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NICHIREN SHOSHU SOKA GAKKAI OF AMERICA IN TUCSON, ARIZONA:
PORTRAIT OF AN IMPORTED RELIGION,

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NICHIREN SHOSHU SOKA GAKKAI OF AMERICA IN TUCSON, ARIZONA:
PORTRAIT OF AN IMPORTED RELIGION

by
Melvin Cecil Powell, Jr.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF ORIENTAL STUDIES
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
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In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

This study describes Nichiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai (NSA) in Tucson, Arizona from data collected by participant observations supplemented with a survey and interviews. These data show NSA to be an imported religion which provides needs not met by other religions inherited from American culture. Through membership in NSA, individuals become part of a religious organization that provides a framework for the establishment and maintenance of many different types of social interactions. This framework is influential in developing and maintaining essential skills in interpersonal interactions. It provides a setting for expression and solution of personal problems. Active members of NSA acquire a world-view rooted in the Buddhist doctrine basic to the organization. They are also influenced by aspects of Japanese culture that are incidentally transmitted by NSA.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The subject of Buddhism usually brings to mind images of the exotic: robed monks with shaven heads meditating in ancient halls misted with incense or huge multi-armed statues born of a culture so distinct from our own as to make them incomprehensible. Quiet, mysterious, calm, monastic: these are a few of the adjectives that most Americans would probably use to describe Buddhism. Yet, in this composite society of ours, there is a form of Buddhism that in no way can be characterized by such attributes. Its practicing members stand out no more than the people we encounter in our daily lives--the check-out person at the super market, the mechanic who fixes our car, or the cook who prepares a business lunch. The rituals they participate in take place not as solitary experiences in a secluded monastery, but in their homes or in large auditoriums. Their frequent conventions have much of the atmosphere of a revival; they certainly are not quiet. Rhythmic chanting, frequent cheering, and lively songs can be heard outside their homes as they conduct their various meetings. Rather than robes, these Buddhists are apt to wear casual clothing, perhaps embossed with the initials of the religious organization that is so much a part of their lives.

Nichiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai of America--NSA as it is referred

to by its members--has its roots in a Japanese religious organization, Soka Gakkai (The Value Creation Society), and has existed in the United States since around 1960. NSA was formed when Masayasu Sadanaga emmigrated from Japan in 1957 and organized a small group of Japanese wives who had come to the new land with their American husbands (World Tribune 1983). From this nucleus, NSA has grown steadily and has extended beyond the original community of American servicemen introduced by their Japanese wives (Holtzapple 1977, p. 102). Today Masayasu, a naturalized American citizen who has taken the name George M. Williams, heads a religious organization which claims over 350,000 members.*

The evolution of NSA in Tucson, Arizona, followed a pattern similar to that of the national movement. Local members recall that in 1970 there were about seventy members, mostly people who were associated with Davis Monthan Air Force Base. Like the first few families organized by Masaysu Sadanaga, these practitioners had been introduced to NSA by their Japanese spouses. Today, NSA officials in the Tucson area claim more than five hundred members.

The introduction of a foreign religious tradition raises questions in the mind of the student of religion. It represents a valuable opportunity to learn more about the nature of religion as well as the culture in which it is found. What accounts for the appeal of a Japanese religion to members of a southwestern American community?

* Personal communication, Janet Beck, staff member, NSA National Headquarters.

What mechanisms does the new religion provide for resolving personal problems that are not present in the native culture? And finally, in what ways, if any, do NSA members' view of themselves and the world around them change as they participate in their new religion? This study addresses these questions by focusing on NSA in Tucson.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

This study is based upon data collected primarily from participant observation. Rather than relying upon textual descriptions of doctrine and organizational structure, I wanted to obtain data which reflect the actual, living experience of membership in NSA. Accordingly, I sought information about members' religious beliefs, practices, and activities, by talking with them and attending their religious functions. I also administered a survey questionnaire. Members were willing to cooperate with me provided that I became a member, which I did.

From November 1984 to May 1985, I observed 22 NSA events. Since it was impossible to attend regularly all of the Tucson area meetings, most of these events were selected weekly meeting of three groups I shall call A, B, and C. Additionally, four public events were observed. These included a monthly devotional service attended by members throughout the Tucson area, an initiation ceremony for new members (in which I participated), a visit by the National President, Mr. George Williams, and a musical presentation open to the public. Formal interviews and a survey (see Appendix A) were also conducted to supplement the field observations. Five people were interviewed: two group leaders, one new member, one Japanese exchange student, and one

person who broke contact with the group after attending several meetings. Twenty-two members of Groups A, B, and C consented to participate in the survey. Ten responses were received.

At the initial contact with each group, I introduced myself and explained that I was a student at the University of Arizona studying NSA as partial requirement for a Master of Arts degree from the Department of Oriental Studies. Permission was asked to observe the event and to use my observations as data for this study. Frequently throughout the study I repeated this identification, so that members who were not present during my initial contact would be aware of my status.

The groups that I regularly visited can be described from the data collected by participant observation. The membership of each group varied in age, ethnic background, length of membership, and occupation. Each group, however, had a distinct composition. I felt that by regularly observing the activities of these three groups, I would have a representative picture of the Tucson area NSA organization.

University students or recent graduates for the most part comprised Group A. On the average there were sixteen members present at the meetings. An equal number of male and female members attended. Most members appeared to be in their early twenties and were not married. My impression from statements made by the members during the meetings and informal conversations indicate that the members of Group A were employed in part time jobs or their first jobs since graduating. These members did not consider themselves to be in stable occupations,

but rather in temporary jobs held "until something better comes along." There were four regularly attending members who were Japanese. Six of the regulars were Black, one was Papago, and five were Caucasian.

Nineteen regular members usually attended Group B meetings. Again, the sexes were equally represented; but in contrast to the predominantly unmarried members found in Group A, about one third of Group B's members were married. Married members usually attended with their spouse. Most Group B members appeared to be in their mid thirties and were more established in their occupations than Group A. These occupations included salespersons, social workers (state agencies), and small business owners. Most members were Caucasian. There were no native or American-born Japanese in Group B. The ethnic/racial background of four of the members was not determined.

Group C meetings had an average attendance of eight members. Three of these regular members were Japanese women, apparently in their late thirties. The other members consisted of a Caucasian in his late forties and his Japanese wife and a couple in their late thirties, accompanied by their two year old son. This completes the core of Group C. One or two guests were usually present. The occupations of these members include chief cook, maintenance supervisor for the local public bus company, waitress, and housewife.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Culture can be thought of as a complex of related symbols-- concepts, rituals, modes of expression, and objects--which are used by people to translate the raw reality of our human experience into an organized and understandable experience. By their use, the information contained in these symbols is transmitted over space and time, establishing and maintaining the social systems which provide the survival for the individual members. However, the information contained in the cultural system is neither uniform nor equally available to all of the members of the society. Distinct islands of symbol systems, called cultural scenes, invariably exist. The symbols and the information they contain are not uniform throughout the entire population of the society (Spradley 1979). For example, the unemployed, homeless Black males who meet at a particular corner in Washington, D.C. have a language, set of goals, and mechanisms for achieving those goals which are distinct from those of nearby working Blacks (Liebow 1967).

