truth" as much as possible, and I am thinking to strive for training in order to help (other people) as much as possible.] [By Mr. H.O, Kanagawa, systems engineer] [emphasis added]

The three examples capture and appeal to the perceived worries of people about an unjust society in which they do not know how to change the current situation or how to proceed. For modern-day people, *Aleph* is presented as an entity like the Messiah that can provide answers to any questions, solve problems, and lead people to a fixed happiness without exception. While the appropriateness and correctness of *Aleph*'s instructions are emphasized in the discourses, there is no room for doubt about an individual's ability to achieve spiritual enlightenment.

It appears that *Aleph*'s media artifacts tend to focus on individual success and the transformation of its converts that allows them to find contentment in their lives. Interestingly, when *Aleph* represents itself through discourses in its media artifacts, it appears to refrain from presenting an exclusive, guild-like sense of group belonging. As observed previously in the media portrayals of "clones of Asahara" (Figure 11) and the giant robot factory (Figure 12), the Japanese public in general seems to have created negative impressions of the "religious community," in which devotional training and absolute loyalty to the group are

usually considered to be required. By emphasizing individual success and improvement rather than group adherence, *Aleph* thus may be attempting to distance itself from the negative association linked with the *Aum* "community."

This chapter observed *Aleph*'s discursive shift from the *karuto* frame to more widely acceptable, mainstream frames such as the frames of "health" and "happiness." The symbols and discourses circulating in the Japanese public about *Aleph* are thus very different from those used by *Aleph* itself in its media artifacts. This contrast in the images plays an important role in the phenomena of the recent increase in the number of new converts to *Aleph*. I will elaborate on why this might be the case in the following sections.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis investigated the ways in which *Aleph* attempts to separate itself from the negative reputation linked to New Religious Movements (NRMs) by using various counter-strategies, aiming to encourage the Japanese public to rehabilitate its image. I argued that symbols and images incorporated into *Aleph*'s media artifacts play a significant role in its conspicuous success in recruiting new converts, despite increased police control over *Aleph* and the rise of anti-NRMs.

This research aimed to identify contemporary Japanese social issues and trends, as conveyed by *Aleph*'s media artifacts. Schieffelin's (2000) work on the Kaluli literacy case helped me identify the types of cultural conventions *Aleph* employs to appeal to the mainstream Japanese audience in an effort to avoid being labeled as a *karuto*. Examining the Kaluli primers created by missionaries to promote vernacular literacy to the Kaluli, Schieffelin (2000) offers key theoretical insights into how concepts and labels can be associated with cultural practices and people. She explains that "the labels and ideas pervasive in […] texts are part of another type of standardization process–a codification or regimentation of identities that is based on cultural stereotyping and necessary for the narrative of religious transformation and conversion" (307).

Specific examples of this process reveal key similarities between *Aleph*'s propaganda and the Kaluli case. In the Kaluli primer, modernity was depicted through an illustration of airplanes used by the Papua New Guinean who visited the Kaluli community. Furthermore, in the scene showing the Kaluli's encounter with the outsiders, the Kaluli were labeled as "uncivilized" through the use of a

pejorative term. In short, the image of the airplane is presented as a symbol of modernity. The literacy primer conveys the message that the Kaluli need to learn how to be civilized from Christian missionaries because they are "backward."

Similarly, in *Aleph*'s case, the central message that is re-circulated within its discourses is that people are in need of achieving enlightenment as well as gaining the miraculous powers to improve their lives, by going through *Aleph*'s training. In the same way as the Kaluli primer, discourses created by *Aleph* can convey certain ideologies to its audiences and even change the ways the audience members view themselves and their lives.

As already observed, in *Aleph*'s case, the material benefits of modernity are highlighted as the natural outcome of devotional religious practices. The value of modernity and materialism as rhetorical themes has been explored productively in other works. Keane (2007) shows the importance of understanding the concept of modernity, materiality, and human freedom when studying Christian missionary work in the case of the Sumbanese in Indonesia. His study demonstrates that in the process of recruiting new converts, religious recruiters tend to show the direct benefits of conversion by referring to specific, material elements that the local people lack, are struggling against, or are eager to obtain. In other words, Christianity was conveyed along with modernity under the name of civilizing the locals. Likewise, we have seen that *Aleph* appeals to the material benefits of modernity as the natural outcomes of its religious practices. However, there is a key difference in the sense that *Aleph* also envelops this materialism within a large element of spiritualism. This study presents the case of a Japanese

religious group introducing spiritualism in Buddhist practices to fix some of the ailments of modernity.

