

THE SOKA GAKKAI: ABSOLUTISM VERSUS PLURALISM
IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Interdisciplinary Studies Program: International Studies
and the Honors College of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

June 1990

APPROVED:



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An Abstract of the Thesis of
Janelle Gates for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program:
International Studies
to be taken August 1990
Title: THE SOKA GAKKAI: ABSOLUTISM VERSUS PLURALISM
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The Soka Gakkai is a Japanese new religious movement that has gained political power and endured skepticism in Japan since its expansion began in the aftermath of World War II. As a global movement, the Soka Gakkai has internationalized interpretations of their ideological doctrines, their organizational structure and their political strategies. In order to establish the movement's legitimacy as an international liasion, this study analyzes how the Soka Gakkai has effectively blended its absolutist ideology with pluralistic approaches to the international community.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: THE SOKA GAKKAI

During the turbulent years following World War II, the Japanese Buddhist lay organization known as the Soka Gakkai (Value Creating Society) blossomed into the largest religious movement in Japan and has since expanded worldwide to become the extensive, and often controversial, new religious movement that exists today.¹ The group has endured negative reactions from the Japanese public over its absolutist ideology and active political involvement. With sweeping international growth in the past fifteen years--the movement now has chapters in over 115 countries--the Soka Gakkai's inherent paradoxical and multidimensional relationship with society has become increasingly pronounced (Metraux 101).

One reason the Soka Gakkai is often categorized as a "new religious movement" is because the movement as it is organized today arose in the postwar period. However, the lay organization incorporates the beliefs of the Buddhist Nichiren Shoshu sect, which boasts a seven-hundred year history in Japan. By pragmatically "updating" the sect's ideology and adapting its socialization efforts in reaction to changes in contemporary society, the Soka Gakkai effectively mixes traditional and modern worlds. Despite the movement's steps to secularize, however, it

maintains enough tension with its greater social environment to be distinguished as a "new religious movement." The degree of tension a new religious movement has with society is crucial--if the movement becomes too secularized, it may be considered an "established religion." On the other hand, if the movement causes too much friction with society it is likely to be pressured into dissolving or leaving that particular social environment.²

In Japan, religious attitudes and affiliations overlap several separate traditions (namely Shinto, Buddhist and Confucianist) to form a unified spirituality (Earhart 3). Although many religious traditions have been imported into Japan, the country's historical isolation has encouraged their "Japanization"; in this case, incorporating incoming religions into the indigenous Shinto belief system.³ This assimilation process functions to tie together all the threads that run through Japanese religious culture. Individual Japanese usually stress certain religious traditions according to their circumstances and needs, but remain within the boundaries of what is accepted as "Japanese" religion. Some characteristics of Japanese religion include belief in the complex notion of kami (something "sacred"), ancestor worship, and the importance of purification, rituals, charms, and festivals. An additional theme is the incorporation of religion into everyday life, which parallels the natural bond between Japanese religion and the Japanese nation (Earhart 1-8). The Shinto religion, which has the Emperor as its figurehead, became extremely nationalistic and supported the state in its

military endeavors during the period from the Meiji Restoration of 1868 until 1945. However, it is important to recognize that "the close tie between Japanese religion and the nation at large is an indelible feature of Japanese history" (Earhart 8).

With the Emperor's declaration of his mortality in 1945, the Japanese saw the Shinto Emperor system, which was the symbol of spiritual and national identity, crumble. Disillusioned because of the unprecedented widespread questioning of indigenous beliefs, the public's initial shock gradually dissolved into acceptance of a more liberal interpretation of the Shinto religion. The era of Shinto nationalism was over and many Japanese stopped expecting to find spiritual guidance through their indigenous religion.

The unsettling postwar era found many Japanese beginning to seek new spiritual outlets. When the established Buddhist sects also failed to meet their needs, having receded to the mere performance of funeral rites, many disoriented Japanese turned to the plethora of new religions to fill the spiritual vacuum. Termed shinko shukyo (newly arisen religions), these groups offered alternative spiritual channels, although most were based in part on the prewar established religions (McFarland 6). The Soka Gakkai, in particular, reached out and nurtured a large population of the sick, poor, and less-educated and aided their recovery by offering fervent enthusiasm at a time when the established religions of Japan were neglecting the people.⁴ Although Japanese today are better educated and significantly wealthier than their counterparts were a generation ago, many

Japanese admit they sense a lack of value in their lives because religious values seem overshadowed by the dominating force of materialism (Earhart 118, Metraux 77). The Soka Gakkai is an appealing alternative because it condones modern lifestyles and material benefits, as well as offers spiritual guidance.

Since WWII, the Soka Gakkai has expanded rapidly, partly because unlike other religions in Japan, which remain largely confined to the spiritual realm, the Soka Gakkai displayed new power possibilities with the creation of its now unaffiliated political arm, the Komeito (Clean Government Party). Moreover, the Soka Gakkai's ability to adapt to the modern needs of different generations and nationalities has broadened its membership. Increasingly, the modern needs of Soka Gakkai members both in Japan and abroad encompass international needs--members require a support system that fulfills their spiritual and their secular needs so that they can cope in the progressively interdependent world. Responding to those needs, the Soka Gakkai is effectively internationalizing interpretations of their ideological doctrines, their organizational structure, and their political strategies. The evolution of the movement into an impressive global organization has helped its members become familiar with the outside world and has given them avenues to participate in that world. Not only does the Soka Gakkai advocate traditional ways of practicing Buddhism, but it also encourages active participation in the modern secular world. The movement's work with the United Nations, especially in the areas of peace and

refugee relief, are notable, but are not publicized except in the Soka Gakkai's array of internal publications.

Despite the Soka Gakkai's own state-of-the-art public relations, however, Japanese nonmembers' reactions to the Soka Gakkai still reflect their skepticism of new religions; often they question the group's claimed socially altruistic motives (Fujiwara 21-36). Because the Soka Gakkai is intolerant in the spiritual realm, and thus is unlike other Buddhist sects, it exists almost paradoxically in its efforts to internationalize when its original doctrines seem to diametrically oppose pluralism.⁵ Critics of the Soka Gakkai have failed to recognize, however, the trend within the movement toward more broadly interpreting its ideology, which originated in the thirteenth century, in order to pursue globalization.

Commenting on the future direction of new religious movements in general, McFarland cites an "attempt to build a bridge back to nationalism" as a possibility; in the Soka Gakkai's case, critics' misinterpretation of this as regressing back to ultranationalism has only reinforced the public's prejudices without considering the reality of the Soka Gakkai's international activities. McFarland goes on to offer another possible role for new religions. He states that "they could endeavor to link the present to the future and help build a bridge to a new and more responsible life that at least transcends omnipresent nationalistic interests" (236). This pivotal concept embracing

globalism makes the modern Soka Gakkai particularly interesting. Its social reforms incorporate universal humanitarian goals and international cooperation--both of which have emerged from reinterpretation of its absolutist ideological doctrines, moving to make the Soka Gakkai more acceptable to a pluralistic world society.

