

**Soka Gakkai in Hong Kong:
Localizing a Japanese New Religion in a Chinese Community**

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論文摘要

本文探討日本新興宗教創價學會於香港的普及化和本地化。香港國際創價學會成立於 1963 年，五十年來發展迅速，會員數目穩步上揚，並超越其他東亞地區。透過多元的文化及宗教活動，學會成功吸引了大批的草根階層，近年更吸納了大量的社會精英，如商人、律師、大學教授、醫生等。此外，創價學會視香港為打進中國大陸的重要窗口。雖然學界對創價學會的討論十分廣泛，但鮮有以香港為焦點的研究。本文旨在探討以下四個問題：一、為甚麼創價學會能夠在香港社會紮根？二、創價學會為香港帶來甚麼影響？三、學會的教義和運作有甚麼程度的本土化特色？四、香港對創價學會在中國大陸的發展上扮演甚麼角色？本文希望解答以上問題，為有關創價學會的全球化研究作一點補充。

Abstract

This paper aims to study the popularization and localization of a Japanese new religion, Soka Gakkai (SG), in Hong Kong. The growth of SG in Hong Kong is fast, and it has more members than its East Asian counterparts. Established in 1963, Hong Kong Soka Gakkai International (HKSGI) has built a very strong grass-roots network by organizing different cultural activities and providing religious support. Recently, it has attracted many social elites such as businessmen, lawyers, professors, and doctors. SG sees Hong Kong as the stepping stone to launch its movement in Mainland China. Although SG is an extensively studied topic, its operation in Hong Kong is little-studied. This paper examines the following four questions. Firstly, why has SG successfully developed in Hong Kong? Secondly, what kind of influence has SG had in Hong Kong? Thirdly, to what extent has SG been localized in terms of teachings and practices? Fourthly, what is the significance of Hong Kong to SG's development in China? It is hoped that this research can fill a gap in the study of the globalization of the SG movement.

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Preface

This paper intends to study the internationalization and localization of Soka Gakkai (SG) in Hong Kong. SG is a Japanese new religion that has established its branches in 192 countries in North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania.¹ Official record claims that they have recruited 12 million members worldwide.² The globalization of SG has drawn a lot of scholarly attention. Important English works in this field include Daniel A. Mettraux's *The History and Theology of Soka Gakkai: a Japanese New Religion* (1988) and *The Soka Gakkai Revolution* (1994), and Karel Dobbelaere's *Soka Gakkai: From Lay Movement to Religion* (2001). They provide readers with detailed introduction of SG history and philosophy in general. Edited by David Machacek and Bryan Wilson, *Global Citizens: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World* (2000) contains case

¹ According to Helen Hardacre, "new religions" (shinko shukyo 新興宗教) appeared around 1800 in Japan. They have a great variety of doctrines, but "share a unity of aspiration and world view significantly different from those of secular society and from the so-called established religions". They emphasize "this-worldly-benefits" by improving spiritual health, family relationships and material prosperity. The founders of these religions are always charismatic individuals who attract followers by faith healing. See Helen Hardacre, *Kurozumikyo and the new religions of Japan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp.3-5. Arai Ken defines "new religions" as religious groups that were founded during or since the closing years of the Tokugawa period. They have "their spiritual center in the person and purportedly unique teachings of a founder who comes from the common people, and are oriented toward the gaining of new members from among the masses". See Arai Ken, "New Religious Movements" in *Japanese Religion: A Survey by the Agency for Cultural Affairs* (Tokyo and Palo Alto: Kodansha International Ltd, 1972), p.94.

² SGI Official Homepage, <http://www.sgi.org/about.html>

studies of SG in the USA, Brazil, Britain, Italy and Southeast Asia.³ Other English works, such as Bryan Wilson and Karel Bobbelaere's *A Time to Chant: the Soka Gakkai Buddhists in Britain* (1994), Phillip E. Hammond and David Machacek's *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (1999) offer readers a clear picture of SG development in one particular country or region. In particular, Daniel A. Mettraux is famous for his studies of the globalization of SG. His works, *The Lotus and the Maple Leaf: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Canada* (1996), *The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Quebec: The Lotus and the Fleur de Lys* (1997), *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: the Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia* (2001) and *Soka Gakkai in Australia: Globalization of a New Japanese Religion* (2002), enhance our understanding of SG development in different areas and are solid foundations for many SG research.

For Chinese and Japanese materials, official publications of SG are numerous and include magazines (*New Century Monthly Magazine* and *SGI Monthly Photo Magazine*), newsletters (*Lai Ming Newsletter* and *Seikyo Shinbum*), and books

³ These important case studies include "Immigrant Buddhists in American" (David Machacek and Kerry Mitchell), "Organizational Isomorphism in SGI-USA" (David Machacek), "Socially Inclusive Buddhists in America" (David W. Chappell), "Buddhist Humanism and Catholic Culture in Brazil" (Peter Clarke), "The British Movement and its Members" (Bryan Wilson), "Buddhism in Action: Case Studies from Italy" (Maria Immacolata Macioti) and "The Expansion of Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia" (Daniel Mettraux). in *Global citizens: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the world*, ed. David Machacek and Bryan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

written by Honorary President Ikeda Daisaku. However, scholarly studies written in Chinese and Japanese language are rather limited. In the Chinese academic world, while studies of Ikeda Daisaku can be easily found, such as Su Dongtian's *Dong fang ju ren Chitian Dazuo* (Giant in the East: Ikeda Daisaku) and Cai Delin's *Dong fang zhi hui zhi guang : Chitian Dazuo yan jiu lun gang* (The light of Oriental Wisdom: Studies of Ikeda Daisaku), studies of this religious organization itself is rare, except the book *Tai Gang Ao zong jiao gai kuang* (Religions in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau) (1996) which outlines SG at an introductory level. For Japanese sources, Fujiwara Hirotsu's *Komeito: Soka Gakkai wo kiru* (I Denounce Soka Gakki) (1969) and Hirano Sadao's *Komeito, Soka Gakkai to nihon* (The Komeito, Soka Gakkai and Japan) (2005) are two Japanese books that look into the development and controversies of SG. Recently, the dialogue between the former chairperson of the Komeito Yano Jyunya and scholar of religion Shimada Hitomi was published with the title *Soka Gakkai: mou hitotsu no nihon* (Soka Gakkai: One More Japan) (2010). However, it only focuses on the relation between the Komeito and SG, as well as some controversial issues of Ikeda Daisaku.

With the exception of Metraux, who attempts to use Hong Kong and other Southeast Asian countries as case studies, most studies on the SG movement focus on Japan and the Western world. Hong Kong is included in Metraux's study in his

books *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: the Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia* (2001) and *How Soka Gakkai Became a Global Buddhist Movement: the Internationalization of a Japanese Religion* (2010), but occupy a relatively small portion. Although SG is an extensively studied topic, its operation in Hong Kong is little-studied. Hong Kong, regardless of its size, is significant in the SG movement in China.

The main reason for choosing Hong Kong as a case study in this research is to fill a gap in the studies of SG movement. SG is said to have caused a great stir among the traditional religions and in the labor movement in Japan.⁴ In fact, SG is exerting influence on Hong Kong society as well. The growth of SG in Hong Kong is fast, having more members than its East Asian counterparts.⁵ The exceptional growth may be due to SG's policies and recruitment strategies, as well as the socio-political and religious background of the Hong Kong community. In brief, SG provides spiritual support to its members. Many members claim that their lives have changed gradually when they became members and started chanting. They believe that the teachings of SG could bring harmony to Hong Kong and even to the whole

⁴ Arai, Ken. "New Religious Movements," in *Japanese religion: A survey by the Agency for Cultural Affairs*, ed. Hori Ichiro et al., trans. Abe Yoshiya and David Reid (Tokyo; Palo Alto: Kodansha International: 1972), p.104.

⁵ According to the latest official figure, the member size of HKSGI has reached 50,000 in 2011 though there is possibility of inflated numbers. See *Brochure of HKSGI Cultural Festival 2011* (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2011), p.16.

world. Besides, the organization has also built up a very strong grass-roots network by organizing different cultural and social activities. Many members of Hong Kong Soka Gakkai International (HKSGI) are social elites, such as businessmen, lawyers, professors, and doctors; their participation further legitimizes SG development in Hong Kong. The religious organization has established branches in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan but not in Mainland China due to the PRC's policy on foreign religions.⁶ Hong Kong, therefore, plays a role as the stepping stone for SG to exert its influence in Mainland China.

Another reason for my interest in SG is the influence of my colleague. The first time I heard of SG was in 2003, the first year of my university life. While living in the dormitory in Shaw College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, I met Mei, who was the cleaning woman of my floor. One day while I was cooking in the pantry, she came to me and started introducing SG to me. However, the “sarin gas incident” perpetrated by members of Aum Shinrikyo (a Japanese new religion) on March 1995 had scared me and I developed the idea that Japanese new religions are evil. Since I

⁶ Article 36 of *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* states that “citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief”, “no state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion”, “the state protects normal religious activities, no one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state”, “religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination”. For more details, see also *Chinese Government's Official Web Portal*, http://english.gov.cn/2005-08/05/content_20813.htm

was worried about its nature, I did not respond to her positively. Even though she continued to bring out this topic in our later conversation, I refused her invitation. Three years later by coincidence, I discovered one of my Japanese colleagues was a SG member by coincidence. The negative image of SG began to fade since I found that my colleague was no different from normal people. He is kind to friends and optimistic towards life. Attracted by his positive living attitude and amiable character, I developed an increasing interest in SG and its teachings.

The final reason for choosing this topic is based on my personal education background. As a graduate in Japanese studies and philosophy, I have great interest in the studies of Japanese religions. Therefore, the fact that SG is one of the over two dozen Nichiren Buddhism sects has drawn my attention. The unique nature of this religion: its teachings are based on *Lotus Sutra* (Sutra on the White Lotus of the Sublime Dharma); it has a number of differences from the other Buddhist sects; it has disputes with Nichiren Shoshu. These features reinforced my curiosity about this religion. In spite of the large number of Buddhist sects and other religions in the world, SG has succeeded in expanding in such a keen religious competition, so it seems to me that there is something unique and attractive in its philosophy. Moreover, I am particularly interested in the reverse import of Buddhism. Buddhism originated in India and spread to Japan through China. While the original elements

might fade away, new features are added whenever it reached a new place. SG therefore is significantly different compared with the original Buddhism in India and that in China and Hong Kong. Why SG has succeeded in attracting the general public despite the fact that there are already other Buddhist sects in Hong Kong? This question also drew my attention.

This paper examines the following four issues. Firstly, why SG has successfully developed in Hong Kong. HKSGI was founded in 1961 and officially registered with the Hong Kong government in 1963. The number of members increased steadily, with its members ranging from lower class to social elites, students to housewives. It can be said that HKSGI has penetrated every corner of Hong Kong. Thus, the social, economic and political factors that contribute to the growth of HKSGI should be studied. Secondly, HKSGI is actively promoting cultural activities, world peace and ‘human revolution’, exerting certain effects on Hong Kong society. What kind of influences that SG has had in Hong Kong so far? Thirdly, cultural differences exist between Japan and Hong Kong. HKSGI has to adjust itself in order to grow in a Chinese community. So, to what extent has SG been localized in terms of teachings and practices? Fourth, the Mainland Chinese Government prohibits the spread of SG. Hong Kong, having close political, geographic and ethnic relationship with China, can act as a stepping stone for SG. So, what is the significance of Hong Kong to SG

development in China?

I adopt a multi-disciplinary approach in this research. Firstly, it studies the history and development of SG from a historical perspective. The development of SG can be divided into four periods. The first period is the rise of Nichiren Buddhism. Nichiren (1222-1282) founded Nichiren Buddhism in the Kamakura era (1185-1333) and set the basic teachings of SG. The second period is the formation of Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creation Education Society, SKG) by Makiguchi Tsunesaburu (1871-1944) and Toda Josei (1900-58) in 1930 which built the foundation of SG. The third period is the conversion from SKG to SG in 1940s, an organization with an emphasis on educational reform became a religion devoted to the teachings of Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Buddhism. The fourth period refers to the globalization of SG, signified by Ikeda Daisaku's establishment of Soka Gakkai International (SGI) in 1975. By studying the four periods carefully, the development of SG in Japan and overseas can be understood clearly. Secondly, a philosophical approach is used to study and compare the beliefs of SG in Japan and Hong Kong. Official SG publications in Japan and Hong Kong, such as *New Century Monthly*, *Harmony* and some of Ikeda's important works, as well as in-depth interviews with members, who actually participated in both Japan and Hong Kong SG, are all important sources for this research. Based on studies of SG development in other

regions, this part also compares how SG localizes in Hong Kong and in other countries. Thirdly, it looks into the rituals and practices of SG through the lens of religious studies. The symbolic value of SG rituals, such as *gongyo* 勤行 (chanting in front of the *Gohonzon* 御本尊), wedding ceremonies, and funerals are studied through participation and interviews.⁷ Finally, an anthropological approach based on participant observation (in particular their *zandankai* and cultural festival), survey and in-depth interviews has been adopted.⁸ I regularly attend the gatherings, cultural seminars, cultural festivals and exhibitions organized by HKSGI from September 2009 to March 2011. A survey has been conducted to study the characteristics (age, sex, reasons for joining SG etc.) of Hong Kong members. Twenty members of different backgrounds, ranging from ordinary members to committee members, core members to less active members, students to working classes, housewives to professors, were interviewed. Through these means, a comprehensive understanding about SG can be achieved.

I have encountered several difficulties in this research. Firstly, the low-profile policy adopted by HKSGI increases the difficulty to obtain information. It could only be overcome by showing my sincerity and building a friendly relationship with their

⁷ *Gohonzon* is a symbol inscribed by Nichiren which features the *daimoku* (title of *Lotus Sutra*) written down in the center and surrounded by various Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and gods.

⁸ *Zandankai* 座談会 is a typical form of gathering organized by SG in which members (as well as non-members) chant, share and study SG teachings together under the guidance of senior members.

members and staff. Secondly, participating in SG activities requires a large amount of time, since meetings, seminars, and exhibition are held very frequent. Thirdly, research on religion is a sensitive issue. An objective perspective should be implemented throughout the whole study. I am not a believer of SG and this research is purely academic with no intention to publicize or criticize SG. Therefore, during participation and observation, I constantly reminded myself of the importance of being objective. I made friends with some of its members and to a certain extent, might be affected by their enthusiasm during social activities. However, once I returned to my study room and started to write, my identity as an independent thinking scholar has resumed. In fact, I was so surprised to find that one of my secondary school teachers, two of my university teachers, and a few net-friends are actually SG members during my research. This proves the permeation of SG in Hong Kong society, and also reveals that some SG members are not willing to expose their identity easily. I also found it difficult to retrieve certain information about SG. Members are generally nice and willing to share with me, but their information is limited to sharing life experiences and SG teachings. SG policies were seldom mentioned in our conversations. They also refused to expose the names of SG member who hold power in political or business circles. Information about the financial status of SG was difficult to obtain, since they keep it highly private and

confidential.⁹

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one deals with SG movement in Japan by discussing the origin and founding principles of SG, and especially how SG develops under the teachings and guidance of Nichiren, Makiguchi Tsunesaburo, Toda Josei and Ikeda Daisaku from historical and philosophical perspectives. Chapter two introduces SG developments in other regions, such as North America, Europe, and Asia in the lens of globalization to show how SG develops in different cultural contexts. Chapter three focuses on SG development in Hong Kong by looking into its history, social and cultural activities, as well as its influence on Hong Kong society. Through looking into the structure of the organization, recruitment strategy, establishment of educational institutions, our understandings of HKSGI can be enhanced. It also shows that one of the most important roles HKSGI plays is to provide spiritual support to its members and promote cultural activities in a Chinese context. Chapter three analyzes the significance of HKSGI to SG development in China, dealing with questions such as why Ikeda places importance on Hong Kong, how the image of SG in China is improved by HKSGI, what is the attitude of

⁹ It was made known by the media that the property owned by HKSGI in Tai Po, New Territories was actually an open space for the general public. In 2009, public concerns about the use of public open space arouse when more people realized that they should have the right of using these space according to law. For instance, the open area outside Times Square in Central was discovered to be a public open space that was long occupied by the property owner.

Chinese government towards SG, to what extent do Chinese people know about SG, and how SG contributes to educational development in China? Through HKSGI's effort, SG has striven to develop a positive image in China. Chapter four compares SG in Japan and Hong Kong in terms of teachings and practices to understand the level of localization in Hong Kong. It compares the structure of organization, membership, practices and meetings, teachings, and philosophies in the two regions, and studies how Japanese and Hong Kong members interpret SG teachings differently. Any differences in their purposes of chanting, attitudes towards various beliefs (such as human revolution, world peace), and feelings about the disputes between SG and Nichiren Shoshu are important hints to study the localization of this religious organization. Chapter five is a concluding summary of major issues discussed in this thesis, highlighting the significant findings and evaluates whether this study can answer the research questions properly.

Chapter 1: Soka Gakkai Movement in Japan

1.1 The Origins of SG Doctrine

SG is a “new religion” originating in Japan in the 1930s that has expanded successfully beyond Japan. Although it was founded in war-time Japan, apparently having a rather short history, SG followers claim that the teachings of SG can be traced to Nichiren Buddhism of the Kamakura period (1185-1333).

Nichiren Buddhism is a Buddhist sect founded by Nichiren (1222-1282) in Japan during the Kamakura period. Hence, it is said to be an indigenous Japanese Buddhism. Nichiren lived in the troubled period when domestic strife, natural disasters, and Mongolian invasion occurred.¹ These series of disasters and misfortune to Japan made him subscribe to the belief that Japanese people were living in the age of *mappo* 末法 (the age of degeneration of the Dharma) when people turned away from the saving truths of Buddhist scripture and turned to evil and violence.² During *Mappo*, people are unable to achieve enlightenment through the word of Sakyamuni Buddha. Although the teachings of the Buddha will still be

¹ Nichiren is also known as Nichiren Daishonin 日蓮大聖人 by Nichiren Shoshu and SG. Other Nichiren sects use the title Nichiren Shonin 日蓮聖人 instead.

² According to Buddhist teachings, human history can be divided into three stages: *shobo* 正法, *zobo* 像法 and *mappo* 末法. In the period of *shobo* (the Age of Right Dharma), Buddhism prospers and leads people to enlightenment. While in *zobo* (the Age of Semblance Dharma), Buddhism becomes established firmly in society but has signs of decline. Finally when it comes to *mappo* (the age of degeneration of the Dharma), Buddhism completely loses its power to help people. See also Kirimura Yasuji, *The Life of Nichiren Daishonin* (Tokyo : Nichiren Shoshu International Center, 1980), p.xxiii.

correct, people can no longer follow them and human society will become morally corrupted. In the Lotus Sutra, Bodhisattva Superior Practices is entrusted to spread the Buddhist law in this age and save mankind and the earth. Therefore, Nichiren believed that its teaching, which is based on Lotus Sutra, is most suitable in the recent Mappo period. Today, SG argues that Mappo still exist now. Nichiren proclaimed that Japan's suffering was caused by fake Buddhist teachings. After years of studying the writings of the Buddha, Nichiren found that the ultimate religious truth lay only in the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren upheld the Lotus Sutra and interpreted these writings to mean that all individuals, the poor and the rich, women and men, the good and the "evil people", have the equal potential for enlightenment, or "Buddhahood".³ He believed that crime, war, and poverty would come to an end when the consciousness of the people was raised through enlightenment. In order to facilitate the process of enlightenment, Nichiren prescribed a simple mantra, *nam-myoho-renge-kyo* 南無妙法蓮華經 (literally meaning "devotion to the mystic law of the Lotus Sutra", also known as *daimoku* 題目) and a mandala, *Gohonzon* 御本尊, as an object of worship. The purpose of chanting *daimoku* is to attain perfect

³ This sutra also contains extensive instruction on the concept and usage of skillful means which suggest the idea that even if a technique, view, etc. is not ultimately "true" in the highest sense, it may still be accepted as an expedient practice to perform or view to hold. It also describe the universe encompasses different realms of beings, such as gods, devas, dragons and other mythological beings and the Buddhas are portrayed as the patient teachers of all such beings.

and complete enlightenment. According to Nichiren, *nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is the distillation of the entire Lotus Sutra and to be the name of the ultimate law permeating the universe. All the sutra's teachings are summarized in its title. Nichiren believed that the chanting the *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra is “the “ship” that can unfailingly transport one across the sea of life’s inevitable sufferings to the distant shore of enlightenment”.⁴

In *Rissho-ankoku-ron* 立正安国論 (Treatise on securing the peace of the land through the establishment of the correct, 1260), Nichiren wrote that other Buddhist sects, such as Pure Land Buddhism, were contaminated with dangerous and false doctrines, as they all deviated from the teachings of *Lotus Sutra*. He blamed these fake Buddhist teachings for causing foreign invasion and internal rebellion in Japan. The idea of *Jikkai* 十界, Ten Spiritual Realms or Ten Worlds, are also important in Nichiren's teaching. The ten spiritual realms are part of Buddhist cosmology and consist of four higher realms (also known as the *shisho* 四聖 in Japanese, or the four noble realms) and six lower realms (also known as *rokudo* 六道, or the six realms of desire).⁵ Some schools of Buddhism see them as being external, ten

⁴ *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p.34, in SGI Library Online, <http://www.sgilibrary.org/view.php?page=34&m=1&q=daimoku>

⁵ *Jikkai*, the ten spiritual realms, from the lowest to the highest, are (1) hell, (2) hungry spirits, (3) animals, (4) *asuras*, (5) human beings, (6) heavenly beings, (7) voice-hearers, (8) cause-awakened ones, (9) bodhisattvas, and (10) Buddhas.

different planes of existence beings can be born into, while Nichiren and SG see them as different states of mind that can be shifted between due to external and internal influences. The Lotus Sutra teaches that “each of the Ten Worlds contains all ten within it, making it possible to interpret them as potential states of life inherent in each individual being” and “the Ten Worlds indicates ten potential states or conditions that a person can manifest or experience”.⁶ Therefore, the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is a component principle of *Ichinen Sanzen* 一念三千, three thousand realms in a single moment of life.⁷

Nichiren even insisted in petitions to the government that his own form of Buddhism be preferred. His intense criticism of other Buddhist sects not only earned him an radical stance, but also dissatisfied the government and a persecution awaited him. Nichiren escaped from execution but died after years of exile. Following his death, Nichiren’s followers were divided into several sects, in which Nichiren

⁶ The Soka Gakki Dictionary of Buddhism, http://www.sgilibrary.org/search_dict.php?id=2282

⁷ *Ichinen-sanzen* is a philosophical system established by T’ient’ai 天台(538-597) in his Great Concentration and Insight on the basis of the phrase “the true aspect of all phenomena” from the “Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. It suggests the idea that the three thousand realms, or the entire phenomenal world, exist in a single moment of life. The number three thousand comes from the following calculation: 10 (Ten Worlds) times 10 (Ten Worlds) times 10 (ten factors) times 3 (three realms of existence). “Life at any moment manifests one of the Ten Worlds. Each of these worlds possesses the potential for all ten within itself, and this “mutual possession,” or mutual inclusion, of the Ten Worlds is represented as 10*10, or a hundred, possible worlds. Each of these hundred worlds possesses the ten factors, making one thousand factors or potentials, and these operate within each of the three realms of existence, thus making three thousand realms.” For more information about *ichinen-sanzen*, then factors, and three realms of existence, please see Ibid.

Shoshu claims to be the most direct lineage from Nichiren. From its first high priest, Nikko (1246-1333), to the present one, Nikken (1922-), Nichiren Shoshu eventually achieved a stable position among the Buddhist sects of Japan. Since Nichiren Shoshu has excommunicated SG in 1991, SG claims that its teachings are directly inherited from Nichiren Daishonin.⁸

It is important to note that Nichiren introduced a number of new elements into Japanese Buddhism that later characterized the teachings of SG. The first element is a sense of exclusivity. He insisted that other sects were spreading false Buddhist teachings and only *Lotus Sutra* could save mankind in the age of *mappo*. He recruited believers in a highly aggressive way known as *shakubuku* 折伏 (break and subdue). This recruitment method was also adopted during the early development of SG in post-war Japan as well as other regions, in a form of approaching strangers in public places and coaxing them to visit SG meetings. Although I still heard of SG members using this term when they talk of recruitment, nowadays it merely means “persuading others to join” and the negative sense of physical threat has disappeared. However, the sense of exclusivity could still be shown by its hesitation

⁸ Possible causes leading to the excommunication of SG from Nichiren Shoshu may be due to insoluble tensions in the issues of authority, finances, and interpretation of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings. See Jane Hurst, “A Buddhist Reformation in the Twentieth Century: Causes and Implications of the Conflict between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood,” in *Global citizens: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the world*, ed. David Machacek and Bryan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.77.

to encourage its members to understand the teachings of other Buddhist sects.⁹ The second element is the active participation in politics. He made numerous petitions to the government, saying that the nation would stop suffering only if people were led to the true teachings of *Lotus Sutra*. He blamed the *bakufu* (shogunate) for not making this move, and thus bringing natural disasters and wars to Japan. The reformist stance of Nichiren was inherited by Makiguchi and Toda as shown by their criticism of the Japanese education system in the Meiji Era. Such political-orientation may also be reflected in SG, for instance, it participates in Japanese politics by forming *Komeito* based on the idea of *obutsu-myogo* 王仏冥合 (fusion of Buddhist beliefs with every phase of social behavior), and has become a non-government organization in United Nations. These are good examples to show SG's involvement in local and global politics.

In short, Nichiren laid the groundwork of SG in a few ways. Firstly, it provides a solid religious foundation based on Buddhism teachings. Nowadays, SG members claim that their beliefs largely come from Nichiren, especially after the religion separated from Nichiren Shoshu in 1991. SG's Buddhist background helps its overseas expansion because many Westerners and Asians are interested in Buddhism. Secondly, Nichiren's sense of exclusivity and a reformist political orientation may

⁹ Phillip E. Hammond and David W. Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.168.

also be reflected in SG's development. SG shows little tolerance towards other religions in its belief, seeing the teachings of Nichiren the only true religion in the world that can provide salvation for human kinds. However, since SG has developed and matured in the early 1970s, the degree of openness and sense of cooperation has improved. For example, SG cooperates with other people, organizations, and nations in peace, education and music programs. Although it is said that non-member are restricted from religious activities, they are welcomed to join SG's cultural activities.¹⁰ The degree of openness towards non-members is high in Hong Kong. For example, when I asked for information about a SG's cultural seminar, an enthusiastic volunteer working in the reception answered me with all the details politely. Even after I confessed to him that I was not a SG believer, the volunteer still welcomed me to join their religious meetings and encouraged me to pray at home even though I am not a SG member. It is a strategic way to attract new members and is what Gordon regards as "pray now, believe later".¹¹

1.2 The Development of SG in Prewar Japan

¹⁰ Daniel A. Metraux, *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: the Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia* (Lanham.: University Press of America, 2001), p.22.

¹¹ Andrew Gordon, *A modern history of Japan: from Tokugawa times to the present* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2009), p.259.

In 1928, the Japanese educator Makiguchi Tsunesaburo, became a believer of Nichiren Shoshu. Two years later, he founded an organization called Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (SKG) to promote the reformation of educational system in Japan and was the predecessor of SG. Education in the Meiji period (1868-1912) had strong political implications. It was used as an extension of government to promote loyalty to the emperor and a sense of national identity. For example, *Monbusho* (the Ministry of Education) standardized school uniforms, textbooks, rules, guidelines, teachers' training, moral education, and school ceremonies so as to develop the spirit of loyalty, filiality, and patriotism among Japanese.¹² However, deeply influenced by western ideas, Makiguchi developed a more humanistic educational philosophy in his writings. He believed that education should be oriented to individual achievement and happiness. Besides, Makiguchi criticized the emphasis of obedience and rote memorization in the Meiji educational system. He encouraged critical thinking as a key to achieve personal goals and interests. He thought that students should also be taught to pursue values and make positive contributions to society.¹³ These ideas were embedded in his 4-volume book called *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy) (1930-4). Makiguchi found that his intention to reform

¹² Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp.147-8.

¹³ Nishihara Kentaro, *Soka kyoiku no genryu: makiguchi tsunesaburo* (The Origin of Soka Education: Makiguchi Tsunesaburo) (Tokyo: Ushio Suppansha, 2008) 10th edition, pp.54-5.

Japanese education resonated with Nichiren's idea to reform society through religion.

Both had a sense of crisis and criticized Japan for going the wrong way.

“Human happiness is the purpose of education” said Makiguchi.¹⁴ His educational ideals became important elements in SKG and SG's beliefs. It can be seen from SG's effort in promoting education, such as the establishment of Soka University, Soka Women's Junior College, Soka Junior and Senior High Schools, Soka Elementary Schools, Soka Kindergarten, Min-On Concert Association, Institute of Oriental Philosophy, and the Fuji Art Museums. The founding principles of Japan Soka University, are to ‘be the highest seat of learning for humanistic education; be the cradle of a new culture; be a fortress for the peace of humankind’. These are also in line with Makiguchi's ideals.¹⁵

Makiguchi also constructed a philosophy of values based on three elements namely *bi* 美 (beauty), *ri* 利 (benefit) and *zen* 善 (goodness), which means the pursuit of personal perceptual experience, individual benefit, and social justice respectively.¹⁶ In brief, beauty is perceived to be an emotional and temporary value, derived through one or more of the five senses, that concerns only the part of human

¹⁴ Ibid., p.98.

¹⁵ “Founding Principles and Mission Statement”, Soka University Official Homepage, <http://www.soka.ac.jp/en/about/statement.html>

¹⁶ Makiguchi Tsunesabuo, *Soka kyoikugaku taikei* (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy) (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1982-1983), p.211.

life. Gain is an individual value that is related to the whole of human life. Goodness is a social value related to the life of the group.¹⁷ Goodness is the most important value while beauty is the least under his philosophical framework.¹⁸ He strongly emphasized value-creation in his education philosophy and even named the organization as *Soka Kyoiku Gakkai* (Value-Creation Education Society). The significance of value-creation, according to Bethel, was to develop a harmonious balance between individual and social values.¹⁹ Makiguchi considered that it was a responsibility of each individual to work for the value of gain, so as to contribute to the welfare of both himself and the society. By constructing his own philosophy, Makiguchi merged the teachings of Nichiren with the idea of value-creation. In other words, the emphasis of gain constituted the “this-worldliness” of SG doctrines and justified the act of chanting for their material rewards and personal happiness. The pursuit of beauty became the goal of SG’s promotion of arts and cultural activities. The pursuit of goodness also explained SG’s activism in promoting social harmony and world peace.

Prior to the beginning of War World II, SKG attracted a few hundred educators

¹⁷ Dayle M. Bethel, *Makiguchi the Value Creator: Revolutionary Japanese Educator and Founder of Soka Gakkai*. (New York: Weatherhill, 1973), pp.50-1.

¹⁸ Nishihara Kentaro. *Soka kyoiku no genryu: makiguchi tsunesaburo* (The Origin of Soka Education: Makiguchi Tsunesaburo) (Tokyo: Ushio Suppansha, 2008) 10th edition, pp.72-3.

¹⁹ Dayle M. Bethel, *Makiguchi the Value Creator: Revolutionary Japanese Educator and Founder of Soka Gakkai* (New York: Weatherhill, 1973), p.51.

who shared similar ideas with Makiguchi, but they failed to bring educational reforms to Japan. Makiguchi's strong and open criticism of the government drew the attention of authorities and he was seen as a political dissident. The Religious Organizations Act enacted in 1940 was a turning point for SKG. To prepare for war, Japanese militant government extended its control over religions by consolidating different sects of Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity under a canopy of State Shinto. As it became the state religion, all citizens were required to follow ceremonial events as a means of enhancing nationalism. Because of his anti-authoritarian nature, Makiguchi refused to co-operate with the government, objected to the use of religion to promote nationalism, and opposed government attempts to consolidate all Nichiren sect.²⁰ As a result, Makiguchi and his followers were arrested including his disciple Toda Josei (1900-58). In 1944, Makiguchi died in prison, leaving Toda to rebuild the organization after the war.

