

SOKA GAKKAI AND THE KOMEITO

BUDDHISM AND POLITICAL POWER IN JAPAN

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The phenomenal growth of Nichiren Shōshū Sōka Gakkai, the “Value Creation Society of the Nichiren Shōshū School of Buddhism,” and its political arm, the Kōmeitō or “Clean Government Party,” has made them the controversial center of attention inside and outside the Japanese political scene. The Kōmeitō is currently the third most powerful political party in Japan, after the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the Socialist Party, it is fast replacing the Socialist Party in influence and importance both on the national and local levels of government. *Look Magazine* first introduced Sōka Gakkai to the United States in 1963 as “an alarming new religion that wants to conquer the world,” and noted that “by respected detractors, the new faith is variously labeled as ‘militaristic,’ ‘fascistic,’ ‘ultranationalist and dangerous.’”¹ In May 1964 *Time Magazine* stated, “The movement mixes the evangelism of Moral Rearmament and the get-out-the-vote discipline of the Communist Party and lots of show biz.”² In the same year Arthur Koestler noted that Sōka

1. *Look Magazine*, September 10, 1963, pp. 15-26.

2. *Time Magazine*, May 22, 1964, p. 42.

Gakkai's tightly knit groups controlled by local block leaders are similar to the Nazi *Blockwarts*.³

The widespread uneasiness about Sōka Gakkai in Japan is not especially caused by its political goals as expressed through the Kōmeitō, which are rather vague and undefined. Nor do the political accomplishments of the Kōmeitō on both the national and local levels of government alarm very many Japanese. As we shall see, in spite of its rather unclear political ideology, the Kōmeitō has been the champion of much needed political and social reform. As such, they have been able to gather popular support from both members and non-members of Sōka Gakkai. What worries the Japanese is the Kōmeitō's connection with a specifically religious organization, for this seems to be a direct violation of Article 20 of the current Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of religion and the total separation of religious and political bodies.⁴ Thus many Japanese are afraid that Sōka Gakkai aims to impose Nichiren Shōshū upon them as a "state religion," which in turn might create a situation similar to the establishment of Shintō as the "state philosophy" (*kokka shintō*) in Japan's pre-war and World War Two days when there was neither freedom of religion nor political freedom.⁵

3. *Life Magazine*, September 11, 1964, pp. 73-74.

4. Article 20 reads: "Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite, or practice. The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity."

5. Rev. Ōishi Shūten, the Executive Director of "The Union of New Religious Organizations" (*Shinshūren*), stated to me in a personal interview in Tokyo on November 14, 1968, that one of the present activities of the *Shinshūren* is active opposition against Sōka Gakkai. His criticism was that Sōka Gakkai is a "bad mixture" of religion and politics, and if the Kōmeitō ever

We shall have occasion to evaluate Sōka Gakkai's response to these charges in what shall follow. The thesis of this paper is that "faith" is understood in present day Sōka Gakkai religious doctrine primarily in terms of political power. In other words, the "fruit" of correct faith is the acquisition of political power, which is considered necessary in order to accomplish the goal of *kōsen-rufu*, the world-wide conversion of all people to teachings of Nichiren, the twelfth-century founder of the Nichiren Buddhist tradition. Only when Sōka Gakkai is in control of the political process will "salvation come to all people" and a peaceful and "happy" society be established.⁶ To demonstrate this it is necessary to briefly discuss the history of the Kōmeitō, its doctrinal foundation, and its specific political goals and activities.

Historical background. Under the direction of the Second

became the majority party in the National Diet all religious freedom would disappear in Japan. He drew this conclusion, even though he did not think that the Kōmeitō could ever control the Diet, because of his belief that Sōka Gakkai is "intolerant and fascist." Most of the criticisms of Sōka Gakkai's political activities follow this line of thought. Similar charges have been made by non-Japanese observers. For example, Noah Brannen's conclusions regarding Sōka Gakkai's entry into politics are very similar to Rev. Ōishi's. Cf. Noah Brannen, *Sōka Gakkai* (Richmond: John Knox Press), pp. 427-131.

6. This was the main topic of discussion in a recorded interview I did with Mr. Akiyama Tomiya, the Vice Director and Chief of the Foreign Affairs Bureau of Sōka Gakkai at the Tokyo headquarters on December 20, 1968. It is also the main thrust of current Sōka Gakkai publications. Specifically religious concerns are defined in terms of the political ideology of the Kōmeitō. It is as if religious values had been transformed into purely political values. The point is not that politics and religion do not have profound connections. The point is that Sōka Gakkai appears to be transforming "religious faith" into specifically secular political values. Both within Sōka Gakkai and the Kōmeitō, political activism and ideology have become a means of evangelism, while at the same time religious faith has become a means of gaining political power. Faith and political power are so intimately related that it is quite difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins.

