From Tokyo to Boston, Brazil, Britain, and Beyond: How Japanese Religious Movement Soka Gakkai International Adapted to a 21st-Century World

Arianna Regalado

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Abstract

My religion honors thesis will examine the roots of Nichiren Buddhism in Japan, founded by Japanese Buddhist monk Nichiren Daishonin (1222-1282) in the 13th century. I will explain how this branch of Mahayana Buddhism has managed not only to survive over hundreds of years but grow, branching out overseas from Japan and amassing millions of followers from Brazil to Boston. Japanese Buddhist priest Nichiren was born in 1222 in the Chiba Prefecture of Japan and lived during the Kamakura period of 1185-1333. He is known for his emphasis on the study of the Buddhist sacred text, the *Lotus Sutra*, as the sole method for attaining enlightenment. Based on his teachings, Nichiren Buddhism was formed as a branch of Mahayana Buddhism. In modern-day Japan, Nichiren Buddhism encompasses traditional schools and modern lay movements like Soka Gakkai. Soka Gakkai, a Japanese Buddhist religious movement and the largest of the Nichiren Buddhist groups, has grown to a membership of more than 12 million in 192 countries worldwide since its inception in 1930.

Part of my thesis will examine Nichiren and critique his interpretations of the *Lotus Sutra* as the most crucial component of enlightenment. I will critically analyze the evolution of Nichiren Buddhism and its development as a branch of Mahayana Buddhism through the vehicle of Soka Gakkai International as the largest Nichiren Buddhist group. I will conclude by exploring the tensions between the tenets of Nichiren Buddhism and Soka Gakkai International, primarily the dissonance of preaching a religion of renunciation whilst being one of the largest and most powerful political and economic forces in contemporary Japan, with a net worth in the billions of dollars and at the helm of the third most powerful political party of Japan, the Komeito Party founded in 1964.
While the bulk of the literature exploring Nichiren Buddhism and Soka Gakkai has been written about the early 20th century and focuses on the early beginnings of Soka Gakkai’s success solely in Japan, my thesis will also include analysis on the modern-day movement around the world. From the creation of Soka University in Malibu, California to Soka Gakkai International branches located in the United Kingdom, Soka Gakkai has made a tremendous effort to appeal to a vast number of the global population, particularly young, college-aged groups, in order to sustain the movement long-term. My thesis will examine Soka Gakkai’s foundations in Japan as well as how the organization expanded globally by looking at their branches in the United Kingdom, Brazil, Italy, Singapore, and Boston and by answering the following pertinent questions: how has Soka Gakkai International been successful in recruiting and adapting to a modern audience spanning over 100 countries? Does Soka Gakkai’s enormous power and influence in the political, economic, and social spheres globally hinder the true message of Nichiren Buddhism as a Mahayana tradition focused on worldly renunciation? If so, is this the kind of compromise the movement has had to make in order to survive and thrive in a 21st-century world? What other compromises has the organization made in the quest for more followers? In my thesis, I will analyze how this religious organization developed and molded itself for a dynamic audience in order to survive. What changes or compromises, if any, did this religious institution have to make in order to thrive in this world? What can we learn from the way this institution developed in order to fit people’s contemporary lives? What messages are lost (or gained) in this modern translation of religious sacred texts like the *Lotus Sutra*?

In order to formulate a strong thesis, I analyzed statistical data on the demographics of Soka Gakkai’s membership over time. I have also conducted fieldwork at Soka Gakkai
International’s New England Chapter, located in Brookline, Massachusetts. Additionally, I participated in the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue seminars on nuclear abolition in order to assess whether the modern-day practices and educational institutions align with the 13th-century Nichiren teachings. With a balance of recent sources, such as the aforementioned qualitative statistical data on member demographics, fieldwork, personal accounts of Soka Gakkai practices, and scholarly texts, such as academic literature and Nichiren works, I will develop a robust argument on the strategies Soka Gakkai International utilized in order to amass a following for Nichiren.
Chapter One

The Origins of Soka Gakkai

Makiguchi and Toda

Soka Gakkai is a Japanese Buddhist religious organization founded in 1930 by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, an elementary school teacher. Born in 1871 in northern Japan, Makiguchi completed his teacher’s training and became an elementary school teacher in Hokkaido. He would soon became the principal of a Tokyo school and would continue in this position until he retired after more than twenty years. As an educator, Makiguchi was inspired by Nichiren Buddhism to write the first volume of Soka kyoikugaku taikei or “A Theory of Value-Creating Pedagogy” which would serve as the foundation for Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, translated as “Value-Creating Educational Society.”

Makiguchi came to be affiliated with Nichiren Shoshu as a result of his meeting with Sokei Mitano in 1928. Mitano was a principal and educator like Makiguchi who took it upon himself to spread the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism. As a result of this meeting, Makiguchi founded Soka Kyoiku Gakkai as a way to promote his education reform movement and religious movement. Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was comprised of a few dozen members and grew to a few hundred by 1940.¹ According to Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at the University of Tokyo, Noriyoshi Tamaru, Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was threatened with violent erasure in 1943 due to the Japanese nationalist sentiments caused by the war. Makiguchi, holding strong to his faith for Nichiren Buddhism and refusing to pay his respects to the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu at

¹ Nariyoshi Tamaru in Bryan Wilson’s Global Citizens, 32.
the Ise Grand Shrine, was imprisoned in July 1943 under the premise of “breaking the law for the preservation of national security.” Makiguchi would eventually perish in prison on November 18, 1944.

After Makiguchi’s death, his loyal follower Josei Toda positioned himself at the helm of Soka Kyoiku Gakkai and served as president until his death on April 2, 1958. Like Makiguchi, Toda was born in northern Japan and became a teacher in Tokyo where they met. Toda worked under Makiguchi as a head teacher and they soon became very close. Toda even edited Makiguchi’s volume of *Soka kyoikugaku taikei* and began his journey as a devout Nichiren Buddhist with Makiguchi’s guidance. Like Makiguchi, Toda was imprisoned during World War II until his release in July 1945. After his release, he changed the name of the organization from Soka Kyoiku Gakkai to Soka Gakkai. On the anniversary of Makiguchi’s death in 1946, he convened the first general assembly in Tokyo to reinstate the religious movement Makiguchi had founded before the war and which both figures were imprisoned for.

Because of the damage and displacement caused by the war, Toda essentially had to start Soka Gakkai anew again. Toda was able to grow Soka Gakkai from a small following to a national organization. During his presidency, in the first years numbers where recorded, Soka Gakkai had roughly 500 families as members in 1951 and by 1958, the year of Toda’s death and last year of presidency, he had 750,000 families registered as members.

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3 Soka Gakkai concentrated on recruiting families as opposed to individual members and counted as such.
Foundations: Makiguchi’s Ideas and Doctrine

Because Soka Gakkai began as an education reform movement and came to incorporate the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism into its doctrine, Soka Gakkai embodies an interesting dualism, as it is both an ideological and religious movement.\(^4\) From the beginning, Makiguchi believed that there was a “supreme principle to render his life meaningful”\(^5\) and pursued it endlessly. He believed that this principle could only be given to him through reason and not given by an external entity or force. In *Soka kyoikugaku taikei*, Makiguchi wrote about his “Theory of Value.” This theory is based on the premise that “values, like scientific truth, should first and foremost rest on reason and evidence. Second, values should have the form of “law” instead of “person.” And third, religious value should also comprehend morality and science.”\(^6\) Makiguchi, after studying Nichiren’s teachings, concluded that Nichiren was the teacher of the authentic truth. Makiguchi also concluded that Nichiren harbored similar philosophies as his criteria for true religion was “reason, empirical facts, and sacred scriptures.”\(^7\) As a result, Makiguchi believed that Nichiren Buddhism was in line with his own core beliefs.

According to the Dean and Professor of Education and Anthropology at the International University of Kyoto, Dayle Bethel, there is an entire belief system that Makiguchi upheld called dissident tradition. After studying Makiguchi’s “value-creating education,” the system upon which Soka Gakkai was originally built, for more than twenty-five years, he concluded that Makiguchi’s basic principles of human learning as outlined by the dissident tradition he adhered to are as follows:

\(^4\) Nariyoshi Tamaru in Bryan Wilson’s Global Citizens, 35.
\(^6\) Makiguchi as quoted by Nariyoshi Tamaru in Bryan Wilson’s Global Citizens, 36.
\(^7\) Nariyoshi Tamaru in Bryan Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 36.
1. “Education must nurture a sense of wonder, awe, and appreciation for life within each learner through interaction with the natural and social worlds.

2. Education should enable discovery of self.

3. It must support learners in the actualization of innate potential--the source of a sense of purpose and personal destiny.

4. Education involves a natural, organic relationship between generations.

5. It is rooted in a sense of place, and a spiritually nourishing traditional wisdom.

6. Education should nurture an appreciation of and love for work.

7. It places responsibility on the learner to choose the what, where, and when of learning.

8. Finally, it takes places in the context of a local community, whose resources provide the curriculum for learning and whose members actively participate in the learning process.”

Makiguchi, along with his contemporaries who upheld this same dissident tradition, realized that “the factory model of compulsory schooling created by industrial capitalism and economic nationalism leads inevitably to cultural, intellectual, and spiritual damage.” These two driving concerns of Makiguchi about economic nationalism and industrial capitalism dehumanizing the education system, instilled a sense of urgency in him to create an education reform movement through Soka Gakkai. He used the organization as a way to build a more humane approach to learning that encompassed the whole child as opposed to the factory model churning students through to become cogs in an economic machine that he so wished to avoid.

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According to Dayle Bethel, three principles resonate throughout Makiguchi’s works that are essential to his theory of “value-creating education.” These three principles are encompassed by the following:

1. The Need for Human Bonding with the Natural World
2. The Need for Community, And
3. The Need for Character-Nurturing Education

These principles present the ideas that Makiguchi embedded into Soka Gakkai as its foundation in 1930 in order to promote an education reform movement to bring back the humanity to Japan’s education system right before World War II. Before the war, these teachings made up the foundations of Soka Gakkai’s ideology in respect to the education reform Makiguchi tried to execute in Japan. It is important to fully conceptualize who Makiguchi was and what he believed in in order to understand Soka Gakkai’s ideological foundation as originally an education reform movement.

The Need for Human Bonding with the Natural World

In regards to the first principle, Makiguchi believed that humans have an interconnected relationship with nature. In one of Makiguchi’s works translated by a team under Bethel, Jinsei chirigaku, Makiguchi writes: “How, then, can we observe our surroundings? How can we make contact with the earth? We are born of the earth; we are inspired by the earth; we die on the earth; the earth is our home.”\(^{10}\) Jinsei chirigaku was a compilation of Makiguchi’s notes and ideas about the way humans interact, shape, and are connected to nature and the environments in which we live. The question of how to observe these surroundings and intentionally ponder the

\(^{10}\) Makiguchi as quoted by Bethel in Wilson’s Global Citizens, 45.
idea of how to connect this earth which we have made our home is at the forefront of Makiguchi’s teachings. Makiguchi believed strongly in the idea that humans are connected to the environment and should empathize with our natural surroundings. He explains this concept in Jinsei chirigaku:

“[We should] regard people, animals, trees, rivers, rocks, or stones in the same light as ourselves and realize that we have much in common with them all. Such interaction causes us to feel, if not consciously think, “if I were in their (or its) place, what would I feel...or do?” Sympathetic interactions occur, therefore, when you regard or feel another person or object that you are in contact with as a part of yourself or as one of your kind. You share experience with that person or object and are able to place yourself in the position of that person or object.”

Makiguchi’s radical notions of empathy in connection to the natural world shines a light on his approach to what it means to be a better human. This conscious thought about the world and our role within it is central to his questioning of what it means to be a whole, moral person. The interconnectedness of nature and the importance of empathizing with the human and material worlds around us demonstrate how important this principle of human bonding with the natural world is to Makiguchi.

The Need for Community

Secondly, Makiguchi stressed the idea of one’s need for community. His belief was that human connection was essential to our nature and the formation of society. Makiguchi wrote about the

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11 Ibid as quoted by Bethel in Wilson’s Global Citizens, 45.
need for humans to feel connected to each other in order to create meaning and purpose within ourselves in relation to one another:

“It is our nature as human beings to form societies. No one can live totally alone. It is through association in society that we can provide not only for our basic needs and security, but for everything that makes our lives fulfilling and rewarding. This realization leads to the universalization of sympathetic feelings that were initially toward a specific individual or object.”

In this sense, Makiguchi is speaking to what he believes is the human’s innate need for togetherness and fulfillment. Through his words, we can infer that Makiguchi valued society as a way in which to bring about this sense of community, purpose, and fulfilment for the humans within it through the creation of interlocking relationships between one and the other in order to promote self-actualization. Makiguchi then relates these connections back to this feeling of empathy presented earlier through the principle about the need for human bonding with nature. These “sympathetic feelings” allude to humans’ ability to feel for and with others, whether inanimate objects, animals, or human beings.

Moreover, Makiguchi also expressed a sense of debt and gratitude in regards to humanity and nature that resonates throughout his works. He wrote:

“Growing awareness of our indebtedness to our society gives rise to feelings of appreciation and a sense of social responsibility within us. Beginning our very personal relationships...our sympathetic concern and appreciation expands to include the larger society and, ultimately, the whole world.”

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Makiguchi describes feelings one should have towards the world and society. Feelings of owing a debt to the society in which we grow and a sense of obligation and responsibility to that society are important to Makiguchi and the way he thinks of humans in the world. The process of forming “sympathetic concern and appreciation” are essential to the development of a larger society and the entire world according to Makiguchi. In his teachings, we learn that Soka Gakkai is founded upon the strong premise of these ideas of community, our place in society, what society means to us, and what we owe to society through a sense of social responsibility.

Makiguchi also stresses the idea of “rootedness” in his works. The idea of being “rooted” in a specific place that has meaning and is where we were born as described by Makiguchi:

“I arrived at a conviction that the natural beginning point of understanding the world we live in and our relationship to it is that community of persons, land, and culture, which gave us birth; that community, in fact, which gave us our very lives and started us on the path toward becoming the persons we are. In other words, that community which has given us our rootedness as human beings. The importance of this rootedness and personal identity given us by our native cultural community, our homeland, can scarcely be overemphasized.”

In this passage, Makiguchi illustrates the world he imagines for Soka Gakkai. Makiguchi sees the world as a community: of humans, animals, and the natural environment. There is a sense of obligation that comes along with being born into this community that is then repaid through social responsibility and gratitude throughout the rest of our lives. Because the community “gave us our very lives” there are sentiments of obligation over this community, in which Makiguchi

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14 Makiguchi as quoted by Bethel in Wilson’s Global Citizens, 52.
calls “rootedness,” that gives us a feeling of belonging, purpose, and self-actualization that Makiguchi calls “value-creating.” Therefore, it is no surprise, given how strongly Makiguchi feels about these principles that Soka Gakkai is translated as “Value Creation Society.” The value that we gain and create comes from this community we are “rooted” in and which we are given a personal identity.

Additionally, there appears to be a symbiotic relationship between Makiguchi’s idea of the person and the community. The community gives the person life, purpose, personal identity, a place to call their own, and a beginning towards “value-creating” or self-actualization. This idea of “value-creating” and community-building is essential to Soka Gakkai as an international organization with various people who seek a type of community. This idea of a community can be applied to a range of cultures and communities and is not necessarily only applicable to Japan. Therefore, this flexible framework of principles can, was, and is applied to an array of countries and persons as Soka Gakkai promoted the idea of understanding place in the world as related to persons, land, and culture. We will later see in subsequent chapters the way Soka Gakkai established these core principles in Brazil, Britain and even New England (with the New England Chapter located in Brookline, Massachusetts) as three case studies.

Makiguchi’s conviction that persons should create community between themselves and land, culture, and people is also central to the education reform movement he promoted through Soka Gakkai and his conception of a holistic education. Makiguchi describes the role communities play in school and learning and the detriment to education systems when the idea of community is taken out of the picture due to implemented government policies:
“In the days before there were schools, the prevailing method of guiding young people to the proper roles in the general scheme of life was an extended home life, whereby one apprenticed at the family trade throughout one’s formative years, with this training supplemented by things learned from the local community. Then came the Meiji period with its modern education and the spread of schools...Everyone was taken by the hand and dragged off to schools, and soon the other two schemes of learning fell into disuse. This was the age of the school reigning unchallenged and omnipotent.”

Makiguchi provides a timeline of the evolution of education in Japan. He observes the idea of community disappearing from the education system as new, imposing education structures are executed by the Meiji period between 1868 and 1912. Makiguchi describes the loss of the “local community” that was replaced by modern education. Makiguchi’s two concerns, economic nationalism and industrial capitalism that would lead to a factory style, one-size-fits-all education system in Japan would be the primary motivation for Makiguchi to form Soka Gakkai as a protest and reform against the policies of the time.

Additionally, he writes about how Japan has attempted to repent and forgo these education policies through other alternatives in order to establish this sense of community Japan had lost. Interestingly, Makiguchi explains the role of the educational institution and its place in a community that exists in separate spheres--school, home, and community--and how they should be interconnected.

“Only in the recent years have we seen the grave error of our ways and tried to fill in the gap with various kinds of adjunct education and youth groups for extra curricular activity...From this point on, school education must be aware of its own share of the
educational role...It must cooperate with the other two areas of education, the home and
the community, each with its own expertise...These three areas of education must link
together in an orderly system of mutual complementarity.”

School education is described by Makiguchi as holding a responsibility and awareness in regards
to cooperating with the other facets of students’ lives. These connections between the
community, home, and school are essential to Makiguchi who believes in “value-creating” and
self-actualization through the community. Through this passage, we can understand how deeply
troubled Makiguchi was in seeing these changes take place in institutions of learning. Without
community, how will students be cognisant of their personal identity, purpose, and, as a result,
self-actualize their true potential as a human being? These components are central to
Makiguchi’s teachings and there is no surprise Makiguchi founded Soka Gakkai as an urgent
need for community bonding that schools were not meeting. To this day, Soka Gakkai has
various youth divisions and student coalitions who meet in designated public spaces to discuss,
chant, and form the community Makiguchi found so vital to human growth.

The Need for Character-Nurturing Education

Makiguchi believed that good institutions (defined by adhering to the three principles and
the dissident tradition of education outlined previously) would create good people who followed
and lived by these principles. He believed that human nature was benevolent but dormant and
that goodness and ability to become great was awakened only when the person was seen as a
holistic human who needed an awareness of nature, community, and autonomy over one’s
learning. Makiguchi explains how students were “force-fed” information and stifled by the
current education system:
“The detrimental effects of force-feeding a small child can be easily seen because of the small body’s inability to metabolise more than it can digest. The excessive bulk passes through the child’s system, an undigested waste. Or worse, it may lodge in the digestive tract, slowly putrefying and poisoning the whole system. Unfortunately, the effects of psychological toxification in children caused by the forced learning of masses of unintelligible information are not immediately visible.”

Makiguchi vividly illustrates the overwhelming amount of information students are forced to consume by schools beginning in the Meiji period in an effort to churn them into cogs essential for economic nationalism and industrial capitalism. He was ahead of his time in observing the aftermath of this education system. Motivated by these observations, Soka Gakkai served as a form of protest from teachers and lay followers against systems that stifle and who hope to work towards a vision for interconnectedness that Makiguchi cultivated in his work *Soka kyoikugaku taikei*, “The Theory of Value” in which he laid down the foundations of the organization.

Makiguchi had a distinct idea of what education should be like. His idea of education involved guidance, mentorship, and self-actualization. He describes the process of education according to his following definition:

“[The purpose of education] is not to transfer knowledge; it is to guide the learning process, to put responsibility for study into the students’ own hands. It is not the piecemeal merchandising of information; it is the provision of keys that will allow people to unlock the vault of knowledge on their own. It does not consist in pilfering the intellectual property amassed by others through no additional effort of one’s own; it would rather place people on their own path of discovery and invention. The words have
been resounding in the ears of educators like ourselves since the days of Comenius and Pestalozzi, but they have yet to be put into real practice.”

Makiguchi presents the importance of student autonomy in his definition of what the purpose of education is. He sees education as an autonomous journey the student undergoes with the guidance of a community to create, innovate, explore, and discover the natural world and the world inside themselves. It is apparent that Makiguchi is nostalgic for earlier education theories and practices and was determined to revolt against anything less than his idea of what education should be.

Precisely for this reason, he created Soka Gakkai as a form of resistance towards what he saw as crushing human character by helping others create a sense of purpose.

“Education consists of finding the value within the living environment, thereby discovering physical and psychological principles that govern our lives and eventually applying these new-found principles in real life to create new value. In sum, it is the guided acquisition of skills of observation, comprehension, and application.”

Soka Gakkai was founded on the premise of being both an education reform movement and a religious movement. Quite literally, Soka Gakkai is translated as “Value Creation Society” that alludes to Makiguchi’s emphasis on education as a process in which humans create value, or meaning, for their lives.

Conclusion

Ultimately, it is vital to understand Makiguchi’s three principles of education reform in order to comprehend the foundation upon which Soka Gakkai is built. Originally an education

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16 Makiguchi as quoted by Bethel in Willson’s Global Citizens, 59.
reform movement, Soka Gakkai would transform into a religious movement under Josei Toda’s presidency after World War II when he served from 1951 to 1958. The organization would, however, never lose the emphasis on education, community, and nature that Makiguchi laid out as his core principles for the foundation. Thus, these principles are the foundation in which all further doctrine would be built upon and it is important to analysis in depth to obtain the full understanding of the purpose and mission of Soka Gakkai as an organization.

Before its rapid global expansion, Soka Gakkai was fiercely nationalistic to its core and saw Japan as the center of the universe. This ethnocentric stance had to be carefully dissipated by successors over the almost hundred years of Soka Gakkai’s existence.

In my next chapter, I will explore where this fiercely nationalistic sentiment originates by presenting Nichiren Daishonin, the 13th century Buddhist monk which formed the religion Soka Gakkai ardently follows, Nichiren Buddhism. I will also present the tensions between creating an international organization while harboring an ethnocentric perception of self and how honorary president Daisaku Ikeda changed the organization to appeal to other cultures and countries to exceed expectations about the potential for Soka Gakkai’s rapid growth in the late 20th century and early 21st century.
Chapter Two

Nichiren and *The Lotus Sutra:*

His Life, Beliefs, and Vision for Japan

Nichiren: His Life

Nichiren was born in 1222 to a fisherman’s family in the southeastern corner of Japan in the village of Kominato, a fishing village on the Pacific coast of the Chiba peninsula. In subsequent letters written in his adulthood, Nichiren describes his childhood as a humble one, “I am the son of an outcast, a man who lived by the sea in the Tojo district of Awa, in Japan’s barbaric east. In this life I was born a humble and poor man. I am the son of a fisherman. I am

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not a man from the central provinces of Japan, nor am I the son of a provincial warrior, but rather a child of the people from a remote province.”

When Nichiren was eleven years old, he was sent to a monastery on a hill known as Kiyozumi or “Clear Luminosity.” He eventually became an ordained monk when he was fifteen years old and given the name “Rencho” or Lotus-Eternal.” Nichiren was dissatisfied with the way Buddhism was being taught, writing, “My wish has always been to sow the seeds for the attainment of Buddhahood, and to escape the fetters of births and deaths. For this purpose I once practiced, according to the custom of most fellow-Buddhists, the method of repeating the name of Amita Buddha, putting faith in his redeeming power. But, since doubt had begun to arise in my mind as to the truth of that belief, I committed myself to a vow that I would study all the branches of Buddhism known in Japan and learn fully what their diverse teachings were.” Due to the doubts Nichiren felt about Buddhism, he spiraled into a religious crisis on a spiritual and intellectual level.

