

BUDDHIST FACTION GROWING IN JAPAN

Opinions Vary on Whether Militants Pose a Threat

By EMERSON CHAPIN

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TOKYO, Nov. 9—The growing strength of Soka Gakkai, the militant Buddhist organization that now puts its membership at one-tenth of Japan's total population, is being watched with fascinated attention and considerable trepidation.

There are wide differences of opinion on whether the expanding Soka Gakkai organization poses an extremist and nationalist threat to the nation or represents a healthful outlet for the lonely and dispossessed in Japan's rapidly changing society.

Soka Gakkai itself, concerned at the adverse publicity it has received here and abroad, is seeking to reassure the public that its aims are peaceful and constructive. At the same time, it is aggressively pushing its program to win converts to the centuries-old doctrine of the Buddhist teacher Nichiren Shonin.

The present strength of Soka Gakkai is uncertain. Spokesmen for the organization say it now has more than 10 million members. Some qualified observers say that this figure is vastly inflated and that the total cannot be more than 4 million or 5 million.

Nevertheless, the organization's dynamism is acknowledged by all. Its amassing of 4.1 million votes for candidates of its political body in national upper house elections in July, 1962, demonstrated its genuine power.

A Soka Gakkai youth meeting here this week, at which more than 12,000 young women packed a big Tokyo gymnasium, sang and clapped rhythmically to a band's pulsating music and cheered their leaders' exhortations to intensify their efforts to win converts, provided a graphic illustration of the fervor of the rank-and-file members.

Growth Watched Warily

The Japanese Government and the major political parties, including the Communists, are watching the growth of Soka Gakkai warily, but have refrained from outright attacks or interference. The prevalent attitude is one of "wait and see."

The conservative ruling party, led by Premier Hayato Ikeda, is said to feel that the Buddhist group, as it expands, may weaken itself by factionalism. In the meantime, Soka Gakkai draws most of its strength from elements that otherwise would support left-wing movements, it is felt, and thus the Government has been content to bide its time.

The United States Embassy also is keeping watch on the rise of Soka Gakkai, but has taken no position and cannot legitimately take one. The feeling is that Soka Gakkai is still in an early stage of policy formulation and has not yet shown what direction it will take.

The growing number of conversions of American servicemen at bases in Japan, particularly men with Japanese wives and friends, is known to cause concern to some military commanders, but the headquarters of the United States Armed Forces in Japan states officially that it has no policy with regard to Soka Gakkai.

There is some feeling that Soka Gakkai's policies on co-existence, its opposition to Japanese rearmament and its condemnation of nuclear weapons could raise questions of security. At the same time, any interference with the serviceman's right to choose his own form of religion could subject the military to strong criticism. In this case, the distinction between religious and political activity could be an uncertain one.

Soka Gakkai spokesmen say they have had to combat "pressure" from some American military officers, while others, they say, have shown interest in their recreational programs, particularly their mass athletic competitions.

Militarism Is Denied

Officers of the Buddhist group indignantly deny charges that Soka Gakkai is militaristic, and point to its declared policy of promoting world peace. One important reason for the charges is the close-knit organization of Soka Gakkai, with its basic element the group of 10 households. Five to 10 groups form a section, five to 10 sections a district, and five to 10 districts a chapter, generally consisting of 5,000 to 10,000 families.

Strong discipline is maintained all the way down through the chain of command.

Many Japanese have been antagonized or alarmed by Soka Gakkai's aggressive methods of spreading its beliefs. On occasion, it has sent members to invade temples of other sects or Christian churches, disrupt the proceedings and sometimes destroy sacred objects. Its members sometimes enter the premises of persons they seek to convert and refuse to leave, or persist in conversion efforts until they break down all resistance.

Daisaku Ikeda, the 35-year-old president of Soka Gakkai, denies that "shakubuku"—the conversion of nonbelievers to the teachings of Nichiren—involves violence and at the same time stresses that the practice of "shakubuku" is a vital part of the religious experience.

Soka Gakkai publications justify aggressive conversion methods by emphasizing the importance of "teaching the ignorant the true religion."

These methods have been so successful that Soka Gakkai now has 255 chapters throughout Japan, 10 chapters in North America, six in South America and six in Southeast Asia and two

in Europe. It has an elaborate head temple at a scenic site near the foot of Mount Fuji and recently opened a modern headquarters building in Tokyo.

It has made a highly successful entry into politics. It holds massive athletic competitions that have attracted as many as 100,000 spectators. It recently inaugurated an ambitious musical and cultural program, one of whose aims is "to expel prevailing vulgar music and provide the people with good music which [hitherto] has been enjoyed only by a limited class of people."

The organization publishes a thrice-weekly newspaper with a circulation of 2.5 million and an English-language weekly with a circulation said to total 20,000 and to be growing rapidly.

Soka Gakkai is not actually a

religion but rather a lay organization of the Nichiren Shu Buddhist sect. The name means "Value Creation Society," and its significance is explained in this passage by Josei Toda, second president of the society, who died in 1958:

"Value is to be created and not to be found, while truth is to be found and not to be created. What is necessary for our life is not so much truth as value, for truth in itself has not bearing for a man to construct a happier life. The creation of value makes our life rich and happy."

The idea that "any man can achieve happiness now" is the basic tenet of Soka Gakkai.

Daily worship, the chanting of sutras, or passages from Buddhist scriptures, and the observance of specified rituals can bring immediate physical well-

being, happiness and prosperity to the true believer, the movement holds.

In its promotional literature, Soka Gakkai stresses the positive and immediate benefits obtained from true belief. A professional baseball pitcher wins when he has strong and pure faith.

Mr. Kuroyanagi said that Christianity had a "poor theory" and that the Japanese were surprised that so scientific a people as the Americans could believe in a religion filled with illogicalities, unscientific teachings and "miracles." In contrast, he said, "the teaching of Soka Gakkai is a rational way of life" and the results are immediately apparent.

In an interview, Hisao Matsuyama, editor of the organization's English-language paper, The Selkyo News, and Akira Kuroyanagi, a director of Soka

Gakkai and chief of its overseas bureau, repeated that Soka Gakkai provides "true happiness, both material and spiritual." They asserted that "actual proof of the benefits is given to every member of Soka Gakkai when he has strong and pure faith."

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"If I cannot obtain actual proof, then I cannot continue to believe," he said. "But there is actual proof."

Mr. Kuroyanagi noted that

Soka Gakkai concerned itself only with religious matters, leaving the political achievement of its aims to its political movement, called Komel Seiji Renmei, or Koselren, the League for Just and Fair Politics. Koselren has 15 members in the upper house of the Diet, the Japanese parliament, and more than 1,000 members in prefectural assemblies and municipal councils all over Japan.

Koselren has not shown any consistent political philosophy, other than proclaiming its intention of eliminating corruption and promoting the people's welfare. In many localities it holds a balance of power between Premier Ikeda's Liberal Democratic party and the Socialists but has sided with one or the other only on a case by case basis.