President, Toda Jōsei, Sōka Gakkai organized a political department called *Kōmei Seiji Remmei* (usually abbreviated *Kōseiren*), "Fair Politics Federation," and in the local elections of 1955 sponsored and elected to office fifty-three candidates. In the national elections of the following year, three Kōseiren candidates, who polled about one million votes, were elected to the House of Councillors, the Upper House of the National Diet. It was these election victories, coupled with rather reckless campaign methods, that led to the arrest of over one hundred Sōka Gakkai's believers on charges of violating national election laws.

In 1959, Sōka Gakkai ran six more candidates for the Upper House and elected them all, bringing their representation in this body up to nine. In 1962, when the three original Councillors plus six new candidates waged successful campaigns, Sōka Gakkai representation became the third largest in the Upper House with a total of fifteen seats. At this time, the political goals of Sōka Gakkai were unclear, and the Kōseiren was not a legally recognized political party. In light of this, Sōka Gakkai members of the Upper House organized themselves into the *Kōmeikai* ("Fair Politics Association") in order to obtain a base for negotiating with other political parties represented in the Diet. Also at this time, Sōka Gakkai dietmen

7. It was reported that Sōka Gakkai campaign workers had engaged in illegal door to door canvassing. Apparently, their methods ranged from rational argument to physical and verbal abuse. Some workers even threatened damnation to those who could not be persuaded to vote for Sōka Gakkai candidates. Cf. *The Mainichi Shimbun*, June 16, 1957. President Ikeda has recently, but indirectly, acknowledged these election violations in a speech delivered at the Thirty-third General Meeting of Nichiren Shōshū on May 3, 1970. The speech is entitled "Great Cultural Movement from Materialistic to Humanistic Society," *Seikyō Times*, June 1970.

tended to favor the politics of the Liberal Democratic Party. All the while Sōka Gakkai officially denied any real political ambitions. It was stated that their member's presence in the Upper House was merely symbolic, and that there were no plans to elect members to the House of Representatives or to form a regular political party.⁸ The major activity of the Kōmeikai during this period was to play a muck rakers role by calling much needed attention to graft and corruption on all levels of government while at the same time lionizing their own representatives as the only politicians interested in the welfare of the people.

On May 3, 1964, a major turning point in Sōka Gakkai political activities was reached when President Ikeda announced:

The mission of the Political Department is to send many men—men who have ability, high character, and merciful interest in saving people—into the political world. Only when this is done can we see the establishment of a happy society.... But we are not a political party. We will send people to the House of Councillors and the local legislatures—the areas which have no political color.⁹

Along with this announcement to directly sponsor Sōka Gakkai candidates in the next Upper House election, Ikeda also indicated that a new political party was to be formed so as to not “directly involve” Sōka Gakkai in politics. On November 17 of this year the Kōmeitō was established. Technically, the party is separate from Sōka Gakkai. However, while membership in the party is not limited to Sōka Gakkai believers,

8. Cf. H. Neill McFarland, *The Rush Hour of the Gods* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967), p. 215.

9. Quoted by Murata Kiyooki, *Japan's New Buddhism: An Objective Account of Sōka Gakkai* (Tokyo: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1969), p. 164.

no real effort is made to cover up the fact that the two organizations are interlocking agencies and that all Kōmeitō candidates are members of Sōka Gakkai.¹⁰ Not only is Sōka Gakkai the sponsor of the Kōmeitō, the leaders of Sōka Gakkai determine its specific policies.¹¹ It is also true that the base of support for the party is mainly the membership of Sōka Gakkai.¹²

The Kōmeitō had its first chance to show what it could do in winning elections in 1965. In the national elections of this year the Kōmeitō increased its membership in the Upper House to twenty. In the local Tokyo elections the party made important gains in the Metropolitan Assembly, mainly because of public disclosure of extensive scandals among incumbent office holders. In this election, neither the Liberal Democrats nor the Socialists were able to gain a clear-cut majority. Thus, the Kōmeitō was left with the balance of power in this important

10. Cf. Ikeda Daisaku, *The Complete Works of Ikeda Daisaku*, I (Tokyo: The Seikyō Press, 1963), pp. 195 ff.
11. However, the party was reorganized in 1970, at which time the leaders of the Kōmeitō resigned from the Executive Board of Sōka Gakkai. It was also announced that all Kōmeitō dietmen in the Upper House would resign from their executive posts in Sōka Gakkai. This was done in order to separate the political organization from the religious organization in response to popular criticism centering around Article 20 of the Constitution. Officially, at least, the Kōmeitō has no corporate connection with Sōka Gakkai, although Sōka Gakkai is still considered to be the "parent organization." Sōka Gakkai also determines who will run for political office on the Kōmeitō ticket and what the platform of the party will be. See *Kōmei Shimbun*, January 6, 1970.
12. For the Kōmeitō's statistics on past elections, see the *Proceedings of the Eighth National Convention*, January 25, 1970, pp. 35-37. It should be noted that most of the supporters of Sōka Gakkai are women whose ages range from twenty to forty, with a few over fifty. For the most part, the average educational level of believers is that of junior high school, and most are engaged in some form of manual labor. For a more complete sociological study of Japanese members of Sōka Gakkai see James Allen Dator, *Sōka Gakkai: Builders of the Third Civilization* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), pp. 59-105.

body.