In considering NSA as a religion, I am assigning the organization the status of being a specific type of symbol system. As Geertz so concisely says, a "...religion is: [1] a system of symbols which acts to [2] establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods

and motivations in men by [3] formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and [4] clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that [5] the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz 1979, p. 79)." Within NSA, as in any cultural scene, one may identify a group of key symbols responsible for the distinct conceptual basis distinguishing one cultural scene from another (Ortner 1979). These symbols are a collection of action sequences (rituals), objects, and linguistic devices which participate in a three-way interaction to order and give meaning to the human experience. This interaction is a dynamic one between the symbol, the referent, and the meaning given to the referent by the symbol (Spradley 1979). The referent may be a real object such as a scroll with calligraphy on it, or an abstraction such as the concept of karma. The actual existence of the referent is not the issue. The power of symbols to define the human experience lies in the way meaning is attached to the referent.*

By identifying the key symbols used within the cultural scene of NSA, and uncovering the meaning behind them, one can discover how membership in NSA shapes the perspectives and actions of its members. In this study, I have identified several key symbols of NSA by recognizing the rituals, objects, and folk terms that were prominently used by the member population, but not found in the non-member population. Once these key symbols were identified, I was able to

*It is important to keep in mind that just as the meaning of any symbol is a composite of many attributes, the role of any one symbol is also a composite. A particular term, object, or ritual can serve many different functions.

learn the meaning given to them by the NSA community. This was done by keeping track of the setting in which each symbol appeared, eliciting explanations from the members, and analyzing the relationships between symbols.

By this process, I have identified one group of symbols that act primarily to classify groups of people, another that identify rituals, still another that serve as structural terms, and finally some that carry doctrinal concepts.

CHAPTER 4

NSA IN TUCSON, ARIZONA

NSA exists in Tucson as two clusters of small sub-units. One set of hierarchial administrative units that gives the organization a tight, vertical structure derived from each administrative unit having authority over the one subordinate to it. A second set of units, defined by age and sex, does not contribute to the vertical structure of NSA, but is important in coordinating social activities. The overall organizational structure is outlined in detail in Appendix B. This structure has a significant influence upon forming the distinctive community found in NSA. To be considered first is the influence of this structure on the communication system so vital to the maintainance of the vital sense of community found in NSA.

NSA as a Communication System

Within NSA there is an efficient communication network capable of distributing information throughout the entire organization with surprising speed. This is a function of the vertical structure of the organization. The leader of each unit is able to communicate with the leader of the next lower unit and be assured that the message will be distributed to its members. This communication grapevine is usually

used for the purpose of organizing events or distributing publications, but is also an important mechanism for maintaining the NSA community. For example, members who are suspected of not playing an active part in the organization are identified and their fellow members are encouraged to urge the truant member to become more active. Because members interact primarily in groups, a decrease in the performance of ritual or other decreased participation is quickly noticed. Several times in the course of the study I noticed unit leaders phoning reports to the next higher official. The reports contained such information as the number of members in attendance, attitude of the members, and whether or not the meeting was conducted smoothly.

In one meeting, following the primary ritual, I was asked by a leader if I had been able to attend any of the Young Men's Division activities. Before I could answer of my own accord, the wife of the leader answered for me. "No", she confidently exclaimed, "he hasn't done any of those things." On another occasion, another leader mentioned that he was aware that I was keeping active in my study by attending several different meetings scattered throughout the Tucson area. At one point in the study I was interested in learning how new members are taught the difficult ritual of gongyō and what types of bonds are developed between the new member and the instructor. The person I interviewed indicated that usually the shakubuku parent (the old member who introduces one to NSA) is the one who teaches him/her gongyō, but in his case the introducing member was too far from the new member's home. Instruction by the shakubuku parent was further complicated by conflicting schedules. Quickly, a han (group) was

located near the new member's home. This han leader was available for giving instruction at a time convenient for the new member, and arrangements were made for the two to meet weekly for special instruction.

The NSA communication system also acts to disperse and monitor the organization's shared ethical values among the member community. At one point in the study I learned that one of the unit leaders had been relieved of his position of leadership. The person was upset, feeling that his demotion was more the result of his ethnic background than his performance. Such an attitude clashes with the NSA position of celebrating the ethnic diversity of its members. Although he made no overt complaint, he did complain to a few of the members closest to him. News of his discontent quickly reached a higher official. Since his dismissal had been purely on the basis of performance--a reputed lack of concern and interaction with the members under his care--the official was quick to comment that she would find a person whom the offended member trusted to assure everyone that the decision was based upon no other criterion than performance. This example illustrates the flexibility of the communicative system of NSA. The essential facts of the situation traveled quickly throughout the community. The response of the official was also swift. NSA, being structured around small, connected units, is able to establish a communication system which is as effective as the mass media when used to distribute study material or news of upcoming events, yet is sensitive to the feelings of individual members, as though they were part of a large family.

NSA as a Coordinator of Activities

NSA, like other religions, touches upon many aspects of the human experience. It is an organization which influences both the social and spiritual life of its members. As Durkheim observes, man is a dual creature, living simultaneously in the private realm of the individual and in the public realm of society. Religion acts as a collection of symbols representing the essential values necessary for the continuation of society and translates these symbols into everyday action. By engaging in action defined by a religious setting, the participant is expressing an involvement with the conceptual foundation underlying the religious system (Durkheim, 1979). The actions defined by a religious setting need not be confined to rituals directly connected to the devotional aspects of the religion. Indeed, by providing a variety of activities, a religious tradition influences the world view of its members to a greater degree than if it were limited to sacred rituals. These constantly expose the individual to the conceptual referents of the actions. Festivals, parades, and conventions are not primarily devotional, but yet participation in them is motivated by doctrinal concepts. The entire activity is imbued with expressions of the group's world-view. For example, stories recall their participation in parades and center on how difficulties encountered on the way to the site were overcome by chanting.

Participation in NSA provides a variety of social settings which reinforce the maintenance of a stable peer group and the basic tenets of the organization. In order to identify these settings,

during the course of the study, I collected a set of folk terms relating to activities associated with NSA. I define folk terms as words or phrases either unique to NSA or given a meaning significantly different from the non-member population. I maintain that the existence of folk terms which describe activities is significant in that as a set, they describe activities which are defined within the cultural scene of NSA and are unique to participation in the group. As such, even events that are primarily social (rather than ritual) activities communicate to the participants motivations and orientations toward the world which are contained within the doctrine of NSA. Consider activities such as playing in a brass band. While this activity can be done in a context other than NSA, the motivation for giving one's time in this manner lies at least partially in the doctrine: by playing in the brass band at public demonstrations and large NSA events, the individual is helping to bring about a principal goal of NSA--the establishment of world peace by introducing the practice of Nichiren Buddhism to as many people as possible.

Folk terms relating to activities are presented in Table 1. Section A of Table 1 contains all of the folk terms that relate to activities dominated by ritual. Section B contains folk terms which are primarily social in nature. Note that social activities are action sequences which do not center on sacred objects and are similar to activities which might be found in other organizations.

The lists in Table 1 show the variety of organized group activities available for members. During the course of the study, most

Table 1: Folk Terms Associated with Activities

daimoku tozo
daimoku
 district meetings
geishu
gongyō
kosen-rufu gongyo
 practice
sansho
shakabuku
 study meeting
 study
tōban
toso
uruban

brass band rehearsal
 convention
 culture festival
 parades
 planning meeting
 planning session
 roller-gymnastics rehearsal
 spring festival
 traffic duty
 WD chorus
 WD mini-orchestra
 YWD ropers rehearsal

members participated in at least one of these activities each week in addition to the two weekly meetings which revolve around gongyō--the central ritual of NSA.* The rehearsals for the various performing groups were done in preparation for public performances. Some of these performances were incorporated into a large secular events such as a rodeo parade, while others were events sponsored solely by NSA. As soon as one event was held, planning for the next one began.

These events provide opportunity for developing leadership skills as well as social interaction. The conventions, parades, and culture festivals require coordination of scores of people. Large props and banners must be designed and manufactured. Rental agreements for meeting halls need to be negotiated and buses chartered. As one district leader told me, "NSA works hard at bringing out the leadership hidden in everyone. It is one of the goals of the organization and a way to bring about kosen-rufu (world peace)."

