Mass Media and Religion in Japan: Mediating the Leader's Image

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Abstract
The development of the new Japanese religions (the so-called *shinshukyō*), right since their first appearance at the end of the 19th century, has always been wholly tied to the development of the means of mass communication. Numerous studies have investigated Japanese new religious movements, but there has been little study of the role played by the media in their development. This article presents an analysis of the relationship between new religion and media through the example of a group called *Kōfuku no kagaku*, founded in 1986 and particularly noted for having related its success to its communication strategies. The analysis will focus especially on the two-year period 1991-1992 when the *sacralization* of the body of the leader – brought about through a massive publicity campaign in 1991 – is then contrasted with the attempt at de-legitimisation carried out by the press in the same period (the so-called *Kōdansha affair*). The relationship with the media is revealed, therefore, in its double role as an instrument of legitimisation of the authority of the leader and the danger for his 'aura'.

Introduction: The New Religions and the Mass Media in Contemporary Japan

The complex religious panorama in contemporary Japan includes the numerous groups that emerged at the end of the 19th century and that have been defined – according to the period of their development and the classification criteria adopted – as new religions (*shinshūkyō*), new-new religions (*shinshinshūkyō*), new spiritual movements (*shinreisei undō*), or spiritual world (*seishin sekai*). What the many classifications proposed over the last few decades in academic spheres have in common is the need to distinguish the most recently formed groups from the so-called 'institutionalised religions' (*kisei shukyō*) or 'traditional religions' (*dentō shūkyō*)[1].

A scholarly approach to the new religions is rendered problematic by the fluidity and complexity of the various groups and by their definitions; and particular attention must be paid to the specific religious and social context in which a particular group is operating. The specific character of the 'new' religious groups

lies more in the changes in relationships between members and in organisational level than in any innovations regarding their practices or doctrines. These changes must necessarily be inserted into their relationship both with tradition and with the specific environment in which a group wishes to place itself. Apart from specific differences, both at doctrinal and organisational level, these religious groups share one clearly recognisable common factor typical of their development: a massive use of the means of mass communication. In point of fact, recourse to the mass media has been adopted not only by new religious groups but by the traditional ones as well. In the case of the new religions, however, their evolution has run parallel to and is strongly influenced by the development of that which is defined as the *information society*, to the extent that they are sometimes defined as 'mass media religions' (*media shūkyō*, Inamasu 1992, 6).

The organisational structure of the new religions in most cases includes teams specialising in public relations or media programming. Many groups have their own publishing houses which distribute their texts to the ordinary retail bookshops as well, the latter often having special sections for groups with large numbers of publications (Ishii 1994). Japan has had nothing akin to the American television evangelists; the new religions presence in the mass media is mainly developing through advertisements in magazines and newspapers, and in broadcasts on radio programmes and satellite television networks. Furthermore, even the enactment and fruition of religious ceremonies and festivals is strongly influenced by the attendance of the mass media, as pointed out in Ian Reader's (1991) analysis regarding the Star Festival (*hoshi matsuri*) of the Buddhist group *Agonshū*.

Furthermore, the groups which developed in the late seventies, the 'new-new religions' should be considered in the historical context of the nineteen eighties, a period in which intellectuals and journalists noticed a 'return to religion' (*shūkyō kaiki*) or 'a religious boom' (*shūkyō būmu*). In the nineteen eighties, two public surveys were held into the religious beliefs of the Japanese[2] according to which, from 1973 onwards, interest in 'religion' tended to be on the increase. According to a survey by the NHK Broadcasting Public Opinion Research Division (1980), the number of Japanese who declared themselves to have some personal faith increased in the five years from 1973 to 1978 (Ibid, 635). In the 1980s, translations of American writings connected to the New Age movement began to appear in Japan, including *Out on a Limb* by Shirley MacLaine and certain department stores reserved shelf space for publications and products related to the *spritual world* in general (it was in a department store that the term *seishin sekai* came to be used for the first time). At the same time, certain magazines specialising in occultism were published, the most well known being *Mū* and *My Birthday*; and these were followed by *manga* and films that dealt with subjects related to the occult or to the supernatural. In 1973 a translation in Japanese of the prophecies of Nostradamus was published and achieved notable success with the public (Kisala 1997, 48-9).

