

# The Organization of the Masses and Their Social Attitude in Contemporary Japan

## Social Psychological Research on "Sokagakkai"

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### I . THE GROWTH OF SOKAGAKKAI

It was in 1951, when capitalism had been reestablished in Japan, that Sokagakkai started to carry out its aggressive propaganda. This religious organization, which had its origins in 1930 as a lukewarm, idealistic sect of Buddhism, Soka-kyoiku-Gakkai (The Institute of Education for Value Creation), reappeared in 1951 amid the poverty and confusion that followed the war. Its conventional dogma was converted into a pragmatic and aggressive one. This sect penetrated mainly the lower classes of the city, and asked of unorganized laborers and citizens who suffered from poverty and uneasiness, "Are you really happy?"

This had great appeal for these frustrated people and converted many of them into believers of the sect. On the other hand, the public came to fear the sect because of its aggressive propaganda. Daily many newspapers talked about this abnormal social phenomenon calling the Sokagakkai "violent believers" (Yomiuri, 8/1/54), and saying that they "propagate by military-like organization, forcing the supporters of other Buddhist sects to cast off their traditional faith." (Asahi, 10/26/54).

In 1951 Sokagakkai had only 5700 families of believers, but by the end of 1954 this number had increased to about 160,000. It seems that

the masses, mainly of the lower classes of the big cities, who were suffering from feelings of helplessness and emotional thirst, were attracted by the leaders of Sokagakkai who urged them to recognize their own loneliness and the uncertainty of illusory happiness and to convert to Sokagakkai.

Sokagakkai converted 500,000 families to their sect in 1956, when rapid growth of economy began in Japan. July 10th of that year, the elections for the House of Councilors resulted in the election of three Sokagakkai candidates, and thus this sect entered politics. In 1959, 261 members of Sokagakkai were elected in the general elections of local assemblies, and it was surprising that all 76 candidates for Tokyo were elected. Sokagakkai converted 3,000,000 families to their sect in 1962 and placed nine candidates up for seats in the House of Councilor elections July 1st of that year. All of the Sokagakkai candidates were elected. In May of 1964, the believers of Sokagakkai numbered 6,000,000 families. The political party Komeito (Clean Government Party) was organized and at the first meeting, held November 17th of that year, they declared that they had decided to place candidate for the coming election of the Houses of Representatives.\* (1)

### II . THE BACKGROUND WITHIN SOKAGAKKAI DEVELOPED

\* They got successful candidates of 25 members at the election of the House of Representative, January 1967.

The above is a brief history of Sokagakkai. Why did Sokagakkai develop so surprisingly fast? In considering this point, we shall begin with an investigation of their political consciousness. As we said above, Sokagakkai began increasing very rapidly its number of Believers and extending its power after 1955, when rapid growth in economy began in Japan. A large number of laborers flowed into the cities with the rapid industrialization and urbanization resulted. At the same time, the prosperity of the "leisure industries" fascinated the laborers, who came to hate working hard and suffering from habitual frustration. Moreover, the nation-wide campaign against the new Police Law and the Mutual Security Treaty between Japan and the United States caused more and more uneasiness and feelings of helplessness in the minds of the people. The lower-middle and lower classes of the cities particularly strongly felt such uneasiness.

This can be fully proved by the fact that Sokagakkai started to carry out its propaganda campaign and gained a large number of supporters in Ota-ku and Shinagawa-ku, poorer districts of Tokyo. Research in the town of katsushika-ku indicates that 34.8% of the followers of Sokagakkai receive less than 30,000 yen per month (about \$ 80.00), that most of them are semi-skilled or unskilled laborers, that 62.5% have no higher education, and that 43.5% are twenty-five to twenty-nine years of age. (2) Generally, these people are not enjoying the benefits of modern Japanese society. In fact, among the lower classes of the cities there are a great many people who are left behind in the rapid economic growth and are driven to despair of this cold heartless world and of politics. They are, for example, minor industrialists, unorganized laborers, petty merchantism, etc. Sokagakkai enabled them to overcome their political inactivity by emphasizing the sense of crisis, which is characteristic of their sect.