In the national elections of January 29, 1967, twenty-five Kōmeitō candidates out of a total of thirty-two won seats in the House of Representatives. This was the first time the Kōmeitō ran candidates for election in this important body, and it was therefore an astounding victory. It was also a difficult accomplishment. Whereas the majority of the members of the House of Councillors are elected by nation-wide balloting, making it easier for the Kōmeitō to elect its candidates through block voting, membership in the House of Representatives is determined through electoral districts, making block voting effective only in those districts where Sōka Gakkai members are concentrated. "Black mist" (*kuroi kiri*) was the major issue in this election, meaning scandals involving certain cabinet members, graft in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, and other ethical issues involving the personal conduct of office holders. The Kōmeitō's candidates for this election ran under the slogan, "Sweep out the black mist," meaning vote out of office those politicians of the Liberal Democratic Party involved in these scandals and replace them with Kōmeitō politicians. It is reasonable to assume that the success of the Kōmeitō in this election was mainly due to the muck raking tactics of its "black mist" campaign.¹³

In the December 29, 1969 elections for the House of Representatives, the Kōmeitō gained another important victory. Forty-seven out of seventy-six candidates were elected. As a result, the Kōmeitō now ranks as the third most powerful political

13. Ikeda, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-7.

party in both the House of Councillors and the House of Representatives, and it now holds the balance of power between the Liberal Democrats and the Socialists in the Diet.

The doctrinal foundation of the Kōmeitō. What is behind this frenzied political activity? Why is the political activity of Sōka Gakkai emphasized over all of its other social and religious activities? Why is it that the current literature of Sōka Gakkai is so concerned with transforming its religious ideology into political ideology?¹⁴ This political involvement is certainly more than mere emotional release for previously non-politicized masses of people having their roots in the lower educational and economic strata of Japanese society. What must be noted and emphasized is that Sōka Gakkai's political involvement has its roots in the basic teachings of Nichiren himself.¹⁵

James Allen Dator has correctly noted that there is a real question whether Sōka Gakkai was dependent upon Nichiren Shōshū during the time of the First President, Makiguchi Tsunesaburō.¹⁶ Makiguchi was more concerned with his "philosophy of value," which he developed quite independently of Nichiren Buddhist tradition.¹⁷ Noah Brannen believes that even those parts of his *Kachiron* ("Theory of Value") which do relate to the Nichiren tradition are later additions, most probably

14. See the following works by President Ikeda: *The Human Revolution*, 4 vols. (Tokyo: Seikyō Press, 1963), *Complete Works of Daisaku Ikeda*, vol. I (Tokyo: Seikyō Press, 1968). This emphasis upon politics can be seen in other Sōka Gakkai publications as well. Cf. *Nichiren Shōshū Sōkagakkai* (Tokyo: Seikyō Press, 1966) and *Guide to Buddhism* (Tokyo: Seikyō Press, 1968).

15. Harry Thomsen, *The New Religions of Japan* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1963), p. 95.

16. Dator, *op. cit.*, p. 9

17. Cf. Makiguchi Tsunesaburō, *Philosophy of Value* (Tokyo: Seikyō Press, 1964).

by the Second President, Toda Jōsei.¹⁸ But since Toda's presidency the fact remains that Sōka Gakkai has consciously based its religious and political philosophy on Nichiren's thought as interpreted by Nichiren Shōshū, the sect which claims to be the "orthodox" transmitter of his teachings.

Simply stated, the doctrinal foundation of Sōka Gakkai's faith is the "three secrets" (*sandai hihō*) of Nichiren: *hommon no honzon*, *hommon no daimoku*, and *hommon no kaidan*.¹⁹

Hommon no honzon stands for the "secret" of the exclusive object of worship called the *gohonzon*. The *gohonzon* is a mandala enscribed by Nichiren in the twelfth century during his exile in Sado in which he symbolically expressed the essence of Buddhism as he understood it to be revealed in the *Lotus Sūtra*.²⁰ Devotees of Sōka Gakkai consider the *gohonzon*, now preserved at Taisekiji, the head temple of Nichiren Shōshū, to be Nichiren himself and not merely a symbolic representation of his thought. Because Nichiren is considered to be the "True Buddha," this is essentially a doctrine of his "real presence" in the *gohonzon*.

Honmon no daimoku refers to the sacred words of *mantra* which believers chant before the *gohonzon* at Taisekiji or before a copy of it enshrined in their home altars. This *mantra* is *Nam myōhō renge kyō*, roughly, "Homage to the *Lotus Sūtra*." This "secret" involves daily worship of the *gohonzon* or its copy through the

18. Noah Brannen, "The Sōka Gakkai's Theory of Value," *Contemporary Religions in Japan*, V (June 1964), pp. 151-154.

19. Nichiren, *Works*, pp. 2051-2054. For a good interpretation of Nichiren's "three secrets," see Anesaki Masaharu, *Nichiren: The Buddhist Prophet* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), pp. 109-122 and Dator, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-11.