The mass media has, therefore, played an important role in the definition of the new movements and in their *reception* in that they have followed the development of the new religions right from the start in the 19th Century. The first magazine article regarding new religions appeared on 5 February 1895 in the magazine *Taiyō* and was entitled *Tenrikyō*, from the name of one of the first of the new religious movements (Inoue et al. 1994, 5). In the 1980s, the mass media gave such widespread coverage to publications that the period became recognised not only as one of a *religious boom* but also as a *boom in religious information* (*shūkyō jōhō būmu*, Inoue 1996, 221).

The sarin gas attack on the Tokyo metropolitan subway by members of the *Aum Shinrikyō* in 1995 was an important turning point in the relationship between the media and religions in Japan. The press and the media in general, contributed to the making of a 'religious phenomenon', after which they highlighted the 'brainwashing problem' and the danger these groups could prove to society. Mass media criticism is often aimed at the new religious groups, whereas when faced with the 'traditional' groups they generally assume a different attitude:

> When dealing with established religious traditions, the Japanese media generally accentuate the positive: the cultural contribution of Buddhist temples, the millions of people tossing money into Shinto shrine collection boxes at the New Year, foreigners challenging themselves with Zen austerities. (Dorman 2001)

Numerous studies have investigated Japanese new religious movements, but there has been little study of the role played by the media in their development. But the identity of a religious group in contemporary Japan cannot be analysed without taking into account its media relations and its mode of propagation. One of the principal effects of the interaction between mass media and religion is the way the latter turns into a *spectacle* (Debord 1979). The result of this effect is that, now, any religious group that disregards the codes of mass communication, and the necessity of *appearing*, inevitably runs the risk of disappearing from view. The mass media were, and still are, useful to the religious movements for providing new information, for keeping members up to date, for studying techniques to attract new members, for promoting their own image and for opposing competition from other groups, as an integral part of what could be defined as 'religious marketing', consisting of a combination of strategies aimed at attracting the attention of the faithful and *selling* a religious product.

In the field of this analysis, the group chosen as an explicative example of the relation between mass media and religions in contemporary Japan is *Kōfuku no kagaku* (literally *The Science of Happiness*). In 2003-2004, I spent one year in Japan

doing fieldwork on new religions and mass communications. I interviewed some representatives of the PR offices of these groups and attended ceremonies, workshops and events. The choice to focus my research on *Kōfuku no kagaku* was dictated by the fact that the group is one of the most recent formations and, especially, because it is one of those that has made most use of the means of communication to construct its own public image and to spread its teachings. Furthermore there has been little academic research on the role played by media on *Kōfuku no kagaku's* image strategies and leader-member relationship.

Kofuku no Kagaku, The Science of Happiness

The *Kōfuku no kagaku* group was founded in 1986 by Ōkawa Ryūhō (born Nakagawa Takashi), then little more than thirty years old, with a degree from the prestigious University of Tokyo and an ex-employee of a large company. Ōkawa became the director and spiritual leader of a group of people, mainly consisting of acquaintances who were studying his texts. In 1991, the group managed to obtain registration in compliance to the Religious Corporations Law (*shūkyō hōjin hō*) and underwent a marked change in its public image. From the doctrinal point of view, from being 'a study group on human happiness' *Kōfuku no kagaku* modified its teachings, assuming a more markedly Buddhist identity. With that purpose, the leader's previous writings were modified in order to introduce more references to Buddhist doctrine and, especially, to highlight the figure of the founder. If, in fact, in his earlier writings – before the divine possession that was said to have taken place in 1981 which led to the founding of the group – the life of Ōkawa was described as normal, with the joys, the delusions, scholastic successes and failures similar to those of any adolescent. In the new version the leader's biography has been transformed into the spiritual journey of a man whose superior qualities are recognized by all those who meet him and are around him (his friends, relations, colleagues and school companions). The exemplary life of the leader has become the unquestionable proof of his being the incarnation of Buddha (Ōkawa 1994). The change determined the group's significant success and a sharp increase in the faithful. The efficacy of the spiritual offering, however, would not have been so great without appropriate promotion through advertising. In the early 1990s, the history of the group is one of an intensive and costly mass media campaign through advertising and spectacular public events.