The influence of NSA goes beyond providing structured social activities, for members often spend their free time in casual activities with other NSA members. In response my questionnaire (question number 28), six of the ten respondents said they spend more than seventy-five percent of their spare time with other NSA members. Three replied that they spend between thirty and forty percent of their time with other members. This supports my impression that most of the Tucson members spend a great deal of their free time in association with fellow NSA members. Table 2 shows the activities mentioned as

*The gongyō ritual is explained following page 33.

Table 2: Activities Done with NSA Members which are Not Part of Organized Events

1. after meeting socializing
2. morning coffee after gongyō
3. visiting each other at home
4. going out with children
5. dining/drinking out
6. doing shakubuku wherever we are
7. home visitation for participation in gongyō or daimoku encouragement
8. going shopping
9. parties
10. movies
11. studying for school
12. hanging out together

examples of unorganized activities done with fellow NSA members. Based upon the number and variety of social activities and the influence NSA has on the way its members spend their free time, it can be considered a "total involvement" organization--one that continually involves its members in a variety of activities and relationships.

Peer Groups

A religion does more than provide opportunities for socializing, develop leadership and interactional skills, establish a sense of community, or make life meaningful in terms of individual experiences. Religion also functions as a mechanism for the solution of personal problems. NSA provides a variety of settings for the solution of such problems. Included in the weekly han meeting is time for the expression of personal problems and joys. These expressions are shared with a small group of peers in a nonjudgmental atmosphere. Additionally, members have the opportunity for extensive exploration of their problems in the informal visiting which occurs after the meeting is officially over.

In order to understand these peer situations, a description of the district meeting is in order. The average attendance at the district meetings I have attended is twelve members, with an even mix between males and females. They are held in the home of the district leaders and begin at 6:30pm. One outstanding characteristic of the meetings is their precision. The various districts followed exactly

the same format and during the course of the study this format remained constant.

The meeting begins by chanting namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō while facing the gohonzon. After one half hour, the gongyō chanting ritual begins. This ritual also lasts thirty minutes. Next, there is a song. There is some variation in the song chosen, but they all share a common theme of pressing ahead to achieve the goal of world peace by the propagation of NSA. Following the song, the leader asks if there are any guests present. If there are, the person who invited the prospective member will introduce him or her. As each guest is introduced, the group applauds and cheers "e e o, e e o, e e o, washoi, washoi, washoi!" When asked about this unusual cheer, they explained that it was quite common in Japan—much like "hip-hip-hooray, let's go" might be heard in the United States. Even though most of the members are not Japanese, or of Japanese descent, this cheer is frequently heard throughout NSA meetings.

Following the introductions, the leader asks one of the members to explain the phrase (namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō) chanted as part of the gongyō ritual. Next, another member is asked to explain the meaning of the gohonzon. Located at the center of the altar and commanding the members' attention while they chant, the gohonzon is a scroll inscribed with a dizzying array of Japanese characters. A third member is usually called on to explain the basic NSA concepts of faith, study, and practice. The guests are encouraged to ask questions as these explanations are given.

The next portion of the meeting is a short discussion of some

aspect of the NSA doctrine. It is led by the district leader, and is drawn directly from one of the NSA publications. Usually the reference is the weekly World Tribune and centers on a passage from the gossho (Nichiren Daishonin's collected writings) and a short commentary by either the president of Soka Gakkai International or NSA. Following the discussion is a request for "experiences." To the guest, it appears that this part of the meeting is a spontaneous sharing of events in the members' daily lives. Over the course of the study, I observed that these "experiences" could be grouped into two broad categories. One is the spontaneous expression of unique and personal events (both problems and triumphs), while another group of statements is commonly characterized as stock descriptions of benefits obtained as a result of chanting namu-myōhō-renge-kyō. Toward the end of the study, I learned that even though some of the "experiences" are spontaneous orations, in other instances members were asked prior to the meeting "to give an experience".

The meeting usually ends at this point, but the members stay on for about twenty minutes afterward and engage in light social chatter. The leader of the group makes an effort to welcome each guest and express the desire to see her/him return. The guest is quite the center of attention. Warm smiles, welcomes, and affirmations of the wonderful benefits open to all who chant namu-myōhō-renge-kyō surround the new members. Regular members not visiting with the guests often carry on discussions relating to a problem expressed during the meeting or an up-coming event. They offer solutions, sympathy, and encouragement to practice.

Most members participate in two meetings which follow this pattern each week. The gongyō ritual and the study portion of the meeting provide a common activity and goal for the members. But it is the "experience" section and the informal visiting after the meeting that provides a setting for the expression and examination of personal problems among peers.

Two phases in the meeting represent distinct situations and provide two different levels of expression of personal events. During the "experiences" section of the meeting, one may express personal problems in a situation free from judgment from the group. It is a very safe setting, for an unspoken set of rules is observed. There appears to be an implicit rule that those present are not to respond in any great detail to what is being said. Expressions of sympathy or support are often given, but, by changing the course of the discussion, leaders tactfully discourage extensive discussions of an issue. The time limit of each member's "experience" is regulated by both non-verbal and verbal cues. Nonverbal devices include scowls, grunts, throat clearing, and rapid changing of body posture which one might easily associate with impatience. Verbal interruptions, such as calling for the next speaker or stating that time was running out, are common. In either situation, the change of subject is handled in a fairly polite manner, usually with a comment about the need to discuss the matter more fully at a later date or after the meeting. These attributes of the "experience" situation make it very much a value/judgment-free environment.

Even though personal problems are brought to the attention of

the group during the "experiences" section of the meeting, they are often discussed in greater detail during the informal visiting which goes on after each meeting. Here there are fewer regulations limiting conversation. It is a small group made up of members chosen by the participants, and the common bond is most likely to be that of friendship rather than the common goal and ritual which binds the members during the "experiences" situation. Further elaboration of problems occur and new, more sensitive issues are brought up for discussion. The most often observed themes discussed during this section of the meeting were problems with interpersonal relationships, job related conflicts, difficulty in maintaining their religious practice, and upcoming events. The most protracted and involved discussions were those concerning relationships between lovers/spouses. Members participating in the discussion would respond by sharing similar experiences and/or by relating the problems to NSA doctrine. Two doctrinal themes were commonly expressed: the view that one could influence one's emotional and material environment through the gongyō ritual and the view that one must value problems and obstacles in one's life, for they are an opportunity to grow and strengthen one's faith in the gohonzon through using it to resolve crisis.

NSA provides a defined community. Membership in NSA also provides situations which encourage the development of leadership skills, social interactions, and the expression of personal problems to a group of peers in a non-judgmental atmosphere. However, membership in NSA has yet another influence upon the members, for by a complex of symbols, a characteristic world-view is transmitted to those who

participate in this religion. The key symbols and the basic aspects of this distinctive world view will be examined next.

Key Symbols and Cultural Themes of NSA

One function of religion is to give meaning to events encountered in daily life by relating them to a system of concepts grounded in the realm of the sacred (Geertz 1979). These concepts, and indeed the very essence of sacredness, are transmitted to the believer by the symbols of the tradition. Within NSA there is a group of key symbols that express the world-view unique to the religion. As a group, these symbols represent a fundamental premise which forms the way NSA members interact with the world. This premise, which I will refer to as a cultural theme, links the separate actions, terms, and symbolic objects together in an organized manner. Cultural themes act as "... a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society (Opler 1945, p. 198)." Opler describes how a cultural theme gives form to rituals and behavior by examining the culture of the Chiricahua Apache. He detects their attitude of male superiority as a premise which is expressed in all of the cultural aspects that characterizes this tribe.

In the case at hand, the primary cultural theme of NSA outlines an explanation of and method for controlling events in one's daily life and one's emotional/psychological/spiritual condition. In order to understand this theme that underlies the symbols of NSA, I have

collected a list of folk terms, listed in Table 3, unique to the group. By looking at the collection of meanings represented by the list of folk terms, one may identify concepts, orientations toward the world, and classifications of events or people that are not present in the non-member population. Through such a procedure, one may begin to see the world according to NSA. Of particular interest are the terms which have doctrinal concepts as an attribute in their meaning. It is in the use of these terms that membership in NSA most affects the individual's way of processing life's experiences.

