

# Soka Gakkai Discussed by American Student in Japan

(Editor's note: This is another in a series of articles from Fred Lorish, son of Dr. and Mrs. Fred C. Lorish, 830 Minnesota Ave., Medford, who is studying at Keio University in Japan.)

By FRED LORISH

Recently I came across a copy of the Sept. 10 edition of "Look" Magazine, in which the cover article dealt with Japan. The cover itself was quite enough to gain a few extra readers: "JAPAN: Prosperity beauty ugliness and an alarming new religion which wants to conquer the world."

I am sure the journalistic word which is used to express the use of such a headline, perhaps "sensationalism" is close. News ertheless, "Look" has taken a number of rather innocent words and blown them up in such a way as to completely misconstrue the meanings.

I will not go so far as to say that the "Soka Gakkai," the above mentioned religion, does not want to conquer the world. But then, what religion doesn't? Perhaps "conquer" is a little too strong, but there is not a major religion existing that doesn't desire to "extend its influence" to include the entire world. This is true of Christianity as well as many other modern Japanese religions (which are, in fact, equally as interested in world domination as the Soka Gakkai). Perhaps Christianity hasn't the prophetic zeal of this religion, but there was a time during which Christians utilized a great deal of "zeal" combined with the machinery of war to extend their influence (need I enumerate). The Soka Gakkai hasn't yet gone to this extreme, though it does use numerous strong-arm tactics.

The article mentioned that the Soka Gakkai has attracted 10 million people. Considering that Japan has a population of 100

million, this is a sizable portion—one-tenth.

William P. Woodard, the director of the International Institute for the Study of Religions (and whose comments were a part of the "Look" article) made a statistical study of the entire spectrum of modern Japan's religions two years ago; among his findings, after requesting all the religions to instruct him as to the number of adherents, was the fact that there were, in total, 140 million adherents, but only 100 million people.

Recently, a newspaper article quoted a member of the Soka Gakkai leadership as saying that the number of converts numbers about 3 million. In the course of my research, I have found figures running from 1.5 million to "Look's" 10 million. The discrepancy lies in the fact that the Soka Gakkai membership is in terms of families, so that if one member joins, the others are automatically counted whether they believe or not. Even those who upon becoming disillusioned leave the fold of Soka Gakkai are included. The number 3 million is probably closest to fact.

**Drift of Article**

The general drift of the article seemed to convey the feeling that Soka Gakkai is in fact a great problem in Japan, and that the Japanese people fear this militaristic, vociferous, intolerant religion.

"The air in Tokyo night or day rings with the cacophony of Soka Gakkai and shakubuku, the endless chanting and the self-asserting songstresses reminiscent of prewar imperialistic Japan." Awfully strong words, and meaningless. I have yet to see, hear, or even hear of a rally, and I know that I am not the only one.

The truth is that this is not the first militaristic and intolerant religion Japan has produced. The prophetic zeal of the Buddhist saint, Nichiren, whose re-

ligion is the fore-runner of the modern Soka Gakkai, during the Thirteenth Century, was much the same. It prospered by sinister means, and finally lost its prestige.

**Run Same Pattern**

Countless other religions or religious sects have run the same pattern. I doubt that there are many Japanese who believe the religion of the Soka Gakkai will become the only religion of Japan, and least of all, the world. Though there is admittedly a great deal of concern, and rightfully so, at present concerning the group's policies, but it is generally felt, I believe, that it has reached its peak and will soon be superseded by another of Japan's numerous religions.

The impression one might have gained from the "Look" article would be that another imperialistic, militaristic influence is again coming to the forefront of Japanese political power. "Look" has, I believe, succeeded in presenting this picture without really admitting anything. It is unfortunate that a good magazine should present an incorrect picture of a rather touchy subject.

The Japanese have a remarkable culture (much of which she has forgotten in favor of Western oriented ideals), from which the West can learn a great deal. Such publicity as "Look" presented can only hinder the interchange of cultural ideals so necessary for mutual understanding.



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### Small Town Life Not as Relaxing As Some May Think

TECUMSEH, Mich. (UPI) — Life in a small town may not be as relaxing as some people would have you believe.

At least, that's what the University of Michigan found during its long study of this southeastern Michigan community of about 10,000.

More than one big city businessman, confronted with ulcers and jangling nerves, has had his physician tell him to relax and take it easy, perhaps adding the suggestion that the quiet life in a smaller community would prove the cure.

But eight years of study by the U. of M. School of Public Health indicates that life in the small town may not be relaxing after all. Almost the entire population of Tecumseh took part in the experiment. The university has now issued its first report and some of the information is startling.

**Heart Disease Evident**

The report shows that "a remarkably high" incidence of heart disease in middle-aged people was evident in Tecumseh. The frequency of high blood pressure, high blood serum cholesterol and high blood sugar was also astonishing in people over 50. Chronic diseases in adults generally was well above what the researchers had expected.

The university set up the study in 1956 with the aid of a grant from the American Heart Association and the U.S. Public Health Service. The first report on the results were made last week in Kansas City at a meeting of the American Public Health Association. The report was made by Dr. Frederick H.

Epstein of the U. of M. Cardiovascular Research Center.

The report showed, among other things:

—One-fifth of the population of Tecumseh above middle age had abnormally high blood pressure.

—A striking climb, relative to age, was found in the percentage of people over 50 who suffered from multiple disorders.

—Six per cent of the women and 12 per cent of the men in their 50s had coronary artery disease.

—One-fifth of the middle-aged people had high blood sugar and high cholesterol.

—Diabetes was detected in 3 per cent of the women and 2 per cent of the men in their 50s.

**Chronic Bronchitis**

—Eleven per cent of the men and 2 per cent of the women in their 50s have chronic bronchitis and 5 per cent of the women and 1 per cent of the men in the same age group have rheumatoid arthritis.

To gather all the data, a clinic was set up in Tecumseh, a city located about 23 miles southwest of Ann Arbor. A complete medical history was taken of every resident taking part in the study and each person has an annual interview and medical checkup.

The first program of its kind in the nation, the study is far from finished. The university spends about \$250,000 a year to pay for the physicians, epidemiologists, public health nurses, industrial hygienists, sanitary engineers, biostatisticians, sociologists and other specialists taking part in the study.



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