Dissatisfied and doubtful, he decided to look elsewhere to learn about Buddhism. When he was seventeen years old, Nichiren decided to study under a teacher of Amita-Buddhism in Kamakura. Afterwards, he concluded that Kamakura would not be the place where he would learn the truth about Buddhist doctrine and traveled to Hiei, the center of Buddhist learning at the time. Nichiren studied in Hiei for ten years from 1243 to 1253. The question he intended to solve was: what is the true form and the unique truth of Buddhism? According to Nichiren’s writings, after his exhaustive study of Buddhism, he came to the conclusion that there exists only one

18 Rodd, 3.
19 Anesaki, 13.
20 Anesaki, 13.
21 Anesaki, 13.
22 Anesaki, 13.
truth: that the essence of Buddhism, or the essence of human life according to him, is singular. He writes, “I had gone to many centers of religion during those twenty years in the quest of Buddhist truths. The final conclusion I arrived at was that the truth of Buddhism must be one in essence. Many people lose themselves in the labyrinth of learning and studies, through thinking that every one of the diverse branches might help to the attainment of Buddhist ideals.” The one truth that he concluded to be the sole essence of Buddhism was the Lotus Sutra. When he realized that the Lotus Sutra was the sole truth of Buddhism, he changed his name from Rencho, the name he was given when he was ordained as a Buddhist monk, to Nichiren, which means Sun-Lotus.

Nichiren believed that the Lotus Sutra was crucial to the salvation of humanity. During this time, Nichiren thought that the world was in deep crisis as defined by Buddhism’s three periods. The three periods outline the sequence of events following the Historical Buddha’s death. Anesaki explains that the first period “made up the age of the Perfect Law, in which the monastic discipline was strictly observed and the believers were sincerely pious.” In the age of the Copied Law, however, faith and morality of the people declined. In the third period that followed, a time of vice and corruption where people were morally bankrupt. Since the Japanese placed the Buddha’s death in 949 BC, the Japanese believed that the third age commenced in 1052 AD.

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23 Anesaki, 14.
24 Anesaki, 14.
25 Anesaki, 4.
Thirteenth-Century Japan as the “Third Age”

The Hojo family, a group of major-domos, took the power of the ruling clan of Minamoto for themselves. The Hojo clan ruled as the Shikken, or Commissioners, while the Minamoto clan remained at the helm as puppets. During this time, the government observed strict policies and encouraged justice, modesty, and simplicity in the daily lives of the Japanese. For the Japanese that regarded the Hojo clan as rebellious usurpers who took the power of Minamoto, they regarded their modesty as a mere facade with which to gain popularity and power. Because the Japanese nationalists associated the imperial family as the descendants of Amaterasu, the Sun-goddess, they believed the Hojo clan were illegitimate rulers and a threat to Japan’s true governance. As a way to gain their power back from the Hojo clan, the Imperial entity created a plot to defeat the Hojos in 1221. The Hojos defeated the Imperial family and the key Imperial family members were vanquished to the remote islands of Japan. In order to maintain their power, the Hojo clan decided to place an infant on the imperial throne and consolidate their power.

These series of political events understandably infuriated the Japanese nationalists who believed that the Imperial family were the true leaders of their country. As a Japanese nationalist, Nichiren was an ardent patriot. His religious views were infused with nationalism. Anesaki explains that Nichiren “declared that the nation would be ruined, unless the fundamental principle of the national life should be restored, that is, unless the people were governed by rulers legitimate both in title and authority (7).” Therefore, Nichiren was a great supporter of the Imperial rule and, as such, made himself an enemy of the Hojo clan which would treat Nichiren as a traitor.
In regards to the religious situation of the time, a center for Japanese Buddhism was created on Mount Hiei. Nichiren believed that the corruption of the state led to the corruption seen in the religious institutions at the time. Anesaki describes “the centralization of government and the consequent accumulation of wealth in the capital” as being “concomitant with the development of ecclesiastical power and the growth of secular aims and motives” that corrupted the clergy of the time. Additionally, according to Nichiren, the corruption of the church was due to the incorporation of Shingon mysticism. Nichiren truly believed that the only way to save Japan (and the world) was to adhere to the *Lotus Sutra* alone and to restore the descendant of Amaterasu as the rightful ruler of the country. The third instance of corruption that Nichiren identified in the religious community of the time was the worship of the Buddha Amita. By emphasizing the worship of the Buddha Amita, Nichiren believed that the Japanese had betrayed the Historical Buddha who is described in the *Lotus Sutra* as the true founder of Buddhism and genuine teacher of all Buddhists. Moreover, the introduction of Zen Buddhism, with a focus on meditative practice, seemed to steer away from the true Buddhist doctrine of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Both the religious and political corruption of the time led Nichiren to believe that Japan needed to be saved. The only way to do away with the political and religious corruption and confusion according to Nichiren was to restore the rightful imperial ruler, the descendant of the sun-goddess of Japan, and adhere faithfully to the *Lotus Sutra* as the truth of Buddhism. The corruption brought on by the political turmoil, along with the decline in the religious adherence to the *Lotus Sutra* for traditions such as Zen Buddhism, Shingon occultism, and Amita Buddhism was destroying the nation of Japan and plummeting the nation into disorder and turmoil. These

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26 Anesaki, 7.
sentiments of desperation felt by Nichiren and his followers would motivate a rebellion against
the government that would label Nichiren as a traitor by some and a national hero by others.

Nichiren: Religion and Nationalism

Nichiren had a dualism to his character that was apparent in his writings. His love for
Japan is seen in his work, particularly his “Treatise on Protecting a Nation,” yet at the same time
he severely criticizes the country’s growing political and religious corruption.

In his “Treatise on Protecting a Nation,” Nichiren focuses on the state of Japan’s morality
and religious piety. He illustrates Japan’s moral bankruptcy after the Historical Buddha’s
passing, his teachings “daily lost its luster and the stream of Buddhism in China transmitted by
masters grew polluted month by month...How much more so in the remote land of Japan, where
Buddhist scholars have been guided by the Chinese!” Nonetheless, Nichiren was incredibly
nationalistic and claimed that Japan was “superior to India, China, and eighty thousand other
countries.” The love he felt for his country was derived from his assertion that Japan was blessed
by the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, and therefore was superior among all the nations. According to
Nichiren, his belief in the Shinto traditions of Japan were compatible with his devotion to
Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra because he recognized the Sun Goddess Amaterasu as
manifestations of the Buddha as a way to reconcile the two.28

Nichiren would blame the nation’s Kamakura feudal government for the calamities Japan
suffered between 1254 and 1260 because of the ongoing political and religious corruption. Such
tragedies include tidal waves, landslides, famines, comets, storms, floods, earthquakes, smallpox

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27 Nichiren as translated by Hori, 3.
28 Kodera, 42.
epidemics, dysentery, and plots to overthrow the Hojo clan from power. Such devastation over the course of a meager six years was attributed to the abandonment of the Historical Buddha’s teachings and for obeying an unrightful ruling clan who banished the imperial family members to Japan’s remote islands. Nichiren described the calamities as “signs in heaven and on earth: famines and plagues [in which] the whole country is filled with misery. Horses and cows are dying on the roadsides, and so are men; and there is no one to bury them. Over half of the population is dead, and there is no one to mourn them.” He blamed the survivors who “invoke the saving power of Amitabha Buddha of the Western Paradise” for abandoning the Historical Buddha. Nichiren blamed the government and interrupted the calamities as heaven’s anger at the corruption of Japan.

Nichiren’s Beliefs: The Lotus Sutra

Nichiren believed that the Lotus Sutra was the key to Japan’s salvation in the latter days. Nichiren felt that chanting the “Sacred Title,” Namu Myoho-renge-kyo or “Adoration be to the Scripture of the Lotus of the Perfect Truth!” with genuine commitment to the Lotus Sutra would be sufficient to save the individual. By uttering the sacred title, it meant that the practitioner was committed to the truths the book enclosed. Nichiren believed that the recitation of the title alone was not lost as a symbolic gesture but the revelation of the whole truth of the Lotus Sutra. If one’s full belief and commitment in the truth of the Lotus was present, one would not need to do anything other than recite the Sacred Title to unlock the truth of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren elaborated on this belief in 1275:

29 Kodera, 42
30 Kodera, 43
31 Anesaki, 16.
32 Anesaki, 15.
“All the letters of this Scripture are indeed the living embodiments of the august Buddhas, who manifested themselves in the state of supreme enlightenment. It is our physical eyes that see in the book merely letters. To talk in analogy, the pretas (hungry ghosts) see fire even in the water of the Ganga, while mankind sees water, and the celestial beings see ambrosia. This is simply due to the difference of their respective karmas, though the water is one and the same. The blind do not perceive anything in the letters of the Scripture; the physical eyes of man see the letters; those who are content with self-annihilation see therein emptiness; whereas the Bodhisattva (saint) realizes therein inexhaustible truths, and the Buddhas (enlightened beings) perceive in each of the letters a golden body of the Lord Sakya-muni. This is told in the holy text in the teaching that those who recite the Scripture are in possession of the Buddha’s body. Nevertheless, prejudiced men thus degrade the holy and sublime truth.”

The *Lotus Sutra* is the written accumulation of the sermons given by the Historical Buddha during his life that reveals the truth of Buddhahood. The exact year or language in which it was composed is unknown. The prevailing theory is that it was created in a local dialect of India and then translated into the Sanskrit. The *Lotus Sutra* was certainly in existence by the year 255 CE because that is when the first Chinese translation was formulated. The *Lotus Sutra* presents a series of parables that teach of the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths. These are described by scholar Burton Watson in his translation of the *Lotus Sutra*:

“...teach that 1. all existence in the saha world, the world in which we live in present, is marked by suffering; 2. That suffering is caused by

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33 Nichiren as quoted by Anesaki, 16.
34 Watson, x
craving; 3. That by doing away with craving one can gain release from suffering and reach a state of peace and enlightenment, often called nirvana; 4. That there is a method for achieving this goal, namely, the discipline known as the eightfold path.”

The eightfold path describes the path to “right views, right thinking, right speech, right action, right way of life, right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right meditation.” The objective of reading the Lotus Sutra is to awaken oneself to unshackle oneself from suffering and break the cycle of samsara, death and rebirth. According to Buddhism, humans underwent an endless cycle of death and rebirth known as samsara. One’s aim was to accumulate good karma through the eightfold path to prepare oneself as to receive the message of the Historical Buddha and break that cycle. It is believed that once the individual has achieved Buddhahood one is free from attachments and the three poisons: greed, anger, and ignorance.

Buddhism in the Lotus Sutra: Traditional Background

The Lotus Sutra is a Mahayana text as opposed to the Theravada school of Early Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism began in the first or second century A.D. in India as a movement against some of the core tenets of Early Buddhism. Scholar and translator, Burton Watson describes this movement as “a reaction against the great emphasis upon monastic life that marked earlier Buddhism and against the arid psychological and metaphysical speculations that characterize much of early Buddhist philosophy. It aimed to open up the religious life to a wider proportion of the population, to accord a more important role to lay believers, to give more appealing expression to the teachings and make them more readily accessible.” Indeed, the

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35 Watson, pg. x
36 Watson, pg. x
37 Watson, pg. xii
early Theravada school emphasized relinquishing all Earthly attachments by the renunciation of the material world. This often meant joining a cloistered, monastic community in order to create a sort of environment that facilitated the vanquishing of material desires. Watson describes this process stressed by Early Buddhism as necessary “in order to pursue the kind of strenuous discipline needed to gain such release” from one’s own desires considering “it was thought all but imperative that one leave secular life and become a member of the Buddhist Order, which consisted of both monks and nuns.” Only when one was in such a disciplined community as this could one be “free from family entanglements and worldly concerns” and “devote oneself to a life of poverty, celibacy, and religious study and discipline, supported by the alms of the lay community.”[3]

Understandably, this school and philosophy could not be practiced by all who were drawn to the Historical Buddha’s message of breaking the cycle of samsara considering the severe commitment Early Buddhism demanded from their followers in order to reach enlightenment. While Theravada emphasized a singular journey to reaching enlightenment alone, Mahayana Buddhism stressed the role of innumerable bodhisattvas all committed to helping all sentient beings reach enlightenment. In Mahayana Buddhism, a bodhisattva is defined as a sentient being who has reached enlightenment and who help others also attain enlightenment as well. Bodhisattvas are “all-seeing and all-caring, capable of extending boundless aid and succor to those who call upon them in sincere faith.”[3] The role of the bodhisattva differentiates Mahayana Buddhism from the early Theravada school. Mahayana Buddhism spread from

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38 Watson, pg. xi
39 Watson, xii
northwestern India to China, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, while the Theravada school thrives in countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Sri Lanka, and modern-day Myanmar.\textsuperscript{40}

The \textit{Lotus Sutra}: Synopsis

The \textit{Lotus Sutra} consists of sermons given by the Historical Buddha to bodhisattvas and his followers. The \textit{Lotus Sutra} presents two crucial points in the practice and study of Nichiren Buddhism.\textsuperscript{41} The first point presented in the text is the the Historical Buddha as the physical manifestation of Buddha-nature that perpetuates eternally throughout time and space. The second point, being a continuation of the first point, states that buddha-nature is unlimited and accessible to all sentient beings and is within all of us. Every sentient being has the power to become Enlightened because of the Buddha-nature within.

The \textit{Lotus Sutra} itself is comprised of a series of parables, stories, similes, and metaphors broken up into 28 chapters\textsuperscript{42} that are meant to be studied and interpreted to facilitate one’s path towards enlightenment. The text presents parables and stories that are meant to help followers renounce their earthly possessions and attachments in order to break the cycle of samsara and achieve Buddhahood. Followers of the \textit{Lotus Sutra} are meant to interpret these sermons as a means in which to comprehend the meaning of Buddha-nature, Buddhism, and the Historical Buddha’s message.

The \textit{Lotus Sutra} states that there is only one goal, which is Buddhahood, and only one path in which to achieve that goal, which is called \textit{ekayana}, a Sanskrit word meaning "one path" or "one vehicle". This is a distinction from the Mahayana teachings because it deviates from the

\textsuperscript{40} Watson, xiii
\textsuperscript{41} Rodd, 35.
\textsuperscript{42} I am utilizing Burton Watson’s translation of The Lotus Sutra
Mahayana idea that there are three types of saints with three distinct goals. There is the *bodhisattva* who strives to save themselves and return to save others. There is the *pratyekabuddha* who hopes to achieve enlightenment through their sole works. Lastly, there is the *sravaka* who attentively listens and relies on a buddha to achieve their goal of personal salvation. Unlike the traditional Mahayana belief of the three distinct saints and three distinct paths, The Lotus Sutra presents parables in which to illustrate that there exists only one path, one truth, and one goal of achieving Buddhahood.

**The Allegory of the Father and the Burning House in “Parable”:**

The Use of Expedient Devices and Buddhist Dharma in The Lotus Sutra

The notion that there is only one path to achieve Buddhahood but many ways in which to approach that path is illustrated through the allegory of the father and the burning house in the “Parable” chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. According to Laurel Rasplica Rodd, Professor Emerita for the Center of Asian Studies at University of Colorado Boulder, the parable of the burning house, for instance, “compares the merciful half-truths about the paths to salvation preached by the Buddha to the promise by a father to his children of varied types of chariots if only they will leave their toys in the burning house and come out to safety.”

Of the innumerable sutras that formulate the Buddhist doctrine, the *Lotus Sutra* stands out as one of the most significant texts for the tradition. To this day, the *Lotus Sutra* remains tremendously important for contemporary Buddhist communities and is an essential part of the foundation on which monks have built global religious movements like Nichiren Buddhism founded in the 13th century. With such an enduring, powerful reputation one wonders how the

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43 Rodd, 35.
Lotus Sutra became such a core part of the Buddhist doctrine. More specifically, what elements of the Lotus Sutra, like the use of stories, make the text so appealing to a vast array of readers spanning countries and generations? Why is the Lotus Sutra considered a Buddhist text, let alone the religion’s most influential one? I will examine a story about a father and a burning house as a Buddhist educational tool, the role of the Historical Buddha as a storyteller, and study the elements of traditional Buddhist doctrine woven throughout the chapter in order to analyze the characteristics of the Lotus Sutra that define it as a Buddhist text.

The parable is an excellent example of the way storytelling is instrumental in the transmission of Buddhist teachings. The parable describes a desperate father who uses expedient means to save his three children from a burning house. This story is a powerful tool for teaching Buddhist followers how samsara, or the endless cycle of death and rebirth, is broken by using a graphic depiction of three children escaping their death with the help of their father. The power of the Lotus Sutra as a Buddhist text lies in the way parables such as these are presented, as allegories that teach the doctrine of the Historical Buddha.

The parable of the father and the burning house depicts key Buddhist concepts through the use of allegory. The burning house in this allegory represents the manner in which non-Enlightened humans who do not follow the path of the Buddha are trapped in their suffering because these beings “have not yet escaped from birth, old age, sickness, death, care, grief, woe, and anguish, are being burned in the flaming house of the three worlds (58).” Additionally, the children the father saves are a symbolic representation for Buddha’s followers who search for a way to break this samsaric cycle in the same manner in which the children “run back and forth, looking at their father (56).” In the same way that the children are “unalarmed and unafraid” with
the “least intention of leaving (56),” the Buddha sees that humans are so enamored with their material reality that they are doomed to eternal suffering and the samsaric wheel of death and rebirth. As a form of expedient means, the father lures the children out of the burning house with the greatest of treasures in the form of three carriages. This exchange is a symbolic representation of the Buddha (the father) saving humanity (his children) from the pain of eternal suffering (the burning house) using expedient means (the allure of the three carriages/the Buddhist dharma). This Buddhist allegory is all the more powerful because it demonstrates the importance of Buddhist practitioners in differentiating the dharma for the individual considering “the power of expedient devices, divide the one buddha vehicle and speak of three (60).” This is demonstrated in how the father understood that each of the three children had different wants and needs. Similarly, the Buddha “preached the three vehicles in order to entice the beings (60)” but know that all these paths lead to the same goal: enlightenment.

The allegory is explicitly used by the Historical Buddha to teach Sariputra about the human condition according to Buddhism. However, this parable harbors many contradictions of core Buddhist principles. A distinct contradiction to Buddhist doctrine was the use of material possessions to lure the children out of the burning house. As the three children were trapped in the burning house, the father proclaimed to the children, “The things you so love to play with are rare and hard to get...Things like these, a variety of goat-drawn carriages, deer-drawn carriages, and ox-drawn carriages, are now outside the door for you to play with (56).” Because Buddhism is a doctrine of renunciation, the idea of the father figure (a Buddha proxy) saving his children (a proxy for his followers) from a burning house (a symbol for samsara) by proposing the exact incentives that they are attempting to renounce is counterintuitive to the path towards
enlightenment. Why would the Buddha teach his followers to renounce the material world utilizing material possessions as incentives? This is a key contradiction in the allegory presented in the “Parable” that must be analyzed in order to truly understand the power of this parable as an educational tool for Buddhist followers of the *Lotus Sutra* and non-Buddhist readers of the text alike. Why would the Buddha present this particular parable to Sariputra in order to teach about the dharma?

The reason behind these contradictions is the concept of expedient devices. The aim of practitioners in Buddhism is to break the cycle of samsara, or the cycle of death and rebirth, in order to escape suffering such as thirst, hunger, and pain. Through the use of parables, Buddhists look within themselves to achieve enlightenment and break the cycle of samsara. The cycle is broken once these practitioners achieve a deep consciousness of the world in which differentiations no longer exist. As such, the Buddha may be using experience, that of the experience of the father saving his children, instead of explicitly describing enlightenment to Sariputra because enlightenment cannot be transmitted directly through words alone, but through experiences in the form of powerful parables. As Buddha proclaimed in “Expedient Devices,” “World-Honored Ones in this manner, by resort to various means and parables, to the power of these and numberless other devices, expound the marks of the dharmas (35).” Knowing his audience is yet to be Enlightened, the Buddha is skillful in his presentation of the dharma. He knows that his audience has yet to vanquish desires for material possessions and achieve enlightenment. The audience’s desire for riches like that of the father’s is yet to be annihilated. Like the father in the parable who uses expedient means to lure his children out of the house with something they already desire, understand, and are familiar with (the material world of wealth),
the Buddha is using wealth to speak to his audience on a level they can understand. As the Buddha speaks to his audience in terms that they presently comprehend, he can then utilize wealth as a symbol for how incredible enlightenment is and instill an invincible desire in his audience to attain wealth that is beyond the limits of the physical world. Therefore, Buddha is using wealth in the parable of the father and the burning house as a powerful tool to move and connect with his followers in a way they can understand in order to plant the seed of desire towards achieving enlightenment knowing full well that they will relinquish their attachment to the exact desires he utilized to incentivize them in the first place as they proceed on their journey according to the Buddhist doctrine of renunciation.

Another contradiction present in the allegory is the character of the father. He is described as “a man of great power, advanced in years and of incalculable wealth, owning many fields and houses, as well as servants (55)” whose house is “broad and great” and declares that his wealth is “limitless.” Considering that the father represents the Buddha in this allegory, the depiction of the father contradicts the true history and essence of the Buddha and the Buddhist principles he stands for. Historically, Gautama Buddha was a prince with exorbitant wealth, like the father in “Parable,” but unlike the father he renounced his wealth to be a sannyasin, or someone who renounces all material possessions. Unlike the Buddha, the father does not renounce his “limitless” wealth at the end of the allegory. If the father serves as a proxy for the Buddha in this allegory, why does he not behave according to the core tenants the Buddha based his entire life on: renunciation of the material world? According to Buddhist doctrine, the father’s material wealth, including his “many fields and houses,” jewels, servants, and the like, are an obstacle to his enlightenment and should be annihilated. If the character of the father truly
was a Buddha figure, he would renounce all his wealth, as the Buddha did, and follow one of the Three Vehicles he presents (of Theravada, Mahayana, or Tantric Buddhism), none of which covet material items and all of which negate attachment to material items.

The use of allegorical representations of the Buddhist dharma is a tool for attaining enlightenment in Buddhism. The use of parables in Buddhism are powerful and emphasize the idea that enlightenment cannot be taught explicitly but through parables. The practitioner must learn through experience instead of step-by-step directions. This is why the “Parable” as a depiction of another’s experience contributes to the importance of the *Lotus Sutra* as a core Buddhist text. The notion that parable is an essential form of transmitting the dharma is central to Mahayana Buddhism, which preaches the Two Truths Doctrine. This doctrine describes two truths called the “provisional truth” which describes our reality in the material world, and there is the “ultimate truth” (paramārtha-satya), which cannot be spoken but only known through experience. Therefore, Buddha presenting this parable to Sariputra in the *Lotus Sutra* is a key moment of meta-learning. While we are learn from the parable, Sariputra learns from the Buddha himself. Overall, the use of parables is an essential component in Buddhist doctrine that is central to this Buddhist text. “Parable” demonstrates how Buddhist dharma can have seemingly counterintuitive features that are simply expedient means to help humans comprehend enlightenment as an unspoken truth.

Like the father in “Parable” Nichiren saw himself as a savior rescuing his children from the burning house that had become Japan in the age of *Mappo*, or The Latter Days, set ablaze by false dharma and illegitimate rule. Nichiren wrote about why Mahayana followers such as the Lotus-Shingon encounter hardships which he responded with the above parable, “It is stated
in...the *Lotus Sutra*, chapter 3, “A Parable,” “Unexpected disaster would be brought on them.”