1.3 The Development of SG in Postwar Japan

Makiguchi's death did not bring the end to SKG development. Instead, Toda's leadership was important for SKG to re-orientate itself in post-war Japan. Toda first met Makiguchi in 1920. Deeply charmed by his personality in 1928, he became a

²⁰ Nishihara Kentaro, *Soka kyoiku no genryu: makiguchi tsunesaburo* (The Origin of Soka Education: Makiguchi Tsunesaburo) (Tokyo: Ushio Suppansha, 2008), 10th edition, p.80.

student of Makiguchi and became a faithful believer of Nichiren Buddhism. During the Second World War, Toda was imprisoned with Makiguchi. Their unbreakable mentor-disciple relation is recognized as a model of *shitei-funi* 師弟不二 among SG members.²¹ While Makiguchi emphasized the importance of study and education, Toda focused more on Buddhist practice and devotion as means to reform Japanese society. Toda did not give up his faith during imprisonment and became even more committed to the teachings of Nichiren. He even claimed to have achieved enlightenment after chanting *daimoku* over two million times. After his release from prison in July 1945, he reorganized SKG by dropping the word *kyoiku* (education) from the name and formed Soka Gakkai (SG). An organization originally emphasized on educational reform became a religion following the teaching of *Lotus Sutra* and Nichiren.

Toda's idea about enlightenment was similar to that of Nichiren. In his essay *Ningen kakumei* (human revolution), Toda indicated that an ideal life and harmonious society can only be achieved when all individuals go through human revolution. Human revolution refers to the "fundamental process of inner transformation whereby we break through the shackles of our "lesser self", bound

²¹ In SG meetings and SG publications, the mentor-disciple relations between Makiguchi and Toda, and Toda and Ikeda, are often seen as role models of *shitei-funi*, meaning the bond between mentor and disciple is unbreakable.

by self-concern and the ego, growing in altruism toward a “greater self” capable of caring and taking action for the sake of others, ultimately all humanity”.²² He said that our world is full of greediness, anger, and stupidity, but it is also the place where individuals can achieve enlightenment. By following the *san-dai-hiho* 三大秘法 (three great secret laws) which are the *Gohonzon* (the object of worship), *daimoku* (the chant), and *kaidan* 戒壇 (sanctuary of correct teaching), individuals can attain salvation in this world.²³ Toda believed that through human revolution of all individuals, our world could become the paradise depicted in Buddhist teachings. In fact, his emphasis on “this-worldliness” can also be found in Nichiren’s teachings. Nichiren criticized Pure Land Buddhism for refusing “this-world” and denying the possibility that human beings can achieve enlightenment by their power. He promoted the idea of *Sokushin-jobutsu* 即身成佛 (attainment of Buddhahood during life), believing all individuals have the potential to attain Buddhahood in their life and opposing to the idea that practitioners might take many lifetimes to achieve the same goal.

Toda also inherited Makiguchi’s ideas about world peace, criticizing Japan for going in the wrong direction. He felt bitter about the ill effects of modernization. He

²² The official definition of human revolution is found in SGI Official Website, <http://www.sgi.org/hr.html>

²³ *Toda Josei zenshu* (Collected Works of Toda Josei) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shinbusha, 1981), pp.11-2.

claimed that “when technology improves, human beings become more violent; when society becomes more civilized, human beings become more arrogant. Technological and cultural development at the same time brings about violence, arrogance, jealousy and obsequiousness among human beings”. The antidote for modern society, according to Toda, was humanism and pacifism.²⁴ Such ideas also became the cornerstones of SG’s beliefs nowadays.

However, under Toda’s leadership, SG developed a reputation of intolerance for other religions. Toda claimed in his article “Jakyo wo tsuku” (Attack on evil religion) that evil religions were popular in Japanese society and criticized the practice of ancestor worship in pursuit of material rewards as useless and stupid.²⁵ After he secured leadership of SG, Toda developed SG in an aggressive way to attack other religions. Its image in the public eye was worsened by the aggressive recruitment strategy known as *shakubuku*, massive rallies and parades, and the practice of smashing household ancestral altars. Nonetheless, Toda’s success is unquestionable as SG members had grown to over 750,000 by the time he died in 1958.²⁶

²⁴ *Soka gakkai no rekishi to dento: zadankai* (The History and Tradition of Soka Gakkai: *Zadankai*) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1976), p.85.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.16-9.

²⁶ Tamaru Nariyoshi, “Soka Gakkai in Historical Perspective,” in *Global citizens: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the world*, ed. David Machacek and Bryan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.33.

1.4 Globalizing SG

SG continued to grow rapidly under Toda's successor, Ikeda Daisaku (1928-). While Toda emphasized the religious and doctrinal elements of SG, Ikeda strengthened the social dimensions of the organization. Under his leadership, SG's radicalism has been lowered by stopping the practice of aggressive recruitment *shakubuku*. SG adopted a low-pressure approach known as *shoju* 摂受 (show by example). SG also deepened its social influence by establishing educational institutions (Soka University, elementary and secondary Soka schools), art museums, a concert association, and a publishing empire based on the education theory of Makiguchi.

Under Ikeda's leadership, SG maintains a reformist stance with regards to the political and religious establishment based on the tradition of Nichiren. In 1964, Ikeda said in *Seikyo Shimbun* that, "should the [members consent], I think that the [Komei Political League] camp, of need be, become a political party, or [send] representatives to] the Lower House in order to realize *obutsu-myogo*, as well as in response to the needs of our times and the demands of the people..."²⁷ Based on the idea of *obutsu-myogo* 王仏冥合 (fusion of Buddhist beliefs with every phase of

²⁷ Hiroshi Aruga, "Soka Gakkai and Japanese Politics," in *Global citizens: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the world*, ed. David Machacek and Bryan Wilson (New York : Oxford University Press, 2000), p.114.

social behavior), Ikeda believes that Japan would benefit if leaders act according to Buddhist ideals of justice and respect for the dignity of human life.²⁸ In 1964, SG established a political party, *Komeito* (known as the Clean Government Party in English), which is the first religious-based party in modern Japanese history that aims to promote “neo-socialism (*shin-shakaishugi*), a third civilization (*dai-san-bunmei*), Buddhist democracy (*buppo minshushugi*) and global nationalism (*gurobaru nashonarizumu*)”.²⁹ The founding objectives of *Komeito* are based on the ideals of Nichiren Buddhism that all individual are equal before the *Dai-Gohonzon* 大御本尊 and all people should be treated with respect and dignity.³⁰ It claimed that by realizing the ideal in *Rissho-ankoku-ron* advocated by Nichiren, the welfare of society and the happiness of individuals could be achieved. Its ultimate goal is to carry out “human revolution” at an individual level which collectively could lead to social and political revolution.³¹ Again, it reflected the tradition of political orientation of Nichiren. In 1967 and 1969, *Komeito* won 25 and 47 seats respectively out of around 500 total seats. However, the challenge of *Komeito* was that it was

²⁸ *Obutsu-myogo* is a concept found in Nichiren’s teachings, meaning “the establishment of a national high sanctuary”. Aruga believed that this concept became the passwords for SG to enter politics. *Ibid.*, p.111.

²⁹ James W. White, *The Sokagakkai and Mass Society* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1970), pp.126-7.

³⁰ Arvin Palmer, *Buddhist politics: Japan's Clean Government Party* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971), p.57.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

unable to earn votes beyond SG base, because its membership since 1960s has remained at a fairly constant eight to ten percent of the Japanese population. However, some critics regard *Komeito* as violating the idea of separation of religion from politics as stated in the Constitution of Japan. Article 20 of the Constitution of Japan states that “no religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority”.³² Ikeda is also criticized as a power seeker who pursues wealth and power by using money and votes from followers. Hirotatsu Fujiwara criticized SG and Ikeda Daisaku for violating the freedom of speech and seeking too much power and wealth.³³

Human revolution was the idea advocated by Toda Josei which also affected Ikeda's thought. From 1965 to 1993, Ikeda started publishing his novel *Ningen kakumei* 人間革命 (The Human Revolution) serially in SG's newsletter called *Seikyo Shinbun*. The novel was based on the life of Toda. From 1993 onwards, the publication of this novel was resumed under a new title *Shin Ningen Kakumei* 新人間革命 (The New Human Revolution). The use of human revolution as the title of the novel reflected the importance of this belief in Ikeda's mind. Similar to Nichiren

³² Tamaru Nariyoshi, “Soka Gakkai in Historical Perspective” in *Global Citizens: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World*, ed. David Machacek and Bryan Wilson (New York : Oxford University Press, 2000), p.39.

³³ Hirotatsu Fujiwara, *Komeito: Soka Gakkai wo kiru* (I Denounce Soka Gakki) (Tokyo : Nisshin Hodo, 1969).

and Toda, Ikeda believed that human revolution is the key to achieving world peace: spiritual revolutions of individuals will eventually lead to the enlightenment of all people and all beings. According to SG's teachings, it is through chanting *daimoku* in front of *Gohonzon* and participating in *shakubuku* (in a soft sense, meaning recruiting new members) that human revolution of all individuals can be achieved. This idea remains the core and guiding value of SG.

Ikeda also promotes a sense of global citizenship. He envisions an interconnecting humanity bonded by Buddhist teachings, while at the same time local customs of different regions are preserved. Ikeda believes that "the only way to create global unity is to build a world civilization linking together all humanity which, while preserving and making positive use of local traditions".³⁴ This idea became the guiding principle of SG development in different regions. It can be seen when SG spreads to a new place, instead of vigorously changing the lifestyle of local people, SG adopts an accommodating approach in which it respects the local culture and traditions, and at the same time keeping its major principles unchanged, such as the promotion of human revolution and world peace and the teachings of Nichiren. It is said that such approach avoids unnecessary conflicts during the process of localization and SG's success in taking root in other regions may prove Ikeda's

³⁴ Ikeda Daisaku, *A lasting Peace: Collected Addresses of Daisaku Ikeda* (New York: Weatherhill, 1981-1987), pp.32-33.

approach effective.

From 1960 onwards, Ikeda has developed affiliate organizations to promote SG worldwide. Branches were set up in North and South America, Europe, and Asia. In 1975, Soka Gakkai International (SGI) was established with its headquarters established in Tokyo to coordinate its branches all over the world, promoting “peace, culture and education based on a belief in positive human potential and respect for the dignity of life”.³⁵ SGI regards itself as an NGO representative at the United Nation and claims that they participated in many official UN activities. Their objective is to promote world peace based on the Buddhist concept of *kosen-rufu* 弘法宣流布 (declare and spread Buddhism). Ikeda presents a peace proposal every year, which explores the interrelation between core Buddhist concepts and global challenges in the effort to realize world peace. It is claimed that under Ikeda’s leadership, SG is more active in promoting peace movements by peace education, communication between different societies, and awareness of environmental problems facing human beings.

Ikeda is also good at publicizing himself by regularly paying visits to different countries and engaging in dialogues with world political and cultural leaders, such as

³⁵ “How does SGI contribute to society?”, SGI Official Homepage, <http://www.sgi.org/about-us/about-faq.html>

Zhou Enlai, Nelson Mandela, and Rosa Parks.³⁶ By March 2011, he has been awarded honorary doctorates and professorships by over 300 universities.³⁷ Among them, over 110 honors were given by universities in China.³⁸ Despite his effort to promote himself, Ikeda and SG often become the target of criticism. In 1991, Ikeda Daisuke was excommunicated by Nichiren Shoshu, since he challenged their priesthood's actions as authoritarian and undemocratic. In 1996, he was involved in a rape accusation in which the former Soka Gakkai Hokkaido Joint Territory Women's Division Chief Nobuko Nobuhira claimed to be the victim. Although Ikeda denied such accusations, his image was greatly affected.

In short, the four important religious leaders exerted different influence on the development of SG. Nichiren founded the religious notion of SG and added a sense of exclusivity and political orientation to its tradition. Makiguchi developed an educational philosophy with emphasis on “value-creation” which defines the objective of SG. Toda converted SG from an organization fighting for education reform to one that emphasizes devotion to Nichiren Buddhism. Ikeda has developed SG from a Japanese new religion to a world religion.

³⁶ *Bauhinia Magazine*, special edition vol. 1, August 2010. 2nd edition (Hong Kong: Thousand Wisdom Ltd, 2010), pp.64-5.

³⁷ “Academic honors conferred upon SGI President Daisaku”. Ikeda Daisaku Website, <http://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/records/degree/by-date-order.html>

³⁸ *Bauhinia Magazine*, special edition vol. 1, August 2010. 2nd edition (Hong Kong: Thousand Wisdom Ltd, 2010), pp.68-9.

Chapter 2: Soka Gakkai Movement Outside Japan

In the 1960s, based on the goal of spreading Buddhism outside Japan, Ikeda established SG branches worldwide. He found that the early overseas believers were primarily Japanese immigrants and that overseas SG branches were needed to group them together. Ikeda's ultimate goal was to spread SG teachings all over the world to different races. Ikeda himself visited overseas branches and encouraged members to do their best to spread SG's teachings to the local communities. As a result, the number of overseas members has been expanding steadily. In 1975, Soka Gakkai International (SGI) was founded with a mission to spread SG's teachings to every corner of the world by uniting overseas affiliated groups under its umbrella. Today, SG has successfully established branches in North and Central American, Europe, Asia, Oceania, South Africa, and America.¹ Table 1 shows the overseas branches of SG.

¹ Readers should be reminded that apart from SG, other Japanese new religions movements have also developed abroad, such as Tenrikyo and Happy Science etc.

Table 1. SGI Branches Overseas²

Continent	Country / Region
Africa	South Africa
Asia	Hong Kong, India, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand
Europe	Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom
North and Central America	Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, USA
Oceania	Australia, New Zealand
South America	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela

An important concept guiding the globalization of SG is *zuiho-bini* 隨方毘尼.³ This doctrine existed in Japanese Buddhism and was highlighted by Ikeda as a strategy to expand SG overseas. It means “Buddhism may be adapted to the unique traditions of any particular culture”.⁴ SG insists that the important notions of Nichiren Buddhism, which is chanting *daimoku* in front of *Gohonzon*, should be strictly followed. However, other aspects such as the way teachings are presented and members are

² *SGI links*, SGI Official Homepage, <http://www.sgi.org/sgilinks.html>

³ According to SG official definition, “*Bini* is a transliteration of the Sanskrit *vinaya*, the body of rules of discipline for the Buddhist Order. *Zuiho* is short for *zuiho-zuiji*, *zuiji* meaning to adapt to or follow the times. The gist of this precept, then, is to follow the culture and traditions of the locale and the age in which one lives and practices Buddhism”. See “The Precept of Adapting to Local Culture”, SGI-USA Official Homepage, http://www.sgi-usa.org/memberresources/resources/buddhist_concepts/bc34_adapting_to_local_customs.php

⁴ Daniel A. Metraux, *The Lotus and the Maple Leaf: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Canada* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1996), p.44.

recruited can vary according to different cultures. Such guiding principles help SG adapt to local cultures and provides room for cultural diversity to flourish.

Besides, the role of individual empowerment may also explain the development of SG abroad. SG teaches its members to be confident, optimistic and positive toward life. They believe that one can achieve both the spiritual and material benefits through chanting *daimoku* and improve their own life and society through participating in SG activities:

We can change our own lives and the world for the better. While the role of institutions or governments is important, change that starts within each person's life is seen as the surest way to tackle the problems facing the world in the 21st century. Many people feel hopeless about these issues, but SGI stresses that people have the power to change their circumstances, and its public education and outreach projects aim to inspire people and equip them with information that they can use to make a difference in their communities.⁵

The idea of individual empowerment enables members to fulfill their potential and

⁵ SGI Official Homepage, <http://mod.sgi.org/community-initiatives/community-faq.html>

take responsibility for their own choices, and is therefore attractive to those who want to improve their lives and society, and be contributive to the world.

This part looks into SG's development outside Japan, which includes the United States, Britain, Canada, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippine, Australia, and Taiwan through the lens of globalization. By examining the characteristics of memberships and practices in these regions, I show how SG localizes into these ethnically and culturally different regions. This part also lays the groundwork for a comparative study of SG in Hong Kong and other overseas in the chapter three.

2.1 SG in North America

SG was introduced to North America in the 1950s by Japanese immigrants. Although USA and Canada are strongholds of Christianity, SG's development in these areas is rather successful. It has attracted not only Asian members, but people of various ethnicities. For example, Soka Gakkai International USA (SGI-USA) and Soka Gakkai International Canada (SGI-Canada) are dominated by non-Asian members. This part shows how SG grows in the soil of North American by using SGI-USA and SGI-Canada as examples.

SGI-USA

SG's development in the United States can be traced back to the 1950s. When Japan was under American Occupation (1945-51), many US soldiers were sent to Japan. It gave rise to international marriages between American military men and Japanese women. When the occupation ended, some of these soldiers returned to the USA with their Japanese wives. Some of these wives were SG believers and thus they brought their religion to the US. Due to the lack of SG's support and insufficient man-power because of the small member size, SG grew rather slowly at that time. 1960 was a breakthrough year when Ikeda visited North America on 5 October. He appointed Masayasu Sadanaga, a Japanese immigrant to the United States, to lead the organization.⁶ Since then, this day is regarded as "SGI-USA Day" because it "set in motion the American movement to spread the Nichiren's Buddhism".⁷ Hammond and Machacek estimated the number of SG members in USA reached 36,000 in 1997.⁸

The successful landing and spread of SG in the USA is attributed to the policy

⁶ Masayasu Sadanaga, an immigrant from Japan to the US, published a book called *Freedom and Influence: The Role of Religion in American Society* to introduce SG's teaching to the general public. See Phillip E. Hammond and David Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.25.

⁷ See "SGI-USA movement: Timeline of Nichiren Buddhism", SGI Official Homepage, <http://www.sgi-usa.org/aboutsgi/timeline.php>

⁸ Phillip E. Hammond and David Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.41.

of Americanization. Machacek argues that SG's "tranquil experience in the USA lies in SGI USA's compliance with American social institutions and a history of reforms designed to make this Japanese religion look as American as possible".⁹ In other words, the practices of SG have been modified to fit in the American social and cultural environments. At the beginning, SGI-USA mainly targeted Japanese immigrants. It is said that SG acted as a community to connect Japanese immigrants together. Therefore, meetings were held in traditional manner in which "participants spoke Japanese, removed their shoes at the door, and knelt on the floor to chant" and sat "in sex segregated groups".¹⁰ Since 1963, following the rise of English-speaking members, English was used along with Japanese in SG meetings. Some meetings were even conducted solely in English for those who cannot speak Japanese. Although the Sutra was still recited in Japanese, SG provided members with English transliterations of the Japanese characters. Apart from language, the format of the meeting was adjusted to suit the culture of American members. For instance, participants no longer knelt on floor or sat according to sex, but sat on chairs arranged in rows with their shoes on feet.

⁹ David Machacek, "Organizational Isomorphism in SGI-USA," in *Global citizens: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the world*, ed. David Machacek and Bryan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.282.

¹⁰ Phillip E. Hammond and David Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.25 & 98.

SGI-USA adjusted itself in a way that the organization embodies more American culture than Japanese culture. For example, although SG members practice Nichiren Buddhism, SGI-USA meetings were conducted in community centers located in commercial buildings rather than Buddhist temples. For example, Boston and Washington cultural centers are located in an old Church and an office building respectively.¹¹ Furthermore, Hurst found that the original name of SGI-USA which was Nichiren Shoshu of America, suited the taste of American since its abbreviation, NSA, sounds “very American”.¹² We can see that by eliminating some Japanese notions, SG promoted itself as a global religion rather than a Japanese religion.

Regarding the structure of the organization, SGI-USA is divided into three the West, Central, and East territories. Each Territory is further divided into Zones, Regions, Areas, Chapters and Districts. Hammond and Machacek found that the organizational structure was reformed to adapt to American culture in two ways.¹³ First, instead of following the patriarchal structure of SG Japan, in which the national headquarter has absolute authority over local branches, SGI-USA adopted a policy which favors the independent administration of local community center. In fact, a

¹¹ Daniel A. Metraux, *The history and theology of Soka Gakkai : a Japanese new religion* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1988), p.107.

¹² Phillip E. Hammond and David Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.98-99.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.99-100.

quick look at the SGI-USA official homepage reveals its emphasis on the independent growth of regional branches. For example, each region has its own well-established homepage serving its own members.¹⁴ By showing details of regional activities, news, and announcements, they act as communication platforms between a particular regional branch and its own members. Therefore, a sense of belonging to a local community can be cultivated among the members. Furthermore, the structure of SGI-USA is relatively flexible, especially at the district level. Normally, SG members are divided into six formal groups according to their age, sex, and marital status, which are Men's Group, Women's Group, Young Men's Group, Young Women's Group, Student's Group, and Future Group. However, Mr. I, a Japanese SG believer who had been living in the United States for one year, said:

In Japan, members are divided into different groups and I belong to the Young Men's Group. Activities are also conducted on a group basis. Each group organizes its activities. However, in this district (Pittsburgh), the number of male members is so small that I have to join the activities organized by the women's group. It is something I didn't experience in

¹⁴ There are a total of 32 SGI-USA regional homepage linking to the official homepage of SGI-USA. See *SGI-USA: Zones and Regional Sites*, SGI-USA Official Homepage, <http://www.sgi-usa.org/memberresources/zone.php>

Hong Kong and Japan.¹⁵

Mr. I's experience shows that local groups of SGI-USA are highly adaptive because they can adjust their policies based on the characteristics of membership. The emphasis on the independence of local groups is regarded as "adopting the congregational model of religious organization to which Americans are accustomed".¹⁶

Secondly, SGI-USA shows higher degree of democracy. For instance, election of committee members, which was originally limited to Japanese male members, was now open to members of various races and sexes after members urged for democracy. Nowadays, out of the nine members in the SGI-USA Board of Directors selected from different disciplines, three of them are female.¹⁷ It is found that this ratio is in rough proportion to the size of female membership. The shift of ethnic make-up of

¹⁵ 1st Interview with Mr. I, 34 years old, dated 12 December 2009. Mr. I is a Japanese male who was born in a SG family. His parents registered him a SG member when he was only a baby. In his younger days, he was not a devoted follower of SG and only participated in its meetings. He failed his university entrance examination when he was 18. Since then, he chanted more frequently in the hope of entering a good university. A year later, he successfully passed the entrance examination of Soka University (a university affiliated by SG), and he believed that it was the result of chanting. Since then, he became more devoted to SG. While working in Hong Kong and studying in U.S., he continued to chant and attended meetings held by SG branches in different regions.

¹⁶ Phillip E. Hammond and David Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.99.

¹⁷ The SGI-USA Board of Directors "oversees the corporate functions of the SGI-USA, which include managing the finances and assets of the organization". They are subject to re-election every three years. See "SGI-USA Board of Directors", SGI-USA Official Homepage, <http://www.sgi-usa.org/aboutsgi/corporate/bod.php>

leadership from Japanese to non-Japanese members also suggests that more American members are holding important posts in the organization and the influence of Japanese members is expected to decline in the future.¹⁸

SGI-USA has also emphasized its close affiliation with American culture and history. 1976 was the bicentennial of USA and many celebrations were organized throughout the year. In that same year, SGI-USA held a tri-city convention in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia with the theme “two hundred years from now”, clearly signifying its linkage with American history. In 1986, the United States celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty. SGI-USA, seeing itself as part of the American history, held its annual convention at the same time to coincide with the celebrations.

Besides, SG’s teachings resonate with the mainstream American culture. In the 1960s, rapid economic growth improved the living standard of many Americans and gave rise to materialism. At that time, many new religions criticized the desire for goods would distract people from pursuing enlightenment and lead to selfishness. However, chanting for material goals, such as new house and car, is acceptable among SG believers in the US. It is because SG regards material benefits as efficacy of chanting and evidence of the human revolution. Moreover, some new religions

¹⁸ Phillip E. Hammond and David Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.100.

require their members to live a strict life and separate themselves from society. Yet, most people found these teachings difficult to follow, since most of them are ordinary people who need to work or go to school. On the other hand, the practices of SG are less time-consuming and more oriented toward social interaction. Members do not need to sacrifice all of their time and effort on religious life and their normal social life can therefore be maintained. The emphasis on this-worldliness suits the materialistic philosophy and living style of many Americans, and therefore it can find its place in American culture.

Traditionally, Christianity is the most influential religion in the United States. Some of the SGI-USA members may have engaged in Christianity before and have been affected by its culture in a certain extent. SGI-USA seemed to have taken this factor into consideration in planning activities or meetings for its members. For example, Mr. I, who has been to SG meetings in Japan, Hong Kong and U.S. said:

In Japan and Hong Kong, meetings are often held on weekdays after work, while in United States, meetings are held on Sunday mornings. Although I do not know the exact reason for this change, it may be to suit American church-going habits on Sunday.¹⁹

¹⁹ 1st Interview with Mr. I, 34 years old, dated 12 December 2009.

Regarding the recruitment strategy, SGI-USA adopted a relatively low profile approach when compared to Japan. A regional leader said in an interview that “we can see what happens to other non-western religions when they get too much public attention”.²⁰ Therefore, SGI-USA switched to more neutral publicity campaigns, such as organizing cultural activities, exhibitions and performances. Instead of practicing *shakubuku*, members were recruited through making contacts with family and friends. By these means, SG developed a more positive image in American society and avoided having keen competition with other new religions emerging in America at that time.

In short, SGI-USA is Americanized to suit the cultural context of the USA. Examples include reforms of organizational structure which enhanced independent growth of local branches, an fair election system that brought about democracy, and a low profile recruitment strategy that built a positive image. SGI-USA also emphasizes its affiliation with American history and mainstream culture to suit the patriotic and materialistic nature of Americans. The smooth landing and spread of SG in the USA proves that the policy of Americanization has been quite successful.

²⁰ Phillip E. Hammond and David Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.101.

SGI-Canada

Similar to SGI-USA, the early development of SGI-Canada was slow due to the fact that SG members, who were mainly Japanese immigrants, lived in scattered areas, and they lacked an organization to coordinate their activities and direct its movement. Ikeda's visit to Canada in 1960 initiated the movement of SGI-Canada. However, at first the membership numbers were not high enough to set up a branch in Canada. So, Canadian members were attached to the New York office, and they had to travel to New York to attend their activities. In 1976, with the increase in members, SGI-Canada was established officially with Elizabeth Izumi as the first leader.²¹ Its membership grew to more than 4,000 people in 1996 with a high concentration in the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal region.²²

In fact, Canada attracts large numbers of immigrants from all over the world. They come to Canada to seek opportunities for work and study, and a better living environment. However, these new-comers often find it difficult to enter the new community and adapt to the new culture. Metraux states in *The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Canada: The Lotus and the Maple Leaf* that, "the rapid pace

²¹ Elizabeth Izumi is a Japanese immigrant who came to Canada with her husband. She met Ikeda Daisuke at the airport when he visited Canada and reported to him on the lives of Canadian SG member. Ikeda was impressed by her enthusiasm and encouraged her to spread SG in Canada.

²² Daniel A. Metraux, *The Lotus and the Maple Leaf: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Canada* (Lanham.: University Press of America, 1996), p.81.

of life in a rapidly changing society, constant movement of people from one job or location to another, and the sizeable growth of immigrants have left many Canadians with an uncomfortable feeling that they are without firm roots and a group to belong to'.²³ Canada is also a major educational center which attracts many overseas students. Since most of them come to Canada on their own, they are separated from their families and homelands. Living in an unfamiliar place, these "new-comers" often feel lonely and long for spiritual support. Therefore, they find organizations that can help them to assimilate into Canadian society appealing. Indeed, SG became popular because it functions as a support group. They see SG as a "home" for them to make friends and to share their concerns and problems. By offering a sense of home and community, SG developed a positive image among the new immigrants. The large number of foreign immigrants also contributes to the multi-ethnic nature of SGI-Canada (45% white, 24% Asian and 19% black people).²⁴ Even on the homepage of SGI-Canada, it is easy to find pictures showing members of different origins and ethnic groups.²⁵

As Canada is both an English and French speaking nation, SGI-Canada treats

²³ Ibid., p.81.

²⁴ Ibid., p.82.

²⁵ While SGI-Canada tends to have members coming from different ethnic backgrounds, the ethnic make-up of SG in Japan and Hong Kong is more uniform, with Japanese and Hong Kong people being the majority respectively. Galleries showing the multi-ethnic nature of SGI-Canada can be found at SGI-Canada Official Homepage, <http://www.sgicanada.org/>

English and French equally. First, SG divides its branches into English-speaking and French-speaking districts. For example, Montreal is divided into six English and nine French districts based on the proportion of English and French speaking members.²⁶ Besides, the French version of the SG newsletter is published every month. The official homepage is also written in both languages to entertain different members. In Hong Kong, however, SG's publications are mainly written in Chinese. It is because most members can read and understand Chinese. The bilingual policy in Canada indicates that SG considers the ethnicity and language of a country very seriously and adjusts its language policy accordingly.

Despite its Japanese origin, SGI-Canada sees itself as a global religion growing in the soil of Canadian culture. Therefore, some unfavorable elements of SG Japan, which might hinder its development in Canada, have been removed. Contrary to SG Japan which exerts political influences through *Komeito*, SGI-Canada aims to promote cultural activities and avoids getting involved into any controversial issues. SGI-Canada also adopts a low profile approach in promotion and recruitment. Some leaders emphasized that “they would rather have a smaller organization of serious and devout members than one which was large in numbers, but short on serious

²⁶ Daniel A. Metraux, *The Lotus and the Maple Leaf: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Canada* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), p.81.

followers’’.²⁷ It is said that members introduce SG teachings only to people with whom they have a close relationship, such as family members and friends. Only those people who show signs of interest would be invited to the meetings. By giving up *shakubuku* and lowering its orientation towards politics, SGI-Canada developed a positive image in Canadian society.

SGI-Canada has long had a sense of autonomy as it regards itself as an entirely independent organization from Nichiren Shoshu. Originated as Nichiren Shoshu of America, SGI-USA has been affected by the culture of Nichiren priesthood. Some of the U.S. members respected Japanese priests very much and even employed them to hold ceremonies, such as funerals. Therefore, when SG was excommunicated from Nichiren Shoshu in 1991, some US members felt uncomfortable and even dropped out. SGI-Canada, however, started as a lay movement and had no direct connection with Nichiren Shoshu.²⁸ As a result, Canadian members are less concerned about priesthood and do not need any Japanese priests for hosting rituals. Therefore, the disputes between Nichiren Shoshu and SG have not had much influence on SGI-Canada.

Lastly, Canadian members are concerned about promoting world peace through

²⁷ Daniel A. Metraux, *The Lotus and the Maple Leaf: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Canada* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1996), p.85.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.123.

cultural and social activities. They had a male Brass Band, a female Fife and Drum Corps performing in cultural festivals. For some occasions, they even participated in non-SGI events, such as the Gardiner Awards ceremony held in Toronto. In 1995, SGI-Canada joined other organizations to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of USA. Through organizing various activities, the image of SGI-Canada as a peace promoting organization has been developed.

In short, SGI-Canada is a multi-ethnic organization that provides a sense of home and community to people who came to Canada for different reasons, such as immigration, work, and study. Through joining SG, they gained spiritual and social support from other members. Besides, SGI-Canada adopted both English and French as official languages since Canada is both an English and French-speaking nation. Besides, SGI-Canada employs a low-profile recruitment strategy and sees itself as an independent peace promoting organization. Such positioning earned SGI-Canada a positive image among the general public.

2.2 SG in Britain

SG has a relatively long history and strong presence in Britain compared to other European nations. In 1961, Ikeda visited nine European countries to strengthen the SG development in these areas. There were only two members when Ikeda came to

Britain. After his visit, SG movement experienced dramatic growth in this island country. In 1990, the number of members increased to 4,000, constituting a quarter of SG members in Europe and making it a SG stronghold in Europe.²⁹ The movement began in London and spread to Southampton, Portsmouth, Liverpool, Oxford, and Brighton. Nowadays, SGI-UK has its national centre located at Taplow Court in Berkshire, and three cultural centers located in London.