The preachers of Sokagakkai conduct dialogues, a kind of Socratic method, with these people and give them a series of questions, such as: "Are you really happy?" and "what do you live for?" By means of roundtable discussions, an extraordinarily enthusiastic atmosphere of a mass meeting is produced, and the Sokagakkai thus induces the frustrated masses to submit to its dignity. Sokagakkai successfully utilizes group dynamics and the theory of compliant behavior. Moreover, this discussion, named shakubuku, is not mere persuasion, but is a passionate and tenacious pursuit which denounces and condemns the character of those with whom they deal socially, economically, and psychologically. The preachers break down the defense mechanism of their personalities, the preachers refer to the faith in Nichiren-Shoshu which promises absolute happiness and then enthusiastically and persistently induce them to embrace this faith.

This is the process by which people who feel uneasiness and irritation in crisis come to be involved in the enthusiasm and cheers of a mass-meeting and in the process of "Escape from Freedom" they come to give up thinking for themselves and submit to absolute authority. Undoubtedly this demonstrates a mass society situation in a critical aspect characterized by desperate and unreasonable passions. There are lots of facts to prove this in the organization and the movement of this sect. We can even find some characteristics that remind us of Nazism, an extreme situation created by the abnormal acceleration of popularization. We may take examples such as the youth bodyguards that pledge absolute loyalty to the President of Sokagakkai, the military-structure of the Gakkai organization, their religious fanaticism, their jealousy and hatred for the existing "liberal" organization as well as the privileged governing class, their anti-intellectualistic feeling, and so on. Considering these facts, some

may be afraid that this religious sect will turn to be fascist, but it is not foreseen that it might become really fascist, because the governing class has enough confidence to keep the present system of "bourgeois democracy" and the progressive group, too, haven't lost their influence.

(3) However, much danger may be apprehended from the fact that the leader of Sokagakkai, whose political idea was a vague one, puts into politics that energy of the lower class which is produced through the unreasonable belief of "punishment and divine favors" or "establishing national sanctuary". (4) President Daisaku Ikeda instructed the believers of Gakkai that they need not necessarily give their votes to the candidates of Gakkai in the election of the House of Councilors in 1962. (5) Nevertheless Sokagakkai easily obtained more than 4,000,000 votes. This may be regarded as a kind of "political apathy" among the believers of Gakkai.

### III. THE POLITICAL SENSE OF THE MEMBERS OF SOKAGAKKAI

Then, let us examine the political sense of the members of Sokagakkai. I am sorry to say that we do not have yet very many reports of investigation on this subject. Kunio Yanagida and others reported about the political sense of the Gakkai members in "Shakubuku" (Aggressive Propagation, 1963), one of the few important reports. They have noted in this report what follows: (6)

- (1) The members gave greater respect for former president Toda and the present president Ikeda than for the Emperor.
- (2) They put no trust in established organization.
- (3) They firmly believe that the Constitution must be defended.

Table 1 results from research undertaken by the author in cooperation with Akira Yonekura (7) and Masayuki Araki (8). We gave classified social attitudes according to

factors, as follows: (9)

- (1) Common people attitude  
the sense of obligation and debt of gratitude and the sense of social position, which have prevailed in the feudalistic society in Japan.
  - (2) Nationalist attitude  
an attitude which has been cultivated through the intensive education of Tennoism, the emperor system of Japan.
  - (3) Citizen attitude  
an attitude based on self-consciousness, liberalism, and the sense of rights.
  - (4) Mass man attitude  
an attitude of the masses who enjoy their private lives, alienated from bureaucracy and drowned in the flood of mass-communication.
  - (5) Socialist attitude  
an attitude of the masses who are strongly interested in the social reforms and are willing to take part in the spirit of unity.
- Each factor has five small items. These

five attitude factors may be said to be fundamental ones based of Japanese social attitudes. This scale containing the twenty-five items (these are shown in Table 1) was presented to groups of persons who instructed to indicate their approval or disapproval of a five-point scale. Strong approval count 5, approval 4, undecided 3, disapproval 2, and strong disapproval 1. This is called rating by the Likert method. The result is in Table 1. At the same time we give the results of the research studies on the members of the radical parties in order to consider whether the surprising entry of Sokagakkai into politics is based on consistent and definite ideology.

