

SOKA GAKKAI AS A CHALLENGE TO JAPANESE SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Abstract

A new Buddhist group Soka Gakkai started its movement in 1930. After World War II it grew rapidly to claim more than eight million families as its members in Japan in 2005. Soka Gakkai International (SGI), which Soka Gakkai organized as its international network in 1975, now extends to over 190 countries and areas worldwide, claiming twelve million members globally, according to their own calculations. Soka Gakkai started a domestic political movement in the early 1960s, establishing Komeito in 1964 that would mostly keep the third position between the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Social Democratic Party throughout the Cold War era. When the political scene in Japan saw a restructuring process in the 1990s, Komeito joined in the coalition government with the LDP in 1999. The general election in 2009, however, turned out to be a failure both to the LDP and Komeito, while the Democratic Party of Japan won the election to lead the new government, almost for the first time since the establishment of LDP in 1955. This paper tries to situate Soka Gakkai and Komeito in the context of Japanese politics and society and attempts an evaluation of the current situation after the 2009 election.

Key words: Soka Gakkai, Komeito, religious political party, Japan's 2009 general election

Overview of Soka Gakkai and Komeito

Soka Gakkai is a lay Buddhist association founded by Makiguchi Tsunesaburō (1871-1944) that originally began as an educational movement in Japan in 1930. Makiguchi was inspired by the thought of the thirteenth-century Buddhist monk, Nichiren. Nichiren's brand of Buddhism has exerted a diverse array of influences on modern Japanese society and according to some interpretations this can be partly attributed to Nichiren's nationalistic appeal. Under these influences there emerged a number of religious or semi-religious figures and movements in twentieth-century Japan. Soka Gakkai grew into a huge and influential religious group after World War II, and can be regarded as one of the most characteristic associations of Nichiren Buddhism.

The postwar recovery and development of Japan paved the way for the growth of Soka Gakkai, which taught individuals to strive for 'human revolution' through self-empowerment, by encouraging them to believe in the positive power of the Lotus Sutra. Promoting a message that individual rejuvenation will inevitably lead

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to improvements in one's community, society, and the world, Soka Gakkai has been actively engaged not only in individual empowerment but also in social activities, especially those related to the peace movement. Although it was formerly known for its aggressive proselytizing and harsh remonstrations of other religions, Soka Gakkai now appears to take a more moderate approach in its social outreach.

Although it started as a lay confraternity in a traditional Buddhist sect of Nichiren Shōshū, the latter excommunicated Soka Gakkai in 1991 on the grounds that the teachings of Soka Gakkai deviated from orthodoxy. Since then, in this new situation, Soka Gakkai has tried to reorganize its structure and reformulate its doctrine. According to their own data, Soka Gakkai counted more than eight million families as its members in Japan in 2005, and Soka Gakkai International (SGI), which Soka Gakkai organized as its international network in 1975 under the leadership of its third president, Ikeda Daisaku, now extends to over 190 countries and areas worldwide, claiming twelve million members globally.

Ikeda Daisaku (b. 1928) joined Soka Gakkai in 1947, and served as the president from 1960 to 1979 during the period of its most rapid growth. He has also served as the president of the SGI since 1975 and as the honorary president of Soka Gakkai since 1979. Ikeda has been very prolific in publishing and has promoted dialogue with various world leaders, both religious and secular. It is well known that he has received numerous honorary titles from academic institutions worldwide. But because of this very active—and sometimes aggressive—leadership, Ikeda has been criticized from various sectors in society. One of the most polemical achievements of Ikeda for Soka Gakkai was to establish its political front under his leadership.

In 1961 Soka Gakkai formed a political group that eventually became a political party, Komeito, in 1964. Advocating both peace and humanitarian policies, Komeito took its political position in the middle between the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP)—the conservative party that ruled almost continuously since its establishment in 1955—and the other opposition parties including the Social Democratic Party of Japan. After its religious orientation was criticized by journalists and questioned in the Diet around 1970, Komeito declared that it would follow the constitutional principle of the separation between religion and state, officially separating Soka Gakkai and Komeito. But this issue continues even today as one of the targets of criticism against Soka Gakkai and Komeito.