In terms of organization, SGI-UK is similar to the Japanese headquarters and other overseas branches. For instance, British members are grouped according to different criteria, such as geographical location, profession and ethnic group. Local groups are linked in larger districts, and several districts are divided in chapters. Although the organization sounds hierarchical, members are free to attend meetings in any districts or chapters. Members are also grouped under professions such as lawyers, scientists, teachers, businessmen, and chefs. We can see the Japanese system managed to survive in different cultural contexts including Britain. Similar to American and Canada, SGI-UK is a multi-ethnic organization which consists of different ethnic groups. Therefore, members are also classified according to their ethnic backgrounds, and include Indians, South Asians, East Europeans, and South

²⁹ The figure 4,000 comes from Bryan Wilson and Karel Bobbelaere's studies. See Bryan Wilson and Karel Bobbelaere, *A time to Chant: the Soka Gakkai Buddhists in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.13.

Africans. These groups maintain their own cultural interests and perform their own songs and dances in various SG activities.³⁰ The SG movement in Britain was subsidized by SG Japan in the early years. Nowadays, SG-Britain is financially independent, and the income comes primarily from the subscription fee of its monthly journal, *UK Express* and the sale of *Gohonzon*. An article in *UK Express* published in August 1990 said that SGI-UK “takes on full responsibility for the activities of *kosen-rufu*” (the spread of Buddhism).³¹ SG-Britain also publishes a monthly magazine, *Art of Living*, which contains study material, President Ikeda’s guidance and real life experiences of members. Members are encouraged to read and discuss the articles in SG meetings.

SIG-UK puts a great deal of efforts on cultural activities. A member said in an interview that “following the principle of *zuiho bini* (local application of Buddhist doctrines) which advocates that each country should carry out its activities with its own cultural framework, SGI-UK has blossomed in a very individual way”.³² Annual general meetings were held in London Palladium with songs and band performances.³³ Members actively participate in concerts, exhibitions, and festivals by showing their talents in music, dance, drama, and visual arts. In the mid-1980s, a

³⁰ Ibid., p.14-15.

³¹ Ibid., p.20.

³² Ibid., p.19

³³ London Palladium is one of the most famous theatres in UK, especially for musical variety shows.

musical written and performed by SG members called *Alice* was shown for two weeks. It is also said that through these cultural activities, SG-Britain created a positive image in British society.

Similar to other SG branches in Europe, SGI-UK has its own official homepage which contains details of the organization and the announcement of events for members. In the ‘member’ column, study materials may be downloaded.³⁴ It reflects the efforts to use new media to spread knowledge about Buddhism for internet generations. Apart from the official homepage, SG members also make use of the internet social platform, Facebook, to connect their members and facilitate their communication. A facebook page called ‘Soka Gakkai International (SGI)’ was established and more than 32,337 people “liked” it.³⁵ All Facebook-users can access freely to the information about this organization, for instance, the principles and objectives of SGI, and the photos taken in various SG functions. Besides, in the “discussion” area, we can see different topics such as “Sensei’s New Year’s Message” and “Youth: The Key for Future”. It reflects how internet generations use new media as a platform for discussion and exchange of information about SG

³⁴ Study notes cover many aspects of SG teachings, such as “*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*”, “History of Buddhism”, “The Ten Worlds”, “Cause and Effect and the Nine Consciousnesses”, “The *Gohonzon*”, “Human Revolution and Overcoming Obstacles” and “The Unity of Mentor and Disciple”. They are available for download in a PDF format at “Introductory Study Programme”, SGI-UK Official Homepage, http://www.sgi-uk.org/index.php/members/study_prog

³⁵ The figure 32,336 was retrieved lastly on 4 April 2010 which may subject to change.

teachings and activities across the geographic boundary.

Despite the emphasis of promoting a strong sense of British identity through different cultural activities, SG movement in Britain preserves a number of Japanese elements. For instance, chanting is still conducted in Japanese and members use many Japanese concepts as part of their religious vocabulary. In fact, some members are critical of some Japanese practices. For example, some dislike the division of members into male and female groups and the policy of wearing uniforms in SG activities. In particular, the concept of master-disciple relationship is criticized as “distinctly oriental”.³⁶

SG grows steadily in Britain despite the fact that Christianity is the most influential religion. One of the reasons is that it does not directly compete with major Christian churches. Based on the research conducted by Wilson and Dobbelaere on SG members in Britain, 76% of their respondents claimed that they did not belong to any religious organization before they believed in Nichiren Buddhism.³⁷ Since the majority of members are religiously available before they joined SG, they did not need to give up their original religion, and therefore reducing conflict between churches and SG. On the other hand, for those who had engaged in religion organizations before they were followers of the Roman Catholics Church, the Church

³⁶ Ibid., p.95.

³⁷ Ibid., p.80.

of England, etc. These former Christians identified two features of Christianity as their reasons to leave, which are “the required belief in an external deity as an object of worship” and “the inculcation of guilt through moral rules”. When compared to SG, they found Nichiren Buddhism, having “no external object of worship” and “concept of guilt”, more appealing to them.³⁸ Wilson suggested that “it was essentially the moral ethos of Soka Gakkai that induced native Britons to adopt this new faith”.³⁹ Therefore, we may say with fundamental differences in religious ideas and doctrines, SG attracts those people who seek an alternative religious belief in a Christianity-dominated society.

In short, SG movement in Britain, as elsewhere in Western countries, has done much to adapt its style to British culture. It devotes time and resources to the promotion of festivals of music and dance, drama and gymnastics, celebrating local cultural styles, and color. To relate SG movement to local history, SG-Britain has found a historical and aristocratic country estate as the location of its headquarters.

³⁸ Ibid., p.85.

³⁹ Wilson also suggested ten features of SG that may appeal to British people, which are “a lay movement among ordinary people”, “Nichiren’s Buddhism is emphatically pragmatic”, “embraces multi-form conceptions of salvation”, “world-affirming”, promotes a view of religion as an instrument of benefit”, “a more de-institutionalized and private form of religion”, “able to restore a sense of community and identity in a society”, “members are encouraged to make others aware of the benefits derived from their faith” and “the whole ideology of the movement legitimizes well-being”. See Bryan Wilson, “The British Movement and its Members,” in *Global citizens: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the world*, ed. David Machacek and Bryan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.356-9.

Besides, its leader is a British national, whereas in US and France the leaders were of Japanese origin who received the citizenship of their adopted countries.⁴⁰ It is believed that SG will further localize in Britain.

2.3 SG in Southeast Asia

SG in Southeast Asia has been growing rapidly, particularly in Singapore and Malaysia. Similar to America, Canada, and Britain, SG developed slowly in Singapore in the 1960s. The members at that time were mainly middle-aged and high-school educated females. Since Singapore Soka Association (SSA) was established in 1972, SSA began to expand quickly, attracting young people as well as the middle-aged who have higher educational level. The ratio of male to female also became more even. The official member size is said to be 15,000 in 1998 with over 90% Chinese.⁴¹

One of the characteristics of SSA, as pointed out by Metraux, is its strong sense of national pride of Singapore.⁴² Singapore is a young nation that gained its independence in 1965. Therefore, the Singaporean government puts a lot of efforts to

⁴⁰ Bryan Wilson and Karel Bobbelaere, See *A time to Chant: the Soka Gakkai Buddhists in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.96.

⁴¹ Daniel A. Metraux, *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: the Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), p.49.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.47.

build a national identity. Numerous ceremonies and festivals are organized by the government to develop a sense of patriotism among its young citizens. To echo the national policy, SSA portrays itself as an organization which promotes patriotic values. It can be seen in its active participation in The National Day Parade and Singapore Youth Festival. Singaporean members, especially the youth, believe that they are working for the better future of society. Through these events, members of SSA present themselves as enthusiastic, patriotic, and energetic citizens, resonating with the young and competitive national image of Singapore.

In 1997, SSA established a modern temple to make it more acceptable to Chinese Singaporeans because older Chinese members have good relationship with Buddhist priests and temples. They often visit temple and invited priests to hold rituals. Therefore, when they heard the news that SGI was excommunicated from Nichiren Shoshu, many of them felt uncomfortable and some even dropped out from SSA. To comfort these older members, SSA built a temple and recruited a Nichiren priest from Japan.⁴³ Again, it shows that how traditional religious practices and background of members can affect the policy of SG. However, the temple has either been renamed or abandoned by SSA recently as its old name “AnLe Temple” no longer appears in the list of SSA’s cultural centers.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid., p.30.

⁴⁴ It is found that the AnLe temple was one of SSA’s cultural centers when I visited SSA official

SG movement in Malaysia is more challenging since most Malays are Muslims. Hence, SG targets mainly Chinese Malaysians. The branch of Soka Gakkai Malaysia (SGM) was founded in 1965 with the assistance of a Japanese member, Hideo Fujisawa. Malaysia consists of 32% Chinese and 68% Malays, but considering the fact that Muslim Malays are forbidden by law to convert to other religions, SGM becomes an organization almost entirely for the ethnic Chinese.⁴⁵ In the 1960s, its members were largely housewives and businessmen. Since the 1990s, more people with better educational background joined SGM. Some of them are professionals and the rich. In addition, SGM is an autonomous organization which is run by local members. Meetings are conducted in Chinese and English, except for those held by Indians.

SGM members show a number of characteristics. First, due to the fact that the majority of SGM members are Chinese, most of its members, especially the older ones, are familiar with traditional Chinese Buddhism and Taoism. So they have a better understanding of Buddhist doctrines, such as karma.⁴⁶ Second, many young

homepage in September 2009. However, a recent visit to the homepage (5 April 2011) shows that it no longer appears in the list. So it is suspected that the temple was either renamed or closed for some reasons. See "Activity Centers", SSA Official Homepage,

http://www.ssabuddhist.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=68&Itemid=110

⁴⁵ Daniel A. Metraux, *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: the Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2001), p.61 & 63.

⁴⁶ Daniel A. Metraux, *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: the Soka*

Chinese Malaysian professionals and businessmen are also interested in SG, since they believe chanting can give them good karma, confidence and luck which are the keys to succeed.⁴⁷

SGM actively participates in community activities. In fact, Malaysia is seen as a melting pot in which different races maintain their own linguistic and cultural traditions. Cultural diversity can be observed easily in Malaysia, such as Hindu and Buddhist temples as well as mosques exist simultaneously. Because Malaysia is a multi-ethnic society, SGM portrays itself as an organization to promote mutual understanding among different races in Malaysia. For example, their members performed traditional dances of Malays, Chinese and Indians in cultural festivals. They believe that through increasing the understanding of different ethnic groups, the Malaysian society will become more harmonious.

2.4 SG in Taiwan

While SG has not been granted the permission to develop in Mainland China, its fate in Taiwan is rather different. It is not only recognized as a legal religion but also a “quality organization” by the Minister of the Interior of the Taiwanese

Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2001), p.67.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.68.

government.⁴⁸ In 1998, it had 35,000 members which outnumbered other new Japanese religions in Taiwan.⁴⁹ Taiwanese news agency *Liberty Times* even estimated that over 100,000 Taiwanese have participated in this religion.⁵⁰

The development of SG in Taiwan can be traced back to the 1960s. It encountered difficulties in its early years. A Taiwanese believer, Mr. Zhu Qian Xun, who joined SG in Japan, promoted SG when he returned to Taiwan. SG members began to emerge in Taipei and Tainan. In 1962, a SG branch office was set up in Taipei and he was appointed branch leader by SG. In fact, SG development at that period was difficult under the militant and political domination of the Kuomintang, as well as the anti-Japanese sentiment of the Taiwanese public. Kuomintang adopted a strict policy to control different forms of religious movements and SG development was subject to suppression in the 1960s. In 1963, the office in Taipei was forced to close, and the branch leader was strictly monitored by the police.⁵¹ In the 1970s, the Kuomintang declared the end of martial law which brought about more freedom of

⁴⁸ It has received 28 prizes from the Minister of the Interior of the Taiwanese Government since 1990. See SGI-Taiwan Official Homepage, http://www.twsgi.org.tw/about.php?level1_id=2&level2_id=3

⁴⁹ Igarashi Masako, *Gendai Taiwan shukyo no shoso: Taiwan Kanzoku ni kansuru bunka jinruigakuteki kenkyu* (Contemporary Religions in Taiwan: Anthropological studies of the Taiwan Han Chinese) (Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 2006), p.160.

⁵⁰ “Chuang jia xue hui yong yi wen zhe fu quan shi jei” (Soka Gakkai uses Arts to convert the whole world). See *Liberty Times* Web, published on 28 May 2001, retrieved on 1 Dec 2009. <http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2001/new/may/28/today-c3.htm>

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

religion to Taiwanese. The branch office was reopened and the development of SG resumed in a quick pace. In 1988, a foundation was set up to promote SG cultural activities, which was formally registered as the Nichiren Shoshu Foundation of Taiwan in 1990 as legal organization to promote Nichiren Buddhism in Taiwan. SG also established its own publishing company called Cheng Yin Culture to promote its own publications. After its split from Nichiren Shoshu, SG established its own organization called Taiwan Soka Association (SGI-Taiwan) in 1994. Nowadays, SGI-Taiwan has 43 local chapters, 28 cultural centers, and nine art centers, actively promoting SG's teaching through organizing various cultural activities.⁵²

The localization of SG in Taiwan has a number of features. First, since the majority of SGI-Taiwan members are ethnic Chinese, meetings are mainly conducted in Mandarin or Hokkien (Taiwanese dialect). Official homepage and publications are mainly written in Chinese as well. Second, SGI-Taiwan prohibits the worship of religious symbols other than *Gohonzon*. There are different forms of religions in Taiwan, such as Buddhism, Taoism, and many folk religions. Although most Taiwanese people do not regard themselves as Buddhists or Taoists, they follow some forms of religious practices. For instance, they worship ancestors or Buddhist statues at home, and funerals are mainly conducted in the Buddhist or Taoist fashion.

⁵² SGI-Taiwan Official Homepage,
http://www.twsgi.org.tw/institute.php?level1_id=12&level2_id=62

Since only Gohonzon is worshipped in Nichiren Buddhism, SG Taiwanese believers are prohibited from worshipping ancestors or other religious symbols.⁵³ Nevertheless, SG shows flexibility and tolerance towards local Taiwanese cultures. For example, the organization celebrates traditional Chinese New Year and promotes Taiwanese cultures (e.g. Taiwanese tea ceremony).⁵⁴ Besides, different kinds of cultural activities including exhibitions of Chinese paintings and calligraphies are held on a regular basis. The most famous one is a series of exhibitions called “searching for the roots of Taiwanese culture: constructing the hundred-year history of Taiwanese arts”. Starting from 2003, SG has invited over 50 famous artists to display their works in these exhibitions. In fact, the title of the exhibitions, “searching the root of Taiwanese culture”, clearly shows that SG wants to relate itself to the history of Taiwan by promoting Taiwanese arts to the public. Finally, SGI-Taiwan emphasizes its affiliation with Taiwanese community and offers different kinds of services to the Taiwanese public. For example, it organizes picnics for teenagers, visits to elderly homes, and cleaning campaigns. It also made donations for the victims of the earthquake which struck central Taiwan in 1999 and the flood caused by Typhoon

⁵³ Igarashi Masako, *Gendai Taiwan shukyo no shoso: Taiwan Kanzoku ni kansuru bunka jinruigakuteki kenkyu* (Contemporary Religions in Taiwan: Anthropological studies of the Taiwan Han Chinese) (Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 2006), p.161.

⁵⁴ See *Harmony News*, SGI-Taiwan Official Homepage, January 30, 2009 http://www.twsgi.org.tw/newsinfo.php?news_id=2353&level1_id=2&level2_id=8 and May 8, 2009 http://www.twsgi.org.tw/newsinfo.php?news_id=2622&level1_id=2&level2_id=8

Haitang which swept across Taiwan in 2005. As a result, SGI-Taiwan developed a positive image in Taiwan and won recognition from the Taiwanese government.⁵⁵

Taiwan is culturally, geographically, and ethnically proximate to China. Therefore, it may be seen as a good stepping stone for SG to enter China.⁵⁶ SGI-Taiwan follows Ikeda's principle of promoting Sino-Japanese relations by strengthening its ties with the Mainland China. It is mainly achieved by organizing cultural exchange activities regularly.⁵⁷ Starting from 1994, SGI-Taiwan started to organize short-term exchange activities with China, such as the "cross-strait angels exchange program" and "cross-strait university students exchange program".⁵⁸ For instance, SGI-Taiwan members visited Peking University, Northeastern University, Jilin University, and Harbin Institute of Technology in 2005. In 2007, 78 students and teachers coming from 22 Mainland high schools were invited to visit SGI-Taiwan. In 2009, SGI-Taiwan organized cultural exchange activities with some Chinese universities. Some forms of cultural exchanges also exist between Taiwan and Taiwan SG. For example, Miss Wong, a Hong Kong student now studying in

⁵⁵ SGI-Taiwan Official Homepage, http://www.twsgi.org.tw/positive.php?level1_id=5

⁵⁶ Political tensions between the Mainland government and Taiwanese government do not hinder cultural exchanges in the non-government level.

⁵⁷ Igarashi Masako, *Gendai Taiwan shukyo no shoso: Taiwan Kanzoku ni kansuru bunka jinruigakuteki kenkyu* (Contemporary Religions in Taiwan: Anthropological studies of the Taiwan Han Chinese) (Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 2006), p.160.

⁵⁸ SGI-Taiwan Official Homepage, http://www.twsgi.org.tw/pcc.php?level1_id=6&level2_id=16&level3_id=13

Taiwan, is happy to participate in activities held by SGI-Taiwan and looking forward to bringing what she learned from Taiwanese members back to Hong Kong SG.⁵⁹ Besides, SGI-Taiwan assisted Mainland China when it was attacked by natural disasters. In 2008, SGI-Taiwan donated one billion New Taiwan dollars to China to assist the relief efforts following the devastating earthquake that occurred in Sichuan.⁶⁰ Through cultural exchange and donations, SGI-Taiwan developed a positive relationship with Mainland China, which may help SG enter China in the future and lead to a more harmonious relationship between the two regions in the midst of political controversies and historical burdens.

In short, based on the concept of *zuiho-bini* (spread of Buddhism according to local cultures), the development of SG overseas is influenced by different local cultures, which color the organization with many unique elements. As argued by Su Dong-tin, SG overseas branches are quite independent from their SGI headquarter, which only coordinate the efforts of various branches to promote the idea of peace.⁶¹

Generally speaking, SG localizes itself in other cultural soils in the following four

⁵⁹ *New Century Monthly*, no.201, September 2010, (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2010), p.20.

⁶⁰ “Tai Wan Chuang Jia Xue Hui Bai Hui Liao Le Yi Juan Bai Wan Zhu Si Chuan Zai Qu Chong Jian” (President of SGI-Taiwan visited Bai Huiliao to donate one million dollars to support the relief work of Sichuan earthquake). *Huaxia News*, 23 May 2008, <http://hk.huaxia.com/zl/tbgz/08-009/977844.html>

⁶¹ Su Dongtian, *Dong fang ju ren Chitian Dazuo* (The Giant from the East: Ikeda Daisaku) (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1997), p.86.

ways. Firstly, SG branches adjust their policies according to the cultural characteristics of a particular region. For example, in most Western societies, the spirit of fair election and gender equality is highly emphasized. Therefore, to suit the ideologies and consciousness of local citizens, a higher degree of democracy is adopted in most Western SGI branches. While leadership is dominated by Japanese male members in Japan, election of committee members is open to different races and sexes in overseas branches. Besides, in Singapore, since elder members feel more comfortable with a temple and priest, it established The AnLe Temple and recruited a priest from Japan. Secondly, while SG Japan is mainly composed of Japanese people, multi-ethnicity is seen in most SG branches. For example, SGI-USA and Canada not only attract local people, but also members of different races. It is strongly related to the ethnic make-up and an open migration policy in these countries. Thirdly, overseas branches tend to adopt a low-profile policy. For instance, they have abandoned the Japanese style of *shakubuku* and recruit members through friends and families, and various cultural activities. In this way, they avoid negative feedback from the local societies and build up a positive image as an organization that promotes world peace and culture. Fourthly, SGI-branches often relate themselves to the history and identity of the local communities. For instance, SGI-USA celebrated the 200th anniversary of the United States in 1976 and 100th

anniversary of Statue of Liberty in 1986; SGI-Canada considers itself as a "home" for new immigrants; SG in Singapore promotes national identity by organizing festivities with the Singaporean government; SGI-Malaysia promotes social harmony among Chinese, Malays, and Indians; and SGI-Taiwan sees itself part of the Taiwanese community by offering different kinds of social services and donations to the local community.

Based on the cultural differences between Western and Eastern regions, the localization of SG in these two places reveals significant differences. Firstly, in terms of organization, SG in North American and Europe show higher degrees of democracy than that of Southeast Asian countries. Members in Western branches generally have more power in choosing their leaders through elections. Besides, the participation of women in leadership position is higher than Eastern branches, which reflects higher gender equality. On the contrary, since Asian societies are still influenced by paternalistic ideas, leaderships are mainly composed of male members. Next, Western and Eastern SG branches differ in terms of practices. Since Christianity is the most influential religion in Western societies, SG meetings are mainly scheduled on Sunday to suit the church-going habit of westerners. As Asian members do not have similar habit, the meetings are not fixed on Sundays. Thirdly, Asian members are more familiar with Buddhist cultures and ideas, so they generally

find it easier to adapt to SG teachings and do not regard it as something foreign. But the prohibition of worshipping ancestors and Buddhist statues discomforted some of the older members. On the other hand, since Buddhism is not a mainstream religion in western countries, most members consider SG as something “Japanese” or “foreign”.

To conclude, cultural diversities appeared in the process of localization when SG and the local cultures interact with each other. Through adopting the local cultures and eliminating some unfavorable Japanese elements, SG has successfully localized itself in North American, Europe, East and Southeast Asia, making it one of the most rapidly expanding Japanese new religions in the world. Hong Kong, based on its historical background and geographical factor, is seen as the intersection of Chinese and Western cultures. How does SG localizes in such a cultural setting? We will shift our focus on SG development in Hong Kong in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Soka Gakkai Movement in Hong Kong

According to my survey, Hong Kong people are not familiar with SG. I frequently ask my friends, “have you ever heard of Soka Gakkai?”, they usually reply: “What is that?” and “Is it an investment bank or an organization related to economics or finance?”.¹ They do not know that it is a Japanese new religion that has taken root in Hong Kong for decades. Although the general public has little understanding of SG, the fact is that it has a long history in Hong Kong and has been actively promoting cultural activities.

This part looks into the development of HKSGI by discussing the origin, education and cultural activities, its role as a window for SG to enter China, and perception of SG in Hong Kong, followed by a comparative study of SG in Hong Kong and overseas based on the case studies in chapter two.

3.1 The Origin of HKSGI

The history of SG in Hong Kong can be traced back to the 1950s. There were around 15 SG members who joined the movement in Japan and came to Hong Kong independently.² Since they had no organization, these members practiced on their

¹ Literally, “Soka” means “value-creation”, so many informants misunderstood it as a business affiliation.

² SGI-HK Official Homepage, http://www.hksgi.org/cht/aboutus/about_hksgi/

own. In January 1961, Ikeda made his first visit to Hong Kong. He gathered the SG members together and encouraged them to establish a formal SG branch in Hong Kong. He said:

Nichiren Daishonin decreed that we should spread his Buddhism throughout Asia and the world and teach all people the way to happiness. That is why we have come to Hong Kong.³

His visit and the symbolic speech started the official development of SG and laid the groundwork for its future growth in Hong Kong. In September 1963, two years after his visit, Hong Kong Soka Gakkai Buddhist Society was officially established. A young Japanese college graduate, Kajiura Hisashi (his Chinese name is Lee Kon Sau 李剛壽) was appointed by Ikeda to lead the organization. Lee still occupied that post until 2000.⁴

The reason why Lee was selected by Ikeda is that he has strong connections with Hong Kong. Lee first came to Hong Kong as a university exchange student. In 1964, after graduating from the department of Economics in Asia University in Japan, he was offered an opportunity to study in New Asia College, Chinese University of

³ Daniel A. Metraux, *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: the Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), p.77.

⁴ Kajiura Hisashi has been using the Chinese name Lee Kon Sau not only in SG activities, but also in most public occasions. It might symbolize his intention to dilute his Japanese identity and to adapt to the local cultures.

Hong Kong (CUHK).⁵ The two-year university life in Hong Kong enabled Lee to enhance his understanding of Hong Kong culture, acquire the Cantonese language skills, and to develop close relationships with local people, therefore building a good groundwork for his mission to promote SG in Hong Kong. He recalled his good memories and the challenges he had in CUHK in the book *Cherry Blossom Memories: CUHK Alumni in Japan*.⁶ After graduation in 1966, Lee was appointed by Ikeda to lead the organization in Hong Kong due to his close relationship with the local communities. He changed his name from Kajiura Hisashi to Lee Kon Sau, showing his respect to Hong Kong culture and intention to make himself more “Hong Kong”.

In 1974, on behalf of Soka University, Ikeda visited CUHK and Lee Choh Ming, the Vice-Chancellor at that time. The meeting succeeded in establishing exchange partnership between Soka University and CUHK, which was the first exchange partner of Soka University.⁷ Apart from promoting SG in Hong Kong society, Lee also helped Ikeda to arrange his trips to China. In May 1974, Ikeda made his first visit to China. Since there was no direct flight from Tokyo to Beijing at that time,

⁵ In the 1950s, New Asia College started exchange partnership with Asia University. Combined with Chung Chi College and United College to become The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) in 1962, New Asia College has maintained its exchange program with Asia University to the present.

⁶ Alumni Association in Japan CUHK, *Cherry Blossom Memories: CUHK Alumni in Japan* (Hong Kong: Comos Books, 2009), pp.182-92.

⁷ Ibid., p.185.

Ikeda first went to Hong Kong and crossed the border to China on foot through Lo Wu Station with the help of Lee.⁸ Lee also promoted SG in China by making school visits and speeches to Mainland China, which helped to establish a positive image for SG in the Chinese community. Rooted in Hong Kong for nearly 40 years, Lee is familiar with Hong Kong cultures and can speak fluent Cantonese. It is no wonder that many people do not know about his Japanese origin.

In 1974, the well-known Chinese scholar of classic studies, Jao Tsung I, visited Soka University and Ikeda on behalf of CUHK, starting a friendship which has lasted over 35 years. Until today, Jao continues to offer his inscriptions to Ikeda which includes “Ikeda Daisaku the Ambassador of Peace”, the title of *Bauhinia Magazine* published in October 2007, and “*Ikeda Daisaku and World Literature*”, the title of a book published by the CUHK Press in 2010. The relationship between the two universities was further strengthened by Ikeda’s donations of money and books to CUHK, as well as different academic exchanges. In 2010, the book *Ikeda Daisaku and World Literature* was published by CUHK to celebrate its 35th Anniversary of exchange partnership with Soka University. The Vice-Chancellor at that time, Lawrence J. Lau, praises Ikeda’s contribution to world peace in the preface.⁹ Kao

⁸ *Bauhinia Magazine*, special edition, vol. 1. 2nd edition. August 2010 (Hong Kong: Thousand Wisdom Limited, 2010). p.33

⁹ Tan Guilin, *Chitian Dazuo Yu Shi Jie Wen Xue* (Ikeda Daisaku and World Literature) (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2010), p.xv.

Kuen, the winner of Nobel Prize in Physics in 2009, also highly praised Ikeda's contribution to Sino-Japanese relations and world peace when he was the Vice-Chancellor of CUHK in 1992.¹⁰

The organization was renamed Soka Gakkai International of Hong Kong (HKSGI) in 1991. Under Lee's leadership, HKSGI expanded steadily and the membership reached 42,000 in 1998.¹¹ According to the latest official figure, the membership of HKSGI reached 50,000 in 2011.¹² The current president of HKSGI is Mr. Ng Cho Yuk and Lee became the Honorary President of HKSGI as well as another position that symbolizes his power in SG, the vice-president of SGI. Nowadays, HKSGI has 11 community headquarters and 53 chapters all over Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and New Territory.¹³ Nine headquarters serve the ethnic Chinese, one serves non-Chinese English speakers including Filipinos, Indians, Americans and British, and the remaining one serves Japanese speakers. Besides, HKSGI also has its own kindergarten and recreational center.

¹⁰ Ikeda Daisaku, *Shi Jie Shi Min De Zhan Wang: Chitian Dazuo Xuan Ji* (The Future of Global Citizens: Selected Words of Ikeda Daisaku), trans. HKSGI (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1993), pp.1-8.

¹¹ Daniel A. Metraux, *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: the Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), p.28.

¹² See *Brochure of HKSGI Cultural Festival 2011* (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2011), p.2.

¹³ Meetings and gatherings are normally held in the five main cultural centers, which are Hong Kong Culture Center, Hong Kong Friendship Center, Hong Kong Peace Center, Tuen Mun Cultural Center and Eastern Culture Center. (SGI-HK Official Homepage, http://www.hksgi.org/cht/contactus_en/)

In fact, Ikeda has been very concerned about development of SG in Hong Kong. In his novel, *The New Human Revolution*, when he described the growth of SG in Asia, it seems that Hong Kong is used as his main reference. The novel depicts Yamamoto Shinichi (Ikeda's name in the novel) who told his Japanese followers who were going to work in HKSIG that "never look down on Hong Kong members and try to be good friend with them".¹⁴ He also reminded them that "in the first year, you have to be patient with Hong Kong members. In the second year, you should only tell them how to live according to Buddhist teachings. Only from the third year onwards, you can start to compare Japanese and Hong Kong style (management) and see which one is better".¹⁵ It shows that Ikeda respected Hong Kong culture and tried not to impose Japanese thinking or management style on Hong Kong members. In the chapter "Fei-jock" 飛躍 (Dynamic Strides), Ikeda described his visits to Hong Kong and China, and thanked the government officials and members who took care of him during the trip.¹⁶ Besides, Ikeda had made twenty official visits to Hong Kong since the mid-1960s, while he only visited Singapore twice and Malaysia once. Talking about Hong Kong in his important novel *The New Human Revolution* and making frequent visits shows that Hong Kong

¹⁴ Ikeda Daisaku, *New Human Revolution*, vol. 9 (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 2001), p.149.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ikeda Daisaku, *New Human Revolution*, vol. 18 (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 2008), p.229.

is a critical center of interest for Ikeda. Besides, the appointment of Lee to be the vice-president of SGI, who was the previous president of HKSGI, indicates that the experience and skills acquired by Lee in Hong Kong may be useful for SGI to expand its influence overseas.

HKSGI consists of members of different ages, professions, and ethnicities. They are divided into different groups under the classification system similar to SG Japan. In fact, in the early 1960s, SG members were mostly middle-class who ran family-own shops and small companies. Campaigns succeeded in attracting members from the poorer sections of Hong Kong. With the rapid economic growth in the 1970s and 80s, the living conditions of most HKSGI members improved dramatically. During that period, middle-aged and older women who had very little formal education were still the majority of the membership. Indeed, older female members outnumber their male counterparts by a three-to-one ratio. In recent years, as suggested by most members, there appears to be a demographic change from lower to higher strata of the society, especially among the young generation who receive more education. In other words, the number of social elites and professionals in SG has been increasing. This group of people may exert significant influence on political, social, and educational issues.

