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Sōka Gakkai: A Contemporary Social Movement

by

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INTRODUCTION

A great revolution of character in just a single individual will help
achieve a change in the destiny of a society, and further, will enable
a change in the destiny of humankind.

Daisaku Ikeda, President of Sōka Gakkai International (2003)

Sōka Gakkai, a Buddhist lay-organization, draws its inspiration from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, a monk who lived in 13th century Japan. First established to address education reform in the 1930s, the organization has grown from a small number of educators, to more than ten million members within Japan, and an international following of 1.5 million in 186 countries world-wide (Ikeda 2003). Ideology and practice of the group have grown from local educational concerns and individual self-realization through faith in Nichiren Buddhism, to a focus on global environmental issues, human rights, and world peace through social and political action. Translated as Value Creation Society, Sōka Gakkai offers its members the means to achieve spiritual, social, and material benefits through faith, study, and practice. Individual effort and collective activism stand out as Sōka Gakkai enterprise. Practitioners believe that personal transformation provides the basis for collective social transformation, in that fulfilled individuals are best able to help others and to create the conditions for peace and harmony on earth.

The most important aspect of practice is the chanting of *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō*. This is not a mindless recitation, but a reflection on one's situation and position within the universe. Chanted repeatedly, this phrase expresses faith in the Lotus Sutra, which Sōka Gakkai members believe to be the most important teaching passed down from the historical Buddha. The devotional chant is directed to the *gohonzon*, a mandala in the form of a scroll created by Nichiren to represent the universe and

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reflect the possibilities within each of us. The *gohonzon* is situated within an altar found in temples, meeting halls, and personal homes. Individually, members are expected to perform *gongyo*, the practice of chanting *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō* and selected sections of the Lotus Sutra, twice daily in front of the *gohonzon*. They also have the opportunity to meet frequently with other members and chant collectively.

A second aspect of practice is *shakubuku*, or spreading the message of Sōka Gakkai to all of humanity. The goal of this practice is to create *kōsen-rufu*, a state in which Buddhism will have influence throughout the world and the values of Sōka Gakkai will be available to all. This reflects the belief that we live in *mappō*, a time prophesied in the Lotus Sutra when Buddhism is far removed from the people and must be returned to prominence through particular effort on the part of believers. Missionary zeal has been a trademark of Sōka Gakkai practice and is somewhat contentious in that its practice has led to accusations of force and cult-like control of members.

A third important aspect of practice is study. Originally created in the 1930s as an alternative vision for education in Japan, Sōka Gakkai continues to stress self-improvement through education and culture. Local meetings serve as occasions to chant together, support each other through encouragement and shared experience, and to study about Buddhism and its benefits for individuals as well as mankind. The organization directly controls many educational facilities, and is associated with a number of universities throughout the world. Conferences, local and international exhibitions, as well as participation in cultural and educational programs offer opportunities for members to learn about Buddhist doctrine and the collective goals of the organization.

Through these avenues, members are encouraged not only to revolutionize their personal lives, but to see themselves as able and effective activists within a global community. Practitioners believe that individual practice can change one's life, and that, because everything in the cosmos is interconnected, collective practice has the power to change the universe. This is grounded in the Buddhist understanding of *karma*, which can be described as action creating reaction through

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time and space. Based on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, members believe that they can change their *karma*, that everyone has Buddha nature within, and that anyone can achieve the Bodhisattva ideal or Buddhahood. Further, Sōka Gakkai has taken *samsara*, the cycle of birth and rebirth, and redefined it in such a way that enlightenment can be achieved within this lifetime. The goal is not to escape *samsara* and enter into *nirvana*, but rather to engage with the issues of this world and, through faith and practice, attain personal transformation that will, in turn, lead to solutions for global problems.

As an anthropologist, I discuss Sōka Gakkai from several positions. In Chapter 2, I begin by looking at sources of inspiration for the modern organization through a discussion of Buddhism as it emerged out of India in the 6th century BCE. Sōka Gakkai is a modern example of engaged Buddhism and is ideologically drawn from the Mahayana Buddhist traditions that spread across the trade routes to China in the 1st century CE and arrived in Japan in the 6th century CE. While Buddhism is perceived in the West as a passive and somewhat pessimistic philosophy (Queen 1996:ix), I will discuss historical and contemporary examples of Buddhism that challenge this view. Chapter 3 follows the paths of Japanese Buddhism, exploring the social and political background that led to Nichiren's teachings in the 13th century.

Chapter 4 brings us back to the 20th century and follows the history of Sōka Gakkai from the 1930s to the present. Looking at political and social events of the time, I outline factors that influenced how the organization grew and expanded out of Japan and into a global context. Although leaders of Sōka Gakkai will be introduced earlier, Chapter 5 will focus on leadership, a crucial element for any social movement. For Sōka Gakkai, this leadership has followed a pattern of mentorship (an important model in Japanese culture) in which the master has trained the student to follow in his footsteps. I will discuss three leaders to date, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda. Each of these men brought particular talents and strengths to the movement, allowing the organization to change and grow into the powerful and far-reaching position it holds today.

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Although members stress the democratic nature of the organization, I believe that Sōka Gakkai's success has been carefully crafted. Makiguchi, the founder, wanted to create value in people's lives and understood education reform to be the foundation of creating character and a sense of value in the lives of Japanese citizens. Toda, the second president of Sōka Gakkai, focused on religious faith and practice, while creating the intensity and structure that characterized post-war growth of the organization. After Toda died in 1959, his protégé, Daisaku Ikeda, introduced a new style of leadership that has facilitated international growth and an agenda for global issues such as world peace, human rights, and environmental protection. In the latter part of the 20th century, we can note a divergence from the tradition of philosophical continuity from mentor to disciple because each of these leaders has been innovative and responsive to the social, economic, and political milieu of his particular time. As we will see in Chapter 2, the Lotus Sutra teaches the concept of skillful means, wherein the means by which people are brought into the Buddhist faith must be presented in a way that people can understand. Each of these leaders has interpreted tradition and history in ways that are appropriate to meet the needs of membership in his time.

Chapter 6 focuses on Sōka Gakkai's relationship with Nichiren Shōshū, the orthodox sect of Nichiren Buddhism. In 1928, the organization's founder, Makiguchi, became a member of Nichiren Shōshū, but this religious affiliation was peripheral to the group's practice until 1937 when the name changed to Sōka *Kyoiku Gakkai* (Value-Creating Education Society). After World War II, Toda further revised the name to Sōka Gakkai and emphasized the exclusivist and missionary nature of Nichiren Shōshū practice. A symbiotic relationship between Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū priests continued for decades, but, as the organization moved into international concerns, values on diversity and global community gained in importance. A rift between the priests and the lay-organization grew as the Sōka Gakkai increasingly challenged the authority and traditions of the priesthood. This chapter discusses the history of the relationship between the two groups, and how the

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society has adjusted to the schism in which Nichiren Shōshū priests excommunicated all members of Sōka Gakkai in 1991.

Chapter 7 looks at the Edmonton Chapter of Sōka Gakkai. I look at diversity within the group and insights I received from the members I have met over the past several months. This chapter looks at practice as I have experienced it. The diverse and widespread membership is held together in what I will refer to as vertical and horizontal dimensions. Using my local example, I will examine how people link themselves to a hierarchy in which local groups relate to national and international levels, while at the same time they participate in groups characterized by age, interests, and locality. This interlocking support system allows members to relate to the organization in a variety of roles, creating multiple relationships to bind themselves within the group. Chapter 8 further discusses how Sōka Gakkai creates collective identity, this time through symbolism as found in material culture and linguistic practices. Here again, I draw heavily on my experience as a participating observer and the generous sharing of knowledge from the members of the organization.

Chapter 9 discusses Sōka Gakkai as a social movement. Using social theory, balanced with members' observations and my own thoughts on the matter, I discuss how Sōka Gakkai fits with established ideas about social movements. The organization has changed over time, and has lost some of the spontaneity that often marks the early years of a struggle against institutional injustice. With its large interconnected organization and elaborate structure, it now resembles the institutions it once fought against. I discuss some features that mark a successful movement and use these to evaluate the likelihood that Sōka Gakkai will continue to grow and prosper at a point where many social movements wither and disappear.

Chapter 10 looks at globalization and how Sōka Gakkai has moved into a global context in ways that may not have been possible in earlier times. Many scholars (McFarland 1967; White 1970; Metraux 1996, 2000; Wilson and Machacek 2000) have studied Sōka Gakkai over a long period of time, making it possible to see how the organization looked in earlier times, as compared to the observations of

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contemporary scholars. I reflect on this change to show how Sōka Gakkai has skillfully constructed its present position, in which it is increasingly linked to prestigious organizations and partnerships within a global community. Globalization can be a very contentious word, evoking polemic views of western hegemony and opportunities for a global community, but I will address how the events of the last century have allowed a peripheral Japanese organization to create itself as a proponent of global unity and human rights. Since the split with Nichiren Shōshū in 1991, the organization has greater freedom to pursue an ecumenical agenda that embraces diversity and universality. Sōka Gakkai encourages its members to understand themselves as part of a united collective that transcends borders and addresses global concerns for world peace and environmental integrity.

The organization draws ideology and practice from a construction of historical truth in order to create a sense of tradition and shared history, but employs thoroughly modern methods to promote solidarity within the widespread membership. Japan has a long and interesting relationship with globalization. The present is rooted in the past and Japan has shown her ability to learn from the world. Japan is an island country; while it is easy to underestimate the outside influences which have shaped her development, she has selectively adopted and adapted from cultures outside her own. Examples of this include the active acquisition of Chinese culture during the Heian period (794-1185), westernization in the Meiji period (1868-1912), and her relationship with American culture since World War II. Perhaps this historical context is relevant in understanding the strategies used to construct Sōka Gakkai's international success.

In conclusion, I review the themes of the paper, reflecting on the organization as a successful social movement that is based on Buddhist principles in a global community. It is clear that, for many, the organization achieves its aims of creating value for individuals, who in turn use their collective strength to work toward a better world in which peace, human rights, and environmental integrity are respected and upheld. Sōka Gakkai is a very modern organization. History and tradition are constantly reinvented to reflect the present, and this ability to take value from the past

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and give it contemporary meaning has allowed the group to create value and meaning for its members in a rapidly changing world that is riddled with new challenges. The organization invites its members to improve their lives by being 'the change they wish to see' (Meers 2003) and to create value in their lives by working toward the broader goals of world peace and environmental protection. It promotes ideas of a global community, emphasizing inclusion and the celebration of diversity through education, cultural events, exhibitions, and activism. This is framed within the context of Buddhism, not the otherworldly Buddhism that deals with suffering by looking toward a better life in future lifetimes, but rather an engaged Buddhism that tackles the problems of this world.

In order to understand Sōka Gakkai, I use textual sources from the disciplines of anthropology, religious studies, history, and sociology as well as the many sources published by the organization itself. In keeping with the focus on education that has always been integral to the goals of the organization, Sōka Gakkai depends heavily on the written word. A sophisticated network of newspapers, books, magazines, and websites connects the membership world-wide. Further to textual sources, I employed participant-observation by attending meetings and events over the past six months. Meetings were at the Edmonton Center and at the home of Paul and Paula Reich. Other than the Edmonton center, I was able to make one visit to the Vancouver center in February, 2004. In this way, I have met the members, who are all aware of my research, and people have become comfortable with my presence in the group. In keeping with goals wherein bringing new members into the fold is a priority, Sōka Gakkai, in my experience, welcomes scholarly study, and is eager to accommodate inquiry.

At the various meetings I have attended, I have met approximately sixty members, and a great number of small children. Some people attend the center more regularly and these are the ones I know best. At meetings, people talk casually and about the organization and themselves, so I have gained most of my information within this informal setting. Paula Reich is a leader in the chapter, has been involved with the organization for about thirty years, and represents Alberta at higher level

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meetings. She was instrumental in the formation of the Edmonton chapter and has been my most important contact within the organization. Over the last six months, we have become friends and she has contributed immeasurably to my understanding of the group. She and her husband, Paul, have facilitated my experience within the group. At meetings, I participate in chanting and discussions; on occasion, people take the opportunity to ask questions about my research. Because people seem at ease with my presence, I chose not to engage in formal interviews that might have made people feel uncomfortable. The exception to this is two extended interviews, over breakfast, with Paula Reich. Contacts outside Edmonton include Tony Meers, SGI Canada's General Director, and Harry Miyazaki, Senior Vice-General Director for SGI Canada. One further important Edmonton contact is with Yukie Hayward, a young Japanese woman and recent immigrant to Canada. Her family has been associated with Sōka Gakkai through three generations, and she grew up within the Japanese Sōka Gakkai organization. Happenstance makes us neighbors and, as she does not drive, we usually ride to and from the meetings together.

Buddhism teaches that everything in the universe is connected through *karmic* action and that we are all part of a vast network in which each action has an effect. Because Edmonton's Sōka Gakkai community is small (approximately 100 members) and people in the group will likely read this work, there are issues of confidentiality and respect for privacy that circumscribe the scope of what I write. I have taken particular care not to use information that could embarrass or cause discomfort to members. I have dealt with this issue by avoiding details that might specifically identify members. This is slightly problematic for this essay, but, even though everyone in the group is aware of my presence and purpose at meetings, I feel it is important to respect and honor the trust of people who have spoken openly in my presence.

I hope that the thesis is reflective of the organization in general, but, like most projects, my information is likely biased toward those with whom I have had most contact. Working with people is like that, and I have closer personal connections with certain people within the group. If I had to choose a specific observation about

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members it would be their diversity. They represent a cross-section of the larger community, with a wide range of ages, socio-economic status, education, and ethnic backgrounds. This will be discussed further in Chapters 7 and 10. .

Literature about Sōka Gakkai describes it as an extraordinarily successful organization. Religious and social scholars have written about Sōka Gakkai throughout the more than eight decades of the organization's existence, allowing for diachronic comparisons that reflect change over time. Religious scholars discuss ideology, practice, and the textual roots of Nichiren Buddhism, as well as trends toward secularism and ecumenicism, while social scientists tend to concentrate more on subjects such as globalization, political and social activism, and Sōka Gakkai's success as a social movement. I have also used historical and religious sources to create a context, derived from history, but firmly oriented in the needs of the present and utilized by Sōka Gakkai to create collective ideology, identity, and action. An unexpected gift from the literature was a meager, but useful, vocabulary of Japanese terms used by Sōka Gakkai members. This facilitated my understanding of how members use language to shape their interaction and to create identity. While English is the common language among members of the Edmonton chapter, Japanese is the language of Sōka Gakkai. This use of language is discussed in Chapter 8, but familiarity with the many words used in relation to faith and practice was valuable in both cognitive and affective communication with members of the group.

These sources have contributed to my understanding of the organization, and for the most part, they match the experience of my field work. Early scholars tend to be more critical of the organization than are contemporary writers, who seem to gloss early associations with violence and aggressive techniques of propagation as something belonging to the past. My personal experience would agree with this evaluation, but throughout the paper, I will discuss the lingering doubts and rumors expressed, not only in the literature, but also by members with whom I have spoken. As to the structure of the organization, it is well described in the literature, and these descriptions match what I found in my field work. In all, the literature is thorough and informative; I could have written the thesis without field work, but working with

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members of the organization has enriched my experience and validated the link between what others have written and what I have observed for myself.

While I have participated in meetings and events, I remain a participating observer, involved but not a member, and therefore somewhat peripheral within the group. While I feel that members have been open and candid with me, I have always maintained a certain distance by ensuring that everyone knows my research agenda. Because my fieldwork involved members of an ethnically diverse Canadian group, some useful comparisons can be made between Sōka Gakkai in Edmonton and Sōka Gakkai in Japan. In keeping with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, in which the lesson must be given within a framework that the listener can understand, these differences may reflect the ways in which the organization has accommodated cultural diversity in order to complete its mandate of creating a global community. Finally, like many other contemporary writers, I found that the organization provides a strong framework within which people can find opportunities to improve their own lives, and through this process, find the strength to help others. While it may seem unorthodox, Sōka Gakkai, in just over seventy years, has built a global network on the premise that chanting is the best way to approach human rights, environmental integrity, and world peace.

Chapter 2

BUDDHISM: A PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT FOR SŌKA GAKKAI

The contents and spirit of the Lotus Sutra are very holy. The practice of its teaching is also holy. We lead ordinary everyday lives, but by understanding the teaching of the sutra, believing it, and practicing it, we try to approach a state of mind free from illusion and suffering. We realize that people should live in harmony and render service to each other. If one has such a feeling for even a few hours a day, his health and circumstances will naturally change for the better—this is his true salvation. That all the people in the world have such feelings and live happily—this is the ultimate idea and vow expressed in the Lotus Sutra.

Indeed, the Lotus Sutra is the teaching of human respect, self-perfection, and peace. In short it is the teaching of humanism. Today, just seven hundred years after the death of Nichiren, we must restore the spirit of the Lotus Sutra and establish a better life for the sake of ourselves, our families, our societies, and the entire world.

Niwano Nikkyo (1989:xxii)

Sōka Gakkai draws on the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, a Japanese monk from the 13th century, and his interpretation of the Lotus Sutra, the last and arguably most important teaching of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni (Sage of the Sakya clan). It is written that the Buddha, in his wisdom, taught the Four Noble Truths: that life is suffering; suffering is caused by attachment and desire; suffering can be eliminated; and that this can be accomplished by following the Eight-fold path and removing oneself from attachment to worldly desires. Grounded in the more ancient Indian tradition of Brahmanism, Buddhism accepts the principles of *samsara*, the cycle of birth and rebirth, in which the ultimate goal is enlightenment, or escape from the cycle. This enlightenment can be thought of as attaining oneness with the universe and is generally thought to be the reward for an exemplary life, or lifetimes. Inherent in this scheme is the role of *karma*, or action that has both negative and

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positive consequences for rebirth. All action has a reaction and that reaction flows through time to create our present situations.

This idea that all action creates a response is important in understanding how Sōka Gakkai members understand the universe. They believe that through faith and the recitation of *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō*, they can modify the *karma* of their own past, and, like other Buddhists, they believe that everything in the universe is interconnected and that even the smallest action can change the course of everything else. Tony Meers (2003) reminds us that the organization is in tune with the contemporary world and compares this understanding to quantum physics, in which, again, everything is connected and every action has influence. This concept underlies the understanding that personal transformation can positively affect the course of global affairs, and that collective transformation has even more power to bring about world peace. Further, these ideas lie behind the organization's efforts for protection of the environment, arguing that all aspects of our world are connected and that humans must respect all aspects of life if we are to create a world without war and suffering.

Born into the warrior caste of 6th century BCE India, Śākyamuni was heir to his father's wealth, power, and social position. His hagiography tells us that he was marked as special even before he was born. His mother had dreams of his future, he carried the marks of greatness, and he was able to speak and walk shortly after his birth. A remarkable child, he grew up, married, and had a son. Although he lived a life of luxury and privilege, the young man discovered that not everyone enjoyed such comfort; he learned that, for many, life consisted of poverty and sickness, and that, for all, death lay at the end of life. Further, his contact with a monk convinced him that wisdom and peace lay in detachment from the world of humans. Śākyamuni sought to understand the universe by choosing an ascetic life in which he sought wisdom through privation and meditation. For many years, he wandered, seeking to learn from the sages, but he found that his efforts were not fruitful.

One day, a young woman brought him some milk to ease his hunger, and he realized that his choice of asceticism had brought him pain and suffering, but little

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wisdom. From that point on, his chose the Middle Way, one that entailed attachment to neither suffering nor material comforts. It is from this understanding that we draw his prescription for easing suffering in this life. He continued to meditate and to look for the meaning of life, eventually reaching a state of enlightenment, wherein he achieved perfect wisdom, compassion and oneness with the universe. He shared this new knowledge with his disciples and, over the next four decades, he continued to preach and extend his knowledge of the universe. After his death, his disciples continued to teach his message and convert new followers. In this sense, Buddhism has always had a strong missionary focus and Sōka Gakkai has taken this idea of proselytization as an essential element of practice.

Early Buddhism emphasized a personal journey to enlightenment and this tradition is generally known as Theravada. The goal of one's life is to become an *arhat*, one who has devoted a life to study, lived in the correct manner, and through this practice, attained great wisdom and compassion. Theravada embraces the idea of the Three Jewels of Buddhism: the Buddha as exemplar, the Sutras (teachings of Śākyamuni), and the *Sångha* (monastic communities of monks and nuns). These ideas continue into the present, although in Sōka Gakkai, these Jewels are interpreted as: (1) Nichiren is the Buddha of our time, (2) the most important teaching is the Lotus Sutra, and (3) the community is not the monastic order; rather, it is the lay community of practitioners belonging to Sōka Gakkai.

Early members of the Buddhist *sångha* perpetuated the Buddha's teachings through oral recitation and it is unlikely that any of the Sutras were written down until the 1st century BCE (Amore and Ching 1996:240-241). The first written texts appeared in Sri Lanka when the community of monks was seriously diminished by a famine and feared the oral teachings would be lost. Sutras follow a stylized form in which the discourse is set out as an answer given to an outsider or a disciple (Amore and Ching 1996:241). Much of the work is in the form of verse, likely because of early oral traditions in which verse is more easily replicated accurately over time. The first words are typically ascribed to Ananda, a cousin and chief disciple of Śākyamuni and consist of a statement beginning with "Thus have I heard: At one

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time the Lord…" (Amore and Ching 1996:241). In this way, the Sutra is acknowledged to be the word of the Buddha as heard by his closest followers. Amore and Ching (1996:244) assert that all levels of society were welcome in the new religion, and that the ruling class, in a milieu that respected religious pluralism, protected the rights of members to follow this path.

In the 3rd century BCE, a Mauryan king, Asoka, took control of most of the Indian continent. In the aftermath of the destruction caused by his conquest, Asoka converted to Buddhism and established his authority according to Buddhist principles, most notably the value of non-violence. He encouraged his subjects to embrace Buddhism and his rule is still quoted as a model for Buddhist politics. Further, Asoka's model of Buddhist ideals and missionary zeal is apparent in the beliefs and practice, not only of Sōka Gakkai, but also of other engaged Buddhist communities of the 21st century. Traditional understanding of Buddhism, particularly in the West, is that Buddhism is a pessimistic philosophy that regards this world as a place of suffering that must be endured for the hope of a more favorable rebirth in the next life (Queen 1996:ix). Citing such activists as Ambedkar, who championed the rights of the untouchable caste in India, monks who protested the Vietnam war, monastic communities in Sri Lanka that support agrarian reform, and Buddhist lay-women in Thailand who protest gender inequalities in Buddhist communities, Queen (1996:1-44) argues that contemporary Buddhism in Asia often engages with social issues.

Theravada continues to be the most prevalent Buddhist influence throughout India, Myanmar, Thailand, and most of Southeast Asia, but by the 1st century CE, there is evidence of a changing ideal within Buddhist ideology. The precise beginnings of Mahayana Buddhism are difficult to pinpoint, but it is clear that by the 3rd century CE, there was a significant movement to embrace new ideas about the nature of enlightenment and the importance of laypersons within the Buddhist community. Amore and Ching (1996:267) argue that Mahayana likely developed in southern India, and spread across the trade routes of central Asia, carried by missionaries and traders, to China, from which it spread throughout East Asia to

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Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. Some of the most important characteristics of Mahayana include the ideas of expedient (or skillful) means, the bodhisattva ideal, and that the potential for Buddhahood is present in everything and can be achieved by anyone.

Sōka Gakkai is rooted in this tradition, as interpreted by Nichiren and modified to meet the needs of the present. Expedient, or skillful means, refers to the idea that, for the listener to understand the teaching, the message must be presented in a form that is understood. This, for Sōka Gakkai, is expressed in *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō*, which can be chanted by anyone as a representation of more difficult concepts, and in *shakubuku* when, at times, the pressure to convert new members has been coercive and justified as skillful means to bring someone to the True Buddhism. The bodhisattva ideal teaches that the goal of enlightenment is not escape from *samsara*, but that when one reaches the threshold of Buddhahood, one remains in this world to help others achieve the same. For Sōka Gakkai members, this is tied up in the ideology of individual enlightenment to facilitate collective peace and happiness. A common metaphor for this is where, in Theravada, the goal is to individually cross a river to reach *nirvana*, whereas in Mahayana tradition, the boat expands and waits for everyone to cross at the same time. The third concept, that everyone has the potential to reach Buddhahood, is reflected in the belief of Ten Worlds and will be discussed below. One final concept, important in Mahayana, but also for understanding Sōka Gakkai, is the idea that everything we perceive is an illusion, and that *nirvana*, or enlightenment is not necessarily something to be found outside of this lifetime. Sōka Gakkai teaches that enlightenment is not the afterlife's reward for an exemplary life, but rather, enlightenment is found in active engagement with the challenges of this world.