The end of the Cold War era on the international scene also influenced the Japanese domestic politics, and Komeito (along with a couple of other political parties) went through a restructuring process. Komeito participated in the coalition government in 1993-1994, and then reorganized as New Komeito in 1998. From 1999 to 2009 New Komeito has been the major partner in a coalition government with the LDP. In the past ten years, this coalition has set the backdrop of the present arguments, mainly among journalists, about Soka Gakkai and Komeito as a topic on the relation between religion and politics in the Japanese context. The English website of Komeito presents their views on religion and politics, and includes information on the relationship between Komeito and Soka Gakkai. The following are several points that I find important in their statement:

- (a) "[T]he Soka Gakkai is a constituency that has provided electoral endorsement

to the party until today. The relation between the two entities is no different from that of a political party and any civil group such as a labor union, for example that endorses the party, and it has been established as being constitutionally legitimate.”

(b) “In April 1970, the government clarified in an official statement that it does not contravene the Constitution even if those who are supported by a religious organization assume the reins of national government, and that freedom of political activities by religious organizations is constitutionally guaranteed.”

(c) “Article 20 of the Constitution is interpreted to mean that the state must not bestow such government power [as taxation, the exercise of police power, and judiciary proceedings] on any religious organization. It is not a prohibition against such organizations from participating in the political process.”

(d) “The political party [Komeito] has never sought nor introduced legislation that would in any way favor the Soka Gakkai or its members since it was founded 40 years ago.”

(e) “The church-state separation issue has merely become controversial whenever a rival party or individual feels some measure of political capital or advantage particularly during an election year can be gained by alleging that the Komeito-Soka Gakkai relationship is unconstitutional, for which the Japanese media almost invariably provides coverage.”

These specific points clarify the stance of Komeito about the issue of the relationship between religion and politics, trying to clear away the lingering suspicion about the legitimacy of political activities engaged in by a religious group. Indeed the suspicion has always lingered, but the legitimacy of the political activities of Komeito has not been squarely contested. Now that their coalition with the LDP has come to an end after the defeat of both the LDP and Komeito in the general election in 2009, critical reappraisal of Komeito in this coalition is a timely issue. In order to contribute to this reappraisal as one small step, I will first review the results of this election, and then move to reflect on the accumulated arguments concerning the relationship between Soka Gakkai and Komeito.

Religious Political Parties and the 2009 General Election

The 45th general election of Japan, held on 30 August 2009, turned out to be a historic sea change where the ruling LDP and Komeito in the coalition government failed to keep their ruling position, while the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) won an overwhelming great majority in the House of Representatives. The election consists of parallel voting of 300 seats for single member constituencies, and 180 seats for proportional representation in multi-member constituencies in eleven regions of the nation. The DPJ won 308 seats in total. Accordingly, the DPJ has organized a coalition government with smaller parties, namely the Social Democratic Party and the People’s New Party.

Before we discuss the result of Komeito in this election, a brief mention should be made about Kōfuku no Kagaku (The Science of Happiness), a very active Japanese new religious group that abruptly announced in May 2009 that they organized a political party: Kōfuku Jitsugentō (The Happiness Realization Party). This party ran 288 candidates for single member constituencies, and 49 for multi-member constituencies,

the latter including their religious leader, Ōkawa Ryūhō. The result of the election was a complete failure. They gained approximately 459,000 votes nationwide for the proportional representation constituencies, with none elected either for the constituencies of proportional representation or for the single member constituencies. In the region where their leader was a candidate, that is, the Kinki region, they only gained about 80,000 votes, whereas the Social Democratic Party that gained the least number of seats in the same region—just one—gained more than 400,000 votes.