Legitimacy as a New Religious Movement

In order to establish the Soka Gakkai as a viable new religious movement its success must somehow be measured. Ultimately, of course, success must be determined in relation to the Soka Gakkai's own specific goals. Nevertheless, it may be useful to compare the Soka Gakkai's goals and efforts with Stark's Model of Success, which provides a more systematic set of guidelines for placing the Soka Gakkai in the realm of new religions. Stark's overall definition of success is based on the "degree to which a religious movement is able to dominate one or more societies" (12). His notion of domination depends on the degree of impact a new religion has on society--how much it influences behavior, culture and public policy. The Soka Gakkai's breathtaking influence in these areas, especially on behavior and public policy, fit neatly with this definition.

In addition, Stark assumes, without addressing the issue directly, that a "successful" movement must to some degree fulfill members' personal and spiritual needs (12). For the purposes of

this study on the Soka Gakkai's sociopolitical relations, the movement's expansion will be considered indicative of membership satisfaction.

Throughout this analysis, reference to Stark's model (see Fig. 1) will provide insights into why the Soka Gakkai has become the most successful new religious movement in Japan's history (McFarland 195).

FIG. 1

STARK'S MODEL OF SUCCESS FOR NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

DEFINITION: A new religious movement is successful if it dominates one or more societies, which depends on the degree it influences behavior, culture and public policy.

New religious movements are likely to succeed to the extent that they:

1. Retain **cultural continuity** with the conventional faiths of the societies in which they appear or originate.
2. Maintain a **medium level of tension** with their surrounding environment; are deviant, but not too deviant.
3. Achieve **effective mobilization**: strong governance and a high level of individual commitment.
4. Can attract and maintain a **normal age and sex structure**.
5. Occur within a **favorable ecology**, which exists when:
 - a. the religious economy is **relatively unregulated**;
 - b. conventional faiths are **weakened** by secularization or social disruption;
 - c. it is possible to achieve at least **local success within a generation**.
6. Maintain **dense internal network relations** without becoming isolated.
7. Resist **secularization**.
8. Adequately **socialize** the young so as to:
 - a. limit pressures towards secularization;
 - b. limit defection.

(Stark, "How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model," The Future of New Religious Movements. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987. 13.)

CHAPTER II

THE GLOBALIZATION OF IDEOLOGY

Snow points out that "a movement's mobilization efforts and relative success may also hinge on the resiliency of its ideology" (170). Accordingly, the Soka Gakkai can attribute its dramatic success in part to being open to reinterpretation of both its specific doctrines, as well as its social conduct codes, in order to emphasize international applications.

The Soka Gakkai finds the origins of their ideology in the thirteenth century, when the powerful Japanese prophet Nichiren founded his own Buddhist sect. Unlike other more discreet Japanese Buddhist traditions,

only the Nichiren sect among Japanese traditions (and some New Religions deriving from Nichiren Buddhism [namely the Soka Gakkai]) expressed an exclusive claim to absolute truth. (Earhart 107)

Generally, Buddhist sects in Japan, and the new religious movements deriving from them, take a gentle, accepting approach (shoju) toward nonmembers (Mizuno 36). The Nichiren Shoshu sect, however, has always boldly stepped forward, propagating its absolutist ideological ideals while simultaneously trying to convince society of its sympathetic humanitarianism. The Soka Gakkai's use of more assertive conversion methods (shakubuku), for example, help explain why Japanese society has had a particularly

adverse reaction to them. Reacting to this absolutism, Japanese nonmembers typically have scoffed at, condemned, or become extremely afraid of Nichiren Shoshu advocates. This condemnation is now especially aimed at the Soka Gakkai, the sect's more visible affiliate, to the extent that often the positive contributions it makes to society are overlooked.

As a new religious movement, the Soka Gakkai recognizes that it sparks friction with its immediate environment and thus strives to comfortably coexist within society while still maintaining enough autonomy to distinguish itself as the only organization that propagates the "Truth." Maintaining this "medium level of tension," as an integrated yet independent social organization, is problematic for any new religion, but the Soka Gakkai has been able to better resolve this conflict by relying on the tremendous impact that stadiality has on Japanese culture and religion in general (Metraux 41).⁶

Soka Gakkai traditions evoke a feeling of "instant familiarity" in all Japanese because they emphasize through symbols and rituals a form of traditional Buddhism, dating back to the founding of Japan's legendary Nichiren Shoshu sect in the thirteenth century. According to the Rules of Soka Gakkai, the Gakkai is defined as a proselytizing arm of the established sect, but in reality the assertive new religious movement has "intruded into Nichiren Shoshu, and the [sect's] Head Temple has completely lost its autonomy, having become the Religious Affairs Section of the Gakkai" (White 32). Both the sect and the new religious

movement glean the benefits, as well as the drawbacks, of a symbiotic relationship. For example, their combined activities elicit more overall public relations coverage, but this also includes negative criticism.

Outside the religious sphere, the Soka Gakkai operates its political and international branches independently from the Nichiren Shoshu sect. But both Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai take pride in the same legendary beginnings, centered on Nichiren (1222-1282), the most colorful prophet in Japan's history. In fact, the teachings of Nichiren himself have hints of international application in them.

[Nichiren] saw in Japan a similar twofold significance, one the physically limited, and the other, to be realized through transformation according to his high ideal. In this latter sense, Japan meant for him the whole world. (Anesaki 98)

Although Nichiren envisioned Japan as the center of his "earthly paradise," he also planned for worldwide propagation of "True Buddhism" (Anesaki 111).

Nichiren was the foremost advocate of the Japanese Buddhist concept of mappo, an eschatological view of life that places the world (from 1052 A.D. through the present) in a gloomy period when almost everyone has forgotten the Buddha's teachings (Metraux 3). Nichiren knew that before his dream of worldwide conversion could be realized, he (as the Buddha of mappo) must guide the Japanese people and government. He thought the Japanese people were "led astray" by the superstitious practices of Amida Buddhism.⁷ In a shocking essay entitled Rissho Ankoku Ron (The Establishment of

Righteousness and the Security of the Country), Nichiren exposed the "degeneracy of the people and the foolishness of the rulers" and "gave a prophetic warning to the nation that, if it did not turn at once to the unique Truth, the country would experience more disastrous calamities, especially a foreign invasion and a rebellion." In 1260, Nichiren presented this document to the Japanese government and was exiled for his threats (Anesaki 36). Later, however, he felt his apocalyptic perspective confirmed when several natural disasters, as well as two invasion attempts by the Mongols, occurred (Metraux 7). As the only means for salvation during mappo, and in order to eradicate all the evil facing the Japanese people, Nichiren insisted that all people must join him in worshipping the Lotus Sutra (Hokekyo). To combat evil and achieve salvation, Nichiren prescribed exclusive, faithful chanting of "Namu-myoho-renge-kyo" (Hail to the Wonderful Truth of the Lotus Sutra). This phrase is the title of the Lotus Sutra, first pronounced by Nichiren and inscribed by him on the gohonzon (sacred scroll), which became the main object of worship for Nichiren Shoshu Buddhists (Brannen 127).