20. For an English translation, see H. Kern (trans.), *The Saddharma-pundarika-sūtra*, vol. 21 in *The Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1894).

repetition of this *mantra*, through which the believer receives enlightenment, protection from diseases and accidents, the granting of specific requests for material and spiritual prosperity, or anything else the believer desires. The only condition is that the believer has faith, defined as absolute trust in the power of the *gohonzon*.

Hommon no kaidan is the “secret” of the sacred altar that will be built after the completion of *kōsen-rufu*, or “world-wide propagation and conversion to the teachings of Nichiren as interpreted by Nichiren Shōshū.” The *Kaidan*, which is now under construction and near completion at Taisekiji, will house the original *gohonzon* and become the center of power and faith in the world.

The essence of these “three secrets” is summed up by Sōka Gakkai in the phrase *shiki shin funi*, meaning that “matter” (*shiki*) and “spirit” (*shin*) are not two things but one (*funi*).²¹ Nichiren Shōshū philosophy stresses the unity of spirit or mind and matter, a position advocated by Sōka Gakkai. On this presupposition, all other religions and philosophies are severely, though vaguely, criticised as being one-sided in their world views. This criticism is especially leveled at Christianity and Marxism, whose world views are labeled as irrelevant to “modern life” because of their one-sided emphasis on the supremacy of “spirit over matter” (Christianity) or “matter over spirit” (Marxism). Christianity and Marxism are simply written off as “spiritualistic” and “materialistic” without careful analysis and understanding of either.²² The “unity of spirit and mat-

21. Ikeda, *Complete Works*, I, pp. 125-126, 426-449, and *Wakaki Sedai Atarashii Butaibira*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-17.

22. Ikeda, *Complete Works*, I, pp. 119-127.

ter” is the foundation of Sōka Gakkai’s teachings concerning the individual’s personal and social problems and their cures. It is also the source of Sōka Gakkai’s social and political philosophy.

The technical term used to summarize the application of *shiki shin funi* to social and political issues is *ōbutsu myōgō*, or the “unity” (*myōgō*) of secular law (*ō-hō*, *ō* meaning “king”) and “sacred law” (*buppō*, “the law of the Buddha”).²³ Hence it is said that the proper governance of society must be established upon the complete integration of the secular law of the state and the “religious law of the universe” as revealed by Nichiren.²⁴ Because at present no nation bases its secular legal and political systems on the “true teachings of Nichiren,” society is in a state of general chaos and turmoil so that the individual’s life is a life of illness, privation, exploitation, misery, and continual warfare, all of which are signs of the degenerate age of *mappō*.²⁵ In spite of the fact that the individual can achieve

23. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

24. Nichiren’s specific teachings concerning *ōbutsu myōgō* are found in his *Risshō Ankokuron* (“The Establishment of Righteousness and the Security of the Nation”), the first version of which was completed in 1259 and the second in 1260. In this essay, Nichiren called attention to the moral, spiritual, and political corruption of the Kamakura Shoguns and the Buddhist establishment, most of the responsibility for which he ascribed to the Pure Land Schools of Hōnen and Shinran. He also warned that if the nation and its leaders did not turn and place absolute faith in his interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra*, suppress all other schools of Buddhism and Shintō, and make his doctrines the state religion, the nation would suffer foreign invasion and rebellion. This essay led to Nichiren’s exile in 1261 to the peninsula of Izu. Cf. Anesaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-38. Sōka Gakkai and the Kōmeitō consider their political involvements to be a modern adaption of the *Risshō Ankokuron*.

25. Cf. Ikeda, *The Human Revolution*, II, pp. 185-186, and *Complete Works*, I, pp. 177-181. *Mappō*, “the latter days of the Law,” is the last of three periods of gradual degeneration of Gautama the Buddha’s doctrines, begin-

substantial and immediate benefit through his conversion to Nichiren Shōshū, even the “true believer,” to borrow a phrase from Eric Hoffer, cannot obtain total happiness until society as such, meaning Japan and the whole world, is converted as well. This means that the politicians and governmental leaders of society must be adherents of Nichiren Shōshū, “the only true religion,” and govern according to the religious, moral, and social principles of Nichiren, the “True Buddha.” The Kōmeitō was established by Sōka Gakkai as the main instrument of propagation and conversion (*shakubuku*, literally “to break and subdue”). This in turn is the reason political activism is so radically emphasized.

Reference has already been made to the constitutional issue confronting Sōka Gakkai and the Kōmeitō. The Constitution of 1947 guarantees Japan a democratic system of government, which means according to Sōka Gakkai a government “of, by,

ning from his enlightenment experience under the Bo Tree. Traditionally the first five hundred years after his death are called “the period of correct doctrine” (*shōbō* in Japanese). As the cycle of history progresses life becomes more degenerate and corrupt the further away time moves from Gautama’s death. Thus *shōbō* evolves into *zōbō*, the period of “counterfeit doctrine.” This age lasts for one thousand years and is a time when very few people understand the correct doctrines and attain enlightenment through their practice. *Mappō*, the last age of the cycle, is an age of total moral, spiritual, and social corruption and decay because it is an age in which the “energy” of Gautama’s teachings has “run down.” This period lasts for ten thousand years. However, as the *Lotus Sutra* teaches, the *dharma* (Law) will be preached in ways suitable to the capacities of all beings living in this period. Nichiren believed that his teachings were the only ones suitable to the age of *mappō*. He thus drew the conclusion that his teachings were the only “True Religion” and that all other forms of Buddhism and Shintō must therefore be suppressed because they do not have any benefit for man in the age of *mappō*, but in fact do him harm.