The process of transformation of the leader's image, understood as the passage from common man to 'divinity', in the period 1991-1992 was based above all on two peculiar events: the publicity campaign of the summer of 1991, and a great public event celebrating the leader's birthday on 15 July 1991, during which Ōkawa declared himself to be the reincarnation of the Buddha and of the principal divinity of the group, *El Cantāre.* The proposed analysis intends to consider this process in relation to the press attempt to *de-legitimise* and *degrade* (Figlioli et al. 1997, 18) the

leader, an attempt which led to the so-called *Kōdansha* (*Kōdansha jiken*) affair beginning in October 1992.

The Megaton Campaign: The Great Publicity Campaign of 1991

In the period between March and July 1991, the group financed a publicity campaign that was entrusted to one of the most famous Japanese advertising agencies, *Dentsū,* which it is said pretended an advance payment of over two thousand million yen (*Asahi Shinbun* 30 July 1991, 29). The first array of advertising messages regarded the texts *Nosutoradamusu senritsu no keiji* (The Terrifying Revelations of Nostradamus) and *Arā no daikeikoku* (Allah's Great Warning), published by the group's publishing house, and attributed to the leader. This was followed by the text *Eien no Budda* (The eternal Buddha) and the event was linked to the leader's birthday on the 15 July at the Tōkyō Dome, an enormous complex usually reserved for sports events or concerts.

As far as the latter event is concerned, between 15 and 19 July the advertising images were carried by four national daily newspapers and thirty-seven regional ones – which published full-page spreads of the advertisements of the books three times – with coverage in thirty magazines, on various television channels that broadcast a fifteen-second spot five hundred times, and on thirty-three radio stations. Besides this, fifty-five adhesive banners appeared on taxis throughout the country, forty advertising vehicles were hired and an air balloon flew over Tōkyō for a week with the slogan 'The time has come, the Science of Happiness' (*jidai wa, ima kōfuku no kagaku*).

The Advertising of the *Text Eien no Buddha*

Of the advertising messages, the most significant one concerning the leader's public image, was the one on the text *Eien no Budda* which appeared from the 15 to the 19 July in certain newspapers. For the first time an image of the founder was used for an advertising campaign. Only the *Mainichi shinbun* agreed to publish the picture of the face of the leader as the group had requested (*Senden Kaigi* 1991, 15). The newspapers *Yomiuri shinbun, Nikkei shinbun, Sankei shinbun* and *Tōkyō shinbun* published a picture depicting the cosmos and, in reduced size, the photo on the cover of the book, while *Asahi shinbun* decided to publish only the picture on the book cover.

There were various reasons for their refusal to publish the photo of Ōkawa: they ranged from the belief that the photo of his face might be a strong element of propaganda aimed at proselytising (*Asahi shinbun, Yomiuri shinbun*), to objections that for the advertising of a publication it was not necessary to insert the author's face (*Tōkyō shinbun*). The *Mainichi shinbun* (which was the only paper to publish one

of the rare interviews with the leader) replied to criticism by affirming that the publication of the photo of the leader could not be considered an incentive to proselytise (Ibid).

As regards the publicity for the event at the Tōkyō Dome, the photo of the leader was published not only by the *Mainichi shinbun*, but also by the *Sankei shinbun* and the *Tōkyō shinbun*; all maintained that it was legitimate to use the picture of the leading figure in the promotion of a conference, as that was nothing new in the advertising of public events. The *Tōkyō shinbun*, however, preferred not to publish the close-up photo of Ōkawa. According to a statement by a spokesman for the newspaper, this was to avoid encouraging proselytising; instead the newspaper chose a picture in which the leader appears at a public conference. On the other hand, for fear of too heavily influencing the group's strategies for expansion, the *Yomiuri shinbun* and the *Nikkei shinbun* both refused to carry the advertisements (Ibid).

We may note that the television networks, *Nihon terebi, TBS, Terebi Asahi* and *Terebi Tōkyō* accepted the advertisements for the publications but rejected those for the spectacular event. The reasons were similar to those given by the newspapers; although, during the same period *Terebi Asahi* transmitted two programmes financed by the group: *Yume oi hito* (broadcast from June to August) and *Tamori no ongaku wa sekai da* (shown in June). Only *Fuji terebi* broadcast both advertising messages (Ibid, 75-6).

