

Japanese Thronging to Soka Gakkai Shrine

Strength of Buddhist Religious and Social Movement Grows

By EMERSON CHAPIN
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FUJIMIYA, Japan — In an ancient grove of stately cedar trees on the southwest base of snow-capped Mount Fuji stand a score of buildings that constitute the religious headquarters of the Soka Gakkai movement.

Every day the bustling activity of 12,000 pilgrims to the Taiseikiji Temple underscores the strength of this aggressive Buddhist organization.

Taiseikiji, with its stone walks and traditional setting, resembles almost any Buddhist center of worship in Japan. But the throngs, the sense of energy and relentless organization and the addition of huge new modern buildings distinguish it from all others.

In groups of 1,500, visitors from all parts of Japan wait patiently to enter the high sanctuary and view the Dai Gohonzon, or "great object of worship," an ideographic tablet written by the 13th-century monk Nichiren.

Tours of the temple buildings, religious lectures and group discussions heighten the members' pride of participation in the fastest growing social-religious organization in this country.

The center of activity at the 700-year-old temple site here is the huge and modernistic Grand Reception Hall completed last April at a cost of \$3.5 million. Symbolizing the mass religious movement's goal of "bringing all mankind into its own faith," this ferroconcrete structure contains stones and building materials from 46 countries.

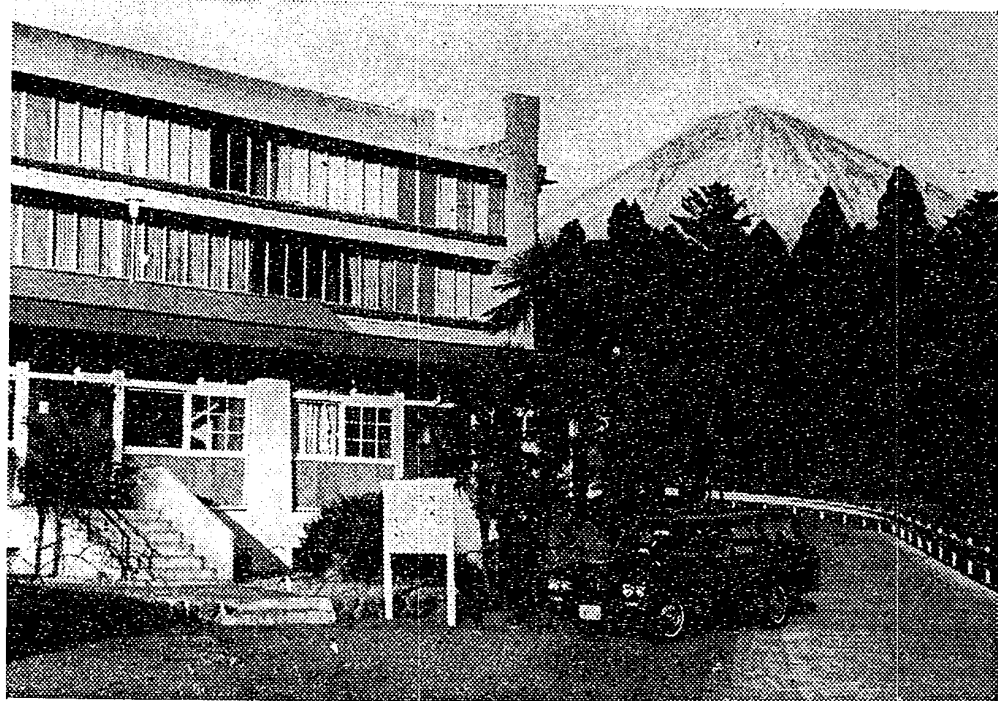
Political Party Started

Its construction followed a four-day fund-raising drive in July, 1961, in which Soka Gakkai members contributed almost \$9 million. An even more magnificent building of marble is planned within the next six years. Meanwhile, officials of Soka Gakkai predict that three million members will have visited the assembly hall in its first year and worshiped the holy tablet.