Kōfuku Jitsugentō was not alone as a political party founded by a religious movement. As its precedents, we know of at least two of them in postwar Japan. The latter case was that of Shinritō (The Truth Party Organization) founded by Aum Shinrikyo in 1990 that lost in the general election that year. The earlier case was Komeito, founded by Soka Gakkai in the 1960s. Compared to Aum Shinrikyo and Kōfuku Jitsugentō, the formation and following activities of Komeito present a successful case: Komeito was in the coalition government with the LDP for almost ten years, although it has also been regarded as very controversial.

According to the Komeito website, their situation before this election was as follows: as of 2008, Komeito had 400,000 members, consisting of 190,000 male and 210,000 female members. As of the end of July 2009, among 480 members of the House of Representatives, 31 belong to Komeito, and from 242 members of the House of Councilors, 21 belong to Komeito. After ten years in the coalition government, however, Komeito now needs to face the reality of the result of the 2009 election.

For the 2009 general election, Komeito ran eight candidates for the single member constituencies, all the present holders of the seat that included their chief representative and the secretary general. Among these eight, four ran in the constituencies in Osaka, two in Hyogo, one respectively for Tokyo and Kanagawa. All of these Komeito candidates were also officially supported by the LDP and a small new party, Kaikaku Club (Japan Renaissance Party). The result of the election was that in those single member constituencies, none were elected. Compared to the 31 in office before the election, Komeito won 21 seats only in the multi-member constituencies of proportional representation. The number of votes that Komeito gained nationwide for the constituencies of proportional representation was 8,054,007. Compared to 8,987,602 votes that gained 23 seats in 2005, the present result was an approximate 10% decrease. Here is a list of the number of the candidates and the elects of Komeito in each region of the proportional representation.

Block for Proportional Representation	Number of Seats for Election	Number of Komeito Candidates	Number of Komeito Representative Elected	Votes Gained by Komeito
Hokkaido	8	2	1	354,886
Tohoku	14	3	1	516,688
Hokuriku and Shinetsu	11	2	1	333,084
North Kanto	20	4	2	855,134
South Kanto	22	5	2	862,427
Tokyo	17	4	2	717,199
Tokai	21	5	2	891,158
Kinki	29	7	5	1,449,170

Shikoku	6	2	1	293,204
Chugoku	11	3	1	555,552
Kyushu	21	6	3	1,225,505

Table 1: Number of Candidates and Elects of Komeito Politicians
Proportional Representation Constituencies
The 45th General Election (August 2009)

Review of Soka Gakkai and Komeito before the Election

Before delving into the current circumstances affecting Soka Gakkai and Komeito, I would like to look back to consider their situation before the 2009 general election.

Politics and Religion is the title of an academic journal newly launched in 2008 by the American Political Science Association, and its very first issue contained a review article that dealt with four Japanese books featuring Soka Gakkai and Komeito. I will briefly review some of the arguments that have been presented to grasp the recent scholarly understanding of them. The author of the article, George Ehrhardt, highlights the shift in the policies of Komeito when they entered into a coalition with the LDP in 1999, and he locates part of this shift in Komeito's dropping of "its opposition to close security ties with the United States and to American-style capitalism" (Ehrhardt 2008, 139). As for the LDP-Komeito cooperation, Ehrhardt explains its institutional backdrop at the electoral level as follows:

Japan switched from multi-member parliamentary districts to a mix of single-member ones like in the United States or Great Britain and proportional representation. This means that with only ten percent or so of the vote, the Komeito was unlikely to win any district elections outright. Faced with marginalization, Komeito leaders struck a deal with the LDP whereby Gakkai members would vote for LDP candidates in their districts in return for a portion of the LDP's proportional votes.