As far as concerns the refusal to publish, it is important to stress that although many newspapers have set rules regulating advertising by religious groups (Ibid,76), their attitude varies notably from case to case: for example, many of the newspapers that rejected advertising for the *Kōfuku no kagaku* accepted it for the *Agonshū* group's event (Ibid, 76). The media's reaction to the group could be attributed to uncertainty regarding the correct attitude to adopt when faced with a request to publish advertising messages from religious groups, especially the newly formed ones. If, on the one hand, the request by *Kōfuku no kagaku* was similar to that of any other company or publishing house intent on promoting its products, the sudden sharp growth in members of the group had surely highlighted the problem of the media's potential in assisting them or not with their expansion strategies. The ambiguity, however, is accentuated too by the above-mentioned norms inserted into the press regulations concerning religious advertising as applied in 1991. The criteria for exclusion were somewhat random, in that the basis for distinguishing between more or less opportune messages was not clearly specified. Furthermore, it was stated that *announcements insisting on earthly benefits* (Ibid, 78) will be rejected; or if doctrines were considered *clearly non-scientific* (Ibid, 78) or contain *arbitrary declarations* (Ibid, 78); but, what criteria are used to judge the legitimacy or even scientific basis of a religious group was not made clear at all. As

far as concerns *Kōfuku no kagaku*, the attitude of the newspapers and radio and television networks to the group's advertising campaign marked the beginning of the criticism that led to the group being targeted on the front pages of many scandal sheets.

15 July 1991: The *Sacralization* of the Body of the Leader
The event of the 15 July 1991 dedicated to the thirty-fifth birthday of Ōkawa Ryūhō was entitled *Kyōsō otanjō kinensai* (Commemoration of the founder's birth). In reality, it was not the leader's first public appearance, but it was the first that would be instituted as a festivity – together with the El Cantāre festival of the 26 December – and it was a recurring event for some years and was related to a personal event in the life of the leader, his birthday.

The most important element in the analysis of the event was the figure of the leader who little by little made himself the centre of attention. He became not only the main point of reference for the group but also the figure all members should emulate.

The event was presented as a birthday celebration, both a mass media event and a religious ceremony of the (re)birth of the Buddha. On the one hand, in fact, the ceremony ratified the 'sacredness' of the body of the leader who, by making a spectacle of his body, performed the rite of consecration, enabling his passage *from spiritual medium to Buddha* (Astley 1995, 360). On the other hand, however, the body of the leader was made into a *spectacle* to persuade the spectators and as such, was sold to his public. The body of the leader became, therefore, paraphrasing Federico Boni (2002), a sort of 'consumer product' that was offered to the faithful through a marketing operation. We shall try to indicate the most important aspects of the ceremony and, especially, of the relation between the leader or, more exactly, the leader as he was presented on the *celebrative occasion* of the festival to the faithful present (or not) at the event.

 Organisationally, the Festival of the Tōkyō Dome appeared similar to any other entertainment spectacle; the programme was written by a famous writer and member of the group, Kageyama Tamio, and the presenter was Ogawa Tomoko, an actress, also a member of *Kōfuku no kagaku*. There were famous guests giving testimonials, a strategy already well-honed by the new religions (Iwasa 1993, 110-1) and these served both to justify the intense advertising of the event and to attract a large audience. The use of special effects, lasers, smoke and suchlike, created a special atmosphere – described in the many newspaper articles, yet not without a hint of sarcasm (*Shūkan gendai* 1991, 33/30, pp.46-9, Ekawa 1991a, 186-9).

The ceremony began with a procession of the members who had shown particular dedication in the work of proselytising, followed by the speech of the director of administration who announced the Fidelity Prize (*Friday* 1991, 31, p.22). Until this moment, the ceremony was not so very different from the usual company assemblies where the best employees are awarded prizes and they celebrate the anniversary of the foundation, the company's sales successes (in this case, the collection of money for the event) and its competitive strategies (here, the increase in the number of the faithful). At a certain point, the leader appeared completely dressed in gold and descended the stairway (Ibid). For the first time Ōkawa abandoned the sober, blue suit that he usually wears in public and dressed up to carry out his *exhibition ritual* through which he assumed his new role as 'divinity'. Ōkawa's posture and gestures were theatrical and the tone of his voice resounding and majestic as – raising his arms to the sky – he proclaimed himself the reincarnation of the Buddha (*Shūkan gendai* 1991, 33/30, p.47; Ekawa 1991b, 37).