Today, the Soka Gakkai keeps the themes of Rissho Ankoku Ron alive. The goal remains the same--to ultimately change the collective karma of humankind through massive change of individual karmas, thus sparking a "Human Revolution" (ningen kakumei) (Metraux 15-16). But the contemporary movement has added an additional "burden" on the route to salvation; members must proselytize as well as chant in order to receive the full benefits

of Buddhahood. Also, modern "evil" has different forms, including the threat of nuclear war, the crime/drug culture, and spiritual apathy. The Soka Gakkai believes that Japan especially is vulnerable to internal and external threats because the gods have yet to return since they left their wrathful mark in World War II (Metraux 62, 45).

Nichiren envisioned, after the eradication of evil, the construction of a high sanctuary built by future Japanese. This ordination platform (kaidan) would symbolize Japan's complete conversion to the true faith, thus making Japan the holy land of Buddha. To avoid emphasizing the ethnocentric side effects of a religious "homeland" in this original ordination platform concept, modern interpretation by the Soka Gakkai suggests that it is more accurately explained as a "people's ordination platform" (Dumoulin 268). Similarly, Nichiren's advocacy of kosen rufu--to widely declare and spread Buddhism--implies propagating Nichiren's message throughout the world. Thus, flexibility and universality are currently being emphasized so that Nichiren Shoshu teachings can easily be adopted outside Japan.

In order to effectively spread these ideas, the first Nichiren Shoshu-based lay organization was started in 1930 by Makiguchi Tsunesaburo and was called the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value Creating Educational Society). But as Makiguchi was more concerned with educational, rather than religious, reforms, he usually is not thought of as the movement's founder as much as his disciple, Toda Josei. It was Toda, in the late 1940s, who removed

education and "value creation" from the movement's focus and who launched the Soka Gakkai as a religious organization with a mission of peace and prosperity through Buddhism (Metraux 29, 34).

Unlike Nichiren, who viewed foreigners as "threatening," Toda saw MacArthur's new leadership in occupied Japan as positive. Remembering Nichiren's statement in Rissho Ankoku Ron that a nation led by false religion will be filled with heresy, Toda welcomed MacArthur's dramatic directive guaranteeing the complete freedom of religion in Japan. This directive allowed religious movements that had been stifled under Shinto nationalism to re-establish themselves.

Not a Japanese, but a foreign conqueror had affected this reform. It was indeed the work of Bonten [Toda sees MacArthur as a guardian deity sent by Buddha], as prophesied in the Gosho (Nichiren's complete works). No longer could the government hinder religious activities; the Japanese people would be saved. (Metraux 33-34)

Toda, interpreting Japan's defeat in WWII as part of the punishment foretold in Rissho Ankoku Ron, planned the Soka Gakkai's program accordingly, using the document as the movement's blueprint for social reform (Metraux 42).

But "today, the Soka Gakkai stresses social problems rather than natural disasters [as] the indicators of the need for society to adopt the Gakkai's teachings (Toda, qtd. in Metraux 43). This shift in perspective ultimately propelled the Soka Gakkai into the political arena because they identified avenues for potential change at the human level.

The Soka Gakkai's postwar ambivalence toward foreigners reflects in part their earlier sense of superiority because

Nichiren was Japanese and did not care for foreigners, and because he founded the only Buddhist sect not imported into Japan. Coupled with this ethnocentricity was a sense of inferiority to Westerners after Japan's defeat to them in WWII. (Dator 15). In 1960, the Soka Gakkai newspaper, Seikyo Shimbun, printed an article entitled "The Superiority of the Japanese Race," saying

The basic problem is whether or not they [foreigners] have the ability to understand Mahayana Buddhism. Throughout all the world, the only people who are able to understand the essence of Mahayana Buddhism--specifically, the meaning of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo--are Japanese. Only the Japanese can understand the True Philosophy of [Nichiren] Daishonin. Therefore, we who can understand must teach those who cannot understand. (Dator 16)

Obviously, tremendous changes in attitude have occurred in the past thirty years, catapulting the Soka Gakkai, along with the rest of Japan, into the international arena. At the very least, the movement was motivated to expand overseas simply because it is unavoidable when its aim is to secure world peace in a modern world rife with intercontinental nuclear weapons. Beyond this protectionist explanation, the Soka Gakkai sincerely believes it is a global religion; Nichiren is understood to have desired peace and happiness for everyone throughout the world (Metraux 101).

The Soka Gakkai's modern world view sees social conditions as the effect of human consequences; therefore, the influence of an educated public is the appropriate way to bring about political change. Despite attacks from Japanese nonmembers and the Japanese press, Gakkai members persevere, fighting for what they deem just in the tradition of Nichiren (Metraux 55).

In its search for the world of Rissho Ankoku Ron, the Soka Gakkai holds its peace movement in highest esteem. The peace program is built on the Soka Gakkai's eschatological foundation of world politics: "peace will be achieved only when there is a fundamental change in man's character." Ikeda has added a global dimension, using stadiality by referring back to Rissho Ankoku Ron:

The core of the message of the Rissho Ankoku Ron is this: on a national, international, or worldwide scale, the only way to bring about lasting peace is to establish the reign of the true Buddhist Law...The keynote of the Soka Gakkai lies in the realization of the spiritual and material happiness of the individual through...faith, practice, and study, as well as in the advancement of peace and culture for society as a whole. (Metraux 45-46)

The Soka Gakkai's numerous activities for peace education, support of the United Nations, aid to refugees, and personal diplomacy have led the organization to rely on international relations. Interestingly, echoes of Nichiren's polemical style reverberate in the Soka Gakkai's approach to domestic politics and international diplomacy. The Soka Gakkai, assuming Nichiren's historical role, acts as one of the foremost watchdogs of government policy and as a guardian of the people. Taking a similarly urgent tone with its peace education agenda, the Soka Gakkai has raised global awareness of the horrors of war through its prolific antiwar publications and international exhibitions (Metraux 50).

CHAPTER III
INTERNATIONAL MOBILIZATION THROUGH STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION

Charismatic Leadership

A new religious movement cannot blossom without a charismatic leader (Goldman). Therefore, it is important to recognize the role that charismatic leadership plays in the mobilization of the Soka Gakkai movement.