The terms "karma", "cause", "effect", and "benefit" are key symbols that establish concepts relating to the members' world-view. As a group, these act as symbols that give meaning to events occurring in daily life. They also conceptually establish the belief that the performance of the gongyō ritual can manifest a desired objective.

"Karma" is the doctrinal concept that simultaneously links each present event to the distant past and the immeasurable future. Actions in disagreement with the value system outlined by the tradition are thought to give rise to positive experiences in the future. Unpleasant events are thought of as the result of past actions which are given negative value by the tradition's ethics. The perception of time and the concept of death are also modulated by this term, for "karma" is linked to the concept of rebirth; thus daily events are seen as the result of one's past experiences and as opportunity to ensure one's future.

One example of how the concept of "karma" is incorporated into the world-view of NSA members is in the way one couple dealt with the

Table 3: Folk Terms

benefit	<u>kotekitai</u>
cause	life condition
chapter	MD
convention	member
<u>daimoku</u>	new member
<u>daimoku toso</u>	non-member
district meetings	parades
district	planning meeting
division	planning session
effect	practice
experience	<u>sansho</u>
faith	senior group
fortune babies	<u>shakubuku</u>
<u>geishu</u>	study meeting
<u>gongyō</u>	study
<u>gossho</u>	<u>taitan</u>
group	territory
<u>han</u>	<u>tōban</u>
<u>ichinen</u>	<u>tosō</u>
<u>ichinen sansen</u>	traffic duty
joint territory	<u>uruban</u>
junior group	WD
<u>karma</u>	YMD
<u>kosen-rufu gongyō</u>	YWD

death of their new-born son. The death occurred six weeks prior to the start of this study, and I was able to speak with the father about his feelings of loss, and later heard the mother speak of the death in the "experiences" section of a meeting. Both parents expressed an ease in accepting his death due to their belief in karma. They were comforted by the belief that since their son was born into a family practicing True Buddhism, he will very quickly be reborn into a favorable situation. They also mentioned that his death encouraged them to practice with increased devotion, for their devotion and sincere execution of the gongyō ritual was thought to ease their son's passage through the period before the next birth. "Our lives are connected to our little son by very strong karmic connections from past lives," the father told me. "Our actions can influence him. When we put ourselves in a state of anger, or hell, our son also suffers. It's really an incentive to keep our practice strong—to help him come back sooner. He won't necessarily come back to our family, but it's comforting to know he will come back to this life soon. Fortune babies (those born into a NSA family) don't get much of a vacation," he concluded with a warm smile.

The term "cause" refers to an act which carries particular significance in influencing one's subsequent condition ("effects") as defined by the doctrine of "karma." It may have positive value (a good "cause") or negative value (a bad "cause") depending upon how the act relates to the ethics of NSA. It is used in conversation by NSA members to acknowledge the operation of the "Law of Karma." A "cause" can be either a conscious or unconscious act, but is always related to

the ethical framework outlined by NSA. One member starts to tell the group of his recent problems with his wife: "I must have made some really heavy ('bad') causes for this to happen to me." The person making this statement was assuming that his current marital problems may be related to undefined actions in his past rather than actions that directly relate to his current crisis. These actions may have even occurred before he met his wife and the effects only now have come to light. "But after this terrible fight," he continues, "I sincerely chanted to the gohonzon for things to get better. I knew that I could change this rotten life condition and get out of hell and manifest my Buddha nature. All I had to do was make the cause of chanting namu-myōhō-renge-kyō to the gohonzon and I would change my life condition." NSA doctrine or activities rarely explicitly comment upon an ideal of moral conduct—a fact many members mention as a key attraction to the religion. However, the folk term "cause" illustrates one mechanism by which an ethical framework is communicated to the members by the symbols unique to the group.

"Benefit" is another folk term that carries the world-view of NSA. A "benefit" refers to a favorable event resulting from participating in the gongyō ritual or simply chanting namu-myōhō-renge-kyō. NSA doctrine states that by these ritual activities one may override past "bad karma (causes)" and change one's life in a positive way. "Benefits" may be the fulfillment of a specific request or any positive experience in one's life.

These terms—"cause", "effect", "benefit", "experience" and "karma"—are used very spontaneously in casual conversation as well as

in a group or district meeting. When they are used in the presence of a non-member, the terms are immediately translated. The conceptual referent, the meaning given these terms, and their fluid use illustrate that the members contacted in the study have incorporated these doctrinal concepts into their world view.

Among the group of terms that relate to doctrinal concepts are several that represent action sequences. In Ortner's terms they are key scenarios (Ortner 1979), expressing fundamental translations of reality into terms understandable to the participant. These rituals are used to influence the events of everyday life, hence they are particularly significant because they link doctrinally defined perspectives of reality and motivations to specific activities--activities which occupy a great deal of the member's free time. The folk terms referring to activities are listed in Table 1. They can be grouped into three categories. One category is terms referring to administrative activities common to any organization. These include "planning sessions," "traffic duty," and "convention." Of more significance are the second and third groups. The second represents activities involving people outside of the organization, but motivated by doctrinal concepts. This group includes "parades," "practice," geishu", and "shakubuku." The third group includes rituals carried out either individually or among group members. These terms include daimoku toso, gongyō, kosen-rufu gongyō, tōban, tosō, and uruban.

The mere labeling of a ritual with a doctrinally related term is not enough to support the claim that the ritual transmits to the members significant changes of world-view. However, the context of the

terms is additional evidence that for the members, this connection does occur. Again, attention is drawn to the use of these terms in casual, spontaneous conversations witnessed in the informal periods following meetings. At almost every contact with an NSA member, I observed conversations describing the use of these rituals to solve problems by an attempt to influence the material or spiritual/psychological conditions of the speaker. Personal as well as group-centered problems are approached by carrying out these rituals. When asked how NSA helps solve personal problems, the almost universal reply is "By chanting namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō to the gohonzon." Two or three members may gather to chant for resolution of a personal problem. The entire NSA population will do extra gongyō during times of stress on the organization such as the preparation for a large cultural festival or the execution of an intensive membership drive.

In response to the survey question "Do you think that joining NSA has made a change in your life?" one member gives a characteristic reply: "Without a doubt. NSA functions to encourage each of us as to how to most correctly practice to the gohonzon to change our own lives." At the culture festival I attended, one excited member who joined eight months ago, described his first really big "benefit":

I just got a really good job, man. You know, I kinda didn't believe some of the things these other people were sayin' in the meetings and all, but ya know, it really works. I've been doin' odd jobs for a movein' company. Not too bad really. Get some big bucks sometimes, but it's nothin' steady. But man, a dude needs somethin' steady. I've been chantin' real vigorous and doin' serious shakubuku. I got this great job as a clerk. All I did was apply and this lady called me up and I went down to talk to her and she hired me. I start at an even higher place than what was advertised on account I been to college. I'm goin' to chant for a better car next. Well, I figure I

come up to Phoenix for activities so often that I should be more comfortable.

We have seen, then, that within the cultural scene of NSA, there are several symbols that act to translate, conceptually and by activities, a particular world-view rooted in the doctrine of the parent organization, Nichiren Shoshu. The existence of these symbols and their prevalence in the language and action of the members' lives illustrates that NSA is more than a social organization, for it establishes in its members an extensive world-view which gives form to the most essential processes of ordering the human experience.