and for the people.”²⁶ However, Sōka Gakkai claims that the present leadership of the government of Japan, both nationally and locally, is one of corrupt self-seeking politicians who ignore the welfare and best interest of the people.²⁷ Therefore, even though the Constitution guarantees a democratic legal and political system, in fact democracy has been destroyed by the politicians now in power. It is believed that this situation can only be remedied through the election of Sōka Gakkai sponsored candidates of the Kōmeitō to national and local political office. Since this can only be done through the established election process, and since Sōka Gakkai claims to be the champion of democracy, it becomes “obvious” that Sōka Gakkai must nominate and elect members of the Nichiren Shōshū laity into government. This is the purpose and function of the Kōmeitō.²⁸

President Ikeda believes that the formation of the Kōmeitō does not violate the Constitution of 1947’s provision for the separation of Church and State.²⁹ He is at least partially correct when he says that the criticism of a religious group forming a political party is quite pointless since any group “religious or otherwise,” may do so through the established means as long as there is no violation of Articles 20 and 89.³⁰ Even though the legality of Kōmeitō has not been tested in the court system,

26. Ikeda Daisaku, “Great Cultural Movement,” *The Seikyō Times*, June 1970, and *Complete Works*, I, pp. 170-176.

27. Ikeda, *Complete Works*, I, pp. 154-155.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 274-278.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 273-274.

30. Ikeda often appeals to the formation of “religious political parties in Europe,” for example the Christian Democrats in West Germany, as part of his argument to show that the Kōmeitō does not violate the separation of Church and State. This is an extremely weak point in his argumentation. *Ibid.*, pp. 119-127.

one suspects that much of the criticism of Sōka Gakkai is merely “sour grapes,” especially on the part of other religious bodies who wanted to form their own political party but were beaten to the punch. The current leadership of Sōka Gakkai also claims that it is not seeking to establish Nichiren Shōshū as a state religion.³¹ Rather, it is seeking through the Kōmeitō to place in positions of governmental responsibility persons who will work for the welfare of all people because of their adherence to the philosophy of Nichiren Shōshū. Again, there is nothing here that is necessarily illegal, for all men live and act according to their particular philosophies of life whether this be Marxist, Buddhist, or Christian. This in itself does not mean that Marxism, Buddhism, or Christianity are state religions when governmental officials are Marxist, Buddhist, or Christian. In relation to this, Sōka Gakkai contends that it upholds freedom of religion. While it is legitimate to try to convert the masses to the “true religion,” it will in no way coerce people into the faith.³² According to Sōka Gakkai, the main principles of democracy are “liberty, equality, and dignity.” However, the “democratic governments of the world” are severely criticised, although the nature of the criticism is vague and unclear,

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

32. President Ikeda has publically upheld “freedom of speech” and “freedom of religion” in both public speeches and newspaper articles. He has also publically apologized for the “overzeal” of members of Sōka Gakkai in their practice of the evangelistic tactic called *shakubuku*, “to break and subdue,” the practice of which has sometimes ranged from rational argument to physical coercion to force non-believers to become believers. He has stated that coercion in any form has never been an official policy of Sōka Gakkai. Ikeda Daisaku, “Great Cultural Movement,” *loc. cit.*

as not being true to these principles.³³ That is, the “liberal democracies” of the Western nations and the “Marxist People’s Democracies” are both inadequate to the needs of their people because they are “one-sided.” In other words, they are not able to promote the welfare of their citizens and are therefore inadequate democracies because they are not founded upon *shiki shin funi*. The Western democracies, which Sōka Gakkai lumps together as “Christian,” overemphasize the spiritual at the expense of the material elements of life. It is claimed that all Western democracies thus exalt the “spiritual value of freedom,” the result of which is that great masses of men are thrown into “poverty and racial prejudice in the so-called free world.” On the other hand, the Marxist Democracies of the Eastern nations over-emphasize the material side of life, the result of which is a political system which makes the freedom of its citizens subservient to the system in spite of adequately meeting their economic needs. Finally, both the “liberal” and the “Marxist” democracies treat human beings as things to be used as means to accomplish the goals of the political system. Thus, only a democracy founded upon the “True Buddhism of Nichiren Daishōnin” will adequately meet and satisfy both the spiritual and the material needs of people, for only Nichiren taught the “unity of spirit and matter,” This kind of democracy is within the grasp of people, at least in Japan, but only on the condition that “True Buddhism” is accepted as the religious faith of the majority of the people.³⁴ In order to accomplish this in Japan,