Traditionally, Japan's group-oriented society follows a pattern of effective mobilization within the group under the leadership of a strong central figure. The role of the leader is particularly important in Japanese Buddhism; often the unifying bond felt by members of a particular sect or movement is not so much from sharing certain doctrinal views as much as identifying with others as followers of the same charismatic leader (Dore, qtd. in White 43).

Ikeda Daisaku, once the third successor to the Soka Gakkai's presidency and now founder and president of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), exhibits what Weber proposes as a "pure type of charismatic rulership."⁸ He definitely commands charismatic authority, defined by Weber as "complete personal devotion to the possessor of the quality, arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope" (242).

It is interesting to note that Ikeda is regarded as the charismatic of the Soka Gakkai rather than the founder, Makiguchi, or Toda, who accumulated the first substantial number of followers. Timeliness was key in effectuating this delayed entry of charismatic leadership into the movement.⁹ Accepting Weber's point that "charisma depends on success," we can correlate the rise of Ikeda's charismatic authority with the Soka Gakkai's dramatic expansion in the 1960s and early 1970s. Although Ikeda displayed fiery religious zealotness as a Soka Gakkai Youth Division leader, when he became president he seemed to make a conscious effort to project the image of a mild-mannered listener. This external transformation reflects Ikeda's personal desire to appear more subtle and flexible, a man of peace and compromise, corresponding to the middle-of-the-road politics practiced by the Komeito domestically and by Ikeda himself internationally.

Despite his unassuming demeanor, however, several Gakkai members worldwide see Ikeda as a divine figure, a notion that Ikeda himself flatly dismisses:

I am very touched at their respect, but they go too far. It would be dreadful if such a misconception should spread among the members...

If a man should over-respect the president...the Soka Gakkai would be degraded to the level of the heretical sects.

(World Tribune 2.ix.65, qtd. in White 229)

Contradictingly, the Soka Gakkai leadership seems to encourage members to aspire toward Ikeda and, to some degree, the other leaders. Indeed, within the Soka Gakkai, "adhering to leaders is defined as a moral imperative of sorts" (Snow 162).

Ikeda would be wise to openly discourage members from idolizing him, as it could prove detrimental to the movement. An unflattering label of "cult-like behavior," if widespread, may distract outsiders from recognizing the work and contributions of other Soka Gakkai leaders and of the organization as a whole (Metraux 170). Too much focus on Ikeda may also intensify the crisis that is bound to occur when Ikeda dies or is no longer actively involved in the Soka Gakkai.

Weber suggests that the charisma which vitalizes prophetic or political movements in their early stages should be transformed in order to respond to everyday needs. Routinizing the leader's personal charisma by building a bureaucracy, which will then legitimize its authority, can bring long-term security to the movement. When discussing the routinization of charisma, Weber states:

the pure type of charismatic rulership is in a very specific sense unstable, and all its modifications have basically one and the same cause: The desire to transform charisma and charismatic blessing from a unique, transitory gift of grace of extraordinary times and persons into a permanent possession of everyday life. (1121)

Because of geographical or structural reasons, non-Japanese Soka Gakkai members are limited in their direct association with Ikeda. As overseas membership grows, the risk of diluting Ikeda's authority increases; in response, a hierarchy of local "secondary or communicable charismatics" has developed (Gerlach and Hine, 1970:39, qtd. in Bromley and Hammond 161). These regional leaders exhibit varying degrees of charismatic ability. As the true charismatic leader of the Soka Gakkai, Ikeda indeed overrules

these subordinate leaders. Since his induction in 1979, Soka Gakkai President Akiya Einosuke is rarely mentioned, suggesting that the movement may encounter what Weber describes as "the first basic problem...of finding a successor to the...teacher." (1123) In this case, the "successors" may be the leaders of the movement in particular countries: Akiya Einosuke in Japan and George Williams in the United States. Because their charismatic leadership is expected to be subordinate to Ikeda's, their "shortcomings" have not yet become problematic.

Leaders lower in the ranks are also likely to be "forgiven" if they lack Ikeda's high-powered charisma because their roles are those of "messengers" bearing the Truth from Ikeda. Their function seems to be to rally support for Ikeda as the true charismatic of the movement, and, in the process, glean popular support for themselves. Leaders under Ikeda become dependent on him for policy directives and for his role as the spiritual center of the movement. At the same time, subordinate Gakkai leaders realize that their relationship with Ikeda is symbiotic because Ikeda relies on his staff for information and the execution of necessary work to make the organization run smoothly (Johnson 15).

Because of the aforementioned reasons, the Soka Gakkai should promote the internal secularization of charisma for the benefit of the movement's longevity, perhaps by molding Ikeda's personal charisma into a "charisma of office" (Weber 1134, 1139). In the meantime, the leadership cannot realistically restrain some members' idolization of him; Ikeda's high visibility as the

representative of the Soka Gakkai is utilized as an effective factor in mobilization. Every time Ikeda makes a visit to a foreign country, or attends the United Nations, his charismatic qualities as the "hero" of the movement are immediately activated in the eyes of Soka Gakkai members. Unless he shares his high-profile, symbolic duties with other Soka Gakkai leaders, he will remain the central charismatic magnet of the international movement.

Ikeda has adapted successfully to the needs of Soka Gakkai members worldwide by balancing his role as spiritual guide with his more practical role as a nongovernmental, international diplomat. He effectively removed himself from Japanese politics when he severed the Soka Gakkai's official ties to the Komeito, the political party he founded in 1960. And more recently, Ikeda passed on the presidency of the Soka Gakkai to Akiya Einosuke so he could become president of SGI, a position that allows him to use his charismatic qualities to appeal to international members.

Following Weber's model of a charismatic leader, Ikeda inspires "a completely new orientation of all attitudes toward the different problems of the 'world'" (242, 245). This new global orientation is reflected in members' commitment to SGI working with the United Nations to promote refugee relief and world peace, among other objectives.

Ikeda arrived in the United States for the first time in three years on February 12, 1990. The World Tribune, NSA's national newspaper, reported on the momentous event, which was

shown via live telecast in 64 locations across the United States. I was unable to attend Eugene's NSA center to watch the telecast because it was restricted to members, but according to a NSA member I spoke with, it was "just like he was really standing before me." The World Tribune describes Ikeda's "triumphant entrance," which caused NSA General Director George Williams, the founder of NSA, and others, to "beam with joy at seeing the SGI president" (17 Feb., 19 Feb. 1990).