As I reflect upon these citations those practicers of the Lotus and Shingon teachings are not in an advanced stage, are without firm faith, and recite the sutras, without understanding their meaning, solely for the purpose of gaining honor and profit. The residue of this sin for slandering the True Dharma in past lives still exists. Thus it is impossible for them to escape disaster.”

Thus, Nichiren saw Japan in great peril because of the Japanese monks’ constant slandering of the True Dharma of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Nichiren: In Defense of the True Dharma, Why the Lotus Sutra was Superior

Why did Nichiren believe that the *Lotus Sutra* was the pinnacle of innumerable sutras preached by the Historical Buddha? Of all the sutras in existence, why did Nichiren devout his entire time and risked his life to preach the Lotus Sutra above all? Nichiren writes about his endless pursuit for the true essence of Buddhism, “The Buddha’s purpose of appearing in the world was to preach the Lotus Sutra, in which He preaches in the second chapter on the “Expedients,” “My old wish has already been fulfilled; it is indeed the time now to expound the Mahayana teaching definitively;” and in the 16th chapter on “The Life Span of the Buddha,” “actually, however Good Men, I have been the Buddha since eternal past.” Thus, Nichiren believed that the *Lotus Sutra* was the sole mission and ultimate message of the Historical Buddha. After all, Nichiren writes in his famous “Treatise on Protecting the Nation” that “Nevertheless, regarding the comparative superiority in doctrine, the Buddha Himself declares in the 10th chapter on the “Teacher of the Dharma,” that although He has expounded numerous, thousands, tens of thousands and hundred millions of sutras, the *Lotus Sutra* is superior to all the

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44 Nichiren as quoted in Hori, 101.
sutras which have already been preached, are being preached, and will be preached.”

Thus, Nichiren establishes that the *Lotus Sutra* is superior to all other sutras because the Historical Buddha, himself, preached that all the sutras before and after the *Lotus Sutra* are inferior to the *Lotus Sutra*, the True Dharma.

Not only did he believe that the *Lotus Sutra* was superior to all other sutras, but Nichiren saw himself as the Historical Buddha’s conduit through which his message could be transmitted during The Latter Days in order to save Japan. Nichiren writes, “Now, I, as the messenger of Lord Sakyamuni Buddha, the Buddha of Many Treasures, and Buddhas in manifestation in all the worlds in the universe, only spread the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* without committing any worldly crime (Hori, 185).” Moreover, through his writings, Nichiren explicitly describes himself as a messenger, a sage, and the ultimate practitioner of the *Lotus Sutra* as he writes,

“For great events, regardless if they are good or bad, are foreshadowed by great omens... They foretell the destruction of Japan, at the same time they are omens of the appearance of the true practicer of the *Lotus Sutra* in Japan. There have been many sages endowed with wisdom and talent in China and Japan, but none has ever believed in the *Lotus Sutra* as firmly as I, Nichiren, nor has anyone had as many strong enemies in the land as I do. From these facts, you should recognize Nichiren to be the prime practicer of the *Lotus Sutra* in the world (Hori, 237)... “I, Nichiren, undoubtedly am the prime practicer of the *Lotus Sutra* in Japan. No one in China, India, and in the whole world is comparable to me (238).”

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45 Nichiren in *Treatise on Protecting the Nation*, Hori, 12.
Through this passage, it is clear the Nichiren sees himself as the ultimate sage and deliverer of the Lotus Sutra. He, alone, can deduce and interpret the True Dharma for the salvation of Japan in the face of calamities. Nichiren firmly believed that the slandering of the Lotus Sutra was the cause of Japan’s tribulations and future demise as he believed that according to the sutras, “the cause of national calamities [came] from all the people being against the right dharma, siding with false dharmas (Hori, 108),” and the only way to save Japan was through the pervasive effort of transmitting the Lotus Sutra across the entire country of Japan.

Defining the Vocabulary of Nichiren’s Core Principles

Daimoku

Nichiren had several traditions that he incorporated into his teaching. He took from the Amidist tradition of reading and chanting the *Lotus Sutra* and particular traditions from the esoteric schools of Buddhism. From the esoteric school, he took the mantra and the mandala. From the Tendai school, he incorporated the practice of chanting parts of the *Lotus Sutra* as a form of meditation. Nichiren encouraged his followers to chant “Namu Myoho-rengekyo”, or “Praise to the Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law.” This was known as the *daimoku* mantra, a symbolic chant that reminded followers of the true meaning of the *Lotus Sutra* and the Historical Buddha’s message to all sentient beings.46

Gohonzon

Taken from esoteric Buddhism, Nichiren created a mandala which he called the Gohonzon, or the “chief object of worship.” The Gohonzon is a scroll that is supposed to illustrate the cosmos

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46 Rodd, 42.
with the title of the Lotus Sutra placed firmly in the center of the scroll. This object gave followers the opportunity to mount a physical object of devotion upon their altar of worship.

Kaidan

Unlike other Buddhist traditions, Nichiren believed that ordination halls for the purpose of welcoming someone into the faith were unnecessary. As such the way that Nichiren’s followers would join occurred through the process of presenting them with the honzon as a way to pass on the teaching of the Lotus Sutra symbolically and welcome them into this new religious community.

Vision

Nichiren feared for the world in the age of the mappo, or the latter days of degeneration when the message of the Historical Buddha was being defiled and spread incorrectly. He preached the *Lotus Sutra* as the True Dharma in order to combat the chaos and natural disasters brought on by corrupt monks preaching anything other then the Lotus Sutra, which Nichiren called slandering of the True Dharma.

Shodo

Nichiren had a very effective pedagogical technique in regards to the way he would teach his followers about the teaching of the Lotus. He used persuasive preaching, or Shodo, as a ways to persuade others to convert. He strived to be inclusive with his sermons and sought followers among all classes, particularly the peasants, fishermen, and warrior classes of Japan. Considering he was born to a fisherman family, he appealed to this class on a personal level. He did not originate from higher ranks like other notable Buddhist teachers, like Dogen.47

47 Rodd, 49.
The Chanting of the *Lotus Sutra*: Why it’s not a Watering down of Buddhism

It may seem as though the Daimoku is but a watering down of the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* but closer examination demonstrates the contrary. How could reciting the title of the *Lotus Sutra* alone be sufficient means in which to achieve enlightenment? Is this not a watering down of the true meaning of the Historical Buddha as he intended it? Nichiren wrote, however, that reciting the title of the *Lotus Sutra* wholeheartedly would be sufficient to save the believer. In his writings, Nichiren writes in a question and answer format that upholds this practice of chanting the *Lotus Sutra*, he writes:

“Question: How can anyone escape the three evil realms just by hearing the daimoku, the title of the *Lotus Sutra*, without understanding its meaning? Answer: It is due to the meritorious acts of past lives that anyone happens to be born in a land where the *Lotus Sutra* is known, hears the title of the sutra and has faith in it. Even though he is ignorant and wicked in his life, because of the meritorious acts in previous lives, he can believe in this sutra upon hearing its name. As a result he will not fall into evil realms.”

As a result, Nichiren attributes a sense of worthiness to his followers based on the premise that they have led meritorious past lives and reincarnated as human beings who had earned the opportunity to follow the True Dharma. Nichiren believed that his followers were meritorious because of their previous good deeds and were so fortunate to find themselves in their current situation of worshipping the True Dharma in the human realm.

When Nichiren is questioned about the evidence behind this argument, he elaborates by speaking to the worthiness of his followers due to their past lives:

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48 Nichiren as quoted in Hori, 65.
“Question: Is there evidence of meritorious acts in past lives? Answer: The Lotus Sutra, fascicle 2, chapter 3 on “A Parable” states, “He who believes in this sutra in this life must have seen the Buddha, shown respect to Him, given offerings and listened to Him preach this sutra.” The sutra also suggests in the tenth chapter on “The Teacher of the Dharma,” “Suppose there are those who, upon listening to even a verse or a phrase of the Lotus Sutra, will rejoice even for a moment of thought after the extinction of the Buddha....You should know that such persons made offerings to ten trillion Buddhas in previous lives.”

Due to the previous offerings and good deeds of his followers as described in the Lotus Sutra, the True Dharma, they were in opportune time, place, and state of mind to receive the message of the Historical Buddha and be Enlightened. To be born in the human realm alone was likened to finding a particular grain of sand in all of the Ganges.

Nichiren: His Prophecy and The Miracle of his Failed Execution

Nichiren felt a great urgency to stop the slandering of the True Dharma that was occurring throughout Japan. He attributed this slandering as a cause for the great misfortunates that afflicted Japan stating that the “slanderers of the True Dharma, themselves as well as those who believe in them, do not known the meaning of slandering, so they commit this grave sin, destroying the country and ruining Buddhism.” The slanderers of Buddhism and the True Dharma were described as the Pure Land Buddhism, led by the monk Honen who Nichiren frequently berails in his letters, and the Zen Buddhists. Nichiren writes about the slanderers of the True Dharma:

49 Nichiren as quoted in Hori, 65.
50 Nichiren as quoted in Hori, 96.
“As China and Korea were converted by Zen and Pure Land Buddhism, protective deities gave up the countries, leaving them to be conquered by the Mongols. In Japan, too, as these evil dharmas of Zen and Pure Land spread and the Tendai-Lotus Sect was neglected, Mt. Hiei is trembling hard. As both Buddhist ministers and their followers in Japan have become slanderers of the True Dharma, I am afraid, chances are that this country will be conquered by the Mongols as China and Korea were.”

As such, Nichiren attributes the fall of the countries of China and Korea to their homage to Zen and Pure Land Buddhism, slanderers of the True Dharma. Nichiren predicts and forewarns Japan about the Mongols by reminding Japan of the defeat of these two great nations in order for the Japanese to repent and take heed of his word.

In Nichiren’s letters to the Hojo clan, he warns the Japanese ruling clan of the invasion from the Mongol Empire stating that, “You shall see that such a time will soon come when the great Mongol Empire will attack Japan with several tens of thousands of warships. All the people in Japan, from the emperor down to his subjects, casting aside all the Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, shall recite in unison “Nam Myoho Renge-kyo;” and holding their hands together...they will cry: “Please help us, Priest Nichiren, please help us.” With fierce conviction, he believed that the Japanese people would go back on their slandering and see that Nichiren was the sage and messenger of the Historical Buddha all along, but it would be too late.

Nichiren: His Warnings to the Hojo Clan, his Letter to the Hojos

In Nichiren’s “Meeting the Late Lay Priest Saimyoji” letter, he writes “Meeting with the late Lay Priest Lord Hojo Tokiyori, I told him that it is nothing but an evil act of heavenly devil

51 Nichiren as quoted in Hori, 158.
52 Nichiren as quoted in Hori, 242.
for him to stop seeking refuge in the existing Tendai and Shingon temples and to begin having faith in the new Zen temples. I also submitted the “Rissho ankoku-ron” to him.”\(^{53}\) Nichiren made several attempts to reach the Hojo clan who was the ruling party at the time. He even sent the Hojo clan a copy of his “Rissho ankoku-ron” which states “I, Nichiren, encountering a severe earthquake, a typhoon, and famine in the Shoka Era (1257-59), and wide-spread epidemics in the first year of the Shogen Era (1259), predicted that these were omens foretelling the invasion of this country, Japan, by foreign troops.”\(^{54}\) Nichiren had foretold these calamities that had befallen Japan and took the initiative to warn the ruling government party before the Mongol invasion occurred.

Nichiren: Banishment and Death

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\(^{53}\) Hori, 156.
\(^{54}\) Hori, 150.
The Banishment of Nichiren\textsuperscript{55}

Unfortunately, all Nichiren did was stir unrest in the Hojo clan and he was banished to the island of Sado. Regardless, he scorned the ruling clan exclaiming that, “I, Nichiren, also know how to repulse the impeding foreign invaders...I am the only one who knows this in Japan. It is because two sages will not appear at the same time, just as there never will be two suns or two moons.”\textsuperscript{56} Nonetheless, the government banished him away and attempted to execute him by sword, which was miraculously stopped by a bolt of lightning and shattered right before they meant to smite Nichiren’s head off. In exile in Sado, Nichiren was walked to the grounds of Kamakura to be executed at two in the morning. Nichiren believed a miracle had stopped the executioner’s hand from beheading him.\textsuperscript{57}

“A 19th century depiction of Nichiren in the snow during his exile on Sado Island”\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} 1920s Japanese postcard artwork, \url{https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nichiren}
\textsuperscript{56} Hori, 150.
\textsuperscript{57} Rodd, 15.
\textsuperscript{58} Artist: Utagawa Kuniyoshi. \url{http://www.sgi.org/about-us/buddhist-lineage/nichiren.html}
In 1274, the Mongols invaded Japan. Fortunately for Japan, as they were about to lose to the hands of the Mongol Empire, a typhoon swept the Mongols’ fleet and they were forced to retire back to Korea and prepare for a second strike.\textsuperscript{59} Five months later, Nichiren would decide to spend his last years on Mount Minobu. Nichiren recounts the last years of his life in ill health, “For eight years I have been wasting away. My body has grown weak and my mind senile. This year, especially, since spring I have had spells of illness. During the autumn and winter my health deteriorated steadily and every night I was worse. For ten days I have been almost unable to eat. Snow has piled up and the winter cold grips us here. My body is cold as a stone and my spirit like ice.”\textsuperscript{60} He would die in the year 1282 surrounded by six disciples who would lead his mission of the Lotus Sutra forward after his passing. After Nichiren’s death, his disciples cremated him and scattered his ashes in Minobu. Afterwards, they would disperse on separate paths to preach the True Dharma of the \textit{Lotus Sutra}.

\textsuperscript{59} Rodd, 19.
\textsuperscript{60} Rodd, 21.
Chapter Three: Soka Gakkai’s Foundations and Organization in Japan

Soka Gakkai’s Beliefs

The core beliefs of Soka Gakkai remain rooted in the teachings of Nichiren. At its core, the organization strives to preserve the teachings of Nichiren as he intended them. Soka Gakkai continues to uphold the four main tenets that are central to Nichiren Buddhism. The first tenet of Nichiren Buddhism being the belief that the Lotus Sutra is the most superior sutra that reveals the truth of the Historical Buddha. The second tenet describes the Buddha as eternal and ubiquitous. Third, the Buddha nature, or the potential for enlightenment, dwells within all of us. Fourthly, the way to achieve enlightenment is through the Three Great Laws, meaning the gohonzon, the daimoku, and the kaidan.

The gohonzon points to the symbolic mandala that represents the Buddha. The daimoku points to “Namu Myoho-Renge Kyo”, or “Praise to the Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law,” which persists as one of the core practices of modern-day Soka Gakkai members in their worship of Nichiren Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra. The kaidan refers to the sanctuary Nichiren hoped to build in which worshippers could practice, where the Gohonzon is enshrined, and practitioners join in the vision of kosen-rufu, the mission to spread Nichiren Buddhism around the world. As described by Soka Gakkai International, kosen-rufu “expresses a centrally important concept for members of the SGI. It is often used synonymously with world peace, and has been informally defined as “world peace through individual happiness.” More broadly, it
could be understood as a vision of social peace brought about by the widespread acceptance of core values such as unfailing respect for the dignity of human life.”

The notion of kosen-rufu was also incredibly important to Nichiren, who “Nichiren Shoshu literature quotes Nichiren as saying that his teaching, based on the Lotus Sutra, was to spread throughout” the entire world. Soka Gakkai has adhered to Nichiren’s four core principles, but there have been reinterpretations from the original 13th-century monk’s beliefs as leaders have taken control of the organization.

Nichiren was a strong advocate of the *shakubuku* method of proselytism that is defined as an aggressive, confrontational tactic that literally translates as “to break and subdue.” Nichiren believed that this was the only effective strategy in which to confront the chaotic, corrupt age of the Latter Days, or *Mappo*, in which Japan found herself. Nichiren’s writings is rife with intolerance of other religions other than his own. He firmly held that all other religions were heretical and would lead to the damnation of the individual and the destruction of Japan. He wrote of other religions: “Nembutsu is Hell; the Zen are devils; Shingon is national ruin; Ritsu are traitors.”

According to Soka Gakkai’s ideology, the entire universe is a “single flow of life, eternal and eternally in flux; any given being, at a given moment, is but the present manifestation of a continuous current of life that also has simultaneous past and future manifestations.” This defined as *ichinen-sanzen*, or “three thousand worlds in a single moment,” which describes a human being at any given point in time as the present embodiment of former lives lived (as well as the current life being lived) and the karmic outcome of all of those lives up to that moment.

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62 Murata, 130.
63 White, 33.
64 White, 33. Quoting Nichiren from someone else
65 White, 34.
each instance of our lives, we have the potential for Buddhahood, or the release from the wheel of birth, death, and rebirth that occurs over and over. Nichiren Buddhists, like other Buddhist traditions, that humans are born, die, and are reborn as a reincarnation. This cycle of life and death is called the cycle of samsara. The ultimate human goal is to obtain Buddhahood and break such a cycle because to live unenlightened is to experience suffering. Suffering is caused by one’s desire and attachment to materials, feelings, humans, etc., or even the feeling of attachment itself. Given these circumstances and beliefs about the human condition, what does Soka Gakkai deem the true purpose of humankind? Soka Gakkai believes that the goal of humankind should be happiness through the creation of value. Now here is where Soka Gakkai incorporates new ideas and beliefs that are not found in Nichiren Buddhism.

According to Soka Gakkai’s concept of value, “human life is simply a process of creating and maximizing certain values and thereby attaining happiness.” President Makiguchi elaborated on the concept of value by defining three types of value and their anti-values: “beauty and ugliness, gain and loss, and good and evil.” Gain, or riyaku, is the most important value of the three and is described as being “individually achieved value” in which “good is simply collective gain. Thus gain, in its collective aspect, takes precedence over all other goals of human endeavor.” Collective gain or collective goodness is what Soka Gakkai strives to create in the world, and is where Nichiren Buddhism and Makiguchi’s ideas about value meet. Value creation is the end while Nichiren Buddhism is the means to that end. Through Nichiren

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60 White, 34
61 White, 35.
62 White, 35
63 White, 35.
64 President Ikeda would later expand President Makiguchi’s ideas about collective value creation and encourage the agenda of kosen-rufu, or the collective effort towards world peace.
Buddhism, humans realize their own Buddha-nature, their potential to transform themselves as people, change their karma, and create goodness in the world.\textsuperscript{71}

Considering the importance of Makiguchi’s ideas about value, how is value actually created according to Soka Gakkai? By being a Nichiren Buddhist and practicing the True Religion as prescribed by the 13-century monk Nichiren. Therefore, the believer must chant \textit{Namu Myoho-Renge Kyo} twice daily, once in the morning and once in the evening in front of the \textit{Gohonzon} and study the Lotus Sutra and the \textit{gosho}, or Nichiren’s collective writings and letters.

The final stage of value creation according to President Makiguchi is the individual’s realization of their own Buddhahood and attainment of enlightenment. Soka Gakkai has defined enlightenment as “a state of absolute happiness to be achieved.”\textsuperscript{72} According to Soka Gakkai, in order to achieve enlightenment, however, is not solely based on individual happiness and is simply “selfish happiness enjoyed in solitude by the faithful, unmindful of the miseries of the rest of the world.”\textsuperscript{73} Instead, enlightenment is the idea that “no man’s happiness is complete until every man’s is; thus individual human revolution must be expanded into universal revolution”\textsuperscript{74} through the mission of \textit{kosen-rufu}, or world happiness. Originally, this meant the spread of Nichiren Buddhism around the globe, as monk Nichiren advocated, but this definition of \textit{kosen-rufu} has been redefined and adapted by practitioners around the globe as Soka Gakkai expanded.

One of the tensions Soka Gakkai faced in terms of their beliefs was the friction between nationalism and internationalism. Soka Gakkai, at its core, originated from Nichiren’s ideas and

\textsuperscript{71} Murata, 17  
\textsuperscript{72} White, 35.  
\textsuperscript{73} White, 36.  
\textsuperscript{74} White, 36.
teachings, which were fiercely intolerant of other religions and incredibly nationalistic. For him, Japan was the center of the world. Nichiren believed it was up to him to save her from heresy, illegitimate rule, natural calamities, and chaos. In every sense, Nichiren’s religion is indigenous to Japan and Nichiren “himself was the most nationally oriented of Japan’s great religious leaders.” As this nationalistic, intolerant religion began to expand through Soka Gakkai’s ethnically Japanese members and reached new frontiers abroad, many of the aforementioned beliefs would adapt and change.

Mobilization

The political and religious climate in which Soka Gakkai thrived was after the end of World War II. In postwar Japan, the rigid restrictions placed on unofficial forms of religion was abolished by Occupation authorities. This period of religious freedom in which the Japanese New Religions spread throughout Japan like water rushing through opened floodgates. Essentially, the prewar constitution permitted religious freedom in Japan while the 1947 Constitution guaranteed the right for the Japanese to practice any religion without repercussions.

\[75\] This was a considerable victory for Soka Gakkai as Makiguchi was imprisoned for starting the organization and died in prison because of the government’s rigid policies on religion.

The Great Propagation Drive launched shortly after in 1951, aimed at spreading Nichiren Buddhism across Japan. The proselytizing efforts under President Toda’s leadership were executed by the organization’s Youth Division\[76\], and consisted of members presenting the organization’s teachings, defending the teachings with previously prepared doctrinal arguments,

\[75\] White, 41.
\[76\] Murata, 98.
and targeting Japanese who were left “unsure of themselves, their beliefs, and their future”77 in post-war Japan.

Leadership

Makiguchi Tsunesaburo, Founder of Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, later renamed Soka Gakkai78

Makiguchi Tsunesaburo (1871-1944) was an academic with no real intention of a widespread expansion of then Soka Kyoiku Gakkai. He moved through a series of jobs including elementary school administration and textbook publishing. His passion was for education and believed education should promote values and creativity instead of what he believed was the stifling and formal educational practices of the time. Unlike Toda, he was not a dynamic orator or aggressive proselytizing figure, but a bookish academic with an interest in education reform and value creation as described above.

77 White, 41.
78 Murata, 149.
Second President of Soka Gakkai, Toda Josei

Unlike Makiguchi, Toda Josei (1900-1958) was a dynamic, energetic orator whose combative style spearheaded Sokai Gakkai’s early mobilization and recruitment movement in Japan. Like Makiguchi, he arrived from Hokkaido and settled in Tokyo where he was an educator. In Tokyo he met Makiguchi who would become his highly-respected mentor. He left teaching, however, in 1923 to pursue other jobs like writing, printing, publishing, selling insurance, and running a school. His life collapsed though when his child died in 1924 and his wife passed away shortly after in 1926. He spiraled there after and succumbed to a deep depression. Fed up with his predicament, he decided to take a turn for the better and transform his life by following Makiguchi and becoming a Nichiren Buddhist in 1928. Toda was skilled at the organization’s finance and organization and left the reading to Makiguchi until he was imprisoned. In prison, Toda intently studied the *Lotus Sutra*, the teachings of Nichiren, and Buddhist scriptures and developed the skilled arguments he would later present to his members.

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79 Murata, 149.
and potential converts when he was freed. As Soka Gakkai’s president, Toda expanded the organization as a skilled orator and persuasive believer in the mission of the organization. He would pass on this same conviction to his mentee, Ikeda Daisaku.

