

Religion Today

Militant religio-political Soka Gakkai gaining power in Japan at terrific rate

By LESTER KINSOLVING

Mt. Fujiyama, Japan—At the foot of this historically sacred mountain are six unpainted concrete three-storied, modernistic, barracks-like buildings which look like a penitentiary designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Each of these buildings has a large yellow number. And the bleak atmosphere of this building compound is further chilled by the sound of rapid and frenzied chantings which reverberate from within each of the buildings.

"NAM-MYOHO RENGE-KYO! NAM-MYOHO RENGE-KYO! . . ."

Inside each building, 300 to 400 teen and college-age boys in white shirts and trousers kneel in front of an altar, roll prayer beads in their hands and shout this chant—at least 3,000 times per day.

This chant (meaning "devotion to the wondrous law of life: cause and effect") is hardly meditative in the traditional sense—although the boys are assured that such chantings will ensure perfect health and a firm bank account. To witness the volume, rapidity and frenzied, self-hypnotic delivery in this chanting and to see the countenances of the young chanters, inevitably recalls the ecstatic countenances of other large groups of young people who once shouted "Banzai!" "Heil!" or "Duce!

buildings are part of



the international headquarters of a ferociously militant religio-political organization called Soka Gakkai ("Value-creating Academic Society"). In just two decades this organization has grown from 5,000 to more than 11 million members.

Soka Gakkai is technically a Buddhist layman's organization. But it thoroughly dominates its parent religion, a Buddhist sect called Nichiren Shoshu.

Nichiren was a 13th century Buddhist priest who fancied himself greater than the original Buddha, Gautama Siddhartha; severely denounced existing Buddhist sects as traitors and devils; was exiled after warning the government that "I am the ridgepole of Japan—to lose me would mean felling the pillar of the country," in spite of rumored power to predict the future and to effect miracles. died at age 60—of chronic diarrhea.

His following persisted however, until in 1946 it was taken over by an appropriately intolerant thug named Josei Toda. "We must consider all religions our enemy and we must destroy them," said Toda, leading the sect's younger followers into widespread attacks upon other Buddhist sects, Christian churches and many of the more than 100 new religions which have sprung up in Japan since the end of World War II.

On April 27, 1952, Toda and 4,000 young Sokas took over the principal Nichiren temple at Fujiyama, by assaulting the aged priest Jimon Ogawarara. In the vanguard of these Buddhist storm troopers was Daisuke Ikeda, who has succeeded

Toda as president.

Under Ikeda, the organization has:

—Created its own political party, Komeito, which has since 1964 won 71 seats in Japan's Parliament (Diet) and is presently the third largest party in Japan.

—Built up a publications empire including the daily Seikyo Shimbun, which has a circulation (3.5 million) which is larger than any newspaper in the U.S. (This and other publications bring in "about \$100 million annually, so that only a few of our well-to-do members are asked to contribute," according to Tomiya Akiyama, chief of the organization's Foreign Relations Bureau.)

—Expanded to 11 million members; through the extremely aggressive conversion technique known as Shakabuku ("Break and subdue") in which potential converts are hounded, threatened and brainwashed in what the Japanese Ministry of Justice has described as "a semi-gangster manner, using a military organization."

If Soka Gakkai is ever able, thorough its awesome economic power and highly disciplined religio-political structure, to win a majority of seats in the Diet, the consequences to the Orient, as well as to the world, could be great.

And the organization by no means confines its conversion objectives to Japan. It points out that Soka Gakkai among other things "is the fastest growing religion in America."

On March 8, The New York Times reported that the number of Soka Gakkai members in the United States amounted to more than 200,000.