However, on a regular basis, the watered-down "charisma" of subordinate leaders that overseas members are regularly exposed to does not produce the same mobilizing effect as the personal charisma that SGI president Ikeda invokes in them when he visits. Rather, the overseas members seem to be drawn to the Soka Gakkai by the "exotic" qualities it offers as an Eastern religion. The allure of being offered something foreign, a "higher truth" that is not easily understood or appreciated by most people, seems to fascinate NSA members.¹⁰

For example, at NSA goshō (study) meetings in the United States, several concepts in the religious lessons are referred to by their Japanese names, yet incorporated into obviously Americanized analogies. American members are not dissuaded by the often hard-to-follow bicultural lessons. At the mention of a Japanese word, people lean forward to catch it a second time, or nod with secret smiles, proud that they already know the meaning of those "mysterious" words. When asked if it is difficult to comprehend the many Japanese terms without knowing the language,

NSA members will often explain that the use of Japanese kanji (written characters) makes the spiritual doctrines even more intriguing because it abstracts them, making them more "unworldly." Because the Gohonzon (sacred scroll) is inscribed in Japanese, they feel it is easier to worship because they cannot read it, and therefore are not distracted by its secular aspects.

Other parts of NSA study meeting lessons may seem very familiar to Americans. In one case, a discussion leader called the good times in life "a bit of Heaven" and the bad times "a bit of Hell." This interesting allusion reveals how translation may conform to the cultural perspectives of overseas audiences; in this case, explaining Buddhist concepts by referring to them in the context of Christianity (NSA Study Meeting, 22 Feb 1990).

Similarly, NSA Director George Williams is painstakingly aware of his target audience and seeks to facilitate the blending of American culture and Buddhist spirituality. First of all, the fact that he changed his own name, and the name of the American branch of the Soka Gakkai to "Nichiren Shoshu of America (NSA)" reveals that he feels changes are necessary for the movement to apply to Americans' lives.¹¹ His booklet, The New Common Sense, goes on an upbeat, patriotic march through American history, sliding in Soka Gakkai optimism with his glorification of American ideals. Williams is convinced that NSA offers Americans spiritual satisfaction, as well as an outlet for becoming involved in the international community. NSA's national headquarters in Santa Monica, California is known as the World Culture Center and serves

as a beacon of world peace for NSA community centers, which are located in virtually all the major cities in the United States (Williams 63).

Organizational Structure

The Soka Gakkai as a social institution is a remarkable combination of growth and cohesion. The mobilization of individual Gakkai members is instrumental in effectuating the goals of the collective movement. Therefore, the way the movement is structurally organized is an important determinant for how the movement functions internally to encourage commitment.

Along with introducing new philosophical avenues in the 1940s, Ikeda's predecessor, President Toda, also laid the present structural foundation for the organization (Metraux 36). When examining the global expansion of this framework in the example of NSA--which parallels it in organizational structure--Snow points out Gerlach and Hine's (1970) contention that

a movement is more likely to be successful when its leadership and decision making are decentralized and when its component parts are loosely coupled in a segmented fashion but still linked together in a reticulate or netlike manner. (157)

The Soka Gakkai demonstrates its cohesiveness despite decentralization by promoting vertical loyalty through a "charismatically infused leadership hierarchy" and by strengthening horizontal unity among members via peer association activities. Those involved in the Soka Gakkai enjoy the tremendous advantages of a large, efficient central

administration: the networks involving international members and centers, the organization's growing voice in Japanese politics, the opportunity for individuals to climb the ranks in the Gakkai's bureaucracy.

But the sheer size of such a grand-scale operation can be overwhelming. To taper feelings of bewilderment and insignificance, the Soka Gakkai has built a strong social support system based on small group relationships. Each Soka Gakkai member initially associates with the members who recruited him or her. This small group is known as a Junior Group and is connected to a larger cell called a Group. A District comprises two or more Groups, incorporating about 50 to 100 members. The District unit is an especially effective level for mobilization through recruitment and promotion because it "constitutes a kind of extended family involving numerous primary relationships, particularly among Junior Group and Group members" (Snow 157).

To offset the potential factionalism that may occur in such a sectioned, vertical structure, the Soka Gakkai has bisected the vertical line with a horizontal line made up of sex-and-age based peer groups. The various divisions include a Men's Division, a Women's Division, a Young Men's Division, a Young Women's Division, and a Student Division, among others. These peer groups reinforce intercommunication and mobilization, as well as try to foster a sense of fellowship (Metraux 119).

The structure of the membership is conducive to interaction with overseas branches. Because the Soka Gakkai is structurally arranged the same in each of the countries where it has branches, transnational interaction is easily accommodated. International SGI meetings are held periodically, but even more successful in crossing cultural--and linguistic--boundaries between members are cultural groups such as the Fife and Drum Corps. The Japanese group, which alone has over 20,000 members, travels extensively overseas to perform. Similarly, the American Corps appears routinely in some of the biggest parades in the United States (Williams 62). Interaction between Soka Gakkai peers from different countries bridges cultural differences by encouraging the valuable exchange of ideas based on a shared spirituality.

The scope of the Soka Gakkai's domestic and international involvement leads one to ponder how such a magnanimous organization is supported financially. Because members are not formally required to pay dues or to make contributions, and because the Soka Gakkai does not disclose budgetary information, it is hard to obtain precise information. Metraux suggests, based on the findings of journalist Murata Kiyooki in 1969, that about half of the organization's budget comes from contributions by the Finance Department, which is comprised of about 400,000 members who are "honored" with special privileges and "allowed" to contribute a small fee during their one-year membership. The remaining half of the budget is mostly provided by profits from

publication sales. Another important contributing source of income for the Soka Gakkai is the success of the organization's donation drives:

Such drives are held for special construction projects [temples, community centers...], but the response is usually so great that the costs of a project are usually surpassed. (Metraux 130)

In a 1988 article in the Los Angeles Times, an ex-Komeito member is quoted as saying that the Soka Gakkai is now collecting between \$1.1 billion and \$1.5 billion in donations each year (Schoenberger).

The positive financial response from members has allowed the Soka Gakkai to expand and diversify, and to support, for example, arts and education. Aside from the schools the movement has started in Japan, ranging from elementary schools to Soka University, which was built in 1971 near Tokyo, it has also established a European Center in Paris and is building an American campus near San Diego, California. Through its educational programs, the Soka Gakkai reaches out to members, and some nonmembers (20% of the student body at Soka University), by offering students close personal attention. All of the schools follow Japanese law and do not directly teach Soka Gakkai or Nichiren Shoshu doctrines in the classroom (Metraux 127). But it is important to note that the organization's efforts to provide educational opportunities at all levels is a step in the process of socializing and bonding youth to a certain way of thinking.