In terms of structure, HKSGI consists of a president, vice-presidents, public

relation officers, and administrative staffs to manage the daily administration and development of the organization. Under this core, committees are established at different levels for various purposes. On the division level, the five divisions, the Men's Group, Women's Group, Young Men's Group, Young Women's Group, and Students' Group, set up their own committees to organize meetings and activities for their members. The 11 community headquarters also have their own committees to arrange gatherings at the district level. I was regularly invited to attend meetings held by one community headquarters which mainly serves members living in Yuen Long, Tin Shui Wai, and Tuen Mun. In the meeting, some new committee members shared their ideas of the future development of their community headquarters and showed their strong devotion to the organization. On some important occasions, such as cultural festivals, specific committees are formed for preparation and coordination of members from different cultural groups and divisions. In fact, I strongly felt the effort of the Committee of Cultural Festival 2011 in recruiting participants. They showed videos of the past festivals and encouraged the members to take part in the coming festival which celebrates the 50th anniversary of HKSGI. In brief, both the division committees and community headquarter focus their effort at the district level, and therefore have a closer relationship with members. On the contrary, president and vice-presidents often appear in important events, such as the opening ceremonies

of exhibitions and the presentations of souvenirs to guests. They also represent the organization to visit other countries or famous cultural figures. Thus, they are seen as more distant by some members.¹⁷

Members are divided into different groups according to various systems. Based on ethnicities and locations, headquarter one to nine are for native Hong Kong people, headquarter ten is for English speakers and eleven is for ethnic Japanese. Each headquarter is then sub-divided into smaller branches based on geographical location. For example, the “third headquarter Tsuen Wan Branch” belongs to the third headquarter and are composed of members living in Tsuen Wan. Members are also grouped according to other attributes, such as age (Student Division, Young Men Division), sex (Men Division, Women Division), and profession (Teachers Division, Doctors Division) etc. Several divisions, such as Teaching Division, Public Relations Division, and Fund Raising Division etc are established to provide services to members and ensure the organization can run smoothly. In fact, the classification system seems complicated in some ways but highly systematic and organized. For example, a married male member whose occupation is a lawyer who lives in Tsuen Wan would probably belong to three groups simultaneously: “third headquarter

¹⁷ Interview with Mr. Y, 22 years old, dated 10 January 2010. F is a university student that I met in a SG activity. He joined SG in the hope of passing the university entrance exam (Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination).

Tsuen Wan Branch’’, ‘‘Males Division’’, and ‘‘Lawyer Division’’.

HKSGI maintains a close relationship with Japan SG. Every month, members from overseas branches, including HK members, are invited to the general meeting held by Japan SG in the Shinjuku headquarter. Ikeda Daisaku, the Honorary President of SGI, hosts the general meetings. At the beginning of the meetings, Ikeda showed his warm welcome to the foreign members who attended the meeting.¹⁸ HKSGI, which actively has been sending its members to the meeting, earned the appreciation of Ikeda. He often said to the public, ‘‘members from Hong Kong. Thank you very much’’. The representatives of HKSGI then stood up to receive the warm welcome from other members. At the end of the meeting, Ikeda thanked the members again for coming all the way to Japan by shaking hands with them. In fact, the general meetings held in Japan are recorded and shown to Hong Kong members in the monthly gathering. By watching the video, Hong Kong members can have a better understanding of SG teachings and keep themselves updated about the development of SGI. According to my observation, Hong Kong members in the video were proud to attend meetings held by Japan SG and those who have not been to these meetings wished that they could have the chance to go there one day.

¹⁸ In the video, Ikeda greeted the overseas members in Japanese language. The most common phrase he used is ‘‘kaigai no minasama. Arigato Gozaimasu’’. It was then translated by a Japanese interpreter into English ‘‘thank you for coming. Members from all over the world’’.

During the early 1960s, the development of HKSGI experienced difficulties due to its limited human resources and the lack of financial support. During these hardships, SG Japan subsidized HKSGI in renting offices and cultural centers. To facilitate the long time development of HKSGI, Ikeda believed that Hong Kong members should have its own cultural center for holding activities. Therefore, Japan SG donated a large amount of money to HKSGI to buy land in Kowloon and built the first cultural centre in Hong Kong, which became the Hong Kong SGI Cultural Centre today. A committee member of Women's division shared her gratitude to Ikeda and SG Japan in a gathering:

In the 1960s, because of the lack of money and place, we used to rent the community centers run by the Hong Kong Government for holding activities, such as chanting and gathering. It was a hard time for us since the meeting places always changed. Nevertheless, I kept on chanting for the better development of HKSGI. One day, I heard that Ikeda-sensei was going to build a cultural centre for us. I was very happy and I believed that my effort in chanting was not wasted.¹⁹

Similar comments were given by members, especially among the older generation who experienced the hardships in the early development of SG in Hong Kong. In fact,

¹⁹ In fact, many old members thanked SG Japan and Ikeda for their financial support to Hong Kong members.

the very strong relation between Japan and HKSGI has lasted to the present. On 11 March 2011, the Northeast region of Japanese was hit by a strong earthquake, followed by a devastating tsunami and the possible nuclear challenges brought by the leakage of reactor. Immediately after the disaster, HKSGI started raising fund for Japan and was able to collect HK\$2,071,490 which was then passed to the Red Cross to conduct and coordinate relief works in the affected area.²⁰

Besides, it seems that SG Japan has a strong network with all overseas SGI branches. In case of Japanese members studying or working abroad, the Japanese headquarter contacts the overseas branch office in advance to ensure its members are taken good care of in other countries. It also makes sure that its members are provided with all the important information about the local branches, such as addresses and phone numbers, so they can continue their SG practice as fast as possible. Mr. I, a Japanese member who came to Hong Kong for study and work, told me that Japan SG helped him contact the local branch before he came to Hong Kong.²¹ With the strong human network established by SG, he could quickly make new friends within the organization and resume his practice in Hong Kong. Although HKSGI sees itself as a financially independent organization nowadays, it maintains a close relationship in terms of cultural exchanges and sharing of membership

²⁰ *New Century Monthly*, vol. 209, May 2011 (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2010), p.6.

²¹ 1st Interview with Mr. I, 34 years old, dated 12 December 2009.

information with the Japanese headquarters. In addition, I found that HKSGI has strong network among members to find jobs or friendship, which Gordon also found in SG Japan.²²

Nowadays, HKSGI has six cultural centers in Hong Kong. They are the Hong Kong Culture Center, Hong Kong Friendship Center, and Hong Kong Peace Center located in Kowloon, Tuen Mun Cultural Center located in Tuen Mun, Eastern Cultural Center located in Chai Wan, and Integrated Cultural Center located in Tai Po. The three centers in Kowloon serve members living in Kowloon, and South and East New Territories; Tuen Mun Cultural Center serves those who live in North and West New Territories; and the members who live in Hong Kong Island gather at Chai Wan Cultural Center. These cultural centers contain halls and study rooms. They are the meeting places for monthly gathering and chanting. Most cultural activities, such as exhibitions and seminars are also held in these centers. These centers also provide space for cultural groups to practice. Besides, HKSGI owns the Integrated Cultural Center (a recreational center) in Tai Po. It is a 7,000m² area consisting a sports ground, two barbecue sites, a football field, a garden and 21 parking spaces. It was a place for HKSGI members to hold training camps and sports functions. In 2008, it

²² Andrew Gordon, *A modern history of Japan: from Tokugawa times to the present* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2009), p.259.

was discovered that the centre was actually a private development that should provide open space to the public.



Figure 1. A shop run by SG inside the cultural center located in Mong Kok selling Buddhist altars, SG publications, incense, beads and other SG products.

3.2 HKSGI's Social and Cultural Activities

HKSGI considers itself as a religious organization that promotes the idea of “value creation” and world peace through the establishment of educational institution and organizing different kinds of cultural and social activities. For the past 50 years, it has organized numerous cultural exhibitions, festivals and seminars in Hong Kong. It was even invited to perform in some important semi-political events organized by the Hong Kong government, such as the celebration of Queen Elizabeth's visit to Hong Kong in 1975 and the celebration of repatriation of Hong Kong to China in July 1997. Nowadays, HKSGI has developed a very close relationship with Hong Kong society in terms of the cultural and social contributions

it has made. By discussing some of the important events organized by HKSGI, this part provides readers with a better understanding of the relationship between HKSGI and the Hong Kong community.

Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten represents a major effort of HKSGI to reach out to the ordinary people. Established in September 1992, Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten is the first Soka kindergarten opened outside Japan. According to its school objectives, the kindergarten aims to cultivate the strength, honesty, and liveliness of children through “value-creation education”, and to develop children's potential through the well-balanced training of mental, physical, and moral cultures.²³ Indeed, it follows the educational philosophy of Makiguchi Tsunesaburo, the founder of SG, who emphasized that students should be educated to pursuit values and humanity.²⁴ Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten is a half-day school. Students can either choose the morning or the afternoon session. In 2010, there are a total of 652 children at the school.²⁵ Although Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten is an affiliation of HKSGI, its religious color is diluted. For instance, it is found that less than half of the children come from SG families and the kindergarten has no attempt to teach SG beliefs to students. In fact, while most kindergarten set up by churches

²³ Objectives of Soka Kindergarten, Soka Kindergarten Official homepage, <http://www.soka.edu.hk/template.htm>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

teach students to pray, Soka Kindergarten does not force or even teach their students to chant. The annual school fee of Soka Kindergarten is HK\$ 23,650 for the year 2010 to 11. When compared to other half-day kindergartens, its school fee is at the middle to low level.²⁶ Parents in general are able to afford the school fee and let their children experience “value-creation education”. However, the fact that only one out of three applicants succeed in getting into the school shows that the school is popular among parents and competition is keen.²⁷ Some members even complained to me that the competition is so strong that their children could only enter the school after applying for two times. Some even thanked *Gohonzon* for helping their kids to enter the kindergarten. According to the *Quality Review Summary Report (Pre-primary Institutions)* conducted by Education Bureau in 2008, Soka Kindergarten was recognized as a kindergarten that provides quality education.²⁸ We can see that SG contributes to the society by providing quality elementary education to Hong Kong people. Still, there are some uncertainties about the “negative impact” of SG

²⁶ Based on the information provided by Ming Pao in 2006, among the Kindergartens operated in a half-day basis, the most Most expensive one is Tutor Time International Nursery & Kindergarten in Kowloon City (HK \$78,000) while the least expensive one is Ma On Kong Kindergarten in Yuen Long (\$4,896).

²⁷ Daniel A. Metraux, *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: the Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), p.79.

²⁸ Education Bureau, *Quality Review Summary Report (Pre-primary Institutions) on Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten*, 2008, pp. 3-4. (retrieved from Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten official homepage, http://www.soka.edu.hk/download_file.php?file=pdf/report_2007.pdf)

teachings on the development of children expressed by people who hold a skeptical attitude towards this religion.²⁹

If the establishment of kindergarten symbolizes the promotion of the idea of value-creation among the youngest generation, then the cultural activities organized by SG is a means to spread world peace to the society. Since 1993, HKSGI has organized many cultural seminars for the public.³⁰ Famous cultural figures from China and Hong Kong were invited to give talks on their expertise. Topics of the seminars cover a lot of different areas, ranging from literature to science, economics to religion, and environmental protection to music. For instance, Mr. Jin Yong talked about Chinese cultures and religions in 1997, Prof. Liu Zaifu discussed the history of Chinese culture in 2000, Dr. Lee Lok Sze shared her adventures in the three poles (North Pole, the South Pole, and Mount Everest) and the previous Vice-Chancellor of CUHK, Prof. Lawrence Lau discussed the impact of financial crisis on China and Hong Kong in 2009. Appendix one shows the 46 seminars organized by HKSGI between 1993 to 2009. These seminars are free of charge and open to the public, so non-members are able to participate and experience SG teachings. HKSGI believes

²⁹ The general public has two opposite attitudes towards Soka Kindergarten. Some interviewees believed that it was common for religious groups to establish educational institutions while some interviewees feared Soka Kindergarten would “brain-wash the kids” without giving any solid evidence.

³⁰ Please refer to Appendix 1 for more details about the cultural seminars organized by HKSGI.

that through promoting cultural seminars, public awareness toward peace, environment protection, our own society, and the global world can be raised, which is one of the essential factors that brings about world peace. However, we should note that the general public might have little access to the details of the cultural seminars, due to the limited effort put on promotion.³¹

Apart from seminars, HKSGI organizes different kinds of exhibitions regularly. The showpieces in these exhibitions range from masterpieces created by famous scholars and artists, such as Prof. Jao Tsung I and Miss Fang Zhaoling, photographs taken by Ikeda Daisaku, to pictures drawn by children from all over the world.³² In 1994 and 1997, HKSGI co-operated with the Hong Kong Museum of Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and University of Hong Kong (HKU), to co-exhibit cultural treasures borrowed from the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, which was established by SG in 1981. Indeed, some of the contents of the exhibitions were highly related to the core beliefs of SG. For example, the anti-war stance of SG is promoted in the exhibition *From the Culture of Violence to the Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit*. The photographs exhibition *Warning on Global*

³¹ Members were informed about the details of the seminars in advance. But the public generally has less access to the information. For example, I only came across the details of the seminar “Jin Yong and the press” (Aug 2009) in their official website by accident. No wonder some interviewees (non-members) had no idea SG was an organization that promotes cultural activities.

³² Please refer to Appendix 2 for more details about the exhibitions organized by HKSGI.

Warming shows SG's concerns about pollution and the need for environmental protection. Actually, some of these exhibitions are held in universities and institutes which include CUHK, HKU and the Hong Kong Institute of Education, to stimulate the young generations to develop a more critical thinking on these global issues. In short, SG believes that through these exhibitions public awareness of world peace and environmental protection can be increased.



Figure 2. Poster of the exhibition *From the Culture of Violence to the Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit*. (from 28 February to 5 March 2010 in CUHK)

Cultural festival is another important event of HKSGI. Conducted every five years, it is regarded by HKSGI as one of the most important cultural events. Preparation started a year before (or even earlier), a committee was formed to plan, prepare and co-ordinate the activities and all members were invited to participate as

performers or helpers. Besides, volunteers were recruited at all levels during general meetings and by phone calls. Posters were posted in all branches, and leaflets were distributed to all members. It seemed that every member had the chance to take part in it and most of them were eager to do so. The cultural festivals usually last for two days, and include dance performances, concerts, Chinese *kung fu* performances, lion dances, and dramas depending on the themes of the festivals. Famous musicians were also invited to perform in the past few festivals, such as famous jazz player Mr. Larry Coryell and the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra huqin specialist Miss Huo Shijie. The year 2011 marked three special anniversaries of this organization: the 50th anniversary of HKSGI, the 80th anniversary of SG, and the 35th anniversary of SGI. More details about Cultural Festival 2011 can be found in the next chapter. Through these festivals, HKSGI believes that the message of love and world peace is sent to all Hong Kong people.

Since the 1960s, HKSGI has set up different cultural groups to promote cultural activities in Hong Kong. In 1992, HKSGI established the Cultural Headquarters to co-ordinate the activities of different cultural groups. Nowadays, HKSGI has 12 cultural groups, including six choirs, three orchestras, a dance team, a gymnastics team and a drama team. Although most of the team members are not professional performers, they receive training regularly. Intensive practice and frequent rehearsals

are conducted right before public performances. The standard of performances was highly rated by the general public. Mr. F, a member of the gymnastics team, was happy about his last performance and showed his enthusiasm in participating in the coming cultural festival held in 2011.³³ These cultural groups were invited by the Hong Kong Government, Hong Kong Tourism Board, and other associations to perform at important occasions over 130 times for the past 30 years.³⁴ For example, they participated in the celebration of Queen Elizabeth's visit to Hong Kong in 1975, Prince Charles's visit in 1989, the repatriation of Hong Kong to China in 1997, the tenth anniversary of repatriation in 2007, as well as the celebration of the transport of Olympic torch in 2008. We can see that HKSGI cultural performances witnessed the social and political change of Hong Kong society.

In short, Hong Kong SG members not only focus on chanting, but also community-based activities and social interactions. Through these means, they seek improvements in their personal lives, communities, and the societies. This idea of progressive changes from one's live to the people surround you, and ultimately to the society and the whole world, are in line with the centre idea of SG, *ningen kakumei* (human revolution).

³³ Interview with Mr. T, 28 years old, dated 14 November 2009. Mr. F is ethnic Chinese, SG member belonging to the Young Men's Division. He is proud of his gymnastics team and even asked me to join them.

³⁴ Cultrual Headquarter, HKSGI Official Homepage, <http://www.hksgi.org/cht/culture/chq>

3.3 The Significance of HKSGI: Stepping Stone for SG to Promote in China

Religion is a sensitive issue in Mainland China. Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China states that “citizens of People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief”.³⁵ The freedom of religion of Chinese citizens is basically protected by the constitution. At the same time, the government still strictly censors religions; those violating the government’s requirement may encounter difficulty and are eventually banned. Controversies over the appointment of clergy between the Chinese Government and Vatican are heard from time to time. Some religious groups, such as Falun Gong, were regarded as illegal organization by the government. There are even some Falun Gong believers being arrested for violating the Chinese law.

Although SG has been developing a friendly relationship with China, its legal status as a religious organization is still not yet recognized by the Chinese Government. Since the 1960s, Ikeda Daisaku has emphasized the importance of mutual understanding between China and Japan. After the Cultural Revolution, he

³⁵ Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China states that “citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination”.

urged for the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in the midst of anti-Chinese sentiment in the world. He has visited China ten times and had meetings with important political leaders, such as Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Hua Goufeng, Hu Yaobang, Ba Jin, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Wen Jiabao, indicating his status in Chinese politics, as well as his influence in the Sino-Japanese relationship. Until 2007, Ikeda received honorary professorships from over 110 Chinese universities, in recognition of his contribution to Sino-Japanese relationship and his support for the development of Chinese education.³⁶ However, the friendship between Ikeda and the Chinese Government has not given SG a permit to promulgate in China. It may be partly due to its strong affiliation with Japanese politics. For this reason, the role of Hong Kong as a stepping stone is significant to the development of SG in China.

Hong Kong, being proximate to China geographically and culturally, is considered by Ikeda as an important window to China. One of the criteria of being stepping stone to China is attributed to the freedom of religion in Hong Kong. According to the Article 32 of the Basic Law of Hong Kong Special Administration Region “Hong Kong residents shall have freedom of religious belief and freedom to preach and to conduct and participate in religious activities in public”.³⁷ Besides,

³⁶ “Academic honors conferred upon SGI President Daisaku”. Ikeda Daisaku Website, <http://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/records/degree/by-date-order.html>

³⁷ See Article 32 of the Basic Law of Hong Kong Special Administration Region.

foreign religions are allowed to maintain and develop their relations with religious organization in other regions according to Article 141.³⁸ Actually, the freedom of religion can be seen easily in Hong Kong. For instance, Falun Gong, which has been banned by the Chinese government, is allowed to organize activities in Hong Kong. They hang banners and have gatherings in the busy area of Hong Kong, such as Nathan Road and the Star Ferry Pier in East Tsim Sha Tsui. Hong Kong also shared similar traditions and cultures with Mainland China. The experience they acquired in Hong Kong will be useful if they expand in China in the future. Transportation between Hong Kong and China is also very convenient which facilitates the exchange of materials and human resources. These factors enable Hong Kong to act as a stepping stone for SG.

Ikeda sees Hong Kong as an important window to China. In the preface of his book, *New Human Revolution*, Ikeda expressed his feeling about Hong Kong:

³⁸ Article 141 of the Basic Law of Hong Kong Special Administration Region states that “the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall not restrict the freedom of religious belief, interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of the Region. Religious organizations shall, in accordance with law, enjoy the rights to acquire, use, dispose of and inherit property and the right to receive financial assistance. Their previous property rights and interests shall be maintained and protected. Religious organizations may, according to their previous practice, continue to run seminaries and other schools, hospitals and welfare institutions and to provide other social services. Religious organizations and believers in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region may maintain and develop their relations with religious organizations and believers elsewhere”.

I visited Hong Kong many times. Every time I visited other Asian countries, I would come to Hong Kong too...In 1974, when I visited China for the first time to establish the "Golden Bridge for Peace" between Japan to China, I passed the border through Hong Kong. I would say Hong Kong is the starting point of my Asian trip for peace.³⁹

Ikeda visited Hong Kong before he set his foot in China. He treated Hong Kong as his stepping stone to China based on two reasons. The first reason refers to the problem of transportation from Japan to Mainland. In 1974, when Ikeda planned to visit China, it was just two years after the normalization of Sino-Japanese relation. Although restrictions on trades and cultural exchanges had been loosened, direct flights from Japan to China were not set up at that time. As it was impossible to travel to Mainland directly, Ikeda had to choose a place which he was familiar with and had access to China. Hong Kong, a place he had visited many times before was the best stepping stone for him. Secondly, HKSGI members were more familiar with the situation in Mainland. Ikeda could gather important information related to China from Hong Kong members. It was easier for Hong Kong members to handle and prepare the necessary applications, procedures and documents for Ikeda's entry to

³⁹ Ikeda Daisaku, *New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1996), p.2.

China due to their familiarity with Hong Kong and Chinese immigration policies. With the help from Hong Kong members, on 30 May 1974, together with his wife, Kaneko, and his assistants, Ikeda took the Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR) from Kowloon Tong Station to Lo Wu Station, where he crossed the border to Mainland China on foot. He recalled in *New Human Revolution* that some HKSGI members took the train with him, making the journey to China filled with joy and warmth.⁴⁰

The twenty visits to Hong Kong reflected the importance of HKSGI in the eyes of Ikeda. In fact, if we analyze what he did in Hong Kong, we are able to understand the significance of this Chinese city to Ikeda. The special edition of *Bauhinia Magazine* entitled “Ikeda Daisaku the Embassy of Peace” provides us with information in this regard by introducing his activities during the trips in Hong Kong.⁴¹ The natures of his activities can be divided into two types. First, he visited HKSGI members and participated in their events. For example, he celebrated the 13 anniversary of HKSGI in 1974, visited Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten in 1993, attended the opening ceremony of arts exhibition held in CUHK in 1994, and visited the HKSGI Orchestra in 1998.⁴² Secondly, he had meetings with important Hong Kong political and cultural figures. For example, he met Hong Kong Governor

⁴⁰ Ikeda Daisaku. *New Human Revolution*, vol. 20, (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 2010), p.12.

⁴¹ *Bauhinia Magazine*, special edition vol. 2, July 2007 (Hong Kong: Thousand Wisdom Ltd, 2007).

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.16-9, 22-3.

Crawford Murray MacLehose in 1979, ex-member of the Legislative Council and Executive Council Chung Sze Yuen in 1983, Jin Yong in 1995 and 1998, Jao Tsung I in 1997 and Fang Zaoling in 2000.⁴³ The first type of activities showed his concern about the development of HKSGI, whereas the second type reflected his intention to develop close relationships with people who can exert important influence in the Chinese community. To further elaborate on the second purpose, we can see some cultural figures Ikeda has met, such as Jin Yong and Jao Tsung I, have high popularity and reputation on the Mainland. Jin Yong is one of the most famous Chinese writers whose works are translated into different languages and Jao Tsung I is regarded as an expert of Chinese calligraphy and culture. Developing a friendship with these figures helps Ikeda to promote his ideas to the Chinese community. Ikeda even co-published books with these cultural leaders, for example the dialogues between Jin Yong and Ikeda was published with the title *Looking for a Bright Century* in 1998.⁴⁴ The book *A Dialogue of the Journey to Culture and Arts* was published with Jao in 2009.⁴⁵ These books were printed in both traditional Chinese and simplified Chinese and sold in Hong Kong, as well as China. Therefore, Ikeda

⁴³ Ibid., pp.20-1.

⁴⁴ Jin Yong and Ikeda Daisaku, *Tan Qiu Yi Ge Can Lan De Shi Ji* (Looking for a bright century). (Hong Kong: Ming Ho Publications Corporation Limited, 1998).

⁴⁵ Ikeda Daisaku, Jao Tsung-i and Sun Li-chuan, *Wen Hua Yi Shu Zhi Lu: Ding Tan Ji* (A Dialogue of the Journey to Culture and Arts). (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 2009).

can further promote himself to the Chinese community with the help of these popular cultural figures. In this regard, Hong Kong has acted as an important platform for Ikeda to meet and develop friendship with these famous Chinese cultural figures, which help him earn publicity in the Mainland China.

HKSGI has also adopted different kinds of strategies to help create a positive image of SG in China. First of all, SG portrays itself as an organization that promotes education by establishing schools in China. In 1999, HKSGI proposed the “Project Hope” which successfully raised half a million HK dollars. The money was donated to Chaoshan, Zengcheng in Guangdong for the re-establishment of an old school, which was renamed as “Chaoshan Soka Friendship Primary School” in recognition of the support from SG. In 2001 and 2003, two more schools were built in Guangdong. To thank Miss Fang Zhaoling and Mr. Jao Tsung I for their financial support, the schools were named as “Phoenix Fang Zhaoling Soka Primary School” and “Xuantang Soka Primary School”.⁴⁶ In 2005, vice-president of HKSGI Mr. Chu Chin Wing led the 36-person orchestra to visit Phoenix Fang Zhaoling Soka Primary School and Chaoshan Soka Friendship Primary School for cultural exchanges. The local government took the visit very seriously and sent representatives to attend the activities. HKSGI also donated books and stationeries to the students from time to

⁴⁶ Xuantang is the courtesy name of Jao Tsung-i.

time to facilitate their learning. In addition, SG Japan also established the Xi'an Soka Hope Primary School to provide educational opportunity to children in Xi'an.

Secondly, HKSGI promotes SG in China through the help of Hong Kong Media. *Bauhinia Magazine* is a monthly magazine founded in Hong Kong in October 1990 which focuses on political and economical issues. It often interviews Chinese officials and experts to interpret the policies of the Chinese Government, showing its very close relationship with the Mainland government. Therefore, it is approved for sale in China and local offices were established in most Chinese cities, such as Beijing, Wuhan, Guangzhou, and DongGuan. SG has developed a close relationship with *Bauhinia Magazine*. For example, the articles of Ikeda on Sino-Japanese relationship and world peace are published frequently in the magazine. In October 2007, a special issue called "Ikeda Daisaku The Embassy of Peace" was published to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the normalization of Sino-Japanese diplomatic relationship. The title "Embassy of Peace" indicates that the magazine highly recognized the contribution made by Ikeda. Besides, *Bauhinia Magazine* has established a homepage offering news reports on Chinese, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese issues which are written in simplified Chinese.⁴⁷ It is believed that by reading these articles, Chinese people have a better image about SG. Therefore,

⁴⁷ See Hong Kong Bauhinia News, <http://www.hkbnn.com/>

maintaining a friendly relationship with pro-Chinese government media, such as *Bauhinia Magazine*, helps SG to build up a positive image in China.

Thirdly, cultural exchanges between China and Hong Kong are becoming increasing rapid nowadays. Many exchange partnerships are set up between Chinese and Hong Kong institutions. Every year, numerous Chinese students choose Hong Kong as their destination to receive higher education. It is not surprising to see that HKSGI targets these exchange students, since they can spread SG ideas when they return to China. For instance, HKSGI organized exhibitions in universities, such as CUHK and HKU, where there are many exchange students from Mainland. Volunteers of the exhibitions were well prepared to approach to every participant. They started by discussing the theme of the exhibitions, followed by the introduction of SG ideas and Ikeda Daisaku. Finally, they would ask the participants for contacts and invite them to their gatherings. In fact, ordinary members also play an important role in promoting SG to these students. Miss Y, who worked as a cleaning lady in a student dormitory in CUHK where Chinese students resided, took every opportunity to share with students about SG and how her life was improved by joining this religious organization. Feeling lonely and isolated in a new environment, these Chinese students might urge for friendship and spiritual support. The enthusiasm of Miss Y easily drew their attention. As a result, Chinese students have a better

understanding of SG which may facilitate SG development in the future. Although it is doubted that these students could hardly spread SG when they return to China; the sharing of their personal experience with families and friends about their encounters with SG could improve their general impressions on this foreign religion.⁴⁸

In short, HKSGI has grown from a small, loosely-organized religious group in the 1960s to an organization that has its own cultural centers and serves 50,000 members today under the leadership of Lee Kon Sau and his successor Ng Cho Yuk nowadays. It has promoted the idea of peace, “value-creation”, and environmental protection to the general public through establishing the Soka Kindergarten, and organizing various cultural activities. HKSGI has also functioned as a window for SG to promote education and dialogue in China. Besides, Hong Kong has been a platform for Ikeda to develop important friendship with popular cultural figures Jin Yong and Jao Tsung I, who can promote Ikeda to the Chinese community. It is believed that HKSGI would continue its role as a bridge to connect SG and China through enhancing cultural exchanges and promoting education, hence building a more positive image for the organization in China.

⁴⁸ There are some SG members who practice secretly on their own in China according to Mr. A, a Japanese who was working as a Japanese language teacher in Sichuan from 2006 to 2008. Interview with Mr. A, dated 22 January 2011.

3.4 The Perception of SG in HK

I conducted two surveys, one to study the public (non-members) opinions of SG, the other one to study how members themselves perceive SG. This part analyses the founding of the surveys and discusses its significance to our understanding of SGI.

The survey was conducted in Hong Kong from 1 June to 6 August 2010. A total of 150 questionnaires were collected. 100 questionnaires were distributed in The Chinese University of Hong Kong in classes and canteens, 50 were distributed in a company located in Shatin with the help of my acquaintance. The survey successfully gathered opinions from 65 males and 85 females aged from 14 to 50. All of them are non SG member. All questions were designed in a way to assess their understanding of and personal feeling about SG.⁴⁹ The reader should be reminded that this survey may not be comprehensive enough and could only reflect the opinions of a certain group of people with particular backgrounds.

In question 1, among the 150 people, over 55% (83) of them have not heard about “Soka Gakkai”. For a foreign religion which has been in Hong Kong for 50 years, the result reveals the fact that its popularity is still relatively low. Among the 67 people who claimed they knew SG, 34% were informed by friends, 32% had seen SG buildings themselves, and 15% heard from media. In spite of its numerous

⁴⁹ Please refer to appendix 3 for more details about the questionnaire (for non-member).

cultural activities, such as exhibitions, festivals, and performances in important occasions, it is surprising that only 1 person responded that he heard of SG because of these kinds of activities. The effectiveness of HKSGI using cultural activities as promotion and recruitment strategy is doubtful.

Question 2 asks them the nature of Soka Gakkai. They are required to choose from the following choices: (1) educational organization, (2) business organization, (3) religious organization, (4) think tank, (5) political party, and (6) others. The result shows that around 40% (60 people) of them chose the answer “religious organization”. We can see that even 45% of them heard of SG in question 1, only 40% give the correct answer in question 2. In other words, around 5% of those who have heard of SG actually have no idea about the religious nature of “Soka Gakkai”. In fact, 27 out of the 60 people who chose the correct answer reported to me that they chose this answer (religious organization) simply out of “intuition”.⁵⁰ Moreover, the numbers of interviewees who regard SG as “business organization”, “education organization” or “think tank” are 42, 26 and 20 respectively. It indicates that there are some misunderstandings about the nature of SG among Hong Kong people. One possible reason for the misunderstanding may be caused by the misconception of the four Chinese characters “創價學會”, the Chinese name of SG. “創價” literally

⁵⁰ The follow-up question ‘why you choose this answer?’ was asked. It was to find out whether they chose this answer because they really understand the nature of SG or they simply guessed.

means ‘value-creation’. In Chinese language, ‘‘value’’ itself can refer to various meanings, such as economical value and living value. Therefore, it may mislead people to regard it as a business or education organization. Besides, the term ‘‘學會’’ is usually used in schools and universities to refer to club or association, having similar meaning to the Japanese term *kurabu* (club). Religious organizations in Hong Kong usually name themselves as ‘‘教’’ or ‘‘會’’ rather than ‘‘學會’’. In other words, the Chinese name of SG does not give any hints about its religious nature literally. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that two interviewees chose both ‘‘religious organization’’, ‘‘education organization’’ and ‘‘political party’’ for their answers, indicating that still a few people knew about the nature of SG and its connection to education and politics in Japan.

Table 1. Question 2. What do you think is the nature of SG?

Nature of SG	No. of people
Educational organization	26
Business organization	42
Religious organization	60
Think tank	20
Political party	0
Others	0
Total	148*

*Two of the respondents chose both ‘‘religious organization’’, ‘‘education organization’’ and ‘‘political party’’ and therefore are not included in the table.

Most interviewees do not have any idea about the origin of this religion. In question 3, over 66% do not know SG is a religion originated in Japan. Even though some of them have heard of SG and know it is a religion, many of them do not recognize it is actually a Japanese religion. It may be due to the low-profile policy the organization adopted. For instance, members would dilute the “Japaneseness” of SG by simplifying SG as “a sect of Buddhism” rather than “a Japanese religion” when they introduced SG to outsiders. So, how the public see a Japanese religion? Question 4 reveals that about 20% of interviewees dislike SG when they know it is a Japanese religion. The figure is not very striking, yet significant enough to require some explanations. First of all, Hong Kong people have a bad impression about Japanese New Religion. Most of them cannot forget the tragedy of ‘sarin gas incident’ that happened in Tokyo. In 20 March 1995, members of *Aum Shinrikyo* released sarin to several lines of Tokyo Metro, causing 13 deaths and injuring nearly one thousand people. This terrorist attack drew worldwide attention to the potential danger posed by Japanese new religions. For this reason, some Hong Kong people became resistant (or even hostile) to these kinds of new religions and stereotyped them as “dangerous cults”.⁵¹ These stereotypes caused a negative effect on the development of SG in Hong Kong. Secondly, Japan’s invasion of China, including

⁵¹ 23 interviewees used “je-gaa” 邪教 (*jyakyō* in Japanese, or translated as “cult” in English) to describe SG when they knew it was a Japanese religion.