By the 1st century CE, monks and merchants carried the philosophy and practice east and north across the Silk Road and into China, a country with significant influence throughout all of East Asia. Buddhism flourished in China; monasteries and nunneries established themselves throughout the country and many of these maintained strong connections with the court. China, at this time, was a diverse and vigorous empire with centralized government, a large bureaucracy, and a strong

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philosophical and moral tradition of Confucianism mixed with the more mystic rites of Taoism. In this milieu Buddhism changed to meet the needs and understanding of its new members; in particular Buddhism fit ancestor worship and Chinese deities into its own elaborate structure of belief and practice. Buddhist literature was translated by Chinese Buddhist monks, accommodating rapid spread of the new religion, particularly within the privileged classes. From the beginning the Lotus Sutra was recognized as one of the most important teachings of the Buddha. The earliest extant translations appear in the 3rd century CE but the most important and widely known work comes from the monk Kumarajiva (344-c.413) (Amore and Ching 1996:268, 288). His version is the one most often translated into other languages such as Japanese and English, and it is also this version that Sōka Gakkai uses in chanting practices.

The Lotus Sutra is believed to be the last and most important teaching of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. In it we hear Ananda's words "Thus I have heard ..." followed by parables and discussions between Śākyamuni and his disciples. Even in translation the work remains lyrical, written in both prose and poetic style, but it is the content of the Sutra that marks it as special because the Buddha gives many lessons that shape the development of Buddhism after his death. These lessons, however, are not always clear and interpretation has been debated through the centuries. Sōka Gakkai takes its direction from the interpretation rendered by Nichiren Daishonin in 13th century Japan and contemporary scholars continue to argue over the intent of the Sutra.

It is made up of twenty-eight chapters, some descriptive, some as lectures and parables, and others as discussion between the Buddha and his disciples. The first chapter begins with a description of the scene in which the teaching takes place, but as this description develops, it becomes clear that the work is metaphorical as the distances and numbers are clearly beyond physical possibilities or even imagining. This leads to the first lesson about the Buddha's infinite presence throughout time and space. We hear that the Buddha has always been present, and although he always returns to refresh the teachings when he is most needed, he is not always

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easily available to humankind. This theme of cycles in which Buddhism is strongest in the time when the Buddha is immanent, and weakest during times when the Buddha is absent, is part of the ideology of Sōka Gakkai, wherein members believe that we are in the third stage of the cycle, a time called *mappō*, in which the Buddha is absent and humans must struggle to retain and utilize Buddhist teachings most assiduously. This idea is central to Nichiren Buddhism and will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

The Buddha teaches that his message has changed over time because humankind has changed and is now ready to understand his most profound lessons about reaching enlightenment. He teaches the concept of skillful, or expedient, means in which the message is presented in ways that best suits the listener. This means that Buddhism changes as the world changes and what is appropriate for one time may not meet the needs of another, and also that it is appropriate for Buddhism to change over time and engage with changing technology, politics, and social conditions.

Another important theme of the Lotus Sutra is that enlightenment is not only available to men who apply themselves to a monastic life of study and strict practice, but also to laypersons, women and to other life forms. One particularly interesting story is that of the Naga princess, who comes from a line of animal forms known as protectors of Buddhism. The child is only eight, and yet she is able to attain enlightenment in a second. But she is hindered by her female body, and so, she changes instantly into a male. This is important because earlier teachings tell us that women are not able to achieve Buddhahood (Watson 1993:xviii). Like many of the parables in the sutra, the story is charming but interpretation is not consistent among scholars. While some see this as a message that gender is irrelevant to enlightenment because it is impermanent and illusory, others believe that only when she is transformed into a male can she achieve enlightenment. Sōka Gakkai takes the more optimistic path, arguing that all beings have the potential for Buddhahood.

Another story emphasizes the possibility that Buddhahood is available to all, even those who have challenged Buddhism (Watson 1993:xviii). In the later years of

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Śākyamuni's life, Devadatta, a cousin and disciple of the Buddha, challenged Śākyamuni and attempted to assassinate him, a crime for which he was sentenced to Hell. The Buddha tells us that, in a former life, Devadatta was not only his friend, but also his teacher, and that eventually the negative *karma* of his present life could be overcome and he would become a Buddha. From this we learn that even the most depraved enemies of Buddhism can hope for salvation. Again, there is a parallel with Sōka Gakkai teachings, in which *karma*, while it may not be erased, can be altered by belief and practice. Enlightenment is available to all who believe and practice the True Buddhism.

The Lotus Sutra maps out the Ten Levels of existence that form the basis for practice as members visualize, through the *gohonzon*, their own position in the universe. The first six (lower) levels of existence are modeled on traditional Indian understanding of the structure of the universe (Watson 1993:xiii). They include, in ascending order, the realms of Hell, Hungry Ghosts, animals, and demons, followed by the realms of human beings, then gods or heavenly beings. To these, Mahayana Buddhism adds four higher levels of Voice-hearers (usually referring to the Buddha's disciples or members of the monastic orders), individuals who claim their own enlightenment without regard for the fate of others, bodhisattvas, who are also enlightened but whose compassion compels them to postpone Buddhahood in order to alleviate the suffering of others (Watson 1993:xiv), and finally, on the tenth level, Buddhahood, the ultimate goal of all those who follow the teachings of the Buddha. At this level we can expect perfect happiness, wisdom, and compassion. Sōka Gakkai members believe that all of these levels can be found in each of us at any time, and that through faith, study, and practice, people can influence *karma* and raise the level at which they spend this lifetime.

In the 17th chapter, the Buddha explains that "those who accept, uphold, read and recite this sutra or preach it to others...need not erect ... temples, or build monks quarters or offer alms to the community of monks." (Watson 1993:241). This passage provides support for Sōka Gakkai's position vis-à-vis Nichiren Shōshū since the 1991 schism, after which the organization was forced to justify its separation

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from the sect with which they had associated since Makiguchi's time. It also supports the practice of *gongyo* and recitation of *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō,* which can be roughly translated from Japanese as 'I take refuge in the Lotus Sutra', as it is used to represent faith in the teachings of the Sutra.

After Kumarajiva's time, the Lotus Sutra continued to influence the monastic communities of China. In particular, Chih-i (538-597 CE), patriarch of T'ien-t'ai, or the Lotus school, proclaimed the Lotus Sutra as the most important of the Buddha's teachings. In his attempt to unify Buddhist thought throughout China, he established the idea that the Buddha's teachings over time represent the evolution of doctrine, culminating in the Lotus Sutra (Amore and Ching 1996:292). Although it appears that Buddhism arrived in Japan in the 6th century as a gift from the Korean monarch to the Japanese emperor, and we know that Prince Shotoku (574-622) incorporated the Lotus Sutra into his political ideology, T'ien-t'ai was not introduced into Japan until the 8th century (Elwood & McGraw 2002:232-233). Known in Japan as Tendai, this school, and the Lotus Sutra in particular, were most influential in shaping the ideology and practice of Nichiren Daishonin in the 13th century.

Chapter 3

JAPAN AND BUDDHISM

Stones are split open for their hidden gems, deer are slain for their hides and meat, fish are caught for their flavour, the kingfisher is killed for its gorgeous feathers, and a beautiful woman is envied for her beauty. This is the case with me. Because I am the votary of the Lotus Sutra, I have suffered all manner of persecutions at the hands of the three powerful enemies. How wondrous that you have, nonetheless, become a disciple and a supporter of such a person! There must be some profound reason for our relationship. Make every possible effort to deepen your faith, and reach the pure land Eagle Peak.

from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*
(New Century 2001:32)
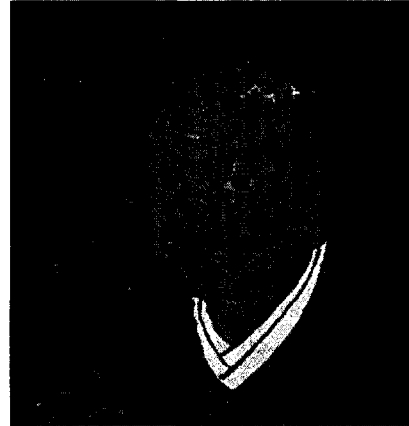
Nichiren Daishonin (Nichiren Shu 2003)

According to the *Nihonshoki*, an 8th century (and somewhat mythological) history of Japan, Buddhism entered Japan in the 6th century as a gift to the Japanese emperor Kimmei (538-71) from King Syong-myong of Paekche, Korea (Niwano 2002:39-40), who sent scriptures and images with the following message: "This doctrine is amongst all doctrines the most excellent... Every prayer is fulfilled and naught is wanting." (Hane 1991:27). Modified by its journey through both China and Korea, a country that appears to have had considerable influence on Japan between the 4th and 7th centuries (Ellwood et al 2002:232), this brilliant and sophisticated religious tradition overwhelmed Japan within two centuries.

Mikiso Hane (1991:27) argues that, at first, there was controversy about adopting the new religion, but that the victory of the Soga family opened the way for Buddhism's foothold in the country. It is clear that political power was linked to Buddhism and that the new religion was "judged in terms of its ability to outdo the Shintō gods in controlling the forces of nature" as evidenced in the victory of its proponents (Hane 1991:28). Tendai and Shingon, both of which are highly ritualized and dependent on text, were the first sects successfully introduced into Japan.

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Tendai, as discussed above, favors study and faith in the Lotus Sutra, while Shingon comes from the esoteric traditions of Vajrayana, a more mystical form of Buddhism. Both traditions are strongly dependent on textual study, making them best suited to the lifestyle and resources of the elite classes.

Prince Shotoku, who ruled as regent to Empress Suiko from 593 until his death in 622, was particularly influential in establishing Buddhism in Japan. His *Constitution of Seventeen Articles* (604 CE) promulgated Buddhism in Japan by taking "the ideas of 'revering the three treasures' (i.e. Buddhism) and 'creating respect on the basis of harmony' as political principles" (Ryōdō 1989:16). He also wrote commentaries on three sutras, one of which was the Lotus Sutra, making this teaching one of the most prominent in Japan. Ryōdō (1989:16) argues that Shotoku understood the Lotus Sutra, which eschews complex discourse by teaching through parables and "easily understood literary expressions", as a suitable teaching, not only for the privileged classes, but for all people.

Buddhism flourished within the upper classes throughout the Nara (710-784) and Heian (794-1195) periods, which were marked by peace, the establishment of centralized government by the aristocratic families of Japan, and continuing cultural and political influence from China. Religious scholars studied in the great temples and continued to associate Buddhism with the protection and well-being of Japan (Hane 1991:53). When Emperor Shomu (mid-Nara period) established monastic institutions throughout Japan, he stipulated that the Lotus Sutra, along with the Wisdom Sutra and the Sutra of the Sovereign Kings of the Golden Light, were called the "three sutras for the protection of the country" (Ryōdō 1989:16). During the Heian period, when the seat of government moved to Kyoto, more Buddhist sects established themselves, and among these was Tendai, brought from China by the monk Saichō in 804 (Hane 1991:52).

By the end of Heian period, there was increasing concentration of wealth in a few aristocratic families and wealthy monasteries, but imperial governance was increasingly threatened by the emergence of a new and powerful warrior class, the samurai, that supported powerful warlords situated throughout the country. The

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Kamakura period (1185-1333) saw the samurai wrest political and economic authority from the emperor (even though the emperor continues to the present as the titular supreme authority of Japan). This was a very turbulent time in which social and political upheavals created widespread poverty and hardship for commoners throughout the country. As the samurai took control of the country, they adopted the Chan tradition from China, renaming it as Zen and creating a powerful new Buddhism apart from the esoteric, ritualistic, and textual traditions of Tendai and Shingon. This marks the first time we find a Japanese tradition not strongly dependent on text, but rather on ascetic practices and discipline suited to a warrior class that values self-sacrifice and indifference for the passing of one's own existence.

By the 12th century, we find Japanese Buddhism in forms that the common people can practice. Pure Land Buddhism, brought to Japan from China by Hōnen (1133-1212), was a popular form that met the needs of people who did not have the literacy and leisure required to study the complex texts of Tendai and Shingon, nor the resources to dedicate their lives to the rigors of Zen practice. Pure Land offered the possibility of enlightenment and rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitabha through *nembutsu*, or recitation of the Amitabha Buddha's name (said with reverence and true belief), and represented the first Buddhism accessible to all classes of Japanese people.

The 13th century was a time of chaos; political instability with samurai families warring for supremacy, a number of unusual natural disasters, and the menace of foreign invasion by the Mongols (1274 and 1281) all threatened Japan. It was within this social, economic, and political context that Nichiren (1222-1282) developed his teachings to offer salvation for the Japanese people, not only in the next world, but also within this lifetime (Metraux 1988:6). He was born into a poor fishing family on the southeast coast of Japan. By thirteen, the boy showed exceptional promise and was sent to the Tendai monastery near his home so that he could be educated and become a monk.

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At sixteen, he was ordained and left for Kamakura in order to further his studies. Three years later, he went to the Nara and Kyoto areas and, as was the custom of the day, studied many traditions. In the end he took elements from each, while rejecting affiliation with any one school. Nichiren did not believe that Pure Land Buddhism was the way to salvation for the common people. He saw the practice of *nembutsu* as too simplistic, but he did understand that practice of meditation could be facilitated by a shortened version of belief that could be practiced by anyone. To this end, he advocated the recitation of *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō* as a reflection of faith in the Lotus Sutra. He rejected Tendai belief that only the most learned of practitioners could benefit from the Sutra and believed, in his departure from other traditions, that the goal of Buddhist faith and practice did not lay in reward after death; rather, enlightenment was something to be found through engagement with the problems of this world. He believed that faith, adherence to Buddhist principles, and aggressive proselytization would not only lead to individual enlightenment, but was the means to economic, social, and political stability for Japan.

From Tendai, Nichiren accepted the idea of Ten Worlds, wherein ten states of mind coexist in each of us. Everyone has the potential for Buddhahood and the higher levels of existence can be achieved in this lifetime through faith and practice. By chanting *daimoku* and centering devotions on the *gohonzon*, Sōka Gakkai members believe that they can change their *karma*, accumulated from earlier action in this or previous lives, and, in this way, can achieve, not only an improvement in their inner lives, but also material and social success. This continues to be an important concept in the present as members strive for personal revolution and to bring themselves into the higher realms of existence.

Daniel Metraux (1988) bases his book *The History and Theology of Sōka Gakkai* on the theory that Sōka Gakkai understands the universe from an eschatological viewpoint, based firmly in the Lotus Sutra and teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. Nichiren believed that the 13th century was the age of *mappō*, or the Latter Day of the Law. In the Lotus Sutra, Śākyamuni Buddha prophesied three

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'ages' that would come after his death. First was a period in which Theravada would prevail. In this time, the memory of the Buddha would be fresh in people's minds, and the world would be peaceful and prosperous. The second period is represented by Mahayana traditions and the concept of the Bodhisattva. In the third age, *mappō*, people would have only the teachings left and Buddhism would falter. *Mappō* would be characterized by natural disasters, wars, famine, and social unrest. During this period, a new exemplar of the Law would arise to interpret the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and use skillful means to bring the people back to Buddhist faith and practice. Nichiren believed that he was the fulfillment of this prophesy, or the Votary of the Lotus Sutra, and spent much of his life preaching his doctrine to the people of Japan (Yoshiro 1989:43).

It is easy to understand how Nichiren could believe that Japan was in the age of *mappō*. The social and political situation was chaotic, and natural disasters stretched the already meager resources of the common people. Sōka Gakkai takes this idea and extrapolates it to the present. After World War II, Japan was again in chaos; defeated in a brutal war that devastated the social and economic structure of the country, it was not difficult to understand that *mappō* was a possibility. The message has a millenarian flavor in that, like the Kamakura period, the present is a time of social, political, and moral danger. Following Nichiren's teachings, Sōka Gakkai preaches that through chanting, studying the Lotus Sutra, and spreading this message to all people, the world can be saved (SGI 2003). Personal revolution can lead to social revolution and, as more people reach Buddhahood, the strength of their numbers will eliminate social injustice, war, and environmental degradation.

Sōka Gakkai claims Nichiren as the true Buddha of this age and considers him to be as important as the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni. Nichiren put his faith in the Lotus Sutra and taught that study of the sutra, sincere recitation of the *daimoku*, *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō* (Hail to the Lotus Sutra), and *shakubuku*, spread of this message to all people, would save the world (Palmer 1971:51). He taught that the Lotus Sutra emphasized "the need to endure the trials of life and to practice the true law" (Yoshiro 1989:43), and that bodhisattva practice would bring people back to

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this true law. For Nichiren, this defined the purpose of human life in the Latter Day of the Law (Yoshiro 1989:43). Sōka Gakkai has revived this message of the "One and Only True Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin [that] has been...transmitted...at the Nichiren Shōshū Head Temple Taisekiji" from 1290 to the present-day (Nichiren Shōshū 2003), and set it into a modern context to engage *mappō* in the present.

Yoshiro (1989:49) argues that, although many earlier schools had emphasized the importance of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren was the first to attach such importance to this third era of *mappō,* and to stress the idea of engagement with social issues and suffering. In this sense, Nichiren Buddhism is the first truly Japanese Buddhism. His own suffering and persecution appears to have defined his ideas, and he "compared himself to the bodhisattva martyrs mentioned in the sutra" (Yoshiro 1989:49). Nichiren challenged not only the political authority of his time, but also the monastic orders. He dismissed Pure Land Buddhism as too simplistic, and accused Tendai and Shingon monks of elitism and perverting the true teachings to their own advantage. This challenge to the monastic orders is used by Sōka Gakkai in its justification of the rift between the priesthood and the lay-organization in the present.

In 1253, it is believed that Nichiren, at the age of thirty-two, first chanted *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō,* and preached that this recitation contained the essence of the Lotus Sutra, to a gathering of priests and villagers who had come to hear what he had learned in his years of study (SGI 2003b). His message enraged existing sects and began the series of persecutions that followed him throughout his lifetime. In 1271, he was taken to the beach at Tatsunokuchi and threatened with execution, but at the last minute, just as the executioner prepared to behead him, a meteor lit up the sky and he was spared. Taking this as a sign of divine intervention, this story is often cited in the present to remind people of Nichiren's special place in the universe. It was after this event that he revealed his mission as the Votary of the Lotus Sutra, come to save humankind in the age of *mappō* (SGI 2003b).

Nichiren spent much of his life in exile. In 1273, having escaped execution, he and several of his closest followers were exiled to the island of Sado, where he lived in a hut within a graveyard. During this exile, he continued to teach, write, and

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gather followers. In 1274, the government pardoned him and he returned to Kamakura, where he once again petitioned the government to take up the True Buddhism. Rebuffed, he retreated to the remote mountains of Minobu to continue his work. In 1279, he created the *Daigohonzon* for his followers. Inscribed on a piece of wood, this mandala in the form of characters is centered by the signs for *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō* and his personal marks, then surrounded by characters that symbolize the Ten Worlds of Existence and the universe as described in the first part of the Lotus Sutra (SGI 2003b). At his death, his followers were charged with keeping the *gohonzon* for future generations and with spreading his teachings.

Sōka Gakkai interprets Nichiren's persecutions as a parallel for the present when Makiguchi and Toda, were imprisoned during World War II for their belief that practicing Nichiren's teachings would bring Japan success in the war effort (Victoria 2001:291). Members also view their own trials as part of this tradition. They believe that suffering, or obstacles, deepen opportunities for faith, and that the Lotus Sutra predicts that believers in the age of *mappō* will face persecution for their faith. This is also expressed in how members view the criticisms directed at Ikeda. In their eyes, it is only natural that a great peacemaker and teacher should attract the jealousy and enmity of lesser persons.

Nichiren was a prolific writer who left many texts; his collected works are known as the *gosho* and are venerated by Sōka Gakkai members. After Nichiren's death in 1282, his followers continued to spread his teachings. They built a temple, Taiseki-ji, near the base of Mount Fuji and preserved his writings and the *gohonzon*, in the form of a wooden carving. This *gohonzon* is the most important relic and symbol of Nichiren's faith in the Lotus Sutra, and is used as an object of worship for all those who follow his teachings. Copies of this mandala continue into the present as objects of worship for practitioners, and the original remains at Taiseki-ji, which is still the head temple for Nichiren Shōshū. There are many versions of *gohonzon*, but this one is understood as being the most important.

Many schools of Nichiren Buddhism have survived into the present but it is Nichiren Shōshū that inspired Sōka Gakkai. For the first several decades of Sōka

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Gakkai's existence, members also belonged to Nichiren Shōshū and shared not only facilities, but were interrelated for purposes of ritual and life-passage events such as marriages and burials. This relationship was severed in the early 1990s and will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 4

SŌKA GAKKAI: 1930s to the present

> How overjoyed and full of praise the Daishonin and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the universe must surely be at the steady, earnest efforts each of you is making to advance kosen-rufu in the respective places of your mission. There is no doubt that the immeasurable benefit and good fortune you are accumulating due to your dedication will continue to adorn your lives throughout all future existences. With deepest respect and admiration, I heartily applaud all of you, who are carrying out a great movement for peace and happiness never before witnessed in the history of humankind.
>
> *Daisaku Ikeda*, New Year's message to the membership (2004)

Tsutomu Shiobara (Tamaru 2000:38) argues that we can understand the history of Sōka Gakkai as occurring in four stages. He envisions the first stage as one of ideology, in which Makiguchi inspired a small group of followers who supported his ideas about education reform. The second stage is represented by Toda's presidency, a time in which militant socio-religious ideology characterized the organization. The third is distinguished by *ōbutumyōgō*, or a blending of worldly matters and Buddhist teaching. The final stage describes the contemporary situation, in which the emerging social movement is giving way to a more institutionalized organization. This adaptation is reflected in Sōka Gakkai's engagement with global issues such as environmental protection, human rights, and world peace. It is also shown in the methods used to address these issues. Today the organization avoids the exclusivist ideology, associated with Nichiren Shōshū, that created enemies in earlier periods, and has adopted phrases such as non-violent resistance, valuing diversity, and global citizens to describe the goals of the membership.

While the organization existed in pre-World War II Japan, the most important growth occurred in the post-war period. Metraux (1988:21) cites three important reasons for the emergence of new religions during the American Occupation, a period which is often called the *Rush Hour of the Gods*, (after Neil McFarland's book (1967) by that name): "(1) the spread of religious freedom, (2) the dismal failure of

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government policies and ideologies during World War II, and (3) the poverty, desperation, and loneliness of many Japanese during this period." (1988:21). Japan was open to new social movements that were rooted in the past, offered opportunity in the present, and could appeal to people as a way to influence the future. Gone were the dreams of an Asian empire, united under Japan. The country was decimated financially, politically, and socially. The economy was in chaos, resources had been eaten up by the war effort, and industrial cities such as Osaka and Hiroshima were in ruins. People were malnourished, impoverished, and without the resources to start over. Politically, the country was taken to task by the American Occupation; the Emperor was obliged to renounce his status as a god, and Western-style democracy was forced on the people of Japan. The new constitution officially disrupted centuries of social structure based on the *ie*, or corporate family system, and legislation guaranteed freedom of religion.

Religious groups proliferated at the expense of Shintō, the ancient Japanese religion that had been used to create a sense of nationalism and ethnic identity in the pre-war period. Hundreds of new religions sprang up in this post-war period, but few were able to gather large numbers of supporters, and fewer still were able to organize in such a way that we might analyze them as social movements. This picture of Japan in chaos and defeat fits with Douglas McAdam's (1988:39-41) argument that culture plays a role in the establishment of social movements. In his opinion, social movements are most likely to come forward in the face of ideological or cultural contradictions and that suddenly imposed grievances and dramatizations of system vulnerability provide opportunity for social movements to emerge.

Sōka Gakkai claims that Makiguchi established the organization in 1930. In actuality, it was not formally established until 1937 when he and Toda set it up under the name Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai (Value-creating Education Society) (Dator 1969:3). Makiguchi and Toda converted to Nichiren Shōshū in 1928 but in the early 1930s, the society's focus was on educational reform. However, after 1937, the organization was increasingly linked to the ideas of Nichiren Shōshū, known for its uncompromising exclusivity and intolerance of other religions. Like Nichiren,

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Makiguchi and Toda believed that the practice of Nichiren Buddhism would be the vehicle for Japanese victory and, also like Nichiren, they were imprisoned for their beliefs. Makiguchi's final defiance of the government came when the government pressured Nichiren Shōshū to merge with other sects of Buddhism. He found this intolerable and in 1943, he and Toda were imprisoned. By this time the organization had gathered about three thousand members. Based in Tokyo with several smaller chapters throughout the country, members established the journal, *Kachi Sozo* (Creation of Value) to disseminate their ideas for educational reform (Metraux 1988:28).