An integral part of the Soka Gakkai's broader education agenda is accomplished through their impressive publishing empire, the Seikyo Shimbun Publishing Company. The company's focal publication, the Seikyo Shimbun, is the organization's 12-page daily newspaper, which is read by about half the members with a circulation of 4.7 million (Metraux 181). Although the first nine pages report exclusively on Gakkai activities, including coverage on Ikeda's every move, the last three are devoted to international news and other secular events. In addition to receiving world news from the AP, UPI, AFB and Tass wire services, the Seikyo Shimbun also has its own reporters in seven world capitals, a valiant effort to seek first-hand information from the international community (Metraux 123).¹²

In order to accommodate non-Japanese members, two monthly publications are released in English: the Soka Gakkai News and SGI Graphic. A wide selection of Ikeda's own writings, including his popular series Ningen Kakumei (Human Revolution) is also available in English, along with dictionaries, resource books, and works written by Nichiren Shoshu leaders. Accounts of Ikeda's 'dialogues' with various scholars and other noted personalities around the world are also published in an effort to make up for the Japanese and foreign media's lack of coverage of the Soka Gakkai's international activities.

Publishing articles and books in English and other languages about not only the movement's religious teachings, but also their international activities, is a significant indicator of the Soka

Gakkai's desire to facilitate its international members' understanding of the movement's global outlook. The World Tribune, the weekly national newspaper published by Nichiren Shoshu of America's (NSA) World Tribune Press, provides a good example of how the Soka Gakkai tries to broaden its readers' perspectives. Each week the back page of the Tribune provides news in a language other than English, including Spanish, Chinese, and Korean (World Tribune). In addition to keeping members worldwide informed of the Soka Gakkai's internal and international activities, the organization also reaches nonmembers through publications produced by a number of affiliated publishing companies. One such magazine, Ushio, is indistinguishable from other mainstream intellectual magazines in Japan, offering no hint of its connection with the Soka Gakkai. It is accepted and widely read by many Japanese scholars (Metraux 125). Perhaps the Soka Gakkai's media outreach efforts, especially through exclusively secular publications like Ushio, will help persuade skeptics of the movement's contributions to education.

CHAPTER IV

CREATING POLITICAL CHANNELS

A new religious movement serves a more positive function when it goes beyond religious escapism and goes "from blind obedience to democratic spontaneity, from unrealistic idealism to realistic concreteness, from mere word to positive action." (Saki, qtd. in McFarland 227).

Ikeda's predecessor, Toda Josei, expanded Nichiren's notion of obutsu myogo, literally "king-Buddha unified," which stresses the blending of government and religion in order to achieve overall happiness for the individual (Brannen 145). Embracing this notion of fusing religion and politics, the Soka Gakkai explains that "politicians need a practical philosophy to guide them." Obutsu myogo aims more at providing a practical philosophy to guide leaders toward the betterment of society than at establishing any sort of theocracy (Metraux 143).

Ikeda views Japan's postwar political system as "a castle built on sand," an imported democracy that merely acts as a facade for Japan's traditional power structure (Ikeda, qtd. in White 128). The overwhelming domination of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) since its inception 30 years ago, combined with the run of recent political scandals, only reconfirms Ikeda's call for reforms.¹³

In order to accomplish their domestic social reforms through political channels, the Soka Gakkai effectively entered Japan's political arena in November of 1964, with Ikeda's creation of his own party, the Komeito (Clean Government Party) (see Fig.2).¹⁴ The Soka Gakkai recognized that "the common people in Japan now have a political voice, and the New Religions are strategically situated media through which it can be expressed" (McFarland 233). Because networking is such an integral part of Japanese politics, and because the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is so overrepresented, the establishment of the Komeito symbolizes the breakthrough of an underdog opposition party. Currently the Komeito ranks second among the opposition parties in Japan; its position as "underdog" affords it the opportunity to play "watchdog" of the other parties.

Periodically, public outcry can be heard in Japan over the Komeito's involvement in Japanese politics because, although officially separate from the Soka Gakkai since 1970, the Komeito is still heavily influenced by their social reform goals. Dual membership in the Soka Gakkai and the Komeito also accounts for the meshing of the two groups. The Komeito is sometimes perceived as a threat to the secular orientation of the state, notably Article 20 of the Japanese Constitution, which says, "No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the state, nor exercise any political authority" (Brannen 129). Japan's current political system, which primarily reflects Western "secular" law, reveals a Western bias against mixing religion with politics.

This Western bias has been superimposed onto political systems that do not share this tradition since the colonial era. In Japan's case, the notion of blending the spiritual with the secular was not considered offensive until the United States insisted during the Occupation that the Japanese government accept secularization as the state's official position. Since then, Japan too has perceived secularization as equaling modernization (White 24).

Although members of the Komeito emphatically deny trying to install a state religion, their hopes to convert the majority of the Japanese people, who will then elect "responsible" Komeito public officials to act as watchdogs of the rest of the Diet, is seen as threatening by many Japanese nonmembers (Metraux 143).

The Soka Gakkai has maintained, however, that it is a purely religious organization without any direct involvement or commitment to politics (Metraux 135). To defend their position, the Soka Gakkai expounds the distinction between absolute (religious) and relative (political) levels of existence. As believers of the Nichiren Shoshu religion, Gakkai members cannot "compromise with heresy or accept misguided religious spirit," but as politicians operating in a

transient, unsubstantial world where judgments of good and evil are relative...the Komeito can affect secular legislation that benefits everyone, including heretics, and can protect the religious rights of everyone, even of heretical clerics "without fear of punishment. (White 129)

Seconding this conscious separation of religion and politics, the Komeito asserts they "are not in any way thinking of taking religious philosophy or religious teachings into the world of politics" (Maruyama, qtd. in White 129). Therefore, in a joint effort, the Soka Gakkai and the Komeito try to assure skeptics that they will not directly apply religious tenets to political situations, but that individual Komeito officials belonging to the Soka Gakkai, which are the vast majority, may utilize the positive guidance provided them by their religious beliefs.

As a proponent of "mass democracy," the Soka Gakkai says that the blending of religion and politics should come about by the insistence of the enlightened masses, not by the direct conversion of political leaders. Consequently, the Komeito and the Soka Gakkai try to inform members of their political rights, duties, and obligations so they may responsibly elect leaders who will rule with the compassion of Buddhism, regardless of whether the candidates personally believe in Buddhism or not (White 128). Thus, the Soka Gakkai acts as a politicizing agent for its members, many of whom were not politically active before they joined the movement (Metraux 79). The Komeito hopes to focus Japan's attention on mass welfare and has a broad, grass-roots electoral base of support within its membership (White 129). Democratically, the Komeito has sought to represent an array of interests--it declares it is on the way to diversifying its support base beyond Gakkai members so it may become "the

representative of the will of the masses." Indeed, Japan's political sphere is calling for more party diversity; as the LDP's grip on power is gradually loosened, the minority parties will need to seek new approaches to replace the present system, which only represents fractional interests (White 131).