Hong Kong, has left Hong Kong people a negative impression on Japan. Although this kind of anti-Japanese sentiment is not serious in the society, it is one of the obstacles that SG has to overcome. In short, hostility toward SG is mainly due to the historical burden caused by the misbehavior of Japan in WWII and some new religions. It also explains why SG always emphasizes its anti-war stance and peace-promoting nature so as to release itself from the heavy historical burden.

Question 5 studies whether the interviewees have any knowledge about the affiliations of SG. Over 70% of them have never heard of Soka Kindergarten or Soka University. This indicates that many people are not aware that SG has established educational institutions in Hong Kong or overseas. Besides, over 75% of interviewees have not heard of Ikeda Daisaku in question 6. In other words, regardless of his popularity in Japan, in global politics, and in the academic circles, the general public of Hong Kong has little understanding of him. In question 8 and 9, more than half of the interviewees do not know how much influence SG has brought to Hong Kong or to the world. 33% and 22% think that SG has little impact locally or globally respectively. While only one person believes that SG has great impact on Hong Kong, four people think its influence on the global world is great. Question 10 shows that only 6% of interviews have an understanding of SG's teaching. It further indicates that the general public has little understanding of SG. The final question

concerns about their overall impression on SG. Most people (over 70%) hold a neutral stance towards SG. The number of people who have a negative impression on SG (27) is double the number of those who have a positive impression (12). It is probably due to the historical burden I have mentioned above.

The survey shows that more than half of the interviewees have not heard of SG. Many of them misunderstood it as an organization related to business, education, academics or politics. We also found that 20% of them dislike this Japanese religion which can be explained by the historical burden it bears. Besides, most of them have no idea about the afflictions, president, doctrines, local and global impacts of SG. Its unpopularity is attributed to the low-profile policy. Despite its effort in promoting cultural activities, its popularity remains relatively low among Hong Kong people. It is also suspected that most people hold a neutral stance towards SG simply because they do not have much understanding about it.

To enhance our understanding of HKSGI members, another survey was conducted in August 2010 targeting SG members. The questionnaires were distributed to members with the help of acquaintances in SG. A total of 50 questionnaires were collected. Among the 50 respondents, 34 were females and 16 were males, aged from 18 to 50. The questionnaire studied their motivations for joining SG, their experience in SG, and some personal opinions on social and moral

issues.⁵² SG members were generally receptive to the questionnaires and showed further interest in reading my completed work. However, older members were more reluctant to finish the questionnaires because of their poor vision or literacy. In fact, many of them simply replied “I don’t know how to do it” or “I can’t read”. The reader should be reminded that the result could only reflect the opinions of some members due to the limited sample size.

In question 1 and 2, members were asked the year they first heard of SG and when exactly they joined SG. Although the answers varied a lot depending on the age of members, it is found that 41 of them joined SG within one to three years after hearing of the organization. Nine of them joined in the same year they heard of SG. It shows that most of the respondents normally spent one to three years before they made the decision to take the “leap of faith”.⁵³ Question 3 investigates through what means they joined SG. It is found that 29 people joined through their families, 15 through friends and 6 through colleagues. It agrees with SG’s policy of recruiting members through acquaintances. The result is also very similar to what Hammond and Machacek have found in SGI-USA.⁵⁴ However, it is surprising to note that no

⁵² Please refer to Appendix 4 for more details about the questionnaire (for member).

⁵³ The phrase “leap of faith” is commonly attributed to the Danish philosopher Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855) that he believed a leap of faith was necessary in accepting Christianity. Nowadays, it is often used to describe someone who accepts a certain kind of religion or belief.

⁵⁴ Phillip E. Hammond and David W. Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.149.

one joined SG through cultural activities, such as exhibition and seminars, or through reading SG publications, casting doubts about how effective these activities are towards member recruitment.

People have their own reasons when choosing religions. Question 4 helps us to understand the motivation of the 50 respondents behind their joining. They were required to choose the most important factor of joining SG from the six options, which are (1) SG teachings are attractive, (2) affected by families and friends, (3) facing difficulties in lives (such as work, study or love), (4) curiosity, (5) interested in Japanese culture, and (6) others. Among the 50 members, 26 of them chose the answer “teachings are attractive”, 15 of them chose “affected by families and friends”, and nine of them chose “facing difficulties in daily lives”. It seems that the teachings themselves are the most attractive factor for many SG members, followed by influence from families and friends, and challenges in their lives. However, Mrs. M, who has been a SG member for over 30 years, told me a different story.⁵⁵ She said “most members joined SG because of sickness or facing difficulties in their lives”. Although what Mrs. M said seems to contradict with the founding, the results can be consistent if we examine the backgrounds of the members more carefully. Mrs. M is over 50 years old and therefore has closer

⁵⁵ Interview with Mrs. M, 55 years old, dated 12 June 2010.

relationship with members who are also housewives around the same age. They may be more vulnerable to disease because of their age. So, it is not surprising for Mrs. M to make such a comment based on her own experience. On the other hand, my survey centered on the younger age group from 18 to 50, and disease might not be the decisive factor in joining a religion. Instead, other factors, such as attractiveness of SG teachings, and difficulties in work or study became more important when they consider joining a religion. It is also worth noting that 15 of them joined SG because they were affected by families or friends. During the sharing sessions of SG meetings, members often expressed how their husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, or children dropped their hostility towards SG and finally became part of the “big religious family” because they witnessed and realized the positive changes that the religion brought to their family. However, there are also cases that children became members simply because they were born in a SG family.⁵⁶ No one chose “curiosity” or “interest in Japanese culture” as their biggest motivation, showing that they may not be the decisive factors of joining SG.

⁵⁶ 1st Interview with Mr. I, 34 years old, dated 12 December 2009.

Table 2. Question 4. What is the most important factor of joining SG?

Factor	No. of people
SG teachings are attractive	26
Affected by families and friends;	15
Facing difficulties in lives	9
Interested in Japanese culture	0
Curiosity	0
Others	0
Total	50

In question 5, the religious backgrounds of members were asked. 47 people replied that they did not have any religions before they joined SG. Only three of them believed in Christianity before. The questionnaire did not ask to what extent they believed in the previous religion. It can be concluded that SG is appealing to people with no religious background and to some people who have other religions experience before. In question 6, all of them claimed that their lives were improved after joining SG. When asked about how their families and friends felt after they joined SG, 35 people found the overall reaction was positive and 15 people experienced neutral reaction.

Questions 9 to 12 help us to understand to what extent members are engaged in SG activities. More than 34 people practice chanting for 10 to 30 minutes every day and 16 of them chant for more than 30 minutes. SG requires members to practice *gongyo* (chant) at least twice a day, in the morning and at night. Other than that,

members are also encouraged to chant whenever they have free time or are feeling unsecure. Based on most members' and my personal experience, chanting for 10 to 30 minutes is normally sufficient to meet the minimum daily requirement, which means all respondents of the survey can follow the guidance of SG in terms of chanting. Other than chanting, the time they spent on SG activities, such as monthly meetings, seminars, and cultural activities, can also reflect their degree of participation. In question 11, 24 of them said they spent four to ten hours per week on SG gatherings, 20 of them spent one to three hours, and six of them spent more than ten hours. Generally speaking, SG gatherings last for 90 minutes. So, we may conclude that the majority of respondents attend three to six SG activities per week. Members who spend more than ten hours are probably working as volunteer or committee members of SG which requires members to devote more time and effort to the religion. Question 12 shows that most respondents are interested in both the religious activities and cultural activities of SG, further indicating that the respondents are happy with the orientation of SG as a religion, as well as a cultural and educational organization.

Questions 13 to 19 studied their personal feeling and impressions of SG. In question 13, members are asked to choose the most difficult things they have encountered in SG. It is found that 23 people regard "activities are too frequent" as

the biggest challenge. Seven are unhappy about the time and twelve are unhappy with the location of gatherings. Eight people see the teachings of SG as the most difficult part. Other options, such as “language problem” and “strong sense of hierarchy” are not chosen by any members. It may be attributed to its policy of cultivating a Chinese environment and eliminating unfavorable Japanese elements (such as a strong sense of hierarchy and formality) based on the principle of *zuiho-bini*. Regarding the management of SG, questions 14 reveals that over 40 people are satisfied and no member is unhappy about it. When asked about the influence of SG, 26 and 24 members believe its influence on Hong Kong society is “great” and “normal” respectively, while 37 people believe that it has strong global influence. It shows that members generally agree that SG is exerting greater influence globally than locally and it seems that there is still room for the organization to increase its influence at a local level.

In question 17, 45 people believe that HKSGI has maintained a close and harmonious relationship with the headquarters in Japan. For instance, the financial support in the early development of HKSGI, Ikeda’s frequent visits to Hong Kong, and various cultural exchanges between Japanese and Hong Kong members are seen as “evidence of a good friendship” by some members.⁵⁷ 32 respondents believe that

⁵⁷ Interview with Mr. U, 35 years old, dated 11 May 2010.

HKSGI and the Mainland Government have a close relationship. The fact that HKSGI was allowed to establish schools on the Mainland, and government officials welcomed the visit of HKSGI staff, are examples of the close relationship. In question 19, 26 people believed that their organization has a positive image in the Hong Kong society, followed by 24 “neutrals” and two “negatives”. The respondents answered in this way because they probably believed that HKSGI has been promoting education and cultural activities to earn support from the general public and adopted a low-profile policy to avoid negative feedback from the society.

As a lay Buddhist organization, one may be interested to find out how their teachings are compatible with modern society, as well as members’ views on some controversial political and moral issues. In setting the questionnaires for SG members, Mr. U told me that HKSGI does not have a list of do’s and don’ts for their fellow members, except three matters that are strictly prohibited which are “borrow money from members”, “do business with members”, and “develop immoral relationship with members”.⁵⁸ Mr. I also said “there is basically no strict rule guiding our behaviors, we are free to have our own opinions on different issues”.⁵⁹ Therefore, instead of looking for an official answer or stance, question 20 intends to study how members themselves perceive some political or moral issues. The first

⁵⁸ Ibid. “Immoral relationships” here refer to inappropriate sexual relationships.

⁵⁹ 2nd Interview with Mr. I, 34 years old, dated 17 June 2010.

three issues in the questionnaires are “abortion”, “premarital sex”, and “homosexuality”. The results are as follow:

Table 3. Question 20 Part 1: How SG members perceive the following issues?

Issues	Support	Neutral	Object
Abortion	7	32	11
Premarital sex	16	30	4
Homosexuality	13	34	3

Different from traditional Christian groups which hold a stronger oppositional stance against abortion, premarital sex, and homosexuality, we can see there are more diverse voices inside SG regarding these issues. Mr. C even argued that “as long as we are pursuing world peace, these issues (abortion, premarital sex and homosexuality) are not that significant at all”.⁶⁰

The second set of issues is more politically oriented which are “democracy”, “general election”, “the Hong Kong Government”, and “the Mainland Chinese Government”.⁶¹ The results are shown in Table five.

⁶⁰ Interview with Mr. C., 27 years old, dated 7 May 2010.

⁶¹ I included these issues in the questionnaire because they were hot issues during the year 2009 to 2011. Campaigns urging the Chinese government to reform the political systems of Hong Kong attracted public attention. The arrest of a number of human-rights advocates also stimulated Hong Kong people to concern about the democratic development of China.

Table 4. Question 20 Part 2: How SG members perceive the following issues?

Issues	Support	Neutral	Object
Democracy	43	7	0
General election	35	9	6
The Hong Kong Government	14	25	11
The Mainland Chinese Government	8	23	15

The universal value “democracy”, and the issue “general election” were supported by many respondents. It could be argued that the majority chose these options because democracy is generally strongly valued and supported by the Hong Kong people. The idea of equity emphasized in Buddhist teachings might also be an underlying cause for the high vote for democracy. Most members hold a neutral stance to the Hong Kong Government and Chinese Government.⁶² The results show that respondents have their own opinions on these issues, and they are allowed to interpret these moral and political controversies based on their own judgments. However, this survey does not prove that HKSGI members have considerably different views from the general population. Further studies are required to examine the influence of Buddhism on their views.

⁶² However, it is note-worthy that there is a significant portion of members who have a negative attitude towards the Chinese Government. It might be a result of being upset by the human-right situation in China during 2009 to 2011.

3.5 Comparative Study of SG in Hong Kong and Overseas

After capturing a general picture of HKSGI, this part compares SG in Hong Kong and overseas based on the case studies in chapter two.

In terms of structure, HKSGI is basically similar to other SG branches. They have very similar member categorization system based on ethnicity, age, occupation, place of residence etc. Members are divided into various divisions (men's division and women's division etc), local district branches, and professional groups. A number of committees are formed to perform specific functions for the organization. For example, Education Committee spreads SG teachings and organizes seminars. While members in America and Europe have higher degree of democracy in selecting their leaderships, Hong Kong SG and many Asian branches are less open in the selection of leaders which is often based on seniority and experience.

Most SG branches engage themselves in education, cultural activities, environment protection campaigns and community services. It is true for SG Britain, the USA, Canada, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore, as well as Hong Kong. However, HKSGI comparatively pay less effort in providing community services, such as cleaning campaigns or tree-planting campaigns. Instead, more effort is put on the establishment of educational institutions (both in Hong Kong and the Mainland China) and promotion of cultural activities (festivals, exhibitions and seminars). This

orientation marks the differences between SG in Hong Kong and overseas. In addition, HKSGI is also seen as a window for SG to promote in China because of its geographic and ethnic proximity to China.

SG function as a “home” for new immigrants by facilitating their assimilation into the local communities in Canada and the USA, and acts as a bridge for people of different ethnicity and cultural backgrounds in Singapore and Malaysia. As an international city where various cultures co-exist, Hong Kong also attracts many people for work and education opportunity. In particular, the number of new immigrants from the Mainland Chinese increases steadily after Hong Kong’s returns to China. Although no specific supportive campaigns are conducted by the organization to help the assimilation of new Chinese immigrants into the Hong Kong society, Hong Kong SG still functions as a “home” for these newcomers because many members are happy to provide various forms of supports to them on a less-organized and individual level. Through individual contacts, these Mainlanders are also invited to join SG activities which allow them to make new friends in a new environment.

Western and Asian members have similar reasons for joining SG. The emphasis of chanting *daimoku*, this-worldly starvation, and individual empowerment in SG teachings are appealing to people who seek for a positive and responsible live. They

believe they could overcome challenges, recover from sickness, and contribute to the society through chanting *daimoku* and participating SG activities. In Britain and the USA, where Christianity is a more influential religion, more members converted from Churches to SG because they found the latter less doctrinal and more oriented to this-worldly benefits. While in Asian regions, including Hong Kong, where Buddhist ideas are already quite popular among the natives, they are more ready to accept this new religion.

Chapter 4: Localization: Practices and Teachings

In the age of globalization, foreign elements, such as music, movies, food, and fashion are flourishing in Hong Kong. When we walk around the cities of Hong Kong, we see western cultures such as Hollywood films, Starbucks, and McDonalds everywhere. The conceptual argument behind globalization and localization is that the two concepts are regarded as highly dichotomized. Globalization emphasizes the unification of world's order which ultimately leads to the homogenization of culture, whereas localization counteracts global homogenization of culture.¹ However, they over-emphasize the uni-directional flow of culture and underestimate the possibility of assimilation of new cultures and local cultures. Whenever a new form of culture arrives, it affects the local community but is also adopted, modified, and nurtured by the local soil with indigenous elements at the same time. The process is known as glocalization.² McDonalds in Hong Kong, for example, offers a menu that is different from its American origin. A restaurant proud of its burger and french-fries, McDonald had offered a rice menu in Hong Kong in July 2002. Despite the fact that it lasted for a few months only, it was obviously an attempt to adapt to the rice-eating

¹ Takis Fotopoulos, "Globalization, the Reformist Left and the Anti-Globalization 'Movement'", *Democracy & Nature: The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol.7, No.2, (July 2001).

² Robertson defines glocalization as "the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole". See Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), p.8.

habits of Hong Kong people. Besides, Hong Kong McDonalds has been selling macaroni in soup, a traditional and common breakfast provided in Hong Kong-style restaurants, *cha-chaan-teng*. Since the year 2000, McDonalds in Cheung Chau has been selling seasonal burger, the vegetarian burger, during Cheung Chau Bun Festival.³ Japanese food is also a well-discussed example that can well illustrate the process of globalization and the power of local soil to modify a culture. Ng found that sushi made in Hong Kong is different from that in Japan in many respects and suggested that Hong Kong sushi restaurants often “promote localized versions of Japanese food as a business strategy and care less about authenticity”.⁴ That is why we can see Hong Kong-style sushi are bigger in size to satisfy “the needs of Hong Kong customers who prefer things cheaper in price, bigger in size, and more in quantity”.⁵ These examples are just tips of the iceberg showing how foreign cultures are modified, enriched, and nurtured by the local cultures and traditions. In the same way, SG has been undergoing a similar process of localization in Hong Kong, affecting Hong Kong society on the one hand and being affected by Hong Kong culture on the other hand.

³ In Qing Dynasty, Cheung Chau was attacked by plague. The plague soon ended after local residents set up an altar and paraded the god statues, Pak Tai through the village. Since then, a Bun Festival is organized every year on Cheung Chau to express thanks to the god for blessing and protecting them.

⁴ Ng Wai Ming, “Imagining and Consuming Japanese Food in Hong Kong, SAR, China: A Study of Culinary Domestication and Hybridization”, *Asian Profile*, Vol. 34, Number 4 (August, 2006), p.300.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.302.

Localization is always a two-directional process as the famous historian of religion Kitagawa wrote in *On Understanding Japanese Religion*:

We are all aware of the dialectical relationship that exists between tradition and new conditions in all historical religions. In every situation, the meaning of a new condition is to a greater or lesser degree colored and conditioned by the weight of the given tradition, whereas tradition is inevitably modified and reinterpreted by new conditions.⁶

Kitagawa also pointed out that “the adaptation of a tradition to new conditions is rationalized and authenticated by appeal to certain features of the tradition itself”.⁷ In other words, the localization of religion is facilitated by indigenous elements, such as mindsets, languages, and traditions of local people. An example he used is the localization of Buddhism in Japan. Since its arrival in Japan in the 6th century, Buddhism has solidified its roots in the Japanese society with the facilitation of Shinto-Buddhism amalgamation (神仏習合 *shinbutsu-shugo*) based on the theory of *honji sujaku* 本地垂迹, which suggests that *kami* (gods) are local manifestations of Buddhist deities.⁸ In this way, Buddhism is “rationalized and authenticated” with the help of indigenous Shinto beliefs. The amalgamation of Shinto and Buddhism

⁶ Kitagawa Joseph Mitsuo, *On understanding Japanese religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.203.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., pp.227-8.

was made possible because their teachings are compatible in many ways. For example, the idea that everything (stones, trees, waterfalls, human being) possesses *kami*-nature suggested by Shinto is similar to the idea that everyone has a Buddha-nature in Mahayana Buddhism. Apart from compatibility of religious beliefs, however, it cannot be denied that there were other factors leading to the growth and transformation of Buddhism in Japan, such as political reasons (legitimization of the ruling class) and social unrest (leading people to seek for salvation in the prolonged warring period).

Katagawa's viewpoint is still sound in modern times. This chapter studies how SG has localized in the Hong Kong soil by looking deeper into the characteristics of HKSGI's practices and philosophies.

4.1 How SG practices are localized in Hong Kong

To study how HKSGI has been colored with local cultures and traditions, I have been participating in their activities since September 2009, which include gatherings (monthly gatherings, meetings of Young Men Division, branch gatherings, seminars for "new friends" (non-members), etc.), exhibitions and cultural seminars. Before I set my feet into the cultural center, I had been worrying if I would be kicked out of the building. An outsider who suddenly walks in to participate in a religious activity

just sounded too unusual. However, the fact is that they were far more friendly than I expected. Miss. W, a branch leader, spotted me out and approached me with a friendly smile. Knowing my purpose, she welcomed me to join some of their gatherings. Since then, she would invite me by phone calls whenever they had a meeting. Although some gatherings, such as dance team, choir, and women division are restricted to some members, information about these “restricted areas” can be retrieved by interviews.

HKSGI meetings

From August 2009 to May 2011, I participated 25 formal SG activities and numerous informal gatherings (usually in the form of meals and light refreshments). The content of most formal SG meetings was similar, except the cultural seminars which were open to the public and did not involve any religious elements. Gatherings are usually scheduled on weekdays, offering two sessions, the afternoon and evening sessions whereas cultural seminars and other large scale meetings are usually held on weekends. For meeting held on weekdays, the afternoon sessions attracted more housewives and older members while the evening sessions attract members who have day-time jobs. Some members attended both sessions. In Japan, meetings are often held in members' homes, while in Hong Kong nearly all gatherings are held in

cultural centers. This difference is strongly related to the relatively smaller sizes of flats in Hong Kong.⁹ The meetings are usually held in big halls or smaller rooms located in the three cultural centers, depending on the nature and scale of the meetings. While monthly meetings attract more members and require a bigger hall, district or division meetings are smaller in scale and a small room is sufficient. Cantonese, English and Japanese speaking members meet separately in specific headquarters. All the formal meetings I attended are conducted in Cantonese and attended by ethnic Chinese. The hall or rooms are open 15 minutes before the meetings start, so as to encourage members to come earlier and chat. Reception counters are set up at the entrance to record the attendance of members. Members report to the volunteers which branches they belong to and how many “new friends” they have brought, if there are any. Outsiders who walk in with no referees are welcomed to join and are looked after by volunteers. The follow-up actions are conducted by senior members, who are mainly committee members. They chat with the outsiders and ask for their contacts if they are interested to join SG meetings in the future.

Among different meetings, the monthly gatherings are the largest in scale. The cultural center is filled with hundreds of members on these occasions. Usually,

⁹ Some members organize gatherings at their homes and invite members to join. But only those who have a big house are able to do so.

fifteen minutes before the meetings start, some members are already sitting in the room. While some of them have started to chant on their own, some of them are chatting with other members, and some of them were talking on phones. It seems that this 15-minute's time is for members to greet each other and settle down before the meetings officially start. When the meetings begin, the masters of ceremony, usually one man and one woman, greet the members with "good afternoon" or "good evening" in Cantonese, depending on the time. Then they introduce the "teacher of the day", who are usually senior and committee members. The teachers then open the cover of a golden cabinet, revealing the *gohonzon* inside, and sit properly in front of it. After beating the bell a few times, all members begin to chant. Suddenly, the hall is filled with the echo of *nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, followed by the chant of Lotus Sutra in Sanskrit. Some members can recite the whole Lotus Sutra while some have to refer to the booklet *Kan-Hung-Jiu-Din* (勤行要典 or *Daily Practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin*) provided by SG. At the end of the chant, members are required to make four prayers, namely "appreciation for life's protective forces", "appreciation for the *Gohonzon*", "for the attainment of *kosen-rufu*", and "personal prayers and prayer for the deceased".¹⁰ The whole religious practice is known as *gongyo*. After *gongyo*, it comes the announcement and sharing sessions.

¹⁰ The first prayer "appreciation for life's protective forces" is omitted in the evening *gongyo*. See *Daily Practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin* (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2010), pp.25-8.

The Publishing Committee member introduces the latest publications of SG and Ikeda and remind members that they enjoy a discount of (around 85%) if they buy the books after the meeting. The Education Committees share a few articles of *New Century Monthly Magazine*, which are mainly written by Ikeda, and remind them to read more at home if they have time. Afterwards, members share their personal experience about how their lives have improved after joining SG. Some members spoke with tears, some of them thanked SG and Ikeda Daisaku for saving their lives from various sickness and difficulties, reassuring members the power of the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. Then, videos taken in the general meetings of SGI held in the Shinjuku headquarters are shown with an overhead projector on a large screen. Chinese subtitles are added to the video to ensure all members understand. In recent meetings, dubbing is also used to ensure members who could not see because they sat too far away from the screen, or have reading difficulties can understand what was going on in the video. It is one of the ways Hong Kong members can find out about the latest situation of SG in Japan. When the videos come to an end, some committee members appear and promote various cultural activities, such as the cultural festival or exhibition. Finally, they chant *nam-myoho-renge-kyo* together three times before they leave the hall.



Figure 1. Annual meeting of the Student Division held in October 2010

Compared with monthly meetings, branch and division meetings are smaller in scale with only 10 to 20 participants on average. Because the meetings I attended were for ethnic Cantonese, they were held in Cantonese and were attended by ethnic Chinese. The content of these meetings are similar to that of monthly meetings but interactions among members are emphasized. Apart from chanting, members are required to sing songs together, such as the songs of men's division or the theme song of Cultural Festival 2010 at the beginning of the meeting. In one of the Men's Division meetings, a member was assigned to stand up and lead others to sing. He held a paper fan and swung in accordance with the rhythm. One could easily recognize their gestures and actions resembled that of Japanese *oendan* (cheering team). The gesture of men, *zaam-mo-wu-seng* 斬魔護城 (kill-evil-protect-castle),

symbolizes “defeating all evils with a sword and defending the castle of *kosen-rufu*”.¹¹ The movement was so big that one could easily sense their strength and devotion to the spread of Nichiren Buddhism. The gesture of women is known as *cyun-sung-hang-fuk* 傳送幸福 (transmitting happiness). The movement is softer than the men’s one, and the hands move in a way that it looks like hugging someone. The inward and outward swinging of hands symbolize the spread of the “seed of Buddhist teachings” and “caring for the others”.¹² A sense of collectiveness and confidence can be cultivated in this kind of singing activity. In these small meetings, members sit in a circle to facilitate interactions. They can see each other and have more eye contacts, which is a way to cultivate a sense of belonging to the group. They take turns to share their recent lives, difficulties encountered in SG, and the positive changes that SG has brought to them. Sometimes, members made use of local materials in their sharing. For example, a senior member in a district meeting suddenly distributed the lyrics of *Si-zi-saan-haa* 獅子山下 (Below Lion Mountain, a popular Cantonese song in the 1970s) and requested all members to sing together.¹³ He concluded that “as a SG member, we have to learn the never-give-up spirit in the lyrics and be a successful person”. We can see that local element was being

¹¹ *New Century Monthly*, vol. 209, May 2011(Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2010), p.22

¹² *Ibid.*, p.23.

¹³ The song *Si-zi-saan-haa* 獅子山下 is composed by Joseph Koo and lyrics written by James Wong.

incorporated into SG in this interesting way.



Figure 2. The gesture of men and women in leading a song
 Source: *New Century Monthly*, vol. 209, May 2011. (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2010), p.22

HKSGI leadership

HKSGI was led by Kajiura Hisashi in its early history. However, even SG members themselves may feel unfamiliar with this name. Encouraged by Ikeda in 1974, Kajiura changed his name to Lee Kon Sau to signify his age of 35.¹⁴ Since then, he has used the Chinese name in most SG and public events and the name Lee Kong Sau, instead of Kajiura Hisashi, became widespread among the members. Nowadays, many members have forgotten his Japanese name and the younger generation have never heard of the name Kajiura Hisashi. In fact, adopting a Chinese

¹⁴ The Chinese name Lee Kon Sau 李剛壽, according to Ikeda, has the meaning of “just became 35 years old”. See Alumni Association in Japan CUHK, *Cherry Blossom Memories: CUHK Alumni in Japan* (Hong Kong: Comos Books, 2009), p.185.

name signifies his wish to construct a Chinese identity which is a strategic move to localize himself in the Chinese setting. Lee also speak fluent Cantonese and is familiar with Hong Kong culture, which helps reduce the cultural gap and allows him to develop closer relations with local members. Some members also found it more friendly and less foreign to call their leader Mr. Lee, a very common family name in Hong Kong. Similarly, the first president of SGI-USA Masayasu Sadanaga, a Japanese immigrant to the United States, adopted the most common English name George Williams to make himself more American.¹⁵ Even though the organizations (HKSGI and SGI-USA) were led by native Japanese in their early histories, they were intended to adapt to the new environment and cultivate a sense of belonging to the local cultures by adopting local names and speaking local languages.

When some overseas SG branches are experiencing a transition of leaderships from ethnic Japanese to local people, such as the USA, Hong Kong is also undergoing similar localization process as seen from the change of president in recent years. When Lee Kon Sau stepped down from the presidency and moved back to the backstage as the honorary president, Mr. Ng Cho Yuk, an ethnic Chinese, carried on the task of his predecessor to lead the organization. When Ng was a university student, he chose Japanese language as an elective subject. He made

¹⁵ Phillip E. Hammond and David Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.25.

friends with exchange students from Soka University and was able to know more about SG and Ikeda.¹⁶ The transition of leadership to Ng signifies the development of HKSGI is steady and the local members are mature (by SG standards) to run the organization by themselves. Being familiar with Hong Kong culture and social changes, Ng may also be able to deal with the local needs more effectively. For instance, he discussed the revised Hong Kong secondary education system, the tragic Hong Kong tour hostage incident in the Philippines, as well as the soccer fever of World Cup 2010 in Hong Kong in the official magazine (*New Century Monthly*) to raise members' awareness of Hong Kong social issues, hence cultivating a sense of belonging to Hong Kong society.¹⁷ However, it is also found that the leader may need to possess a certain degree of cultural lineage with Japan in order to be promoted to the very top position. In the case of Ng, it would be his Japanese language ability and the personal networks he established with Soka University and SG Japan when he was a university student. Still, passing the leadership to local people can be regarded as a big step in the localization process of SG.

¹⁶ *Lai Ming Newsletter* no.2154 (23rd May 2011) (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2011), p.2.

¹⁷ Ng wrote the preface of the *New Century Monthly*. The three articles can be found in *New Century Monthly*, vol. 200, August 2010. (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2011), p.6-7, vol. 201, September 2011, p.6-7, and vol. 202, October 2010, p.6-7.

Overcoming language barrier

Language is one of the main obstacles SG has to encounter in the process of localization. The direct adaptation of Japanese vocabulary, such as names, religious concepts and daily expressions is a way to solve the language problem. It is only made possible because of the language proximity of Japanese and Cantonese, especially the use of Chinese characters (*kanji*) and similarity in pronunciations. For example, many Japanese concepts, such as *gohonzon* (the object of worship), *daimoku* (the chant), *shukumei* (fate), *shakubuku* (persuade/convert), *keibi* (volunteer job within the organization), *sensei* (teachers, always refer to Ikeda Daisaku), *ijo* (meaning ‘that’s all’, always used after sharing), *kaikai* (‘open a meeting’), can be represented in Chinese characters and pronounced in Cantonese. They can be easily understood by Hong Kong members and therefore become the daily religious vocabulary among members. Sometimes, it seems a little bit odd to outsiders that they prefer to use these Japanese terms to refer to very simple and common concepts. For example, they can use the Cantonese expression *ji-gung* 義工 to refer to volunteer work instead of *keibi*, say *do-ze* 多謝 (thank you) or simply say nothing to end a sharing instead of saying *ijo*.¹⁸ While some members said it is “fun” to use

¹⁸ Although the adaptation of religious terms into daily life can also be found in many other religions, SG are different from them in the sense that the vocabulary is directly adapted without the need of translation.

these kind of vocabulary, some see it as a very normal phenomena because all religions have their specific concepts and vocabulary. However, one may still argue that the direct implementation of these religious concepts may be a strategy to develop a Japanese atmosphere within the organization so as to remind members their origin is Japanese, since the president and branch leaders often use these vocabulary in general meetings. It may also help intergrate members and cultivate a sense of belonging to the organization with the use of a shared language system.

Table 6 shows some Japanese concepts which are directly adopted by HKSGI and where they are used.