President Ikeda (born 1928) joined the organization as a 19-year-old. He ascended up the ranks of the Youth Division and became Chief of Staff of the division in 1954 and, subsequently, Ikeda became the General Administrator in 1958. He would become President of Soka Gakkai in 1960 after Toda’s death. As the organization’s leader, President Ikeda was perceived as a “remarkably unassuming...forceful...calmly authoritative and...extremely self-possessed” man. A capable and charismatic leader, President Ikeda would lead Soka Gakkai towards of future of global expansion and would see the opening of Soka University of America and The Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue described in Chapter Five. As Soka Gakkai expanded

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80 Murata, 149.
81 White, 44.
around the world, President Ikeda would deviate from Toda’s aggressive persuasive tactics into a more tolerant perspective stating that the organization is “not anti-Christian” but “just un-Christian”\(^{82}\) and admitting that Nichiren Buddhism “and Christianity have something in common: we are both monotheistic religions. Therefore we can respect each other, not being mutually hostile. We can study each other's doctrine and thus elevate ourselves.”\(^{83}\) This tolerant perspective is in blatant opposition to Nichiren’s condemnation of other religions of his time, often calling for the imprisonment of leaders of different schools like Zen Buddhism.

### Membership

#### Sex

In nine surveys conducted nationwide during the years 1963 and 1967, women encompassed the majority of Soka Gakkai members as well as the political party Soka Gakkai established, the Komeito. The average proportion of the nine surveys showed Soka Gakkai’s membership to be 58% women and only 42% men.\(^{84}\)

#### Age

The following 1963 nationwide survey results shows the relative age distribution of the organization in the 20th century:

![Age distribution chart]

\(^{82}\) Ikeda as quoted by White, 53.
\(^{83}\) White, 176.
\(^{84}\) White, 62.
\(^{85}\) White, 62.
There is a concentration of Soka Gakkai members in the 20-49 age group, even higher percentage in the 30-49 age group, and the most concentration in the 40-49 age group.\textsuperscript{86}

\textit{Education}

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Sample & Elementary School (6 years or less) & Junior High School (7-9 years) & High School (10-12 years) & College (13 years or more) \\
\hline
\textit{(First Survey)} & & & & \\
National Sample & 21\% & 41\% & 29\% & 8\% \\
Sōkagakkai Members & 19 & 55 & 18 & 4 \\
\hline
\textit{(Second Survey)} & & (9 years or less) & & \\
National Sample & 56.4 & 34.4 & 8.7 & \\
Liberal Democratic Party & 60.5 & 31.1 & 8.4 & \\
Japan Socialist Party & 47.1 & 41.3 & 11.6 & \\
Democratic Socialist Party & 53.3 & 36.0 & 10.7 & \\
Japan Communist Party & 55.6 & 25.9 & 18.5 & \\
Kōmei Party & 65.5 & 34.5 & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Education in the Nation, the Sōkagakkai, and Five Political Parties}
\end{table}

Ten nationwide surveys were conducted during the years 1963-1967 of the Soka Gakkai membership population. They showed that the “percentage of Gakkai members or Komeito supporters with no more than nine years’ education exceeded the national percentage, regardless of what demographic or socioeconomic controls one applies.”\textsuperscript{88}

\textit{Geographic Distribution}

The organization is definitely concentrated in urban areas. In surveys conducted nationwide between 1963-1967, 77\% of members lived in urban areas. This concentration in urban areas is a

\textsuperscript{86} White, 62.
\textsuperscript{87} White, 64.
\textsuperscript{88} White, 64.
predictable outcome of the organization’s structure. Members are responsible for the new
Nichiren Buddhists they convert. They are responsible to retaining these new members by
making home visits, ensuring new members participate in organized activities with other
members, chanting with them, and accumulating them in their new role as members. This
structure and face-to-face contact relies on the converter’s proximity to the converted. Urban
areas are ideal locations because high population density ensures that members are highly
concentrated.
Population per Square Kilometer, 1965

- Less than 200 people
- 200-399 people
- 400-599 people
- 600 people or more

**Occupational Distribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Employment</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Gakkai Members</th>
<th>National Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agricultural/forestry/fishing</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trade/manufacturing/service</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>at home</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Agriculture/forestry/fishing</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>elsewhere</td>
<td>Trade/manufacturing/service</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed by other</td>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White collar</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>14.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housewife and other</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>34.1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*No members of the Student Division appeared in this sample, which corroborates other indications that Gakkai estimates of their numbers are inflated.*

*Housewives 38.8%*  
*Others 9.4%

As evident in the table, the percentage of housewives dominates the general membership of the organization at 43% when compared to other occupations like white collar (6.3%) or service workers (13.2%).

**Conclusion**

Based on the surveys conducted nationwide in Japan, it is evident that the early members of Japan’s Soka Gakkai consisted mainly of women in their thirties or forties with less than a high

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89 White, 66.  
90 White, 70.
school educational background who lives in a metropolitan city and who identifies as a
housewife. If the typical member is a man, they will probably identify as a laborer or service
worker. The model member also “was brought into the Gakkai by a relative or neighbor (or, if a
man, possibly by a friend or co-worker)” and “was motivated to join primarily by problems of
mental or social conflict and secondarily by problems of economics and health.”

Induction and Recruitment

Part of a Soka Gakkai member’s responsibility is to help spread Nichiren Buddhism to the
greater community. Part of the tactics practiced by Soka Gakkai is the zandankai, or discussion
meetings at the smallest, local level. Members are brought in primarily through other family
members. As mentioned, shakubuku was an essential technique used to recruit new members.
This strategy was seen as an “act of mercy” on the part of the proselytizer who attempted to save
the potential convert from heresy and suffering. Examples of severe shakubuku tactics that have
long been stripped from the organization’s methods includes members surrounding “a home and
mak[ing] noise until one family member agreed to join. Or they would belabor a mark with
argument and exhortation for hours on end. Sometimes threats of divine punishment were used:
dire injuries and calamities might be predicted as the cost of resistance to the True Religion; a
child’s illness or death might be traced to the parents’ heretical beliefs.” These tactics,
particularly when performed for hours or consistently for a period of time, were often successful
in persuading the subject to join the organization.

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91 White, 77.
92 White, 82.
This early form of recruitment was one of President Ikeda’s primary qualms when he became the leader. He removed shakubuku in favor of encouraging members to lead by example as a way to appeal to potential converts stating that:

“(1) The member should first build a united, harmonious, and happy family circle worth of admiration and respect by all; thus (a) familial discord and late hours are to be avoided, and (b) neighbors are to be treated with respect and consideration regardless of their religious beliefs.

(2) The member should endeavor to make himself the most trusted and respected person at his place of work. (3) Specific shakubuku activity should be bright, enjoyable, and relaxed.”93 As a result, most members were converted by friends (33.3%), neighbors (30%), co-workers (22.3%), or relatives (average of five surveys, 24.4%).94 When surveyed, new converts said they converted to Nichiren Buddhism due to illness (mean of 20%), poverty (mean of 14%), or conflict (mean of 29%) in the hopes of bettering their situation.95

*Induction and Cohesion:*

Soka Gakkai does a great deal to retain their new followers. Upon converting a new member, the converter is responsible for the new convert’s acclamation into the group. They are tasked with mentoring the new member and ensuring that they attend meetings and become involved in the group’s activities. The organization’s structure ensures that new members receive one-on-one attention while still belonging to a large, collective organization spanning the country of Japan (and, in later years, the world).

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93 White, 83.
94 White, 84.
95 White, 85. The mean is calculated over five surveys conducted on the Soka Gakkai membership.
The Organization of Soka Gakkai

Soka Gakkai consists of three types of structures. First there is the “vertical line” which describes the most localized forms of support--small groups that meet with plenty of face-to-face interaction. The vertical line encompass the “unit (kumi), up to ten families (twenty adults); the group (han), five to ten units, or fifty to one hundred families; the district (chiku), five to ten groups, or five hundred to one thousand families; the chapter (shibu), five to ten districts, or five thousand to ten thousand families; the general chapter (so-shibu), an unspecified number of chapters; the headquarters (honbu), several general chapters; and the joint headquarters (sogo honbu). The kumi is prohibited from growing to the point where one-on-one interaction is no longer feasible in order to maintain intimate, social friendships within the network. These small groups are essential to creating cohesion in rapidly growing organization and consists of the family unit or the converter that persuaded the member to join so members always have some preexisting tie to the group. If a kumi grows too large, it is subdivided into new kumis and that becomes one han. This process continues up the echelons as they amass in size.

In addition to the vertical structure outlined above, there are peer groups within Soka Gakkai that further attempt to create social ties among members with similarities. These peer groups have three branches: the Women’s Division, the Men’s Division, and the Youth Division. The Youth Division encompasses both the Young Men’s Division and the Young Women’s Division but has also created the Student Division for members in college, the Junior High School Division, High School Division, and a Boys’ and Girls’ Division. Once one joins Soka Gakkai and converts to Nichiren Buddhism, they are placed into all of the peer groups that apply

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96 White, 89.
97 White, 93.
to them. The structural organization of Soka Gakkai has aimed at creating strong social networks within the organization as a whole. From kumis to the Young Women’s Division, there are pre-existing groups meant to retain and attract new members by making large, organized activities like publications and parades possible all the way down to one-on-one contact with family members and friends in the smallest unit of socialization.
FIGURE C.2. STRUCTURE OF THE SÔKAGAKKAI IN JANUARY 1970


* Seikyô Shim bun, April 30, 1967.
* Takase, Kömeitô, p. 315.
* Sôkagakkai Overseas Bureau, No. 3, pp. 7–8.
Soka Gakkai’s Political Party: The Komeito

Komeito, or the Clean Government Party, was officially founded by Soka Gakkai in November 1964 and became the third strongest political party in the nation. The founding of the party was a way in which Soka Gakkai could promote Nichiren Buddhist principles into the economic, social, and political environment by promoting the idea that “the happiness of each individual and the prosperity of the entire society can be realized simultaneously.”99 Komeito’s original platform ran on issues such as the firm establishment of local politics, a sound social security program, stable prices, increase in the number of public schools, increase in loans to small businesses, and the support of industries such as agriculture.100 Komeito has also pushed an agenda of pacifism and disarmament, which is befitting considering President Ikeda’s Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue that also pushes for the disarmament of nuclear weapons. All in all, like Nichiren, Soka Gakkai recognizes the importance of politics to influence others.

Nichiren was also heavily involved in politics, writing letters to political officials, criticizing the illegitimate rule of Japan by the Hojo Clan, and appealing to the ruling clan in order to influence Japan towards the True Religion. Both the organization and Nichiren comprehended the crucial role politics plays in social movements. In the words of retired Professor Kiyokaki Murata of Yachiyo Institute University, “While Nichiren could [individually] press his cause to the rulers of the land.... Soka Gakkai today can seek to influence the government with much greater success through its own political party, Komeito.”101

99 White, 127.
100 White, 144.
101 Murata, 20.
FIGURE C. 3. STRUCTURE OF THE KÔMEITÔ IN JANUARY 1970

SOURCES: Adapted from KÔMEITÔ—CLEAN GOVERNMENT PARTY; Takase, KÔMEITÔ, pp. 316–17.
Foreign Affairs Committee

Administrative Affairs Committee

Economic Affairs Committee

Social and Labor Affairs Committee

Land Development Committee

Divided into Nineteen Divisions

Local Headquarters

Prefectural Assembly League

Chapters

Prefectural Assemblies

Ward and City Assemblies

Town and Village Assemblies

International Affairs Bureau

Youth Bureau

Women's Bureau

Student Bureau

Labor Bureau

Public Welfare Bureau

Education Bureau

Medium and Small Enterprise Bureau

Bureau for Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries
The Split: Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood

The Nichiren Shoshu school began in thirteenth century Japan based on the teachings of Nichiren. After Nichiren died in 1282, his disciple Nikko Shonin established a temple at Mt Fuji where he enshrined the *Dai-Gohonzon*, the mandala of the Lotus Sutra. Soka Gakkai relied heavily on the Nichiren Shoshu sect, Nichiren Shoshu priests bestowed the *Gohonzon* for each member, performed ceremonies at the head temple to welcome the new members into the faith, and legitimized Soka Gakkai due to the sect’s lineage tracing back to Nichiren. In turn, members would financially support the priesthood by maintaining old temples and building new ones. Priests also provided services for funerals, marriage ceremonies, led rituals during pilgrimages to the temple in Mt Fuji.

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103 White, 309.
104 Hurst as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 72.
105 Hurst as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 75.
106 Hurst as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 73.
“The Mutsubo (Six-Compartment Temple) at Taiseki-ji. This temple, rebuilt in 1965, follows the design of the original, built in the thirteenth century by Nikko, founder of Taiseki-ji.”

Despite an over fifty-year cooperation between Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, the two split in 1991 from each other due to several conflicts. The split forced members of Soka Gakkai to either be excommunicated from the Nichiren Shoshu school and stay with Soka Gakkai as members or leave Soka Gakkai and remain a part of Nichiren Shoshu’s school. Members left one or the other and some even left both and terminated their worship of

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107 Murata, 55.
the *Lotus Sutra*. This divide shook Soka Gakkai around the world as members from Japan to Brazil had to make this decision.

But what caused the split in the first place? What incidents forced Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai to terminate their partnership once and for all after nearly half a century and put into question millions of members’ faith and status in these organizations? One of the reasons for the rift was President Ikeda deviation from the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood. For instance, Soka Gakkai under President Ikeda neglected to register all Soka Gakkai members at their local temples. According to the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, this misstep meant that Soka Gakkai was disrespecting the Nichiren Shoshu priests by not holding them to the authority they believed they deserved. Moreover, the Nichiren Shoshu priests were wary about the expansion of Soka Gakkai and the changes undergoing the rapid spread of Nichiren Buddhism overseas and accused SGI of becoming too “Western.”

Some of the other reasons behind the split involve the rapid pace in which Soka Gakkai International was moving towards global expansion and modernization, a speed in which a traditional, ethnically-Japanese, hierarchical sect couldn’t match. Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Gallaudet University, Jane D. Hurst, outlined the key points that explained the divide between Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu sect as a “a conflict between priestly authority and lay creativity; a hierarchical versus egalitarian organization; an emphasis on sacrament and ritual versus an emphasis on the faith of the individual; a focus on tradition as the key to understanding scripture, compared to a focus on scripture alone; a view of religion that is local, conservative, and mystical versus one that is global, progressive, and rational; and an

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108 Jane Hurst as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 77.
other-worldly spiritual focus, as opposed to one that is engaged with the world.”\textsuperscript{109} In other words, the divide between Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu sect is a testament to the rapid expanding changes Soka Gakkai was initiating during the late 20th century that were concerning and downright threatening to an organization which foundations lie in carrying and preserving tradition forward from their beginnings in the 13th-century after Nichiren’s death.

So what has changed since the split? The separation meant Nichiren Shoshu priests would no longer perform weddings and funerals, would ban members from visiting the head temple at Mt. Fuji, and no longer bestow \textit{Gohonzon} when members became Nichiren Buddhists. In turn, Soka Gakkai stopped financially supporting and building temples for the priesthood. By breaking away from the priesthood, critics of Soka Gakkai saw this break as a “disrespect for the legitimate legacy of Nichiren Daishonin in their refusal sufficiently to honor the high priest and his authority.”\textsuperscript{110} Additionally, Soka Gakkai began to utilize lay volunteers to perform tasks previously executed by the priesthood, such as legally performing marriages and funerals, as well as giving out \textit{Gohonzon}, previously made and issued by official Nichiren Shoshu priests before the split, to new converts. Members serve these roles on a voluntary yearly basis. This gave Soka Gakkai International more flexibility when recruiting members in a globally, rapidly expanding environments around the world considering every chapter around the world had to wait for priests to travel overseas from Japan in order to bestow \textit{Gohonzons} to new converts. By utilizing the laity, chapters around the world could convert new members to Nichiren Buddhism at a much faster pace than before the split in 1991 when they relied heavily on the priesthood.\textsuperscript{111} From the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood perspective, however, “those who have stayed to practice

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{109} Jane Hurst as quoted in Wilson’s \textit{Global Citizens}, 85.
\textsuperscript{110} Jane Hurst as quoted in Wilson’s \textit{Global Citizens}, 79.
\textsuperscript{111} Jane Hurst as quoted in Wilson’s \textit{Global Citizens}, 92.
\end{footnotes}
Nichiren’s Buddhism with Soka Gakkai are believed to be worshipping a false mandala (the Nichikan Gohonzon)\textsuperscript{112}, and this rejection of true Buddhism will bring upon them a fate worse than death.”\textsuperscript{113}

The real question, however, is whether or not Nichiren Buddhism can be practiced without the role of the priesthood. The answer to this, according to Soka Gakkai, is absolutely. For instance, if we read over Nichiren’s writings and letters, the stress is centered on the *Lotus Sutra* and the recitation of *Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* as a viable practice to achieving enlightenment of the individual. The most important role the priesthood served was the making and bestowing of the *Gohonzon* to members of Soka Gakkai. This was the way in which to welcome and legitimate Nichiren Buddhist converts to the faith. The use of the *Gohonzon* was not initially a central part of Nichiren’s practice while he was alive. Nichiren only included the *Gohonzon* because once he amassed a following, his new converts wished to have something tangible and material in which to chant to. As explained by Professor Emerita for the Center of Asian Studies at University of Colorado Boulder Laurel Rasplica Rodd:

“The *gohonzon* answered the need of Nichiren’s lay followers for a concrete object of worship. Devotees of the Lotus needed an image to place upon their altars, a substitute for the images of buddhas or bodhisattvas which Nichiren deemed too particularized to represent the Eternal Dharma. Many devotees requested copies of the Lotus Sutra to keep and worship, but Nichiren could hardly fill all such requests. The *gohonzon* mandala was a satisfactory solution.”

\textsuperscript{112} The *Gohonzon* is an object of worship that practitioners of Nichiren Buddhists pray to. It symbolizes the essence of the Lotus Sutra.

\textsuperscript{113} Jane Hurst as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 94.
Thus, Nichiren was urged by the laity to create a physical, material item of worship in which to appease the laity. Thus, the *Gohonzon* was an appeasement, a device of and for the laity as opposed to an intrinsic, essential device initially concocted by Nichiren as core to an individual’s enlightenment. The object of the *Dai-Gohonzon*, the mandala created by Nichiren himself as one of the few physical objects we have left from him. Priests have treasured this piece to the extent where they also treasure all subsequent copies made after it. As a result of the meaning the priests have placed on the *Gohonzon*, the mandala has taken on such an essential role in the Nichiren Buddhist practice. Although, to be clear, the *Gohonzon* was not initially a part of Nichiren’s essential teachings but a response to converts who called for a tangible object of worship.

At the heart of Nichiren Buddhism according to Nichiren’s letters to public officials as part of the *gosho* has always been the *Lotus Sutra* and the recitation of *Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* to change our individual, karmic circumstances, break the cycle of samsara, and achieve enlightenment. Soka Gakkai has not deviated from these core teachings. Soka Gakkai staying true to the practice of chanting *Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*, the veneration of the Lotus Sutra as the supreme sutra, and the serious study of Nichiren’s collective writings, the *gosho*. Before and after the split, the organization has stayed constant with the Nichiren’s core teachings he recorded in the 13th century.
Chapter Four:

Soka Gakkai International’s Global Expansion

Brasil Soka Gakkai International (BSGI)

A predominantly Catholic country such as Brazil seems an unlikely location for Buddhism, but is home to the largest Soka Gakkai International population outside of Japan. As of 2000, Brasil Soka Gakkai International (BSGI) has about 150,000 members of which only 20% are people of Japanese origin. When President Ikeda established Soka Gakkai International, Brazil, he comprehended that incorporating a new Japanese religion into a Catholic country would be difficult. In his *Nova revolução humana*, he described how his endeavor was comparable to “that of the first Catholic missionaries to Japan in the sixteenth century: as a voyage into unknown territory, without any knowledge of the culture, customs, and language of the people he was seeking to convert.”

Soka Gakkai International’s Brazil district was established in São Paulo on October 20, 1960. Before the inauguration of the new district in the country’s capital, Ikeda and the organization had previously ventured to Brazil and converted Brazilians in the region. Besides São Paulo there were members in the northeastern states of Bahia and Para, in the western state of Mato Grosso do Sul, and in Paraná, located to the south of São Paulo. The founding members of BSGI were Japanese people who had immigrated after World War II. BSGI, being in a predominantly Catholic country attempted to adapt Nichiren Buddhism to the particular cultural

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114 Peter Clarke as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 326
115 Peter Clarke as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 333
and religious climate. A tactic utilized by BSGI was its “attempts to relate to Catholic culture by developing what it refers to as a “Buddhist notion” of God.”  

BSGI has not sought to create connections between Nichiren Buddhism and the idea of God according to Catholicism. In fact, the idea of the existence of God, “undermines, members explain, the fundamental Nichiren Buddhist principle of self-responsibility” in which the individual is responsible for their own karma and is solely capable of transforming their karma in the future. The agent of change here for a better future and karmic state is the sole individual without the assistance of superhuman forces such as the existence of God according to the Catholic faith. A Brazilian member in Salvador explained that “believing in a personal God as Father is not only incompatible with *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* and with Nichiren Buddhist philosophy, but brings the whole idea of God into disrepute. It is incompatible with Soka Gakkai, which is founded on the practice of self-transformation.”

According to Nichiren Buddhism, chanting is a way in which to remind oneself of our own Buddha-nature, or the immense power and potential of the individual to act and transform ourselves as well as our material reality and universe in which one operates. BSGI members, however, never denied the existence of God in Brazil. Considering they were keenly “aware of the psychological importance of such a belief,” they made no attempt to “dissuade people from believing in God.” Quite the opposite, BSGI members were encouraged to stress the “Buddhist notion of God” to potential converts and present the idea that “there are many ways of thinking about God, and that clear similarities exist between saying that God is *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* and the Catholic notion of God as Creator of the Universe.”

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116 Peter Clarke as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 328
117 Peter Clarke as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 346
118 Peter Clarke as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 346
In addition to addressing the existence of God, BSGI has changed procedures from those practiced in Japan. For instance, during discussion groups and meetings, the local Brazilian preferences have given way to different chanting positions. Instead of the traditional kneeling while chanting, Brazilians began to sit on chairs. Another drastic change was the role of healing native Brazilian members took from their former Catholic religion and fused it with their practice of Nichiren Buddhism. Brazilian Members of BSGI saw the practice of chanting as a means of healing. This was a stark difference from the Nichiren Buddhism practiced in Japan, which traditional saw chanting as a means to comprehend the essence of the Lotus Sutra, break the cycle of samsara, and obtain enlightenment. Therefore, this new interpretation of chanting as a healing ritual demonstrates the vistages of Catholicism new converts have brought with them as well as the markings of a particular cultural and religious environment.

The concept of *kosen-rufu* also gave flight to the BSGI movement. *Kosen-rufu* was based on the idea that one’s happiness is not fully realized until everyone has achieved happiness. The main way in which to achieve such happiness is through the practice of Nichiren Buddhism. Following this logic, new converts were urged to convert others in the name of building a “land of eternal peace and tranquility.” President Ikeda explained to members that, according to Nichiren Buddhism, there could be no personal success or happiness if others around them are suffering. Therefore, BSGI members created a proselytizing movement to convert others in the country. The objectives and mission of BSGI was documented in a monthly newspaper, *Nova Era (Brasil Seikyo since 1966)*. The dispersion of content around the country created a greater sense of awareness of BSGI throughout Brazil that continues to this day.

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119 Peter Clarke as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 336
120 Peter Clarke as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 337
Pictured: Soka Gakkai International, Brazil’s monthly newspaper given in Portuguese to Brazilian members around the country from the year, 1966.