In close elections, this strategic voting has proved enough to push LDP candidates over the top. (142)

According to Ehrhardt, Soka Gakkai thus has successfully mobilized their members to vote not only for Komeito but also for the LDP on some occasions, based on the bargain struck between these two parties. How to mobilize voters is an important question, but Ehrhardt does not seem to have reached any convincing conclusions. In his view, one of the difficulties in doing research on Soka Gakkai and Komeito lies in the lack of first-hand information and the scarcity of scholarly literature. Ehrhardt explains:

This lacuna may partly stem from the Gakkai's well-known suspicion of outside investigators and its reluctance to allow access. For example, studying the LDP is a matter of building personal connections with individual politicians, but Gakkai members direct outside researchers to the organization's central headquarters, reinforcing the idea of a single collective identity. (145)

It is true that there are several scholarly works on Soka Gakkai, but Ehrhardt adds:

While the edited volume *Tonari no Soka Gakkai* [The Soka Gakkai Next Door: 1995] is an exception, most of those researchers who do gain access to the

Gakkai, like Metraux [The History and Theology of Soka Gakkai, Edwin Mellen Press, 1988] or Seager [Encountering the Dharma, University of California Press, 2006] rarely tackle controversial issues. This leads the Gakkai and its critics into a vicious cycle with no information to the contrary, observers assume the worst about the organization, and in turn, their critiques only confirm members' distrust. (146)

In other words, Ehrhardt thinks "it's time for scholars to address the Komeito-Soka Gakkai connection in more robust, synthetic, and theoretically sophisticated ways" (147).

One of the books reviewed by Ehrhardt is the one written by Shimada Hiromi. Shimada is a former university professor and now an independent writer who has published several books focusing on Soka Gakkai and/or Komeito in the past five years or so. He summarizes the meaning of the electoral activities for Soka Gakkai members as the only occasion in which they feel the real capacity of the organization that they belong to. The election is, in his view, an event in which members can feel united to the Soka Gakkai organization, and in addition can feel the victory of their faith if Komeito wins at the election (Shimada 2006, 132-3).

As to the above-mentioned strategic cooperation in voting for the LDP and Komeito, Shimada points out that not only has the LDP gained from this voting strategy, but Komeito has gained as well. Komeito won approximately 1.2 million more votes in 2005 than in 2000 in the proportional votes, and according to him, these 1.2 million votes were won based on the cooperation with the LDP. Since the votes Komeito gained before the coalition in 1999 amounted at most to approximately 7.5 million, and since the LDP and Komeito were already in cooperation at the election in 2000, Shimada estimates that of roughly 9 million votes cast for Komeito in 2005, around 1.5 million were gained based on cooperation with the LDP (Shimada 2007, 180-1; Shimada 2008, 25).

As for the achievements of the coalition government, even though Komeito may be proud of the social welfare policies that they realized through their participation in the government, they were unable to stop dispatching of the Self Defense Forces for the reconstruction and support of Iraq (2003-2009), or stopping Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine (2001-2006); both of these failures were criticized by some members of Soka Gakkai (Shimada 2007, 190; 208; 227-7).

There are other interesting points that Shimada makes regarding the relationship between Soka Gakkai and Komeito. One point is that Soka Gakkai members are far from uncritical supporters of Komeito; actually they are often very critical of Komeito and Komeito politicians (Shimada 2008, 2-3; 81-3). Another point is that, although Soka Gakkai members are active in election campaigns, it does not mean that they are also active in daily political activities in support of Komeito (3-4; 277).

Furukawa Toshiaki, an independent journalist who used to work at a major newspaper company, has repeatedly criticized Soka Gakkai-Komeito, and in his latest publication he critically reviewed the achievements of the LDP-Komeito coalition government. Furukawa points out that the personnel management of Komeito has been decided dictatorially by Ikeda Daisaku (Furukawa 2008, 2-3; 61). His criticism focusing on the position of the heads of Komeito is as follows:

The post of the chief representative of Komeito had been passed from

Takeiri Yoshikatsu, to Yano Jun'ya, to Ishida Kōshirō in the years after they had their members elected in the House of Representatives for the first time in 1967. After New Komeito was reorganized in 1998, the post has been passed from Kanzaki Takenori to Ōta Akihiro. These chiefs all were decided on without voting. The general assembly was held and the ceremony of selecting the chief representative was conducted, but all the personnel were decided on in advance under the direction of Soka Gakkai.