Makiguchi died in prison, but Toda had a religious experience while incarcerated. After hearing of Makiguchi's death, he recited the *daimoku* two million times, and swore to spread the message of salvation to others on his release (Metraux 1988:30). He studied the Lotus Sutra and came to believe that enlightenment, such as he had reached while in prison, could not be reached through study alone, but rather this goal was attainable through chanting the *daimoku*, spreading the message of Nichiren Buddhism, and study (Metraux 1988:30). This departure from the earlier days of Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai led the organization into a period of tremendous growth. Toda had ambitions to change the movement into one that would use Nichiren's ideology to create a new society. It was his ability to organize, as well as to use symbols available within the culture, that increased membership in the organization to over fifteen thousand within two years, and to 750,000 families before his death in 1958. Metraux (1988:23) argues that Toda was "a man who saw acute misery and who felt that he had a solution to the problems".

He continued to preach, and changed the structure of the society; where originally the organization was set up in a vertical pattern, marked by relationships of mentor/disciple that are common to Japanese organization, Toda added horizontal dimensions. Now, not only did small groups relate to larger and more inclusive groups, but two other kinds of groupings allowed people to socialize and form bonds that functioned independently of the hierarchy and offered more opportunity to work toward common goals. One of these structures was geographic in nature, and this

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became an important aspect of later political mobilization. Community groups were formed that did not necessarily stay within the boundaries of groupings that met for weekly prayer and information meetings. Other horizontal groupings were marked by common interests, and included Women's Groups, Men's Groups, and Children's groups (White 1970:89-106). These have flourished and become more diverse over time, but the concept of having different settings for social interaction continues in the present. Under Toda's leadership, the organization worked, not only through the personal practices of its members, but also through involvement in local and national politics.

Following Nichiren's teachings, Sōka Gakkai believes that the world will be changed through political involvement. While, outside of Japan, this is largely translated into educational programs that promote peace, human rights, and environmental protection, within Japan, direct political action is effected through the Kōmeitō, or Clean Government, party. This reflects the principle of *ōbutumyōgō*, wherein Sōka Gakkai supports the idea political action should be based on Buddhist principles. In the 1950s, under Toda's leadership, Sōka Gakkai began its involvement in politics by supporting candidates, first in local elections, and then expanding into national level politics where their candidates were increasingly successful. In 1962, the organization formed the Kōmei Seiji Remmei (Clean Government League) as the political arm of Sōka Gakkai. In 1964, this was transformed into the Kōmeitō, an officially recognized political party, which, in 1965, won 25 seats in the Lower House of the Diet. By 1969, the Kōmeitō held 47 seats and a position as the second largest opposition party in the Diet (Metreaux 1988:134).

In 1970, the relationship between Sōka Gakkai and the Kōmeitō party was more clearly delineated because of public criticism concerning the influence wielded by a religious organization over a political party, as well as an incident in which critics accused Sōka Gakkai of suppressing the publication of a book that criticized the organization's political influence. The organization denied the allegations, but formally severed the relationship between Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō. However,

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speculation continues that Sōka Gakkai controls the party and that Mr. Ikeda continues to wield considerable influence over party policy (Aruga 2000:116). By the early 1990s, Kōmeitō strengthened its position in national politics by strategically aligning itself with other powerful parties. The party was able to exert pressure on policy because of the large number of Sōka Gakkai voters, as well as the considerable financial and media resources controlled by Sōka Gakkai.

The Kōmeitō continues to evolve and change its role as necessary, and the controversy over its connections to the large, wealthy, and powerful organization of Sōka Gakkai, continues to draw criticism from politicians and academics. These critics often center their comments on Ikeda's influence and power. Kitagawa Takayoshi, a professor of Sociology at Senshu University in Tokyo says that "While I wouldn't say that Sōka Gakkai is seen as a cult, they are a very structured, organized, militaristic group that wields immense political power." (Magee 1995:np). Shokei Takashi, a professor of Culture and Sociology at Meisei University in Tokyo, goes further in describing Ikeda as "a power-hungry individual who intends to take control of the government and make Sōka Gakkai the national religion" (Magee 1995:np). The Weekly Post, an American publication (2000:np), quotes Ikeda, in response to the political alliance with the leading party in Japan, as saying (in a Sōka Gakkai executive meeting) "It has become a great time for our party. Some of our Diet members will be appointed as ministers. Now, the Diet members are working for you. Sōka Gakkai is Number One in Japan". Of course Sōka Gakkai denies these charges and concentrates attention on their educational, cultural, environmental, humanitarian concerns, and peace activism. Outside of Japan, the organization has not entered into formal political arrangements, but rather, encourages members to be politically active within existing political structures. In considering this, it is relevant to consider the membership within the context of total population. While in Japan, Sōka Gakkai claims approximately 10 percent of the population, its membership in other countries is much smaller and would likely not have the ability to significantly affect election results, let alone constitute the basis for a political party.

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When Toda died, Ikeda took on the leadership of the rapidly-growing organization. He honored the memory and goals of his mentor, but under his direction Sōka Gakkai continued to change and grow. Political, cultural, and educational programs expanded and Ikeda's sense of a global organization began to take on a reality as membership began to grow outside of Japan. Success in political and economic spheres was a mixed blessing; while it provided the means to effect social change and pursue its activities, it also stirred feelings of distrust in the minds of Japanese people who felt that great wealth and secular power were inappropriate for a religious organization. In the 1960s and 1970s, rumors of violent retribution against members who left, or even criticized, the organization were reported in the media. *Shakubuku*, or recruitment, was sometimes violent or coercive in nature, and this led to further speculation that the organization was really a violent cult and should be suppressed.

Takesato Watanabe (2000:230), a professor of Journalism, Media, and Communication Studies at Doshisha University, critiques Sōka Gakkai's ability to control the media. He argues that the organization has been too preoccupied with its internal solidarity, and has neglected to deal with negative media attention, especially within Japan, that has strongly influenced attitudes of those outside the society. The Japanese media has been consistently harsh in its treatment of Sōka Gakkai. Watanabe criticizes the media for dismissing the organization's efforts in the areas of human rights, peace activism, and environmental protection, but he also criticizes the organization for not dealing openly and effectively with criticism.

Over time, it appears that this side of Sōka Gakkai has softened under the rhetoric of global community, a theme frequently used by Ikeda in speeches and publications. The old premise that all religious practice other than that of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism must be challenged has softened. This change has paved the way for Sōka Gakkai to take an inclusive approach to diversity and to successfully integrate the organization into new cultures and geographies, but it has exacted a price. In 1991, Nichiren Shōshū excommunicated all Sōka Gakkai members, a move that has both hurt the organization and afforded further opportunities for growth. It

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may be that the organization's spread into more than 180 countries, along with its spectacular growth in North America, reflects the strength and global strategies of Japan's economy. As the nation moved into global markets, Sōka Gakkai members followed. This argument has strength, but looking at the strategies used in building the organization suggests that it is somewhat simplistic. I will discuss this further in Chapter 10, which looks more carefully at the growth of Sōka Gakkai within the framework of how social movements emerge and change over time.

Following in the traditions of Makiguchi, Sōka Gakkai has always promoted social change through education. Ikeda (SUA 2004) argues that "what our world most requires now is the kind of education that fosters love for humankind, that develops character – that provides an intellectual basis for the realization of peace and empowers learners to contribute to and improve society." In the 1950's, under Toda's leadership, groups organized study sessions to learn about Buddhism. In Japan today, this practice continues and members are expected to study and pass examinations that reflect their knowledge about Buddhism and Nichiren Buddhism in particular. Children are considered to be the 'Future' of the organization and of the world, and there is a strong focus on their education and well-being. The Edmonton chapter has a number of young families and this theme of preparing the children to carry on the work and ideals of the organization is frequently expressed. The Canadian magazine, *New Century*, always has a section for children's activities and ideas for involving children in the activities of the organization. Members make the effort to welcome children at meetings, and create opportunities for children to participate through performances and games such as a piñata at New Years. Because of the large, and growing, number of children at this center, special efforts to include the children are arranged for one meeting each month. One member, who describes herself as 3rd generation Sōka Gakkai, relates that, as a child, she was expected to study for examination 'levels' and that there were many opportunities for her to learn about Buddhism within a semi-formal setting.

Study sessions comprise an important part of practice for all members. Not all members are equally interested in this aspect, but all are encouraged to participate

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and learn. In the Edmonton group, learning takes place in various contexts. Once monthly, at the Sunday meeting that brings all local members together, a Study Meeting is prepared and presented by members of the group. Everyone participates, but certain people lead the discussion. In Edmonton, members get together and discuss the presentation, but in larger centers, the preparation would be guided by someone with more experience in this endeavor. An interesting element of this practice is that the topic and shape of the discussion is drawn from the New Century, and that discussion is coordinated all across Canada, ensuring that all members have access to similar teachings and encouraging a sense of solidarity that is planned, not random, within the organization.

In mild contrast to this, at the Edmonton center, this study meeting, while covering the same topic, is usually divided into two groups, one for those whose first language is Chinese, and one for everyone else. As the group is best described as polyglot, this can be an interesting mix. Planning starts in Japan, is disseminated to various countries, then coordinated through the regions, and down to individual centers and members. In this way, centers throughout the world are linked through the parent organization in Japan, creating a sense of connectedness that extends beyond political boundaries and encourages members to understand themselves as belonging to the stated ideal of a global community.

These formal study opportunities are only part of the program. In Edmonton the larger group meets twice weekly, and at both of these sessions, Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, after chanting informal discussion is geared toward teaching Buddhist ideals or sharing information about events that concern the group. Interest group meetings also present opportunities for study. For example, the Youth Group, which consists of young adults, many of whom are students, are preparing a program to learn about Buddhist history. They plan to follow that program with sessions more focused on the history of Nichiren and Sōka Gakkai. Meetings are not exclusive and everyone is expected to help as needed. This material will form the basis of a learning package for the Future division, which is the name given to the

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children's group, most of whom are under ten years, within the local Sōka Gakkai community.

As the organization has grown, the Edmonton chapter has divided itself into smaller groups based on geography and interests. Geographical districts meet monthly, and again the agenda is chanting, followed by an educational component, discussion, and opportunities to support each other in all aspects of life. People share their needs and strengths, always emphasizing Buddhist context and the importance of practice. Interest groups reflect age, gender, and language as well as special interests such as university (or student) groups, or as is the case in Vancouver, gay members and ethnic interests.

At a national level, there are opportunities for members to visit Caledon, in Ontario. Caledon represents another example of how Sōka Gakkai is interconnected across national boundaries. The facility was built with central Sōka Gakkai funding, but its operating costs are covered by what members pay for food and lodging when they stay there. Set up as a retreat and conference center, members go there to take part in study sessions, cultural events, and opportunities to meet with other Sōka Gakkai members. From the accounts of several members, this is a very inspirational experience that takes members out of the ordinary world and into a community of practitioners. It is, in that sense, a form of pilgrimage aimed at strengthening ties to the organization. Focusing on practice and study, trips to Caledon allow members to experience personal growth through discussion, lectures, and cultural activities. They also offer opportunity for members to return and share these experiences with other members on their return home. Again, like pilgrimage, it is not only the shared experience of the trip that is important and builds solidarity; it is also the stories that are brought back to those who stayed at home. These stories, as well as the trips themselves, serve to reinforce the idea that members are part of a strong and supportive collective.

Sōka Gakkai's commitment to education goes further. The organization has a network of schools, ranging from kindergarten programs to universities. Some of these address special interests, such as a Women's College in Japan and the Sōka

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University Center for Environmental Research in Brazil. Sōka University, near Tokyo, was founded in 1971 and is the venue for many international events that bring members together from throughout the world. The school advertises its founding principles as "[to] be the highest seat of learning for humanistic education, the cradle of a new culture, and a fortress for the peace of mankind" (Soka University 2004). It is a fully accredited university with a strong reputation in Japan; it claims a strong undergraduate program with about 8,000 students. The academic emphasis is on liberal arts and focuses on humanities, languages, and international relations. Students have the opportunity to take one year of their studies in a foreign country and the university welcomes many international students to study in Japan. In 2001, Sōka students had the opportunity to study at 59 foreign universities and each year about 250 non-Japanese students come to study at the Tokyo campus. This focus on international experience underlines the stated goals of creating global citizens. Forming a "human network is the foundation of Sōka's education" (Soka University 2004) and this is reflected in the one-on-one and multi-faceted relationships fostered between members within Sōka Gakkai. Attached to the campus are the Institute for Comparative Study of Cultures, the Institute for Peace Studies, and the Center for African Studies (Metraux 1996:381).

> The mission of Soka University of America is to foster a steady stream of global citizens committed to living a contributive life.
>
> *Daisaku Ikeda ,* Founder SUA (SUA 2004)

In 1987, Sōka University of America opened in Calabasas, just outside of Los Angeles. At present, this campus features programs at the graduate level and is "committed to fostering students who desire to work toward a more peaceful world" (SUA 2004). It is associated with a second campus at Aliso Viejo, which opened for undergraduate liberal arts students in 2001. These centers claim to embody the concept of sōka, or value-creation, by emphasizing humanism within a Buddhist context.

In 1993, Ikeda established the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC 2001) to promote dialogue between scholars, activists, economists, and politicians in order to prevent wars and promote "respect for life and the earth" (Dobbelaere 2000:249). This institute aims to foster "dialogue among scholars and activists on common values across cultures and religions [and] to support an evolving global ethic for a peaceful twenty-first century" (BRC 2001). The center works with universities and citizen groups to sponsor symposia, conferences, lectures, and other educational programs aimed at promoting global peace, human rights, and environmental ethics (BRC 2001).

One function of the center is to provide curriculum resources for educational programs, many of which are aimed at promoting these core values in children. One example is the Center for Ecoliteracy, a program of "science education with an emphasis on the web of life and the natural habitat" (BRC 2001). The program is based on systems theory and direct experience as a means to helping children understand the concept of environmental sustainability. It offers web support through publications, outlines for projects, teacher-training opportunities, and access to financial grants. This is only one of the many projects supported by the Boston Center, which involves itself, not only in these small grass-roots projects, but also participates in large symposia and conferences to address issues of the environment, human rights, and world peace (BRC 2001).

> Until the peoples of the world develop a mutual understanding and respect for each other, there is no way we can expect to achieve a peaceful world. It is the creation of art and music coming from the depths of our lives which expresses the rich spirit of a people or an age and communicates itself directly to the hearts of all.

Daisaku Ikeda, (Tokyo Fuji Art Museum [FAM] 2004b)

Sōka Gakkai has always employed culture and education as important elements in spreading and maintaining its message. Social activities are planned around cultural events, and while this started with cultural displays in Japan, it has

carried forward into the present through music, literature, and art. The organization sponsors the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum in addition to conferences, symposia, and performances world-wide (Dobbelaere 2000:243). The Min-On Concert Association, founded by Sōka Gakkai in 1963, sponsors concerts, exhibitions, and cultural programs throughout the world (Metraux 1996). This focus on cultural development reflects the idea that if one improves oneself, one improves the world. Ikeda himself is a prolific writer, poet, and photographer, whose work hangs in Sōka Gakkai centers and is prominent in many educational exhibits. In Japan, video-recordings of events often feature a brass band as entertainment, and the Vancouver center has a Youth Band that plays on special occasions (personal communication Paula Reich 2003).

Even the small Edmonton center boasts a keyboard, which is used by members to entertain on occasions. The focus on youth leads to the use of songs and games with which to engage the children in learning about Buddhism. As well, the little ones are encouraged to show their talents in ways such as playing their instruments for a supportive adult gathering. Sōka Gakkai supports the arts in more formal ways as well, such as funding international tours of performing arts (Metraux 1996:375). One Edmonton member speculated that many dancers, and other artists, are drawn to Sōka Gakkai through the experiences offered by the organization (personal communication Paul Reich 2004). He cited the extreme competition, challenging lifestyle, and intense relationships experienced by artists as possible reasons for joining Sōka Gakkai, which offers not only the promise of secular success in a demanding profession, but a also supportive environment in which to address spirituality.

The Fuji Art Museum in Tokyo, "is dedicated to expanding an appreciation of our shared humanity by serving as a crossroads of global arts and cultures [and helping to] deepen mutual understanding and lay the foundations for world peace" (TFAM 2004). The museum houses a spectacular collection of traditional Japanese art, Western paintings, and Chinese ceramics. It arranges for parts of the collection to
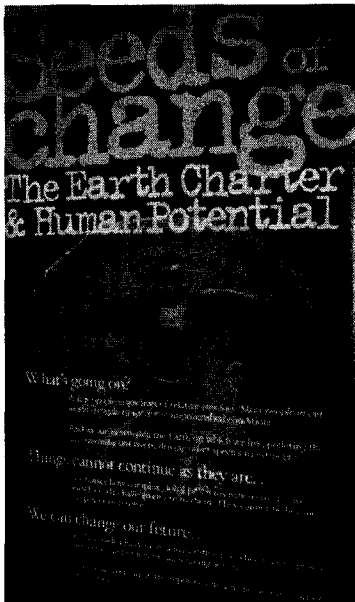
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be exhibited internationally, and was commended by the Japanese Foreign Affairs Ministry in 1991 for its contribution to the cultural arts (TFAM 2004).

Both Sōka Gakkai's environmental and peace programs are closely tied to education. My first contact with the local Sōka Gakkai group was in October 2003. I attended a lecture given by Tony Meers at the University of Alberta. As part of a series of lectures sponsored by the Mahatma Gandhi Canadian Foundation for World Peace, Meers spoke on the topic *Be the Change You Wish to See*, a quote from Gandhi, on the subject of personal transformation as a force against violence and injustice. He spoke to the subjects of world peace, environmental integrity, and commitment to the principles of non-violence. He also spoke of personal transformation through study and self-reflection. Without talking about Sōka Gakkai practice, Meers emphasized the idea that all individuals have the potential for self-fulfillment that will in turn influence the direction of the universe, and that only through personal and collective commitment to non-violence can we bring peace to our world. His lecture was optimistic in tone and he gave the impression of a somewhat moderate peace activist. A member of the Gandhi Foundation introduced Meers, lending both prestige and credibility to the lecture by his endorsement of Sōka Gakkai and its leader Daisaku Ikeda, whom he praised as a bodhisattva and great peace-maker of our time.

Later that week, I attended two other lectures in the series, both by Leonard Carter, Ph.D. and Dean of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Carter is a Baptist minister and frequent lecturer on the subjects of world peace and the principles of non-violence. While attending these lectures I began to get a sense of the solidarity within Sōka Gakkai. The Edmonton Chapter had been very involved in the events of the week and I began to see the same people helping with the technical aspects of the day, greeting people, and handing out souvenir bookmarks. At the first session, a man introduced himself as Harry Miyazaki, a member of Sōka Gakkai who was visiting from Vancouver in order to support the local group. It turned out that he is a Senior Vice-General Director for Sōka Gakkai – Canada, and once again, my project and I were greeted with enthusiasm, invitations, and promises of help. Also,

once again, I was encouraged to search out both positive and negative sources, so that I would be able to come to my own conclusions about the organization.

In February, 2004, the local chapter, in partnership with the local United Nations Association, brought *Seeds of Change* to Edmonton and organized its display at Grant McEwan Community College. This exhibition, which includes a poster presentation, photographs by Ikeda, and the video *A Quiet Revolution*, documents three grassroots projects from Kenya, India, and Eastern Europe. Each project is directed at sustainable development, environmental protection, and the idea that ordinary people have the power to create meaningful change, not only in their own lives, but for the environment and the communities in which they live. This theme ties in with Sōka Gakkai's affirmation that individual revolution leads to collective social reform. We do not need to wait for government to lead the way; if committed individuals work together, change can be effected. The local chapter concentrates

(C.L. Geekie 2004) on the quality of the projects it undertakes, refraining from attempting too many projects that might dilute the enthusiasm and effectiveness of participation.

Members endeavor to create collaborative relationships with other organizations. This ability to successfully collaborate with prestigious individuals and organizations, not only broadens the impact of the message, but also provides a sense of credibility for the small local group. While in the October event, the organization worked with the Mahatma Gandhi Foundation and the University of Alberta, for *Seeds of Change* members collaborated with Grant McEwan Community College and the local United Nations Association. They further drew on previous relationships to invite The Honorable Lois Hole, the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, to formally open the exhibit, and were also able to secure Michael Phair, an Edmonton city councilor, to speak at the opening. Phair arranged for the exhibit to

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run at Edmonton City Hall for the following week. These dignitaries drew the attention of the media, again broadening the impact of the display. Support from the wider organization was apparent in that Sōka Gakkai Canada arranged for, and financed, the exhibit's delivery to Edmonton. It took the coordination of many members to set it up, there was a large turnout of members

Seeds of Change exhibition (C.L. Geekie 2004)

at the opening, and Miyazaki came from Vancouver to support the group and participate in the ceremony.

It is difficult to understand why a large and successful social movement, with well over ten million members in countries throughout the world can seem to be invisible, even when it has created relationships with powerful allies, established universities in Japan and North America, and collaborated in educational programs and cultural events to promote some of the most important issues of our time. The organization's stated goals seem exemplary and Ikeda is hailed by many as one of the most influential and important peacemakers of our time, and yet, many seem wary of the motives of this influence. Scholars in the 1960s and 1970s (White 1970; McFarland 1970) were much more cautious in their evaluation of the merits of Sōka Gakkai than are more recent scholars (Hurst 2000, Wilson and Machacek 2000, Metraux 1988, 1996, 2000). If the literature reflects change in the organization, it suggests that the coercive and sometimes violent practices of the past have been successfully converted into a movement that sees personal revolution through the practice of Nichiren Buddhism as a means to achieving, not only personal social and material success, but also the larger goals of world peace and environmental integrity.

In Japan, the organization is clearly involved in direct political action through the Kōmeitō party, but in other countries, grass roots activism, educational activities, and cultural displays are emphasized as a means to develop both personal and

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community strength. Sōka Gakkai has committed itself to creating educational materials and settings that foster these goals; and its membership continues to grow, not at the rate noted in the first decades after the war, but steadily into countries throughout the world. It has integrated itself invisibly into communities in ways that do not threaten the integrity of existing institutions, making it possible to create partnerships and work together for common goals. This is evident in materials produced by Sōka Gakkai to support the cultural and educational endeavors they support. Often these are very sophisticated pieces of work, but the only mention of the organization will be in the final credits, and profits from much of the work are directed toward charities such as UNESCO or UNICEF. Many of these materials are created by Sōka Gakkai members, and enlist the participation of well-known entertainers, academics, and political figures.

The integrated vertical and horizontal structures instituted by Toda have allowed the far-flung organization to maintain solidarity in its goals and programs, while facilitating personal support systems at many levels. Economic security established in the early years (through publishing, real estate, commercial enterprise, and mausoleum business) has allowed the organization to establish schools, cultural centers, and other centers from which to promote its peace and environmental agendas. Leadership, sensitive to the needs of membership in times of shifting social, economic, and political milieu, has facilitated the organization's evolution from a small, and somewhat elite, educational interest group, to an egalitarian movement that promotes broad social and environmental programs within the context of Buddhist faith and practice.

Chapter 5

LEADERSHIP

> Eric Hoffer wrote: "A movement is pioneered by men of words, materialized by fanatics, and consolidated by men of action." Though Soka Gakkai was not among his referents, it fits quite neatly the pattern that he described. Thus far, in this organization's succession of leaders, its three presidents typify respectively these three categories. The first president, Makiguchi Tsunesaburo (1871-1944), was the man of words who founded the society. Toda Josei (1900-1958), the second president, was the fanatic, under whose leadership the organization achieved its most spectacular growth. The man of action is the third president, Ikeda Daisaku (1928-), who is succeeding in making more and more observers acknowledge that "Sōkagakkai is more than an emotion...It is a monumental reality."
>
> *Neill McFarland* (1967:196)

Leadership has played a crucial role in the formation and development of Sōka Gakkai. As McFarland (above) points out, each of the three leaders has been able to guide the organization in ways that were effective within the particular social and political milieu of his time. McFarland's statement continues to be as relevant now, in 2004, as it was when he wrote it in 1967. Looking back, Makiguchi's ideas for educational reform, while revolutionary within their social context, were both moderate and limited in scope. Toda came into post-war Japan with the determination to create a legacy for his mentor and an organization that would revolutionize the lives of its members. In turn, his disciple, Ikeda, has led the organization through the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st. His dynamic style has expanded Sōka Gakkai's sphere of influence into the realms of culture, politics, and education throughout the world. This chapter will look at the three leaders and how each of these controversial figures addressed problems and solutions for the time in which he was situated.

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What then is the purpose of national education? Rather than devise complex theoretical interpretations, it is better to start by looking to the lovely child who sits on your knee and ask yourself: What can I do to assure that that this child will be able to lead the happiest life possible?