Ikeda explains the overall aims of the political movement:

At the government level, Buddhist democracy entails reestablishing the proper focus, objective, and spirit of politics. All the political ideals...are to be achieved through Buddhist democracy: compassion, humanism, freedom, equality, trust, cooperation, and harmony between men; responsiveness and honesty in government; responsible political behavior among the people. Because democracy as the Gakkai defines it is a set of attitudes, rather than structures, it can be realized under any formal political, social, or economic system, whether capitalist, pre-capitalist, or communist. (Ikeda, qtd. in White 131)

The political philosophy of a Buddhist Democracy (buppo minshushugi) theoretically may be coordinated within any political framework. Basically, it offers all people who accept Nichiren Shoshu "the same opportunity to rid themselves of suffering and misery and to attain true happiness" (Metraux 145). However, the Komeito does promote an ideal economic restructuring plan, which it calls ningensei shakaishugi (humanistic socialism), also referred to as neo-socialism or a mass welfare economy (White 131). Humanistic socialism is the Soka Gakkai's economic solution to "the imbalances of socialism and capitalism [by]...the creation of a democratic welfare state" (Metraux 145).

A mixed economy will be constructed gradually; "We will not pursue any radical reform; and we flatly reject revolution by force" (Ikeda, qtd. in White 132). Furthermore, decisions to nationalize particular enterprises will be made not on a priori, ideological grounds but pragmatically, by representatives of all classes, taking into account the interests of the populace, governmental bureaucracy, and owners. (Takase, qtd. in White 132)

To date, the Komeito has quietly promoted their ideals by practicing middle-of-the-road politics domestically, but they could potentially take a stronger stance if they assume more power in the future. The Komeito now occupies ten percent of the seats in the Diet (Japan's National Parliament), representing the roughly ten percent of Japan's population that the Soka Gakkai claims as members (Metraux 2).

The Soka Gakkai's direct involvement in Japanese domestic politics in the 1950s and 60s later shifted to emphasize a more indirect, international approach beginning in the 1970s. With the creation in 1975 of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), the Soka Gakkai has dramatically increased its membership and involvement in global activities under the guidance of Ikeda Daisaku, who officially assumed leadership of SGI in 1979 after being president of the Soka Gakkai since 1960. Indeed, Ikeda's leadership marks a milestone in the history of internationalizing the Soka Gakkai's teachings. Ikeda, realizing the importance of international social reforms, is striving to convince nonmembers worldwide of the universality of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist values.

For its promotion of the nuclear-free peace movement, refugee relief, and worldwide cultural and educational exchanges, the Soka Gakkai has been earning praise worldwide. An example of how the Soka Gakkai's peace objectives are influencing the Komeito's policies revolves around the ongoing debate over the United States-Japan Treaty. The Komeito has supported the treaty, which holds the United States responsible for Japan's national security, to maintain friendly relations between the two countries. The Komeito's policy of "protecting the peace constitution" (see Fig. 2) implies that the party sees the treaty as pro-peace. But recently another interpretation of the treaty's peacekeeping capacity has emerged. There has been growing opposition within the Soka Gakkai, led by some of the younger party activists who want to withdraw support for the treaty to protest the deployment of Tomahawk missiles and nuclear weapons and to avoid having Japan being committed to going to war. In response to these protests, the Komeito has begun to review its policy on the treaty; if they reverse their stand on the issue, the Soka Gakkai's peace efforts will have had an impact on Japanese politics (Metraux 52-53).

Another one of the Soka Gakkai's projects is fostering awareness of the United Nations among members and nonmembers alike. Because the Soka Gakkai is registered as an NGO (non-governmental organization) with the UN Department of Public

Information, it is obligated to redisseminate information to a wider public. Thus,

The Soka Gakkai claims that it is furthering the cause of the UN by its attendance at annual NGO conferences, by its contributions to the UN Oral History Project, by its presentation of the exhibit "We and the United Nations" at sites all over Japan, and by its public forums where support for the UN is urged. (Asahi Evening News, qtd. in Metraux 53)

Refugee relief is another area to which the Soka Gakkai has made substantial contributions. Since 1981, over half a million dollars has been donated to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) from the Soka Gakkai's fundraising efforts. Additionally, the Gakkai produces a variety of pamphlets publicizing the refugee and hunger problems of the Third World, hoping to encourage the philosophy that "it is the duty and obligation of those in wealthier nations to help the less fortunate" (Aichi Prefecture Youth Division, qtd. in Metraux 54). By reaching out and including a broader public in its relief efforts, the Soka Gakkai transcends the role of the detached beneficiary and actually educates and involves others about world problems and responsibilities.

For their support, United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar complimented SGI in 1989 by saying that its support for the UN serves as a model for other organizations (SGI Graphic Apr. 1989 1). Furthermore, for his personal role, Ikeda was awarded the United Nations Peace Award in 1983 (Metraux 181). He has also been made an honorary citizen of 49 foreign cities

during the more than thirty overseas trips he has made on his quest for "personal diplomacy" (Williams 55-58).

The generally negative response in Japan to the Soka Gakkai's association with secular politics, against the backdrop of applause from the international community, is indicative of nonmembers' approval of the movement's indirect over direct involvement in politics. Promoting universally-desired programs such as peace and education through public awareness campaigns is not perceived as nearly as threatening as the Komeito's direct work in influencing public policy in Japan. The Soka Gakkai continues to go through political channels that are deemed appropriate by secular society--by officially establishing the Komeito as a legitimate political party in Japan and by working under the approved category of NGO in the United Nations. Consequently, the organization has legitimized itself as a "fair player" in the game of politics in terms of deserving a role in the political process. Despite the Soka Gakkai's precautions, however, the general uneasiness in Japan about the Komeito's religious origins may prevent the party from ever extending beyond representation of Japan's Soka Gakkai population. Therefore, the Soka Gakkai's niche in the international community as an NGO may prove to be a more powerful political channel for not only improving the organization's, but also Japan's, international public relations.

FIG. 2

THE KOMEITO'S PARTY PLATFORM AND BASIC POLICIES

Party Platform (adopted in June, 1970):

[The Komeito is] a national political party dedicated to a spirit of moderation based upon respect for human nature, seeking to advance in company with the common people through the energy and practice of reform.

Fundamental Policies

1. To work to establish a benevolent society in which both the prosperity of society as a whole and the happiness of the individual can be realized through a spirit of respect for the human being.
2. To promote a policy of independent and peaceful diplomacy.
3. To protect the present "peace" constitution of Japan and guard basic human rights.
4. To establish parliamentary democracy.

(Metraux, Daniel. The History and Theology of Soka Gakkai: A Japanese New Religion. Lewiston, New York: E. Mellen Press, 1988. 2.)