6.1 Mainstream Cultural Values

Aleph also appears to use a different method of reaching the target audience in the sense that it provides training using both traditional ideas and modern technology. This approach might be attractive to many Japanese people because cultural assimilation has been frequently seen from the perspective of the imagined old era in Japan and continuously tends to be positively valued– *wayosecchu* (a compromise between Japanese and foreign, 和洋折衷). The same can be said of religious culture. For example, Buddhism has coexisted with the Shinto religion as well as other traditional philosophies adopted from foreign countries such as Confucianism. Japanese people are often said to live in harmony with nature as well. Based on the above, *Aleph*'s approach appears to naturally correspond with the values of the target audience.

As discussed previously, *Aleph*'s website provides various success stories of converts. The group therefore appeals to the genre of storytelling, which is one of the central methods used in Japan to teach various moral lessons and cultural values. In Japan as in other cultures (Basso 1996), people, especially children, develop a sense of right and wrong through the telling of diverse tales. The storytelling activity not only helps people plant moral lessons in the audience's minds but also reinforces stereotypical views. For instance, in the Japanese folktale, the gender roles of elders are fixed: men work outside and females work at home. Through my analysis of contemporary Japanese social issues and

currents conveyed by *Aleph*'s media artifacts, I will elaborate on the ways in which *Aleph*'s discourses function to reinforce specific mainstream cultural values. Direct and necessary benefits seem to be more attractive to the public's mainstream values than offering preternatural powers. *Aleph*'s selected discourses reflect culturally specific anxieties of modern Japanese society as well as the importance of spiritualism in Japanese society. This was reflected in *Aleph*'s discursive shift, focusing on offering more direct and necessary benefits, such as passing college exams or finding good partners.

First, as already observed, *Aleph* artifacts appeal to the value of elders, as reflected in a cartoon image of an old woman who is cared for by her son and neighbors. The traditional Confucian value of the family taking care of the elders is rapidly vanishing in Japan (Ministry of Health, Labor and, Welfare 2012). Thus, many youth today have never had a chance to keep company with the elderly. Figure 40 contains an image, from a TV commercial created by the Japanese Advertising Council, featuring a high school boy helping an elderly woman going up the stairs.

FIGURE 40. Consideration Is Visible to Anyone (思いやりは誰にでも見える) by Advertising Council Japan, 2011.

These images and messages are circulated because traditional values such as taking care of elders are perceived to be vanishing. Using the figure of a high school student also helps strengthen the message and impact that everyone can (or should) help elderly people in their own way.

As also observed in *Aleph*'s cartoon image, the image of an old person who has a bent back walking with a stick is used in many places in Japan, especially before Respect for the Aged Day on the 3rd Monday of September, as illustrated in the following figure.

FIGURE 41. Gifts: Respect for the Aged Day by People Who Are Good at (Selecting) Gifts Are Conveyers of Happiness (ギフト上手は幸せお届け人), 2006.

Such an image not only symbolizes elderly people in general but appears to be used to remind Japanese citizens of the old Japanese custom of younger generations taking care of elders.

Another key theme in the *Aleph* literature as noted above is companionship, as reflected in an image of a university student who at the end of a story feels happy when surrounded by his friends. In the real world in Japan, however, interpersonal relationships among immediate family, extended family, and neighbors have been getting weak (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2005). Furthermore, many unexpected social issues have

appeared due to the rapid aging of Japanese society. For instance, elder abuse,

solitary death, and increased petty crimes, such as shoplifting by the elderly due

to financial distress and loneliness, have become serious societal problems (Lah

2008). Despite the reality, however, the idea that happiness can be achieved by

having an extended family is still frequently seen in TV commercials in Japan.