33. Ikeda, *Complete Works*, I, pp. 152-157.

34. President Ikeda has forbidden the establishment of the Kōmeitō by overseas members within their respective countries. Overseas members are instructed

the masses must be aroused from their political apathy and actively work to establish a "true Buddhist democracy." For this reason the Kōmeitō was established "for the realization of a society which combines the happiness of the individual with the prosperity of all society."³⁵

Ōbutsu myōgō, the unity of secular and sacred law, therefore, has four areas of concern. The first is a cultural concern, or the attempt to combine the best of Western Christian ("spiritual") cultural with the best of Marxist ("materialist") culture. The goal of this aspect of *ōbutsu myōgō* is to create what Sōka Gakkai calls the "Third Civilization" (*daisan bummei*).³⁶ This is to be accomplished through establishing the educational system, the arts, and science and technology on the presuppositions of "True Buddhism." The second area of concern is the sphere of economics. Here also, the best of capitalism, defined as that economic system which encourages individual initiative and freedom, is to be combined with the best of socialist economic

to work within the already established political and party systems and to "humanize" them with the philosophy of Nichiren Shōshū. Cf. *The Nichiren Shōshū Sōkagakkai, op. cit.*, p. 200. It is also interesting that the conversion goal of Sōka Gakkai has been modified. "World-wide conversion" now seems to mean that Sōka Gakkai can accomplish its religious, political, and social goals in any country if one-third of the population is converted and become "true believers," one-third become "supporters" but not necessarily converts, with the remaining one-third having no relationship at all with Sōka Gakkai. In other words, the goal of *kōsen-rufu* had been changed from "world-wide propagation and conversion" to the conversion of one-third of the world's population to "True Buddhism." Ikeda, *Complete Works*, I, pp. 177-198. This was also discussed with me during my recorded interview with Mr. Akiyama Tomiya on December 20, 1968.

35. Quoted by Dator, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

36. Ikeda Daisaku, "East and West," *The Seikyō Times*, November 1969 and "Outlook for the Twenty-first Century," *The Seikyō Times*, August 1969, and *Complete Works*, I, pp. 181-188.

thought, defined as that economic system which promotes the material welfare of all people. The resulting economic system is called “neo-socialism” (*shin shakaishugi*).³⁷ The third area of concern is the establishment of world peace through the creation of a society which utilizes the unique character of each national grouping and race, but which at the same time recognizes the necessity for “world brotherhood” (*chikyū minzokushugi*, literally, “global racism”).³⁸

To summarize, it is through *ōbutsu myōgō* that Sōka Gakkai by means of the Kōmeitō hopes to combine what it determines to be the “best” of “Western” and “Marxist democracies” with the religious, moral, and social doctrines of Nichiren as interpreted by Nichiren Shōshū. The resulting political system will be one which will guarantee the “freedom, dignity, and equality” of all people. This is the essential content of what Sōka Gakkai calls “Buddhist Democracy” (*buppō minshushugi*).³⁹

Political platform. Because of the rather vague nature of Sōka Gakkai’s ideological justification for entering the field of Japanese politics through the creation of the Kōmeitō, it is very difficult to assign a political label to the Kōmeitō. The fact that the policy statements of the party follow the general pattern of overgeneralization and unclarity of its parent organization makes it all the more difficult to discover its place on the Japanese political spectrum. To the question of whether it is “progressive” (meaning “leftist”) or “conservative,” the Kōmeitō generally replies that it is a party of *chūdōshugi* (“middle-

37. Ikeda, *Complete Works*, I, pp. 225-228, 274-278.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 267-270.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 261-267.

of-the-roadism”).⁴⁰ *Chūdōchugi* means the “synthesis” of capitalism and socialism, both of which are never clearly defined, which in turn makes the exact meaning of the term all the more problematic. However, one gains the distinct impression from this concept that the main political ideology of the Kōmeitō is one of “playing it by ear,” for the essential practice of *chūdōshugi* is the conscious attempt to assume positions on social and political issues which will place the party in opposition to the Liberal Democrats and the Socialists, while at the same time appearing to be the champion of the people.⁴¹ This is an effective tactic for getting votes, but it hardly makes understanding of the Kōmeitō any easier. It is doubtful that the party operates according to any peculiar or unique political ideology. All that can be concretely said in this regard is that the Kōmeitō is allied with the moderate left of Japan on some issues, but at other times it is quite conservative and allied with the Liberal Democratic Party.⁴² At no time on any issue has the Kōmeitō ever been a “middle of the road” party.

However, in regard to international political issues, the goals of the Kōmeitō are quite specific, even though official statements as to how these goals are to be achieved revert back to the pattern of overgeneralization and unclarity. The same is true, to some extent of the party’s official stand on domestic issues. Thus, it will be useful to examine some of these political goals, since this might be useful in throwing some light on its political

40. Cf. *Proceedings of the Eighth National Convention*, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-55.

41. “Towards the Realization of World Peace through the Middle of the Road Principle,” a Kōmeitō press release dated January 22, 1969, pp. 1-6.

42. Jerrold Schecter, *The New Face of Buddha* (Tokyo: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1967), p. 268.

philosophy as such.