The newspaper often reminded members that “Nichiren Daishonin himself demonstrated that only through energetic shakubuku was it possible to extinguish all the faults of the past--that is, to change our destiny in order to attain absolute happiness,” further encouraging members to spread the tradition of Nichiren Buddhism to others. In order to maintain cohesion in the group, BSGI organized “zadankai (study groups) sessions, seminars on Buddhism, and youth activities” as well as “chanting, classes on Buddhism, counseling, and youth band rehearsals” within the BSGI center. The newspaper also grapples with topics such as the place of Nichiren Buddhism in a Catholic country and the role of God in the tradition. Issues have acknowledged the issue with the Buddhist tradition and the existence of God in a Catholic culture like Brazil.

121 Peter Clarke as quoted in Wilson’s Global Citizens, 338
For instance, an article written by the executive director of the movement in Brazil wrote, “‘Sejamos úteis ao Brasil’ (‘Let us be Useful to Brazil’)” that explains how Nichiren Buddhism is “a mais correta e maravilhosa religião entre as demais (the most correct and marvelous of all religions).” This hones true to the traditional Nichiren Buddhist thought was exclusive of all other religions and demanded sole belief in the Lotus Sutra. However, the article continues to emphasize that Nichiren Buddhism should be spread without degrading other religious traditions. This is uncharacteristic of Nichiren, who fervently criticized and demanded the imprisonment of leaders from other religions, like Pure Land Buddhism.

Another traditional practice that was not executed in Brazil was *hoho-barai*, or the elimination of non-Nichiren images or icons. In Japan, more extensive *shakubuku* practices demanded the destruction of all other idols and iconographic depictions of worship. Some members even destroyed new converts’ ancestral tablets much to the shock of the Japanese. Once they acquired a *Gohonzon*, however, the new members of BSGI would have to get rid of all other idols of worship. Moreover, if members were invited to participate in ceremonies of other religions, like baptisms or communions or other similar Catholic rites, they were allowed to attend. The reasoning behind this drastic leniency was the idea that “it would be worse for [members of BSGI] to belittle them by not going,” “them” being non-members of the predominantly Catholic Brazilian community who had not converted to Nichiren Buddhism. These ideas and practices were discussed in articles written in the monthly newspaper. This newspaper continues to be published in Brazil as pictured below.

122 Peter Clarke as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 342.

The liberty to associate and be a part of other religions traditions stemmed in part from BSGI’s confidence in their district, teachings, mission, and, of course, their members. BSGI

[123] https://www.facebook.com/livrariapearl/
understood the “clear separation between the religious and other spheres of life.”\textsuperscript{124} Meaning their members could live in a Catholic culture and environment in which Catholicism was pervasive and inescapable without having to be Catholic. The lenient views of BSGI allowed members to participate in their communities without restrictions. For instance, members, if they so desired, could send their children to Catholic schools for their education because Catholic education had “nothing to do with religion” and “pupils would be protected by the invincible power of the *Gohonzon* even if difficulties over faith were to arise.”\textsuperscript{125} This tolerance and leniency is in stark opposition with Nichiren, who often wrote to government officials asking that they imprison those who practiced other religions and worshiped false doctrines that did not pertain to the *Lotus Sutra*.

**Soka Gakkai International, Italy**

Italian Soka Gakkai (ISG), or Istituto Italiano Soka Gakkai, consisted of approximately 38,000 members and was the largest presence in Europe for the organization in 1998 at the beginning of the expansion. In order to disperse information, ISG also had their own publications, *Il Nuovo Rinascimento*, written for members, and *Duemilauno*, published bimonthly for the wider public to learn about ISG and its commitment to the Italian community and beyond.

One of the key objectives of ISG lies in its social engagement that is based on their Nichiren Buddhist belief of the bodhisattva, or “someone who is on the earth to help his neighbor attain enlightenment”\textsuperscript{126} and Soka Gakkai International’s conception of kosen-rufu, the idea that

\textsuperscript{124} Peter Clarke as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 343
\textsuperscript{125} Peter Clarke as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 343
\textsuperscript{126} Maria Macioti as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 378
an individual’s happiness is closely connected and wrapped up in the happiness of others. According to SGI, achieving one’s happiness can only be realized once they have helped others achieve their own happiness.

ISG prides itself on its work in human rights. One of the projects the ISG members led was collecting funds to financially contribute to Consiglio Italiano Rifugiati (CIR). CIR is an independent humanitarian organization that originated in Italy in the year 1990 through a United Nations initiative in order to defend the rights of refugees and asylum seekers by providing legal and medical assistance as needed. In addition to supporting humanitarian organizations, ISG has supported a series of conferences and seminars across Italy led by Johan Galtung to reflect on human rights issues and executed a human rights exhibition entitled “Human Rights in the Contemporary World.” The exhibition was hosted by the Museo Nazionale Delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari in Rome during January 26 and February 20. In regards to the exhibition, attention was given to a variety of issues such as female circumcision, refugee crises, kidnapping, malnutrition, and infant mortality and schools were invited in “the hope of awakening children to the problem of human rights” violations.

Through social engagement, ISG has demonstrated that its commitment to society plays a significant role in their district and has appealed to members in the Italian community. Their actions are particularly important because it demonstrates the way districts abroad have interpreted and acted upon Soka Gakkai’s concept of kosen-rufu, or the mission for world peace

127 http://www.cir-onlus.org/chi-siamo/
128 Maria Macioti as quoted in Wilson’s Global Citizens, 387
129 Maria Macioti as quoted in Wilson’s Global Citizens, 379
to the extent that Italy has been described by then vice-president Mr. Tamotsu as “one of the leading countries in the kosen-rufu movement in Europe.”

Soka Gakkai International, Singapore

The Singapore Soka Association (SSA) gained momentum in the late 1960s and 1970s with the help of a predominately female, middle-aged population. Since the 1980s, SSA has gained a larger amount of younger (below 40) and male members. By the end of the 20th century, 75% of SSA members were older than 45 years of age and 98% were Chinese.

SSA’s strength in Singapore was found in its promotion of a Singaporean national identity and appeal as a patriotic organization. This is evident in SSA’s 1996 reaction to their participation as an organization in Singapore’s National Day Parade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Age Grouping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men's Division</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>Below 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Division</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>25-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Men's Division</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>40-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Women's Division</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>55+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Members</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Members</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Membership</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>Total Membership: 15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Membership</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>Active Membership: 11,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Singapore Soka Association, July 1998

131 Metraux, 49
132 Metraux, 49
“Driven by the sense of mission [to perform], 520 performers and another 235 working behind the scenes displayed the kind of pioneering spirit and resolve that our forefathers possessed to build the nation we proudly call Singapore.”

In an effort to appeal as a patriotic, unifying organization to Singapore, SSA also invited government officials to their events, being praised by the Prime Minister when he participated in the opening ceremony of the Soka Culture Center in January of the year 1993:

“We have made a conscious effort to separate religion from politics. Religious leaders in Singapore understand why we have the Religious Harmony Act. Many, like the Singapore Soka Association, have contributed to better national understanding, over and above their usual religious teachings. I congratulate the Singapore Soka Association for its consistent efforts to promoting social, cultural and educational activities, for the benefit of all Singaporeans.”

SSA used a number of tactics besides patriotism to encourage membership among the population. In addition to monthly meetings at their cultural center, informal meetings in the zadankai (local, neighborhood groups), individual members were expected to chant twice a day in their household.

SSA’s ability to connect with a community and nation has allowed it to flourish in Singapore. Along with participating in national traditions, like the National Day celebrations, Youth Festival, and Chingay (New Year’s) cultural festivities, SSA organizes fundraising campaigns and community service initiatives in local communities. For instance, SSA organized a fundraising campaign for The Society for the Physically Disabled (SPD) and collected over

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133 Metraux, 51
134 Metraux, 50.
S$500,000 for the purpose of helping SPD build a four-story Vocational Rehabilitation Center in Singapore. SSA also orchestrated a charity concert that raised $30,000 towards the Kidney Dialysis Foundation.\textsuperscript{135} Besides fundraising and charity events to support organizations, SSA leads outreach programs to better their local communities. For instance, SSA partnered with the Ministries for Health and Education and Northeast Community Development Council of Singapore to launch the “Day Education and Activity Programme for Senior Citizens (DEA) in February, 1998 to provide month-long services for the elderly including health screenings, cultural activities, and occupational therapy.

SSA early emphasis as a patriotic organization promoting Singaporean national identity facilitated SSA’s growth in the beginning of their movement. Their participation in patriotic events like the National Day Parade and local initiatives helped SSA earn the approval of the Singaporean community and the government. SSA capitalized on its momentum to grow and continue partnering with organizations such as SPD to promote Soka Gakkai’s mission for \textit{kosen-rufu} in the Asian continent.

\textbf{Soka Gakkai International, United Kingdom}

SGI-UK is unique on the demographic level because the vast majority of its members are not Japanese. According to the results of the surveyed membership of SGI-UK, 71.2% were born in the United Kingdom, 28.7% were born outside of the United Kingdom either in the United States, the Caribbean, or in Malaysia.\textsuperscript{136} This is an extremely high number of non-Japanese members when compared to the aforementioned countries.

\textsuperscript{135} Metraux, 54
\textsuperscript{136} Wilson and Dobbelaere, 43.
In the United Kingdom, a full 87.4% identified as Westerners, supporting the above findings that the vast majority of members were not Japanese.

The mean age for new members was 31 to 32 years of age, while the median age was 29 years and the mode age was 25 years.  

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137 Wilson and Dobbelaere, 39  
138 Wilson and Dobbelaere, 45  
139 Wilson, 45
Considering that the majority of SGI-UK are Westerners, what attracted SGI-UK members to Nichiren Buddhism? Of the SGI-UK members, 76% did not belong to a particular religious organization prior to their joining the organization and practicing Nichiren Buddhism. 47% of respondents considered themselves to be non-religious individuals. 140 90% of SGI-UK members had previously encountered Buddhism in their lives before joining SGI-UK. So what attracted these individuals to join the organization? The following table demonstrates the sort of qualities the organization had that these new converts found appealing:

### Table 6. Who attracted new members? (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Partner and family</th>
<th>Other persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 40 or more</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger than 40</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 30 or more</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger than 30</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7. The initial and subsequent attraction of SGI (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Initial attraction</th>
<th>Current attraction</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Those whose initial attraction persisted*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of members</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-23</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical benefits</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character of organization</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal happiness and confidence</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual satisfaction</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical motivation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>+15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social involvement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total whose initial attraction persisted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

140 Wilson and Dobbelaeere, 52  
141 Wilson, 79  
142 Wilson and Dobbelaeere, 63
One of the reasons SGI-UK members began practicing was for “direct practical benefits” like “wealth, health, and a variety of material blessings.” For instance, a retired female of 63 chanted because she “had cancer for several years” and her will to live was quite low but “at the first meeting [she] chanted for one hour” and felt as “if the power had been switched on again” indicating that her resolve to live and fight her cancer was renewed. This woman chanted for the will to continue living and fighting her disease in order to change her reality. Similar to this woman, health is one of the motives for which members begin to chant.

In addition to health, another motivating factor for members was the characteristics of the organization. In the survey given to SGI-UK respondents cited the “simplicity of the rituals, the aesthetic appeal of the chanting, and the fact that the individual could engage in ritual activity without intermediaries.” The lack of hierarchy was a big draw for approximately 16% of the membership population. The idea of a flat structure in which there was no leader proved appealing to the British chapter of the organization. The lack of a hierarchical structure aligned with Nichiren Buddhism itself as a religion that stresses the importance and power of each individual to make change.

*Are Westerners attracted to SGI-UK because of its Organized Community?*

Similarly to Soka Gakkai International in Japan, SGI-UK has organized itself to support members at the individual level while maintaining solidarity among a cohesive whole. There is a local group comprising of eight to ten people which comprises unit leaders who can welcome and teach two or three new converts how to practice Nichiren Buddhism. The next tier comprises of two or three groups, based on how large the geographic concentration of membership in that

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143 Wilson, 55
144 Wilson, 56
145 Wilson, 56
particular area, called districts. A district is a neighborhood in a place like London, but may be a small town in areas where members are not as concentrated. Young Women, the Men, the Women, and the Young Men divisions consisting of the representatives from the district and local levels can be leaders in the four divisions. A chapter encompasses three or four districts which is lead by a member with eight or more years of practicing Nichiren Buddhism. A chapter is responsible for organizing activities such as community service days, summer garden parties, and outdoor picnics. SGI-UK uses these activities to create opportunities for members to bond but also as ways in which the general public can interact with members and learn about the organization in a relaxed setting and see that “Buddhists are ordinary people, leading ordinary lives.”

Soka Gakkai International, United States

Japanese war brides were the first to bring Soka Gakkai into the United States when they immigrate with their American servicemen husbands, whom the women had successfully converted to Nichiren Buddhism. Once the Japanese brides came to America, they sought other recent immigrants from Japan whom they could relate to and establish a sort of social cohesion through SGI-USA. In fact, many Japanese moved to the United States in the early part of the 20th century, particularly California, as laborers. These Japanese immigrants became successful in farming and business but was stripped of their possessions during the Japanese internment during World War II. In the 1950s, second generation Japanese Americans were able to slowly rebuild what had been destroyed during the war in places such as Los Angeles and San Francisco. In these cities, they met ethnically Japanese wives of American servicemen who were

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146 Wilson, 166.
147 Wilson, 167.
Soka Gakkai members.\textsuperscript{148} Therefore, SGI-USA’s recruitment efforts were targeted firstly to Japanese immigrants. As a result, SGI-USA’s beginnings can be characterized as a group of Japanese immigrant women who attempted to find a sense of community in a foreign, unknown country of the United States while preserving their customs, language, and traditions they brought with them from Japan.\textsuperscript{149}

As this first generation immigrant population brought in second generation children, we see the transition of SGI-USA change from an ethnically Japanese population composed of predominantly service workers and housewives to highly-educated, white-collar professionals. The organization reacted to a following that has become more assimilated to American culture and had more American-born followers join.

At first, SGI-USA was modeled directly from Soka Gakkai in Japan. The membership, as said, consisted of ethnically Japanese leaders and much of its membership. SGI-USA was dependent financially on Soka Gakkai and sought much of its guidance from the Japanese organization in terms of establishing and developing the new chapter. SGI-USA, as a result, mirrored Soka Gakkai in terms of its rigid, hierarchical structure in which members could only ascend to leadership positions through a “mentor-disciple” relationships in which the mentor, a powerful leader in the organization, appointed the disciple as their successor and not through the democratic process of election by the membership as a whole.\textsuperscript{150} Women were also excluded from organizing activities orchestrated by leaders in positions of power and they were not allowed to hold most offices. In this respect, women were prohibited leadership roles in which they could gain influence within SGI-USA. Additionally, SGI-USA members planned mass

\textsuperscript{148} David Chappell as quoted in Wilson’s \textit{Global Citizens}, 305.
\textsuperscript{149} Machacek and Mitchell as quoted in Wilson’s \textit{Global Citizens}, 259.
\textsuperscript{150} Wilson, 286.
pilgrimages to Japan in order to visit Nichiren Shoshu temples and worship the ancient scroll Nichiren created during his lifetime, the *Dai-Gohonzon*, that was enshrined in the temple. Lastly, the ties between Soka Gakkai and SGI-USA is demonstrated in the fact that new members in the United States had to travel overseas to Japan in order to receive a copy of the *Gohonzon* in order to officially be inducted into SGI-USA or, alternatively, wait until a Nichiren Shoshu priest traveled overseas to the United States for the purpose of giving out *Gohonzons* to these new converts. To improve upon this great dependency on Japan, SGI-USA would recruit priests from Japan to move overseas and become official leaders of SGI-USA.

There are several changes and reforms that have completely transformed SGI-USA into an organization that mirrors the new American environment in which it is now functioning as a collective, diverse group of members. For instance, after the break between the Nichiren Shoshu sect and SGI as a whole, SGI-USA becomes a completely lay movement. American members also targeted the hierarchical structure of ascension into leadership positions through appointment. Women were also given the opportunity to apply and be selected for leadership roles in SGI-USA for the first time. The focus of SGI-USA also shifted away from a focus on the top-tier leaders in the organization and began to emphasize the power of the local groups and community centers. For the first time, activities were organized directly by the local groups instead of orders descending from the top and trickling down to local leaders to respond accordingly.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Wilson, 290.

These changes in leadership were not accepted without a fight from traditional, more conservative members who favored appointment and male leaders who feared that “without
direction from above, autonomous local groups risked contamination by other religious ideologies.”[152] Tensions within SGI-USA flared to the point where President Ikeda had to travel to the United States from Japan to appease the conflict. President Ikeda spoke in support of the new reforms toward a more democratic organization and the Americanization process SGI-USA was undergoing stating that “A true leader is someone who protects his members, praising them and being tolerant toward them. In contrast, leaders who exploit their positions in the organization, rebuking people and acting in a high-handed manner, not only cause the Buddha’s children to suffer, but make causes for their own suffering in the future as well.”[153] His response was met with one of the SGI-USA leaders of the time telling Dr. Jane Hurst, scholar and professor of philosophy and religion at Gallaudet University that “as the walls came down we could redefine SGI-USA as an organization and our place in American society.”[154]

SGI-USA drastically changed as more American members joined SGI-USA, they began a series of reforms. In the time of its founding in 1960, SGI-USA was made up of only 4% American members while in 1970, the organization consisted of 70% American members.[155] With these changing demographics in the organization, an Americanization process of SGI-USA and begins by swapping out the Japanese for the English as the language for worship. Japanese customs are completely erased and substituted by American preferences, also. Instead of sitting in sex-segregated groups, kneeling on the floor during worship, and removing one’s shoes at the door before entering, SGI-USA adopted American customs of sitting among different genders,

[152] Wilson, 290.
wearing shoes indoors, and sitting in rows of chairs during worship. Transliterations of the Japanese *gongyo*, the words chanted during worship, were also provided to accommodate increasing numbers of American members who did not know Japanese. Moreover, recruitment in the mid-1970s was described as combative and involved members of SGI-USA “in favor of approaching strangers during *shakuku* campaigns on the street, debating religion with them, and then coaxing them to attend a Soka Gakkai meeting.” This recruitment tactic was practiced until the mid-1970s and then eliminated in favor of encouraging members to “share the benefits they were experiencing from their practice with family members and friends in the hope that they would take an interest in learning more.”

The Americanization of words were also evident in the transformation of the organization. The name used at the time was Nichiren Shoshu Academy, an English title that “provided an easy to pronounce acronym, NSA, which sound[ed] very American” to the members. Even the organization’s leader, Masayasu Sadanaga decided to change his own name in 1972 to George Williams. He chose George Williams because of how frequently these two names appeared in the Los Angeles phone book. In this sense, the assimilation of SGI-USA into American culture through various reforms mirrors the assimilation of its ethnically Japanese members who, like the organization, aim to adapt to this new environment in order to thrive in this unfamiliar land.

*Mirroring the Melting Pot of America: Diversity in SGI-USA*

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156 These American customs are still practiced today in SGI-USA chapters located in Massachusetts. As members chant in front of the *Gohonzon*, they seat in rows of blue chairs.

157 Wilson, 289.

158 Wilson, 287.
These reforms would result in an increasing membership of diverse communities of color as SGI-USA added African Americans and Hispanics to their membership in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami in the 1990s. The Los Angeles chapter was characterized by African Americans who had joined to deal with the frustration and anger felt after the 1965 Watts riots. In Los Angeles, African Americans like Kenneth Levy spoke about his reasoning for joining SGI-USA:

“When I joined, I was an angry, confused, frustrated, 27 year-old African American, who thought the American Dream had eluded me, mainly because I was not able to achieve anything that would lead me toward a positive existence.

The leaders in SGI taught me many things. They talked about world peace and gave me hope and courage for the future. I was taught responsibility by consistently calling members and reminding them of meetings, facilitating study meetings, giving personal experiences. Through my efforts, I became a reliable person.”  

By appealing to the frustration and anger surrounding urgent issues facing people of color in Los Angeles and advocating for world peace as a viable, tangible alternative to racial violence, SGI-USA attracted more African Americans like Levy to the organization.

Similarly to SGI-Los Angeles, SGI-Chicago attracted a number of African Americans. Representation at the leadership level in the Chicago chapter played a critical role in attracting more African Americans to the organization. By 1997, 47% of leaders in SGI-USA’s Chicago chapter were African American while only 16% were Japanese. Leaders like African American Malvin Wright and Andrew L. Joshua pioneered this movement. Joshua wrote letters...

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159 David Chappell as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 311.
160 David Chappell as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 315.
in the SGI-USA publications that were disseminated to the general public encouraging more black members in Chicago to join the organization. Based on their efforts, a surge in African American members was seen in the early 1970s. Race relations was a motivating factor for new African American members. A new SGI-USA member, Phyllis Goodson who joined in 1971 recalled how she felt ostracized by her previous religious community because “no white members would sit in the same pew with her” and “in contrast, in the crowded Soka Gakkai meetings people of various races were sitting”\(^{161}\) with each other and chanting.

In Florida, SGI-USA attracted numbers of Hispanics, particular those who had recently immigrated to the United States and were attracted by the social cohesion and community the organization could provide them in an unknown land. This was particularly befitting for SGI-USA considering that the organization had started by a group of immigrants who bounded together to create a sense of unity, familiarity, and collective support as they operated within a completely unfamiliar social, cultural, and economic ecosystem. In areas such as Miami, for example, Hispanic dominated in numbers, as they encompassed 37% of SGI-USA leadership and 26% of the overall membership as seen in the following table.

![Table 11.1. Ethnic composition of SGI in south Florida (%)](image)

\(^{161}\) David Chappell as quoted in Wilson’s *Global Citizens*, 314.

\(^{162}\) Machacek and Wilson, 322
Professor of Buddhist Studies, Professor David Chappell writes about these new, diverse members as those “without social stability in the 1960s and 1970s” who SGI-USA had the “capacity to welcome into the organization and to develop their abilities.”\textsuperscript{163} Whether it be African American frustrated by racial violence in Los Angeles, Hispanics in Florida looking for social cohesion in foreign lands, or representation of African American leaders in the highest tiers of SGI-USA, Chicago and their campaign to disseminate information into black communities, SGI-USA comprehended the vitalness of appealing to new, American audiences for the purpose of growth and assimilation. They sought to bring diverse peoples together in the name of \textit{kosen-rufu}, or world peace, and were successful in doing so, reaching the Hispanic and African American population in these regions.

\textsuperscript{163} Machacek and Wilson, 323
Chapter Five:

Soka Gakkai International in America

Fieldwork and Analysis of SGI-USA New England Chapter

As part of my fieldwork for this thesis, I had the privilege of attending an introductory meeting at Soka Gakkai International’s New England Chapter. Soka Gakkai established a New England Chapter in 1968 on Charles Street but it was recently relocated where it stands today in Brookline, Massachusetts.

As I approached the Soka Gakkai International’s building, I was taken aback by the modern, brightly-lit building that stood in front of me. I approached the glass doors with hesitation and nervousness for what was to come. Would they question me? Would they let me in? I had come to SGI-Brookline to join in on the Women’s Division meeting. I believed I would be more comfortable if I could, at least, find something in common with the members in that I am female. Instead, I was greeted by a man named Jason\textsuperscript{164}, a larger than life leader who welcomed me to the center. My eyes glanced from the lobby, to the reception area, to the cafeteria entrance. Along with Jason, I met a knowledgeable practitioner of more than 40 years. He was incredibly knowledgeable about Buddhism and the practice.