The commercials often contain images of three generations gathered together, for

instance while traveling to a foreign country (Figure 42), celebrating Respect for

the Aged Day (Figure 43), or grandchildren's birthdays (Figure 44).

FIGURE 42. The Momentary Smile and Recollections of A Lifetime by HIS Travel Agency, 2012.

FIGURE 43. Family Project: Respect for the Aged Day by *Ito-Yokado* Co., Ltd., 2012.

FIGURE 44. A Birthday: Blowing Out a Candle by Sony Marketing (Japan) Inc., 2012.

Three generations living or spending time together is still symbolic of the ideal family, even after the popularization of the nuclear family, consisting of parents and their children, and still seems to be associated with the greatest happiness in Japanese society. Some of the main characters in *Aleph*'s media artifacts are not members of an extended family, and the family members are unexpectedly separated or have passed away. The media artifacts, however, display the idea that after joining the religious group, even such protagonists find happiness and peace and at last and have support from other people. *Aleph* thereby sends the message that even if you do not have a close family, you can achieve happiness through close connections with and support from the religious group.

Furthermore, the frequent reiteration of the concepts of certainty or permanence in *Aleph*'s discourses appears to reflect the contrasting reality of modern Japanese society in which rapid, constant change has been taking place in various areas. For instance, the sense of insecurity due to the bad economy, a stratified society between poor and rich, increased domestic violence and other violent crimes, suicide, unemployment and job insecurity, an aging society, the experiences of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami disaster (lost family,

friends, job, housing, and hopes) and radiation concerns and so on is ubiquitous in current Japanese society. Through its media artifacts, *Aleph* demonstrates what it can offer to its believers, by making connections to people's anxieties originating from these predicaments of contemporary Japanese life.

It appears that *Aleph*'s audiences are attracted to the religious group because the group's discourses and symbols touch upon generalized fears and anxieties of the mainstream Japanese population as a whole and not because *Aleph* appeals to marginalized individuals, groups, and communities. I initially thought *Aleph* specifically targeted youth, such as current university students, who were not familiar with the *Aum* incident because of their age, as religious studies scholar Kawashima had pointed out (*Mainichi Shimbun* 2012). An unexpected outcome of this study is that it revealed that *Aleph* appears to target a generic, broad audience rather than a marginal group such as the youth since the group does not use regional or historical markers in its media artifacts, as observed in the sample discourses in Chapters 3 and 4. In the same way, the outcomes proposed by *Aleph* in its media artifacts appear to be almost natural in the Japanese social context, without being restricted in any way. This might suggest that *Aleph* reinforces the stereotype of Japanese culture as a homogeneous entity.

6.2 Naturalization of Mainstream Values

I propose that *Aleph*'s media artifacts further naturalize and reinforce Japanese cultural values by presupposing traditional values, such as three generations living under one roof, even though statistically speaking, this is not the case. The concept of three generations sharing life experiences is still

acknowledged as the greatest happiness, even though very few people in Japan

today live as a part of an extended family. This reflects the concept of (language)

ideology derived from Inoue (2003), which people in Japan recognize what the

"women's language" sounds (or looks) like, although most Japanese women do

not actually use such speech styles in their everyday lives. Therefore, the

"Japanese women's language" dubbed onto the white women in movies and

books produced in the United States and translated into Japanese has a huge

impact on naturalizing the idea that there is such a thing as a "Japanese women's

language" (Inoue 2003).

Similarly with *Aleph*, a *karuto* group voicing or symbolizing mainstream

socio-cultural values has strong, direct effects on naturalizing those mainstream

values. People join *Aleph* not because it provides an alternate way of being.

Instead, I propose that *Aleph* attracts followers because its discourses and symbols

touch upon generalized fears and anxieties and not because it appeals to

marginalized individuals, groups, and communities.

At the beginning stage of this research, *Aleph* at first appeared to aim to

shift from the *karuto* frame to a more benevolent frame to appeal to mainstream

Japanese values. However, it is important to note that this research indicated what

Aleph is doing is not just a shift from the *karuto* frame to more benevolent,

mainstream socio-cultural frames. Instead, this is a powerful moment of symbolic

displacement (Inoue 2003), where the training provided by the *karuto* group

promises its adherents and converts the fulfillment of mainstream aspirations, thus

functioning to further reinforce mainstream socio-cultural Japanese values as natural, homogeneous, and even universal.