The present representative, Ōta Akihiro, was re-appointed in September 2008, again without voting. The election for the post of the chief representative with two or more candidates has never been held in Komeito, although they criticized at the time the election of the President of the Democratic Party of Japan that decided on the new President without voting. (Furukawa 2008, 4)

Furukawa's reproach is directed toward a seemingly undemocratic procedure in the decision-making process of Komeito, if not toward its religious character itself. Moreover, Furukawa points out a right-wing fascist element in the coalition government, especially under Koizumi's leadership (9). In Furukawa's view, this kind of undemocratic or totalitarian tendency, that is, the tendency toward the avoidance of open discussion and intolerance of different opinions or objections appears to have contributed to Komeito's failure to stop the neo-liberal policies of the LDP (16).

There have been criticisms against Soka Gakkai and/or Komeito published one after another, some written by journalists and others by former members of Soka Gakkai who have seceded, which I will not or cannot cover in this paper. But the number of the publication of serious academic works on Soka Gakkai and Komeito is still very limited. In the past few years, however, a few sociological studies on Soka Gakkai, or on Soka Gakkai and Komeito, have been published. In the following, I will review some of the arguments presented in these works. These were published before the 2009 election, and therefore do not contain any comments on the present situation of Soka Gakkai and Komeito.

Recent Sociological Studies on Soka Gakkai and Komeito

According to Tamano Kazushi, whose work I will refer to later in this paper, there appeared several academic works on Soka Gakkai and Komeito in the 1960s, but since then the number of academic arguments has been relatively limited (Tamano 2008, 132). Under this condition, some works have appeared one by one in the past few years. In this section, I will pick up two works to review the arguments on Soka Gakkai and Komeito.

In 2003, Nakano Tsuyoshi, a sociology professor at Soka University and professed member of Soka Gakkai, published his work that includes chapters dealing with the political activity of Soka Gakkai. According to Nakano, participation in politics by religious people and religious groups is characterized in Japan as one feature of freedom in society realized after the end of World War II in the course of democratization under the occupation (Nakano 2003, 137). Although Nakano thinks that religious traditions in Japan originally thought highly of their social outreach activities, political participation was made possible only in the postwar years (138). In this postwar situation, Soka Gakkai is considered to have been most actively engaged in the political participation.

This characterization by Nakano may seem contradictory to the general understanding of the sociology of religion in the West that has found the tendency of privatization among the new religious movements (NRMs) in the West (139). The NRMs in Japan, on the contrary, have been characterized as actively engaged in such social matters as environment and peace as well as politics. Nakano notes that candidates with some religious background, some from the established religious organizations and others from the NRMs, ran in the first postwar general election for the House of Representatives in 1946 and also in the first election for the newly established House of Councilors in 1947. The result was that some of them were elected and others lost (144-5). Among a number of the NRMs, Seicho-no-ie (literally meaning "the Home of Growth"), originally founded in 1930, first organized a political section in 1945. Through engagement in politics and cooperation with the rightists in the LDP, this group insisted on such conservative political goals as an establishment of a new Constitution, normalization of education, and overcoming of materialist thought (147-8).

Around the time of the establishment of Komeito in 1964, the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan (abbreviated in Japanese as Shinshūren), an organization established in 1951, also became actively involved in elections. In the election for the House of Councilors in 1965, seven candidates of the LDP backed by religious organizations of the NRMs or of Buddhist groups were elected, whereas nine Komeito members were elected as well (150-1). This active involvement in politics of religious organizations, besides Soka Gakkai, can be explained, on the one hand, as a precaution against the stronger presence of Soka Gakkai in society and Komeito in politics, and, on the other hand, from a calculating motivation on the part of the LDP for cooperation from the NRMs (151).