Table 1. Some Japanese concepts directly used by HKSGI members and pronounced in Cantonese

Japanese concept and pronunciation	Cantonese pronunciation	Meaning	Occurrence
折伏 (shakubuku)	zit3 fuk6	Conversion	speech, book, conversation
警備 (keibi)	ging2 bei6	Voluntary work as guard	conversation
先生 (sensei)	sin1 saang1	Teacher	speech, lyrics, magazine/newsletter conversation
以上 (ijo)	ji5 soeng5	Used to close ones' speech	speech
師匠 (shisho)	si1 zoeng6	Master	Speech, conversation
七重 (shichiju)	cat1 zung6	Sevenfold	Lyrics, magazine/newsletter
英知(eichi)	jing1 zi1	Wisdom	Speech, lyrics, magazine/newsletter

獅子王(shishio)	si1 zi2 wong4	Lion king	Speech, lyrics, magazine/newsletter
奮迅 (funjin)	fan5 seon3	Advance furiously	Lyrics, magazine/newsletter
日蓮大聖人 (Nichiren Daishonin)	jat6 lin4 daai6 sing3 jan4	/	Speech, magazine/newsletter, conversation
池田大作 (Ikeda Daisaku)	ci4 tin4 daai6 zok3	/	Speech, magazine/newsletter, conversation
戸田聖成 (Toda Josei)	wu6 tin4 sing3 seng4	/	Speech, magazine/newsletter, conversation
牧口常三郎 (Makiguchi Tsunesaburo)	muk6 hau2 soeng4 saam1 long4	/	Speech, magazine/newsletter, conversation
宿命 (shukumei)	suk1 meng6	Fate/ destiny	Speech, magazine/newsletter, conversation
宿命轉換 (shukumei tankan)	suk1 meng6 zyun2 wun6	Change ones' fate	Speech, magazine/newsletter, conversation
題目 (daimoku)	tai4 muk6	Chant	Speech, magazine/newsletter, conversation
御本尊 (Gohonzon)	jyu6 bun2 zyun1	The object of worship in SG	Speech, magazine/newsletter, conversation
唱題 (shodai)	coeng3 tai4	To chant	Speech, magazine/newsletter, conversation
開会 (kaikai)	hoi1 wui6	Meeting/ gathering	Speech, magazine/newsletter, conversation
勤行 (gongyo)	kan4 hang4	Buddhist practice	Speech, magazine/newsletter, conversation
広宣流布 (kosen ryufu)	gwong2 syun1 lau4 bou3	Spread of Buddhist teachings	Lyrics, speech, conversation magazine/newsletter
異体同心 (itai dooshin)	ji6 tai2 tung4 sam1	Different body, same spirit	Speech, magazine/newsletter conversation speech
師弟不二 (shitei funi)	si1 dai6 bat1 ji6	The inseparable relationship between master and apprentice	Speech, magazine/newsletter conversation speech

勝利 (shori)	sing3 lei6	Victory	Lyrics, speech, conversation, speech, magazine/newsletter
奮戰 (funsen)	fan5 zin3	Hard fighting	Lyrics, speech, conversation, speech, magazine/newsletter
人間革命 (ningen kakumei)	jan4 gaan1 gaak3 meng6	Human revolution	Lyrics, speech, conversation, speech, magazine/newsletter
地涌 (jiyu)	dei6 jung2	Gush from the ground	Lyrics, speech, conversation, speech, magazine/newsletter
妙法 (myoho)	miu6 faat3	Lotus Sutra/ Buddhist teachings	Lyrics, speech, magazine/newsletter

However, the direct adaptation of Japanese vocabulary has its own limitation. That is, this strategy cannot be applied to Japanese terms which do not have their corresponding Chinese characters, or to whole pieces of scripture and speech which are written in Japanese. In this case, they have to be translated into Chinese (sometimes English) properly. The three versions of *Kan-hung-jiu-din* 勤行要典, in English *Daily Practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin*, are good examples to illustrate the importance of translation to the process of localization.

As stated in *Daily Practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin*, *gongyo* (practice) is one of the three pillars of SG, the other being faith and study.¹⁹ Chanting *nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is an important practice for SG believers. Recitation of the “The Expedient Means” and “The Life Span of the Thus Come One” from *Lotus*

¹⁹ *Daily Practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin* (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2010), p.2.

Sutra is a “vital supporting practice” for oneself.²⁰ Originated in Japan, Nichiren Buddhism has long been using the Japanese translation of *Lotus Sutra*, and it also became the practice of SG members. In principle, all SG members recite *Lotus Sutra* in Japanese regardless of their nationalities and mother tongues. So, how do Hong Kong members (mainly Cantonese or English speakers) overcome this language barrier? To deal with this problem, HKSGI has published three version of *Kan-hung-iiu-din* 勤行要典, in English *Daily Practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin*, each of them serving a particular group of ethnic group, which are Cantonese, Teochew and English speakers. The content of the three versions are basically the same, which are composed of the Japanese version of “The Expedient Means” and “The Life Span of the Thus Come One” (the second and sixteenth chapter of *Lotus Sutra*), as well as guidelines for making prayers (four times per one *gongyo*). Apart from the scriptures themselves, the three versions differ from each other in terms of the languages (preface, introduction and instruction) and the phonetic transcriptions used. For the Cantonese and Teochew versions, all guidelines are entirely written in traditional Chinese, while English is used in the English version. To help members recite the sutra easily, Cantonese, Teochew, and English phonetic transcriptions were provided respectively. For example, the text “妙法蓮華

²⁰ Ibid.

經”(myo-ho-ren-ge-kyo) is transcribed into “咪喺靚嘅奇喺”(mai-jo-leng-ge-kei-jo) in the Cantonese version. Although the transcription sounds different from the originally Japanese pronunciations, it provides the easiest way for Cantonese speakers to learn how to recite the sutra. The publication of the Teochew version of *Kan-hung-iuu-din* also indicates there are a considerable number of Teochew speakers in HKSGI.

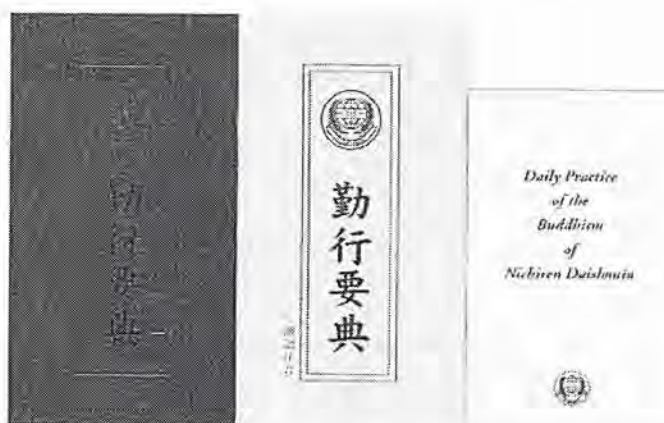


Figure 3. The Cantonese, Teochew and English versions of *Daily Practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin* (from left to right)

The basic format of the meetings held in Hong Kong and Japan is quite similar. “We are doing the same thing in Hong Kong and in Japan, such as chanting *nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, sharing and promoting SG activities”, said Mr. I.²¹ Nevertheless, the contents of the meeting show significant difference between the two places. The most obvious difference is the media of instruction. Meetings in Hong Kong are usually conducted in Cantonese except for those centers which serve

²¹ 1st Interview with Mr. I, 34 years old, dated 12 December 2009.

Japanese or English speakers. Nearly all official documents and magazines are published in Chinese. Also, instead of taking off shoes and sitting in Japanese fashion with two legs folded, Hong Kong members sit on chair with their shoes on. The atmosphere of gatherings is also different. Mr. I compared Japanese and Hong Kong SG in this way. “For SG meetings, Japan is very serious (*kibishii*) while Hong Kong is very relaxed (*raku*)”.²² For the term *kibishii*, Mr. I refers to formalism in Japan. He said “everything has to be calculated accurately, including the length of speech, when to start and when to end, without any errors”. While in Hong Kong, he found that the meetings are conducted in a relaxed way. I also observed kids running around the hall, members talking on phones, and freely moving in and out of the meeting room. One of the reasons maybe that Hong Kong people are not as sensitive to time and rules as Japanese members, and small mistakes are permitted.

HKSGI and Hong Kong festivals

Every culture celebrates its own festivals, which are strongly related to their own histories, religions, and traditions etc. For instance, Christian countries place much importance on the celebration of Christmas, while some Buddhist countries celebrate the Buddha’s birthday instead. For the celebration of New Year, cultures

²² Ibid.

that have a long history of using the lunar calendar are different from that of using the sun calendar. Besides, gods or goddess, important historical figures or historical events, vary a lot from different cultures, which are often the themes of festivals. In the process of localization, it is unavoidable for SG to confront the local festivals. Their encounter raises a few questions, such as how does SG see Hong Kong festivals? Do they celebrate these festivals? What is SG's role in these festivals? Having a look at what HKSGI does in Hong Kong festivals is another way to study the localization of SG in Hong Kong.

Different kinds of cultures co-exist in Hong Kong. Among them, Chinese and western cultures exert the greatest influence on Hong Kong society. Our calendar provides one of the best indications of the influence brought about by these two cultures. The general holidays that Hong Kong people enjoy are combined of Chinese and Western festivals, which are New Year's Day, Chinese New year, Ching Ming Festival, Easter Holiday, Labor Day, Buddha's Birthday, Dragon Boat Festival, Hong Kong Administrative Region Establishment Day, Mid-Autumn Festival, National Day, Chung Yung Festival, and Christmas.²³ Some festivals, such as Valentine's Day, Mothers' Day, Father's Day, Ghost Festival and Halloween, though not regarded as holidays, are also widely celebrated by Hong Kong people, showing

²³ General Holiday for 2011, GovHK, <http://www.gov.hk/en/about/abouthk/holiday/>

the multiplicity and diversity of Hong Kong society.

Being part of the Hong Kong community and composed of mainly Hong Kong members, HKSGI has been influenced by the local festivals to a certain extent. However, it does not mean that SG celebrates the festivals in a traditional way, such as worshipping ancestors on Ching Ming Festival and Chung Yung Festival, organizing moon-watching activities on Mid-Autumn Festival or participating in Dragon Boat race in Dragon Boat Festival. Instead, it organizes gatherings known as *kan-hang-wui* 勤行會 (in Japanese *Gongyo* 勤行) in the names of the festivals, such as Ching Ming Festival Kan-hang-wui, Chung Yung Festival Kan-hang-wui, Ghost Festival Kan-hang-wui, and New Year's Day Kan-hang-wui etc. Despite the fact that these *kan-hang-wui*'s borrow the names of festivals and are held around festival times, they do not have any special relations with the festivals themselves. The contents of these *kan-hang-wui*'s include chanting, making announcements, and sharing of members, showing no significant difference from the regular general meetings or other gatherings. Adopting the name of local festivals to the meetings has a number of implications. First, HKSGI uses the festivals to attract members. It seems to the members that the *kan-hang-wui*'s are given special meaning when they are attached with the name of the festivals. Some of the member told me that they enjoyed these *kan-hang-wui*'s because they felt like celebrating festivals with

members. Second, attending *kan-hang-wui*'s can compensate the spiritual discomfort associated with not celebrating some festivals. According to SG teachings, the practice of other religious activities is not encouraged. However, most Hong Kong people are used to celebrate Ching Ming Festival and Chung Yong Festival by following the practices and traditions of folk religions. It includes grave-sweeping and burning of paper offerings, such as joss paper, paper house, paper clothes or even paper electrical appliances. It is also a means of showing filial piety and respect to ancestors. Believers of SG may suffer from a sense of loss once they abandon these religious practices. According to SG teachings, all creatures (Buddha, human beings, ancestors, animal etc.) are part of the *Dai-gohonzon*, and the fourth prayer of *gongyo* is directed to deceased relatives.²⁴ Therefore, attending festival *kan-hang-wui*'s may be a means to show their love and respect to ancestors, relieving their discomfort resulting from not worshipping in the traditional ways.

SG does not encourage their members to practice other religious activities based on the exclusivity of Nichiren's teachings, but traditional religious practices still affect the lives of members on some occasions. Mrs M, who has been a SG member

²⁴ The fourth prayer of *gongyo*: "I pray for my deceased relatives and for all those who have passed away, particularly for these individuals". Therefore, some SG members chose not to worship ancestors in the traditional way because they believed their love and respect can be transmitted to their ancestor through practicing *gongyo*. See *Daily Practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin* (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2010), p.28.

for over 30 years, may give us some hints in this regard. In every Ching Ming Festival and Chung Yong Festival, Mrs. M goes to worship her deceased parents in a columbarium, where their bone ashes are placed. To her, these festivals were not only for worshipping ancestors but also reunions for family members and relatives. Mrs. M is not the only SG members in her big family. Some of her sisters, her husband, aunts, and uncles are also SG believers. When they gathered at the columbarium, they followed the traditional ways of worshipping her parents, which includes offering incense and burning paper offerings. She said, “because not all family members are SG members, so it is better to worship in a way that everyone feels comfortable”.²⁵ She believed that burning incense and paper offerings are the traditions and habits for most Hong Kong people, rather than practices of any specific kinds of religions. Not only Mrs. M, many other members I encountered in my research also had similar beliefs. In short, instead of giving up all other religious practices, some members prefer to preserve part of the traditions so as to maintain a harmonious relationship with family members who are not SG members.

HKSGI wedding and funeral

SG has exerted significant influence on the lives of members in terms of rituals

²⁵ Interview with Mrs. M, 55 years old, dated 12 June 2010.

and ceremonies. One of the examples is that it affects how SG members organize their wedding and funeral. Rarely known by the general public of Hong Kong and similar to many other religions, SG has its own style of wedding ceremony and funeral. According to Mrs. M, if the couples are SG members, they can apply for having a wedding ceremony in SG style, which is held in the cultural center located in Mong Kok.²⁶ Mr. T, who has been to a Hong Kong SG wedding said “since the couples are SG members, I have to attend their wedding and chant for their happiness”.²⁷ Although I have not attended any SG wedding during my research, some internet sources introduce and discuss the format and elements of a SG wedding. Prof. Zhang wen-liang of Remin University of China commented on SG wedding in this way. “*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is recited in front of the *gohonzo* during the ceremony. The faith of members towards Nichiren Daishonin is reinforced as a result”.²⁸ Besides, a photo album taken by a Taiwanese SG member Jerry shows a SG wedding ceremony held in Taiwan in 2008.²⁹ As seen from the pictures, the wedding hall is decorated with a series of pink, heart-shaped balloons on the stage; a large banner showed the names of the couples; a Chinese character *hei* 囍 is

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Interview with Mr. T, 28 years old, dated 14 November 2009.

²⁸ “Buddhist Wedding Ceremony”, Foyin (Buddha’s Voice) Forum
<http://jzf.cixin.org/www.foyin.com/banruo/guandian/200908/81341.html>

²⁹ Soka Gakkai Wedding ceremony of Wen-he and Ya-li,
<http://www.fotop.net/digitrec/digitrec226?page=3>

put on the wall, meaning “double happiness”, which is always used in Chinese wedding ceremony. The couples then sign a document with the presence of a witness, followed by a series of rituals in front of the guests, such as exchanging glasses, and kissing each other. It is also interesting to note that the couples wear Western-style wedding dress instead of the Chinese one. The following picture taken by a Taiwanese member may provide reader with some basic ideas of what a SG wedding in Taiwan is. More studies are required to have a more comprehensive understanding of HKSGI wedding.



Figure 4. SG style wedding

Source: Soka Gakkai Wedding ceremony of Wen-he and Ya-li,
<http://www.fotop.net/digitree/digitree226?page=3>

Birth and death are the most important events in human life. Every religion has different answers to the mystery of life. Christianity affirms the creation of human by God and the existence of after-live; Buddhism proposed the endless cycle of life and the ultimate state of enlightenment. Based on their attitudes towards death, different religions have their unique forms of funerals and SG is no exception. According to

Mrs. M, SG funeral is simple because it does not contain many procedures or rituals.³⁰ Chanting *nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is almost the only procedure in the funeral. It is a little bit surprising that even though Mrs. M's mother was a SG member, she did not conduct a SG funeral for her mother. She explained that because some family members and relatives were not SG believer, it was better to do it in a more ordinary way. Finally, Mrs. M and her family reached a consensus. The funeral was basically in Taoist fashion. After all the Taoist rituals were finished, she led around 20 SG members into the funeral hall and started chanting. Mr. F, a very close friend of Mrs. M, believed that the deceased could rest in peace in the echo of *nam-myoho-renge-kyo*.³¹ Despite their good intention, some non-SG relatives felt a bit uncomfortable because they were all these members were like strangers to them.³²

The use of more than one religious rituals in a single funeral by individual members may not necessarily indicates the organization itself approves this act. The combination of Taoist and SG funeral in Mrs. M's mother's case is largely due to her family's wish to perverse local traditions and to maintain harmonious relations among family members and relatives. HKSGI's tolerance toward non-SG religious activities may help the organization avoid conflicts with other religions and allow its

³⁰ Interview with Mrs. M, 55 years old, dated 12 June 2010.

³¹ Interview with Mr. K, 40 years old, dated 12 June 2010.

³² Interview with Miss N, 53 years old, dated 12 June 2010. The younger sister of Mrs. M, she found it a little bit "strange" to have so many people chanted for her mother.

members to be more flexible in cooperating with non-members in planning wedding ceremony or funeral. It is also one of the reasons that facilitates the localization of SG in Hong Kong.

HKSGI Cultural Festival 2011

During my research, the hottest topic among Hong Kong SG members was Culture Festival 2011. Although they organize festivals every five years, the one held in 2011 had very special meaning to them because it marked the 50th anniversary of HKSGI, the 80th anniversary of SG, as well as the 35th anniversary of SGI. In most meetings, members were regularly updated with the latest news of the festival. Hundreds of volunteers were recruited as performers or helpers, and every sub-group, such as dance team, choir, and orchestra were busy with practices and rehearsals. HKSGI cultural festival sought for all possible help from its members. In fact, sometimes they even asked me to participate as a helper or performer although I refused.

An official website was set up for countdown and to display the highlights of the preparation work of Cultural Festival 2011.³³ When you open the website, the music video of the festival is played automatically. The MV is composed of the

³³ HKSGI Culture Festival 2011 official homepage, <http://hksgi.org/2011/>

theme song *fei-chang-sheng-li* 飛常勝利 (in English *Fly to Eternal Victory*), and lots of pictures which highlight the old Hong Kong (fishing village and fish boats) and the culture festivals held in the past decades. The writers of this song incorporated certain Hong Kong elements to signify the relationship between SG and the local community.³⁴ The song begins with the lyrics “the transition of a prosperous island witnessed different social changes” (繁華小島的變遷 人情世態 盡呈現). Apparently, the prosperous island refers to Hong Kong as evidenced by the photos of fishing village and boats. It is followed by the lyrics “growth accompanies challenges, difficulties are seen as training” (成長必須抱擁挑戰 挫敗當做磨練), intentionally suggests the idea that “HKSGI is growing with Hong Kong people”. The “challenges” in the lyrics refer to the hardship of both the early development of SG and Hong Kong. For instance, HKSGI did not have its own center and had to financially depend on Japan SG for renting cultural centers. Members also encountered difficulties in organizing activities because of limited resources. In fact, senior members often recalled the hardships in the past and urged the junior members to cherish everything they had. One may find the development of HKSGI resembles the history of Hong Kong. The brochure of Cultural Festival 2011 introduces the

³⁴ According to Mr. Jacky Chan, the composer of *Fly to Eternal Victory*, the idea behind his composition of SG songs were to “encourage members, make them happy”. So he did not include those elements found in commercial pop songs and tried to make them easy enough for all members to sing. See *New Century Monthly*, vol. 209, May 2011 (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2011), p.17.

theme song in this way:

During the past 50 years, Hong Kong society underwent many major changes. In the course of these changes, activities for propagating Nichiren Buddhism in Hong Kong have also achieved a monumental advance. Moving forward towards the future of boundless hopes, all HKSGI members embrace faith as their roots of belief, soar and ascend hand in hand to create history and witness the unprecedented victory.³⁵

Originated as a fishing village and experienced so many ups and downs, successes and failures, Hong Kong evolved into one of the most prosperous regions in the world. The theme song intends to link HKSGI to the history of Hong Kong, and cultivates a sense of belonging and “Hong Kong identity” among its members.

³⁵ *Brochure of HKSGI Cultural Festival 2011*. (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2011), p.4.

39
飛

常勝利
2011 香港 SGI 文化節主題曲

作曲：陳德健
作詞：陳世圖、余佩珊、
石桂芬、邱韻姿、
羅迪妮、

繁華小島的變遷 人情世態盡呈現
成長必須抱擁挑戰 挫敗當做磨練

尋求心中的理想 沿途有您足能靈
人生找到了方向 不會害怕世事無常

越過千個山千個海 覓尋幸福所愛 哪怕小意外
也許跌跌碰碰 纔會有感懷 多得您賜采

迎向 晨曦 陽光早已預備
放眼未來滿路是契機 感激您伴我飛
(高瞻眺望遠地 信心早已預備
放眼未來滿路是契機 莫回頭莫顧忌)

同躍 同飛 同一起創傳奇
奮勇地前進莫退避 沿路有您為我打氣
(一起創造價值 每一刻創傳奇
奮勇地前進莫退避 沿路有您為我打氣)

越過千個山千個海 覓尋幸福所愛 你我跨障礙
每天滿載勇氣 與惡世比賽 想飛躍喝采

迎向 晨曦 陽光早已預備
放眼未來滿路是契機 感激您伴我飛
(高瞻眺望遠地 信心早已預備
放眼未來滿路是契機 莫回頭莫顧忌)

同躍 同飛 同一起創傳奇
奮勇地前進莫退避 沿路有您為我打氣
(一起創造價值 每一刻創傳奇
奮勇地前進莫退避 沿路有您為我打氣)

迎向 晨曦 陽光早已預備
放眼未來滿路是契機 多得您伴我飛

同躍 同飛 同一起創傳奇
奮勇地前進莫退避 同邁向勝利我跟你

Figure 5. Theme song of Cultural Festival 2011

Source: *Cong-gaa-miu-jam-go-zap* (The collected songs of Soka Gakkai),
(Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2010), p.39.

The mascot of Culture Festival 2011 is a *fenghuang* 鳳凰 (phoenix), a mythical bird in Chinese culture. It is a legendary creature used to represent the empress and females. June, the designer of the mascot, believed that phoenix had the meaning of fortune and rebirth, and could represent the spirit of culture festival.³⁶ It

³⁶ Interview with June Yau, HKSGI Cultural Festival 2011 Official Homepage,
<http://hksgi.org/2011/?m=201004>

is believed that Hong Kong members' affection for *fenghuang* made her stand out from other designers (whose designs were less representative of Hong Kong culture, such as mouse and child) and won the competition. A series of *fenghuang* products were also released, such as pen, pencil, notebook, t-shirt, kettle, sandglass, and towel, to publicize the event and also as a means to make a profit. It is also noteworthy that *fenghuang* is a traditional mythical bird in both Chinese and Japanese cultures. The use of *fenghuang* might be to symbolize the strong kinship between the two cultures.



Figure 6. The poster and mascot of Culture Festival 2011
Source: *New Century Monthly*, no.207, March 2010,
(Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2011), cover.

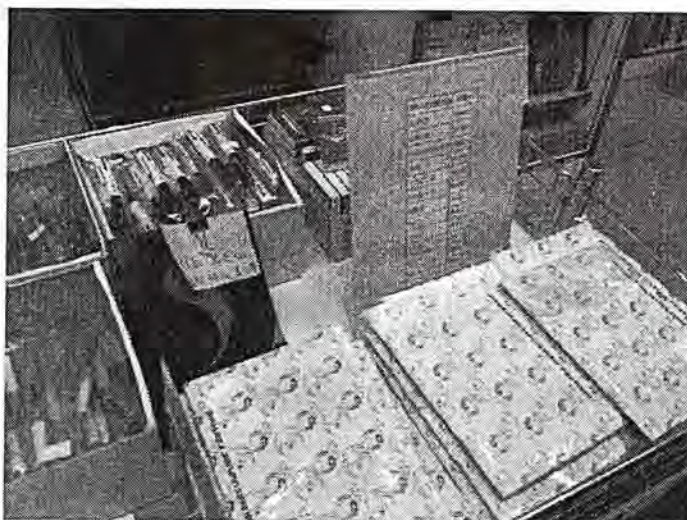


Figure 7. Products of the mascot of Culture Festival 2011

There were a total of three shows for Cultural Festival 2011. One was held on 29 January 2011 in the evening and the other two on 30 January in the afternoon and evening respectively. I was invited by Mr. I, a Japanese national who is working in Hong Kong, to attend the one held on 29 January. He said members who were interested in the show were given two tickets. One for himself/herself and the other one for the new friend he/she invited. If it was accurate, then half of the audiences were not SG members. The show was held in Hall one (AsiaWorld-Arena) of AsiaWorld-Expo. Shuttle bus was arranged to transport the guests back and forth the venue and the nearest train station. Mr. I heard from rumor that the Japanese pop singer Yamashita Tomohisa who also held a concert on 29 January, had to change to a less preferable venue (Kowloonbay International Trade and Exhibition Center) because AsiaWorld-Arena was reserved by HKSGI. And Mr. I proudly said “HKSGI is really powerful (in Japanese *sugoi*)!”.

When we entered the hall, it was almost full already.³⁷ Some audiences were trying to look for the best position. Before the show started, the organizer presented the Chinese translation of a speech written by SGI president Ikeda Daisaku. In the speech, Ikeda said “Hong Kong is my most beloved hometown of my heart and soul”.³⁸ He then praised Hong Kong as the “Harbor of Hope”, “Harbor of Peace”, and “Harbor of Capable People” and finally wished Hong Kong people to “obtain eternal victory, infinite prosperity in this beloved heaven and earth of Hong Kong”.³⁹ A cheer arose from the crowd which marked the end of Ikeda’s speech and also the beginning of the show.

The show was divided into four sessions, which were “Act one: Prelude 2011”, “Act two: Airborne Dreams”, “Act three: Soaring Dreams Setting Sail”, and “Curtain Call”.⁴⁰ Performances included a pop band, orchestra, dance, choir, and gymnastics etc. Some local celebrities, who seldom revealed their SG identity in order to avoid misunderstanding, also performed and contributed to the festival. Since SG claimed that all the performers and helpers are members, one may believe

³⁷ Maximum capacity of the hall is 14,000. See AsiaWorld-Expo Official Homepage, Facility Information, Concepts and Special Events, Overview, <http://www.asiaworld-expo.com/html/en/facilityinfo/ArenaEvents.html>

³⁸ HKSGI Cultural Festival 2011 Message, *Brochure of HKSGI Cultural Festival 2011*. (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2011), p.5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.15.

that all these local celebrities are also SG members. Overseas branches also sent representatives to perform in the festival who dressed in different national costumes and dance together to symbolize the idea of “unity of the world”.⁴¹ The show was generally well-organized and of quality. However, because most performers were not professionals and they only received intensive trainings a few months before the festival, some minor mistakes were seen occasionally throughout the show.

Mr. I was very “*kandou shita*” (touched) by the show and the effort of the members. He wished he could have contributed to it if he had more free time. SG claimed that the festival successfully drew the public attention and many non-members developed a positive impression on SG and became more interested in SG teachings after watching the show.⁴² Yet, no concrete evidence has proved that the show improved the image of SG and increased the memberships.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See Interviews with Vicky Fung and Kimshan, HKSGI Cultural Festival 2011 Official Homepage, <http://hksgi.org/2011/?paged=6>



Figure 8. The closing of Cultural Festival 2011



Picture 10. The *Cultural Festival 2011 Brochure* can be used as a fan (front and back)



Figure 9. Ticket of Cultural Festival 2011

Why are there more women than men in HKSGI?

According to Daniel A. Metraux's research in 1999 to 2000, HKSGI has 42,000 members in total.⁴³ Among them, 31,000 are females and 11,000 are males.⁴⁴ My observation further indicates that women outnumber men in most HKSGI meetings. Based on my participation in 25 gatherings so far, except four gatherings organized

⁴³ The figure has increased to 50,000 by 2010.

⁴⁴ Daniel A. Metraux, *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: the Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), p.28.

by young men's division which solely consisted of men, 21 of them were dominated by middle-aged women, with female to male ratio approximately seven to three. In general, most members were very concentrated when they were chanting, with their heads lowered and prayer beads held tightly in both hands. However, female members looked more serious in chanting than male. Some male members were simply just sitting quietly with their arms folded.

One of the reasons for the higher participation rates of women in HKSGI may be attributed to the fact that most middle-aged female members are full-time housewives. They have relatively more free time to experience different forms of religion and therefore have higher opportunity of becoming members of a religion. Once they become truthful believer, they are more likely to introduce SG to other housewives. The experience of Mrs. M may provide some hints explaining the unbalanced sex ratio. Mrs. M has been a SG member for over 40 years. Her aunt was a Japanese SG member who came to Hong Kong with her husband in the 1960s. Mrs. M's mother was so affected by her aunt that she also became a member. After seeing some positive changes in her mother's life, Mrs. M also started to believe in SG. She said:

In the 1960s, HKSGI did not have so many centers like nowadays.

My aunt had to invite members to her home for gatherings. Her home

could accommodate 20 to 30 people. Among these members, eight out of ten members were women... SG emphasizes the power of women. Mothers are seen as the “sun of family” who have the ability to maintain the stability of family. Women also have better communication skills.⁴⁵

The story of Mrs. M indicates the role of mothers was very important in the early SG movement. SG regards mothers as “the sun of family”, a source of power that induces positive changes on family members. They can provide spiritual support to their husbands and children whenever they are depressed by work or study. The positive power, together with good communications skills that based on love and care, mothers were considered as good at promoting SG . As a result of this strategy, the number of women within the organization increases steadily and has eventually outnumbered men.

Another reason may be related to women’s commitment to their families. According to some members’ sharing, most of them admitted that they started chanting because of their motherly affection. For example, they chanted for the good health of family members, better family relationship, and improvement in academic results of their children, etc. Therefore, their commitment to their families may be

⁴⁵ Interview with Mrs. M, 55 years old, dated 12 June 2010.

one of the motives for their interest in SG. Besides, this kind of utilitarian view of religion, i.e. chanting as a means to achieve material or spiritually rewards, has long been a common practice for many Chinese people. For many Chinese traditional folk religions, people visit temples or donate money for some visible or invisible benefits. Housewives, who have relatively more free time, may find it worthy to invest a small amount of time on chanting for the benefit of their families. More importantly, like many traditional folk religions, SG does not prohibit members from chanting for this-worldly benefits. In this way, their utilitarian mind-set may become one of their motives.

Mr. K, a male senior SG member, gave an interesting comment on the uneven sex ration in HKSGL. “Hong Kong men always work overtime and seldom have time to participate in religious activities. Even if I want to join SG gatherings, my job nature does not allow me to do so”.⁴⁶ When I said that Japanese men work overtime too, Mr. K replied in this way: “After all, SG is originated in Japan and has a very long history, it is normal for them to have a more even distribution of males and females. Also, even though Japanese men also work very hard too, they have different national characters from Hong Kong males that make the difference”.⁴⁷

His comment indicates that “Hong Kong men are busy at work” is one important

⁴⁶ Interview with Mr. K, 40 years old, dated 12 June 2010.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

factor for fewer men than women in HKSGI. It is also true that SG has a longer history in Japan than in Hong Kong. Its influence has penetrated to different areas of Japanese society, such as education, politics, publishing circle, and various businesses. Therefore, its popularity is relatively higher among Japanese people. Besides, although he did not mention what are the differences between Japanese and Hong Kong males in terms of “national characters”, he probably refers to the Japanese spirit of loyalty towards their organizations. This typical Japanese character makes it very difficult for them to leave SG and they are obligated to spend much time and effort on SG activities even though they already have a busy job.