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (Holte 2004)

Makiguchi (SGI 2004)

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) is best remembered as an educator who believed that the purpose of education was to develop young minds to think about the world and to develop their creative potential (Holte 2004a). Born in Arahama, a small fishing village on the Sea of Japan, in Niigata prefecture, he was abandoned by his father at the age of three, then adopted into his uncle's family. After finishing elementary school he began working to help support the impoverished family, but at age fourteen he set off for Hokkaido, which was considered the frontier, but was also known a center for progressive thought (Holte 2004a). He began working as an errand boy for the local police department and worked to continue his education. He did well and his co-workers contributed to his endeavors by raising money to send him to a teacher's training college from which he graduated in 1893. From here, he started his teaching career in a nearby primary school.

In 1903, Makiguchi published his first book *Jinsei Chirigaku* (The Geography of Human Life) a reference book for teachers. He began to write textbooks for children and earned some critical acclaim for his work. In 1912 he wrote *Kyodaku Kenkyu* (Study of Folk Culture), in which we can begin to understand the philosophy that he later introduced into Sōka Gakkai.

The methods of humanitarian competition are not, of course, simple or unitary; all other forms of competition—military, political, economic—must be conducted within a humanitarian framework. In other words, the objective of states should not be merely the selfish pursuit of their own good, but should be to enhance the lives of

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other peoples as well. We must choose those methods that profit ourselves while profiting others. We must learn to engage consciously in collective life.

From *Kyodaku Kenkyu* (Holte 2004a)

He began to develop his pedagogic theories, including the idea of value-creation (sōka) education, and this brought him into conflict with the existing Japanese education authorities. In 1930, he published *Sōka Kyōikugaku Taikei* (Value-Creating Pedagogical System), which received critical acclaim but no support for implementation. Chris Holte (2004a) argues that as Makiguchi's ideas matured, they increasingly conflicted with the militarist and authoritarian government's agenda to create "obedient, unquestioning servants of the state". This conflict resulted in his early retirement, which left him with time to devote to religion, and in 1928, at the age of 57, he converted to Nichiren Shōshū, adding this practice to his ideas about educational reform.

In 1930, along with his friend Josei Toda, he formed a society, made up mostly of intellectuals and educators, to promote his ideas. At this time the focus was on educational reform, but by 1937, when they formalized the organization as the Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai (Society for Value-creating Education), the group began to draw on a broader membership that promoted the spread of Buddhism and Buddhist ideals within education. The group had about 2,000 members by the beginning of World War II, and both Makiguchi and Toda became increasingly convinced that "Nichiren's philosophy, with its focus on the transformation of society through the individual's transformation, was the means to achieving the fundamental social reform that they had been trying to accomplish through their educational efforts" (Holte 2004a).

At this time, the Japanese government was promoting State Shintō, a religious system in which the Emperor is supreme, social hierarchy is enforced, and foreign influence defiles Japan (Holte 2004a). As the war approached, the state's tolerance of other religious influences declined. Nichiren Shōshū was divided on opinions about the increasing militarization, and this is where Makiguchi's stand on pacifism

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comes into question. Sōka Gakkai today argues that Makiguchi's imprisonment shows how the organization has espoused pacifism since its inception, but Brian Victoria (2001:275-292) argues that it was not pacifism that motivated Makiguchi and Toda; it was not even that they disputed the emperor as a deity. Rather, it was the firm belief that Japan's political, economic, and military success could only be achieved if the government supported and practiced Nichiren's teachings of the True Buddhism.

Holte (2004a) also questions Makiguchi's pacifism, citing a quote from 1933 and arguing that his defiance was based on the government's interference with Nichiren Shōshū's autonomy.

> Regardless of social class, everyone should be conscious of the nation's destiny, harmonizing their lives with that destiny and, at all times, prepared to share that destiny. It is for this reason that the work of national education is to prepare ourselves to do exactly this, omitting nothing in the process....However, in order to do this, and prior to placing ourselves in service to the state, we should first contribute to the local area that has nurtured us and with which we share common interests.

Makiguchi, 1933 (Holte 2004a)

Dayle Bethel (2004), a professor of education and anthropology at the International University Learning Center in Kyoto, Japan, disagrees with these authors, claiming that the central themes in Makiguchi's writing included: (1) "respect and appreciation for the earth", (2) "a sense of awe and respect for the wonders of nature", (3) "respect and appreciation for human society and a corresponding sense of indebtedness to and responsibility for society", (4) "the local community, one's homeland, as the arena of childhood learning and education , and geography as a tool available ... to us in teaching", (5) "child-centered learning", and (6) "humanitarian competition", which he describes as the "culminating stage of ... moral development in human evolution". In Bethel's view, Makiguchi was clearly a pacifist and a visionary who delineated the ideology and set the stage for contemporary Sōka Gakkai.

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In 1943, Makiguchi, Toda, and 19 other leaders of the Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai were imprisoned by the Japanese government, but only Makiguchi and Toda remained in prison when the others chose to accept the government's position. On November 18, 1944, Makiguchi died, in prison, of malnutrition. In his last letter to his family he wrote:

> I have been carefully rereading Kant's philosophy. It is clear I have been able to develop a theory of value that philosophers for the past hundred years have sought without success. At the same time I have linked this to the faith of the Lotus Sutra, the truth of which has been proven by the experiences of several practitioners...In this sense, it is no wonder that the three obstacles and four devils...have arisen to oppose us. It is just as the sutra teaches.

(Holte 2004a)

In refusing to compromise his ideals, Makiguchi is understood by Sōka Gakkai members as a martyr to the faith of Nichiren Buddhism. Because he suffered persecution and imprisonment like Nichiren Daishonin, Buddha of the Age of Mappō he is revered as a Bodhisattva and exemplar in our time.

> Although a movement to ban the testing of nuclear weapons is now under way around the world, it is my wish to attack the problem at its root, that is to rip out the claws that are hidden in the very depths of this issue...we, the citizens of the world, have an inviolable right to live. Anyone who tries to jeopardize this right is a devil incarnate, a fiend, a monster.
>
> *Josei Toda*, 1957, in response to the United States, Britain, and Soviet Union nuclear weapons testing (SGI 2004b)

Josei Toda (SGI 2004)

Sōka Gakkai's second president, Josei Toda (1900-1958), survived imprisonment and vowed to honor the memory of his mentor by reconstructing the organization they had created together. Born in Ishikawa prefecture, then raised and

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educated in Hokkaido, Toda became a teacher and, in 1921, gained a position in Tokyo at the school where Makiguchi was principal. The young man, impressed by Makiguchi's ideas, quickly assumed the role of protégé. In 1928, along with his mentor, Toda converted to the practice of Nichiren Buddhism, but Holte argues that, at first he "had a shallow practice, doing *shakubuku* (propagation) and practicing for the sake of making lots of money" (2004b). He was a successful entrepreneur and publisher, but these businesses went bankrupt while he was in prison during World War II. He co-founded the Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai in 1937, and in 1943, he followed his mentor into prison when both were accused of thought crimes subversive to the Japan's military goals. In fact, like Makiguchi, his crime was that he did not compromise his Buddhist ideals, choosing instead to remain incarcerated for much of the war. While in prison, Toda studied and practiced Nichiren Buddhism. He described two episodes of transcendence while chanting the *daimoku*, and he vowed to dedicate the rest of his life to "propagating the Supreme Law." (Holte 2004b). When his mentor died, the guards did not inform him of the death until much later when one casually said that the older man had died. This treatment further strengthened Toda's resolve to honor Makiguchi by carrying on the organization they had started together.

When Toda was released from prison in 1945, the war was almost over. Japan was in chaos, and as McFarland (1967) argues, the country was fertile ground for religious groups that could offer solace and hope for the future. Toda, a successful businessman in the pre-war period saw the opportunity to create a new organization, based not only on the educational platform that Makiguchi had envisioned, but firmly embedded in the faith and practice of Nichiren Buddhism. He promised personal transformation that would be manifested in social and economic benefit. In 1946, the organization was reborn as Sōka Gakkai (Value-Creation Society) and "No longer to be identified essentially with the educational field, the reorganized group took as its main purpose "to bring peace and happiness to all mankind."" (McFarland 1967:198).

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Other schools of Nichiren Buddhism of the time concentrated on more traditional roles for Buddhism, but Toda believed that Nichiren had taught that happiness and fulfillment were possible, not only for the elite, but also for the common people, whom he was particularly successful in attracting to the organization. One aspect of Japan's disarray was the displaced urban poor. Migration from the rural areas into the city left many people rootless and separated from the strong *ie*, or corporate family system, that provided both social and economic security in the past. Toda's organization offered structure, social support, and an ideology that promised benefits, not only in future existence, but in this world. The ideology may have attracted people, but Toda's gift was for organization. As described in Chapter 4, he created both vertical and horizontal structure within which people could relate at many levels; for many, this was the structure they needed to re-order their lives.

In 1951, Toda formally assumed the presidency of Sōka Gakkai and officially began his drive for converts. At his inaugural address, he vowed to *shakubuku* (convert) all of Japan. Hoping to redress the injustices dealt to him and his mentor, Makiguchi, Toda wrote *History and Conviction of the Sōkagakkai* (1951), an account of his past problems with the Japanese government and the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood. In 1952, several youth members went to the Head Temple and confronted an elderly priest, whom they believed had not supported Makiguchi and Toda at the time of their imprisonment. While Nichiren Shōshū accused Toda of ordering the action, Sōka Gakkai denies accusations that either Toda or Ikeda were associated with this incident that exemplifies the tension between the lay-organization, and the priesthood. However, it is likely that this incident colored the relationship between Ikeda and Nichiren Shōshū in later decades.

By the time of his death in 1958, Sōka Gakkai claims that Toda had reached his membership goal of 750,000 Japanese households and the organization was reaching out of Japan, mostly into the United States and Europe. As part of his legacy, Sōka Gakkai built a five-story building, the Dai-Kodo (Great Lecture Hall) near Taiseki-ji, the head temple of Nichiren Shōshū. Toda is also known for his

stand against nuclear weapons. He died in April, 1958 and it was reported that more than 300,000 people came to mourn his passing, including many high-ranking officials. Although McFarland (1967:200) suggests that this might reflect a tribute to the power of Sōka Gakkai, it should be noted that Sōka Gakkai members continue to revere his memory, citing his loyalty and strength as examples of an exemplary life devoted to the betterment of others. He left behind a wife and several children, and his wife has been critical of the direction in which Ikeda, his protégé and successor, has taken the organization founded by her husband. She is particularly critical of the schism between Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū, especially when her husband had contributed so much to the economic and social prestige of the priesthood (McFarland 1967:200).

Toda's legacy is complicated; on the one hand he left a vibrant and growing organization, well-positioned in the economic and political sectors of the country. Expansion overseas appeared as a possibility for growth, and an agenda for world peace was established in his anti-nuclear stance. A strong structure was well-established and leadership within the ranks was assured because of emphasis on the youth program and educational opportunities within the organization. The relationship with Nichiren Shōshū seemed secure, and this alliance would provide support to the ideology presented to members. But there was a dark side to his legacy in his authoritarian leadership style, his bluntness and intolerance for all other religious groups, and his endorsement of violent and coercive *shakubuku* (McFarland 1967:200).

Daisaku Ikeda (TFPFR)

In 1960, Daisaku Ikeda (1928-) succeeded his mentor as the 3rd president of Sōka Gakkai. Born in Tokyo, he came from a family of seaweed collectors (Kimuro 1999). After the war, Ikeda met Toda at a Sōka Gakkai meeting, and the youth quickly became one of the older man's closest disciples. He joined the Youth Division, organizing and participating in some of the most important Sōka

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Gakkai programs. Drawing on a publication of Ikeda's early diaries Holte (2004c) argues that Ikeda, even in the early years, saw himself as Toda's true disciple:

Wednesday, December 27, 1951

Fine and Clear. I am confident I understand Mr. Toda's great mission better than anyone else. I alone truly understand what is in his mind. Blazing with righteous anger, I will fight with all my life.

Holte (2004c) asserts that Ikeda envisioned himself as Toda's successor from early in their association and that he fought to advance his position in the organization, but other sources (Global Management Group, Inc. 2001) propose that Ikeda was hesitant to take on such responsibility at the age of 32 years. His health was poor; he had suffered from tuberculosis as a young man and did not have a robust constitution. His wife had concerns with regard to his health and the enormous responsibility he would be taking on as leader of the growing organization. What is clear is that he had the support of the powerful Youth Division and that when he was installed as President in 1960, he was acclaimed by the members as their leader. Toda taught the idea of human revolution, in which the individual can effect social change, but Ikeda brought this idea to the forefront. Ikeda resigned as President of Sōka Gakkai in 1978, but has been President of Sōka Gakkai International (SGI) since its inception in 1975 (SGI 2003).

Like his mentor, Ikeda is a persuasive and charismatic leader. During his presidency, he has taken the membership from around one million to more than 10 million world-wide. He is a prolific writer and his books are translated into several languages. Most of his speeches have been transcribed and collected so that his words are available as encouragement to members everywhere. His speeches are also video-taped and are played for members at meetings throughout the world. Much of his time is spent on tour, promoting his books, his humanitarian work, world peace, and environmental integrity. This self-promotion is criticized by many as self-serving and fame-seeking, but Ikeda defends his actions by affirming that the

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message of Nichiren Buddhism, with its foundation of non-violence and happiness for all of humankind, is a message the world must hear.

Much of his travel is directed to his dialogues with influential politicians and activists, associations that he feels are of importance if the messages of non-violence, human rights, and global community are to have widespread influence. His early efforts at personal communication to effect political international accord were directed toward restoring diplomatic relations between Japan and China. This forging of relationships with other powerful groups is crucial to the success of Sōka Gakkai programs, and, as President of Sōka Gakkai International, Ikeda is the spokesperson who creates the relationships through his speeches, dialogues, and patronage.

Ikeda is a controversial figure, criticized by many and revered by millions. His early career offers opportunity for censure, especially when tied to events such as the alleged raid on the Nichiren Shōshū temple in 1952. Scholars writing in the 1960s and 1970s (White 1970; McFarland 1967) were quick to point out the violent episodes and coercive techniques of *shakubuku*, but recent scholars (Metraux 1996, 2000; Hurst 2000; Machacek and Wilson 2000) are kinder in their evaluations of Ikeda. Leonard Carter (2003) speaks glowingly of Ikeda as a peace activist and champion of non-violence. He goes so far as to say that Ikeda has taken up the mantle of non-violence in the tradition of such great men as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and Morehouse College has produced a video-recording hailing Ikeda as a man who carries this legacy into the 21st century (Jones 2001).

His commitment to world peace stems from his wartime experiences. Each of his four older brothers fought in World War II. The oldest fought in China, returning to tell the young Daisaku stories of atrocities and that there was no glory to be found in war. Working in a military factory building airplanes, Ikeda developed tuberculosis, and his family, like many others, lost its home. In the film, *Daisaku Ikeda Up Close* (Kimura 1999), he relates his mother's anguish on receiving the ashes of her oldest son who was killed in Burma. After the war, like many others, he was disillusioned, not only with war, but also with Shinto, the religion he believed

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had betrayed the Japanese people by leading them into war. He first met Toda in 1947, in a private home where Toda was lecturing on Life Philosophy, and was so impressed by the man and his message, that he joined Sōka Gakkai.

Ikeda is a complex man. Although he is clearly comfortable speaking with people from all levels, he has limited formal education himself. His writing ranges from polemically passionate to scholarly. He is known to lose his temper when addressing those who oppose him, yet portrays an image of benign graciousness in his public persona. He holds dialogues with the rich and powerful, yet answers personal letters from members throughout the world. One surprising thing about him is that, although he is a strong advocate of language as a tool for creating global connection, he speaks only Japanese. Members tell me that he claims this as one of his regrets in life, but says that to learn English would give advantage to that language over others. He always works with a translator, and from what I have heard and read, the translations are eloquent, persuasive, and of exceptional quality.

From my discussions with members, who refer to him as *sensei*, I would say that Ikeda is revered as a teacher and exemplar. I would also say that his popularity in Japan is a sensitive issue, and that while he is revered by Sōka Gakkai members, this reverence is not shared by the Japanese people as a whole. The media is distrustful and critical of the man, and he is surrounded by security wherever he appears. Japanese, outside of the organization, are distrustful of the motives and power of both the organization and the man (Global Management Group 2001). As a Japanese friend of mine said, Japanese people are distrustful of an organization associated with so much wealth and power (personal communication Takasugi 2003).

Outside of Japan, that prejudice is less apparent, likely because most people have never heard of Sōka Gakkai and the negative implications of wealth and power are simply not known. For example, in Japan, if someone unknown to the group arrives at meeting, for security reasons, it is expected that the person will sign the register and state why they have come. In Edmonton, no one questioned my motives for attending, although they showed mild curiosity and support for my project, and when I dropped into the meeting in Vancouver, people asked if I was new to the

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center, but when I explained that I was from out of town visiting, I was made welcome and invited to participate. For whatever reason, it does appear that public opinion about Sōka Gakkai, and Ikeda, is less polemic outside of Japan. Saying that however, I will comment that a member of the local chapter in Edmonton told me that the University of Alberta lecture by Meers (October, 2003) was almost cancelled when unknown persons protested the inclusion of Sōka Gakkai in a program promoting non-violence (personal communication Paula Reich 2003).

McFarland (1967:71-78) argues that one of the most important characteristics of all the new religions seen in Japan after World War II is that of charismatic leadership. He claims that founders all "claim to have received a new inspiration or revelation or to have discovered anew the truth or power inherent in something already familiar" (p.71). This is certainly true in the case of Sōka Gakkai. Buddhism is not new in Japan, and Nichiren Buddhism has a history going back to the 13th century. While Makiguchi was able to relate this Buddhism to his ideas of educational reform, Toda was able to use the religious ideology to invigorate a mass movement. This is important because we can look at each of these leaders and relate their methods to the time in which they found themselves. Makiguchi lived during a time in which religion was firmly controlled by the state and Japan was changing very quickly into an industrialized state with a heavy military agenda within Asia. He pulled people to his organization by the strength of his ideals.

Toda led in a very different social and political milieu. The American Occupation and new Japanese constitution guaranteed freedom of religion. The country was devastated from the war and people were uprooted from family and the land. Many were newly transplanted into urban settings where they had little in the way of material or social support. Toda was one of these; he had lost everything during the war; but, while in prison, he had undergone a religious experience that fueled his drive to change Japan. His talent for organization, coupled with his ability to gather loyal followers, created Sōka Gakkai as it is still structured today.

When Ikeda took control of the organization in 1960, he was heir to the success of his predecessors who left him with a growing membership, a firm

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economic base, political strength, and a structure that allowed for further growth while at the same time centralizing control of the organization. The social and political milieu was different again. Ideas about global markets, world peace, and human rights displaced the emphasis on nationalism. If Sōka Gakkai were to expand further, changes were necessary, and Ikeda appears to be the diplomat who has facilitated these changes. Ikeda promotes ideals of tolerance, human rights, and environmental integrity. Instead of stressing Nichiren's Buddhism as the only acceptable practice, he concentrates on building relationships that emphasize global community. Although he has no official political status, he continues to lecture and create connections with high-ranking officials throughout the world.

Leadership is, in itself, an interesting concept. All three leaders of Sōka Gakkai have been charismatic, leading people by the force of their ideas and personalities. Makiguchi appears to have been a quiet man and led by his example as a philosopher and an educator. Toda led with the authority of his conviction and his ability to use symbols to create structure and a sense of purpose for the organization and its members. Ikeda also uses symbols successfully, and has led the organization into the global setting in an age characterized by communication and concerns for global solidarity in the areas of world peace and environmental integrity. If the rhetoric is true, Ikeda's leadership is distinguished by the ideas of empowerment, in which the objective of leadership is to help everyone reach their potential for happiness, because achieving that goal will lead to social reform.

Ginette Rodger, a Canadian academic and activist, argues that successful leaders are marked by vision, knowledge, visibility, and confidence (Hibberd and Rodger 1999:261-267). Each of the three leaders discussed above have embodied these characteristics to some extent. Makiguchi was clearly ahead of his time in his ideas about education. Japan has, and continues to, struggle with the Confucian legacy of education, in which rote learning is valued over creativity. He was well-educated and drew on the philosophy of diverse thinkers such as Dewey and Kant. In terms of visibility, he held positions of authority within the school system and his

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published works had a strong following. He truly believed that he was right and had the confidence to stay with his convictions, even when this course resulted in jail.

Although the ideology of Sōka Gakkai started with Makiguchi, it is Toda's leadership that stands out in the creation of the organization. His vision was clear; he would create an organization in which all humans could achieve happiness; this organization would honor the memory of his friend and mentor, Makiguchi; and he would bring 750,000 households into the society. Toda was an educated man and a successful businessman. His skill at organization and business established not only swelling membership, but also a strong economic base for the society. This economic base has allowed Sōka Gakkai to amass large real estate holdings throughout Japan, a chain of restaurants, and a publishing empire that, in addition to creating financial security, affords the means to publish a daily newspaper, magazines, and other printed materials that link the far-flung membership to the central organization. Furthermore, it has facilitated the financial support for centers outside Japan and the production of educational materials that enable peace and environmental programs. Toda's visibility allowed him to stand for the group as a whole. He held mass rallies to address tens of thousands of members, thus becoming a symbol of the organization's purpose and solidarity. His confidence is exemplified in the way that he emerged from his wartime suffering and threw himself into creating Sōka Gakkai.

In many ways, Ikeda is the most interesting of the three men. His leadership has spanned more than four decades, during which time the organization has changed to meet the demands of a diverse and growing membership within a context of globalization. Ikeda's vision has changed the organization into one that addresses global issues, embraces diversity, and allows SGI to form powerful relationships with prestigious organizations outside of Japan. His visibility is maintained through travel, published works, and the vast communication system that brings his message to members throughout the world. His words and countenance are constantly presented to the membership; every meeting I have attended has included some aspect of his teachings. These are presented through readings, video-recordings, his

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poetry, and messages sent through the web to address particular occasions as well as general messages of encouragement for members. He presides over large assemblies in Japan and on tour throughout the world. His confidence seems unlimited; he has maintained a steady course in the face of obstacles throughout his leadership. Even the break with Nichiren Shōshū, which will be discussed in Chapter 6, is understood as part of the plan for kōsen-rufu; freed from the restrictive ideas of the priesthood, Sōka Gakkai is able to redefine itself as part of a diverse global community in which everyone can access happiness and enlightenment.

Christopher Queen (1996:19) categorizes Sōka Gakkai as a Buddhist Liberation movement, or "voluntary association of people, guided by exemplary leaders and a common vision of a society based on peace, justice, and freedom". He (1996:23) characterizes these exemplars as (1) high profile, (2) activists that promote cultural renewal, social change, and a focus on ecumenicism, and (3) honored by their followers as saints or bodhisattvas. Members of Sōka Gakkai see Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda as bodhisattvas in our time; they are understood as men who spent their lives bringing happiness to others through the path of Nichiren Buddhism. Although Makiguchi was not as colorful and high profile as Toda and Ikeda, his philosophy was always based on the ideas of social change. Toda, while intolerant of other faiths, maintained a very visible leadership and based his organization on social reform. But it is Ikeda who best exemplifies the leader described by Queen's work. As discussed above, he maintains a high profile through his publications, travel, dialogues, and constant visibility directed to the membership through extensive and sophisticated communication networks. He is an activist promoting world peace, environmental integrity, human rights, and social reform. This activism centers on education and takes advantage of the connections forged with powerful organizations. Ikeda has disassociated Sōka Gakkai from Nichiren Shōshū, allowing the organization to work with other faiths and to embrace diversity in a manner that allows for global growth and an ideal of global community. It is this leadership that has brought Sōka Gakkai successfully into the 21st century.

Leadership is an important topic within the organization itself. Although there is clearly a structure in which levels of leadership are clearly defined, Sōka Gakkai emphasizes the egalitarian nature of the society. This is grounded in the idea that enlightenment is a possibility for every human and that personal revolution is the responsibility and potential of each individual. It is reflected in meetings, where leading various aspects of the session is taken by different members of the group. As one member put it, her first experience with leadership came when someone needed support and she was in the best position to offer it. In this sense, leadership comes with one's ability to offer help when it is needed. It is couched within the framework that as one's personal revolution progresses, one's ability to help others evolves as well. Tony Meers (2004:foreword) reflects on the meaning of leadership when he writes that "Leadership in the Buddhist sense refers to the capacity to lead others to happiness. It arises from the image in the Lotus Sutra during the Ceremony in the Air, when Śākyamuni introduces the disciples he has trained from the immeasurable past to carry out the mission of propagating the Lotus Sutra in the age long after his passing, called the Latter Day of the Law...The Bodhisattvas of the Earth, led by Nichiren Daishonin, are ordinary people, the people of this earth...The Buddha's great wish and vow is to enable all people to attain perfect enlightenment, to conquer their sufferings and create a world of peace, prosperity and happiness."