The gohonzon as a Summarizing Symbol in NSA

The gohonzon is a dominant symbol in NSA, one that has many roles and attributes to its meaning. Using Ortner's terms, it acts as both a summarizing symbol and an elaborating symbol. Summarizing symbols express a large complex of concepts, motivations, and emotions, and may even imply methods to reach goals. They take a wide range of statements on a variety of human experiences and distill them into a single symbol (Ortner 1979).

As a summarizing symbol, the gohonzon expresses the entire doctrine fundamental to NSA. It is one of the few items in the organization's realm of the sacred. It mobilizes an emotional response from its members which is rooted in the belief that each gohonzon is the very essence of Nichiren Daishonin, the founder of the sect and the individual worshiped as the manifestation of the True Buddha and savior

of mankind. The possession of a gohonzon is prerequisite to full membership in the cultural scene. It is central to all rituals. Even social activities usually start with a ritual which the gohonzon plays a central part. An individual member's status in the organization is clearly indicated by the possession of a gohonzon, which type of gohonzon is owned, and the attitude displayed towards it. Leaders who are very active in propagating the practice and guiding those in their group are given a larger gohonzon that is considered to be more powerful than ones given to new members. Members who do not physically protect their gohonzon or display respect toward it either by speech or action are held in very low esteem by other members. The gohonzon is rarely talked about by members in unemotional terms.

During the initiation ceremony I attended, as the time approached for the distribution of the gohonzons to the initiates, I was suprised by an uncharacteristic aura of solemnity surrounding one of the officials. He very carefully put on a pair of white gloves as a hush came over those in attendance. As each new member stepped foward to receive his/her scroll, he delicately lifted a gohonzon from an ornate box and handed it to the priest for distribution. As I sat in a quiet corner of the hall recording my impressions after the ceremony, I noticed one of the Japanese members of the group I had been assigned to was quietly standing next to me. "Excuse me," she said, "but you should always take great care of this gohonzon. Please place it inside your backpack so that it will not be harmed." There was a note of stern disapproval underlying her gentle manner. I placed the scroll in my pack as requested, explaining that I thought it might have been

crushed by the books I was carrying and for that reason had placed it on the empty chair besides me.

Another indication of the central position the gohonzon plays in the lives of NSA members is that it is housed in an enclosed altar located in a central part of each member's home. As members enter their home, or the home of another member, they kneel in reverence toward the enshrined gohonzon and quietly chant namu-myōhō-rence-kyō three times. Furthermore, according to accounts given by Tucson members, when a member becomes inactive in the organization or dies without an heir willing to receive the gohonzon, the group goes to great lengths to recover it and return it to the head temple in Japan.

The gohonzon is often used to illustrate ethical concepts, and for this reason too, it may be considered the summarizing symbol of NSA. This is illustrated by one member's spontaneous speech of encouragement to his fellow members:

Being a Buddhist isn't a part-time job. You have to have the same attitude that you have when you sit in front of the gohonzon every morning with you at all times. Carry it with you all day long. Always. On your job, going shopping, in the bathroom. No exceptions! Someone pisses you off, think of the gohonzon and remember what being a Buddhist is all about. Problems are only opportunities to strengthen our practice and prove the strength of the gohonzon!....

The gohonzon as an Elaborating Symbol

Besides functioning as a summarizing symbol, the gohonzon acts as an elaborating symbol. Ortner's description of elaborating symbols fits the gohonzon for it is a symbol which "...formulate[s] the

culture's basic means-ends relationships in acceptable forms (Ortner 1979, p. 95)." It does this by being the central object in the gongyo ritual. As the "true object of worship", the gohonzon is thought to have the power to effect changes in the individual's physical and spiritual environment. Any member of NSA will attest to this. A common testimony might be "Through the power of the gohonzon, you can achieve anything. I needed a job right away, I mean, like that day, so I sat down in front of my gohonzon and chanted for a job. That afternoon I was reporting for work. Of course I had to go out and search the streets for a job, but who knows how long it would have taken without the gohonzon." This utility function is often explicitly stated by high ranking members and its effectiveness is thought to be due to its being a link with myōhō--the mystic law of the universe. In this way, the gohonzon acts in concert with the symbols discussed in establishing a theory of causation.

As a key element in the main ritual of the group--the recitation of gongyō--these attributes of the gohonzon are linked to actions. Practitioners are able to express their belief in the concepts behind terms such as "karma", "cause", and "benefit". In addition, it is a way of expressing devotion to the values of NSA. This takes the form of appreciation for the teachings of Daishonin Nichiren or reverence for the memory of ancestors.

The basic elements of the ritual are the recitation of the phrase namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō while focusing one's attention on the gohonzon. This is followed by the recitation, in Japanese, of a section of the Lotus Sutra. There are periods of silence as members

read to themselves printed prayers for their ancestors and appreciation for the past and present high priest of Nichiren Shoshu. The sutra is chanted in Japanese, for the sounds of the Japanese language, especially the phrase namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō is thought to act as a switch that opens a channel to the "Mystic Law of the Universe" (myōhō), hence changing ones physical environment and spiritual condition and manifesting the Buddha nature that is considered to be inherent in all beings.

CHAPTER 5

WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN NSA?

Why do people join NSA rather than one of the dominant religious traditions in the U.S.? The answer lies in the elements of NSA that are not found in other traditions. Paraphrasing A. F. C. Wallace, a religion new to a culture may deal with stresses not relieved by existing cultural mechanisms (Wallace 1979). I believe most members are attracted to NSA because they believe the rituals give them power to control their physical and spiritual development. However, I consider the social organization to be an even more important reason for the appeal. The members contacted in this study often expressed a desire to achieve the happiness seen in the people they met at their first meeting. Many indicated that prior to joining NSA, they had difficulty in interacting with people or maintaining stable relationships. Additionally, the religion is attractive because the doctrine does not carry sanctions against the pursuit of pleasure.

Developing skills in personal interactions stands out as a perceived need in prospective members. A woman staff member at the national headquarters in Long Beach, California told me about her life before joining NSA. She started with her High School days, saying that although she was a cheerleader and knew many people, she had no close friends. She often felt lonely and commented that the same pattern

continued as she studied to be a teacher in college. She married soon after graduation and described her marriage as years of long periods of silence relieved by arguing. It finally ended in a divorce. She describes herself as a completely different person since joining NSA. The most valuable change, she concluded, was an increased ability to develop close personal ties to others. Further evidence of NSA helping in interactional problems is found in the survey responses to question three, asking about the number of close friends the respondent had before joining. Only two of the ten felt they had many. Five said they had few, one said very few, one responded with "none", and one skipped the question. In response to the question "Do you think being a member has made a change in your life," one respondent replied "Beyond description! I was totally unable to maintain any normal relationships with anybody." Another member mentioned that he had an uncontrollable temper. Through chanting, he claims, he "...was able to eliminate this life condition, and become a much more pleasant person to be around." Yet another member testified that he experienced many failed relationships with women due to his arrogant, self-centered nature. "Now, through chanting to the gonhonzon, I have become more sensitive to others. I still have a long ways to go, but if only you had known me before I joined, you wouldn't believe the change that has occurred."

Comments collected from the "experience" section of the district and group meetings also indicate that the need for a peer group is met by being a member in NSA. One new member in her late twenties described the joy in being able to move into her own apartment

for the first time in her life. She felt she could not have made this move toward independence without the support of her district leader and knowing that she had a stable group (her NSA district) to count on. Previously, she continued, she had needed roommates to help her overcome the fear of living alone. This was not a satisfactory solution, as the problems associated with sharing living quarters produced additional stress.

The structure of the NSA community provides a setting for acquiring interactional skills by providing its members with a nondemanding peer group. The development of stable friendships and total involvement with the organization occur simultaneously. Furthermore, the proselytizing methods of the group encourage interpersonal interaction. NSA, in marked contrast to other Buddhist traditions, is unique in its aggressive proselytizing activities called shakubuku. At every meeting and in each publication, members are strongly urged to introduce new members to NSA. It is a primary motivation for the various festivals that are held several times a year at each level of the organization. One of the qualifications for rising in the vertical structure of NSA is to introduce many people to the practice. This proselytizing, carried out in a definite pattern of personal contacts, communicates to the prospective member the types of interpersonal interactions characteristically found in NSA. For a person in need of friendship or lacking interactional skills, NSA can be very attractive.