Nakano traces the process of the political participation of Soka Gakkai in detail. Keeping its liberal stance in their political agenda, Komeito gained more than five million votes in the election for the House of Councilors in 1965, and it became the third biggest party in the House of Representatives in 1967, although the religious agenda that they still held in these years was generally seen as a possible violation of the constitutional principle of the separation between religion and state (152-3). Then there was a scandal in which there was an attempt to obstruct publications critical of Soka Gakkai and Komeito, followed by the deliberation of this matter at the Diet, and the declaration by Soka Gakkai and Komeito that they would follow the principle of their separation (153).

Nakano also argues about the relation between the NRMs and the LDP in the following years, and about the related issue of the so-called Yasukuni Bill around 1970 that would determine the nationalization of Yasukuni Shrine, but these are issues that fall outside of the scope of this paper. To focus on his argument on Soka Gakkai and Komeito, some points of his explorations into Soka Gakkai's political engagement are worth special attention.

In Nakano's view, the motivation of Soka Gakkai to engage in politics should be understood as something religiously motivated, or an intention based on their faith (177). Then the contents of this religious motivation or the faith-based intention should be explained. Nakano therefore looked back at the earliest manifestation of political interest in the 1950s in the writings of Toda Jōsei (the second president of Soka Gakkai) (177-8). Although Soka Gakkai proceeded through a more aggressive involvement

into politics in the 1960s, it reached a deadlock in the 1970 declaration of separation. However, Nakano sees in this separation, especially in Ikeda Daisaku's statement, a positive differentiation of the religious aim and the social aim. The religious aim is to establish the right dharma through a religious revolution of individual faith, whereas the social aim is to bring about social prosperity, the happiness of people, and world peace. Nakano explains that to bridge these two aims, other universal ideals are necessary, and those humanistic ideals—that include dignity of life, respect for humanity, absolute pacifism—should be realized by people of integrity through their political or social activities. Thus Komeito was established with the purpose of realizing universal humanistic ideals through politics. And with the 1970 declaration of separation, Komeito would stick to this political plane, leaving religious matters to each individual (181-2).

Nakano further pays attention to this issue of the separation between religion and state. In his view, the relation between Soka Gakkai and Komeito has become a relation between a supporting organization and a supported political party (195). As to the suspicion about whether the involvement of Soka Gakkai in political and election campaigns may violate the constitutional separation by going beyond the tolerable limits of religious activities for a legal religious corporation, Nakano does not find any excessive involvement, claiming that "political activities in a narrow sense, such as an election campaign, are only conducted intensively in a very limited period of time," and "there is no dubious case observed where Komeito should use a space or a facility free of charge that was purchased by Soka Gakkai with the tax privilege." In addition, he insists that Komeito should keep its neutrality in religious matters, without giving any favorable treatments toward Soka Gakkai (196).

Nakano thinks that when a religious organization engages in social and political activities as an extension of their religious activities, the ideals that they hold must be a highly abstract ideal to be applied universally to humanity. And therefore, in his view, the most important role that a religion can play in politics, based on this ideal, will be to keep performing a critical function to stand in judgment against ugly power politics, political corruption, and a state or government that is forgetful of democracy or the people as the holder of sovereignty (199-200).

In the case of Komeito that joined in the coalition government with the LDP in 1999, Nakano fears that it has functioned as a complement to the LDP in enacting the LDP policies. At the moment of the publication of Nakano's work, it may have been too early to evaluate the coalition government that would continue for ten years, but after the 2009 election, Nakano and others should reconsider the results of the coalition.

Compared to Nakano's view somewhat from the inside of Soka Gakkai, the argument of Tamano Kazushi (another sociologist) is more or less from the outside. Although his work covers a number of topics on Soka Gakkai, here I focus only on his argument on the relation between Soka Gakkai and Komeito. His basic understanding about one feature of Komeito is that this party politically organized common people, especially those laborers working in smaller enterprises, who had been neglected both by the wealthy capitalists, the supporters for the LDP, and by those organized in the unions of larger enterprises and public workers—the supporters for the former Socialist Democratic Party (Tamano 2008: 169-70). Another interesting observation in Tamano's argument is that, after the collapse of the agreement between Komeito and

the Japanese Communist Party in the mid-1970s, the political approaches of Komeito have been characterized based on a realism of their own. This realism can be explained as follows. Its aim is to gain higher social status under the protective measures by the government, with realistic moderate means to exert influence—even in a small way—upon the present ruling power within the context of capitalism and representative democracy. This realism means that Komeito has always avoided cooperating with the Communist Party after the failed agreement with that party. It does also mean that they do not seek any revolutionary change (174-5).