First, as for the common people attitude, we find that the members of Sokagakkai give stronger support to all of the items those of the radical parties. As I said above, it is unorganized laborers in the cities, petty

**Table 1** The Comparison of the Social Attitude of Both Sokagakukai's member and Progressive Party's member.

Attitude Dimension	Statement	Profile of rating
		<span style="margin-right: 10px;">1</span> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">2</span> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">3</span> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">4</span> <span>5</span>
1 Common people Attitude	1. following social conventions 6. admire the person who respects his obligation 11. try to get along in harmony with others 16. not bad to be extravagant for weddings 21. respects the formality of the world	
2 Nationalist Attitude	2. prosperity of Japan owes to the emperor system 7. advisable for the people to do as the government suggests 12. must maintain and strengthen its military power 17. in order to win war, morale and spirit of a nation is decisive 22. require an authoritative person	
3 Citizen Attitude	3. should not meddle in the affairs of other individuals 8. should abolish the custom of behind-the-scenes political or economic dealings 13. do not have to make any donations to a social activity 18. more desirable not to promote formal association with one's remote relatives 23. more desirable for one to join the professional societies	
4 Mass man Attitude	4. my present feeling is that I can do nothing to help this 9. should clearly separate our working life from leisure time 14. it is the best way to form one's opinion in accordance to the news reports 19. very frequent change of fashion is desirable 24. young people who are crazy about jazz and rock'n roll are better than those who are active in political activities	
5 Socialist Attitude	5. working class may have to cooperate even with communist party 10. we must cooperate with the strikers 15. the rich are the least useful group 20. we must organize a labor union 25. the quickest way to improve the society is to vote for progressive and radical candidates	

1. ——— rating of Progressive Party's member  
 ..... rating of Sokagakukai's member  
 2. strong approval 5, approval 4, undecided 3, disapproval 2, strong disapproval 1.

merchants, minor industrialists, etc., who support Sokagakkai. They are, so to speak, the common people of the city. The friendliness which was shown them for the first time by Sokagakkai was quite attractive to those people. Moreover, its doctrine is quite plain and easy to understand. Sokagakkai denounces "the sense of social position" (*bungen-ishiki*), Japanese traditional virtue of restraint, saying, "Don't pursue petty desires, and procure greater happiness from Gohonzon-sama\*." It is a direct challenge to the morals of the common people in Japan. Sokagakkai instructs its believers that the pursuit of their own profits is the most valuable purpose of the life, and that for pursuing profit people must be emancipated from all the worldly bondage. Sometimes the peaceful home may even be destroyed for this purpose. The common people, who had been living under the burden of *giri* (obligation) and *bungen* (permanent social position) were enlightened, devoted themselves to "Shakubuku" (a kind of aggressive propagation) and political activities in order to secure true happiness, and thus, have come to enter the political world at an amazing rate. However, so far as the result of this research tells us, the members of Sokagakkai are far behind those of the radical parties in the extent to which they are emancipated from the traditional values of the common peoples. Sokagakkai is called the city-religion with an ideology of the destruction of the status quo and the pursuit of the "secular happiness." But, in fact, lower-grade personnels of the hierarchy of Gakkai are not necessarily faithful to this ideology. We must call your attention to this fact.

Next, as for the nationalist attitude, the members of the radical parties show a stronger negative attitude than do the Gakkai-members. Especially in regards to the attitude toward

the Emperor, the Gakkai-members are quite indifferent to the Emperor, while those of the radical parties give the negative decision definitely from their ideology. Hostility to the remilitarization of Japan is expressed intensely and this may be because the strong anti-war doctrine of this sect has penetrated among the believers. (10) To the opinion that we need among us an authority whose voice is law, they express, though not so strongly, their approval. So it is not without reason that some should fear that the members of Sokagakkai are obedient to the authority.