Introduction to NSA almost invariably is through a person already known to the prospective member. During the "experiences"

section of District and han meetings, members often speak of the people who introduced them to NSA. Family members, fellow students, close friends, co-workers, and lovers are the references most often heard. Out of the ten survey responses, only two responded that they were introduced to NSA by strangers. Five characterized the person as friends or close friends, one responded "boss", and two mentioned family members. The quality of this personalized introduction is preserved throughout the first encounters with NSA.

Prospective members are urged to attend an "introductory meeting" by the person making the shakubuku effort. This is one of the weekly district meetings described earlier. As each guest is introduced, there is clapping and cheering. When guests are present, members speaking during the "study section" usually address the new members rather than the group as a whole. The testimonies given during the "experiences" section are mostly statements of "benefits" received by the speaker as a result of his or her practice. They are offered as proof in the advantages and effectiveness of following the practice outlined by NSA. The common theme of the meeting and the testimonies given by the members is that any desire is granted through chanting namu-myōhō-enge-kyō to the gohonzon. During this testimony it is usually stressed that materialistic desires are quite acceptable within the frame work of NSA. A certain lover, new cars, a raise, or a better job are often mentioned as "benefits" which have been received through chanting to the gohonzon. However, it is quickly pointed out that such pleasures are only "relative happiness and that the real value in this practice is the absolute happiness that one realizes through chanting

to the gohonzon." Guests are urged to try the practice, keep a list of desires that come true during the 'trial period' before rejecting NSA.

When asked why they returned to additional meetings, informants often reply that they were impressed with the happiness of the members at the meeting. Usually they recall wanting to feel the same cheerful optimism for themselves. When asked how they felt after their first NSA meeting, the following is characteristic of the survey responses:

A): Joyful, curious,--I wanted to a part of the happiness I saw.

B): Overwhelmed with the members shining, bright appearances and their moving accounts of their experiences from this practice. Desired to become a member but was too shy to express my wishes.

C): Fantastic, hopeful--as if I had finally found what I had been seeking all of my life.

D): I was very glad that I went because many questions I had about life were answered in or with logical answers. I also enjoyed the harmony I felt from the chant and the people.

The chance to enter into a happy community of peers is not the only reason given by members for their attraction of NSA. Members often express that the claims of the doctrine intrigued them. While a few individuals mentioned that they were most interested in the chance to help bring about world peace through practicing Nichiren Buddhism, most speak of more self-centered concerns addressed by the doctrinal emphasis upon this life and the encouragement to seek material gains. I often heard criticism of religions that deny life's pleasures and portray humanity as fundamentally evil. As one member says, "In NSA it's OK to be happy. Money, sex, a nice house--these aren't evil

things. Of course the most important thing is to bring out your Buddhahood, but to deny your earthly desires is stupid. It's the same as wanting to die. As the gossho (the collected writings of Nichiren Daishonin) says, 'Earthly desires are Buddhahood.' " Another member member confided that "Having been born into the Catholic religion, I was constantly exposed to a gloomy, morbid attitude toward death (eternal damnation being a constant threat if one did not strictly follow the teachings). The dark churches with a bleeding Jesus hanging on the cross, self sacrifice, guilt, etc. clouded my early years and continued into my early adult life." Besides offering the means to change both one's inner nature and one's material conditions, the doctrine sanctions the pursuit of pleasure and grounds such actions in the sacred. NSA beliefs stress that human society can be perfected by the happiness of its individuals. Thus, the achievement of material and spiritual happiness is almost obligatory. The fact that NSA links these benefits to a religious practice influences its members in ways that a purely secular organization cannot, for it establishes these pursuits in an ethical framework validated by the sacredness of the teachings. In NSA, the strivings for success are not only encouraged, but they are sanctioned--given meaning beyond the mindless acquisition of material possessions.

CHAPTER 6

NSA AS A CULTURAL TRANSMITTER

NSA is distinctly Japanese. Among all the variations of Japanese Buddhism, the foundation of NSA--Nichiren Shoshu--is the one which most bears the influence of Japanese culture. As Joseph Kitagawa puts it, "It has been rightly said that Nichirenism is half the man and half the Lotus Sutra (Kitagawa 1966, p. 118);" no other Buddhist leader was as nationalistic as Nichiren Daishonin. Most of his activities were directed toward convincing the governmental powers of his day to abandon other religious practices and adopt his in order to assure the safety of Japan (Matsunaga, 1976). While other Buddhist traditions in Japan have components which are traceable to their transmission from China, Nichiren Buddhism originated in Japan and is dominated by uniquely Japanese elements.

The incorporation of such a foreign religion into another society is often accompanied by elements unique to the culture of that religion. This has certainly been the case of NSA.

Upon entering the homes of NSA members the influence of Japanese cultural elements is apparent. Shoes are left at the door. Participants in the weekly meetings prefer to sit on the floor rather than on chairs. It is only at large meetings held outside members' homes that the participants use chairs. A Buddhist altar occupies a

central part of the room. Pictures and decorations tend to be Japanese. For example, a single Japanese character may be tastefully displayed. Mt. Fuji and portraits of President Ikeda seem to be favorite photographs.

To be sure, these are superficial characteristics of culture, and it would be hard to argue that they are proof of profound changes in the world-view. But there are some elements of Japanese social organization and culture practiced in NSA that are of a more significant nature. Foremost is the prominence of the group in the daily activities of the individuals. A second element is an emphasis on appearance and detail. NSA members display a great amount of courtesy--reminder of the honorific vocabulary which is so deeply embedded in the Japanese language. A third hallmark of Japanese culture is the many inter-personal relationships which follow a parent/child or master/disciple pattern. Like Japanese society, NSA is a group centered, vertical society made up of individuals who are very sensitive to ritual, details, and polite speech. I maintain that these cultural elements are not an integral part of Buddhist doctrine or rituals, but rather are a result of NSA being a religion born in Japan.

The extent to which NSA is a group-centered organization is readily apparent. "What district are you in?" is the most frequent question asked of a new member. Whether it is in the context of the han, the district, or one of the age/sex based divisions, group activities account for most of the individual's interaction with the religion. The full complement of group activities would leave very

little time or energy left for non NSA activities. Most of the members questioned reported that their free-time activities rarely involved non-members. Consider the two weekly han meetings, and the weekly district meeting, the hour or so of chanting done every Saturday at the district leader's home. Then, depending on the sex of the member, there is the daily 5:30 am chanting at the Young Women's Division (YWD) or Young Men's Division (YMD) leader's home. Most weeks also involve a rehearsal, many of them taking place in Phoenix. It is not uncommon for members to travel to Phoenix several times each month--usually on Sundays, and usually starting out at 4:30 am.

One characteristic of Japanese culture which is so often commented on by foreign observers is the attention to detail, the well-planned execution of group activities, and the polite nature of conversation. These characteristics are certainly evident in events sponsored by NSA. Whether it is the weekly district meeting or a visit by the NSA president, there is a smooth precision to the event. At large gatherings, members are guided to a parking spot by blue jacketed YMD members. If it is at night, each one is equipped with a flashlight. At the entrance to the event, there is a welcoming line of members dressed in the official NSA attire: for men, white pants and shirt with an accompanying red tie; for women, white skirt with a red blouse. Both the tie and the blouse have the letters NSA neatly printed in white. The dispersal of the event follows the same procedure, with the same cast of characters.