The simple spectacle turned into a ceremony and at the same time a performance; it concluded the journey to what could be termed 'the coronation' (Dayan and Katz 1993, 36) of the charismatic leader who manifested his divine nature through a body no longer seen as unitary, but transformed through being dressed up in the costumes representing the various reincarnations of the primary spirit in the multiple body of the divinity. The leader's political legitimacy, in Weber's term, is based on his appeal to tradition: Ōkawa first declares himself Buddha and then introduces a new original divinity, *El Cantāre*. The Buddha announced in the advertising was now manifested and the proof of his authority is based, above all, on the realisation of the prophecy regarding the increase in the faithful, who contribute to the significance and importance of the leader's authority. The possibility the spectacle offered of approaching the public emotionally and expressively was skilfully exploited and joined the bodies of the leader to those of the faithful who became angels of the light (*hikari no tenshi*), witnesses of the event and invested with the task of being the messengers of the divine light (*Shūkan gendai* 1991, 33/30, p.48).

Assisting at the ceremony, the faithful became part of the event itself, and the spectacle created a strong sense of community: the wholehearted enthusiasm of the audience became the reconfirmation of its fidelity to the leader. The public's role was not only that of witness to epochal events, but also one of participation and emotion.

As in every rite of passage, transition is dangerous and once over the threshold the group either finds itself with a new and superior integration or it breaks up and faces a separation. The reactions to Ōkawa's declarations were not unanimous, even to the extent that some of the faithful considered the change a sort of betrayal and left the group (Hayakawa 1991b, 64-5). As for the mass media

coverage at the event itself, to all appearances the event was organised outside the mass media (Dayan and Katz 1992, 5) in the sense that it did not take place within a television studio and was not arranged by television companies. The ceremony was televised and broadcast live at all the premises of the group through a system of closed circuit television, and furthermore it was recorded and has become a video sold by the group's publishing house. Through television, the event reaches a far wider public and the presence of the *body* of the leader is extended over the vast zone covered by the transmission. Moreover, the possibility offered to the faithful to be an *omniscient onlookers*, having the possibility to observe the whole ceremony and even from different angles (so, seeing even better than those who really took part) makes up for their not being actually in the *proxemic presence* of the leader as were the faithful at the live ceremony.

As far as regards, instead, the video recording, a feature of traditional ritual ceremonies is that they are not repeatable; but here *reproducibility* is possible and characterised by spatial and temporal dilation of its fruition. The video can in fact be seen in different places from that in which it was made and even after a period of years. The ritual, therefore, will continue to take place each time the video is seen, becoming a sort of testimony for the faithful who, by seeing it, can almost feel as though they *were there*.

Kōdansha Jiken: The Desecration of the Body of the Leader

The process of the 'consecration', or the making sacred of the body of the leader by creating a spectacle of it, is strictly connected to that which—following the analyses proposed by Erving Goffman (1959) applying the metaphor of the stage—is defined as the separation between the *onstage*, the public spectacle, and the *backstage*, what takes place behind the scenes. Everything that remains hidden in the background of the spectacle, from the rehearsals to private life, must not become known because it would undermine the spontaneous nature of the leader's words and therefore impinge on his credibility. This separation between onstage and backstage is essential when roles are enacted that are prevalently based on mystification and on an aura of greatness. The leader's exposure to the mass media follows a double logic if, on the one hand, it can serve a propagandistic purpose in order to exalt and spread his image, but on the other hand can produce the opposite effect. In so far as his is a spectacular celebrity 'sold' to the public, the leader is always more vulnerable and his legitimisation always more fragile. Everything is known about him and this close examination could cause the leader's *loss of aura* (Ibid, 8), the decline of his authority (Meyrowitz 1985, 167) from the moment in which he is scrutinised by the camera; an aura which was based on the distance between him and his public goes missing the moment that what was previously backstage has the spotlight turned on it. In Ōkawa's case we can consider the backstage as his private life which, in the first years of the

development of the group, was absolutely safeguarded and distinct from his public image.

The massive cost of the advertising for the event at the Tōkyō Dome, however, despite the rapid and sharp increase in the faithful, attracted attention and criticism from both religious scholars and from the mass media. In particular, between the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992 a series of texts appeared that were critical (Yakushi' in 1991; Yonemoto and Shimada 1992) and numerous newspapers published articles that attacked the group or held it up to ridicule. The attention of the press was due both to the peculiarity of the group and to enquiries by the mass media into emblematic figures who might confirm a trend in the 'return to religion' (Berthon 1991, 33-6).

