

Buddhist Group to Help Spark the 4th

By EMERSON CHAPIN

A Buddhist organization that had its origins in Japan will play a major part in New York City's Bicentennial program on the Fourth of July weekend.

The organization, the Nichiren Shoshu Academy, will stage an illuminated night parade up the Avenue of Americas on July 3—believed to be the first such event in the city in 30 years. About 3,500 performers from all over the United States, other Western Hemisphere countries and Japan will participate, and 13 theme floats will trace American developments from pre-Revolutionary days. After the parade the organization will stage a 20-minute fireworks spectacular at the Sheep Meadow in Central Park.

On the Fourth, Nichiren Shoshu will participate in the city's "Fourth of July in Old New York" Festival in the Wall Street district, providing street captains and crowd-control personnel at all the plazas sponsored by participating groups. It itself will also have east of Federal Hall, between Pine and Wall Street, the festival's largest plaza, an "International village," with Nichiren Shoshu performers from the United States and South America providing continuous entertainment throughout the day.

More than 15,000 members of the Nichiren Shoshu organization will be in New York for the group's 13th annual convention

to be held on the holiday weekend. A total of 1,500 performers will also entertain New York Met baseball fans with a "Spirit of '76" musical show at Shea Stadium between the games of the Sunday doubleheader, and the convention will end with the organization's general meeting at the Louis Armstrong Memorial Bowl in Flushing Meadow Park, Queens on Sunday evening.

The Nichiren Shoshu Academy is the independently incorporated Western Hemisphere affiliate of Soka Gakkai, the largest of the so-called "new religions" of Japan, which has grown from a membership of a few thousand after World War II to a strength now believed to be about 10 million.

Though its tight organization and energetic proselytizing may give Soka Gakkai a superficial resemblance to the controversial Unification Church of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the basic nature of the organization is quite different, and Nichiren Shoshu has generally not obtruded on public consciousness in New York.

Soka Gakkai is the lay organization of the Nichiren Shoshu sect of Buddhism, composed of adherents of the 13th-century Buddhist saint, Nichiren, the central feature of its religious observance is the chanting of Nichiren's Lotus Sutra. In Japan, Soka Gakkai is known for

its spectacular dance and musical festivals, it emphasizes a positive, "success" philosophy and provides a wide array of participatory activities for its members.

The first United States lay organization was established in 1960, and the Nichiren Shoshu Academy, with headquarters in Santa Monica, Calif., now claims 250,000 members, including a number of persons prominent in sports and the entertainment world. Membership of the New York chapter is put at about 4,000. The group has a community center at 3922 30th Street, Long Island City, that was opened last year during a visit by Da'saku Ikeda, president of Soka Gakkai International.

The July 3 parade, which starts at 7:30 P.M. from 36th Street, is described by the Nichiren Shoshu Academy as "a sparkling Broadway-style musical production depicting America's history from pre-Revolutionary days to the present." The floats will include a 40-foot-high model of Independence Hall and a 30-foot model of the Boston Tea Party ship.

A spokesman for the Nichiren Shoshu Academy said that a group of about 200 members was expected to come from Japan for the weekend activities, in addition to representatives of chapters throughout the Americas.