Leadership is not a vocation and leaders do not have authority over the membership. Sōka Gakkai is a lay-organization; association with the group is not full-time, nor does it preclude employment. Other than Meers, who is employed by the organization, all of the leaders I have met work within their communities, and this employment is variable according to education, skills, and temperament. Their time spent on Sōka Gakkai is all volunteer commitment, and only expenses incurred for the organization are reimbursed. This is an important concept because it draws on the conflict between Nichiren Shōshū and Sōka Gakkai (to be discussed in Chapter 6), in which the priesthood definitely understood their religious organization as being in a position of authority over the lay-organization. Again, as an ideal, each member is equal in the eyes of the group.

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At a conference held in August, 2003, Ikeda discussed his ideas about leadership (Ikeda 2004:1-25). He declared that leadership is first found in the mentor-disciple principle, commonly understood and utilized in Japanese culture. He argues that leaders have a responsibility to speak up for what is right and to defend their principles even in adversity, and he supports the youth division as a source for future leaders who must develop their skills through study, effort, and practice. Respect and trust of the members is the cornerstone of leadership and he acknowledged the power and importance of the women's division in issues of leadership. Members in Edmonton estimated that about 75% of members are women, but, from my observations, most of the high-level leaders appear to be men.

Ikeda encourages leaders to be innovative, to plan carefully and thoroughly, and to act with calmness (Ikeda 2004:1-25). Many of his lectures are directed at young members, exhorting them to develop their skills and their character in order to help the organization achieve its goals. The many levels of study and structure allow people to develop the skills needed for leadership. Even within a small chapter such as Edmonton's it is clear that many opportunities for developing skills and confidence are created for members through participation in meetings, study group, chanting, and events.

The final aspect of leadership that I would like to discuss is succession. At lower levels or the organization, many leadership positions rotate among capable members, but higher positions, such as president, are of indefinite duration. As we have noted, leadership has come out of the mentor/disciple relationship that often defines succession in Japanese culture. Ikeda's position is referred to as President, but it is not clear how the decision to install someone is accomplished. Even though Ikeda is apparently in good health, he is seventy-six years of age, and while it is unlikely that he would be removed from the position of President (of SGI), what is not clear is who will succeed him and how that process will occur. The first three leaders were mentored into their positions, and, in 1995, Michelle Magee (1995:np) speculated that Ikeda's son, Hiromasa, is expected to become the next President of SGI. Already, he takes on official duties in his father's place, such as speaking with

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foreign visitors when they come for meetings in Japan. Paula Reich (personal communication 2004) rejected this idea, saying that she has never heard anyone suggest that Hiromasa might be in line for the presidency. She relates that there is a concern about succession in the event of Ikeda's passing, but that no one in the organization has been marked to move into the position of president. She speculates that the leadership of Sōka Gakkai may, in the future, be divided among three or more individuals, each of whom has specific responsibilities within the organization. Certainly this idea is more in keeping with the stated egalitarian ideals of the organization. Whatever the future brings, the multi-layered vertical and horizontal structures of the organization, along with its emphasis on education, rotating leadership at the lower levels, and political activism has prepared many potential leaders within the membership.

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Chapter 6

SŌKA GAKKAI AND NICHIREN SHŌSHŪ

Is our enlightenment to be okayed by someone? The priesthood claims, "The master gives his sanction to a disciple's enlightenment." According to Nichiren Shoshu, the high priest personally has the power to determine who attains Buddhahood and who does not... Nichiren Daishonin says your enlightenment "will no doubt depend on the strength of your faith." But the priesthood claims that the high priest is "what makes the attainment of Buddhahood possible." Does he have the powerswitch of Buddhahood for all of us?

Shin Yatomi, SGI-USA Study Department vice leader (2002:12-13)

Makiguchi and his protégé, Toda, joined the Nichiren Shōshū sect in 1928, and by 1937, the tone of the organization shifted to one in which religion increasingly defined the ideology and practice of members. Makiguchi understood the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin as the correct, and only, means for Japan to realize unity and prosperity. In the post-war period, Toda took this to new extremes, and Sōka Gakkai was further identified with the sect most closely associated with Nichiren Daishonin's teachings.

Nichiren Shōshū claims that it is the most authentic of Nichiren Buddhist sects. When Nichiren died in 1282, his six closest disciples vowed to carry on his work. They soon argued over the issue of worship at Shintō shrines and in 1288, Nikkō-Shōnin (1246-1333) formed his own school, preaching that he alone understood the true teachings of the Daishonin. In 1290, he moved near the base of Mount Fuji and built the temple of Taiseki-ji, which has served as the head temple for Nichiren Shōshū since that time. This sect represents the most radical and exclusivist teachings of all Nichiren Buddhist sects, understanding Nichiren as the *honzon,* "the first of the Three Mysteries, in the eternal Buddha as revealed in the Lotus Sutra" (Tamaru 1996:27). Much of Sōka Gakkai literature refers to Nichiren as the Votary of the Lotus Sutra, reflecting a belief in his authority to bring the sutra to humanity. Over time the sect accorded central significance to the *honzon*, or mandala that was inscribed by Nichiren before he died. This *honzon* is enshrined at

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Taiseki-ji and acts as the central focus for worship. Over time, worship of this mandala led to the understanding that Nichiren is the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law (or *mappō*) and that his teaching supercedes that of the Buddha Śākyamuni (Tamaru 1996:27). Although Nichiren Shōshū maintained a firm stand on Nichiren's exclusivist doctrine and made some converts through the ensuing centuries, the sect seldom came into conflict with other religious groups until the 20th century.

Makiguchi's parents were associated with a Zen temple, and his adoptive parents attended a Nichiren temple, but as a child, he rejected the doctrine of both sects and was more comfortable with the Christian faith that many of his friends followed. In 1916, on a trip to Tokyo, he attended a lecture by Chigaku Tanaka, but rejected Tanaka's "nationalistic interpretation of Nichiren's teachings" (Tamaru 1996:31). In 1928, he attended a meeting with Sokei Mitani (1887-1932), a teacher and principal at Mejiro Gakuen School in Tokyo, and became involved in literary activities that promoted Nichiren Shōshū.

Drawing on this, he began to develop his "theory of value", an intellectual approach to blending religion and ordinary life (Tamaru 1996:31-32). In 1931, in *Sōka Kyōikugaku Taikei*, Makiguchi argued that (1) "values, like scientific truth should...rest on reason and evidence", (2) "values should have the form of 'law' instead of 'person'", and (3) "religious value should also comprehend morality and science" (Tamaru 1996:36). Tamaru (1996:36) argues that this philosophical approach was far too complex for the masses, and that Toda's interpretation of Makiguchi's ideas was more intuitive and more accessible to the people who would follow him into Sōka Gakkai in the post-war period.

The first hint of conflict between Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū is evident when Makiguchi and Toda, along with several priests, were imprisoned for their strong opposition to the controls and restrictions proposed for Nichiren Buddhism. While the two men held steadfast and remained in prison, the priests did not stand their ground and were released. When Makiguchi died in prison, he became a martyr to his principles. Toda remembered this betrayal and took this enmity into the post-war period, as evidenced by the 1952 incident, in which young members of

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the organization went to confront the priesthood that they felt had betrayed Toda and Makiguchi..

While there may have been tension between the priesthood and the lay-organization, Sōka Gakkai's religious affiliation was, at that time, to the sect of Nichiren Shōshū and that connection was supported by financial donations to the priesthood and the many temples springing up throughout Japan. The priesthood, in return, provided (1) ritual services such as weddings and funerals, (2) the *gohonzon* for Sōka Gakkai centers and individual practitioners, (3) an ideological link to Nichiren Buddhism, and (4) traditional religious authority.
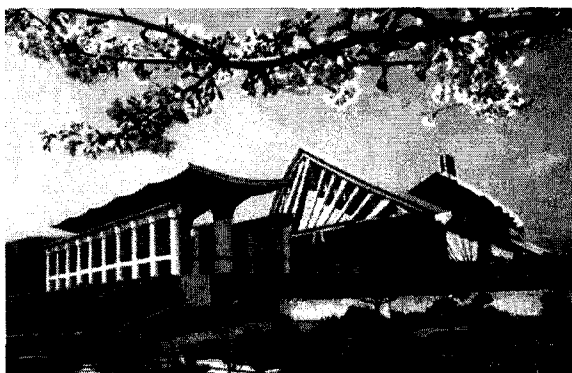
In 1972, the Shō-Hondō, a magnificent building for worship and meetings, was completed at the site of Taiseki-ji. Built with the donations of Sōka Gakkai members, the building's cost was around $100 million and the hall covered more than 35 thousand sq. meters in area. It was built to hold the *Daigohonzon* and when the hall was completed, the head priest of the time, Nittatsu Hosoi, called it "a great edifice

Shō-Hondō near Mt. Fuji (SGI 2002a)

that shall be the high sanctuary of the temple of true teaching at the time of *kōsen-rufu*" (SGI 2000). Architects and religious scholars throughout the world expressed

Shō-Hondō (SGI 2002a)

admiration and wonder at the construction and splendor of the building. The main auditorium's semi-rigid suspension roof was considered an architectural wonder. Members who visited the hall say that one could see the *gohonzon* from any seat within the huge auditorium, the acoustics were exceptional, and that the building was magnificent. Sōka Gakkai

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provided not only the Shō-Hondō, but also planted thousands of cherry trees on the grounds, creating a beautiful spot for worship and pilgrimage.

Toda instituted the practice of pilgrimage to Taiseki-ji in the 1950's as a response to the priesthood's plan to open the temple as a tourist destination (Yatomi 2002:24-25). Before World War II the temple had supported itself by renting out its land to local farmers, but with post-war agrarian reform, that land was taken away, leaving the temple to support itself through the donations of supporters. Toda was furious at the thought of people coming to this sacred space when they were not "seeking the Gohonzon" (Yatomi 2002:25). He began to organize pilgrimages for members, a practice that grew through the decades. When the Shō-Hondō was built, it became the destination for members from all over the world.

Jane Hurst (2000), an American professor of Religion and Philosophy, traces the history of conflict between Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū by looking at the prayers in the *Gongyo* book in North America. She writes that, in 1960, the order of recitation for silent prayers included the words "I pray for the Sōka Gakkai to flourish and accomplish merciful propagation of the true Buddhism" and a prayer of thanks for the lives and work of Makiguchi and Toda. In 1978, as tension between the two organizations escalated, these prayers were removed from the *gongyo* books used by the priesthood. Much of this conflict centered on the policies of Ikeda and what the priesthood interpreted as his changes to what they considered to be sacred laws. As Sōka Gakkai moved into a global setting, the fierce exclusivism of Nichiren Shōshū dogma became problematic, and Ikeda was the main target of the priests' criticism. They saw Sōka Gakkai as undermining their authority, particularly when the rhetoric of the organization challenged the authority of the priesthood by its claim that all members were equal before the *gohonzon* and had equal opportunity in the search for enlightenment.

Hurst (2000:70) speculates that culture and technological change underlie the problems between the two groups, and that the needs of a 20th century membership, with their worldly, pragmatic and goal-oriented focus, were incompatible with those of priests who lived by precepts set out in the 13th century. For centuries, Nichiren

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Shōshū had coexisted with other religions, maintaining its exclusive doctrines but de-emphasizing the need for new converts. Suddenly the priests were thrust into a world of intense proselytization, changing technology and social milieu, and a relationship with an economically and politically powerful lay-organization that questioned their authority. The symbiotic relationship of the early decades was cracking.

In 1973, the Seikyō Times ran a photo of Ikeda and the High Priest Nittatsu Shōnin at the opening of the Shō-Hondō, but by 1978, when Ikeda resigned as president of Sōka Gakkai and took on the presidency of Sōka Gakkai International, the priests were openly critical of his actions and policies. They accused him of deviating from Nichiren Shōshū practice, and of not fulfilling his promises to the temples (Hurst 2000:75). In November of the same year, Ikeda performed a *tozan*, or ritual apology, to the priesthood, and tried to dispel the claim that Sōka Gakkai was in competition with the priests.

Hurst (2000:76) suggests that Sōka Gakkai members sometimes regard Ikeda as an incarnation of Nichiren, and this reverence for the man continues to inflame the priests. His *tozan* settled the open dispute for a while, but the priests continued to see Ikeda as hypocritical and insincere. Issues ranged from the organization's use of Western music at culture festival to Sōka Gakkai's global vision of *kōsen-rufu*, but the main issue was the challenge that Ikeda and the lay-organization represented to the authority of the priesthood.

Throughout the 1980s, the conflict continued, and in 1991, the High Priest Nikken Shōnin excluded all Sōka Gakkai members from the temples, discontinued the practice of providing weddings and funerals, and excommunicated all members of Sōka Gakkai from Nichiren Shōshū. Some members stayed with the sect; others left Nichiren Buddhism altogether; but most stayed on with Sōka Gakkai. This schism has created both problems and opportunities for the organization.

At first, there were issues of authority and legitimacy; Nichiren Shōshū had always symbolized the link with Nichiren's teachings and the *gohonzon* as an object of worship. Access to ritual became problematic because, although contact with the

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priests and lay-members had always been limited, the priests had provided services for marriage and funerals. Perhaps the most important function of the priesthood was to provide *gohonzons*. Central to belief and practice, official *gohonzons*, sanctioned by Nichiren Shōshū, became unavailable to Sōka Gakkai and its members. Apparently, while this was problematic, it was far from insurmountable. For a few years, Sōka Gakkai issued certificates and made do without the scrolls, but in time, priests representing a reform group of Nichiren Buddhism took over the production of *gohonzons*, apparently solving the problem (Hurst 2000:92). These scrolls were replicated from an earlier form, one which had been previously used by the organization (personal communication Paula Reich 2004).

Hurst (2000:84-86) likens the split to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. She argues that there were several issues leading to the schism. Conflict between priestly authority and the lay movement's creative engagement with the contemporary world underlies the split, but other concerns were also present. The priesthood is hierarchical and insisted that they alone could provide authority in matters of ritual and faith; the lay organization claims to be more egalitarian and leadership is defined, not by traditional social order, but by relationships in which leaders offer encouragement and support. The priesthood focuses on the importance of ritual, while lay members are taught that faith is the most important aspect of practice. A sincere heart is more important than rigid attendance to ritual. Lay members are encouraged to study, and believe that scripture has authority over the priesthood. Nichiren Shōshū has always tended to have a "local, conservative, and mystical" (Hurst 2000:85) view of religion, whereas Sōka Gakkai is increasingly focused on global, progressive and rational concerns. This is best expressed in the organization's focus on membership growth outside of Japan, which has led to increasing policies of inclusion and ecumenicism that are antithetical to the exclusivist doctrines of Nichiren Shōshū. Finally, Hurst cites the tendency for the priesthood to focus on other-worldly concerns, while Sōka Gakkai members are encouraged to engage with the world as activists for human rights, world peace, and environmental issues.

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Citing parallels not only in the issues, Hurst (2000:84-86) argues that changing social and economic conditions influenced the split and ensuing changes to religious practice. Fluctuating economic, social, and political milieus allowed new ideas to gain influence. Urbanization led to new ideas about self-determination and challenged the traditional authority of priests, who, while demanding their due as ritual specialists, were not meeting the needs of followers. In both situations, people had access to new technology and communication networks that allowed them to challenge ideas from the past, and lay-organizations were able to gather enough resources to defy the establishment and create a new structure from which to practice their faith. She likens the Catholic church's sale of indulgences to the way in which Nichiren Shōshū sold ritual and material culture to Sōka Gakkai, while ignoring the "real needs of believers" (2000:86).

The priesthood's final strike against the lay-organization came in 1998, when High Priest Nikken ordered the destruction the Shō-Hondō. Not only Sōka Gakkai members who had financed the building, but also art critics, architects, historians, and religious leaders, spoke out against the action but Nikken destroyed

Destruction of Shō-Hondō (Sōka Spirit 2002a)

the building and cut down the thousands of cherry trees that Sōka Gakkai had planted on the grounds. This action sparked a deep-seated enmity between the two groups, one in which the priesthood is portrayed not only as selfish, but somewhat ridiculous in causing such needless destruction.

The split between Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū allowed further opportunities for strengthening collective identity. Members were forced to make open choices about what direction they would take, and while many decided to leave the organization, those who stayed declared their commitment to the new path.

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Antonio Melucci (1996:4), in his work on collective identity within social movements, argues that collective identity is "the outcome of exchanges, negotiations, decisions, and conflicts among actors". In the early years, identification with Nichiren Shōshū was a strong part of Sōka Gakkai's collective identity, but after the split, the conflict forced people to declare their positions and resulted in even stronger solidarity for those who chose to remain with the organization. Sōka Gakkai was forced to create new symbols in the form of literature, prayers, and rituals for the performance of weddings and funerals within the secular organization. In 1995, the society created a new charter containing themes of world citizenship, religious tolerance, cultural diversity, education, and the environment, which Hurst (2000:81) describes as a "blueprint for the 21st century". So, while the split was difficult and contentious, it has helped to shape the present organization in ways that are more relevant to the needs of the membership.

Before the split, Taiseki-ji and the Shō-Hondō represented a central sacred landscape and were a destination for pilgrimage for members throughout the world. Since the split, and especially since the destruction of the Shō-Hondō in 1998, the idea of pilgrimage has necessarily changed. Wilson and Machacek (2000:7) argue that, perversely, this allowed the group to focus more strongly on its international membership and less on the concept of sacred Japanese geography (Wilson and Machacek 2000:7). Now, although the organization remains firmly centered in Japan, other centers, such as the Caledon center in Canada, have been created to accommodate the needs of members throughout the world. These act, not so much as sacred destinations, but as places where people can come together to study and learn from one another.

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Chapter 7

FACES IN THE BOAT

The Lotus Sutra compares the beauty and strength of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth to the
lotus blooming in a muddy pond. All of us have the power to create our own happiness
in the here and now, as Nichiren Daishonin states, "Wherever we dwell and practice the
single vehicle, that place will be the Capital of Eternally Tranquil Light."

Yatomi (2002:16)

I first gained access to the organization through the Sōka Gakkai Canada
website, which advertised sites for both the Edmonton chapter and a University of
Alberta club. When I tried both of these local groups, there was no reply, but
apparently the message was forwarded to the next level in Toronto and then relayed
back to Edmonton. At first I thought this was odd, but since then I have seen many
examples of this interconnectedness that is expressed in both vertical and horizontal
dimensions. Within a day, I received a phone call advising me of upcoming lectures
and events that my contact thought might interest me.

Members have been quick to offer me pamphlets, current publications, books,
videos, and access to their meetings. Perhaps more surprising, they have given me
names of people who criticize their organization and might be able to give me insight
into the concerns voiced against them, thus affording me a more balanced approach
to my own analysis. My impression is that most members I have met are truly
committed to their organization and value the exposure that might be afforded them
by a study such as this. This is in keeping with my understanding that Sōka Gakkai
values exposure as a means of creating credibility, particularly in the academic field.
According to Gary Marx and Douglas McAdam (1994:96), if a social movement is to
continue to grow and exert significant political influence, it is imperative to draw
support from higher socio-economic groups. Therefore, encouraging academics to
study the group affords excellent opportunities for positive evaluation from people

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who might potentially influence others. As I had further contact with members, this theme recurs and people voice the concern that their message is important and that, while they would like to be represented fairly, it is also important to have the message spread.

My first visit to a meeting was in October 2003, after attending Tony Meers' and Leonard Carter's lectures at the University of Alberta. Again, people were very friendly, and I was told I was free to talk to people and participate as I wished. I continued to make it clear that I was not joining the organization, but rather, that I had an academic interest and a thesis to write, but they simply expressed enthusiasm for my project and offered to help in any way possible.

The center is located in a commercial building near the downtown area; it consists of office space, backed by a large room set up for meetings and chanting. Chairs are arranged in rows that face the end of the room where a large wooden altar is set up. Above the altar and set into a recessed case, is the *gohonzon*, which is the focus of worship when people chant. The
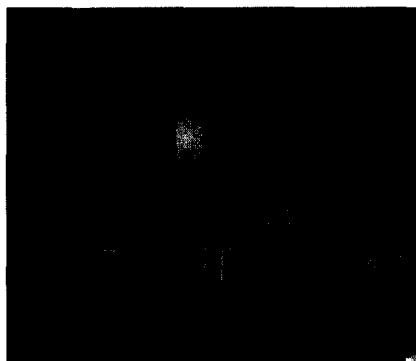
Edmonton center (C.L.Geekie 2004)

surrounding surface of the altar has offerings of greenery, water, incense, candles, and, on special occasions, fruit. Just ahead of the front row, there is another chair, placed centrally before the altar, and with a large inverted bell beside it. The person leading the chanting sits on this chair and rings the bell to signal changes in the sequence of chanting.

I have met approximately sixty members from the Edmonton community. There are a few elderly women, many young adults, a number of middle-aged women and men, and many young families with children. Since my first meeting I have learned that approximately half of the membership could be described as Asian, with members originally from Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia making up most of these. While English is the common language used to address the group, a few speak Japanese, and many speak various Chinese dialects.

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Approximately 75% of the Edmonton membership is female. At the meetings, people dress conservatively, are generally well-groomed and no one stands out as either flamboyant or tattered. People are friendly and respectful to each other, gathering into small groups and chatting when they arrive. As the meeting time grows closer, people take their seats facing the *gohonzon,* and begin to chant *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō.*

The group is geographically scattered through the city and surrounding areas. Some members are relatively new to the practice, while others have been members for twenty-five years or more. Socio-economic status within the group is likewise varied, as is educational background. Several students from the University of Alberta are members, and these are enrolled in both undergraduate and graduate programs. Other students are enrolled at a college or in professional programs. Some are here only to pursue their education, and many plan to return to their home countries when they are finished.

As the chanting begins, people put their hands together in prayer. Most use beads that are looped over the middle finger of each hand, crossed in the center and held between the hands throughout the chanting. Sometimes people will roll these beads between their hands as if to center their own attention. Chanting of *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō* continues until the leader signals for a stop, at which time, if it is during the day, everyone turns toward the window and chants the *daimoku* three times slowly. Then, using the *Gongyo* book, which has Chinese characters as well as a Romanized script so that the chanting is phonetically adequate to the Japanese version of the Sutra, members chant from the Lotus Sutra,. Many people do not need the book and chant confidently without help. Usually, at the end of this section, or later in the meeting, there are a number of silent prayers marked by the leader chanting *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō* between them, more ringing of the bell, then more chanting. At the end of the chanting, the meeting turns to short pieces of entertainment, inspirational speeches, and general information shared within the group. It is all done in a semi-formal way, with some taking on leadership roles and others supporting the proceedings.

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At the meeting when Tony Meers was present, he presented a young woman with a personal *gohonzon* to use at home. This was clearly of rite of passage, marking her acceptance of the *gohonzon* into her life. Another young woman, who is active in the Young Women's Group, was commissioned with a leadership role in this group. Again, she was publicly acknowledged for her contributions and honored with her appointment to the new position within the community.

The meeting ended with Meers giving an inspirational talk that emphasized the importance of success within the secular setting. He expressed the idea that Sōka Gakkai must "win". This sentiment is often expressed by members, and it seems to reflect the need to bring all people to Nichiren Buddhism, and also as a metaphor for convincing people that Sōka Gakkai is following the correct path. It also seems to reflect a need for acceptance for the organization within society in general. I found this to be an interesting choice of words for an ostensibly non-violent organization that promotes human rights and global community, particularly in light of the criticisms leveled at Sōka Gakkai in regard to its emphasis on material and social success. This mention of "winning" is often found in inspirational literature put out by the organization, but it can be an unsettling phrase when attached to an organization accused of violence and coercive methods of recruitment. Years are marked by themes, or slogans, and the theme for 2004 is the 'Year of Total Sōka Victory'.

McFarland (1967:204-205) argues that there is a heterogeneity in the involvement and awareness of members within the organization. He describes four "distinctive, though sometimes overlapping, levels of religious orientation, ranging from utter naïveté and credulity to a fairly advanced state of sophistication." Although I might soften this evaluation, my experience confirms his opinion. In McFarland's analysis, members at the first level look for the power of chanting *daimoku*, charmed by the idea of easy access to social and material success through an almost magical formula. The second level consists of Buddhists who, in the teaching and practice of Nichiren Buddhism, find new meaning in the practice of the ancient religious tradition. The third level addresses those who take on the serious

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study of Nichiren's writings, the Lotus Sutra, and the vast literature surrounding Nichiren Buddhism. Finally, McFarland describes the highest level, intellectuals who are attracted to Sōka Gakkai as a means of fulfilling a spiritual void.