I can find the most typical expression of their feeling in the citizen attitude. Hostility to communities, such as young men's associations and women's societies, and indignation against dinner parties\*\* and the act of donation\*\*\* are fully inspired, because these are part of "policies" of Komei Party. The members of Sokagakkai feel more strongly these points those of radical parties. This policy, among many other policies which the opinion leaders of Sokagakkai created, will penetrate the members most completely.

Next, as for "mass-man attitude," that is, the helplessness in the flood of mass-communication and the tendency to enjoy their own private lives, Sokagakkai members are far more inclined to this attitude than those of the radical parties. Especially in response to statement 4, "Though I wish that national politics would be improved my present feeling is that I can do nothing for myself, "many of them gave the vague response. What does this mean? I can find great significance in the contrast between this vague opinion and the surprising result of the election of the House of Councilors and local assemblies. We cannot discuss this subject without mentioning how the people think about the election in our country. The

\* God of Sokagakkai

\*\* statement 8, We should abolish the custom of behind the scenes political or economic dealings.

\*\*\* statement 13, We do not have to make any donation to a social activity if we do not agree with its purpose as long as we pay taxes.

fact is that their voting in the election doesn't necessarily mean the expression of their will to the politics but a kind of moral obligation. In fact, the Gakkai members are feeling helpless about the politics. Nevertheless, the rate of their voting is very high and the candidates from Gakkai are all elected. This tells us that they do not cast their votes as the political action but as the proof of their comradeship through the faith. When they have chances to show off their strong unity of the in-group to the members of the out-group that look at them with indifference, they show a vague attitude to the statement 9, "We should clearly separate our working life from the leisure time, and our life should be sure to give ourselves and our families rewarding vacations." They don't criticize severely the commercial mass-communication (statement 14), while the members of the radical parties criticize them pretty strongly. To the statement 24, "Young people who are crazy about Jazz and Rock'n roll are better members of the society than those who are active in political and ideological activities," they show, naturally enough, a strong negative attitude. However, on this point too, they are far behind the members of the radical parties.

Lastly let us look into the socialist attitude, that is, the attitude of those people who intend to actively reform society. There are great differences between the attitude of the Gakkai members and that of the radical party members. The radical party members have apparently a strong socialist attitude, while

the Gakkai members have a vague attitude saying, "No comment." This may be, however, supposed that these opinions, which were based chiefly upon an ideology of one particular party, had made the Gakkai members without class consciousness hesitate in accepting the opinion. But we can say that all the criticism to the political attitude of the Gakkai members are concentrated directly to this point. It is doubtful whether Sokagakkai can reform the society without show-down with the organization governed by the Japan monopolistic capitalists, though it consists chiefly of poor people of the cities. Let us add that it is generally said Sokagakkai can't even improve its members' lives, much less society only with an "emotional" ideology to reform the status quo, lacking a definite class-ideology against capitalism. (11)

#### IV. CONCLUSION

As mentioned above, I have looked into some of the political sense of the Sokagakkai members, chiefly on the basis of our data. In a word, they are characterized by "political apathy". We can not help feeling it dangerous that the group characterized by this political apathy will go into politics supported by their enthusiastic mass-meeting and their firm solidarity. It seems to be one of the most important themes of our social psychology to explain the organization of Sokagakkai and the social attitude of those members.

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STATEMENT	YOUR OPINION				
18. It is more desirable not to promote merely formal association with one's remote relatives.	++	+	?	-	--
19. Very frequent change of fashions is desirable because it adds color to one's life.	++	+	?	-	--
20. I think that we must organize a labor union whenever we work and claim our rights through the strength of organization.	++	+	?	-	--
21. We should stay away from the kind of people who would not respect the conventions and formality of the world.	++	+	?	-	--
22. Most committee meetings require an authoritative person to settle arguments.	++	+	?	-	--
23. It is more desirable for one to join the professional societies than to belong to the community associations such as Parent-Teachers Association.	++	+	?	-	--
24. Young people who are crazy about Jazz and Rock'n roll are better member of the society than those who are active in political and ideological activities.	++	+	?	-	--
25. The quickest way to improve the society is to vote for progressive and radical candidates rather than for conservative ones.	++	+	?	-	--