In short, female members have higher participation rate in HKSGI because the early SG movement was centered on women. SG believes that women are “the sun of family” and the backbone of SG development. Especially housewives, who have more free time and better communication skills based on emotion and care, are active in recruiting new blood. On the contrary, being the breadwinner of the family and have lower sense of loyalty towards organizations, Hong Kong men are less interested or devoted to SG activities. Therefore, the higher female to male ratio may be a result of HKSGI’s recruitment strategy and differences in national contexts.

4.2 How SG's Teachings Are Localized in Hong Kong

Soka Gakkai International (SGI) claims to be a global peace-promoting organization. It upholds the flag of anti-war and anti-nuclear weapon, promotes environment protection, humanitarian aid, human rights, education, cultural activities, and international relationship.⁴⁸ The SGI official charter also states ten principles of its organization, emphasizing its various objectives, which are “promotion of peace, culture and education; protection of fundamental human rights, and the freedom of religion and religious expression; protection of nature and environment; promotion of an understanding of Nichiren Daishonin; contribution toward the prosperity of their respective societies as good citizens; respect for the independence and autonomy of its constituent organizations; respect for other religions, engages in dialogue and work together with them toward the resolution of fundamental issues; respect for cultural diversity and promotion of cultural exchanges”.⁴⁹ Being one of the overseas branches, HKSGI follows the instructions of the headquarters and upholds these philosophies in *kosen-rufu* (the spread of Buddhist teachings). This part discusses to what extent these ideologies are adopted in Hong Kong society.

⁴⁸ ‘How does SGI contribute to society?’ SGI Official Homepage,
http://www.sgi.org/about-us/about-faq.html#faq_about_q5

⁴⁹ SGI Charter, SGI official Homepage,
<http://www.sgi.org/resource-center/introductory-materials/sgi-charter.html>

World Peace

Promoting world peace is an important element in SG philosophies. They believe that chanting *nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, studying Buddhist philosophies and taking action daily for the well-being of others, human beings can go through the process of “human revolution”, achieve a state of profound happiness and wisdom, and bring about social harmony and world peace. The handbook of SG also states that when doing *gongyo*, “tenacious efforts are required, but doing these daily prayers is a privilege, not an obligation, and these are not only for our own sake but also for our ultimate goal of world peace”.⁵⁰ In addition to religious practices, various exhibitions and international peace seminars are held occasionally, and proposals of world peace are submitted by Ikeda Daisaku to the United Nations on behalf of SGI every year. In these proposals, Ikeda shows how Buddhist teachings can contribute to world peace and sustainable development. While SGI promotes world peace at the international level, HKSGI’s actions are more oriented to local activities and individual religious practice. Under the umbrella of SGI, HKSGI does not have the authority to submit peace proposals to any international organization on behalf of SGI. The idea of anti-violence is promoted at the local level through various cultural activities in Hong Kong.⁵¹ Despite the routine practice that requires

⁵⁰ *Daily Practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin*. (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2010), p.3.

⁵¹ For example, the exhibition “From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the

members to pray for world peace in each *gongyo* 勤行 (chanting), HKSGI organizes “pray-for-world-peace gongyo” 祈求世界和平勤行會 every month to concentrate and intensify their “power” in changing the world to a safer and better place to live. HKSGI believes that all members have the ability and responsibility to promote world peace through chanting and studying Buddhist teachings by themselves. However, one may wonder how effective these cultural activities and individual religious practices in contributing to world peace. For example, do they improve Sino-Japan relation, or relieve Israeli–Palestinian and Christ-Islamic conflict? Some Hong Kong members admitted that international conflicts are beyond their control and may only be solved, as some described, “by the power of chanting”.⁵² Although in theory, the idea of world peace is upheld and emphasized by HKSGI, how exactly can it be achieved in Hong Kong and how can a tiny city contribute to international peace campaign, are questions both to outsiders and to the organization itself.

Anti-nuclear Weapon

The idea of “anti-nuclear” is one of the core principles of SGI which is

Human Spirit” was held in the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Institute of Education in 2009.

⁵² Interview with Miss. C, 33 years old, dated 12 December 2009.

founded by the second president of SG Toda Josei. Living in wartime Japan and witnessed the devastating effect of atomic explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Toda believed that world peace could come only if the use of nuclear weapons was banned. In 1957, a peace gathering was held in Yokohama Japan. More than 50 thousand young people attended the event in which Toda made an important speech to express his anti-nuclear stance:

Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of atomic or nuclear weapons has arisen around the world... I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons. I wish to declare that anyone who ventures to use nuclear weapons, irrespective of their nationality or whether their country is victorious or defeated, should be sentenced to death without exception. Why do I say this? Because we, the citizens of the world, have an inviolable right to live. Anyone who jeopardizes that right is a devil incarnate, a fiend, a monster.⁵³

His call for anti-nuclear movement became an important objective of SGI to this day.

Through various activities and campaigns, such as “*From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit*” exhibition, petition drives and the

⁵³ ‘Soka Gakkai Second President Josei Toda’s Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons’, HKSGI Official Homepage, <http://www.hksgi.org/eng/peace/declaration/>

People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition campaign, SGI urged all nations to disarm nuclear weapons which it claims is the essential step for world peace. His successor, Ikeda Daisaku, even promotes the abolition of nuclear weapons through submitting SGI's annual peace proposal to UN. So, we can say SGI plays a part in facilitating the disarmament of nuclear weapons at the international level. However, the idea of "anti-nuclear" may not be significant in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Based on "one country two system", it does not have the authorities to possess its own military forces or weapons (including nuclear weapons). Regional security is therefore maintained by the People's Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison. Because the Hong Kong Government has no say in any disarmament issues based on its limited political power, it is not practical to promote "anti-nuclear" campaigns in Hong Kong. Instead, HKSGI promotes the idea of anti-nuclear through cultural activities, such as revealing the devastating and tragic effect of atomic explosions in exhibitions. Other activities, such as campaigns or petitions to urge for the abolishment of nuclear weapons were not seen so far because they are seen as impractical in the political environment of Hong Kong. One committee member Mr. U, believed that "we do concern about the abolishment of nuclear weapon, but it is an issue beyond our control due to our limited political influence and the fact that we do not possess our

own military”⁵⁴. So, HKSGI tends to put less emphasis on disarmament issues due to its limited influence in international politics. In addition, right after the devastating earthquake that hit northeastern Japan on 11 May 2011, Japan and the world have to face the challenges as a result of the reactor breakdown in Fukushima. According to my observation, HKSGI has not taken any action to raise the public concern of the safety issues of the Daya Bay Nuclear Power Plant which is only located 50 kilometers away from Hong Kong. It shows that SG idea of “anti-nuclear” only apply to nuclear weapons but not to nuclear power in general.

Environmental Protection

SGI promotes environmental protection and preservation of nature. It regularly organizes clean-up campaigns, recycling, and tree planting projects to promote the idea of sustainable development. Other than that, SGI produced a film “*A Quiet Revolution*” and organized the exhibition “*Seeds of Hope: Visions of sustainability, steps toward change*”. It also established Brazil SGI's Amazon Ecological Conservation Center to promote reforestation and environmental education. HKSGI also promotes environmental protection and sustainable development through various cultural activities. In 1995, HKSGI established the Environmental Protection

⁵⁴ Interview with Mr. U, 35 years old, dated 11 May 2010.

Research Centre to increase public awareness of environment protection. In 2000, HKSGI co-organized the seminar, “Earth Charter” with Hong Kong Sustainable Development Forum and Centre of Urban Planning and Environmental Management of the University of Hong Kong. In 2003, the Youth Division of HKSGI performed a drama to promote the idea of sustainable development, anti-discrimination and anti-monopolization.⁵⁵ However, other than cultural activities, we seldom see HKSGI organize practical or concrete campaigns to improve our living environment. According to members, clean-up campaigns, recycling, and tree planting projects are rarely organized by HKSGI. It is very different from what we see in other SG branches, especially in Japan and Taiwan, which promote the idea of environment protection through providing community services. These volunteer work help cultivate a sense of belonging to the community and build a positive image for SG. For stance, SG local branches in Japan organize clean-up campaigns for their own community. In the winter, they help clean up the streets which are covered by snow. Responding to the lack of community services in Hong Kong, Miss P explained “although HKSGI does not provide community services or offer help to people in need, we do encourage members to participate in other community services as volunteers or simply try their best to help people around”.⁵⁶ Clean-up campaigns

⁵⁵ The drama is called ‘Peace Hotel: The Earth Fried Rice’.

⁵⁶ Interview with Miss P, ethnic Chinese, 24 years old, dated 15 February 2010. She was a university

and tree planting projects are commonly organized in Hong Kong by the government, schools or non-government organizations (NGO) in order to raise the public awareness of environment protection, the reason for SG not to organize or participate in this activities require further study.

Promotion of Education

Having originated as an educational organization (Soka Kyoiku Gakkai), SGI has incorporated the spirit of promoting education into its major objectives. Soka universities were established in Japan and USA; Soka junior high schools and elementary schools can also be found in many places. HKSGI shows no exceptions in this regard. In 1994, the first overseas Soka Kindergarten was established in Hong Kong. Although Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten is an affiliation of HKSGI, its religious atmosphere is rather weak. For instance, it is found that less than half of the children come from SG families, and the kindergarten making no attempt to teach SG beliefs to students. According to Mr. U, a senior SG member, HKSGI is also devoted to promote primary and secondary education in Hong Kong.⁵⁷ For instance, it has sent applications to the Hong Kong Education Bureau in the hope of building new schools. Another committee member, Mr. S, also believed that HKSGI can exert

student who worked as a volunteer in one of SG exhibitions.

⁵⁷ Interview with Mr. U, 35 years old, dated 11 May 2010.

more influence on Hong Kong society by promoting education.⁵⁸ In fact, Hong Kong has a strong backbone of Christianity and many schools (including elementary, primary, secondary and tertiary) were established by Christian groups. “Many social elites are Christians. For example, nearly half of the university professors in Hong Kong are Christians. Many bureaucrats are also Christians, including the Hong Kong Chief Executive Mr. Donald Tsang..... SG can exert more influence on Hong Kong society if it expands its education”, Mr. S added.⁵⁹ Although the number of university professors who are Christians suggested by him may seem a bit exaggerated, the influence of Christians on Hong Kong society is significant. However, the possibility of SG to expand its education is still unclear due to the demographic challenges facing Hong Kong society. Table five reveals that the numbers of students in primary and secondary schools that have been declining in the past ten years. In the midst of the controversy over “kill school” (shutting down of schools by the government), the possibility of SG to establish primary or secondary school is unclear.⁶⁰ However, an increasing number of Mainland children studying in

⁵⁸ Interview with Mr. S, 60 years old, dated 10 December 2010. He was a History professor and a former Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor of a university.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ From 2005 to 2010, the numbers of kindergarten and primary school decreased from 1,063 to 985 and 779 to 629 respectively. The number of secondary school remains similar (642 in 2005 and 685 in 2010). See “Number of Educational and Training Institutions by Level of Education of Courses Offered”, Press Releases & Publications, Figures and Statistics, Hong Kong Education Bureau, <http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=6498&langno=1>

Hong Kong may compensate for the declining birth rate and may require the establishment of more schools in the future. HKSGI also endeavors the educational development in Mainland China. In 2001 and 2003, “Phoenix Fang Zhaoling Soka Primary School” and “Xuantang Soka Primary School” were built in Guangdong. Through these educational campaigns, it is said that it developed a positive image of SG in China.

Table 5. Number of Students in Hong Kong⁶¹

Number of students	2005-06	2009-10	2010-11
Kindergarten	149,141	140,502	148,940
Primary school	425,864	344,748	331,112
Secondary school	478,440	469,466	449,737

Protection of Human Rights

SGI upholds the flag of protection of human rights. It also agrees with the ideas of “democracy, non-violence and peace” stated in the Earth Chapter.⁶² It promotes the respect of equality and dignity of all people through organizing cultural activities and workshops. Since 1993, SGI has been organizing the exhibition “*Toward a Century of Humanity: An Overview of Human Rights in Today's World*” in eight

⁶¹ See “Key Statistics on Kindergarten, Primary, Secondary and Special Education Figures and Statistics”, Press Releases & Publications, Hong Kong Education Bureau (EDB), <http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=92&langno=1>

⁶² Earth Chapter, HKSGI Official Homepage, http://www.hksgi.org/eng/green/earth_charter/

countries. In 2005, SGI took part in the UN's "World Programme for Human Rights Education". In 2006, it organized working group on Human Rights Education and Learning with other NGOs. Through participating in the UN and co-operating with other NGOs, SGI plays a role in promoting human rights at an international level. Similar to SGI, HKSGI promotes human rights through organizing cultural activities, but they are small in scale and target only local people. These activities raise our awareness of how wars and violence cause harm to basic human rights. However, they seldom make an attempt to investigate or reveal the human rights situations and challenges found in China or Hong Kong.⁶³ Among the fifty-five cultural seminars held by HKSGI since 1994, the theme "human rights" has never appeared.⁶⁴ Besides, HKSGI is basically not engaged in any human rights campaigns. For example, it does not participate in the annual protest known as Hong Kong 1 July march (七一遊行) when different organizations or individuals express their concerns and fight for universal suffrage of the Chief Executive.⁶⁵ Neither does it participate

⁶³ So far, HKSGI has organized two human-rights related exhibitions 'From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit' in University of Hong Kong and The Chinese University of Hong Kong. However, there are no special seminars or exhibition on human right situation in Hong Kong.

⁶⁴ For more information about the themes of cultural seminars, please refer to Appendix.

⁶⁵ Hong Kong 1 July March is an annual protest originally initiated by the Civil Human Rights Front since the 1997 handover. In 2003, Hong Kong Government proposed the legislation of Basic Law Article 23. Many Hong Kong people feared that their freedom of speech would be harmed and around 500,000 marchers participated in the protest that year. Nowadays, the protest became an annual event in which many organizations see it as an opportunity to express their own concerns.

in the memorials for the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, which is considered as one of the most tragic campaigns advocating for democracy and freedom in China. These examples inevitably raise some questions: to what extent the organization is supporting human rights? How does HKSGI interpret these historical events?

HKSGI adopted a non-intervention policy towards political issues. According to Mr. U, a senior SG committee member, HKSGI allows its believers to be members of political parties, to have different political stances, and to participate in political activities in their own names.⁶⁶ Therefore, even though the organization did not participate in human rights campaigns due to its low-profile policy and political concerns, some HKSGI members who were devoted supporters of democracy did take part in these campaigns. As an organization that strives for a steady growth and a harmonious relation with Hong Kong and Mainland Government, HKSGI has positioned itself in a more conservative way by not intervening in the local political environment. “Ikeda’s instruction was very clear. Overseas branches, including us (Hong Kong) are not allowed to participate in any political activities because it may cause negative effect on our future development”, said Mr. U.⁶⁷ However, one may also find that voices inside the organization are quite diverse. For instance, when it

⁶⁶ Interview with Mr. U, 35 years old, senior SG member and has been working in various branch or male division committees, dated 11 May 2010.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

comes to some controversial issues, such as 2011 Nobel Peace Price winner Liu Xiaobo and human rights issues in China, some members who were more educated and had a better understanding of universal values, such as democracy and human rights, responded in a rational manner by discussing the current challenges facing Chinese people and the reasons for Chinese slow democratization process, some of them even showed their anger and dissatisfaction to the current human rights situation in China. Some members were also interested in contemporary issues about Sino-Japanese relationships, such as the sovereignty of the Diaoyutai Islands (In Japanese *Senkaku Shoto*). It seemed that instead of having a singular political orientation, members embrace a wide range of political views and they preserve the final rights to interpret these issues and choose their own political stances, as long as their actions do not affect the image of SG.

Improving International Relationships through Dialogues

Ikeda believes that improving international relationships is a key to world peace. He sees himself as a peace ambassador by promoting dialogue with political and cultural leaders all over the world. Particularly, he believes that Japan maintaining a good relation with the Chinese Government is beneficial to regional stability and prosperity. In fact, Ikeda has long enjoyed a high status in the Chinese political circle

where he met important politicians Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao in the past decades and is regarded as “an old friend of China”.⁶⁸ Following Ikeda’s path of peace, improving mutual understanding between the people of China and Japan has become one of the objectives of HKSGI. Being proximate to China, Hong Kong functions as a platform for Ikeda to develop friendships with influential cultural figures. In his trips to Hong Kong, Ikeda met Jin Yong (1995 and 1998), famous writer of Wuxia literature (fiction concerning the adventure of martial artists), and Jao Tsung I (1997), an expert in Chinese cultures and calligraphy, who exert influence on the Chinese community. Their dialogues with Ikeda were later published as two books: *Looking for a bright century* (1998) and *Journey to Culture and Art* (2009) in both traditional and simplified Chinese and sold in Hong Kong and Mainland. In these books, Ikeda, Jin and Jao compared Chinese and Japanese cultures, philosophies and literatures, as well as sharing their visions of peace, promoting the idea of peace by enhancing the mutual understanding between the two countries. Dialogue among lay members were also encouraged by giving young members the opportunity to visit schools in China. These cultural exchanges deepen their understanding of Chinese cultures and cultivate a sense of belonging to China. In short, HKSGI spread the idea of peace in the region of China

⁶⁸ Li Kam Kwan and Liu Yuk San, *Chitian Dazuo Yu Zhong Guo* (Ikeda Daisaku and China) (Macau: University of Macau, 2009), p.1.

through promoting dialogue at both the official (with the help of Chinese popular cultural figures) and grassroots levels (ordinary members exchange ideas with each other in short trips).

Objectives of Chanting More Oriented to Local Situations

In every HKSGI's cultural center, a large, eye-catching banner is hung on the wall of the lecture hall which states the five objectives of chanting. They are to pray for (1) the good health of Ikeda and his wife, (2) the success of *kosen-rufu* 広宣流布 (the spread of Buddhist teachings around the world), (3) the prosperity of Hong Kong society, (4) the success of the 50th anniversary of HKSGI, and (5) the breakdown of *Nikken-jyashu* 日顯邪宗 (Nikken evil sect, Nikken is the current head of Nichiren Shoshu in Japan). For number one, two and five, these objectives remind members that they should show their respect to President Ikeda and his wife, their devotion to promote SG teachings, as well as their dissatisfactions to Nikken, which are the general principles shared by all SGI members. On the other hand, objective three and four are more Hong Kong-oriented. In addition, SG members are not advised to have contact with Nichiren Shoshu believers. "The relation between Nichiren Shoshu in Hong Kong and HKSGI can best be described as we don't care

about them and they don't care about us".⁶⁹

De-politicization

While SG has been influencing the policy-making of Japan because it has close affiliation with the *Komeito*, the political color of SG in Hong Kong has been diluted remarkably in the localization process. The participation of SG in Japanese politics can be traced back to 1955 where it helped 53 candidates to win seats in some local elections. With the support from SG, three candidates were elected in the upper house in 1956 and an additional six in 1958. In 1961, it formed *Komei Seji Renmei* 公明政治連 (League for Clean Politics) and later renamed to *Komeito* in 1964. In 1998, it was renamed the *New Komeito* after restructuring.⁷⁰ Nowadays, SG still maintains significant political influence in Japan. In the article "Soka Gaikkai and Japanese Politics", Aruga found that over 3,000 Komeito's representatives working at various levels of government are members of SG.⁷¹ To examine SG's efforts in promoting

⁶⁹ Interview with Mr. K, 40 years old, dated 12 June 2010.

⁷⁰ In the 1965 general election, the *Komeito* succeeded in supporting all their 25 candidates to get elected. However, the *Komeito* officially separated from SG in May 1971 after the controversial "freedom of the press incident" in which the *Komeito* tried to obstruct Professor Fujiwara Hirotatsu (Meiji University) from publishing the book *Soka Gakkai wo Kiru* 創価学会を斬る (Critic of Soka Gakkai).

⁷¹ Aruga Hiroshi, "Soka Gakkai and Japanese Politics," in *Global Citizens: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World*, eds David Machacek and Bryan Wilson (New York : Oxford University Press, 2000), p.123.

pacifism, Timothy O. Benedict published an article in 2011 entitled “Inroads or Crossroads? The Soka Gakkai’s Pacifist Endeavours in Japanese Foreign Policy”. He found that although the changing international role of Japan to be a more assertive nation has made SG and the Komeito’s efforts on pacifism negligible, SG was “successful in pressuring the Komeito to be an advocate for their pacifist principles” on issues including nuclear disarmament, revision of Article 9 in the Japanese Constitution, and deployment of Japanese forces on United Nations missions.⁷² Contrary to the active participation of SG in Japanese politics, Hong Kong SG has been keeping a distance from politics. This tendency of de-politicizing itself is attributed to the fact that all overseas branches were instructed “not to intervene in local politics”.⁷³ “Our organization is not allowed to form political parties or engaged in any political activities. Because when compared to Japan SG, we have a rather short history and our organization is still immature in some ways. Involving ourselves in the local politics will harm our development” said Mr. U.⁷⁴ It seems that instead of reforming the society based on Buddhist teachings, expanding the membership has become the first priority of HKSGI.

⁷² Timothy O. Benedict, “Inroads or Crossroads? The Soka Gakkai’s Pacifist Endeavours in Japanese Foreign Policy,” in *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese studies* 2011. First published on 31 January 2011. <http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/discussionpapers/2011/Benedict.html>

⁷³ Interview with Mr. U, a senior SG member, 35 years old, dated 11 May 2010.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Localization of SG Concepts

Apart from the guiding principles and objectives of chanting, some important religious concepts were localized and re-interpreted with local flavors. First, the concept *ningen kakumei* 人間革命 (human revolution), which means that “the fundamental process of inner transformation whereby we break through the shackles of our "lesser self," bound by self-concern and the ego, growing in altruism toward a "greater self" capable of caring and taking action for the sake of others, ultimately all humanity”, is interpreted as a Confucian concept by the former Education Committee member of SG Mr. S.⁷⁵ He said “Confucianism suggests that human beings can achieve the status of “Saint” or “moral person” by his own effort. This way of thinking resonates with the core value of SG that everyone can become Buddha”.⁷⁶ Therefore, members may find it easier to understand and accept the concept of *ningen kakumei* with the help of Confucian ideas.

Secondly, in both private conversation and public speech, the expression *itai-doshin* 異体同心 was repeated. Literally meaning “different bodies, same soul”, it emphasizes the idea that different individuals could work together and create the desired outcome. The reason for emphasizing the idea of *itai-doshin* is to promote harmony within the organization. In fact, nearly all members liked to use the analogy

⁷⁵ Human Revolution, SGI Official Website, <http://www.sgi.org/hr.html>

⁷⁶ Interview with Mr. S, 60 years old, dated 10 December 2010.

“big family” to describe HKSGI. For example, the members often said in the sharing session that “my life has improved a lot after joining the SG big family” or “I feel very warm in this big family” etc. Miss W, one of the branch leaders, said in a meeting that SG was like a family and members are linked together spiritually. The “big family” analogy is actually another expression of *itai-doshin*. As Metraux put it, “SG has succeeded in Asia also because it provides members with a new extended family”.⁷⁷ They believe that all members should unite and work together for a better future of human beings. The idea of *itai-doshin* was even more emphasized in the time of crisis, such as the economic downturn in 1997, the spread of SARS in 2003, and 2009 to 2010 when financial crisis and political conflicts hit the Hong Kong society. It is believed that the promotion of this idea helps to maintain a stable and harmonious development of the organization.

4.3 Opportunities and challenges in localizing SG

So far, we have discussed how SG’s practices have localized in Hong Kong. We have also found that SG has adjusted its policies and philosophies in the localization process to suit the ‘appetites’ of local members. This section consists of two parts.

⁷⁷ Daniel Metraux, “The Expansion of SG into Southeast Asia” In *Global Citizens: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World*, eds David Machacek and Bryan Wilson (New York : Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.425.

Firstly, I discuss the elements that facilitate the localization process. Secondly, I study how SG fine-tuned its policies and philosophies to adapt to the local cultures.

First of all, the growth of HKSGI is facilitated by the fact that Hong Kong is a highly developed society. Hong Kong has a comparatively advanced political system, economic structure, and education system. They together laid the foundation for the steady development of SG in Hong Kong. For instance, a politically stable environment enables the organization to grow without being threatened by any parties. A growing economy provides financial resources to secure the operation and development of a religious group. A good education system cultivates quality people and future leaders for SG. Besides, HKSGI could adopt foreign elements and new ideas more easily based on the multiplicity and diversity of Hong Kong cultures. Hong Kong people are also good at efficiently modifying foreign cultures according to local needs. It may take much more time and effort to establish a SG branch in a less developed region such as Africa.

The localization of SG is facilitated by the branch leaders of various districts. The administrators, such as the president or vice-presidents, have more power in decision-making regarding important matters (guiding principles of the organization, donations, establishment of schools, culture festivals etc.). These people are often

seen as “powerful and busy” and distant from the general members.⁷⁸ One may also argue it reflects the hierarchical structure of SG which is a characteristic of Japanese culture.⁷⁹ The gap between administrators and general members may hinder the operation of the organization.⁸⁰ For instance, how are SG teachings can be transferred to the lower level? On the contrary, how do voices of the general members reach the upper level? Failure to handle this problem leads to managerial inefficiency and ineffectiveness, and even internal conflict and disharmony. A mediator who functions as the bridge between the two poles is necessary. In the case of HKSGI, they are the branch leaders who bridge ordinary members and the leadships.

Based on my observation, the branch leaders facilitate the localization of SG in two ways. Firstly, they shape the mindset of members. For the term “mindset”, I refer to their understanding of SG teachings and impression on SG. The branch

⁷⁸ Although the president may seem distant from the general members, the fact is that Ng occasionally participated in SG activities and shared his experience in the meetings. In May 2011, Ng had a very interactive conversation with young members in a training camp. He shared how he became a SG member and encouraged them to work hard and have a successful life. See *Lai Ming Newsletter* no.2154 (23rd May 2011), (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2011), p.2.

⁷⁹ Japanese organization has a strong sense of hierarchy, i.e. *kouhai* (juniors) have to respect their *senpai* (seniors). However, one may argue that this feature does not only exist in Japanese organizations.

⁸⁰ The gap between the administrative level and ordinary people are actually found in most organizations. For example, the pro-vice chancellor of a university is almost unreachable for students; a general staff in a company can hardly meet the CEO etc. Overcoming the challenges brought about by the communication gap is important for the operation or even the survival of an organization.

leaders are normally senior members who have a better understanding of SG teachings. Some of them have even taken Buddhist Studies examinations held by HKSGI which cover the *Lotus Sutra*, scriptures written by Nichiren, the life of Nichiren, the newsletter, and magazines of SG, as well as publications by Ikeda.⁸¹ Therefore, being the senior members in the organization, they are also regarded as more knowledgeable in SG teachings and more experienced in dealing with problems in life. The general members seek for guidance from branch leaders whenever they have questions or doubts about *Lotus Sutra*, Ikeda Daisaku's teachings or even personal matters. Miss W, one of the branch leaders of Yuen Long, is keen on answering questions by referring to the teachings of Nichiren, Ikeda, Toda and Makiguchi. "Ikeda has mentioned..." and "Nichiren Daishonin taught us..." are some of her favorite phrases. For example, she said "according to sensei's (Ikeda Daisaku) teaching, we will succeed only if we have enough confidence". Miss W believed that through quoting the "SG literatures", a more systematic understanding of SG teachings is gradually developed among members. However, the shortcoming is that a careless misinterpretation of SG teaching by a branch leader may spread easily within the branch. For example, a branch leader who emphasized the

⁸¹ For details about the exam, please refer to *Lai Ming Newsletter* no.2128 (8th Nov 2010) or "The content of Buddhist Studies examination held by HKSGI in 2008" in HKSGI Lai Ming Blog (<http://www.hksgi.org/lmblog/2008/01/02>)

benevolence of Nichiren, but failed to identify his exclusive nature, might have built a one-sided image of Nichiren among the members.

Apart from teachings, the branch leaders also help the general members to cultivate a positive impression on SG. It is positive because they somehow skip the controversies or the negative sides of SG in the education process. I found that the branch leaders were happy to discuss the peace-promoting nature of SG. For example, the story of the imprisonment of their first president Makiguchi because of his refusal to cooperate with the Japanese government during WWII, was repeated and repeated again to emphasize SG's stance of anti-militarism. Other stories such as Ikeda's proposal of the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in 1968 and his dialogues with famous cultural and political figures are also repeated regularly. Hostility towards SG as a result of Japan's misbehaviors in WWII is somehow reduced by these stories. The branch leaders were also eager to clarify the rumors of SG or Ikeda. For example, Mr. K responded carefully when asked about the seemingly huge financial asset of HKSGI. He said "every religious organization has its own assets. It is also true for the Christian organizations in Hong Kong to have much money and land. I wonder why people do not question their financial status but pick on us. Some of them are even richer".⁸² For other rumors, such as the relationship between SG

⁸² Interview with Mr. K, ethnic Chinese, senior SG members, 40 years old, dated 12 June 2010.

and the *komeito*, the dispute between Nichiren shoshu and SG, and Ikeda's private life, branch leaders patiently clarified them one by one. In a small meeting, Miss. W said it was their responsibility to tell the member the truths and help them understand the history of SG. Through this education process, some uncertainties and negative sentiment towards SG may be resolved. Secondly, the branch leaders help to maintain the cohesiveness of organization. The branch leaders, with the help of the branch committee members, are responsible for the co-ordination of branch-level gatherings and home visits. They remind members the date of the up-coming meetings, gather current information of members (mainly work and study) by making phone calls. Mr. L, a very active SG member confessed that "whenever there was a meeting, I became busy contacting members. Yet, I am used to this job already".⁸³ By these means, they build a relatively closer relationship with the general members. It is common for them to have lunch or dinner together before or after the gatherings as a way to cultivate positive human relationship and mutual understanding.

In the process of localization, HKSGI not only sees itself as a lay Buddhist organization that aims to bring about happiness to Hong Kong people, but it also emphasizes its educational and peace promoting nature through establishing

⁸³ Interview with Mr. L, 28 years old, ethnic Chinese, contact person of SG activities and member of the SG Orchestra, dated 3 December 2010.

educational institution and organizing various cultural activities. The steady growth in membership reflects that its localization policy is on the right track. However, HKSGI still has to overcome a few obstacles to strengthen its root in the local soil.

The ambiguous relationship between SG and Japanese politics had posed a negative effect on its development. The *Komeito* (Clean Government Party) was a Japanese political party established by Ikeda Daisaku in 1964. It claims itself as a party that aims to promote world peace through globalism, egalitarianism, and democratic government.⁸⁴ In 1967 and 1969, *Komeito* won twenty-five and forty-seven seats respectively out of around 500 total seats in the Diet. However, many Japanese people have learned a hard lesson in WWII the disastrous effect of the close affiliation of religion (State Shinto) and politics. So, the *Komeito* is criticized as violating the idea of separation of religion from politics (The Constitution of Japan, Article 20).⁸⁵ In fact, although few Hong Kong people (including members) realize the connection of SG and *Komeito*, some of them are worried about their delicate relation. In 2009, two donors, Dr. Lam Kin-chung and Dr. Ho Hau-wong decided to donate HK\$ 10 million to Shaw College, the Chinese

⁸⁴ Arvin Palmer, *Buddhist politics: Japan's Clean Government Party* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971), p.57.

⁸⁵ Tamaru Nariyoshi, "Soka Gakkai in Historical Perspective," in *Global Citizens: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World*, eds David Machacek and Bryan Wilson (New York : Oxford University Press, 2000), p.39.

University of Hong Kong. They wished to change the name of hostel from “Student Hostel II” to “Ikeda Daisaku Hostel” as one of the give-and-take conditions.⁸⁶ This act of “giving credits” to Ikeda Daisaku reveals the close relations between the donors and HKSUI. This incident aroused a controversy among students, teachers and alumni of CUHK, especially for those belonging to Shaw College.⁸⁷ The student union of Shaw College held an urgent meeting with students and professors. Prof. Joseph Sung Jao-Yiu, who is the Vice-Chancellor of CUHK and the former Dean of Shaw College, also attended the meeting. Students expressed their concerns about the incentives of the donors and the political nature of SG.⁸⁸ At the end, understanding the worries of students, the two donors and Shaw College agreed to name the High Block of Student Hostel II to be “Sun Yat-sen Hall”(孫逸仙樓) in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of Xinhai Revolution (辛亥革命) and the Common Room of Student Hostel II to, “Liao Zhong-kai International Student Exchange Centre” with

⁸⁶ In addition to donation, Dr. Lam also sponsored the publication of two books, *Ikeda Daisaku and China* (2009) and *Ikeda Daisaku and World Literature* (2010), revealing a strong relationships between the two parties.