I asked Bryan a question about his faith in Nichiren Buddhism. He explained how chanting gave him the power to change who he was and his life. I probed, “So is chanting like meditation?” He shook his head, “No, it’s not like meditation. It’s more powerful than meditation. Chanting has allowed me to look inwardly in a way meditation has not. But save

\textsuperscript{164} All names have been changed.
your question for the group and I will explain.” Bryan gave me a tour of the building. He showed me the pristine lobby, decked with a series of tables and chairs with small flowers adorning each table. He demonstrated the communal kitchen and cafeteria. I saw a stack of sheets of memo papers that encouraged members to write memos to Daisuke Ikeda, president of Soka Gakkai International. “So how does this all work? You have your headquarters in Japan, right? Who is the leader?” “There’s no hierarchy or leader. We organize everything. There is no clergymen or priests. We are completely run by lay members.” I was surprised by how flat the structure was at SGI-USA’s New England Chapter.

He showed me the library which was supplied with books in Japanese and English about Nichiren Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra. I saw one of the prayer rooms which members used to chant to the Gohonzon with their string of beads which Bryan informed me symbolized the human body. Each bead was a desire of the human mind. There were more than 100 beads. Then we went up the stairs into the meeting room where hundreds of members congregate on every first Sunday of the month where they virtually connect with members from across the world and speak of their goals for kosen-rufu. “We also have the festival called “50K Lions of Justice” where everyone gets together. It’s powerful because everyone is there to change the world and make it a better place. As an organization, we are currently 12 million members in 192 countries,” Bryan explained to me.

Then we went into the room where we were to have our meeting. To my surprise, I was not attending the Women’s Division meeting, but the meeting that was scheduled from 3-4pm on this Sunday afternoon was the introductory meeting for new members. In this meeting, potential new members are brought by members of the organization to learn more about Soka Gakkai
International and Nichiren Buddhism. Bryan escorted me to the front of the room full of comfortable, blue chairs arranged line after line facing the Gohonzon they described as the embodiment of Namu-myo-ho-renge-ko, or the essence of the Lotus Sutra. To my shock, Of the 11 members I met, I did not meet a single person of Japanese heritage who attended the meeting. At 22, I was the youngest member there also.

The Gohonzon, Bowl, and Stand that we Chanted Towards

We started the meeting with chanting to the Gohonzon. The Gohonzon was a large mandala framed and placed in the center of the wall. There was a microphone with which the leader bellowed the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo repeatedly for five minutes. During the next ten minutes we used a purple book called the “The Liturgy of the Soka Gakkai
International”\textsuperscript{165} to recite prayers and two chapters in the Lotus Sutra. One of the members approached me with her book and prayer beads wrapped around her right hand as she helped me chant the words of the Lotus Sutra. The entire room fell into harmony. It was clear that most of the people in the room have been practicing for years. I learned that members ranged from 45 years to 25 years to 1 year of experience practicing Nichiren Buddhism as a member of Soka Gakkai International. As we chanted, I focused my eyes on the leader who led the chant, Bryan. Jason leaned in and politely let me know, “When we chant, we try to focus all our focus on the Gohonzon,” as he pointed to the large mandala in the center of the wall with inscription in Japanese.

We recited word for word chapter 6 and chapter 28 from the Lotus Sutra in the Japanese. I was able to follow along using the romanization of the words inscribed in the book. These chapters reveal the Historical Buddha’s two messages as explained by one of the members, “These chapters reveal that everyone is born a buddha. We all have that buddha nature in us. You were born a buddha and have been a buddha all along.” We continued to recite three prayers from the liturgical book, the “Appreciation to the Gohonzon”, “Appreciation for the Three Founding Presidents, “Prayers for Worldwide Kosen-rufu and for the Deceased.” I read the “Appreciation to the Gohonzon” along with the other members:

\textbf{“Appreciation to the Gohonzon:”}

I offer my profound gratitude and appreciation to the Gohonzon, which embodies Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra.

\textsuperscript{165} The image of this book is provided as part of Appendix A
I offer my profound gratitude and appreciation to Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

I offer my profound gratitude and appreciation to Nikko Shonin.

*Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times.*

This prayer demonstrates the respect and veneration Soka Gakkai International has for the Lotus Sutra and the legacy left by Nichiren Daishonin, which they see as a buddha in his own right. Interestingly, the vestiges of the Nichiren Shoshu sect lingers after the split seen in the appreciation for Nikko Shonin, the founder of the Nichiren Shoshu sect. Nikko Shonin was the original disciple of Nichiren Daishonin and vowed to spread Nichiren’s teachings after his master passed away in 1282.

In addition to the prayers given for Nichiren, Nikko Shonin, and the Lotus Sutra, prayers were said for the first three presidents of Soka Gakkai, Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda:

**Appreciation for the Three Founding Presidents:**

I offer my deepest appreciation for the three founding presidents of the Soka Gakkai--Tunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda--the eternal mentors of kosen-rufu, for their selfless dedication to propagating the Law.

*Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times.*

**Prayers for Worldwide Kosen-rufu and for the Deceased:**

I pray that the great vow for worldwide kosen-rufu be fulfilled and that the Soka Gakkai International will develop in this endeavor for countless generations to come.

I pray to accomplish my own human revolution, change my destiny, and fulfill all of my wishes.

*(Offer additional prayers here.)*
I pray for my deceased relatives, fellow members, friends, and all those who have passed away, particularly for these individuals: (Sound the bell continuously while offering prayers.)

*Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times.*

I pray for peace throughout the world and the happiness of all living beings.

*Sound the bell and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times to conclude (if in a group, chant in unison).”*

At the end of reciting the two chapters, Bryan reached over a large, hollow bowl and hit it three times until vibrations filled the room. Our chanting ceased. “Now we are going to watch a ‘Buddhist in America’ video,” said Jason. I was familiar with the ‘Buddhist in America’ videos that Soka Gakkai International made in order to show potential converts how Americans became members of the organization. This video showed a beautiful American model, Naima Mora, who recalled the period of depression she faced after winning one of the nation’s top televised modeling contests, America’s Next Top Model. Naima explained her journey:

“I thought winning America’s Next Top Model would lead to lasting happiness for the rest of my life but soon thereafter I fell into a really dark and deep depression. I realized I needed something much more profound and I found that in Nichiren Buddhism.”

She narrated her life story as pictures of her younger self growing up in Detroit, Michigan flashed on the screen before us. She described her upbringing in Detroit,

“Detroit is an amazing city. There’s so much art and creativity but on the other hand it has also been one of the most dangerous cities in the United States. I had to deal with very violent circumstances like my friends being murdered due to gun and drug violence. I was held up at gunpoint for the first time in my life when I was 15 years old.” She
detailed how chanting nam-myoho-RENge-kyo enabled her family and herself to overcome
difficult circumstances and how the Soka Gakkai International “community really
couraged [her] to find the confidence within [herself].”^166

She described how chanting nam-myoho-RENge-kyo and her “Buddhist practice served as a
mirror of who [she] really is,” echoing the perspective that I heard from three members around
me.

Watching the “Buddhist in America” video reminded me of the Soka Gakkai
International YouTube Channel that disperses content out to viewers. One such campaign is
called “Treasure the Connection” that includes videos from Soka Gakkai International members
from countries like Korea, Canada, Taiwan, France, Brazil, Philippines, New Zealand, United
Kingdom, Japan, and India, and demonstrates how these members strive towards kosen-rufu.
From actors to puppeteers to dance teachers, they show viewers how they follow Nichiren
Buddhism in their own daily lives.^167 While the “Treasure the Connection” series depicts global
perspectives, the “Buddhist in America” series depicts profiles of various Americans and how
they used the Soka Gakkai International organization and the Nichiren Buddhist faith to
overcome obstacles such as brain tumors, feelings of suicide and failure, and deaths in the family
by finding strength and confidence through chanting and the support of the Soka Gakkai
International community. This is particularly important because the use of media as powerful
methods of content sharing has been crucial for SGI today. SGI has effectively utilized social
media as a platform to expand in ways only viral internet videos and campaigns can, particularly
hitting younger audiences with content that is easily consumable.

^166 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rmyvO5o6I&list=PLY61xqKoCKaqPl69-7K5-PmDPDxZtje1v&index=3
^167 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXQ3uNI7X_4&list=PLY61xgKoCKARfYH1JkzNACe6b33cCE
After the video, they called all of us, guests and members alike, to join in a circle in the back of the room. We arranged our chairs in a circle and Jason started to reflect on the experience we just had. He explained what Nichiren Buddhism is, what the Gohonzon signified, and what Nam Myoho Renge Kyo meant. I was also given this card:

The front of the card reads “Nam Myoho Renge Kyo. www.sgi-usa.org” with the image of the lotus flower Soka Gakkai International uses as their symbol.
While the back of the card read “Soka Gakkai International-USA Nichiren Buddhism for Daily Life” followed by the following message:

“Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” contains the very essence of the Buddha’s lifetime of teachings. By chanting “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” and inspiring hope in others, we manifest the unlimited potential of our lives and become the starting point for a peaceful society.”

Followed by a quote by Daisaku Ikeda:

“Buddhism is a teaching of unparalleled humanism that believes in the boundless potential within human beings.”

Another guest asked Bryan what Buddhism was. I was intrigued by the idea that members in SGI-USA attracted potential converts without prior background on Buddhism. When I learned that this guest was brought by a friend, however, I recalled the organizational structures of the kumi in Japan and the emphasis on friends and family as the most successful recruiters. Bryan answered with the historical account of Prince Shakyamuni coming out of his castle and seeing the suffering of his people in a very effective way exclaiming, “some people search for a cure for cancer, others become great singers-- this man wanted to understand how to stop suffering in the world.” I followed with my own question, “You say that chanting nam-myoh-renge-kyo is more than meditation. It is more powerful than meditation. What do you mean by that?” Bryan replied, “It is more powerful than meditation because chanting is like a mirror with which you can see your true self.” He explained how chanting allows you to see your karma, “You, right now, are your karma. Your karma is made up of all your experiences, feelings, emotions, and thoughts. Your karma is made up of all you have done and all that has been done to you. We cannot blame others for our karma. We have to take ownership over who
we are and what makes us who we are.” This was an interesting insight into how practitioners see their chanting as a way in which to take ownership over their own life. Bryan compared chanting with a mirror, which he can finally hold up to himself to see who he truly is. He continued, “Life is hard to see sometimes. It’s like your eyebrow. You cannot see your eyebrow because it’s so close to your eyes you cannot see it. This is like life. We are so close to our own life, we cannot see how we truly live, who we truly are as human beings. Chanting allows me to finally see myself as I am.” Members and guests nodded vigorously to his explanation of chanting and the strength and self-reflection it gave to his daily life. Bryan cleared his throat and started, “We are going to conclude the official meeting but feel free to ask more questions afterwards. Usually, we always end our meetings with a short chant. We like to ask a guest to close the meeting.” He turned to me and said, “So why don’t you try closing the meeting for us this time.” I was taken by surprise, “Oh I can try it but how do I do it?” Bryan ushered everyone back to the neat lines of seats arranged in rows in front of the Gohonzon, microphone, and instrumental bowl. I sat in front of the microphone as Bryan had done earlier holding the book we had read from. Bryan handed me something with which to strike the hollow bowl with and said, “You hit the bowl three times and then lead us by chanting “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.” Accordingly, I rang the bowl three times and a monotonous ring echoed in the room. I spoke into the microphone, saying “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” three times and as I did, the whole room echoed in harmony as guests and members alike joined in.

Once the meeting was over, I asked for a copy of the “The Liturgy of the Soka Gakkai International.” I learned that they would place me in contact with the leader of the Soka Gakkai International discussion group in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Therefore, I learned that in addition
to the large chapter here in Brookline, Soka Gakkai International has smaller, informal discussion groups in towns where practitioners can build a community.

I took a seat in the lobby of the Center and began to read over the liturgical primary source I was given in order to see whether my readings on Nichiren Buddhism and the *gosho* paralleled the actual practices of the 21st century American chapter of Soka Gakkai. In the beginning of the book, I was greeted with the important history of Nichiren Buddhism and the practice that Soka Gakkai International’s New England Chapter give to potential members and new converts to introduce them to the faith:

“**Introduction:** One of the most significant attributes of Nichiren Buddhism is its easily accessible practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This profound yet simple method of Buddhist practice is the perfect Buddhist teaching for the modern world. Practice is one of the three pillars of Nichiren Buddhism, the others being faith and study, through which we can bring forth our innate Buddhahood. Practice entails two aspects, practice for oneself and practice for others. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the primary practice for oneself. Nichiren Daishonin specified recitation of certain portions of the Lotus Sutra as a vital supporting practice for oneself. Doing both the primary and supporting practices each morning and evening gives rise to maximum joy and benefit in our lives.

Nichiren Daishonin never gave specific instructions on the format for the sutra recitation. But he did recommend reciting the “Expedient Means” (second) and “Life Span of Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapters of the Lotus Sutra, which are the heart of all Buddhist teachings.

He taught that our existence is identical to the universe as a whole, and the universe as a whole is identical to our existence. Each individual human life is a microcosm of the life of the
universe. We recite the sutra and chant Nam-myoho-rengyko, the universal Law, so that our lives perfectly harmonize with the universe. Carrying out these practices activates the infinite power that the microcosm inherently possesses. It transforms our fate, helping us to break through apparent deadlocks and convert sufferings into happiness. It creates a transformation of our inner realm, leaving us invigorated, refreshed, and positive. Through our primary and supporting practices, we develop wisdom and compassion to lead both ourselves and others to happiness.

Our twice-daily prayers establish a rhythm in our lives, moving us toward happiness and harmony. By making this consistent effort, we will attain perfect unity with the universal Law and experience the state of Buddhahood. Buddhism aims to make people free in the most profound sense; its purpose is not to restrict or constrain. Doing these daily prayers is a privilege, not an obligation. Tenacious efforts are required, but these are all for our own sake. To have great benefits or develop a profound state of life, we should exert ourselves accordingly.

As the language of the sutra is not English, people often ask if there is truly any value in reciting something we cannot understand. Certainly there is value in understanding the sutra’s meaning. In addition to the translation found in the back of this booklet, there are in-depth explanations available in various SGI publications. Studying such material can help us strengthen our understanding of and commitment to the Law but intellectual understanding without practice is of no use. Moreover, we cannot comprehend the real depth of the teachings through reason alone.

Birds have their own language, their own speech. People don’t understand it, but other birds do. There are many examples among humans as well--codes, jargon, or foreign languages
are well understood by experts or native speakers but unintelligible to others. Similarly, the language of the sutra is the language of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Whether we understand them or not, the words we chant evoke a powerful response from the universal Law, which is depicted on the Gohonzon.

Our attitude during these daily prayers has far reaching influence. Doing the daily practice joyfully and full of high expectations brings a much more positive result than doing so grudgingly or filled with doubt.

The daily practice, especially the sutra recitation, can take some time to master. Stumbling over pronunciation is common in the beginning. Nevertheless, one’s sincere attitude during the learning phase will bring the full benefit of the practice. Diligence in our Buddhist practice will enable us to savor ultimate victory.”

Reading the introduction, I made connections between the teachings of the SGI chapter in Boston with Soka Gakkai’s original foundations based on the teachings of Nichiren. Like Nichiren, Soka Gakkai International’s American chapter placed a large emphasis on core principles, mainly the recitation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and the Lotus Sutra as the supreme sutra. As is pointed out in the introduction, Nichiren strongly advocated for the core messages found in the second and sixteenth chapter in the Lotus Sutra and serves as the core principles of Nichiren Buddhism. These two principles assert that everyone has the potential within ourselves to be Enlightened and that everyone is already a buddha but simply has not realized it yet. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the first point asserts that there exists a Buddha-nature that is enduring throughout time and space, and the second point affirms that buddha-nature is in all of us and we have the power to realize it through enlightenment. All in all, I was pleasantly
surprised to affirm that the core Nichiren Buddhist teachings and principles, like chanting, the veneration of the Lotus Sutra, and the Gohonzon were all present in the liturgy of the modern practice of Nichiren Buddhism under Soka Gakkai International.

After reading the introduction, I continued through the book and found the sort of prayers that Soka Gakkai International gives to practitioners of the faith. They are as followed:

“The Silent Prayers: As mentioned above, Nichiren Daishonin never gave specific instructions on the format of our daily practice, which has changed over the centuries, all the while staying true to his intent. The SGI recommends that we recite the Lotus Sutra excerpts contained in this booklet, which are portions from the two chapters Nichiren Daishonin emphasized.

In addition, the SGI has formulated silent prayers intended to express our shared sense of gratitude and resolve as believers in Nichiren Buddhism and as SGI members. The wording of these prayers is meant as a guideline to help us express such gratitude and determination. It is not the specific wording of the silent prayers but our sincerity and heartfelt thoughts while performing the prayers that are important.

According to the principle of “three thousand realms in a single moment of life,” our wholehearted prayer is powerful enough to bring forth the protective functions innate in our lives and the environment. In beginning the morning and evening recitation of the sutra, after sounding the bell and while chanting Nam-myoho-rengo-kyo three times, we offer appreciation for these protective functions.

In Nichiren Buddhism, the greatest degree of gratitude is expressed through dedicating ourselves to Buddhist practice for self and others, and attaining enlightenment.
As core to the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism, the SGI regards Nichiren Daishonin as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, upholds belief in the Three Great Secret Laws--which embody the fundamental Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo--and carries out the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon for oneself and for others. In several of his writings, Nichiren describes Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the fundamental Law of the universe, as “the essence of the Lotus Sutra,” which he expressed in graphic form as the Gohonzon.

Thus the first prayer expresses a vow to base one’s faith on the Gohonzon and to uphold practice as taught by Nichiren Daishonin, in addition to expressing gratitude to Nikko Shonin, Nichiren’s immediate successor who correctly preserved and transmitted his mentor’s teachings.

The spread of Nichiren Buddhism throughout the world has been realized due to the noble efforts of the three founding presidents of the Soka Gakkai- Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda to perpetuate the global spread of Nichiren’s teachings and the spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple, we honor these three presidents as the mentors of kosen-rufu.

In the second silent prayer, when offering deep appreciation for the selfless dedication of the founding presidents, we are also vowing to put their guidance into practice, and to carry on and convey the spirit with which they endeavored to spread the Mystic Law.

In the third silent prayer, with the awareness that the SGI--the community of believers practicing Nichiren Buddhism throughout the world--carries out Buddhist practice as taught by Nichiren Daishonin in exact accord with the Buddha’s will, we pray for the attainment of worldwide kosen-rufu and the continual advancement of the SGI.

In addition, we determine to accomplish our own human revolution, change our destiny, and fulfill all of our wishes.
Our chanting of Nam-myoho-reng-kyo and recitation of the sutra reach beyond the limits of time and space, and affect the life of the entire universe, as indicated in our prayers for the deceased and prayers for the happiness of all living beings.

These silent prayers are offered morning and evening at the conclusion of the sutra recitation and chanting of Nam-myoho-reng-kyo.”

These “Silent Prayers” are a guide to practicing Nichiren Buddhism in daily life. They are a reflection on the practice and intent behind worship. Words such as “determination” and “resolve” describe the act of prayer and chanting. Worship as powerful and as an expression of gratitude is evoked by the latter half of this section. It addresses the importance of feeling and emotion play into acts of worship not quite understood, which would be helpful to a practitioner who is barely starting to chant and who is a not a Japanese speaker. This reflection and explanation would be particularly helpful for new members who are going through the motions of chanting and need to identify the meaning behind their actions of worship. I was impressed to read “Silent Prayers” and identify the Three Great Secret Laws, concept of karma, meaning behind chanting, the importance of feeling and intent during worship, and the mention of Mappo, or the Latter Days. These all explicitly point to Nichiren’s teachings and affirms that Soka Gakkai International’s preservation of his teachings irrespective of time, place, and space. Be it overseas or back home in Japan, Nichiren’s core teachings prove to be intact in regards to Soka Gakkai International’s practice and understanding of them.

As I sifted through the book, I noticed the in-depth glossary that the chapter provided where they defined all the key teachings of Nichiren from the meaning of the Gohonzon, Shakyamuni, the Great Secret Laws, and other key definitions for Soka Gakkai International and
Nichiren Buddhism. Along with a glossary came instructions on how to chant for beginners and the format in which chanting is done as well as a “Pronunciation Guide” with instructions on how to read aloud and chant the Japanese prayers and the Lotus Sutra chapters in Japanese using the romanization of the words. This allowed people who are not fluent in the Japanese language to chant effectively and participate in the greater community chanting ritual, as I did during the group chant I was a part of. The romanization of the Japanese allowed guests like myself to follow along with members who had been chanting for decades sitting alongside of us. The incorporation of the English language and liturgical books that provide definitions, glossaries, and introductions to Nichiren Buddhism and Soka Gakkai are some of the powerful bridges between the Japanese world and new environments like America that have made the movement so successful abroad.

In addition to the liturgical book, a crucial resource for beginners and potential converts, I was also given the World Tribune. This is one of the publications Soka Gakkai International’s American organization publishes monthly and is written for the general public. When members hope to inspire others to join the organization, they give them this sort of literature in order to inform them about the ongoing activities of the organization. When I was given the World Tribune during my visit, the event that stood out prominently on the front page was the “50,000 Lions of Justice” Festival set for September 23, 2018. This highly-anticipated festival organized by SGI-USA’s youngest members will take place across nine cities as seen here on the cover of the World Tribune’s January issue:

168 Glossary in Soka Gakkai International’s liturgical book is provided as a primary source in Appendix B
169 Format instructions is found as a primary source in Appendix B
170 The pronunciation guide is included as part of Appendix C
171 The Japanese prayers romanization is found as part of Appendix D
The purpose of the festival is to gather 50,000 SGI-USA’s youth, members ages 14-39, across the United States and unite in the mission of world peace, *kosen-rufu*, through Nichiren Buddhism. In the “Who are we” section of the event’s registration page, it outlines the organizers sense of identity and purpose for the event:

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172 Please find the January issue of the *World Tribune* as part of Appendix E
“As SGI Nichiren Buddhists, we believe at the root of the violence, disrespect, and inequality in our country is the anger, greed, and fear in the human heart. To change the world, we have to change ourselves, and inspire the people around us to change. SGI Nichiren Buddhism exists to help us win over our anger, fear, apathy—it exists to help us win over ourselves.”

As part of SGI-USA’s promotion of this event, they have launched social media campaigns online through Instagram\textsuperscript{174} and YouTube\textsuperscript{175} that highlight youth members who will be attending the festival in September. SGI-USA is directly spotlighting members’ stories and how they came to practice Nichiren Buddhism, what the practice means to them, and how they plan to help others find meaning for themselves in their own lives. The following is an example of a member who will be attending the “50K Lions of Justice” Festival as seen on SGI-USA’s page on Instagram that was shared for the purpose of encouraging others in their own lives:

“By age 20, I finally accepted my true identity as a transgender man. Telling others was painfully difficult and scary. Some friends were confused and rejected me outright. I was commonly harassed and even denied employment. All this abuse made it easier for me to devalue my life. Deep down I still didn’t accept who I was. My Buddhist practice became my lifeline, and as I embraced the purpose of the SGI as my own, I experienced incredible joy. With renewed confidence, I embarked on my goal to have gender-affirming surgery. I chanted to forge the courage to cast off others’ expectations of me, and in the end, I fully embraced myself, and the surgery was a complete success! I will advance my dream to build value-creative cultural spaces and communities for youth

\textsuperscript{173}https://www.lionsofjustice.org/#whoweare
\textsuperscript{174}https://www.instagram.com/sgiusa/
\textsuperscript{175}https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnf70hhCgJs
who lack access to quality education. I’ll be at the 50,000 Lions of Justice Festival because it represents helping another person believe their life is valuable. That’s what Buddhism has done for me! #ittakesalion #nrmk #daisakuikeda #sgi #sgiusa #transgender #nonbinary #buddhism.”