Many members I have met fit within these categories. Some have very little knowledge of Nichiren Buddhism, or of Buddhism in a more general sense. For them, the sense of a caring community and the possibility of material and social rewards achieved through the practice of chanting are enough. Often these represent the newest members of the group, some of whom come from a background of unhealthy or abusive relationships. Rhetoric within group discussions is forthright about this, arguing that this is often the first stage of membership in the organization. Everyone is encouraged to study and explore the deeper meaning of Nichiren Buddhism, but this is addressed through the idea that not everyone is ready for higher levels of understanding. The Japanese concept of *kokoro*, or heart, is also at issue here. In Japanese culture, *kokoro* is central to personhood and takes precedence over intellectual achievement, in the same way that faith and a willingness to help others are more important than knowledge. Others come from various Buddhist traditions and appear to have found something that is fulfilling for them personally. Some of these practice within a family setting, while others practice within the context of families who follow other Buddhist traditions. Within this level, I might include people have chosen Buddhism as an alternative to, and who seem uncomfortable with, more traditional western religious settings. These people study as well, and opportunities to deepen one's knowledge are structured into meetings at various levels.

In my experience, the third level is most common within the membership, particularly for those who have been members for some time. Many are very knowledgeable about Buddhism in general, the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, and the teachings of Sōka Gakkai exemplars: Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda. This is consistent with the message given by members themselves; as one progresses in faith, study, and practice, one is able to take on more responsibility for changing one's own life and giving back to others. This reflects my experience in Canada, but

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in Japan there is far more emphasis on study and passing levels of examination, and from what I have heard, being a member of Sōka Gakkai in Japan may well be a more intense experience than in Canada.

As to intellectuals seeking to fill a spiritual void, it might be argued that such people are equally valued within the organization, but that their quest would not be more highly valued than that of anyone else. From the vast amounts of literature available on the organization, Nichiren Buddhism, and the Lotus Sutra, I would venture to suggest that many scholars are interested in the organization, but that intellectual curiosity is not prized over sincere faith and practice.

The Edmonton chapter holds meetings on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. Sunday meetings usually last about two hours and are more formal than Wednesday's meeting. The first morning meeting of the month is called World Peace *gongyo*, the third is a Study meeting, and the fourth focuses on the children and planning. Wednesday meetings are for one hour of chanting, followed by a short discussion. At World Peace *gongyo*, someone is assigned to lead the meeting after chanting. Usually, members are called upon to give an 'experience', which consists of a personal story that reflects on how Sōka Gakkai has created positive change within their lives. These are also meant to act as 'encouragement' for others in the group. Members, especially at New Year's, are encouraged to make 'determinations' or goals for themselves. This format allows people to share their problems and successes within a supportive structure. Sometimes, members will ask the group for help. For example, if someone is sick, or in need of special prayers, the membership will be asked to direct their chanting toward a particular problem. Chanting can be directed in many ways. Health, material success, good marks, a new car; any of these might be targeted. Chanting is meant to affect the cosmos and change *karma*. It can be directed at personal and specific goals, such as success on an exam, or diffuse universal goals such as world peace and environmental integrity. These goals are as diverse as the membership itself. This reflects the idea that chanting can impact *karma* and influence outcomes in a positive way.

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District meetings are held monthly in convenient locations, and generally reflect geography. The youth, young women's, and student meetings tend to overlap, and one group is based on language. The monthly calendar is pretty full, and I suspect that one could be involved most days of the month. This does not even address the morning and evening personal *gongyo* that members are expected to perform. Extra to this, a member could be involved with preparation for meetings, events, and personal time spent supporting other members. Sōka Gakkai does not ask members to do all of this, but it is available, so, one can be involved to the level that suits one's lifestyle.

This is an important concept because it reflects the flexibility of membership, and the fact that membership need not interfere with other areas of one's life. One can participate as much, or as little, as works within a larger context of one's life. It is not expensive to join. There are no set dues to pay, and, once you own your beads and a *gongyo* book ($1.50), there is not much else needed. Members are encouraged to donate a small amount of money toward upkeep of the center, but this is minimal and optional. Members are encouraged to buy Sōka Gakkai publications, especially the *New Century*, a monthly magazine from Sōka Gakkai – Canada.

The organization controls substantial financial resources, and uses these to support chapters throughout the world. Many chapters own their own buildings. For example, Calgary and Vancouver both own their facilities, which were bought for them by the parent organization. The Edmonton chapter rents its center, and both rent and upkeep are managed by Sōka Gakkai – Canada. Expenses are tallied, paid here, then reimbursed for receipts. This is all carefully accounted for and these practices are meant to stave off criticism about finances. Gifts or donations are accepted, but all of these are documented and anonymous donations are firmly discouraged.

Why do people join the organization? According to members with whom I have spoken, that answer is variable. Many are introduced by friends and become involved because they like the people they meet in the group. Some join because of a spouse who practices. Others relate that they joined during a difficult period of their

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lives, perhaps when they were in abusive relationships, depressed, or otherwise vulnerable. Still others were introduced by family members, and one young woman told me, with great pleasure, that she is "3rd generation Sōka Gakkai". Some said that they were exposed to the organization as children, but remained uninvolved until they were in university or even older. In other words, the stories about why people join are as diverse as the members themselves.

James White (1970:179-214) theorizes that people who join social movements are generally disengaged from society with few ties to social groups. He sees them as feeling alienated, relatively impotent or helpless, and perceiving their own actions as futile. His research suggests that housewives and laborers are heavily represented in the membership, while white-collar workers, professionals, and self-employed people are less likely to belong. Sōka Gakkai tends to be an urban phenomenon and, while membership does not stand out for its high levels of education, those with higher education are better represented within the leadership of the group. White does say that the demographics within the organization were changing, and given that his research was done in a time when Sōka Gakkai was experiencing tremendous growth and changing very quickly, it is valuable to compare his findings to the present.

In the 21st century, Sōka Gakkai's membership numbers tend to be more stable and the organization claims to represent the demographics of the general population. However, its strength still lies in the urban areas and women are more heavily represented than men within the membership. Now, the socioeconomic status of members is generally higher than in the 1960s, but this reflects a general rise in standards of living in Japan overall (Metraux 1988:79-81). Metraux relates this to the general prosperity and social stability of Japan in the 1980s and speculates that Sōka Gakkai continues to reflect the general population's demographics in Japan.

Marx and McAdam (1996:81-91) argue that people do not join social movements because they feel helpless or alienated from society. Theories that emphasize the negative incentives for membership do not take into account the individual agency and potential for benefit that membership can offer. These authors

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suggest that more significant factors in the choice to join such organizations include: (1) prior contact with activist groups, (2) membership in organizations, and (3) an absence of constraints to participation. The first refers to the previous experiences of potential members; are they familiar with the idea of working collectively for social change? An example of this might be someone growing up in a home where social activism is discussed and practised, or a student who becomes involved with politics in university. The second condition looks at a person's experience with organized groups, such as churches or clubs. They claim that this experience makes people more open to joining and participating in new groups. The third runs counter to the theory of alienation and a sense of hopelessness, in that people who engage in activism must have the resources and leisure time required for participation.

Marx and McAdam (1996:121-123) also refute Daniel Bell's 1960s claim of the "end of ideology", and look to ideas, belief, and principles as motivation for joining social movements. They argue that social movements are founded in places where ideas are discussed, and that universities and religious organizations are frequently the locus for ideology and activism. They cite idealism as the source of increasing numbers of nationalist movements, as well as the globalization of protest for human rights, environmental integrity, and world peace.

Meers (personal communication 2003) agrees with this assessment of ideology as a force for action. He believes that many people, young people in particular, are drawn to Sōka Gakkai for ideological reasons. He feels that many young members are attracted by the ideals of world peace and environmental integrity, seeing the organization as a structure from which to express their concerns and to actively work toward these goals. This sentiment is consistent with the stated goals of young members within the Edmonton group, and when I visited the Vancouver, B.C. chapter, it was hard not to be impressed by the many young people who were actively involved with the meeting and its presentation, as well as the many others I observed participating in chanting and discussion groups. Sōka Gakkai sees these young people as the future of the organization and this is clearly stated in

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local chapters, national directives, and in messages that President Ikeda constantly presents to the far-flung membership through written and visual media.

Clark Strand (2003), an American Buddhist activist and author, argues that Sōka Gakkai's propagation success lies in the organization's commitment to diversity and social reform. Strand suggests that this explains why Sōka Gakkai has attracted large numbers of African Americans and members of gay communities. He claims that these are not necessarily economically, educationally, or politically marginalized groups but that they sense an acceptance of diversity not found in other Buddhist organizations. They also see Sōka Gakkai as platform of social reform that values and facilitates their input. This fits with Marx and McAdam's analysis of why people join social movements. It is not from a sense of alienation as much as to enable their capacity for activism.

Chapter 8

CREATING COLLECTIVE IDENTITY THROUGH SYMBOLS

Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo (is the) ultimate Law or true essence of life permeating everything in the universe. *Nam* is the act of summoning Myoho-renge-kyo from within us and putting it into action in our lives and environment by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. *Myoho* is the power of revitalization, the emergence of the highest state of life – the Buddha state – from within us. *Renge* means lotus flower, and indicates the law of simultaneous cause and effect which consistently operates within all aspects of life. *Kyo* is the thread or link of life, connecting everything through sound and vibration throughout the three existences of past, present and future: specifically, the sound of the Buddha state, which is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

(Nichiren Coffeehouse 2004)

(SGI-Canada 2001:41)
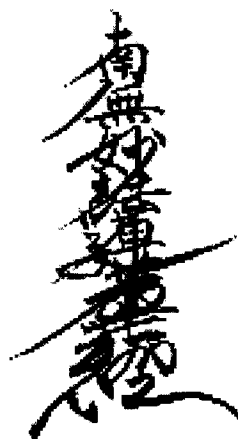
Sōka Gakkai is a social movement and, as such, it has created a structure that joins together diverse individuals into a collective identity. Through this identity members are able to pursue common goals and to understand themselves as part of something greater than themselves. This chapter will discuss the organization's use of symbols that give visibility to the invisible, make social that which is personal, and enable members to create and understand meaning through the use of both language and material culture. Using my own observation from participating at the Edmonton chapter, as well as textual sources (which are cited), I will now look at some of these symbolic elements used by the Sōka Gakkai, starting with some of the more straightforward material items used in ritual practice, and following with a discussion of some of the more difficult or complex symbolic elements such as the use of language, the *daimoku, Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō*, and the Lotus Sutra. Finally, I will address the *gohonzon*, or mandala, used as the object of worship and as a device to focus the believer's attention on the Ten Worlds within each of us.

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Victor Turner (1967:50) discusses ways in which we can take meaning from symbols: first, the exegetical or indigenous interpretation, second, the operational meaning, as understood from the way in which the symbol is used, and third, the positional meaning which is derived "from its relationship to other symbols...(within) the system as a whole". Each level is important to understanding how symbols function within a group; meaning may not be consistent among members and not all levels of meaning will be available to all members. For example, the exegetical meaning may differ between ritual experts and newly initiated members. This is clear in discussion of symbols used by Sōka Gakkai. Some members are clearly more knowledgeable than others, and, in my experience, not everyone in the group has the same interest. Some are mainly interested in the operational meaning of symbols, knowing how to use them in particular circumstances that further their own ability to participate in the rituals. Others come in to the group with a desire to learn more about the philosophy of Buddhism, and Nichiren Buddhism in particular. Many people in the group have participated in study groups for decades and are very knowledgeable about such matters. These members are much more likely to be able to understand the positional meaning of symbols as they relate to the broader context of Buddhist traditions. Sōka Gakkai members themselves are quick to point out that everyone comes with particular strengths and that it not necessary for everyone to achieve the same level of understanding. Diversity is welcomed and passion is equal to, or more important than, intellectual achievement.

This highlights another feature of symbolism, that symbols "have an orectic as well as a cognitive function" (Turner 1967:54). This means that while symbols can be used to enhance cognitive, or intellectual, understanding, they can also be used to elicit emotion that may, in the case of Sōka Gakkai, help to develop collective identity. Furthermore, Turner stresses that many symbols are multivocal, or capable of multiple meanings, and that context will determine the meaning derived from a particular symbol. Used in ritual, symbols convey particular meaning, but as I have pointed out above, that meaning may not be consistent among members, and it can

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change as one gains more understanding of the larger context of a world-wide organization and Buddhist practice in general.

Turner's work provides a framework for the discussion of symbols and meaning, but Dan Sperber (1975) argues that Turner's approach does not adequately account for the mechanisms of symbolism. While Turner concentrates on the symbol's qualities, Sperber stresses the complexity of the connection between the symbolic element and its meaning. For him, symbolism is a cognitive process; the link between symbols and their referents is both arbitrary and learned. He writes that "individuals are endowed with a general symbolic mechanism and a learning strategy" (1975:136) and that "the experience of cultural symbolism may lead, at least partially, to a shared orientation among the members of a single society."(1975:136). This suggests that, while individuals may perceive symbols in unique ways, shared experience can influence groups in ways that are shared by members. In the Sōka Gakkai community, I believe that, while individuals understand symbols through their own cognitive interpretation, the experience of participation provides a framework of understanding that reinforces collective identity that is in opposition to those outside the group.

Like Sperber, Roger Keesing (1982:182) argues against "cultural cryptography", or the idea that symbols can be 'read' by the anthropologist. He stresses that ritual symbols "*evoke* meanings, which may depend on who individuals are, what they have experienced, and what they know". While this knowledge is important, Keesing (1982:197) also reminds us that the position of an individual will also affect the meaning taken from symbols. For example, age, gender, and status will affect one's understanding in ways that may change over time. Keesing (1982:185) cites Gilbert Lewis' work in which Lewis argues that "meaning is present not in things but in people's minds" and that societies "differ in the ways they teach, diffuse or control the interpretation of their rites and symbols as something to be clearly established, or left open and unexplained, or made mysterious, or kept secret". Lewis also warns that anthropologists should consider not only the cognitive or

intellectual aspects of symbolism, but also the "emotional, expressive, and functional components" (Keesing 1982:186).

Lewis differentiates between the 'ruling' or specific nature of procedure in ritual, which is often explicit, public, and social in nature, as opposed to the 'meaning' which may be either explicit or implicit (Keesing 1982:182). When the connection between symbols and their referents is unclear or covert, anthropologists should be especially wary of how meaning is assigned. Keesing reinforces this warning when he reminds the reader that anthropologists bring their own experiences and theoretical frameworks to the work, and that this influences the interpretation as well (1982:182). One final point that Keesing (1982:197) makes is that it is important to note who creates, preserves, and modifies symbolic structures. In Sōka Gakkai, members are provided with opportunities to construct connections between the symbolic elements and meaning through study materials, shared ritual, group discussions, and mentoring. This shared knowledge, although not uniform, helps provide a sense of shared or collective identity within the organization.

My final point before discussing material culture and linguistic features used by the organization is that some symbols are noteworthy because of their absence. Sōka Gakkai teaches that Buddhahood is within each of us. Therefore, in contrast to the altars of many Buddhist sects, there are no images of the Buddha. Members consider the Buddha as an exemplar and a teacher, but his image is not used in worship. Further, images of Nichiren and the three most important leaders of the organization, Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda, are also not found in meeting halls. Rather, centers of worship are simply appointed with the focus on the *gohonzon*.

Upstairs, in a modest office space, the Edmonton chapter has created a sacred space in which to hold their meetings. The walls are painted in vibrant colors and several photographs, taken by President Ikeda hang on the walls. The *butsudan*, or altar, at the front of the room is made of light colored and polished wood and is both elegant and simple. As noted above, there are no images of the Buddha or of any of the founders of Nichiren Buddhism or Sōka Gakkai, and according to the members, this is deliberate and consistent with the belief that Ten Worlds, including the

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capacity for Buddhahood lies within each of us. It can be seen in this photograph that the upper cabinet of the altar is closed. The *gohonzon* is inside, but photos are not allowed of this sacred object. For the image of a *gohonzon*, I have used an internet source to show an example of one that has been sanctioned for public display. On each side of the altar are vases with green (artificial) plants, and a large candle. On special occasions baskets of fruit are added to this display. At the front of the altar is

(Edmonton Center C.L. Geekie 2004)

an incense burner, although it is not used. I asked about that and was told that it was not used because some members were sensitive to the scent. This triad of evergreens, candles, and incense represents the three truths, the three properties, and the three inherent potentials of the Buddha nature: the Law, wisdom, and action (SGI 2002). The Vancouver center, which is much larger, is similar, but the altar is far more elaborate, made of black lacquered wood and decorated with gold-colored designs. The greenery is fresh and the other symbolic elements are larger as well. In particular the bell in Edmonton is fairly small but in Vancouver the bell is like a large cauldron.

Evergreens represent the property of action, the physicality of the Buddha and his action, in the sense of compassion, and the ability to interact appropriately with the environment. This allows humans to exhibit Buddha nature. Because the plants adorn the space in which the *gohonzon* rests, it is important that the greens should be unchanging (perhaps explaining the use of artificial plants). Greens from the

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shishimi tree are used, because the greenery is constant throughout the year. Further, the wood from this tree is aromatic, creating a pleasant ambience for the altar and making it a good choice for the offering. The leaves of the *shishimi* are a dark rich green, standing for the "unchanging steadfastness of believers' faith" (SGI 2002). Sometimes, in lieu of the evergreens, flowers are used as an offering, and I have seen this done at a personal altar in someone's home.

Candles represent the impermanence of life and also the property of Wisdom as found in the Buddha's enlightenment and in the potential for Buddhahood within all humans. The custom of candles is found in the Lotus Sutra, wherein there are many examples where candles are used to offer light to the Buddha. In one parable, an old woman offers the Buddha light from her candle, which burns long after the lights of others have gone out. This is interpreted as finding the Buddhahood within each of us if the gift is given with love and sincerity. It also signifies the defeat of darkness and ignorance, allowing humans to find light or wisdom in Buddhism. Finally, burning candles "signifies incinerating earthly desires and sparking of the flame of wisdom in the Buddha nature" (SGI 2002).

The third offering is incense, representing the "truth of the Middle Way, the essential property of the Buddha's life or the property of the Law, and the potential of our innate Buddha nature" (SGI 2002). Sticks of incense are laid flat in a container at the center-front of the altar. In this position they represent the serenity of the space in which the *gohonzon* is located. The sticks are burned from left to right, creating a fragrant space for worship. At home, lighting candles and burning incense would accompany morning and evening *gongyo*. Burning incense, spreading through the room also signifies the universality of the Buddha's Law. Stick incense is most commonly used, but for funerals and memorials, powdered incense is usually used (SGI 2002). In addition to these three offerings, fresh water may be placed on the altar each morning, then removed before evening *gongyo*. Food, often fruit, is offered on special occasions. This offering may be accompanied by ringing a "bell three times, plac[ing] one's palms together, and chanting *daimoku* three times as a gesture of deep gratitude and appreciation" (SGI 2002).

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Each of these offerings gives tangible form to unseen meaning, providing a link to the intellectual understanding of ritual and belief, and possibly inspiring people to action due to the emotional element of the symbolism employed. Ritual in itself is symbolic and shared understanding of ritual helps to create community and collective identity for the organization. While I have described a specific setting, this configuration for the altar is fairly uniform throughout the world.

During the meeting, the person leading the chanting sits in the front chair, facing the altar. Beside this chair is a large bell, inverted and settled into a padded cushion. There is also a thick stick for hitting the bell. If the altar is in a private home, this bell is situated beside the practitioner who sits or kneels before the altar to perform *gongyo*. It is definitely not an ordinary bell and, when struck, it reverberates with a lasting note that is very distinct. It is rung before *gongyo*, at certain points within the chanting and recitation, and at the end of the session.

The SGI (2002) website explains the bell as "to offer a pleasing sound to the Gohonzon". Bells are common symbols in Buddhist traditions and also in other Japanese religious traditions such as Shintō. In Shintō, the bell is rung to catch the attention of the spirit world, and as such, ringing the bell to signal changes throughout the service would be appropriate. In Buddhism, the bell is often understood to signify Wisdom, or the feminine aspect of the law. The center's bell is held in a cushion shaped like petals that hold the bell in place. Although it was not confirmed, I expect that this bell, held by petals, symbolizes
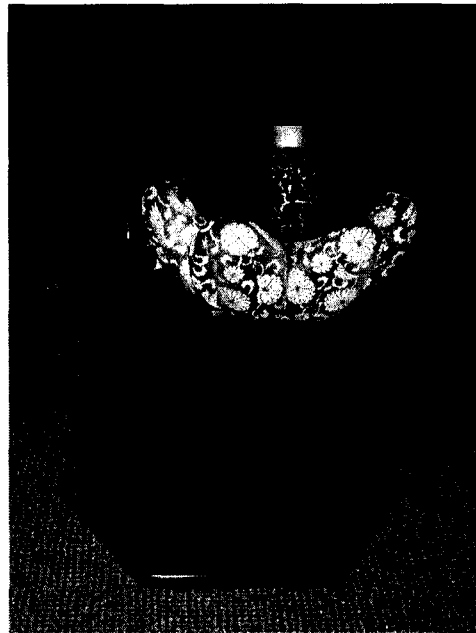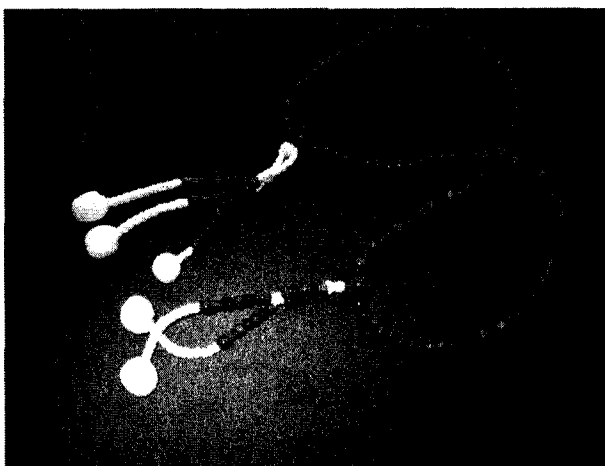

Edmonton centre (C.L. Geekie 2004)

the Lotus. In fact, it looks like a lotus rising up out of its stand, with the petals of the cushion, rising to hold the inverted bell like a flower. The Lotus represents not only the Lotus Sutra, but also the lotus flower that rises from the murky depths to appear

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with great purity on the surface of a pond. While much cognitive information can be found in the symbol, the emotional effect of the bell ringing is not inconsiderable. As well, meaning attached to the bell is not confined to only one possibility; it is connected to the position of the interpreter, to the context in which it is used, and to the wider interpretation within Buddhism generally.

While the above are all kept at the altar, members carry personal items with them to facilitate practice: first, *Juzu* beads, similar to a rosary, and second, a small book containing sections of the Lotus Sutra. These beads come in many colors and are available for sale through websites and mail-order. Given the variety of hues and prices, they are not only an aid to practice, but also an expression of individuality. The beads form a circle, which is looped over the middle fingers of each hand and crossed
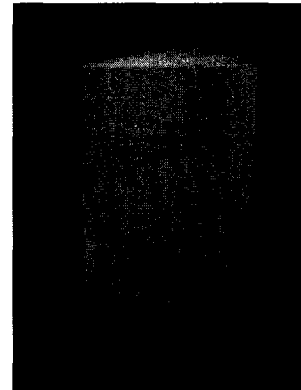

Juzu beads (C.L. Geekie 2004)

over in the center between the hands. The three-strand end loops over the right hand and the two-strand end over the left. At opposite ends of the circle, there are strands containing more beads. At one end there are three strands and at the other end, only two. The beads also represent the human body; the two strands at one end representing legs, and the three at the other as arms and a head. There are 108 beads in total and these represent earthly desires. In Nichiren Buddhism, the object is not to eliminate desires but to transform, or purify, these desires to create positive action and the desire to help others. This is in keeping with the goal of inner transformation and engagement with the world in ways that create value and happiness in this lifetime. At the point where the strands meet the circle, there is a large bead, one of which is called the father's bead, while the other is the mother's bead. Both of these represent the Buddha. Held between the hands while chanting the *daimoku*, these beads are used not only to aid in concentration, but also "so that the benefits of

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practicing and chanting *Daimoku* will not fall through" (Nichiren Daishonin Gosho 2003).

Four small beads stand for the Four Leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, or the four virtues of the Buddha's life: his true self, his purity, his boundless eternity, and his happiness (Nichiren 2003). Beside the 'father' bead is another small bead that stands for the essential and eternal essence of the Law, or absolute truth. On four of the strands outside the circle are jar-shaped beads, representing the "essential nature of all life, which is 3,000 worlds in a momentary existence, each one of which is a perfect manifestation of cause and effect" (Nichiren 2003). In these beads are stored the benefits accumulated through practice. The fifth string of beads is for counting the number of *daimoku* chanted within a session.