The first critical articles started appearing in May 1991 and – in tones similar to those used for scandals involving famous personages – mainly focused their attention on the huge 'donations' which the faithful were obliged to make to finance the advertising campaign and the event in the Tōkyō Dome, or they accused the group of resembling a company rather than a religious organisation. (*Sukora* 23 May 1991, 60-3). What most stirred the group's violent reaction in September 1991 was a series of articles appearing in the *Friday* and *Gendai* magazines. The reasons for this reaction are clearly evident in the articles mentioned. The first ones focus mainly on criticism regarding the fundraising (*Shūkan gendai* 1991, 33/30, pp.48) or on the directors' attitude towards the faithful. These articles use testimonials from certain ex-members or the families of such (Ibid, 48-9). Criticism of this type, however, though showing the disquiet of a number of the faithful, is no danger to the group's stability in that it only attacks the most evident aspects of the organisation, but not its *backstage space*. In the articles that followed however (*Friday* 1991, 30; *Friday* 1991, 31; Hayakawa 1991a; 1991b; 1991c; Arita, 1991; Yamada 1991; *Shūkan gendai* 1991, 33/26; *Shūkan gendai* 1991, 33/30) the leader and his privacy were directly attacked: especially important was the testimony of Ishihara Tsuneji, an ex-director of the GLA new religion, according to whom, at the time when he was still an employee, Ōkawa – hiding under a false name – had come to consult him on his obsession about being possessed by a fox (Hayakawa 1991a, 8).

The *profanation* of the leader continued with the invasion of his private life in order to depict him as a very ordinary, even banal person. The account of his childhood and adolescence was built up through the testimony of his companions at school, at university and his colleagues at work (Hayakawa 1991c, 60-1).

The *degradation* of the body of the leader came next: on the one hand, from a medical report with morbid details of his presumed consultations with the doctor of the GLA and on the illness that struck his brother following a serious accident;

and on the other hand, from the invasion of an intimate emotional sphere such as the memories of his childhood and adolescence. In reality, some articles leading up to the event at the Tōkyō Dome had accused Ōkawa of having mental problems, but the real danger was perceived when – after the declaration of his being the reincarnation of the Buddha – the attack was directed at the *divine body* in an attempt to deride it as that of a common man (or even worse, a man who was not sane), and therefore to *desecrate it* (Boni 2002, 53), and this was what caused a violent reaction from the leader himself.

The protest campaign consisted of demonstrations, the distribution of brochures and, especially, the sending of hundreds of faxes and telephone calls that blocked the telephone lines of the offices of *Kōdansha* (publishers of *Friday* and *Gendai* magazines). According to the company, work was interrupted for five days and the group was accused of having monopolised 295 telephone lines and 94 fax lines from 2 to 6 September (Astley 1995, 370). For their part, some important members of the *Kōfuku no kagaku* – including the writer Kageyama Tamio (director) and the actress Ogawa Tomoko (assistant director) – founded the National Association of the Victims of Friday Magazine (*Kōdansha furaidē zenkoku higaisha no kai*). The incident ended with a legal suit that lasted for many years. Notwithstanding the fact that the court cases held in various cities concluded in favour of the group, the *Kōdansha* affair affected both the teachings of the group and its membership, causing a scission between members and causing many members to abandon the group. According to the journalist Hayakawa Kazuhiro and Professor Shimada Hiromi (1992, 204), about three thousand of the faithful sued *Kōdansha* for damages as their spiritual life (*seishinteki kōgai soshō*) had been harmed and the defamatory accusation had affected their faith. The Association published some texts concerning the incident with *Kōdansha*, and among these is a significant example given by the comic book *Kibō no kakumei* (The Revolution of Hope), published in 1995.

The Leader's Winning Strategy and the Attack on Religious Groups
The group's victory in the trial against *Kōdansha* was in part owing to the cohesion of the faithful who formed around their own leader to safeguard his public image, strongly refusing to accept his degradation and, in the end, notwithstanding some defections, the group's stability was reinforced. The response to the appeal to protest against *Kōdansha* shows not only how religion is seen through the mass media, but also shows how – through the vision that the religious group has of the media – the faithful judge the means of communication (Stout, Buddenbaum 1996, 12-34).