CHAPTER V

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Soka Gakkai's ideal environment is a religiopolitical society accomplished by the implementation of obutsu myogo. However, the group is aware of, and functions according to, the realities of a secular society, both in Japan and in the international community. Thus, while privately espousing their informal ties, the Soka Gakkai and the Komeito publicly profess that the two realms are and should be independent of each other. Having adopted this rhetoric, the movement gained passage into the political arena, where it continues to pursue its social reform objectives in the interest of humanity.

The Komeito's position in secular Japanese politics has been problematic mainly because nonmembers are often skeptical of new religious movements and do not acknowledge the movement's social contributions. In order to understand and put in perspective the potential negative reaction of nonmembers to new religious movements, different ways of interpreting the movements must be considered as influential factors. The well-publicized, and often sensationalized, psychological interpretation of new religions fuels the stereotype that new religions are "involved in 'mind control' and are guided by or concerned with 'ulterior motives'" (Kilbourne and Richardson 246). Bromley, Hadden and Hammond point

out that this psychological interpretation "ignores such issues as the role of sociocultural forces" and the fact that new religious movements constitute "part of a continuing evolution of symbolic systems in response to sociocultural change" (215-16). They also identify a

political component to this clash between the social and psychological sciences. The brainwashing ideology was constructed by partisans seeking to redress their grievances and gain allies to oppose new religious groups.... Thus, a sociological perspective obviously presents a distinct threat to the anticult-sponsored [psychology] ideology, for sociological investigations of "cults" often challenge the strong negative stereotypes surrounding them. (216)

In order to dismantle negative stereotypes as they affect the Soka Gakkai in Japan, it is necessary for critics to understand how the movement interacts as a religious, social and political institution. With this understanding, skeptics of new religious movements may be convinced that, despite its absolutist ideology, the Soka Gakkai's social function should be perceived as both legitimate and acceptable in Japan, as it is in the international community.

To date, SGI, as a non-governmental organization, remains relatively uncriticized outside Japan, perhaps because its participation in the United Nations or in 'personal diplomacy' campaigns only has a limited impact on the global community. If the Komeito were to become the leading political party in Japan, there would likely be a shocked and nervous reaction from some parts of the world, especially from the United States and other proponents of the secular state system. However, the international community as a whole, being composed of a diverse

range of political traditions, is unlikely to feel threatened by the movement. Since a recent trend toward global interdependence has generally elevated the status and necessitated the function of non-governmental international organizations, religious groups dedicated to global expansion for missionary and humanitarian purposes are recognized as playing an increasingly vital role in international relations. Therefore, with political, economic and cultural tensions between Japan and other nations continuing to increase, it is imperative that religious organizations such as the Soka Gakkai be considered in terms of their roles as international liaisons.

ENDNOTES

Much of the research for this thesis was done through the use of English resources, including works translated from Japanese sources. However, tours and interviews done firsthand in Japan were conducted in Japanese.

1. For the sake of complying with scholars' general acceptance of the term "new religious movement (NRM)," the Soka Gakkai will be referred to as such in this analysis. Since "new" is relative--Christianity was a new religious movement 2000 years ago--this term is clearly not ideal. "It may be argued that no religious movement at any time or place is completely new, and the New Religions of Japan certainly demonstrate continuity with earlier Japanese traditions" (Earhart 108) However, the synonyms "cult" and "alternative religion" are as problematic because they also carry negative connotations associated with the universal skepticism of nontraditional religious movements. Regardless of the term, the assigned category refers to a religious group that has completely divorced itself from the originally established "church," as well as the reformist "sect" (Goldman).
2. Stark discusses how important it is for a new religious movement to "maintain a medium level of tension with their surrounding environment; [to be] deviant, but not too deviant." See Fig. 1 or Stark, pp.15-16.
3. For more information on the implications of Japan's cultural isolation, see : Reischauer, The Japanese. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1981. 32-37.
4. Personal suffering was, and continues to be, a significant motivation for joining the Soka Gakkai; members and converts often claim that only through dedication to the organization's spiritual and secular goals have they been able to overcome their suffering. Data collected by White in the 1960s reveal that the motives for joining the movement were mainly social reasons (i.e. conflict in relationships), illness, and poverty, respectively. The motives remained virtually the same when Metraux collected data in 1984-85, but he discovered another important factor: "lack of confidence" was cited as the motive for 40% of the members.

5. This study aims to disprove this assumption and show how the Soka Gakkai can be both ideologically absolutist and socially/politically pluralistic.
6. Stadiality is "the ability to negate the past and yet to preserve it by incorporation." Mettraux comments that "no other culture [as Japan] so readily assimilates new concepts while so loyally preserving the old and adapts to the new by turning to the past for inspiration" (39).
7. Although Nichiren ridiculed the popular cult of faith in Amida Buddha and repetition of the nembutsu ("I put my faith in Amida Buddha"), he copied these practices with his gohonzon and chanting of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. Thus, his real objection to Amida Buddhism was that it failed to recognize the proper object of devotion, the Lotus Sutra (Hokekyo) (Earhart 64).
8. All Japanese names will be referred to as they would be in Japan, with the surname preceding the given name.
To maintain consistency and ease confusion, the organization will primarily be referred to as "the Soka Gakkai." The official international branch, Soka Gakkai International (SGI), and the American branch, Nichiren Shoshu of America (NSA), will be referred to under the name "Soka Gakkai" unless it is relevant to distinguish them.
9. The prophet Nichiren (1222-1282) also displayed charismatic leadership qualities, but is not included in this discussion of the lay organization of the Soka Gakkai (Anesaki 45).
10. To understand how the Soka Gakkai has internationalized, the case study of Nichiren Shoshu of America (NSA) will serve as a representation of the overseas branches.
11. George Williams came to the United States in 1957 under his original Japanese name, Sadanaga Masayasu. He became a naturalized citizen, changed his name, and now patriotically considers himself a native American and "shows his love for his "homeland" by spreading what he considers the fundamental means to people's happiness--faith in true Buddhism [Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism as propounded by the Soka Gakkai]" (Williams 61).
12. The Seikyo Shimbun Publishing Company also produces a variety of other printed materials, including a monthly theoretical and doctrinal journal (Daibyakurenge), a weekly picture magazine (the Seikyo Graphic), and literature for the organization's various divisions.

13. Some Komeito members have also been involved in Japan's recent widespread political scandals, namely the infamous "Recruitgate" scandal of 1988 (i.e. Komeito Chairman Yano Junya's resignation) (Metraux 61).
14. In 1961, the Soka Gakkai's fledgling attempts to enter politics began with the launching of Koseiren (League of Fair Statesmen), but soon saw it falter because "its platform was nebulous to the point of vacuity." The Komeikai, which was established the following year, also struggled until it was overtaken by the Komeito in 1964 (White 133-135).

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