As to the recent coalition government of the LDP and Komeito, Tamano explains that the Komeito vote became important for the LDP because the latter was losing the support from the local and conservative old middle-class, owing to their neo-liberalist policies in favor of the wealthy in the urban areas. Thus the Komeito vote became the substitute for those former supporters of the LDP, who were neglected by the LDP especially under Koizumi Jun'ichiro's leadership (183-4). This complementary relation between the LDP and Komeito actually has a prehistory. On the level of the local government, Komeito joined the ruling coalition since the mid-1970s in one place after another. Here, on the local level, the LDP and Komeito have worked together for more than thirty years in a conservative political frame that involves the inducement of specific profit to localities through political clientelism, including, for example, public construction dependent on governmental subsidies (188). The result of the 2009 general election, that is, the defeat for both the LDP and Komeito, probably indicates the malfunction of this political style.

Concluding Remarks

A weekly magazine, *The Diamond*, featured the involvements of NRMs in politics in a special issue published after the 2009 election, the main interest in this issue being property and other financial matters of NRMs. In one article in the issue, the 2009 election was characterized as a victory for the Federation of New Religious Organizations (Shinshūren) together with one religious organization outside of this federation: the Sekai Kyuseikyo Izunome (The Church of World Messianity, Izunome), both of which mainly supported the DPJ, and as a defeat for the Soka Gakkai that supports Komeito and the LDP.

Another article in the issue written by Yamada Naoki, a journalist who has written on Soka Gakkai once in a while, tries to predict where Soka Gakkai and Komeito will head in the near future. Yamada mentions on the one hand that under the government composed of the DPJ and their allies, there might be the possibility of a national legal reformation regarding religious corporations that, among others, would affect Soka Gakkai. He also mentions on the other hand the possibility that a change will probably happen in the attitudes of Komeito toward election campaigns. According to Yamada, for the future elections for the House of Representatives, Komeito will need to reduce the number of candidates, at least, by running the candidates only for multi-member constituencies of proportional representation. Or possibly they may have to recede completely from the election for the House of Representatives with a view to concentrating on elections for the House of Councilors (Yamada 2009, 69). Yamada concludes his article with the following:

Soka Gakkai and Komeito already passed their peak as organizations. The vote of Komeito in the constituencies of proportional representation is around eight million. Although they have aimed at gaining ten million votes for many years, that feasibility is almost nill. How can they maintain these gigantic organizations, and how can they extend their term of validity? The organization of Soka Gakkai seems to be too delicately designed and fabricated to adapt to changes. (71)

I am not sure whether or not Soka Gakkai and Komeito have passed their peak, but I believe at least that an organization that can still gain eight million votes has maintained its importance in society and that this should not be neglected. Seen in light of the results of the 2009 election, it may be true that Soka Gakkai and Komeito are now coming to a turning point. This result shows that their campaign activities will not always result in victory. If, as Shimada Hiromi notes, the election is a very important part of the activities of Soka Gakkai, we should pay close attention to what effect this result of the 2009 election is having on the Soka Gakkai members.

Yamaguchi Natsuo, the current Komeito representative, in interviews with some weekly magazines repeatedly denies the possibility of candidates withdrawing from standing for single member constituencies in the coming elections for the House of Representatives. According to Yamaguchi, it will not be their decision because, on the one hand, when a candidate makes every effort to be elected in a single member constituency, their local political activities are energized and they gain support within the constituency. On the other hand, if Komeito can recover seats in the single member constituencies in the future, keeping posts both in the single member constituencies and in the multi-member constituencies will assure that the party will hold a significant voice, particularly with regard to the election system and its possible reformation in the future.