From the point of view of the group's leader and directors, the *Kōdansha* affair shows not only their skill in knowing how to involve the faithful and make them

act, but also their strategic know-how in shifting the level of conflict and widening it to include arguments that involve those who are not of their faith: if the protest had been presented as a mere reply to the criticism against the group leader it would have, in fact, risked being accused of fanaticism. The *Kōdansha* affair marks the beginning of *Kōfuku no kagaku's,* social and political initiatives in particular the protest campaign against pornography in the press, addressed especially to the publications of the *Kōdansha* group. By focusing on subjects that offend morals – such as nude pictures – in the counter-attack against *Kōdansha*, the group managed to persuade even those who were not in accord with its methods to accept the reasons for its protest. It was the first time that a religious group reacted in this way to attacks by the press;[3] and the campaign influenced public opinion to the extent that in 1994 a Group on Research into the Ethics of the Means of Communication was set up to examine the problem of the loss of ethical values in the mass media.

It was in this period too that the 'educational campaign' (*keimō undō*) started, through which the group taught ethical and moral questions and judged the truth or not of other religions. In the years following the *Kōdansha* affair, the *Kōfuku no kagaku* took on the task of revealing 'false religions' and set off a violent controversy with other religious groups, in particular with *Aum shinrikyō* and the *Sōkagakkai.* In reality, the aversion to the other religious groups was already evident right from 1991 (Astley 1995, 373), but it became more intense in later years, probably encouraged by the public success of the protest against the publishing house. As far as regards the relationship with the *Aum shinrikyō* of Asahara Shōkō, the criticism was reciprocal and based on a series of publications and television debates, which Ōkawa often did not take part in – refusing to come face to face with his rival. In this phase of their development, the two groups had some points in common as far as their public image, and this placed them in competition with certain sectors of the public. For example, in the same period each of the two leaders wrote a book and produced a film on Nostradamus, attracting a public of young people and students. The terrorist attack on the Tōkyō subway system by members of the – favoured the criticism by *Kōfuku no kagaku* who for some time had been urging the police to investigate the activities of the Asahara group, going so far – as members of an association of citizens against *Aum shinrikyō* – as to call a protest demonstration in March 1995.

After the subway attack, *Kōfuku no kagaku* published a special issue of a magazine regarding the case, The Strategies of Destruction of the *Aum shinrikyō (Oumu shinrikyō bokumetsu sakusen*) showing their skill by distancing themselves from the event to save their own public image. The text criticised the ascetic techniques practised by the faithful, but the heaviest criticism related to the leader, Asahara, who was considered to be the reincarnation of Ishikawa Goemon, an infamous and cruel assassin. Asahara was accused of suffering from psychological problems

related to a sense of inferiority deriving from his humble origins and his physical handicap (short-sightedness):

> Asahara himself suffers from a strong, this-worldly inferiority complex, brought about by the extreme poverty of his childhood and a physical handicap (myopia). To compensate for these things, he has gorged himself with the desire to do strange things that nobody else can do. With the control he gains over believers through brainwashing, he tries to satisfy his inflated ego and thirst for power. There are demons at work behind these dark ambitions of his.(Translated by James Heisig in Kisala 1995, 24)

In reality, however, the accusations are very similar to those brought against Ōkawa by journalists who insist that he has socialization problems related to his obesity, which could be the basis of his protagonist complex (Hayakawa 1991c, 60-1). It is outside our scope to discuss the validity or not of the accusations Ōkawa made against Asahara, but it is important to stress that the criticism aimed at *Aum shinrikyō* was based on articles by newspapers and magazines whose contents are in no way doubted, quite unlike what happened during the *Kōdansha* incident. *Kōfuku no kagaku's* attitude to the press (and the mass media in general) is therefore demonstrated as ambiguous and changeable according to the situation.

Conclusion
The analysis of the relationship between *Kōfuku no kagaku* and the means of mass communication at the beginning of the nineteen nineties shows how the combination of efficacious strategies linked on the one hand to doctrinal changes and, on the other, to the technique of persuasion offered by the means of mass communication has determined the success obtained. Even though the data regarding the *audience* could have been altered and the figure of 5.5 million faithful indicated by the group in 1992, appears somewhat improbable (Astley 1995, 352), it is an undeniable fact that the sudden increase in the number of the faithful happened within a short space of time and, as numerous articles testify, the group obtained wide mass media coverage during that period.