This story is powerful because it describes how a brave transgender man struggled with the harassment he faced from society about his gender. It speaks to the inner turmoil he faced when he came to grips with his feelings about his identity. He then shares how Soka Gakkai International and Nichiren Buddhism became his “lifeline,” the tool to overcome the abuse and emotional distress he was facing in a difficult point in his life. With the “renewed confidence” Nichiren Buddhism and the organization provided, he was able to face his hardships and emotions and “fully embrace” himself to the point where he was comfortable enough to undergo surgery to affirm his new identity. The sharing of these stories, journeys of individual members who have found Nichiren Buddhism and SGI as incredible sources of support in the most difficult of times, is an incredible method in which to attract new followers who also face hardship and are looking for a way through or a way out. Moreover, the sharing of these stories via a platform that can be instantly shared with millions of Instagram users with the click of a button and the phenomenon of content “going viral” gives SGI-USA a strong tool in which to reach millions of youths around the world who are looking for kinds of support they may need in their lives. When youth read posts like these on Instagram about transgender members who used Nichiren Buddhism and SGI-USA to pull themselves up from an abyss, they see that SGI-USA is a community where young people can be vulnerable and honest and people will listen and help, as they did with this young transgender man.
Soka Education in America: The Ikeda Center For Peace, Learning, and Dialogue

Daisaku Ikeda founded the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue in 1993 near Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This organization is another limb of Soka Gakkai International that is devoted to the process of realizing kosen-rufu, world peace, through actionable items. In President’s Ikeda 2018 Peace Proposal he writes, “To fundamentally negate the existence of those seen as enemies, to be willing to eradicate them with an extreme destructive power—this cruel tendency to deny human dignity underlies the thinking that justifies the possession of nuclear weapons.” President Ikeda’s strong opinion over nuclear weapons originates from his Soka Gakkai mentor, former Toda. He continues to write, “This is precisely what my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda (1900-58), expressed in his declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons in September 1957 amidst the intensifying nuclear arms race of the Cold War.” Through his previous mentorship with Toda, we see that both leaders of Soka Gakkai International are committed to their mission for nuclear disarmament and sees it as essential to fulfilling their mission.

I had the privilege of attending the Center’s talk on nuclear disarmament entitled “Nuclear Abolition: Claiming Your Right to Live.” Other previous talks included ending war around the world, humanism, and conflict resolution in order to live harmoniously with others. The first thing we were shown at the event was a video in which fellows with the organization asked people in Harvard Square about their thoughts on nuclear weapons. Afterwards, through a series of small group discussions, my group and I attempted to answer vital questions concerning the issue of nuclear weapons. Questions that I was asked included the following three:

176 The image is available as part of Appendix F
177 Appendix G includes an image from the event and the programming schedule.
1. What concerns or issues that were raised in the video have you thought of previously or haven’t thought of at all?

2. What kind of information and awareness should citizens have around these issues?

3. What do you think about this video project as a technique to raise awareness?

It was clear, through these questions alone, that the Ikeda Center and its members were concerned with education, awareness, and actionable items, or “techniques” in which to gain community support and involvement surrounding these issues. Through discussion, I learned that members of Soka Gakkai International had traveled from New York City and Boston to attend the event. I learned of the ties between SGI and the Ikeda Center through my time at the event. It was evident that President Ikeda was using the Ikeda Center as a tool for awareness, education, community activism, and the promotion of *kosen-rufu*, world peace.

**Conclusion**

It was interesting to observe the way in which community centers could promote values Soka Gakkai International advocates for without relying on members who are Nichiren Buddhism. Members were not practicing Nichiren Buddhism but were still promoting values that Soka Gakkai International advocates for, like world peace. In this sense, Soka Gakkai International has opened chapters that are not explicitly religious, like Soka University of America\(^\text{178}\) and the Ikeda Center. Nonetheless, these institutions created by Soka Gakkai International advocate for the values the organization stand by such as education and the mission

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\(^{178}\) I had the pleasure of interviewing a Soka University of America alum who spoke about his time at the university in the early 2000s. He described the university as devoid of a religious agenda. He described it as a secular institution. I have not been successful in finding sources that would negate or complicate this statement.
of kosen-rufu through actionable items like: nuclear disarmament, ending war, and conflict resolution.

Final Conclusion:

Assessing A Modern Movement

Soka Gakkai International has successfully managed to retain the core principles of the 13th century monk, Nichiren Daishonin. Despite their global expansion, Soka Gakkai International retained the core elements of Nichiren Buddhism. The utilization and endurance of the Gohonzon, the scroll in which Nichiren Daishonin first presented to his followers as a physical object of worship, has endured through the test of time. More importantly, the Gohonzon continues to retain its original meaning as the physical representation of the Lotus Sutra. The explicit teaching of Nichiren Daishonin’s Gohonzon as taught by Soka Gakkai International does not fall short of SGI’s practice of the religion either. In the “Liturgy of the Soka Gakkai International,” they define the Gohonzon as the “embodiment of the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, expressing the life state of Buddhahood, which all people inherently possess,” echoing the beliefs of Nichiren Daishonin more than half a millennium later.

Soka Gakkai International also continues to preserve the practice of chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, or “Adoration be to the Scripture of the Lotus of the Perfect Truth!” Chanting was crucial to the enlightenment of the followers of Nichiren in the 13th century. Nichiren writes about this practice in his letters and defines the practice of chanting as the only path to enlightenment. Just as Nichiren’s original disciples practiced chanting
Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo in front of the Gohonzon hundreds of years ago, Soka Gakkai International’s Boston chapter chants these words to a large, enshrined Gohonzon also.

Besides the importance of chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and the Gohonzon, the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra is a key component of Nichiren Buddhism. All three are seen in SGI-USA’s practice of the religion. Indeed, in addition to Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, the organization also recites excerpts from the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” chapters of the Lotus Sutra as part of daily worship. These two chapters are two of the most highlighted passages in Nichiren’s original writings. They are sermons given by the Buddha that assert the infinite, eternal quality of the buddha nature, or the potential to be Enlightened, as well as affirm that buddha nature is within every sentient being. In this respect, Soka Gakkai International is following the teachings of Nichiren, as both organization and 13th century monk vehemently attest to the superiority of the Lotus Sutra as the true and complete truth as transmitted by the Historical Buddha.

Moreover, both Nichiren Daishonin’s writings and Soka Gakkai International subscribe to the idea that humanity is living in the age of Mappo, or the Latter Days, and only the true teaching of the Lotus Sutra can save them. In Nichiren’s lifetime, he ambitiously sought to convert all of Japan in an effort to save the country from chaos and destruction brought on by evil religions proclaiming false dharma and the illegitimate rule of the Hojo clan. In this respect, Nichiren was trying to bring peace to his country in the Latter Days. More than half a millennium later, Soka Gakkai International has taken on this mission to use Nichiren Buddhism as a path towards world peace. Soka Gakkai International defines their mission for world peace as kosen-rufu and proclaims that the mission for world peace starts with one human revolution.
This revolution is the process in which the individual human realizes their own power through the force of chanting *Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*. Through this mission of proselytizing others in the name of world peace, Nichiren and Soka Gakkai International are similar because they are both passionate about converting the world as opposed to converting a few chosen disciples and isolating themselves from the rest. On the contrary, Nichiren and Soka Gakkai International attempt to gain as much influence as possible in order to persuade potential converts en masse through different tactics.

The tactics utilized by Nichiren and Soka Gakkai International mirror each other. Soka Gakkai International’s establishment of the political party Komeito demonstrates that the organization saw the political sphere as a viable way to gain influence and push their agenda for world peace through this medium. With the same intent, Nichiren wrote letters to government officials in order to influence the Japanese through people with political authority. Like Soka Gakkai International, Nichiren understood the power of the political to influence the public.

In addition to the political, Soka Gakkai International gained inspiration directly from Nichiren’s style of proselytizing of *shakubuku*, or literally “to break and subdue”, in order to convert new believers to Nichiren Buddhism. These aggressive tactics are explicit in Nichiren’s letters and demonstrate the radical determination in which Nichiren carried out his mission to promote the Lotus Sutra.

Where Soka Gakkai International does differ from Nichiren is on the matter of *shakubuku* during the latter half of the 20th century. During Soka Gakkai International’s expansion, they had to abandon Nichiren’s radical tactics, like *shakubuku*, in order to appeal to new cultures and environments that were not characteristic of 13th century Japan. In countries such as Brazil and
Italy, Soka Gakkai International refrained from denouncing God and merely worked around the concept of the existence of God. Instead, Soka Gakkai International members did not discourage new members to fuse their Catholic faith with Nichiren Buddhism. Because of this lack of clarity on the part of Soka Gakkai, new members often reinterpreted Nichiren Buddhist practices in their own way. Some new members defined the Historical Buddha as God when, clearly, there is no place for God in Nichiren Buddhism. Nichiren Buddhism, after all, is solely based on the individual’s path towards enlightenment without assistance of the superhuman variety. The clear, radical, and fierce intolerance of other religions is characteristic of 13th century Nichiren. It is not characteristic, however, of a growing, expanding organization like Soka Gakkai International who must develop beyond simple, aggressive tactics like shakubuku and speak directly to the qualms facing people in an age of modernity.

Instead of the nationalism and apocalypticism that characterised Nichiren, Soka Gakkai International is described as an organization that is tolerant of other religions but remains steadfast in Nichiren Buddhism’s role in the path towards kosen-rufu, world peace. The motives behind Nichiren’s chanting and proselytizing was for the safety and security of Japan. Japan was the center of Nichiren’s universe and it was up to him to rescue her from illegitimate rule and the slanders of true dharma. These distinct priorities and point in time and place caused Nichiren’s chanting and efforts to be solely placed on the salvation of his country. Nichiren hoped to stop earthquakes, natural disasters, and Mongol invasions that were destroying Japan. Quite the contrary, Soka Gakkai International members do not pray for the safety of their country at all. Members have been known to pray for their health, quality relationships, and other individualistic, material goals. From good grades in school to finding the confidence to affirm
their new transgender identity or escape the violence in their environment, members often chant about changing their own material environments.

Therefore, Soka Gakkai International’s Nichiren Buddhism deviates from Nichiren’s practice of Buddhism in that the priorities and intent are different for practitioners in the 21st century. I would note the important difference between the motives, priorities, and circumstances between Nichiren’s practice of Buddhism when compared to Soka Gakkai International’s modern member’s interpretation but I would not go so far as to discount SGI’s practice as a complete deviation for Nichiren’s original teachings. After all, Nichiren never set clear guidelines in terms of the intent and motives behind practicing the religion. The only clear goal behind chanting is to realize one’s buddha-nature, one’s potential for enlightenment. Enlightenment is defined as a renunciation of all worldly suffering through the relinquishing of attachments from the world. If one is chanting for a new car, this might be a problem. How can one relinquish attachments to the material world and still openly practice a religion of worldly renunciation? This becomes a complicated question worthy of future research and probing. In the meantime, this question goes beyond the scope of this thesis which is concerned with the practice of Nichiren Buddhism, the foundations of Soka Gakkai in Japan, and the expansion of Soka Gakkai International into different parts of the world.

As we have learned, Soka Gakkai International has had to let go of many things on their path towards global expansion: the priesthood of Nichiren Shoshu, Nichiren’s radical nature and Japanese nationalism, Nichiren’s intolerance of other religions, the conservatism of an all-male leadership, and the practice of shakubuku to gain members. Does this mean that they deviated from Nichiren’s original teachings and, therefore, have strayed from the True Religion? I would
argue not at all. Soka Gakkai International simply adapted to fit a global, contemporary world. In terms of the future of the organization, however, I predict that if chapters within the organization begin fusing elements that are in direct opposition to Nichiren Buddhism, than they would no longer be Nichiren Buddhists. For instance, if BSGI decides that Buddha is God, then this would no longer be Nichiren Buddhism according to the 13th century monk. Would this lead to a split from the larger organization of Soka Gakkai International? Will the same incident occur as the time when Soka Gakkai International was changing at a speed the conservative Nichiren Shosho priesthood could not keep up with? Will there be such a large expansion of Soka Gakkai International chapters that the neat organizational structure Soka Gakkai had in its inception will start to deteriorate is it gets larger? And a more pressing question, what will happen to the organization after President Ikeda, who just celebrated his 90th birthday, leaves the organization? How will power be allocated then and will this change the organization, religion, and practice of Nichiren Buddhism when these power shifts finally occur? These are the questions I am left with and will continue to grapple with beyond this work.
Appendices

Appendix A

The Liturgy of the Soka Gakkai International

Appendix B
“Format: Morning and evening gongyo follow the same format:

To begin, face the Gohonzon, sound the bell, and chat Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times (in unison if in a group). This includes appreciation to the protective functions of the universe.

Recite the excerpt from the “Expedient Means” chapter (pages 1-5). When finished, sound the bell.

Recite the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter (pages 6-17). When finished, sound the bell as you begin chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Continue chanting for as long as you wish.

To conclude the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, sound the bell and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times. Then offer the silent prayers (as described on pages 18-19).”

The Glossary:

“Buddha: “Enlightened One,” One who correctly perceives the true nature of all phenomena and leads others to attain enlightenment. The nature of a Buddha exists in all beings and is characterized by the qualities of wisdom, courage, compassion, and life force.

“Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra: The second of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra, in which Shakyamuni Buddha reveals that the purpose of a Buddha’s advent in the world is to lead all people to enlightenment. Shakyumuni shows that all people have the potential for Buddhahood. This is the principal chapter of the theoretical teaching (the sutra’s first half) and one of the two pivotal chapters of the entire sutra, the other being the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapter, the core of the essential teaching (latter half).
Gohonzon: The object of devotion in Nichiren Buddhism. The embodiment of the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, expressing the life state of Buddhahood, which all people inherently possess. Go means worthy of honor, and honzon means an object of fundamental respect.

Human revolution: An inner transformation by which people cultivate and come to express their highest human qualities, enabling them to change their circumstances as well. This process is a revolution in the character, in the life, of an individual human being.

Kosen-rufu: Widespread propagation, or wide proclamation and dissemination. It is a term from the Lotus Sutra that literally means to declare and spread widely—Shakyamuni Buddha’s injunction to his followers. The spread of the essence of the Lotus Sutra, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, will bring about peace and happiness in the world. Therefore, kosen-rufu also refers to the creation of a peaceful, happy, and prosperous society based on the humanistic principles of Nichiren Buddhism.

“Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra: The sixteenth chapter of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra, in which Shakyamuni Buddha reveals that he originally attained enlightenment in the far distant past rather than in his present life in India as his listeners generally thought. This chapter concludes with a verse section, which restates the important teachings of the preceding prose section. This is the principal chapter of the essential teaching (latter half) and one of the
two pivotal chapters of the entire sutra, the other being the “Expedient Means” (second) chapter, the core of the theoretical teaching (first half).

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo: The name of the fundamental Law of life and the universe expounded in Nichiren Buddhism. The literal meaning is: Nam (devotion), the action of practicing Buddhism; myoho (Mystic Law), the essential law of life and its phenomenal manifestations; renge (lotus), the simultaneity of cause and effect; kyo (sutra), the truth expressed through the sound of one’s voice.

Nichiren Daishonin (1222-82): The founder of the Buddhist teaching upon which the SGI bases its activities for peace and happiness in the world. He established the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon as the universal practice for attaining enlightenment. The name Nichiren means sun lotus, and Daishonin is an honorific title that means great sage.

Nikko Shonin (1246-1333): Nichiren Daishonin’s designated successor. He concentrated on propagating his mentor’s teachings, educating disciples, and collecting and transcribing his mentor’s writings.

Protective functions: Literally, heavenly beings and benevolent deities. Referred to also in Buddhist texts as heavenly gods and benevolent deities, Buddhist gods, protective gods, etc. These are inherent functions of nature and society that protect practitioners who uphold the correct Buddhist teaching. They function to protect the people and their land, and bring good
fortune to both. These protective functions gain strength through one’s Buddhist practice. They also indicate the protective or supportive actions of other people.

Shakyamuni: Also known as Gautama Buddha. The founder of Buddhism. Shakyamuni means “sage of the Shakyas,” Shakya being the name of the tribe or clan to which his family belonged. The many Buddhist sutras are regarded as records of teachings expounded by Shakyamuni.

Soka Gakkai: Value Creation Society. The lay organization that promotes Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings for peace and happiness. The Soka Gakkai was founded in 1930 in Japan, and the SGI, Soka Gakkai International, was established in 1975 on Guam.

Three founding presidents: Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) was the first Soka Gakkai president. An educator and scholar, he developed the philosophy of value creation (soka), from which the Soka Gakkai gets its name. Together with Josei Toda (1900-58), he founded the Soka Gakkai in 1930 and taught that practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s teaching is the means for leading a life of the highest values and greatest good. Both Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda were imprisoned by the Japanese wartime government for their unyielding imposition of state-sponsored religion. Mr. Makiguchi died at age seventy-three during his incarceration. Mr. Toda became the second president in 1951. After World War II, he lead the reconstruction of the Soka Gakkai, taking the membership from 3,000 to more than 750,000. Mr. Toda’s closest disciple, to more than 75,000. Mr. Toda’s closest disciple, Daisaku Ikeda (1928-), became the third president in 1960. He took office as the first SGI president in 1975. Under his leadership,
Nichiren Buddhism has spread to nearly two hundred countries and territories. These three founding presidents, due to their committed efforts and dauntless spirit, are honored as the eternal mentors of kosen-rufu.

Three Great Secret Laws: The core principles of Nichiren Daishonin's teaching. They are the object of devotion of the essential teaching [the Gohonzon], the daimoku of the essential teaching [Nam-myoho-RENGE-kyo], and the sanctuary of the essential teaching [where we enshrine and chant to the Gohonzon]. Here, “essential teaching” refers to the teaching of Nam-myoho-RENGE-kyo and not to the essential teaching, or the latter fourteen chapters, of the Lotus Sutra. The Three Great Secret Laws represent Nichiren’s embodiment of the Mystic Law, to which he was enlightened, in a form that all people can practice and thereby gain access to that Law within their own lives.”
### Pronunciation Guide

This book uses the Hepburn system of Romanization:

**Vowels:**
- a as in father
- e as in ten
- i as in machine
- o as in open
- u as in rule
- ai as in Thailand
- ui as in Louie

**Consonants:**
- g as in get
- j as in joy
- ts as in bets
- h as in hello
- y as in yet

### Rhythm

As a general rule, there is one Chinese character for each beat, with the following exceptions:

- **shari-hitsu** (two beats)
- **hara-mitsu** (two beats)

### Format

Morning and evening gongyo follow the same format:

To begin, face the Gohonzon, sound the bell, and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times (in unison if in a group). This includes appreciation to the protective functions of the universe.

Recite the excerpt from the “Expeditious Means” chapter (pages 1–5). When finished, sound the bell.

Recite the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter (pages 6–17). When finished, sound the bell as you begin chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Continue chanting for as long as you wish.

To conclude the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, sound the bell and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times. Then offer the silent prayers (as described on pages 18–19).
Appendix D

無 數 諸 佛。盡 行
Mushu sho butsu. Jin gyō

諸 佛。無 量 道 法。勇 猛
Sho-butsu. Muryō dōhō. Yūmyō

精 進。名 称 普 開。成就
Shōjin. Myōshō fu mon. Jōju

甚 深。未 曽 有 法。隨 官 所
Mizu-u hō. Zui gi sho

說。意 趣 難 解。舍 利 弗

吾 從 成 佛 已 来。種 種 因 緣
Go ji jō-butsu irai. Shuju innen.

種 種 語 訳。廣 演 言 教。無
Shuju hiyu. Kō en gonkyō. Mu

數 方 便。引 導 衆 生。令 離
Shō hōben. Indō shujō. Ryō ri

諸 著。所 以 者 何。如 來

方 便。知 見 波 羅 蜜。皆
Hōben. Chi-ken hara-mitsu. Kai

已 具 見。 舍 利 弗。 如 來
I gu-soku. Shari-hotsu. Nyorai

知 見。廣 大 深 遠。無 量
Chi-ken. Kōdai jinnon. Muryō

無 磯。力。無 所 畏。禪 定。

解 除。三 昧。深 入 無 際。

成 就 一 切。未 曽 有 法。舍 利
Jōju issai. Mi-zō-u hō. Shari-

弗。如 來 能。種 種 分
Shuji hotsu. Nyorai no. Shuju fun-

別。巧 說 話。 言
Bet. Kō seis hotsu. Gyō seis sho hō. Gon-

柔 柔 柔。 悅 可 衆 心。 舍 利
Ryōi nyūnan. Ekka shushin. Shari-
WHERE WILL YOU BE ON SEPTEMBER 23?
50,000 LIONS OF JUSTICE FESTIVAL IN 9 CITIES. BE THERE!
Fostering Capable People Is Key to Brilliant Achievement in Kosen-rufu

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda

Congratulations on this magnificent fresh departure from our great Chubu Region toward the upcoming Year of Brilliant Achievement in the New Era of Worldwide Kosen-rufu!

I am delighted to hear about the wonderful exchange meetings that were held in Chubu’s Aichi, Gifu and Mie prefectures (on Dec. 9) with visiting SGI members brimming with a noble seeking spirit. I would like to sincerely thank these leaders from 16 countries and territories who are compassionately spreading the Mystic Law. Let’s all give them a warm welcome!

Let me also express my appreciation to our members in Chubu, throughout Japan and all across the globe for their all-out efforts over the past year—especially, their efforts in Buddhist dialogue, which have caused our network of happiness to grow at an astonishing pace.

Let’s give one another a big round of applause for our effort and unity, infusing it with a resounding call to the heavenly deities to protect us without fail.

In January 1976, I attended the first women’s division general meeting of the year in Nagoya. Surrounded by members of our Soka family in Chubu—the brightest star of kosen-rufu—I declared: “Who are the most noble and admirable in all the world? The ordinary, unheralded women and mothers—in particular, the women and mothers of the Soka Gakkai, the shining stars of kosen-rufu.”

I would once again like to express my profound gratitude and respect for the wonderful members of our women’s division, who “strengthen their faith day by day and month after month” (“On Persecutions Befalling the Sage,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 897) and cheerfully illuminate the entire Soka Gakkai every single day, like the sun that rises without fail.

Let us resolve together to make next year, 2018, a year of development and victory for our movement that will bring joy to all our women’s division members.

Carrying on the vision of my mentor, second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda, I presented my beloved members in Chubu with the motto: “Be a strong fortress of kosen-rufu.” And now, having overcome many hardships, they have succeeded in building a towering and indestructible “golden castle” here in the “strong fortress” of Chubu.

What is the driving force for building a “strong fortress” of kosen-rufu? It is none other than invincible faith.

Nichiren Daishonin writes, “The greater the hardships befalling him [the vortary of the Lotus Sutra], the greater the delight he feels, because of his strong faith” (“A Ship to Cross the Sea of
Suffering,” WND-1, 33). As the onslaughts of the three powerful enemies of Buddhism buffeted Chiba more fiercely than anywhere, the noble pioneering men and women’s division members there persevered bravely with strong faith, just as Nichiren teaches.

I will never forget the words of the early pioneer and first-district leader of Chiba, who said to me in December 1958: “No matter what happens, we will not be defeated. We will strive together with the Soka Gakkai for kosen-rufu. No matter what the situation, we will continue to defend the Soka Gakkai and spread our movement.”

It fills me with great joy and pride that the Chiba spirit of being a “strong fortress of truth and justice” remains alive and vital, and is being carried on by our successors in the youth division.

Our faith in the Mystic Law and our Soka Gakkai activities are the ultimate driving force for building in each person’s heart a “strong fortress of respect for the dignity of life” that will never fall in the face of any trial or adversity in our lives or society.