The second item used for chanting *daimoku* is a small book containing sections of the Lotus Sutra. Some are written in Chinese characters (Japanese *kanji*) and for those of us who read in English, there is a phonetic version so that we are all able to chant the same sounds. The sounds represent Japanese words, and the work itself is set in an archaic form of Japanese found in early translations from Kumarajiva (Nichiren 2003a). Members chant from this book, using a set order for the process of *gongyo*. In this

Gongyo book (Geekie 2004)

sense, not only are the words and the book symbolic, but also the ritual which is shared by members and understood within a common framework. Again, it is this shared sense of symbolic representation through objects and language that allows members to understand themselves as part, not only of Sōka Gakkai, but of an unseen universe that is understood in particular ways.

John Gumperz, in his work on linguistic community, emphasizes the social or cultural elements of language use in creating collective identity (Hudson 1980:26-27). He describes a linguistic community as "any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language use" (Gumperz

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1968:219). Sōka Gakkai uses language to distinguish itself from other groups and to create shared meaning and a sense of collective identity for members of the organization.

The name Sōka Gakkai is Japanese and is used throughout the world, regardless of the native language spoken by members. This creates a sense of exclusivity as it is a phrase outside the understanding of most people who are not members of the organization. While not used as secret passwords or signs of recognition between members, many Japanese words are used to create a sense of solidarity within the group. Sōka Gakkai – Canada discourages the use of Japanese terms because this might be seen as exclusivist or too reliant on an exotic past that does not truly reflect the inclusive and ecumenical direction of the organization. However, members of the Edmonton chapter regularly use the terms in practice and discourse.

Members use words such as *sensei* (teacher), *butsudan* (Buddhist altar), *gosho* (the collected writings of Nichiren Daishonin), *gongyo*, *daimoku*, and many others when speaking to each other; most of these are not really translated, but are associated with objects and ideas that have shared meaning within the organization. One such phrase is *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō*, the *daimoku* chanted by all members as the most important and fundamental practice of Sōka Gakkai. Again, one can examine a symbol from many positions. In its general usage, the phrase represents taking refuge in the Lotus Sutra (Niwano 2002:48). Chanting this phrase can mean many things; for some it may represent the desire for improved material or social status; for others it may be a wish for better health. In its finest sense, directed to the *gohonzon*, it might be attached to a reflection on the Ten Worlds of one's own inner life or a desire to change karma in ways that will create peace in the world.

The phrase *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō* is also referred to as the "ultimate Law or true essence of life permeating everything in the universe" (SGIC 2001:41). Literally translated and broken down into sections, it is imbued with further meaning. *Nam*, as it is pronounced in Japanese, comes from the Sanskrit word *namas*, which means "I take refuge in" (Niwano 2002:48). Sōka Gakkai (SGI 2003) extends that meaning to

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refer to devotion as action, or the practice of Buddhism. *Myōhō* is the Mystic Law and refers to the power of revitalization, and the possibility of Buddha nature, that is accessible within each of us. *Renge* is the lotus flower ("which blooms and seeds at the same time" [SGI 2003]) and "simultaneity of cause and effect", while *kyō* is the thread that connects everything within the universe through space and time (SGIC 2001:41) and the sutra or teaching received from the Buddha (SGI 2003). Chanted by all members, this phrase is a powerful symbol with both cognitive and emotional aspects, cognitive in the sense that it is an accessible representation of complex ideas, and emotional in that it creates connection, not only within Sōka Gakkai, but also to a limitless universe as understood within the Buddhist context.

The most important physical symbol used in Sōka Gakkai practice is the *Gohonzon*. *Go* is an honorific meaning "worthy of honour" and *honzon* means "object of fundamental respect" (SGIC 2001:41). This *honzon* is in the form of a mandala, but not what one might ordinarily think of as a mandala. Rather than a pictorial representation of the universe, this mandala is written in Japanese *kanji*, or Chinese characters. Shortly before his death, Nichiren Daishonin created several *honzon*, one of which is called the *Daigohonzon* (*Dai* being an honorific that can be translated as "great") (Metraux 1988:14).

Metraux (1988:14) writes that most Nichiren Shōshū temples display either original mandalas created by Nichiren in the 13th century, or copies that have been made by

Nichiren's last gohonzon (GRP 2004)

priests since that time. Usually kept on an altar, or some other prominent space within the temple, *honzons* are made of wood. They are approximately 1 ½ meters in height, ½ meter wide, and around ten centimeters thick. The characters for *Nam-*

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myōhō-renge-kyō are written down the center space. In the Edmonton center, the *gohonzon*, placed above the altar at the front of the room, is in the form of a scroll, carefully mounted in fine cloth. While not in use, it is covered by doors that fold across to protect the scroll, and when it is used during chanting or meeting time, the doors open to make the gohonzon available to the membership. These *gohonozons* are used in collective situations but also for personal use. Most members create an altar at home in order to create a sacred space within which to enshrine their personal *gohonzon*.

Not everyone has a *gohonzon*; it is something to be earned. In order to 'receive the *gohonzon*', one is expected to publicly and formally pledge one's faith in the *gohonzon* and Nichiren Buddhism. One is also expected to perform *gongyo* and display some competence in chanting from the Lotus Sutra. In that sense, in order to receive the *gohonzon*, one is expected to demonstrate a certain desire to engage in the faith, practice, and study of Nichiren Buddhism. Receiving the *gohonzon* takes place within a meeting. In the ceremony that I saw, Tony Meers was in town and he conferred the *gonhonzon* on a young woman. It was a short ritual in which Meers said a few words, then gave her the scroll wrapped in fabric. She responded with a short speech about why she had chosen to make this step. She had been practising for some time, but had recently moved to Canada from Taiwan. Far from her family, she expressed that it was time to take

Map of Gohonzon (SGI 2002)

responsibility for her faith and practice. Everyone applauded, and later offered congratulations. In this context, the *gohonzon* represents both membership and commitment to the organization.
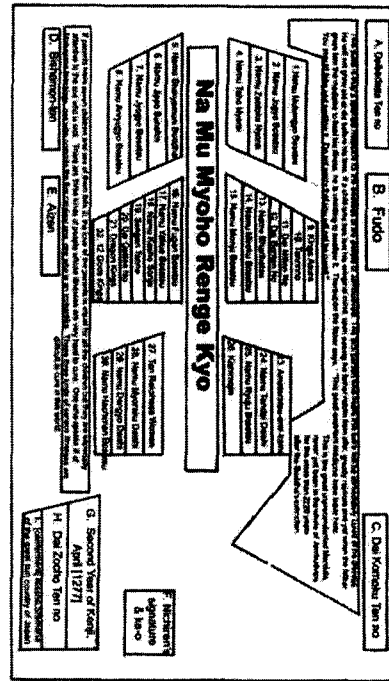
The Sōka Gakkai website (SGI 2002) has a map of the *gohonzon* as it is used within the organization. As one member described it to me, it is a map of the

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universe, depicting the Ten Worlds of existence throughout the cosmos and within each of us. *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō*, in characters, represents the ultimate law and "true entity of life that allows people to directly tap their enlightened nature" (SGI-USA 1997). Directly below this is the character for Nichiren Daishonin's name, followed by the characters for *zai gohan*, or Nichiren's personal seal, which would stand for his signature. The *gohonzon* is graphically arranged to represent events told in the Lotus Sutra. It also contains, in two groupings, the Ten Worlds. First the four noble worlds of Buddhahood, Bodhisattva, Realization , and Learning, followed by the six lower paths of Heaven, Humanity, Anger, Animality, Hunger, and Hell. As Sōka Gakkai members believe that each of these states can be found within a person at all times, this visual representation of the universe allows the practitioner to focus on emphasizing and encouraging the higher states to take precedence in one's life. As members chant, they focus on this *gohonzon* as a means of changing their karma and achieving a better level of existence for themselves.

There are different levels of understanding. The exegetical explanation for a new member is unlikely to correspond to that of someone who has practiced for a long time. Sōka Gakkai does not ask for uniformity; rather some may take the academic path to study, while others contribute in different ways. Faith that is passionately expressed in good works is certainly to be valued as highly as the acquisition of scholarly knowledge. The *gohonzon* is a tangible guide to the unseen, a map if you will, showing us a diagram for the universe; it is also an object of worship, one which guides the practitioner on a journey of self-improvement and provides a communal focus for worship. It links ideology with history, providing a sense of traditional authority that people in the organization can share with one another. Again, both the cognitive and emotional effects of the symbol are employed to create collective identity.

Chapter 9

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

> Contemporary movements assume the form of solidarity networks entrusted
> with potent cultural meanings, and it is precisely these meanings that
> distinguish them so sharply from political actors and formal organizations next
> to them. We have passed beyond the global and metaphysical conception of
> collective actors. Movements are not entities that move with the unity of goals
> attributed to them by ideologues. Movements are systems of action, complex
> networks among the different levels and meanings of social action. Collective
> identity allowing them to become actors is not a datum or an essence; it is the
> outcome of exchanges, negotiations, decisions and conflicts among actors.
> Processes of mobilization, organizational forms, models of leadership,
> ideologies, and forms of communication – these are all meaningful levels of
> analysis for the reconstruction from the within of the action system that
> constitutes the collective actor. But, in addition, relationships with the outside
> – with competitors, allies, and adversaries – and especially the response of the
> political system and the apparatuses of social control define a field of
> opportunities and constraints within which the collective action takes shape,
> perpetuates itself, or changes.

Alberto Melucci (1996:4)

Sōka Gakkai is a social movement. It is an organization that has changed considerably since its inception in the 1930s, but it has always engaged in action directed toward social change. That action has always been unconventional in the sense that members understand their action as coming from outside the established institutions of society. Originally understood as a vehicle for Makiguchi's ideology of educational reform in Japan, the association, under Toda's leadership, changed into one in which personal transformation and social change could be accomplished through the religious ideology and practice of Nichiren Buddhism. Through aggressive recruitment, membership grew rapidly and Sōka Gakkai emerged as an economic and political force within Japan. Structures created within the organization afforded increasing opportunities for socialization, both through the vertical ties emphasizing hierarchy and mentorship, and the horizontal ties that drew people into geographic communities and broad interest groups. In the early days, political

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influence consisted of pressure brought to bear on existing officials. That gave way to politicians from within the organization, and then into an official political party, Kōmeitō, financed and guided by Sōka Gakkai leadership. In 1978, the Kōmeitō separated from the organization, but even today, it is speculated that Sōka Gakkai leadership and Ikeda in particular, hold tight control over the party (Aruga 2000:116). In Japan, Kōmeitō represents Buddhism in politics, giving a voice to the ideals of an otherwise peripheral segment of society.

Sōka Gakkai's identity as a social movement draws not only on its activities in the present, but also from the past. Makiguchi's objective was social change through education, and he saw his organization and Nichiren Buddhism as a vehicle for that change. The ideology of the society also draws on the social agenda of Nichiren Daishonin, who saw a world of chaos and social inequity, and developed the means to confront it. He attempted to influence existing institutions through his religious convictions and practice, and created a new form of an existing religious tradition that had the potential to empower common people of his time. Melucci (1996:4) characterizes social movements as solidarity networks, entrusted with potent cultural meaning and Sōka Gakkai defines itself through Nichiren Buddhism, developed in Japan, by a Japanese monk, to preserve the nation of Japan against both internal and external threat.

All Japanese are familiar with Buddhism, and while Sōka Gakkai represents a more socially engaged and active form of Buddhism than most sects, the basic ideas of Buddhism are familiar within cultural context. Japan has a long history of tolerating multiple religious traditions. Many Buddhist sects have flourished since Buddhism was introduced from China in the 6th century, and Nichiren sects have co-existed with other traditions in Japan since the 13th century. That Sōka Gakkai chose aggressive *shakubuku* as a means for propagation in the early years, is anomalous with this multiplicity of co-existing traditions, but did have a cultural precedent in the teachings of Nichiren. Most scholars group Sōka Gakkai within the category of New Japanese Religions, but the organization would refute that and claims that members prefer to think of themselves as "promoting the spread of the 700-year-old teachings

of Nichiren' and prefer to call Sōka Gakkai a "new religious movement." (Metraux 2000:402). Sōka Gakkai has successfully drawn on the idea of history and tradition to create a sense of continuity with the past, but has successfully integrated these ideas into the contemporary milieu in order to meet the needs of people in the present.

It is significant that, in the 1990s, the organization was able to successfully disassociate itself with Nichiren Shōshū in such a way as to emphasize contemporary values of inclusion and ecumenicism that support an agenda for global community. While the ideology and ritual of Buddhist faith and practice have been maintained, those ideas and action have been transformed to confront the world as we find it today. Personal concerns for material and social success are constructed as the solution to global concerns for peace, human rights, and the environment, making Sōka Gakkai relevant at both the personal and social levels.

Makiguchi emphasized the idea of mentor/disciple within the organization. This vertical hierarchy is a well-known concept in Japanese social structure (Hendry 1995:84-89) and worked well in the early stages of Sōka Gakkai. This is where we can begin to understand the enduring success of Sōka Gakkai because, while Makiguchi started an organization that is firmly based on Japanese nationalism and tied closely to Japanese Buddhism, later generations, under the leadership of Toda, and then Ikeda, have been able to adapt and employ different symbols to change the organization into one that addresses the needs of members in their particular social milieu. Makiguchi used Nichiren Shōshū teachings to create solidarity because this sect understands itself as the True Buddhism and is traditionally intolerant of other groups. Toda, in turn, used his mentor's death to emphasize the urgency of the message. Makiguchi is understood to be a martyr, and his persecutions are linked to Nichiren's conflict with the Shogunate in the 13th century. These parallels help to solidify the ideological position of the organization while providing members with a sense of identity and urgency in a very difficult period of Japanese history. Ikeda, in turn, has further changed collective identity into something more relevant to the 21st century.

The format of meeting in small groups is a familiar aspect of Japanese culture, one in which people join clubs or groups based not on family, but rather on interests (Hendry 1987:62-63). Many early members were women, and women's groups can be found in Japan stretching back into medieval times. Some were religious in nature, and for this precedent we can look at local shrine organizations, centered on local Shintō shrines in which protective *kami* (spirits) are lodged. Women's community groups met and were responsible for the maintenance of the local shrine, and by extension, for the well-being of the community (Hendry 1987:62). As evidenced in his address to the members in 1951, Toda appreciated the value of the women's organization: "The power of women...is truly monumental...When observing the development of the Sōka Gakkai, and also its activities, it seems that the women are always one step ahead of men in initiating progress...Now that the Sōka Gakkai has made a new departure, we must further strengthen the organization necessary for future development toward our goals. In order to do this, the capacities of everyone assembled here today will be indispensable." (Usui 2000:156). The association of women, social groups, and religion likely helped to promote the organization through structure familiar within the culture. In this cultural context a group promising 'self-improvement' and 'benefits in this world' through religious practice and good works within the community would be easily understood for many Japanese.

Social movements are systems of action (Melucci 1996:4), and Sōka Gakkai stands out for its engagement with worldly affairs. Nichiren believed that, in a period of *mappō*, when most people were far removed from the True religion, that political action was the key to a better world. Sōka Gakkai has always espoused, if not specific political action, at least an active engagement with social issues. Like Nichiren, Makiguchi tried to influence politicians through religion, but his successors extended that into concrete political involvement by creating a political party, which, although formally separate from Sōka Gakkai, is clearly understood to be associated with the organization.

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This association has been controversial through time, and although the Kōmeitō has undergone various changes in its relationship with Sōka Gakkai, Aruga (2000:116) goes so far as to suggest that Ikeda is the most powerful man in Japanese politics. In 2000 the New Kōmeitō Party boasted 350,000 party members, and continues to influence Japanese politics through its more than 3,000 elected officials, most of which are Sōka Gakkai members (Komeito 2000). Much of this influence derives from the ability and willingness to act in coalition with other powerful parties. While Sōka Gakkai does not insist that its members become politically active, there is strong voter support within Japan, and all members (world-wide) are encouraged to engage with social and political issues within the existing structures of their own communities. Cameron Barr (1995:5) estimates that the organization controls over six million voters in Japan. This sense of involvement through individual and collective practice has been a strong element in creating a sense of solidarity and identity for members of the organization. Outside of Japan, political involvement is less formal. Sōka Gakkai maintains ties with organizations such as the United Nations, and President Ikeda is known for his dialogues with powerful political figures, but the organization has not developed political parties. Members are encouraged to participate in cultural and educational activities within existing institutional frameworks.

Sōka Gakkai teaches that social revolution begins with personal revolution, and that humanity can not rely totally on the efforts of governments to create social and environmental change. To this end, it supports grassroots projects that empower people to better not only their own lives, but their communities, and the world at large. Examples of this include educational programs, such as the *Seeds of Change*, which aims at teaching young children about sustainable development and environmental protection. The program promotes local initiatives as exemplary models for global change. As an example of how Sōka Gakkai supports environmental causes, delegates from the organization participated in the World Conference on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, a conference that produced *The Earth Charter*. This initiative supports the work of activists such as

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Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan biology professor who, since the 1970s, has organized women and children in a campaign that has planted more than 20 million trees in an effort to combat deforestation in rural Kenya. Her commitment and enterprise are documented in the *Seeds of Change* exhibition and the video, *A Quiet Revolution*, both of which are sponsored and financed by Sōka Gakkai International (Kalaw, d'Evie & Tsumura 2002).

Social movements are "organized efforts to promote or resist change in society that rely, at least in part, on 'noninstitutionalized' forms of political action" (Marx and McAdam 1994:73) and collective identity is the "outcome of exchanges, negotiations, decisions, and conflicts" (Melucci 1996:4). Marx and McAdam (1994:73) further define non-institutionalized action as any activity outside the normal political channels (for example, chanting or the stated purpose of challenging *mappō*). From the beginning, Sōka Gakkai has represented itself as a collectivity in opposition to the general public. In the early years, identity was fashioned through membership in Nichiren Shōshū, which has always been understood as contentious and extreme in its views. Metraux (1988:89-90) describes the 'typical' way in which members were recruited in Japan during the time of Toda's presidency. When a potential member was introduced to the group, sponsoring members went and spoke with the neophyte's family in order to clarify the intention and seriousness of Sōka Gakkai as a religious choice. Before acceptance into the organization, new members were required to remove altars and symbols of all other faiths from their homes. In Japan, the *kamidana*, which housed the protective household *kami*, or gods, would be removed, as well as the *butsudan*, the Buddhist altar wherein the ancestors' spirits are revered and honored. This means that not only was allegiance to other religious traditions renounced, but even ancestor worship was sacrificed for Sōka Gakkai. Aggressive proselytizing was curtailed under Ikeda's leadership, especially as Sōka Gakkai moved into countries outside of Japan. Now recruitment is more low-key and less threatening to mainstream institutions, as members are recruited through ideology of self-realization, active engagement with social issues, and the attractive nature of Sōka Gakkai members themselves.

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McAdam (1988:36-57) characterizes social movements as sources for new collective identities, innovative forms of action, new items of material culture, and changes in educational curricula. In Makiguchi's time, the group identified with Nichiren Shōshū and specific goals aimed at personal empowerment through education. It attracted mostly intellectuals who shared Makiguchi's philosophy. After World War Two, Toda introduced new material culture to the organization. Flags and banners marked the group's collective activities, and festivals were used to bring large numbers of people together. Later, as more moderate and mainstream ideation took over, material culture has been minimized so as to keep Sōka Gakkai from standing out and creating negative attention for its members. As discussed in Chapter 8, material culture has survived and continues to influence collective identity, but there is increased focus on ideology, faith, and action within the community of members.

McAdam (1988:41) contends that successful movements take advantage of 'master frames' from the past in order to frame their message in culturally acceptable ways. Sōka Gakkai drew on Buddhist ideology, using Nichiren's teachings to create an organization devoted to social reform through personal and collective action. Toda drew on the comparison between Makiguchi and Nichiren as martyrs to their ideals. Nichiren believed that political action and aggressive recruitment of members was crucial to Japan's wellbeing, and Toda set very clear goals in this direction, increasing the number of members from about 500 households to 750,000 households within a period of seven years (SGI 2003). Although Nichiren's, and Toda's, concept of this earthly paradise was Japanese in scope, over time, it has grown to include people throughout the world. This shift, under Ikeda's leadership, has enabled Sōka Gakkai to construct its position as belonging to a global community. It also reflects the organization's ability to create relevant goals for its members in a world that increasingly emphasizes commitment to universal concerns such as human rights and environmental integrity.

Marx and McAdam (1994:93-100) argue that in order for a social movement, which is generally founded on radical or revolutionary ideology and practice, to

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become established as a mature movement, it is necessary to change the ways in which members perceive the group and their involvement in it. They characterize the mature movement as one that is larger, more organized, and more integrated into mainstream institutions of a society (1994:93-100). Changes in recruitment, as above, is one way in which the organization has made itself more accessible for diversity in membership and reduced potential criticism from ruling elites who, in earlier times, could point to 'cult-like' recruitment practices. Aruga (2000:107) has argued that, due to the presence of ideology and practice as a means to social change, Sōka Gakkai has been a social movement from the beginning, but Marx and McAdam's (1994) work on the evolution of social movements supports the idea that the organization has changed in ways that mark the successful transition from a period of emergence, when identity is formed through contrast against the dominant culture, to a mature social movement in which the organization becomes integrated into the structures of society in ways that create acceptance while retaining a sense of collective purpose.

In contrast to the early organization, today's Sōka Gakkai is involved with many enterprises that are highly organized and grounded within mainstream concerns. Political action is integrated into Japan's system of government through the New Kōmeitō party, which is not only successful in terms of seats, but also in the formation of strategic alliances that increase its ability to influence legislation. The organization has a system of schools, ranging from pre-school to university. Min-On, and Tokyo Fuji Art Museum represent mainstream cultural organizations supported by Sōka Gakkai. Schools extend outside of Japan as well, with two universities in the United States owned by Sōka Gakkai, and many other universities throughout the world affiliated with the organization through exchange programs.

Sōka Gakkai's structural organization has also contributed to the scope of the movement. Robert Weller (1994:86-110), in his work on the Taiping Rebellion argued that when the religious fervor of a group becomes fragmented, new purpose and structure were required to keep the movement intact. There is a parallel with the Sōka Gakkai, in that as the organization grew, it was important to provide new goals,

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and also to give members a social organization with which to identify. Two ways that Sōka Gakkai provided this structure in the early years were, first, to organize as a political entity and, second, to construct a strong social network. This facilitated growth and feelings of solidarity within Japan, but also paved the way for international growth because the organizational framework and bureaucracy was available and able to accommodate the widening organization. Vertical structure guarantees support from above, while the horizontal organization creates inter-connectedness through interest groups that reflect culture, community, age, and particular causes or projects. These structures combine to create collective identity and the strength to use that identity to create social change.

Like the Taiping, Sōka Gakkai has organized its membership into cohesive units and provided a sense of shared purpose. Unlike Taiping rebels, who did not integrate into legitimate power structures, Sōka Gakkai has been able to change the organization in ways that have allowed the movement to mature to a point where it is integrated into mainstream political systems, or at least has modified both its ideology and practice so as not to attract attention to itself. This has been crucial to acceptance of Sōka Gakkai in countries throughout the world, particularly when the fervor of the early members is lost in a second generation that places higher value on respectability and accommodation (Machacek and Mitchell 2000:278-279). This ability to become more integrated into mainstream culture is important in the evolution from 'emerging' to 'mature' social movement, but it is also important in maintaining converts over a prolonged period (Marx and McAdam 1994:86). If, as McAdam (1988:53) argues, social movements have more impact if they are able to interface with elites, this integration has implications for the success of the organization in terms of achieving its goals.

Marx and McAdam (1994:108) emphasize the importance of broad goals if an organization is to survive and mature. They argue that if a social movement's goals are narrowly focused, then when these goals are met, the organization loses the impetus to continue. However, if goals are sufficiently diffuse and focused on broadly defined social values, members will be able to create multiple programs and

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perpetuate their goals as the movement changes and grows. In this way, if Sōka Gakkai had kept the narrow focus of changing education in Japan, it likely would not have appealed to such a broad section of the population, let alone moved into the international arena. Moreover, goals such as world peace and environmental integrity not only appeal to a wider audience, but opportunity for involvement in these causes is limitless. These authors also categorize goals as displacing or nondisplacing, and argue that goals which do not threaten more widely held values are more likely to be successful and are less likely to attract the negative attention of institutions that might otherwise oppose the movement. So again, by endorsing universal values, Sōka Gakkai has minimized the potential for opposition against the organization.