In league with the Socialists and growing numbers of the liberal wing of the Liberal Democrats, the Kōmeitō has taken a strong four-point stand regarding Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations.⁴³ First, the government of the People's Republic of China should be recognized by the Japanese government as the legitimate and only government of China. This recognition should be normalized by the conclusion of a peace treaty between Tokyo and Peking. Second, the Taiwan problem should be regarded as an internal Chinese affair. Third, the People's Republic of China should be admitted to the United Nations and it should assume the seat of Nationalist China on the Security Council. Fourth, because Japan has not been able to act independently in regard to its China policy because of its special diplomatic relationship with the United States, the Kōmeitō insists that the United States-Japan Security Treaty be dissolved as early as possible in the 1970's. By abolishing the Security Treaty system Japan will no longer be subservient to the anti-China policy of the United States.

There are other issues involved in phasing out the United States-Japan Security Treaty. Basically the Kōmeitō has taken a six-point stand in regard to this which has allied it with the majority of the Japanese masses.⁴⁴ The party has called for complete and total withdrawal of all United States military forces, bases, and installations from Japanese soil. The recovered land is not to be handed over to the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, but is to be promptly put to economic use by converting

43. *Proceedings of the Eighth National Convention*, pp. 101-106.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-99.

it into farm land. Coupled with this withdrawal of United States military forces, the Kōmeitō has called for refusal to increase Japan's military defense potential, one of the conditions which the United States has placed on withdrawing its military forces. Similarly, the Japanese government should not cooperate with the United States military forces stationed in the Republic of South Korea. Lastly, the Kōmeitō supports the early reversion of Okinawa to Japan and the total withdrawal of United States military forces stationed there.

Perhaps one of the most important and creative political goals of the Kōmeitō has been its call for the establishment of a United Nations headquarters for Asia and the Far East to be located in Tokyo.⁴⁵ The Chairman of the Kōmeitō, Takeiri Yoshikatsu, has even sent a letter to United Nations Secretary General U Thant in this regard.⁴⁶ It must be added that U Thant's reply was quite non-committal.⁴⁷ The Kōmeitō has recognized the necessity of strengthening the peace-keeping functions of the United Nations by calling for the establishment of a universal collective security system binding on all nations. This is part of the party's general pacifism regarding all warfare, except wars of self-defense. In particular, the Kōmeitō objects to the manufacture, use, and possession of nuclear weapons, as well as experimentation with them, by any nation for any purpose.⁴⁸ It is for this reason that the United Nations is to be strengthened and a Far Eastern headquarters established

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-117.

46. Published as a press release dated October 15, 1969.

47. Published as a press release dated December 15, 1969.

48. *Proceedings of the Eighth National Convention*, pp. 66-70.

in Tokyo to meet the special needs and problems of Asian peoples. In connection with this, the Kōmeitō has taken a hard line against United States military involvement in Viet Nam. Thus, the foreign policy of the Kōmeitō seems to be entirely oriented towards the United Nations.

On domestic political issues one must agree with H. Neill McFarland that Kōmeitō policies and goals seem unimaginative and reflect a lack of political acumen and experience.⁴⁹ It is here that it is most difficult to judge the merits of the Kōmeitō's ideology, primarily because it has assumed the role of a moral crusader. The party's moral commitments seem very well defined, but not the means for expressing its moral concerns through concrete political action. Thus the Kōmeitō favors war on environmental pollution, as do all the political parties, but specific and clearly-defined proposals as to how to improve the environment are lacking.⁵⁰ The Kōmeitō also favors a policy of price stability, but only promises "to work for the stability of prices by means of an aggressive control policy designed to curb government expenditures."⁵¹ In a similar way, the Kōmeitō favors legislation to more adequately solve the traffic problems of Japan, particularly in Tokyo, which has lead to such fearful tolls in deaths and property destruction.⁵² Thus, the Kōmeitō seems to be content in pointing out problems without offering specific solutions and legislative programs to deal with the problems.

49. McFarland, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

50. *Proceedings of the Eighth National Convention*, pp. 71-72.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

In the realm of social reform, the Kōmeitō is in favor of legislation increasing the child allowance payments for underprivileged families to three thousand yen per month per child, as well as expansion of the social security system to 20,000 yen per month plus one hundred percent medical coverage for all persons over sixty-five (currently 360 yen to \$1 U.S.).⁵³ These and other social reform issues are part of the Kōmeitō's over-all plan to introduce what it calls "welfare economics," the elaboration of which is published in a four volume work entitled *Fukushi Keizai e no Michi* (*The Road to Welfare Economics*). Again, specific programs for implementing this economic program are rather vague and unspecified.

Conclusion. It is important in judging the Kōmeitō that one does not overlook the rather salutary influence it has contributed to Japanese politics. As of the moment, the Kōmeitō is strong enough to perform the role of a gadfly, although it is not strong enough to assume any real responsibility for policy making other than occasionally holding the deciding vote on issues where there is no clear-cut Liberal Democrat or Socialist majority. The most effective political role of the Kōmeitō has been its ability to arouse the Liberal Democrats, who have been in control of the Diet since 1947, from their lethargy. At the same time, the Kōmeitō has been able to expose the shallowness of the many demonstrations and mass meetings that the Socialists and the Communists often offer as substitutes for real political intelligence and action. They have also been able to get large segments of the Japanese masses involved in the political process

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-75.

for the first time in Japan's history because the Kōmeitō is what it claims to be—a party which actively works for the welfare of the citizens of Japan.