If, therefore, the choice of a malleable and not strictly set doctrine allowed the group to adapt itself to the requirements of contemporary society by proposing a path to salvation realizable in daily life, in relations with friends or in the workplace, the way it is presented has to be adapted as well to the requirements imposed by society and the mass media, in whose eyes *its existence* is in proportion to *its appearance*. The transformation of a charismatic leader into a divinity is not new in the sphere of new Japanese religious movements, which are usually characterised by founders to whom divine powers and appellations are attributed in order to legitimise their authority. Ōkawa's peculiarity lies rather in his way of interacting with the faithful and in his building of a public image of the leader that

makes him credible through his *showing himself* in public and the amplification of the message through the mass media. The more the message is spread, the more visible the leader becomes and the more he attracts new faithful-clients, attracted also by the various promotions and prizes that are proof of the validity of the prophecies.

The new charismatic leader draws economic power from the legitimisation of his divine nature, because wealth is considered the tangible proof of his being the reincarnation of Buddha. Economic power, in order to be maintained, requires however stability; and so the leader must abandon his charismatic spontaneity, creating a body-image in which each single move and each single word is controlled and measured with the aim of appearing to have a body of unobtainable and *divine perfection*. The final development is to be the abandonment of the body, the creation of an immaterial and virtual leader: since 1995, in point of fact, Ōkawa has communicated with the faithful almost exclusively through video.

Considerations of the close relationship between the *Kōfuku no kagaku* and the means of communication appear however to be in question owing to the violent criticism the group continues to aim at the mass media. While, for the advertising campaign and for the public event too, the opportunities offered by the media were appreciated, the case of *Kōdansha* appeared as a direct attack on the power of the press. In real terms, the book that started the advertising campaign of 1991, *Arā no daikeikoku* (Allah's Great Warning) already contained strong attacks against the press. In the text, the newspapers were accused of being only interested in increasing their readership and of focusing their attention exclusively on negative aspects of the activities of politicians (Ōkawa 1991, 56). They were accused of changing their opinions to please as many people as possible, of dealing with subjects too superficially, of lacking depth (Ibid, 52), and of being 'factors of pollution' for people (Ibid, 60-1).

The protest against the publishing house was particularly penetrating thanks to the use of mass communication. So even attacks against the mass media utilized the media itself as a means of distribution and were essentially based on the sale of texts promoted by advertising campaigns which exploited to the full the group's ability to persuade through the means of communication. In reality, therefore, the stormy relations between the *Kōfuku no kagaku* and the mass media, proved to be an efficacious expedient – on the one hand, to increase its own popularity (both through the criticism and through the success obtained during the demonstration) and, on the other hand, to safeguard the figure of the leader whose integrity was being threatened by the newspapers' attacks.

In conclusion, this paper has provided an analysis of the role of the media in the construction of a religious leader's image. However, its focus on 'when' and 'how'

religious messages are created, produced and disseminated through the media ought to be complimented by further research on their reception to verify how audiences make use of and (re)definite mediated narratives.

Notes

[1] For an overall view of the studies on the new religions and on the evolution of the definitions, see Inoue (1992) e Shimazono (1992; 1994, 2004).

[2] A survey entitled *Nihonjin no kokuminsei* (The national character of the Japanese) was commissioned by the *Institute of Statistical Mathematics* of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology while another, *Nihonjin no ishiki* (The awareness of the Japanese) is from the NHK Broadcasting Public Opinion Research Division.

[3] The Kōdansha case was not the first example of a press attack on the new religions in Japan. At the beginning of the 1950s, heavy accusations regarding the accumulation of gold ingots and trafficking in cocaine were levelled at the leader of the Reiyūkai by the Yomiuri shinbun. The same newspaper was involved in the so-called Yomiuri jiken case about the Risshō koseikai group accused of plagiarism and instigation to suicide. For an analysis, see Morioka 1994, 281-310. For a recapitulatory table of legal cases regarding the new religions from 1946 to 1992, see: *Chōsa Jōhō* 1992 (403), 2-6.

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