As reviewed in this paper, a number of criticisms have been written about Soka Gakkai and Komeito even before this latest election. At least two points I find very important.

First, doubts have been raised about the internal organization of Soka Gakkai and Komeito. Furukawa Toshiaki (2008) criticizes the opacity of the organization of Komeito, especially regarding their decision-making process. The question is: How democratic is the management of the Komeito organization? It may be more or less natural that some religious organization should respect an authoritative hierarchy and continues following an undemocratic decision-making process. However, as a modern political party it is most desirable for Komeito to have full accountability in this very point of their decision-making process. In addition, as to the inter-organizational level, the relation between Soka Gakkai and Komeito will continue to be challenged on the principle of the separation between religion and politics. Nakano Tsuyoshi saw no problem in the relation between Soka Gakkai and Komeito, but as long as these two organizations co-exist, their relation should always remain open to examination. Especially since other religious parties have appeared after Komeito, the model of Komeito, as the oldest and most experienced religious party in Japan, will always be under critical examination by both journalists and scholars.

Secondly, as some Soka Gakkai members have claimed and just as Shimada Hiromi noted, the position of Komeito regarding the role of the Self Defense Forces

has been contested. This point is related to several general issues, such as the policy of defending the nation, international cooperation in general, and cooperation with the United Nations as well as that with the United States in particular. Soka Gakkai is known for its peace-promoting activities, and therefore if Komeito does not look active enough in the field of peace-keeping, not only domestically but also internationally, it will disappoint Soka Gakkai members who have voted for Komeito.

Finally, on a broader level, Soka Gakkai and Komeito present a very special case for Japanese society. In a society that has been generally said to respect harmony, some members of Soka Gakkai have dared to be conspicuous enough to be estranged from the majority of society. Probably, the act of professing or of showing intentionally one's religious identity in public in Japan is regarded as very distinctive, or too distinctive, and this applies, if not exclusively, both to some Soka Gakkai members as well as some Christians. Yet, with more and more people of foreign nationalities staying or living in Japan, becoming more conscious of one's religious identity and professing or showing it "up front" may become more common and natural than before. In this sense, the Soka Gakkai members may have been forty years ahead of their times.

One could argue that Soka Gakkai has been very conspicuous because they are very exclusive toward non-members. This may, however, reflect the exclusive nature of Japanese society toward something new, or deviant, or just different. In this very point, studying Soka Gakkai will probably contribute to a further study of the characteristics of Japanese society itself.

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Окујама Мићиаки

СОКА ГАКАИ КАО ИЗАЗОВ ЗА ЈАПАНСКО ДРУШТВО И ПОЛИТИКУ

Резиме

Нова будистичка група Сока Гакаи зачала је свој покрет 1930. године. После Другог светског рата рапидно је расла, да би у Јапану до 2005. године придобила осам милиона породица за своје чланове. Сока Гакаи Интернешнал (СГИ), коју је Сока Гакаи 1975. године организовала као своју међународну мрежу, данас, према сопственим прорачунима, има дванаест милиона чланова и простира се на преко 190 земаља и подручја широм света. Сока Гакаи је зачала унутрашњи политички покрет почетком 1960-их, успостављањем Комеита 1964. године, који је током Хладног рата углавном држао трећу позицију, између Либерално демократске партије (ЛДП) и Социјалдемократске партије. Када је политичка сцена у Јапану пролазила кроз процес реструктурирања 1990-их, Комеито је приступио коалиционој влади са ЛДП-ом 1999. године. Општи избори 2009. године представљали су пораз и за ЛДП и за Комеито, док је Демократска партија Јапана победила на изборима за вођство нове владе, готово по први пут од оснивања ЛДП-а 1955. године. Овај рад настоји да позиционира Сока Гакаи и Комеито у контексту јапанске политике и друштва, те да да процену тренутне политичке ситуације након избора 2009.

Кључне речи: Сока Гакаи, Комеито, верска политичка партија, општи избори у Јапану 2009.

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