Nor should one be too hasty in passing negative judgments about the relative lack of profundity of Sōka Gakkai's religious and political philosophy. There is indeed much about Sōka Gakkai that is vague, unclear, and simply out of touch with "the facts of life as such." But Sōka Gakkai is fundamentally a religious-political mass movement, and as Eric Hoffer has correctly pointed out,

.....the effectiveness of a doctrine should not be judged by its profundity, sublimity, or the validity of the truths it embodies, but how thoroughly it insulates the individual from his self and the world as it is.⁵⁴

People who join mass movements are not interested in empirical truth. They are motivated by a future-oriented faith that the present "empirical truth" which now oppresses them socially, economically, and politically will be radically and totally changed because of their possession of and their possession by the "correct doctrine." It is not important to the "true believer" to understand the truth presented to him in the movement's doctrine. Doctrines function in this future-oriented way in all mass movements, and Sōka Gakkai is no exception.

However, there are several questions relating to Sōka Gakkai which must be answered before an adequate evaluation of its political action through the Kōmeitō can be given. H. Neill McFarland has raised two of these questions.⁵⁵ First, will Sōka Gakkai be able to elect enough representation to the Lower House to gain a position powerful enough to effect political and

54. Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 79.

55. McFarland, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-217.

social change in Japan? Sōka Gakkai has been very successful in electing members to the Upper House because the majority of membership in this body are elected by nation-wide balloting, making the tactic of block-voting easier. But as we have indicated, membership in the Lower House is determined on a district basis, so that it would seem that the tactic of block voting will be effective only in those districts where believers are concentrated. This question still remains partially unanswered, although one gains the impression from the last National Election that Sōka Gakkai is quite capable of electing substantial members to this body because of the support it has been able to get from both believers and non-believers. However, the possibility of unseating the Liberal Democrats as the majority party in the House of Representatives appears to be quite remote. Still, Sōka Gakkai and the Kōmeitō are a political force to be reckoned with by both the Liberal Democrats and the Socialists.

McFarland's second question has to do with whether or not Sōka Gakkai stands for a policy that can be politically implemented. The goal of establishing a "Buddhist Democracy," which has been defined as a "parliamentary democracy in which every individual has been awakened to the principles of Buddhism,"⁵⁶ presupposes the conversion of the majority of the Japanese to Nichiren Shōshū, although the current goal of *kōsen-rufu* is one-third of the population. It does not seem likely that a political system can be created on the condition of conversion to a particular religious faith.

Finally, will Sōka Gakkai transform itself into another "es-

56. Murata Kiyooki, "Buddhist Democracy," *The Japan Times*, August 13, 1966, quoted by McFarland, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

establishment organization?" As a mass movement, Sōka Gakkai has been a severe critic of the politico-religious establishments of Japan. However, there is a tendency for all mass movements to "sell out the revolution" when they become strong enough to make changes in society. Mass movements also begin to institutionalize themselves at this point in order to solidify their gains and to provide a base for future operations. Thus, a powerful mass movement usually becomes part of the socio-political establishment it started out to change. Sōka Gakkai is fast approaching this point because of its complex organizational structure and its political strength. The very fact that it has organized a legal political party places Sōka Gakkai squarely within the Japanese political "system" it so severely criticizes and wants to change. However, much depends upon the leadership of President Ikeda as well as the abilities of his successor. Sōka Gakkai was able to survive the leadership vacuum when President Toda died because its Board of Directors conferred the Presidency upon Ikeda, Toda's disciple and personal choice as his successor. President Ikeda is a charismatic leader, although not to the same degree Toda was. But charismatic leadership has a way of running itself out so that what is left is not the personal charisma of the leader but the charisma of the leader's office. At this point, a mass movement ceases to be a mass movement and becomes part of the establishment. The question remains open as to whether or not Sōka Gakkai will be able to find a leader of Ikeda's ability and charisma. But in a movement where all things revolve around the charisma, skill, and decisions of the leader, the vacuum created by his departure and the problem of finding a successor are crucial to its

future.

One thing is certain at the moment. Sōka Gakkai has only begun to develop the political role of Buddhism in Japan, and it has the potential to develop this role through the Kōmeitō further than ever before in Japanese history. But the specific directions of this development remain unclear. This much can be safely said. The political and religious goals of Sōka Gakkai have become identified with and oriented toward national power based on the rather authoritarian formula of unswerving faith in and absolute allegiance without dissent to the religious faith of Nichiren Shōshū as interpreted by Sōka Gakkai and the political policies of the Kōmeitō as determined by President Ikeda. Sōka Gakkai is a new form of Japanese Buddhism that equates faith with the acquisition of political power.