For instance, *Aleph*, formally viewed as "other," an extreme and often violent *karuto* group, can be interpreted by potential converts as a group that can resolve "our" common, everyday problems. The symbolic displacement is feasible because traditional values are reproduced and circulated by the marginalized religious group rather than the state-sponsored Advertising Council, whose job is to promote the improvement of moral sense. While *Aleph* adjusts its discourses with social change, it also serves to normalize certain cultural values. These two might appear to contradict each other; however, such discord (the marginalized promoting mainstream values) appears to be necessary for this naturalization, as Inoue (2003) pointed out.

6.3 Significance of the Research

The present study addresses key gaps in the literature. Researchers who have looked at the influence of popular Japanese cartoons on *Aleph*'s predecessor group, *Aum Shinrikyo*, featuring catastrophically destructive battles, are Ihara (1995), Arita (1995), Tomino (1995), and Gardner (2008). They suggest that the Japanese subcultures greatly influenced many *Aum* members who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, around the time subcultures first gained popularity in Japan. Researchers such as Inose (2009), Sakurai (2009), and Watanabe (2009) studied contemporary Japanese NRMs including *Aleph* and described them as socially

problematic groups by highlighting their doctrines, mind-control, and recruiting methods.

However, as far as I am aware, no empirical research focused on the discourses used by the Japanese NRMs or on the relation of such discourses to mainstream culture. I examined the relationships between discourses created by *Aleph* and mainstream Japanese culture. My contribution thus focuses on this dynamic relationship, which I argued is influenced by social and economic changes affecting Japanese society today.

6.4 Limitations

As described above, my investigation resulted in several significant findings. However, there are some limitations to this research and its findings. One restriction is that all the discourses provided on the *Aleph* website, including the converts' testimonials, presumably were censored by *Aleph*. Therefore, the effectiveness of the circulation of their discourses is hard to measure quantitatively. Incorporating more resources as well as broader archives will be helpful. Moreover, conducting actual fieldwork involving live observations of the training programs will allow researchers to better understand the group's actual preaching and training contents and methods.

Another limitation is due to the design of this research study. Investigating media artifacts alone will not provide enough information to allow researchers to explain why *Aleph* has been successfully recruiting new converts. A future study should include interviewing believers and having them fill out questionnaires with

questions about what eventually convinced them to join the group. Asking *Aleph*'s representatives and some members involved with creating the informational media artifacts will be also helpful for researchers to have a better understanding about the group's motivations. Additionally, presenting some narratives to non-Japanese researchers to further understand the cultural conventions used in *Aleph* media artifacts might be interesting. Finally, it would be of interest to look into other NRMs to compare my findings to see the similarities and differences.

To conclude, these images of "real happiness" touch upon aspects of physical and mental health, family and friends, and community, education, and work, representing them by inversely canceling out their most fearful elements. *Aleph* and similar religious organizations in Japan have successfully deployed these images in their public media to recruit new members because these symbols and images have meaning and value in terms of social and cultural anxieties that are perhaps too real to bear. Consequently, *Aleph* is an example of a religious group seeking to rehabilitate its public image and recruit new converts by touching upon problems associated with modernity, circulating images that represent its practices as potent palliatives to fearful and painful aspects of peoples' everyday lives. *Aleph* has successfully deployed these images in its public media artifacts to recruit new members because the resolutions that it offers have meaning and value in terms of widely-circulating social and cultural anxieties.

6.5 Summary

In summary, this study demonstrated the importance of investigating *Aleph*'s strategic use of culturally normative discourses, since this reflects the group's attempts to re-adjust its discourses, as well as a larger trend among Japanese religious groups to be more appealing to mainstream Japanese cultural values. I predict in the future that the NRMs will continue to adjust their discourses in order to survive and recruit new converts. In other words, these discourses are not fixed but are expected to change with the social changes of Japanese society. Thus, studying their discourses will help researchers understand the larger trends of the Japanese society as well.

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