Nichiren writes: “When with our mouths we chant the Mystic Law [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo], our Buddha nature, being summoned, will invariably emerge. The Buddha nature of Brahma and Shakra [the two main guardian deities of Buddhism], being called, will protect us, and the Buddha nature of the Budhas and bodhisattvas, being summoned, will rejoice” (“Those Initially Aspiring to the Way,” WND-1, 607).

Precisely because we live in such troubled times, let’s work even harder to expand our grassroots network for peace based on the humanistic principles of Nichiren Buddhism, and make our jubilant chanting for the happiness of ourselves and others resound vibrantly!

Next year is the Vow of Brilliant Achievement. Our focus is on brilliant achievements that will endure forever, not transitory, fleeting acclaim. The key is fostering people and nurturing young lives to fulfill their potential.

Our Soka castle of capable people overflows with a spirit to treasure everyone and wholeheartedly support and encourage them. Chiba, in particular, stands as an inspiring model in efforts to help future division members develop into global citizens.

Today, people the world over are searching for a path that supports humanistic values, human rights and peace. Calling forth ever-greater numbers of young bodhisattvas of the Earth, let us continue to forge ahead bravely on this path of brilliant achievement we have chosen.

I am chanting for all of you, my dear fellow members everywhere. Be well and safe. And working together in harmony and good cheer, may you lead lives of brilliant achievement and fulfillment as complete as the full moon.

Wishing you all a very Happy New Year! WT
SGI News

NUCLEAR ABOLITION
SGI Attends Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony

OSLO, NORWAY, Dec. 10—On behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, ICAN Executive Director Beatrice Fihn (right) and Hiroshima atomic bomb survivor Setsuko Thurlow (center) accept the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize from Norwegian Nobel Committee Chair Berit Reiss-Andersen. In recognition of the SGI’s integral partnership with ICAN, SGI representatives attended the ceremony.

BOOKS

The Five Eternal Guidelines


The book is available for $4.95 at SGI-USA bookstores and will be available soon as an e-book.

JOBS

SGI-USA Is Hiring

The SGI-USA is hiring full-time and part-time staff. Active participation in SGI-USA activities is required. Please send a resume and relevant work examples to jobs@sgi-usa.org.

- Construction Specialist
- Real Estate Manager
- Accounting Specialist

SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow the SGI on Twitter!

The SGI introduces its official Twitter account! Follow @sgi_info for updates on the SGI's community-based activities and Buddhist practice. You can also visit https://twitter.com/SGI_info.
Experience

The Wonderful Sounds of Peace
How I transformed a hardship into the source of my growth and happiness as a musician.

by Jason Faust
NEW ORLEANS

At 13, I discovered my love for the trumpet when I heard my music teacher perform. I immediately told him that I wanted to switch from the clarinet to the trumpet, but he told me it would be too difficult. I proved him wrong when, a few days later, I asked my parents to buy me a trumpet and I taught myself the basics.

By the time I was 16, I was performing with a professional jazz band in my hometown of Boca Raton, Florida. I developed a love for jazz, because as an improvised form of art it allowed me to express my voice.

Following my dream of becoming a great jazz trumpeter, I joined the jazz studies program at Florida State University. In summer 2015, as I approached my junior year, I began having severe dental problems, which affected the way I played. I had a series of oral surgeries to correct the issues but the operations themselves caused severe nerve damage to my teeth, I was forced to put my trumpet down.

When I lost the ability to play, I felt as if I had lost a loved one. I was so traumatized that I completely dismissed the possibility of playing the trumpet again.

During this difficult time, I began to explore Eastern philosophies and spiritual practices, which helped ground me. With my abiding love for jazz, I soon decided to take up the challenge of learning the piano. Within half a year of daily practice and private lessons, I had gained enough proficiency to be accepted into the jazz piano program at my school, which allowed me to graduate on time with the rest of my peers.

In 2017, I moved from New Orleans to play music full-time, but I couldn’t find work and soon struggled to pay my bills. That was when I came across an online video of jazz legend Herbie Hancock giving a lecture on “Buddhism and Creativity” at Harvard University. A piano student had once asked Herbie, “How do you develop your touch?” to which he replied, “Develop your life.” Herbie went on to explain in his lecture that chanting Nam-myoho-reno-kyo was the main reason for his success in life, because it enabled him to develop his humanity. I was amazed by what he said and wanted to learn more.

As a lion of justice, I’m determined to continue expanding my life as a musician.

JANUARY 12, 2018
MESSAGE

Bring Forth the Heart of a Lion King

SGI President Ikeda sent the following message to the SGI-USA Youth General Meetings held across the country in December.

Congratulations on holding this SGI-USA Youth General Meeting, marking a spirited departure toward 2018, the Year of Brilliant Achievement in the New Era of Worldwide kosen-rufu.

You have exerted yourselves wholeheartedly this year, and Nichiren Daishonin is well aware of the noble efforts you have been making day after day throughout this beautiful land of America. Therefore, you will without a doubt enjoy boundless benefits.

We all have a right to become happy. We have a right to live in peace and freedom. Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is the source for actualizing this.

It is truly remarkable that you have embraced this great Mystic Law at this time and are leading admirable lives as trailblazers of worldwide kosen-rufu.

Nichiren writes: “There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku” (The True Aspect of All Phenomena, The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 365).

I ask all of you to cheerfully awaken to your profound mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth and to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo resoundingly no matter what happens. Bring forth the heart of a lion king and overcome all obstacles as you proudly walk the path of your youthful vow. Please become people of wisdom who embody the Buddhist principle that “faith equals daily life” and demonstrate brilliant proof of creating value in your families, schools, places of work and communities.

Second Soka Gakkai President Josai Toda often said: “This Buddhism enables people experiencing adversity to become happy. This is a religion that helps people in despair to attain happiness. The greater a person’s unhappiness, the more incredible the power and ability they display when they overcome it. Such individuals can gumstickily encourage others and become their allies.”

The struggles you are facing now will enable you to encourage and empower others, and become allies to those who are truly suffering. Furthermore, the human revolution in each of you who upholds the Mystic Law will help achieve a great transformation in the destinies of your respective communities.

At last, we have entered an age in which our grassroots movement promoting peace, culture and education, based on the respect for the dignity of life as taught in Buddhism, is becoming a reliable compass for leading humanity toward a bright future.

I ask the youth of the SGI-USA to widely expand your network of young Bodhisattvas of the Earth through cheerful and courageous dialogue, imparting hope and encouragement to those around you.

Let’s make the Year of Brilliant Achievement in the New Era of Worldwide kosen-rufu the Year of Brilliant Achievement for the SGI-USA Youth Division!

I will continue to chant daimoku [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] for all of you, the treasurers of American kosen-rufu, so that you may enjoy good health and success in all your endeavors, as well as for the great happiness of your families. Please take good care of your health!

Daisaku Ikeda
December 2017

14,262 Lions of Justice

Youth hold powerful general meeting to celebrate SGI President Ikeda’s 90th birthday and toward the 50,000 Lions of Justice

by Ayumi Inoue
Staff Writer

“Happy 90th birthday Sensei! The youth of America wish you a new era of hope and respect”

Such was the roaring declaration of 14,262 lions of justice who gathered for their December Youth General Meetings, held across the country in 52 locations—from the far reaches of Guam and Puerto Rico to New Mexico, Alabama, Dallas, New York and Los Angeles. Some 2,300 of these youth were guests.

These gatherings both celebrated SGI President Ikeda’s 90th birthday on Jan. 2 and served as major dress rehearsals toward the 50,000 Lions of Justice Festival on Sept. 23 in nine U.S. cities (see p. 8).

A heartfelt message to the general meetings, SGI President Ikeda reaffirmed the purpose of our 90th: “We all have a right to become happy. We have a right to live in peace and freedom. Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is the source for actualizing this” (see left column).

What were the keys to victory?

Many zones experienced dynamic growth, doubling, even tripling, their youth attendance from activities a year ago.

Rocky Mountain Zone, which tripled the young men’s attendance from the December 2016 Young Men’s General Meeting, focused on home violations and engaging in dialogue with each youth.

Zone Young Men’s Leader Tyko Shoji noted that amid personal challenges that the young men faced, they continued reaching out to their friends in faith and sharing Buddhism with their community. As a result, Mr. Shoji said they began to experience breakthroughs and created a ripple effect of compassion.

In addition, through home visiting many of the youth who hadn’t been to an SGI meeting for some time, Mr. Shoji said he learned that they were often feeling isolated in the midst of major obstacles in their lives. “I gained a deeper understanding of the significance of our youth meetings,” he said. “We are creating a movement to inspire hope and courage in others, and create great friendships.”

Prayer and unity first

Pennsylvania Zone, which more than tripled their youth attendance from the March 2017 Nembutsu Meetings of the New Era Youth Meeting, noted that prayer and unity were the keys to victory.

Zone Young Women’s Leader Shana Jones said they had come a long way since the beginning of the year, when every division was running on their own, struggling to achieve their 30k milestones. But together, they determined to win based on prayer and unity, hosting chanting sessions every night with
Report

14,262 lions of justice roar

Youth hold powerful general meetings to honor SGI President Ikeda’s 90th birthday and to launch toward the 50,000 Lions of Justice Festival.

by Ayumi Inoue
staff writer

"Happy 90th birthday Ikeda! The youth of America will usher in a new era of hope and respect!"

Such was the roaring declaration of 14,262 lions of justice who gathered for their December Youth General Meeting, held across the country in 33 locations—from the far reaches of Guam and Puerto Rico to New Mexico, Alabama, Dallas, New York, and Los Angeles—to create a ripple effect of compassion. These gatherings, held in celebration of the SGI President’s 90th birthday on Dec. 3, served as major stress relievers toward the 50,000 Lions of Justice Festival on Sept. 23 in nine U.S. cities (see p. 6).

In a heartfelt message to the general meetings, SGI President Ikeda reaffirmed the purpose of our faith: "We all have a right to happiness. We have a right to live in peace and freedom. Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is the source for actualizing this." (see left column).

What were the keys to victory?

Many zones experienced dynamic growth, doubling, even tripling, their youth attendance from activities a year ago. Rocky Mountain Zone, which tripled the young men’s attendance from the December 2019 Young Men’s General Meeting, focused on home visits and engaging in dialogue with each youth. Zone Young Men’s Leader Tyko Shoji noted that amid personal challenges that the young men faced, they continued reaching out to their friends in faith and sharing Buddhism with youth in their community. As a result, Mr. Shoji said they began to experience breakthroughs and created a ripple effect of compassion.

In addition, through home visiting many of the youth who had not been to an SGI meeting for some time, Mr. Shoji said he learned that they were often feeling isolated in the midst of major obstacles in their lives. "I gained a deeper understanding of the significance of our youth meetings," he said. "We are creating a movement to inspire hope and courage in others, and create great friendships."

Prayer and unity first

Pennsylvania Zone, which more than tripled their youth attendance from the March 2017 Champions of the New Era Youth Meeting, noted that prayer and unity were the keys to victory.

Zone Young Women’s Leader Shima Jones said they had come a long way since the beginning of the year, when every division was running on their own, struggling to achieve their 50% milestones. But together, they determined to win based on prayer and unity, hosting chanting sessions every night with the zone team, followed by reporting and planning. "Once we determined to unite, we experienced victory after victory," Mrs. Jones said.

Despite her personal challenges, she determined to run into 2018 with youthful momentum, not waiting until next year to do so. She shared that it was her fellow young women who kept her going through their spirit to support in any way, eagerly asking, "What can I do?"

Toward the December meeting, she saw a core of young women emerge, and together they are determined to take the joy they feel in their lives and spread it across Pennsylvania by activating many more young women and sharing Buddhism with other youth.

Taking a stand as a lion of justice

"We will not be quiet to the injustices of the world," said SGI-USA Youth Leader David Wiesendahl, on what it ultimately means to take a stand as a lion of justice. "We will create a society where all people are respected, and can freely hope and dream for the most fulfilling lives."

With powerful momentum created from the Youth General Meetings, SGI-USA members are now focused on strengthening the bonds with each youth who attended while ensuring that they can usher in the Year of Brilliant Achievement by participating in their chapter kickoff meetings this month.
The SGH-USA has announced Sept. 23, 2018, as the date of the 50,000 Lions of Justice Festival. To accommodate all 50,000 youth participants, additional festival locations have been added. Here are all the cities where the youth will gather:

Los Angeles  Chicago  New York  Atlanta  Miami
San Francisco  Phoenix  Dallas  Miami

Registration Opens!
In December, members and guests ages 18–39 began registering for the Lions of Justice Festival at www.lionsofjustice.org. The registration fee is $20, which secures your seat at the festival. Each participant will also receive a commemorative gift. (Junior high and high school members can register at the same website, but they must turn in a parent consent form for their registration to be complete.)
CHAPTER
NEW MEMBERS MEETING

STUDY MADE EASY

Faith Equals Daily Life

Though many religions teach principles for living, the question is, are people able to put them into practice in their daily lives? Nichiren Buddhism views faith and daily life as inseparable, and aims to help us establish unshakeable happiness in our everyday lives.

Nichiren Daishonin says, “Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra” (“Reply to a Believer,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 805).

In today’s context, “your service to your lord” equates to fulfilling our roles and responsibilities at home, at work and in society. Through this practice, Nichiren teaches that our daily life itself is the training ground for showing actual proof of Buddhist practice through our behavior.

This idea is expressed in the SGI through the principle “faith equals daily life.” Here, “daily life” points to the outward expressions of our inner lives. And “faith,” or our Buddhist practice, strengthens the power within us to transform our inner lives on the deepest level.

Faith refers to chanting Nam-myoho-reno-kyo courageously to the Gohonzon, participating in SGI activities, working for the happiness of ourselves and others, and using our Buddhist practice to resolve the issues we face each day.

We develop our faith through taking on our challenges as opportunities to bring forth our Buddha nature. Thus, our daily lives become the stage for bravely tackling our difficulties with the rich life force and wisdom we cultivate through faith. Based on such efforts, the SGI has achieved a steady advance in its endeavors. The principles “faith equals daily life” and “Buddhism manifests itself in society” guide us. A religion divorced from reality is a dead religion, and with that conviction we have consistently emphasized the importance of daily life and society. (November 2011 Living Buddhism, p. 30)

SGI President Ikeda’s Guidance

Buddhism does not exist apart from human society. A truly wise person is one who takes action to contribute to society and guide it in a positive direction through the power of Buddhist wisdom and compassion. Meanwhile, a society imbued with the wisdom of Buddhism will prosper and thrive.

The SGI has driven steadily forward in its endeavors. The principles “faith equals daily life” and “Buddhism manifests itself in society” guide us. A religion divorced from reality is a dead religion, and with that conviction we have consistently emphasized the importance of daily life and society.

Q&A WITH SENSEI

Make Concrete Plans for Your Daily Life

I'm chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to break through my tendency to miscalculate my finances, but nothing seems to be changing.

SGI President Ikeda says: “We must revolutionize our daily lives. That’s what putting ‘faith equals daily life’ into action means. In other words, we must develop our life based on our faith in Nichiren Buddhism. It is wrong to have the attitude: Things will somehow work out because I practice. We must make concrete plans for our lives, keeping track, for instance, of your household accounts and making detailed plans for each day. Of course, there may be challenging times when we don’t make enough money. However, if you continue putting forth efforts based on faith, you can absolutely change poison into medicine. If you persevere for two years, three years, striving to cut down on your expenses, you will definitely break through.” (February 2016 Dailykurenai)
1. There are many ways to describe the idea of "human revolution." How does the article describe human revolution from the perspectives of attaining Buddhahood, lesser self versus greater self and the Ten Worlds?

2. In the mentor and disciple relationship, rather than simply receiving the mentor's approval, what essentially drives the disciple?

3. What well-known statement is cited from SGI-President Ikeda's novel, The Human Revolution that refers to the impact one person's human revolution can have on all humanity?

4. In his writing, "Many in Body, One in Mind," what does Nichiren Daishonin say can be achieved when people act based on the spirit of many bodies, one in mind?

5. What does "many in body" refer to?

6. What does being "one in mind" mean?

7. What analogy does President Ikeda use to describe the relationship between the oneness of mentor and disciple, and the spirit of many bodies, one in mind? And how does he say these two relationships that are essential to the practice of Nichiren Buddhism?

8. How can the difference between the Lotus Sutra and pre-Lotus Sutra teachings be explained based on the following

9. Buddhist principles?
   A. The attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles
   B. The attainment of Buddhahood in one's present form
   C. Earthly desires are enlightenment
   D. The sufferings of birth and death are nirvana

10. What are the three paths and the three virtues? In relation to these two concepts, and according to Nichiren, what does it mean to change poison into medicine?

11. In "Heil the Land of Tranquil Light," Nichiren teaches, "You should bear your mind on the ninth consciousness, and carry out your practice in the six consciousnesses." What does this mean?

12. What do the two Chinese characters comprising shin-sho mean for compassion?

13. What does Nichiren say about his disciple who has passed away?

14. What does Nichiren state in "The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life" about those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in their final moments?

15. The eighth level of consciousness, also called the alaya-consciousness, is the "karmic storehouse" where latent causes and effects result from all of one's thoughts, words and deeds throughout time reside. In contrast to traditional Buddhist views, how does Nichiren say we can change our karmic karma for the better?

16. In "Hei the Land of Tranquil Light," Nichiren teaches, "You should bear your mind on the ninth consciousness, and carry out your practice in the six consciousnesses." What does this mean?

17. What does Nichiren do to open the way for all people to attain Buddhahood?

18. As a votary of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren continued to take action in exact accord with the teachings of the sutra, even at the risk of his own life. What was the focus of his lifelong efforts?

19. In his treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," Nichiren asserts that peace and social prosperity are indispensable to building individual happiness. This message is encapsulated in what passage?

20. Through their selfless efforts, the Soka Gakkai's three founding presidents revived the practice of Nichiren Buddhism in modern times. List the names of the three presidents.

21. To favor certain people over others is a natural human tendency. But how does a Buddha view all people when it comes to relieving their suffering and leading them to Buddhahood?

22. "The Four Virtues and the Four Deeds Of Gratitude" (see pp. 25–28)
23. What are the four deeds of gratitude discussed in this letter?
24. What does President Ikeda say that repaying our debt to the nation's ruler means today?
25. What does President Ikeda mean by "the three treasures of Buddhism?"
26. According to Nichiren, the Lotus Sutra is the only sutra that enables one to truly repay all four debts of gratitude. Which benchmark teaching does Nichiren use to come to this conclusion?

27. "Flowering and Bearing Grain" (see pp. 29–30)
28. When Nichiren writes, "If a teacher has a good disciple, both will gain the fruit of Buddhahood," what is he describing in terms of his relationship with his mentor, Dozen-bo?
29. The mentor-disciple relationship is the core foundation of Nichiren Buddhism. In his lecture, how does President Ikeda explain this relationship from the standpoint of our lesser selves and greater selves?

30. With respect to the great vow and the state of the bodhisattva, how does President Ikeda describe kosen-rufu?
To be a unifier, we should:

1. **Change Our Mind-Set First**
   "If members of an organization are constantly at loggerheads, always blaming and criticizing one another, then they will always remain disunited, in the condition of many in body, different in mind. Since organizations are made up of people, we are bound to encounter all kinds of people. At times, our personalities may not mesh with those of other individuals. That is why unless we each ground ourselves within our own human revolution, we cannot create genuine unity" (p. 212).

2. **Have a Firm and Concrete Resolve**
   "Certainly, nothing meaningful can be accomplished by a person conflicted, or of two minds, about which course to pursue. That only stands to reason. If we cannot make up our minds, we cannot have firm resolve. We will be swayed by our environment and lose our direction. Such is the folly of human beings" (pp. 211-12).

3. **Transcend Attachment to Self**
   "A mind prone to making distinctions of self and other leads one to self-isolation, to self-attachment and to regarding the self as faultless, which gives rise to evil and misery ... People who transcend attachment to the self and bring forth the power of the Mystic Law free themselves from a negative life tendency that confines one to evil and suffering. ... The Daishonin also urges us to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim" (The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life, WND-1, 217). This means developing a sense of affinity or fellowship with everyone who joins us in studying and practicing Nichiren Buddhism and working for kosen-rufu, and indeed with all people with whom we have a connection" (p. 213).

4. **Make the Law the Basis of Unity**
   "As we strive to accomplish human revolution while working to forge the unity of many in body, one in mind, we can conquer our attachment to self and establish faith based on the selfless spirit of valuing the Law more highly than our own lives." Making the Law the basis of our practice is the true essence of the spirit of many in body, one in mind."

["Second Soka Gakkai President Jodo"] (p. 215) often remarked: "If we ask what kind of unity has enabled the Soka Gakkai to realize the development it has today, the answer is the unity of faith and nothing else. It is the unity of many diverse individuals who share the same purpose or commitment. The human heart is very fickle, easily swayed by changing circumstances. It is an extraordinary thing for people's hearts to be united in a shared goal. It's not something that can simply be achieved by ordering people to unite" (p. 213-14).

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To learn more on the spirit of unity to advance kosen-rufu, please see the February Living Buddhism.
DID YOU KNOW?

And the 2017 Word of the Year Is...

The Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2017 has been revealed and the winner is...

“Youthquake.”

The word is defined as meaning “a significant cultural, political, or social change arising from the actions of a young people.” It represents the awakening of millennials striving for change during a turbulent 12 months across the world.

The word “Youthquake” may be the winner of 2017, but is not new. It was coined in 1965 by Vogue editor Diana Vreeland, who used it to highlight changes in the fashion and music industries driven by young people.

So how exactly is the word of the year decided?

“We try to choose a word that reminds us about where we’ve been,” said Casper Grathwohl, president of the Dictionaries Division. Each year, the winning word is expected to reflect the mood or ethos of the past 12 months.

—Jennifer Hassel of The Washington Post

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“However, ordinary each of us may seem, we are all in some way special and can do things that are extraordinary, perhaps until then even thought impossible.”

—Rogen Rammster, the first person in recorded history to run the mile in under four minutes, a feat many believe is impossible.

ANSWER TO LAST ISSUE’S

SOKA SCRAMBLE

New Year’s Gosho: Where Do Hell and the Buddha Exist?

(Anagram the words based on the theme)

Hell exists in our _____ body (DOVPITTE)
Footprint
Buddha dwells within like fire in _____ (ABMFLT)
Buddha exists in our _____ (WROTHEARRNS)

(To learn more, see The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. I, p. 1137–38.)

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Appendix F

TOWARD AN ERA OF HUMAN RIGHTS:
BUILDING A PEOPLE’S MOVEMENT

2018 Peace Proposal

January 26, 2018
Daisaku Ikeda
President, Soka Gakkai International (SGI)
NUCLEAR ABOLITION:
Claiming Your Right to Live

APRIL 21 • 1PM
IKEDA CENTER FOR PEACE, LEARNING,
AND DIALOGUE
PROGRAM

1:00 PM
WELCOME BY IKEDA CENTER

1:30 PM
VIDEO PROJECT & GROUP DISCUSSION

2:35 PM
PANEL DISCUSSION

3:05 PM
ACTION POSSIBILITIES & GROUP DISCUSSION

3:50 PM
SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

The Ikeda Center is an institute committed to building cultures of peace through learning and dialogue, founded by Buddhist thinker and leader Daisaku Ikeda. Since 1993, the Center has engaged scholars, students, young professionals, and others in open-hearted and open-minded dialogue toward a shared vision of peace.
Works Cited


Hagimoto, Koichi. “Soka Gakkai University of America and Soka Education.”