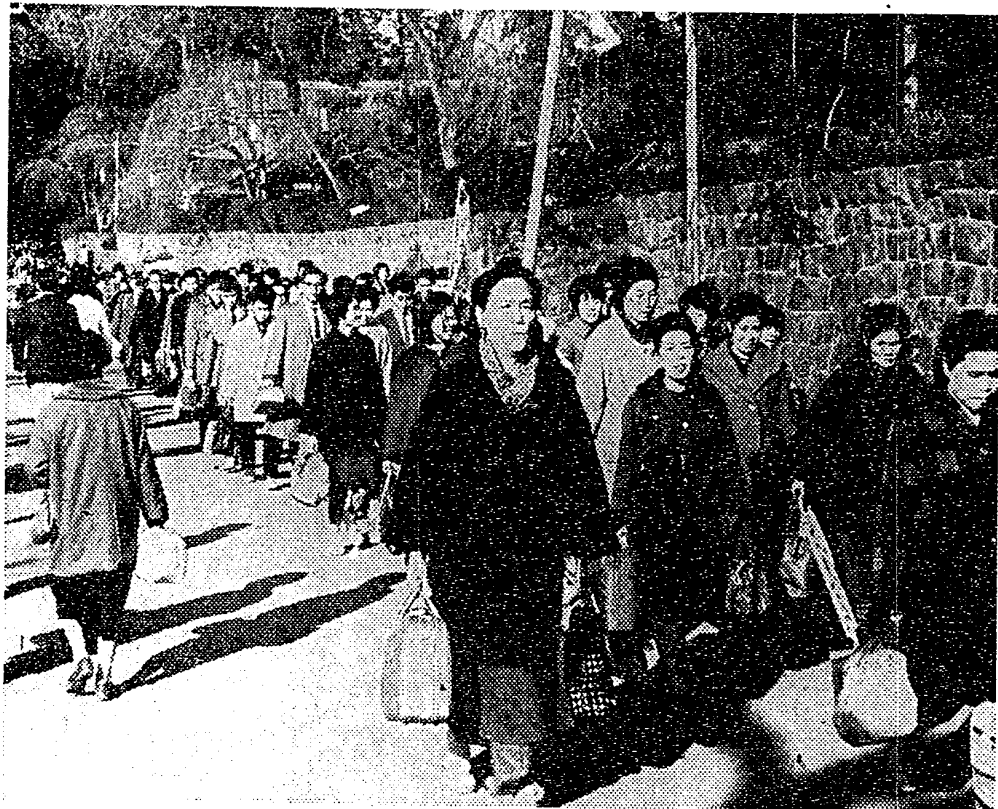
From its organizational headquarters in Tokyo, Soka Gakkai—literally, the Value Creation Society—conducts a tremendous range of social, cultural, religious and athletic functions for a membership that it says now exceeds 15 million, or 15 per cent of Japan's population.

Hiring the largest municipal halls in major cities, it packs as many as 20,000 people into regular monthly meetings of its men's, women's or youth groups. Rousing songs, brass bands, cheer leaders and drum majorettes are part of its appeal to persons who need a sense of participation and belonging in Japan's rapidly changing society.

Soka Gakkai initiated last November a full-fledged political organization, the Komeito, or Clean Government, party, to translate its aim into political endeavor "for the masses." Though its objectives are still



An administration building of Soka Gakkai movement on southwest base of Mount Fuji



Pilgrims at the area, where the Taiseikiji Temple is visited by 12,000 persons daily

ambiguous, Komeito, with the tightly organized power to millions of Soka Gakkai adherents, is confident of becoming a "third force" between Japan's conservative business-dominated Government and the Marxist-oriented Socialists.

A basic element in Soka Gakkai's mushrooming growth is the aura of success and prosperity with which it surrounds itself. Members are taught that ardent faith in the teachings of Nichiren brings direct and tangible rewards and that the daily chanting of Nichiren's "lotus sutra" is a vital part of the process by which man can fulfill his inner potential.

Members say their individual and organizational achievement constitute "actual proof" of their doctrine. Those who fail to gain material success have not believed strongly enough, they assert.

In a movie shown to thousand

of pilgrims at Taiseikiji nightly, a misfortune-ridden family with a polio-stricken son achieves happiness and prosperity after becoming adherents. The son recovers full use of his legs through faith after having been told by physicians that he will never walk again.

The rank-and-file members, sitting on straw mats in the vast lecture hall, burst into applause as the boy gained his triumph through faith. They cheered repeatedly at appearances in the film of Soka Gakkai's 37-year-old president, Daisaku Ikeda, and at sequences on the mammoth "culture festival" held by more than 100,000 members last fall at the Olympic stadium in Tokyo.

In the central chamber of the Grand Reception Hall, 2,500 pil-

grims sat attentively on the floor as a university professor lectured on the Goshu, Nichiren's basic writings. Heads nodded in accord as he said that "the lotus is a pure flower but grows out of mud" and then went on to explain how man similarly can attain his potential through prayer and faith, whatever his environment.

Komeito politicians and Soka Gakkai leaders, in informal talks to groups from mining and industrial areas, depicted advantages deriving from membership.

Last year's visitors included 1,400 Soka Gakkai adherents from the United States. Soka Gakkai announced last month that it had 63 headquarters, 251 general chapters and 1088 chapters throughout the world.