The terms amae, oyabun/kobun, and vertical society are bound to appear in any discussion of Japanese society. As a set, they refer to

the quality of the inter-personal relationships between the superior and the subordinate, the master and the teacher, or the parent and the child. Such relationships are hierarchial, but benevolent. The superior position is usually associated with seniority (Nakane, 1970). NSA is rife with such relationships. The structure of the organization sets the stage. han leaders are below district leaders, who are under chapter leaders and so on down the line.

The new member is similarly related to the person who introduced her/him to NSA. This person, known as the shakubuku parent or shakubuku mother, takes special care in the member's first few weeks in the organization. The shakubuku parent is a source of information and encouragement and also somewhat of a watch-dog, making sure that the new member is practicing correctly. It is a relationship that is usually life-long and accompanied by deep feelings of gratitude and obligation. When asked to describe their feelings toward the person who shakubuku'd them, eight of the ten respondents expressed a feeling of deep, eternal appreciation for being introduced to the religion.

The extent of the influence of these Japanese cultural themes upon the world-view defined by participation in NSA was not determined in the course of this study, but the detection of these themes being at least superficially present supports the hypothesis that participation in NSA involves the members in a cultural scene greatly shaped by imported cultural elements. One observation can be made: involvement in NSA does develop interest in, and a favorable view of, Japan. The responses to survey questions 49 through 54 suggest that most members had little contact with Japanese culture before joining NSA. Half the

respondents indicate only superficial relationships with Japanese or Japanese-Americans before joining. Only two mentioned interest in visiting Japan before hearing about NSA. This contrasts with all the respondents expressing a strong desire to visit the homeland of their religion as a result of NSA membership. A full explanation of this attraction of Japanese culture must await further study, but it appears that by accepting NSA as their religion, the members also accept much of Japan's culture.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This study has described the structure and key symbols of NSA. It has explored the mechanisms by which membership in NSA influences the world-view and provides a setting for the development of interactional skills for those who are active in the organization. We have seen that NSA is a religion focused mostly upon this life and generates a belief in a means for the improvement of one's material and emotional situation. Japanese cultural elements introduced into the lives of NSA members combine to make NSA a distinct cultural scene.

NSA can be thought of as a "secularized religion." The term religion is appropriate because NSA establishes a unique view of reality which is grounded in faith in the truth of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu. This world-view transcends the realm of human influence and perception and is imbued with "the mystic laws of Buddhism." Although small, there is a defined realm of the sacred. The gohonzon carries reverence, awe, and a feeling of belonging to the "wholly other" as components of its meaning. Comments by the members reveal Nichiren Daishonin as a figure hallowed in their hearts. The expressed goal of the religion transcends the individual and is expressed in terms of a universal salvation--the attainment of world peace by the spread of the practice of True Buddhism.

Yet, NSA cannot be termed a religion without some qualification, hence the term "secularized religion". The distinct absence of clergy and the emphasis upon the present life are two aspects of NSA which makes one uneasy with the term religion.' There is an ethical framework embedded within its symbols, but it is diffuse and not clearly tied to any sense of the divine. It stems more from a sense of obligation and appreciation to one's fellow members and, by extension, to society. The rituals of NSA are not primarily devotional, but are directed toward a specific goal, a goal which, despite the ultimate aim of the organization, is often focused upon the individual's temporal needs.

The NSA members in Tucson describe themselves as religious individuals. Their membership in NSA is clearly a strong influence upon their lives. The needs most clearly met by their participation are a setting in which interpersonal relationships can be established and maintained. Furthermore, NSA generates a belief that each individual influences the condition of his/her life. The doctrine defines humanity as inherently good and considers individuals able to attain perfection through their own efforts. Additionally, the doctrine establishes an ethical system that sanctions the striving for material success and happiness. These elements represent aspects of religion that the members found lacking in the dominant tradition but readily offered by NSA. As I so often heard during the months of this study, for these Tucsonans, NSA works.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE SURVEY

This survey is completely confidential. If there are any questions which you prefer not to answer, please feel free to skip them. If you need more space than is provided below each question, please use the back of the page.

1. What is your age? _____
2. Are you married? _____ How long have you been married? _____
3. Think of the number of close friends you had before you joined NSA. Would you say that you had many close friends or just a few?

4. Did you participate in sports during High School? _____
5. If you participated in sports during High School, which sports did you participate in? _____
6. If you were a member of any clubs while you were in High School, which clubs did you belong to? _____
7. If you worked while you were in High School, how many hours each week did you work, and what type of job did you have?
8. What is your educational background? High School _____ College _____
(Major: _____, Degree: _____) Graduate School _____ (Major: _____, Degree: _____)
9. As you grew up, did you attend church? _____ If you did, how often? _____ If you did you attend with your family? _____
10. Do you presently attend any other church? _____ If you do, which one? _____
11. Before joining NSA, did you ever have any interest in the occult or supernatural experiences? (For example: ESP, clairvoyance, soul travel, astrology, numerology)
12. At the present, do you have any interest in the occult or

supernatural experiences?

13. Please comment on your interest in or involvement with political issues.
14. Please list any magazines or newspapers which you regularly read.
15. Besides NSA, please list any other organization(s) you are a member of?
16. Think back to when you first heard about NSA. How would you describe your relationship to the person who first told you about NSA?
17. Why did you attend your first NSA meeting?
18. When did you attend your first meeting? _____
19. At the first NSA meeting you attended, were you the only visitor present? _____
20. If there were other visitors present at the first NSA meeting you attended, did you talk with them? _____
21. How did you feel after attending your first NSA meeting?
22. Why did you continue attending NSA meetings?
23. If you have received a gohonzon, when did you receive it? _____
24. What are some of the types of meetings that you attend, and how often do you attend them?

TYPES OF MEETINGS

HOW OFTEN?

25. Please list all of the NSA organizations that you belong to. (for example, Young Women's Division)
26. Have you ever been to a regional or national event? If so, please specify which one(s).
27. Think of the things you do at the NSA meetings you attend. Indicate which of the following activities you do, and how often you do them.
 - a. lead a song _____
 - b. lead a gosho study _____
 - c. read from the World Tribune _____

- d. read the daily guidance _____
 - e. plan future meetings _____
 - f. explain the meaning of Buddhist terms _____
 - g. tell experiences and benifits _____
28. Which of the above activities are you asked to do before the meeting takes place? _____
29. Think for a moment of the people you regularly have contact with during your spare time. About what percentage of these people are NSA members? _____
30. Do you participate in any activities with NSA members that are not part of an NSA-organized event? _____
31. If you answered yes to question number 29, please list what kinds of activities these are.
32. Does NSA hold any fund raising events? _____ Please describe some of the events you know of.
33. Do you pay an annual membership fee? _____
34. Do you buy NSA publications on a regular basis? _____ About how often, and which ones?
35. Does the group you most regularly meet with have a leader? _____
- If so, is the leader male or female? _____
- If so, what is the name of the leader of the group you most regularly meet with? _____
36. Please list as many different types of NSA leaders as you can think of.
37. Who selects each of the leaders you have listed in the above question?
38. What are the qualifications of being a NSA leader?
39. Do you think that joining NSA has made a change in your life?
40. Do you think that being a member in NSA has made a change in the way you interact with people? If so, please explain how.

41. Do you feel that your involvement in NSA has made a difference in any of the following aspects of your life?
- a. The achievement of material success _____
 - b. Improved health _____
 - c. Have personal problems been easier to solve? _____
42. If you feel that your involvement in NSA has made it easier to solve personal problems, please briefly explain how.
43. Do you regularly study the writings of Nichiren Daishonin? _____
44. Do you read commentaries on his writings? _____ If so, where do the commentaries appear? _____
44. Do you read articles written by other members about how their practice and faith help them in daily life? _____
45. How often do you have any contact with a priest? _____
46. Please list the circumstances under which you have contact with a priest?
47. Do you participate in Study Department examinations? _____
48. If you participate in Study Department examinations, please explain why?
49. Think for a moment about the NSA publications that you read. Please estimate the percentage of the articles that are written by:
- President Ikeda _____
- Mr. Williams _____
50. Did you know any native Japanese before joining NSA? _____
51. Did you know any Japanese who were born in America before you joined NSA? _____
52. If you answered yes to either of the above questions, please indicate how well you knew each of the individuals.
- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| NATIVE JAPANESE | AMERICAN BORN JAPANESE |
|-----------------|------------------------|
53. Please think back on your life before joining NSA. Indicate any of the following statements which relate to your life.