Social movements are influenced by the way in which they relate to those outside the organization (Melucci 1996:4). For Sōka Gakkai, we can see how these relationships have contributed to identity, ideology, and practice within the movement. The split with Nichiren Shōshū, described above, was an important factor leading to the increasingly ecumenical message of Sōka Gakkai. Also, Sōka Gakkai's involvement in politics has defined the organization, both as support for particular candidates, and through involvement with the Kōmeitō party. Political success identifies Sōka Gakkai as being in opposition to corruption within government and helped the organization to advance the idea of cooperative government through coalitions. These have allowed the Kōmeitō, and by extension Sōka Gakkai, to exert tremendous influence in Japan. Another way in which Sōka Gakkai has defined itself in relation to those outside the organization is to align itself strategically with organizations outside of Japan. For example, the United Nations recognizes SGI as a Nongovernmental Organization that works through UNESCO to offer humanitarian aid in the form of currency, food, clothing, and medical teams. This ability to form alliances with other, often more prestigious, organizations appears to be one of Sōka Gakkai's most successful strategies for achieving global influence.

GLOBALIZATION

> The first and most basic starting point of our great cultural movement of kosen-rufu is for each person to stand up on their own, self-reliant in faith. The great human revolution of one person will lead to the creation of boundless joy for both oneself and others and to the expansion of a beautiful garden of peace and hope around the globe.
>
> Daisaku Ikeda, New Year's Message (2004a)

In a world where travel and communication technology links different areas of the world in ways that are unprecedented, Sōka Gakkai has chosen a path that includes international membership and universal social goals. Ikeda has enabled this agenda through education programs, financial and structural support for membership, and his personal efforts to interact with members, political figures, and international organizations. The word globalization often assumes the idea that this exchange of ideas and goods is something recent, linked to European imperialism, but as Marshall Sahlins (1988:1-51) argues, western powers are not the only active partners in this relationship between cultures; nor is globalization a 20th century phenomenon. Japan has actively negotiated its position vis-à-vis other cultures throughout the past two millennia. Not only has Japan been influenced by other cultures, but she has often sought out new ideas and changed them into something Japanese. In this case, Sōka Gakkai, a movement that sees bringing in new members as a crucial part of its ideology, has reversed this by taking something Japanese and extending it into a global setting.

Globalization is a multivalent word that elicits both positive and negative reactions; on the one hand it connotes opportunity, while on the darker side, we find ideas about homogenization of culture coupled with exploitation and western hegemony. Ulf Hannerz (1992:217-267) takes a positive view of globalization, arguing that it allows for ideas from the periphery to gain a voice that has influence

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on the centers of power. While Japan would never understand herself as peripheral to world politics, I think that Sōka Gakkai is a good example of how globalization has allowed a small social movement, rooted in a uniquely Japanese religious tradition, to gain access to a world audience.

Sōka Gakkai has always understood the power of communication and this has contributed significantly to the organization's ability to spread throughout the world. Nichiren was a prolific writer who left a large body of work for his followers; Makiguchi authored two books, and other smaller publications to present and promote his ideas about education and how Nichiren Shōshū could show the way to peace and prosperity. Toda, before the war, owned a publishing enterprise and always remained committed to spreading his message through the media. The group's sensitivity to the written word is shown by the 1970 scandal in which it was rumored that the Kōmeitō tried to suppress publication of a book criticizing Sōka Gakkai. This incident precipitated the severing of official ties between the two groups. However, it seems clear that Sōka Gakkai has remained, if not in control of, at least heavily involved in the policies and decision-making of the party (Aruga 2000:116).

Sōka Gakkai first moved into North America with the Japanese wives of American servicemen, and has grown from their efforts to continue their practice in a new home (Machacek and Mitchell 2000:259). These young women, lonely because of the language, cultural, and financial problems they faced, appealed to Ikeda when he visited the United States in 1960. He advised them to face reality and triumph by developing their own self-reliance through learning English, getting their driver's licenses, and becoming American citizens (Kimura 1999). Since then, David Chappell (2000:299-302), who claims there are 45,000 active Sōka Gakkai members in the United States, asserts that "Soka Gakkai has become the largest and most racially diverse Buddhist organization in North America". In the 1960s, most members were of Asian ancestry, but since then, while other Buddhist sects remain predominantly of Asian descent, Sōka Gakkai has drawn heavily from other segments of the population. The organization has been particularly successful in

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attracting African American and Hispanic members (2000:301). Most centers are located in large urban settings, and different cities tend to reflect their own demographic composition in membership. Chappell credits this growth to the social development present in Sōka Gakkai, contrasting this to the more solitary practices of other Buddhist sects such as Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, or Vipassana (2000:324). This social development is reflected in cultural activities, a global vision and social responsibility (2000:324).

Peter Clarke (2000:347-348) asserts that Brazil has approximately 150,000 members, with less than 20% of those having Japanese ancestry. This is the largest Sōka Gakkai membership (by country) outside of Japan, and it appears to have developed through a unique relationship with Catholicism, in which the organization has accommodated the existence of God, while rejecting the symbols and rituals of the Church. Clarke speculates that Sōka Gakkai's success in Brazil may be affected by its ability to balance synchretic practices with the distinctiveness of Nichiren Buddhism, particularly in the face of Protestant Evangelism that is far better positioned to blend Catholic symbolism and practice into its structure.

Bryan Wilson (2000:35) estimates 6,000 members in Britain and he credits Sōka Gakkai's success to its secular orientation, as well as its pragmatic assertion that problems are the responsibility of the practitioner and can be solved by chanting. He argues that practice, for British members, is a practical approach to personal benefit in both this life and the afterlife. Sōka Gakkai does not insist that its members withdraw from the world; rather they are expected to participate in political, cultural, and social activities, which Wilson writes is "markedly in tune with the times". The organization is attractive in that it is not judgmental; nor does it require the trappings of conventional churches. Meetings are informal and held in homes, reflecting trends that take spirituality out of the formal settings of churches and temples and into more comfortable and informal surroundings. Wilson also stresses ideology and opportunity for collective activism as being attractive in an age when communities are transient and depersonalized. The organization emphasizes this sense of a caring and supportive community, while encouraging members to extend themselves in

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humanitarian good works. Wilson sees Sōka Gakkai as "an agency capable of reinforcing a measure of social cohesion in societies where the level of shared common consciousness has been jeopardized or eradicated" (2000:374).

Daniel Metraux (2000:402-429) writes that Sōka Gakkai claims 800,000 to 900,000 members in Asia (outside of Japan). The organization spread to ethnic Chinese communities in Thailand and Hong Kong, starting in the early 1960s (2000:404-405), then moved into Malaysia and Singapore toward the end of the 1960s. Metraux argues that Nichiren Buddhism is ideal for young, upwardly-mobile urban members, many of whom have deep roots in Buddhist traditions but find that Sōka Gakkai offers something more relevant to the needs of contemporary society. He further asserts, from interviews with members, that the concepts of "karma and responsibility for one's own actions" (2000:406) appeal to young, educated members in these highly competitive urban settings. Metraux found that most Asian members are young, in their twenties and thirties, well educated, and engaged as students or in professional careers. The most important reason cited for joining the organization is the close and caring community that Sōka Gakkai provides.

Once again, issues of leadership appear to be important in the success of Sōka Gakkai. Metraux explains that leadership in Southeast Asia rises out of the local population and that centers are financially and structurally autonomous from Japan. Leaders tend to have "strong spiritual commitment and genuine or "spontaneous" devotion to the movement – and especially to the welfare of other members" (Metraux 2000:414). They are expected to be successful in their businesses, have supportive family structures, and to maintain good social relationships. Asian members tend to spend more time on Sōka Gakkai activities than do American members, and perhaps are more dependent on these relationships than we might expect in the United States. Metraux sees this as crucial in understanding the appeal of Sōka Gakkai because of the pressures put on young people to succeed in locations that are often far removed from family supports. This certainly seems to hold true in my experience, where many international students in Edmonton depend heavily on the support system they have within the local Sōka Gakkai community.

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Canada's membership is around 5,000 members, centered mainly in urban areas. The largest chapters are in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, but smaller chapters are scattered across the country. Some of these own their own centers, and each center is run by volunteer members. The groups are diverse and reflect the populations from which they draw. For example, Vancouver has a larger proportion of Japanese members than the Edmonton chapter. Chapters are linked through both vertical and horizontal structure, and there is considerable contact and support between the various chapters throughout the country.

In 1970, James White (291) observed that the "tension between adaptation and integration seems...to be the primary potential problem facing the Society" and it is interesting to see how this has been addressed in the thirty years since White's book. Attention to this is evidenced by the ways in which Sōka Gakkai has established itself in other countries, drawing on cultural models that allow the organization to blend in. For example, in Canada and the United States, large rallies that draw attention to the group are discouraged. Practice is private, in homes, or in centers where people gather for collective chanting and encouragement. David Machacek (2000:282) asserts that Sōka Gakkai's "compliance with American social institutions and a history of reforms [is] designed to make this Japanese religion look as American as possible" and has allowed the organization to grow without much controversy. By "adopting the conventions of everyday culture, Sōka Gakkai was implicitly expressing its intent to comply with the widely accepted rules of behavior that govern American social life", thereby avoiding "direct challenges to its legitimacy" (2000:282). Machacek goes on to argue that this non-confrontational attitude has allowed Sōka Gakkai to attract, not only more members, but also members who have close ties to the existing establishment.

Since the 1960s, the organization has taken an assertive stance in its growth world-wide. The internet represents a strong example of this; complex and sophisticated websites in many languages offer information on the various chapters throughout the world. Sōka Gakkai offers publications with updates on current events, as well as providing links to help people connect with other members and

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projects throughout the world. Globalization has offered this organization a framework within which to create themselves as citizens of the world and this rhetoric is reflected in the terms they use to describe themselves.

Sōka Gakkai communicates with its members through the written word. In Japan the organization publishes *Seikyō Shimbun* a daily newspaper (Dobbelaere 2000:251) which has a circulation of 800,000 (Komeito 2000). An SGI magazine comes out monthly and quarterly, and the *World Tribune* is published weekly in the United States. Publications are available in paper form, and also through the internet. Extensive websites are available for members to keep in touch with both local and global affairs. These are coordinated through the Sōka Gakkai International site, with links to national and local groups in a variety of languages. One interesting section is that of university clubs throughout the world, including the student group at the University of Alberta. Local organizations are listed with addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses available so that interested individuals can contact the group.

The SGI website includes information on Buddhism in general, and the biography of Nichiren as well as an outline of his teachings. Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda are profiled, and the general history of the movement is briefly documented. Information on current issues is available and the SGI's monthly publication, containing articles about work being done by various groups, is featured. This newsletter contains articles about current work being done by various groups within Sōka Gakkai. Articles are polished and articulate, revealing a level of sophistication in keeping with a successful, high-profile, and contemporary global movement. Sōka Gakkai – Canada publishes a monthly magazine, the *New Century*, which carries inspirational stories, study guides, a children's section, and general information about Canadian and international concerns. Another feature, one that that seems typical of the organization's strategy, is testimonials from members whose lives have been improved through their association with Sōka Gakkai. It seems clear by the content of this website, that it is used to keep members connected to local and global

concerns. This appears directed toward, not only individual goals of self-realization, but also toward collective goals of social and environmental activism.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) argues that people are increasingly able to understand themselves as members of a global community. He writes that "mass migrations [are] hardly a new feature of human history. But when it is juxtaposed with the rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations, we have a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities" (2000:14). In the last few decades, people are increasingly able to live in various settings, while, through mass-media, they also have access to diverse settings throughout the world. Not only is information available, but there is new discourse, and this has opened up the opportunity for people to consider themselves as members of both a local and a global community. This discourse includes ideas about multiculturalism, economic liberalization, human rights, and refugee claims (2000:199). These ideas do not promote cultural homogeneity in the face of globalization, but according to Appadurai, they do alter ideas about constructed boundaries and create increasingly complex and overlapping identities in the cultural economy (2000:32). That SGI understands these concepts is evidenced by the way in which it constructs the rhetoric of global community through its communication networks and commitment to encouraging personal connections among members throughout the world.

The emphasis on diversity within the organization, as well as the educational programs, provide opportunity for communication through personal networks at the local and international levels, but the organization's gift for communication is best seen in its network of publications, websites, video-recordings, and educational programs. Mellucci (1996) argues that "Social movements of modern and premodern historical periods were deeply rooted in the material conditions of their environment, and their capacity for a symbolic elaboration of this specific context was comparatively lower than it can be today. The capacity for symbolization and for cultural representation of social action evolves directly in proportion to the social capacity to produce symbolic resources. A society which is highly dependent on its material environment consequently possesses a lower capacity to produce an

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autonomous cultural sphere" (p.109). If this is true, then Sōka Gakkai's choice to downplay the importance of material culture and sacred geography may be as important as its choice to influence the world through education and its sophisticated communications network.

These ideas fit well with Sōka Gakkai's goals of creating global citizens and encouraging its members to consider themselves as belonging to a global community. Many members that I have met already understand themselves as part of a global community. The diversity within the Edmonton group is a good example. Some are immigrants from many places, others are international students, and many have traveled extensively, often within the context of their membership in Sōka Gakkai. As one student from the University of Alberta expressed it, she is looking forward to going home on her break, but she has commitments, friends, and obligations in Edmonton as well. She is connected to both communities, and, for her, Sōka Gakkai strengthens her sense of community in both locations.

Machacek and Wilson (2000:2) argue that one reason for studying Sōka Gakkai is to understand the changing position of religion in the world. Religion is increasingly involved in issues of social change, and the focus of this activism is increasingly global. Marx and McAdam (1994:124) echo this sentiment and cite religious organizations as frequent sources for both the ideology and structure for new social movements. Along with this is the increasing emphasis on lay-involvement over monastic tradition and authority. As Queen and King (1996) point out, engaged Buddhism, emphasizing social change and engagement with the problems of this world, is increasing throughout Asia, and Sōka Gakkai, while more economically stable, more closely aligned with mainstream politics, and more aggressively visible in the global political context, is one example of this socially engaged Buddhism. This sets Sōka Gakkai into an existing context of social reform based in the non-violent and inclusive tenets of Buddhist tradition.

Marx and McAdam (1994:122) argue that social movements will continue to flourish. Sōka Gakkai fits well with their ideas about the "globalization of protest", which these authors assert is ideologically driven, of an increasingly international

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character, enhanced by the available structures of global political institutions such as the United Nations, and supported by overwhelming advances in communication technology. They believe that ideology is increasingly relevant as a motivation for collective activism, and assert that social change is possible, especially if the goals are diffuse and encompass broad objectives based in a strong ideological framework.

It appears that Sōka Gakkai agrees with that assessment. Sōka Gakkai estimates membership outside of Japan at 1.5 million in 186 countries, and claims that this number is growing through propagation efforts centered on the promise of personal transformation and social reform (Ikeda 2004a). Members believe that *kōsen-rufu*, or the spread of Buddhism throughout the world, can effect positive change in our world, and that if enough people are personally transformed to a higher level of existence, then a global community based in happiness and respect can be achieved. The organization does not look at globalization as a homogenization of culture, but as an opportunity for humankind to recognize collective potential for harmony.

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CONCLUSIONS

There are many reasons for studying Sōka Gakkai. As a social movement it has been particularly successful in creating a large, diverse, and geographically scattered membership, and it also appears to have successfully managed the transition from an emergent to a mature movement. Melucci (1996:4) argues that social movements afford many possibilities for analysis and these include: ideology, processes of mobilization, organizational forms, leadership, and forms of communication.

Ideology has always defined the group; members identify with the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, even since the dramatic split with Nichiren Shōshū. For Sōka Gakkai members, *mappō* is the present as foretold by the historical Buddha and Nichiren is the Buddha of the present. The road to salvation is through enlightenment, in this world, of enough people to overbalance evil and bring peace and prosperity in our time. This state can be accomplished through faith in the Lotus Sutra as expressed in chanting *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō*, study, and *shakubuku*. Practice is clearly laid out, with twice daily prayers, frequent meetings, and opportunities to participate in both educational programs and social activism. Nichiren taught that collective action, through politics, could reverse *mappō* and create paradise on earth. This message has not changed and Sōka Gakkai emphasizes the power of personal self-realization and a commitment to social issues for all of its members. The organization brings this ideology into practice through chanting, education, cultural activities, and political action.

Sōka Gakkai uses history and tradition, and as the Lotus Sutra teaches, adapts them to meet the needs of a contemporary world. Unlike the monastic order of Nichiren Shōshū, Sōka Gakkai does not seek to find refuge apart from the concerns of the secular world. Members are encouraged to engage with this world, to improve their own situation, and to understand themselves as global citizens who can make a

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positive difference in this world. This ideology has evolved during the seven decades of the organization's existence, and it has done so in order to meet the changing needs of its membership.

Early mobilization, after the war, was extreme and gave the organization a reputation as aggressive and sometimes violent, but over time, Sōka Gakkai has labored to change that reputation. While there are still those who question the idea that coercive *shakubuku* is a thing of the past, members, while not denying that some members might be overzealous in propagation techniques, assert that this is not the official policy and that members who overstep the boundaries are sanctioned by the organization. That aside, mobilization in the post-war period was extremely successful and membership numbers swelled in Japan. During this period, the organization laid the foundation for future growth by establishing both an economic, organizational structure, and political arm that has carried it into the present. Sōka Gakkai began to expand its horizons outside of Japan, not only through a growing international membership, but also by the creation of diplomatic relationships, a focus on global issues, and aligning itself with prestigious organizations like the United Nations. This move to more inclusive, ecumenical, and broad global issues created problems with the priesthood of Nichiren Shōshū and eventually led to the schism between the two groups, a move that created both problems and opportunities for Sōka Gakkai.

Leadership has been a central issue for the organization. James White (1970:291) predicted a possible schism between the well-educated members Sōka Gakkai was trying to attract, and members from less privileged backgrounds. This issue is often expressed in concerns about leadership and remains current. At the local level, from my observations, leadership is based on ability and the resources available to provide guidance. Sharing responsibility is encouraged, and there appears to be a conscious effort to spread the tasks among as many members as possible. As president, Ikeda continues to be a controversial figure, revered by the members, honored by many prestigious and powerful people and organizations, yet reviled by his critics (mostly in Japan). He is a frequent target of the media and is

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constantly guarded by security officers. As there is neither a clear successor, nor a clear process for choosing one, there is concern about the future of leadership within the organization.

When Toda died, there was speculation that the organization would fade away without his charismatic and popular presence, but Ikeda has shown himself as more than equal to the task of taking the organization into the 21st century. His energy and presence are of great importance to members throughout the world. While Sōka Gakkai prepares all members to act as mentors and, through its emphasis on education, enables people to improve themselves through participation at many levels, leadership itself seems to be a contentious issue in a society that values egalitarianism, yet is hierarchically structured to maintain solidarity within a diverse and widespread membership. What is clear is that, when the time comes, there will be no shortage of capable people with the skills for the job. The question is likely more one of who will command the respect and support of the membership. Another question, which is not asked in any of the literature I have seen, concerns the role of women in future leadership. Already there has been criticism from the Women's Division about the lack of female leaders in top jobs within the organization (Usui 2000:153-204). While a few countries, including Canada, have had women at the highest levels of responsibility, generally, men occupy the most important and influential positions. It will be interesting to see how these issues of leadership and the role of women develop in the next decades as the organization continues to spread outside of Japan.

Sōka Gakkai's communication networks set it apart from many social movements. The publishing capabilities and attention to education, have allowed the organization to disseminate its message throughout the world. Many members are involved with the arts and have used their talents, resources, and connections to help produce educational materials of exceptional quality. Websites are sophisticated, easily accessed, and a constant source of information to connect membership throughout the world. If, as Melucci says, communication is a key factor in creating ideology and constructing solidarity within a diverse membership, then Sōka

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Gakkai's attention to its communication networks is well justified. Again, Ikeda is an important image in this construction; his encouragements, his visage, and his ideology are constantly presented to the membership through video-recordings and printed materials.

In 1970, sociologist James White studied Sōka Gakkai, and his findings contrast with the more recent writers quoted in this paper, most of whom of are very positive about the organization. White saw Sōka Gakkai as a marginalized organization, preying on the weakness of people who had little power and were susceptible to the promise of health and wealth in a troubled world. His conclusions seem almost prophetic in that he argued for increased political involvement and questioned adherence to the exclusivist doctrines of Nichiren Shōshū, which he felt would hinder the organization's ability to attract a broader membership. He argued that as the organization became more stable, members would lose some of the early enthusiasm, requiring that Sōka Gakkai set itself up to fit in with the established institutions of society, perhaps even as a "denominational form of religious organization" (White 1970:291). This has proved to be an important issue in attracting and keeping members, particularly outside of Japan.

If Sōka Gakkai continues to focus on creating a global membership, it will be interesting to watch the relationship between chapters in Japan and those outside of Japan. At present, while groups outside of Japan relate back to the central organization out of Japan, members in Japan tend to focus more on the organization within their own country. It is possible that this might change as educational and cultural institutes in Europe, North America, Asia, and Africa continue to develop and create new relationships within the global community. Membership outside of Japan may become increasingly independent of the parent organization, or the Japanese membership may have increasing opportunities for exchange with members outside of their own country. This is already a focus for Sōka University, but with two universities already open in the United States, there is increasing potential for this face-to-face exchange of ideas and collective action.

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It is likely that these changes will be heavily dependent on recruitment, not only the numbers, but also the demographics. Many Sōka Gakkai members in Japan are aging, and while the organization claims to attract significant numbers of young people, there is a risk that recruitment will not surpass attrition as older members die or become frail and unable to participate to any extent. With increasing emphasis on social diversity, the social agenda may shift to focus more on local and national projects, such as youth programs against urban violence, gay rights advocacy, and literacy. These programs are already in place for many chapters in the United States.

It will also be interesting to watch how the organization will choose to exert its influence on power structures in various countries, particularly when the relationship between Kōmeitō and Sōka Gakkai has been so contentious in Japan. Will members become involved in the political structures, or will they be content to work behind the scenes with grassroots movements that influence through cultural and educational programs?

Sōka Gakkai appears to be thriving, not only in Japan, but throughout the world. However, even if members number in the millions, it would difficult to say that the Society is a fully established institution. These numbers, while impressive, do not represent a majority in any country, and Sōka Gakkai practice remains both unconventional and peripheral to mainstream ideologies. It has however, evolved from an emergent social movement into one that displays many of the features of a mature movement, which Marx and McAdam characterize as "larger, less spontaneous, better organized, and largely led by formal organizations that have gradually come to replace the ad hoc committees and informal groups that directed the movement at the outset" (1994:95). It has aligned itself with such prestigious groups as the United Nations, engaged in mainstream politics, and created an elaborate bureaucracy to support its large international membership.

McAdam (1988:52) asserts that a social movement will have greater impact if it addresses broad social issues rather that narrowly focused local concerns. If this is true, Sōka Gakkai policies of human rights, environmental protection, and world peace have the potential, not only to attract new members, but also to effect real

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change in the world. The message is appealing; it is easy to believe in *mappō* in a world touched by epidemics, war, and social injustice; Sōka Gakkai offers a solution accessible to anyone. Buddhism has always been a religion of missionaries who have taken their message out and adapted it to the needs of people in distant lands. Sōka Gakkai has taken Nichiren Buddhism and created a message accommodated to the needs of the present and, while the organization is generally understood as peripheral to mainstream culture, it has made significant progress in making its voice heard throughout the world.

GLOSSARY

Daimoku – *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō.*

Gohonzon – a *mandala* used as the object of worship. It represents the universe and focuses the energy of meditation to reflect the world of the worshiper. The *Daigohonzon* is the *gohonzon* inscribed by Nichiren in the 13th century before his death. It is his conception of the universe and the original is kept at Taiseki-ji, the most important temple of Nichiren Shōshū. *Dai* is an honorific meaning large or great.

Gongyo – the practice of chanting *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō* and selected parts of the Lotus Sutra daily before the *gohonzon.*

Nichiren Daishonin – The word *Dai* (great) *sho* (religious) *nin* (person) is an honorific emphasizing Nichiren's importance.

Kōmeitō – (Clean Government Party) political party, associated with Sōka Gakkai, was established in 1964. Its policies include: (1) to establish a benevolent society based on respect, (2) independent and peaceful diplomacy, (3) respect for human rights, and (4) parliamentary democracy.

Kōsen-rufu – the spread of Buddhism throughout the world

Mappō – (The Latter Day of the Law) is the third period of Buddhist Law, a time in which people have lost the teachings of Buddha. It is a time of political and social chaos, and Nichiren believed that the 13th century represented the beginning of that time. Only through faith in the Lotus Sutra could humans gain enlightenment and create a paradise in this world.

Nichiren Shōshū Sōka Gakkai of America (NSA) – Founded in 1960, NSA is a recognized religious organization in the United States. Its headquarters are in California but there are branches throughout the country.

Ōbutumyōgō – the union of worldly matters and Buddhist teaching

Shakubuku – is the practice of bringing new members into Sōka Gakkai. This is a central practice, offering peace and happiness to oneself and to others.

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