⁸⁷ Sa Nam, *CU Student Press*, vol.3, March 2010 (Hong Kong: CU Student Press, 2010), p.25.

⁸⁸ In fact, similar incident happened when the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong was renamed Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine after businessman Mr. Li Ka Shing donated 10 billions. Renaming of facilities is a very common issue in universities. Students’ objections against particular renaming issues obviously reflect their special concerns (hegemony of the rich in the case of HKU and political concerns in the case of CUHK).

the aim of encouraging students to learn more about Chinese history.⁸⁹ According to a teacher working at City University of Hong Kong, SG's donation also drew opposition from students and teachers because they feared SG was a "cult". These examples indicate that SG's tie with politics and public misunderstandings of this organization may pose a negative effect on its development.

To conclude, SG philosophies have been localized to suit the social and political background of Hong Kong. In general, HKSGI regards these ideas as its guiding principles and promotes them through various cultural activities. However, some philosophies have become less applicable and significant in Hong Kong, such as the idea of anti-nuclear and human rights, due to the political status of Hong Kong and the non-intervention policy SG adopted. Instead, SG is more oriented to promote education and cultural exchanges in Hong Kong and China. In the foreseeable future, it is believed that HKSGI would continue to uphold these objectives, with particular emphasis on the area of education and cultural exchanges, which are the foundations of world peace.

⁸⁹ An email entitled "Naming of Shaw College Student Hostel II and its common room" was sent to all Shaw college students, staffs and alumni by Prof. Joseph Sung, the Head of Shaw College at that time on 21st April 2010 to announce the renaming issues.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Using HKSGI as a case study, this paper studies the localization of SG in Hong Kong. We reviewed the history of SG in Japan and overseas, knowing how an organization originated as an educational reform group in 1930 became a religion based on the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, and how it has expanded globally and influenced the world in the 21st century. Starting with only 15 members in 1961, the membership of HKSGI has reached 50,000 nowadays. Membership tends to shift from grassroots to more social elites and professionals who received higher education. While culturally and socially affecting our community, SG's practices and philosophies are also colored with local elements in the localization process. Attributed to the cultural and geographical proximity, Hong Kong also functioned as a window for SG to China.

This paper attempts to answer the following four important issues: (1) Why has SG successfully developed in Hong Kong, (2) what kind of influences has SG had in Hong Kong, (3) to what extent has SG been localized in terms of practices and teachings, and (4) what is the significance of Hong Kong to SG development in China. This part highlights the important findings and the significance of this research.

Why has SG successfully developed in Hong Kong?

The history of SG in Hong Kong can be traced back to the 1950s. Around 15 SG members joined the movement in Japan and came to Hong Kong independently at that time. These members practiced on their own because there was no formal organization to belong to. The first HKSGI meeting triggered by Ikeda's first visit to Hong Kong in January 1961 was a turning point for its future development. Encouraged by Ikeda, they decided to establish an overseas branch in Hong Kong and promote SG teachings to the local people, writing a new chapter of HKSGI in local history. In half a century, HKSGI has become an organization consisting of 50,000 members, which is more than its Asian counterparts. Members are becoming more educated compared to the past because this religious organization successfully attracted people from the upper social strata. The number of social elites, such as lawyers, doctors, professors, and accountants are also increasing. Considering the increase in membership size and average educational level of the organization, it is reasonable to say that HKSGI has successfully developed in Hong Kong society. This paper suggests that the four important factors have facilitated the localization of SG in Hong Kong: (1) an image of an organization that promotes education, culture and peace, (2) an image of a Buddhist organization, (3) a low-profile organization, and (4) cultural proximity between Japan and Hong Kong,

HKSGI portrays itself as an organization that promotes cultural activities, education and peace. Through the establishment of schools (Soka Kindergarten in HK, three primary schools on the Mainland), donations (to places affected by natural disasters, and promotion education in universities), and cultural activities (seminars, exhibitions and festivals), SG aims at building a more positive image for itself. In fact, some of the efforts and achievements of HKSGI have been recognized by the public. According to the *Quality Review Summary Report (Pre-primary Institutions)* conducted by Education Bureau in 2008, Soka Kindergarten was recognized as a kindergarten that provides quality education.¹ Three teachers from Soka Kindergarten received the Chief Executive's Award for Teaching Excellence in 2008.² It is also regarded as one of the best fifty kindergartens in Hong Kong by some education experts.³ Important guests, such as representatives from the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong, members of National People's Congress, and Executive Council member Lawrence J. Lau attended the banquet celebrating the 50th anniversary of HKSGI. Dr. Shi Zi-qing, vice-chairperson of the Education Committee of National People's Congress highly praised the

¹ The *Quality Review Summary Report (Pre-primary Institutions) on Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten*, can be retrieved from Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten official homepage,

http://www.soka.edu.hk/download_file.php?file=pdf/report_2007.pdf

² *Lai Ming Newsletter*. (no. 2139) (Hong Kong: HKSGI, 2011).

³ "School Hunting: Kindergarten Ranking", Education Info, http://www.hked.org/kg/pri_content.htm

educational and cultural influence of HKSGI, saying the organization is like “a spring in a cultural-desert”.⁴ It seems that HKSGI has successfully gained the recognition from the public. In addition, upholding the idea of peace and emphasizing its anti-militarism stance also helps reduce the anti-Japanese sentiment associated with WWII and the Japanese occupation.

Secondly, HKSGI appeals to the local people because the organization emphasizes its Buddhist nature and teachings. Hong Kong people are familiar with Buddhism because it is one of the most influential religions in Hong Kong. As a result of the secularization of Buddhism, Buddhist teachings have become part of Hong Kong culture and language system unconsciously. In everyday life, we speak of many Buddhist concepts, such as *karma*, the cycle of life and death, and “good will be rewarded with good, and evil with evil” etc. HKSGI realized the fact that Hong Kong people are familiar with Buddhism and embrace some of the teachings. Therefore, instead of emphasizing its specific Nichiren origin, it may be more effective to promote itself as a “general” Buddhist organization to earn public acceptance. Meetings targeting new members are called “Buddhist Teaching

⁴ Hong Kong is always criticized as a culture-desert because public policies tend to support economic development and care less about cultural development. See Ng Yee Man, “Xiang Gang Guo Ji Chuang Jia Xue Hui Ju Xing 50 Zhou Nian Qing Zhu Jiu Hui” (the cocktail party celebrating the 50th anniversary of HKSGI), Wenweipo, 1 February 2011, <http://paper.wenweipo.com/2011/02/01/zt1102010001.htm>

Seminars for New Friends”, with no indication of which sect it belongs to. Members introduced SG as a “Buddhist group” and only talked deeper about its Nichiren background if the conversation went smoothly. In the official website, magazines and newsletters, HKSGI describes itself as a “lay Buddhist organization” at the very beginning, and mentions its Nichiren origin in the later part. Therefore, we may say that HKSGI tends to portray itself as a general Buddhist group because being too specific about its Japanese origin may draw unfavorable feedback from the public.

Thirdly, HKSGI has adopted a low-profile policy in recruiting members. SG leaders have realized the negative consequences brought about by aggressive promulgation of new religious groups in the USA, as well as SG in Japan during the 1950s. Therefore, the practice of approaching strangers on the street and inviting them to meetings, which is known as *shakubuku*, has been abandoned by all SG branches, including Hong Kong. According to their recruitment practice, members promote SG teachings only if they have developed a close relationship with the person. It is to minimize any antagonistic feeling that may arise. They also seek for the most suitable timing and opportunity to introduce SG which is usually when the persons have difficulties in life and hope for spiritual support. Many people became SG members because they received support and encouragement from their SG friends or colleagues in difficult times. This approach does not lead to an exponential

rise in membership size, but it ensures a slow yet steady growth of the organization.

Last but not least, cultural proximity between Japan and Hong Kong has facilitated the development of SG in the Chinese community. The most significant similarity is the use of *kanji* (Chinese characters) in both language systems. Many Japanese religious concepts and vocabulary can be directly used and pronounced in the corresponding Cantonese phonetics. The huge number of Chinese characters in SG teachings, for example, *ningen-kakumei* 人間革命 (human revolution), *shukumei-tenkan* 宿命轉換 (changing one's fate), and *itai-doshin* 異体同心 (different body, same soul), reminds Hong Kong members that they are living in the same Sinosphere with the Japanese (or Chinese-character cultural sphere), sharing similar cultural backgrounds, philosophies, ethics, and living values. These similarities make Hong Kong people develop a sense of intimacy towards the Japanese religion.

What kind of influences has SG had in Hong Kong?

SG exerted its influences in Hong Kong society mainly in three areas: education, cultural activities, and religious support. In terms of education, SG has established its first overseas Soka Kindergarten in Hong Kong, and donated money, books, and accessories to various Hong Kong universities. Their continuous attempts to set up

primary and secondary schools in both Hong Kong and China also reflect the organization's intention to expand its educational influence beyond the border. Some members felt optimistic that the organization would exert greater influences to Hong Kong society through promoting its "value-creation" education.

SG has promoted its philosophy through various cultural activities, such as exhibitions, seminars, and festivals, increasing the public awareness towards world peace and environmental protection. Although HKSGI has adopted a rather low profile policy in member recruitment, the religious organization has not hesitated to promote itself in social or semi-political events. For example, the Buddhist group sent representatives to participate in some important events organized by the local government, which includes the parade celebrating Queen Elizabeth's visit to Hong Kong in 1975, the repatriation of Hong Kong to China in July 1997, and the celebration of the transport 2008 Olympic torch, reflecting the organization's increasing popularity in Hong Kong society and its good relationship with the Hong Kong Government.

In religious aspect, many members found that their lives have improved after joining SG, indicating this religion has been providing spiritual supports to some Hong Kong people, though there are people who quitted the organization because they are not satisfied. Members are taught to be optimistic, energetic and responsible

based on the idea of individual empowerment in SG teachings; these attributes may exert a positive influence on Hong Kong society. The Hong Kong Buddhist Association, which plays a bridging role to facilitate communication between Buddhist groups and the Hong Kong governments, also recognized the effort of HKSGI in promoting world peace and Buddhist teachings in Hong Kong.⁵

Obviously, HKSGI has maintained a harmonic relationship with the Mainland and Hong Kong government. For instance, the Chinese government sent representatives to attend the 50th anniversary of HKSGI, and the Hong Kong government has invited the organization to participate in various semi-political functions. However, it is rather difficult to examine the organization's influence in Hong Kong politics. It is because while Japan SG has a delicate relationship with the *Komeito* and has exerted political influence through the party, SG's relation to Hong Kong politics is rather unclear. Due to their low-profile policy, HKSGI seldom reveal its stance on political issues. While other religious group, for examples, leaders of Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong and Po Ling Monastery occasionally commented on government policies and social problems, the leaders of HKSGI never did so.⁶ It is also unknown to the public that how many government officials,

⁵ Ng Yee Man, "Xiang Gang Guo Ji Chuang Jia Xue Hui Ju Xing 50 Zhou Nian Qing Zhu Jiu Hui" (the cocktail party celebrating the 50th anniversary of HKSGI), Wenweipo, 1 February 2011, <http://paper.wenweipo.com/2011/02/01/zt1102010001.htm>

⁶ His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun is considered as one of the most controversial religious

bureaucrats or politicians are actually SG members. Therefore, the exact influence of SG teachings in the local politics, if there is any, requires further study. However, if HKSGI wants to realize Buddhist ideal of equality and fight against the oppression of the underprivileged (the poor, racial and ethnic minorities, etc), their leaders and members may have to be more active in political and social activities and take a stronger stand against human-rights violation and social inequality found in Hong Kong, the Mainland China, and the rest of the world.

To what extent has SG been localized in terms of practice and teachings?

The localization of SG's philosophy is largely hindered by the ambiguous political status of Hong Kong. In principle, HKSGI supports all the guiding principles of SGI which are anti-war, anti-nuclear weapon, promotion of environment protection, humanitarian aid, human rights, education, cultural activities, and improving international relationship. However, HKSGI found it difficult to implement some principles in Hong Kong because it is a Special Administrative Region of China which lacks the authority to adjust its own diplomatic and military policies. Urging the Hong Kong government to respond to their "peace proposal" or "disarmament proposal" is not very practical in achieving world peace. Therefore,

leader that has the courage to speak his mind. He said in an interview that "I speaks from the perspectives of human rights and ethics, but not politics" (*U-Beat Magazine* vol.55).

HKSGI relies on education and cultural activities as well as the power of chanting to promote these ideologies in Hong Kong. In this regard, SG in Japan differs from Hong Kong significantly because it implements SG philosophies in Japanese society and affects Japanese foreign policy with its political power (*Komeito*). HKSGI chose not to intervene with the local political environment because of Ikeda's de-politicization policy. However, Mr. U, a senior SG member, suggested that in the long term, it may be possible for HKSGI to step into the Hong Kong political arena once it has become "mature enough".⁷

Hong Kong member practices SG teachings differently from their Japanese counterparts in terms of language, location, and format. In HKSGI, Cantonese is the primary language, while English and Japanese are used in specific branches by foreigners. Publications, such as magazines (*New Century Magazine*), newsletter (*Lai Ming Newsletter*), and the handbook for chanting (*Daily Practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin*), are released in both traditional Chinese and English versions. Handbooks marked with Teochew phonetic symbols are also available in Hong Kong, indicating a certain amount of members are Teochew speakers. Official publications written in Japanese or English by the SGI headquarters are also sold in Hong Kong to satisfy the needs of different members. In

⁷ Interview with Mr. U, 35 years old, dated 11 May 2010.

Japan, *gongyo* (chanting) and meetings are mostly conducted at members' homes, while in Hong Kong most gatherings are conducted at cultural centers due to the relatively smaller living area. Besides, gatherings (including *gongyo* and seminars) are conducted in a relaxing atmosphere with babies crying, kids running around, and members talking on phones. Members are also allowed to come in and get out the meeting room freely. Similar scenes hardly happen in Japan as they are more concerned about punctuality, formality (stick to procedures and rules), and sensitive to noise. No wonder Mr. I, a Japanese SG member who is now working in Hong Kong, said "SG meetings in Japan are *kibishii* (serious) while Hong Kong are *raku* (relaxing)".⁸ Besides, local elements are also incorporated into SG practices. For examples, Cantonese songs are used as teaching materials; local festivals (Chinese Lunar New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival etc) are used to increase members' attendance and local pop stars were invited to perform in Cultural festivals 2011 etc.

In terms of rituals, SG members conduct their wedding ceremony or funeral in their own fashion. Intense chanting of *nam-myoho-renge-kyo* signifies the characteristics of the two ceremonies. If the members request for it, wedding ceremonies and funerals can be held in SG cultural centers in SG style.. In reality, not all members stick to SG ceremonies. In some cases, members chose to conduct

⁸ Ist Interview with Mr. I, 34 years old, dated 12 December 2009.

their family members' funerals in both traditional styles (mostly Taoist or Buddhist) and SG fashion in order to avoid antagonistic feelings from other relatives who are non-SG members. The idea of incorporating two religious elements into one single ritual may be controversial in some sense, since it challenges the exclusive nature of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. On the other hand, it indicates that SG is highly tolerant to local cultures.

What is the significance of Hong Kong to SG development in China?

Since the 1960s, Ikeda Daisaku has emphasized the importance of mutual understanding between China and Japan. After the Cultural Revolution, he urged for the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in the midst of anti-Chinese sentiment in the world. He has visited China ten times and had meetings with important political leaders, such as Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Hu Jintao, and Wen Jiabao. Even though SG has been developing a friendly relationship with China, its legal status as a religious organization is still not yet recognized.⁹ For this reason, the role of Hong Kong as a window is significant to the development of SG in China.

Hong Kong, being proximate to China geographically and culturally, is considered by Ikeda as a stepping stone to China. Hong Kong shared similar

⁹ "Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination" (Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China)

traditions and cultures with Mainland China. Transportation between Hong Kong and China is also very convenient. In fact, Ikeda has made twenty official visits to Hong Kong since the 1960s. In 1974, he made a transit in Hong Kong to China because there was no direct airline from Japan to China at that time, and he could also gather important information from HKSGI members because they were more familiar with the situations on the Mainland.

Ikeda met important Hong Kong political and cultural figures such as Hong Kong Governor Crawford Murray MacLehose in 1979, ex-member of the Legislative Council and Executive Council Chung Sze-Yuen in 1983, Jin Yong in 1995 and 1998, Jao Tsung I in 1997, and Fang Zaoling in 2000. Some cultural figures Ikeda has met, such as Jin Yong and Jao Tsung I, are reputed on the Mainland. Ikeda can further promote himself to the Chinese community with the help of these famous figures. Therefore, Hong Kong acted as an important platform for Ikeda to meet and develop friendship with these famous Chinese cultural figures.

HKSGI has adopted different kinds of strategies to help create a positive image of SG in China. First of all, SG portrays itself as an organization that promotes education by establishing schools in China through the establishment of two primary schools, Phoenix Fang Zhaoling Soka Primary School and Chaoshan Soka Friendship Primary School. Secondly, HKSGI promotes Ikeda and SG in China

through the Hong Kong media, the *Bauhinia Magazine*. Articles of Ikeda are published frequently in this magazine which shares his ideas about Sino-Japanese friendships and world peace; the magazines are distributed to major cities of the Mainland China. Finally, frequent cultural exchange between China and Hong Kong enables Chinese exchange students, visitors or businessmen to know more about SG in Hong Kong, and the people may help spread SG teachings when they return to China.

While Japanese Studies scholars have frequently utilized popular culture, Japanese economic power and technologies as examples of Japanese soft power and influence in the global community, the study of Japanese religions in this area is less pronounced. In fact, the internationalization of SG is a broad and challenging, yet interesting and significant topic. The fact that overseas branches may develop very differently from each other due to the diverse social and cultural settings of the local communities poses challenges to SG scholars. However, it is also the cultural diversity that interests and draws the attraction of so many scholars to explore into this globalizing religion. Through the studies of the SG movement, one may also be surprised to find that people of different traditions, cultures, languages, colors, political backgrounds, occupations, ages etc. are brought together and interconnected by this religion. As Wilson and Machacek put it:

There is much to be learned from this examination of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement, but there is one lesson that stands out: the blurring of religious, ethnic, and national boundaries necessitates the development of new ways of thinking about ourselves in relation to others.¹⁰

This research shows that SG has localized in Hong Kong quite successfully in terms of its steady growth in membership and various contributions to the Chinese communities. But we should not forget that SG development in Hong Kong is still subject to local and global challenges, such as Sino-Japanese relations, cold perception of Japanese religion from the general public, and connection with the political party, *Komeito*, in Japan. In addition, it appears to me that HKSGI is facing another new challenge (or opportunity) recently. Near the end of my research, the discussion over the reformation of HKSGI branch system was very popular. While the current system classifies members into different district headquarters based on ethnicity and language ability, the new system concerns more about the residence of member. For example, English-speaking members who used to attend activities held by Headquarter No.10 regardless of the places they live, will instead go to their nearest cultural centers under the new system. In other words, instead of dividing

¹⁰ David Machacek and Bryan Wilson, *Global citizens: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the world* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.9.

members into three language groups (Cantonese, English and Japanese), the new system encourages members living in the same district to group together regardless of their ethnicities. Ng Cho Yuk, the president of HKSGI, believed that the new system is for the benefit and convenience of members because it reduces the time spent on transportation. The new system may also allow local branches to have higher autonomy in organizing activities and promoting SG teachings, which may also indicate an increasing level of localization of SG in Hong Kong. However, negative feedbacks has arisen from some members. Mr. I, who is Japanese, worried that non-Cantonese speakers like him may find it difficult to adapt to a new environment and may result in the marginalization of those foreign members who are less adaptable in terms of language ability. He was also concerned about the possibility of cultural conflicts arising. Whether this worry may come true still needs more time to prove, but it is important for SG to take their concerns and uncertainties seriously and implement corresponding measures to relieve their worries or even to revise the new policy. If it is not dealt with properly, it may pose negative impact on the future development of HKSGI.

Appendix 1: Cultural Seminars Organized by HKSGI

2009-04	Professor Lawrence J. Lau – Impact of Financial Crisis on Economies of China and Hong Kong
2009-02	Mr. Liu Wei Zhong – Reform, Opening up and Social Changes of China
2008-10	Mr. Tang Hoi Chiu – Heritage of Culture – Positioning of HK and Museum of Art
2008-04	Professor Lee Cheuk Fan – “Science and Buddhism”
	Chancellor Cheng Biao – “Kejia Culture”
2007-10	Prof. Shuai Min Feng - “Comparison between Japan and China Arts and Culture”
2007-09	Mr. Wong Lun Cheong - “Planting Good Causes ? Or Bad Causes ?”
2007-05	Dr. Chan Man Hon – “Grown up and Growing up – the Role of a Mother”
2006-12	Mr. Zhang Jian Bo - Media
2006-11	Dr. Kawada Youichi “Can Destiny be Changed?”
2006-05	Mr. Kwong Ngai – “My 50 years in Performing Industry”
2005-10	Ms. Suzanna Cheung Chuiyung – “Discussing the Path of Peace from Culture, Economics and Education Perspectives”
2005-10	Mr. Yang Ruisheng – “Couplet is fun”
2005-04	Ms. Chow Mimi – “Happiness and Joy of Reading”
2004-09	Mr. Wong Bing Gan – “Friendship of Bing Xin and Mr. Ikeda”
2004-08	Dr. Rebecca Lee – “The Three Poles Declaration and Us”
2004-05	Dr. Sun LiChuan - “Daisaku Ikeda and Sino-Japanese Culture and Education”
	Mr. Cen Yifei – Daisaku Ikeda’s Peace Philosophy and World Status Quo
	Prof. Cai Delin – Sino-Japanese Friendship and “Ikeda Proposal”
2004-04	Ms. Mabel Mak – Green Wisdom
2003-08	Mr. Yoshida Minoru – The Courageous Proposal
2002-05	Prof. Li Zehou – Let’s Talk about Art
2002-03	Prof. Cai Delin – “ The Historial Monument – Looking back Mr. Ikeda’s Contribution to Actualize Normalization of Sino-Japanese

	relationship”
2001-09	Mr. Cen Yifei – “Human and Nature”
2001-07	Prof. Liang Guiquan – History and Choice of Guangdong Province Modernization
2001-06	Prof. Cheng Yat Shu – My First Investigation of Soka Pedagogy
2001-03	Dr. Rebecca Li – North South Poles and Us
2000-10	Prof. Liu ZaiFu – Enlightenment in 20th Century China Three Great Cultural Awareness
2000-05	Mr. Liu Ousheng - Research in Shi Wan china
2000-04	Dr. Sun Lichuan - Dialogue with a Century of Chinese Literature — Daisaku Ikeda and LuXun, Bajin and Jinrong
1999-10	Prof. Ho Shihche - DunHuang and Lotus Sutra
1999-09	Dr. Luk Chiu Hong Guan - Prime Education and Growth
1999-03	Prof. Chang ZongHao - Chinese Art and Humanism
1998-11	Chancellor Hou ZiXin - Premier Zhou EnLai and NanKai University
1998-09	Mr. Tan Baoshuo - Dong Xiao and Life
1998-08	Prof. Cai Delin - Significance of Religious Culture and Oriental Religious Reformation in 20th Century
1998-01	Dr. Fang Zaoling - Painting and Calligraphy Exhibition
1997-09	Dr. Zha Liangyong - Discussion on Chinese Culture and Religion
1997-04	Prof. Jiang ZhongXin - 21st century and Lotus Sutra
1996-09	Prof. Su DongTian - 21st Century and Buddhism – Mr. Ikeda’s Buddhist Philosophy and 21st Century Literature
1996-04	Dr. Chow Siu Cheung - It’s Never Too Late and the Green Living
1995-09	Dr. Leung Ting Pong - City Life and Cultural Arts
1995-04	Mr. Wai Gei-Shun - Discussion in “Religious Role in the Changing Society”
1994-09	Mr. Lin JianTong - Sino-Japan Art and Cultural Exchange
1994-04	Prof. Chen Charnie - Physiology, Health and Family Perceptions
1993-11	Chancellor S.S. Hsueh - Contemporary Society and Culture

Source: Seminars of HKSGI, Official home page of HKSGI,
<http://www.hksgi.org/cht/culture/seminar/>

Appendix 2: Exhibition Organized by HKSGI

2009-03	Warning on Global Warming – Photo Exhibition of North Pole, South Pole and Mt. Everest
2009-02	From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit
2008-12	Warning on Global Warming – Photo Exhibition of North Pole, South Pole and Mt. Everest
2008-10	Warning on Global Warming – Photo Exhibition of North Pole, South Pole and Mt. Everest
2008-06	Guilin College Teacher Art Exhibition
2007-06	Zhejiang Province Chinese Painting Exhibition
2007-02	Who is LuXun Exhibition
2006-11 2007-03	to Lotus Sutra Peace and Coexistence Exhibition
2006-06	Heart of Spring – Xu Dong Tian Chinese Painting Exhibition
2005-06	Lai Ming, Wong Wing Yin Art Exhibition
2004-10	Rendezvous with Nature — Daisaku Ikeda Photo Exhibition
2002-07	Rao Zong Yi Calligraphy and Painting Exhibition
2001-05	Chang Zong Hao, Li Xiao Ming Calligraphy and Painting Exhibition
2000-05	Water Margin Models Art Exhibition
1999-06	Fang Shao Lin Calligraphy and Painting Exhibition
1998-02	World Children Painting Exhibition
1997-10	Tokyo Fuji Art Museum Western Painting Exhibition
1994-02	Tokyo Fuji Art Museum Japan Art and Treasures Exhibition
1993-05	Rendezvous with Nature III - Daisaku Ikeda Photo Exhibition
1992-02	World Children Story Books Collection and Works of Daisaku Ikeda, Brian Wildsmith Joint Exhibition
1991-02	World Children Painting Exhibition
1990-09	Rendezvous with Nature II - Daisaku Ikeda Photo Exhibition
1988-07	Rendezvous with Nature I - Daisaku Ikeda Photo Exhibition

Source: Exhibitions of HKSGI, <http://www.hksgi.org/cht/culture/exhibition/>

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for Non-Member

有關創價學會問卷調查(非會員用)

你好。本人是中文大學日本研究學系研究生，現正從事有關創價學會在香港本地化的研究。希望閣下能抽空填寫此問卷。所有資料只作研究之用途。

性別：_____ 年齡：_____ 學歷：_____

1. 你有沒有聽過創價學會？ 有 沒有
如有，透過哪一個途徑？ 家人
朋友
傳媒(如報章、電視等)
學會活動(如展覽、講座等)
曾親身目睹該學會的建築物
其他(請列明)：_____
2. 你認為創價學會是個甚麼機構？
教育機構 商業機構 宗教團體 民間智庫 政黨 其他(請列明)：_____
3. 你是否知道創價學會是日本的宗教？ 知道 不知道
4. 創價學會的日本背景會令你心理上產生抗拒嗎？ 有 沒有
5. 你有沒有聽過創價幼稚園或者創價大學？
有，並十分了解 有，但不太了解 沒有
6. 你有沒有聽過池田大作這個人？ 有 沒有
7. 你認為創價學會對香港社會的影響如何？ 大 一般 小 不知道
8. 你認為創價學會對世界的影響如何？ 大 一般 小 不知道
9. 在你的親友之中，有沒有創價學會的成員？ 有 沒有
10. 你對創價學會的教義可有理解？ 有 沒有
11. 你對創價學會的整體印象如何？ 正面 中性 負面

全卷完

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for Members

有關創價學會問卷調查(會員用)

你好。本人是中文大學日本研究學系碩士研究生，現正進行有關創價學會在香港本地化的研究。希望閣下能抽空填寫此問卷。所有資料只作研究之用途。

性別：_____ 出生年份：_____ 支部：_____

1. 你第一次聽到創價學會是甚麼時候？_____年
2. 你甚麼時候入信？_____年
3. 你透過哪一個途徑加入創價學會？
家人 朋友 同事 參加展覽或講座 閱讀學會刊物
4. 你加入創價學會的最大原因是甚麼？
教義吸引 受親友影響 生活上遇到困難(如工作、學業、愛情等)
新鮮感 對日本文化(如動漫、飲食、旅遊等)感興趣 其他(請列明)：_____
5. 在加入創價學會前，你有宗教信仰嗎？ 有，該宗教是：_____ 沒有
6. 加入創價學會後你的生活改變了嗎？ 沒有 有，變好了 有，變差了
7. 加入創價學會後，來自家人或朋友的一些反應是？ 正面 中立 負面
8. 你有向親友介紹創價學會嗎？ 經常 間中 甚少 從沒
9. 你每天花多少時間唱題？ 少於 10 分鐘 10 至 30 分鐘 多於 30 分鐘
10. 你每星期花多少時間閱讀《黎明聖報》和《新世紀月刊》？
少於 1 小時 1 至 3 小時 4 至 10 小時 多於 10 小時
11. 你每星期花多少時間參與創價學會活動(包括開會、佛法講座、以及文化本部的練習)？
少於 1 小時 1 至 3 小時 4 至 10 小時 多於 10 小時
12. 你對學會的哪些活動最感興趣？

祈求世界和平大會 新朋友佛法講座 青年佛法講座 展覽活動
 文化講座 文化支部活動(如合唱團、舞蹈隊等) 其他(請列明): _____

13. 你在參與創價學會活動時(如唱題和開會等),有遇到下列困難嗎?(可以不選或選多於一項)

語言障礙 會場的交通不便 難以遷就活動時間 活動太頻繁
 教義深奧難明 教內階級觀念嚴重 其他(請列明): _____

14. 你對學會的管理層感滿意嗎? 滿意 一般 不滿意

15. 你認為創價學會對香港社會的影響如何? 大 一般 小 不知道

16. 你認為創價學會對世界的影響如何? 大 一般 小 不知道

17. 你認為香港創價學會和日本創價學會的關係如何? 良好 一般 疏遠

18. 你認為香港創價學會和中國的關係如何? 良好 一般 疏遠

19. 你認為香港社會對創價學會的印象如何? 正面 中立 負面

20. 你對下列事項有甚麼看法?

墮胎	<input type="checkbox"/> 支持	<input type="checkbox"/> 中立	<input type="checkbox"/> 反對
婚前性行爲	<input type="checkbox"/> 支持	<input type="checkbox"/> 中立	<input type="checkbox"/> 反對
同性戀	<input type="checkbox"/> 支持	<input type="checkbox"/> 中立	<input type="checkbox"/> 反對
民主	<input type="checkbox"/> 支持	<input type="checkbox"/> 中立	<input type="checkbox"/> 反對
普選	<input type="checkbox"/> 支持	<input type="checkbox"/> 中立	<input type="checkbox"/> 反對
香港政府	<input type="checkbox"/> 支持	<input type="checkbox"/> 中立	<input type="checkbox"/> 反對
中國共產黨	<input type="checkbox"/> 支持	<input type="checkbox"/> 中立	<input type="checkbox"/> 反對

全卷完

Appendix 5: Sample Interview Questions for Members

1. 甚麼時候入信？
2. 入信的最大原因是？
3. 入信後有甚麼改變？
4. 你對香港創價學會有甚麼看法？
5. 你對池田大作有甚麼看法？
6. 你認為香港創價學會對創價學會的發展有甚麼影響？為甚麼？
7. 你認為香港創價學會的社區服務足夠嗎？為甚麼？
8. 你認為香港創價學會和日本的本部或其他支部甚麼相同或不同之處？
9. 你認為香港創價學會對香港社會帶來甚麼影響？
10. 你知道有關創價學會或池田大作的一些負面報導嗎？有甚麼看法？
11. 你對香港創價學會的組織架構有甚麼看法？
12. 你對香港創價學會舉辦的活動有甚麼看法？
13. 你對香港創價學會的男女分工有甚麼看法？
14. 你知道香港創價學會的財政狀況嗎？
15. 你對香港創價學會未來的發展有甚麼看法？

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