- a. I read at least one book on Japan before joining NSA.
(This includes novels or collections of short stories
which deal with Japan.) _____
- b. I took a course at college in which Japan was an
important part. _____
- c. While in high school, I studied Japan. _____
- d. I studied a form of Japanese martial arts. _____
- e. I studied one of the martial arts, but it was not one of
the Japanese schools. _____
- f. I visited Japan before joining NSA. _____
- g. I had some Japanese friends that were not NSA members
before I joined NSA. _____
- h. I remember reading a few articles in magazines or
newspapers which referred to Japan. _____
- i. I saw at least one movie which took place in Japan.

- j. I remember wanting to visit Japan before I joined NSA.

54. Now please think about your life since you have joined NSA.
Indicate any of the following statements which relate to your life.

- a. I have read at least one book on Japan since joining NSA.
(This includes novels or collections of short stories
which deal with Japan.) _____
- b. I have taken a course at college in which Japan was an
important part. _____
- c. While in high school, I have studied Japan. _____
- d. I have studied a form of Japanese martial arts. _____
- e. I have studied one of the martial arts, but it was not
one of the Japanese schools. _____
- f. I have visited Japan since joining NSA. _____
- g. I now have some Japanese friends that are not NSA
members. _____

- h. I remember reading a few articles in magazines or newspapers which referred to Japan. _____
 - i. I saw at least one movie which took place in Japan.

 - j. Since joining NSA, I want to visit Japan.
55. If you go to Japan, will it be alone, or with a group? _____
56. Please think about how you spend your spare time. Would you say that you more often do things alone or with a group? _____
57. Please think a moment about the person who introduced you to NSA. Please write a brief summation of your current feelings about that person.
58. Is the person you thought of in question 56 the same person who taught you to chant gongyo? _____
59. Please write a brief summation of your current feelings about the person mentioned in question 57.
60. Why did you join NSA rather than some other religious organization?

APPENDIX B

THE STRUCTURE OF NSA IN TUCSON, ARIZONA

One way NSA functions as a religion is by establishing a defined community. This community exists in part due to the structure of the organization. The basic structure is a mosaic of administrative units. The foundation is a unit called the han, or group. Composed of eight to ten members, it links each individual member to a world-wide organization called Soka Gakkai International (SKI). Between the han and the president of SKI, there is a nexus of geographically defined administrative units. Each nation represented in SKI is headed by a national headquarters. Between the han and the National Headquarters, NSA is divided into Districts, Chapters, Headquarters, Territories, and Joint Territories. Ideally, a District is composed of three groups (about thirty members), a Chapter is made up of three Districts (about one hundred members), and on up the line, each higher division being made up of three lower divisions. The actual size of each of these administrative units varies with the population density of the region.

In addition to each of the geographically defined administrative units, there are divisions based upon age, sex, and specific activities. These are the Young Women's Division, Women's Division, Young Men's Division, and Men's Division. Within each of these divisions, there are groups organized around specific activities.

Young Men's Division, for example has a Brass Band and the Soka Group whose duties are to provide traffic direction at large events. The age limit separating the Young Men's/Woman's Division and the Women's/Men's Division is flexible (around thirty).

Table 4: NSA Administrative Units in the Tucson Area

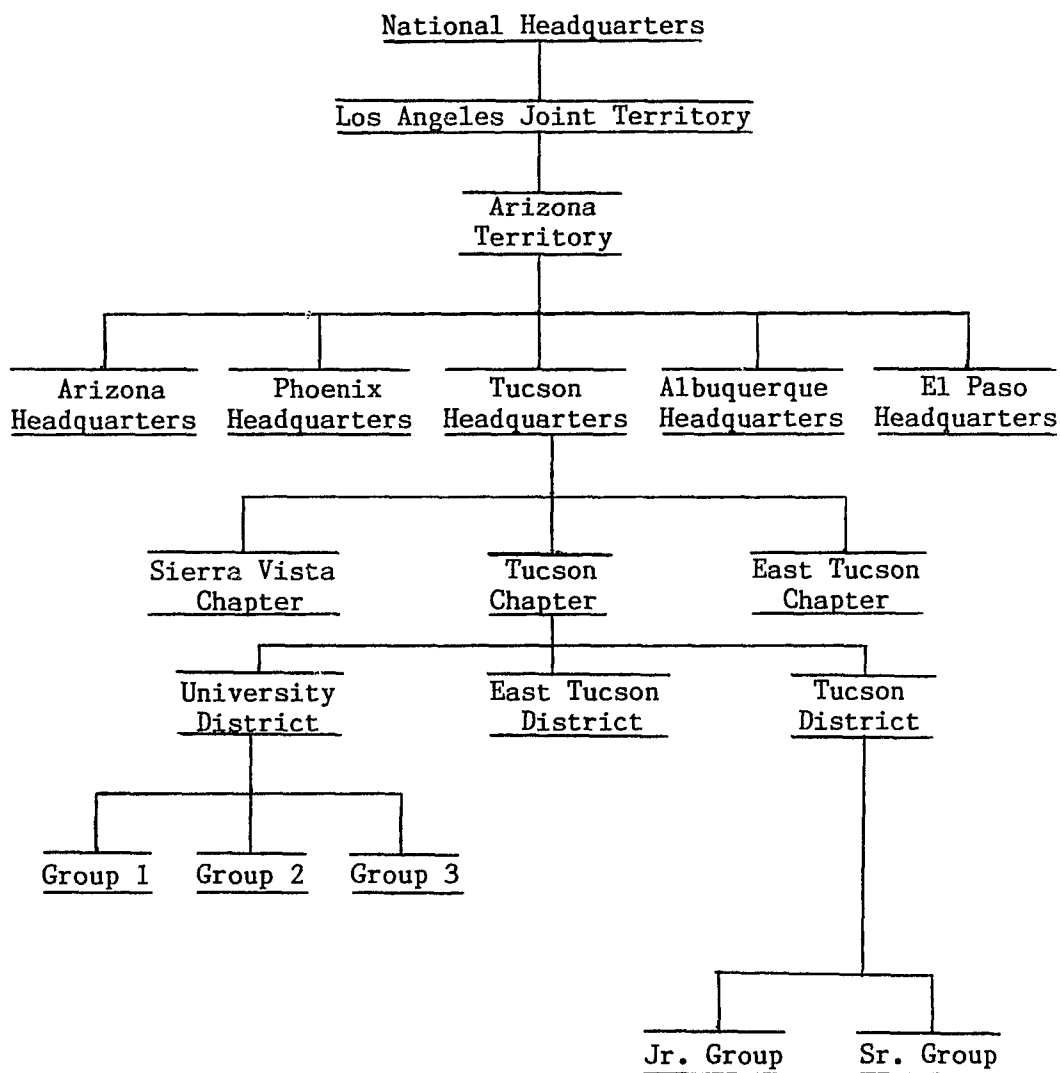


Table 5: Age/Sex/Activity Based Divisions in the Tucson Area

Young Women's Division

kotekitai (Drum and Fife Corps)
Hostess Group
Chorus
Mini-Orchestra

Young Men's Division

Soka Group (Traffic Directors)
Brass Band

Men's Division

No activity groups.

Women's Division

No activity groups.

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