

From NSA to SGI in the USA: The Emergence of Soka Gakkai in America

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ABSTRACT: An early step in the globalization of Soka Gakkai began in the United States in 1960. The initial local centers of Soka Gakkai were brought together by President Daisaku Ikeda during his first foreign trip immediately following the announcement of the policy of *Kōsen-rufū*. The first American district opened in the recently formed state of Hawaii but within weeks, Ikeda also established the work in San Francisco, the state of Nevada, Seattle, Chicago, New York, had formed a chapter in Los Angeles, and a group in Sacramento. The trip culminated in Ikeda appointing to lead the American work the youthful Masayasu Sadanaga who, soon after being officially named General Director, changed his name to George Williams. During Williams' thirty years of leadership, SGI will become the largest Buddhist group in the United States. The last year of Williams' directorship was marked by a period of turmoil that saw Soka Gakkai break with its parent body, the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhists, and its emergence as an independent Buddhist movement. Significant changes followed in 1995 with the adoption of the SGI Charter that committed the organization to strive for a peaceful world, based on the philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism. Simultaneously, President Ikeda announced a new emphasis on "dialogue" as a tool for spreading Buddhism and opened the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (now the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. By 2010, when SGI celebrated the 50th anniversary of Ikeda's initial visit to the United States, SGI-USA reported more than 300,000 members, a figure based on the issuance of individual *Cohonzons* to new adherents.

KEYWORDS: Soka Gakkai, Nichiren Shoshu, Daisaku Ikeda, Buddhism in the United States, Soka Gakkai in the United States

The Origins

Soka Gakkai, a contemporary representative of the Nichiren Buddhist tradition that burst upon the world in the last half of the twentieth century, really had two beginnings in the United States. It was originally brought to the United States by Japanese women who married American servicemen in the years after World War II. These women engaged in the basic practice of chanting *Nam Myōhō Renge*

Kyō in the privacy of their own homes, and rarely met together in groups. Most resided in California but others were in communities across the country.

Their quiet life would change in 1960 when back home in Japan, a youthful Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023) became the third president of the organization. Almost immediately, he established a new Overseas Affairs Section, the first visible indication of his intention of spreading the organization internationally and inviting non-Japanese into its membership. This was not just a whim of the new president, but part of a vision that has been passed to him by his predecessor, Josei Toda (1900–1958), who had wanted to spread Nichiren Buddhism globally.

Then, on October 2, 1960, Ikeda began what would become decades of international travel with a flight to the United States. He was armed with a list of members who had moved to America and was intent upon calling them together and organizing them for growth. His initial stopping point was in Honolulu where some three dozen members had come to reside. While there, he called them together and organized the first Hawaii District, the first Soka Gakkai organization outside of Japan. He understood that the future of the organization in America would rest upon its becoming an American movement, and he strongly encouraged the members (1) to integrate fully into American life and culture by learning English, (2) to obtain a driver's license, and (3) to earn US citizenship. He also released the first copies of a book, *The Soka Gakkai*, an initial text in English for introducing Nichiren Buddhism to Americans. Ikeda clearly indicated that Soka Gakkai was not opening in America merely to serve the Japanese diaspora (Ikeda 1995).

In his talks to the small group with whom he met, Ikeda spoke of his purpose as spreading *Kōsen-rufu*, generally translated to mean “wide propagation,” (English Buddhist Dictionary Committee 2002, 344), which manifests in Soka Gakkai members disseminating the *Lotus Sutra* broadly throughout the world, introducing people to the basic practice of chanting *Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō*, and inviting people to join the movement. Ikeda will later mark October 2 as the beginning point of his efforts at the international propagation of Buddhism. And as it grew, Soka Gakkai attracted a spectrum of observers to track its progress. (Dator 1969; Metraux 1988; Hurst 1992; Snow 1993; Hammond and Machacek 1999; Seager 2000; Machacek and Wilson 2001; Metraux 2010).

As Ikeda moved on to the mainland, he initially establishes districts in San Francisco and in Nevada, followed by stops in Seattle, Chicago, and New York. The newly established San Francisco district was to comprise three groups, encompassing the San Francisco, Suisun City, and Sacramento areas. While in NYC, Ikeda visited the United Nations. He also broke up his American schedule with side trips to Toronto and then to San Paulo, Brazil. He finished his American visit in Los Angeles, his last stop on the trip. A chapter was established in Los Angeles. Within the chapter, six districts were formed: St. Louis, Olympic, First, West, Long Beach, and San Diego.

In Los Angeles, he encountered Masayasu Sadanaga (1930–2013), a young practitioner who had moved to California in 1957. At the time of their meeting, Sadanaga's father had just died, and he wanted to return to Japan. Ikeda pressed him to stay and direct the work of the dissemination of Buddhism. Ikeda organized the North American chapter of SG and left Sadanaga in charge. He assumed his duties while working odd jobs and pursuing his studies at UCLA.

Remembered for its energetic pace, Sadanaga's leadership was initially marked by his setting up headquarters in Los Angeles and the founding of a periodical, the *Seikyo News* (later, English-speaking readers were offered the *Seikyo Times* an English monthly magazine edited and printed in Japan, and the *World Tribune*). In 1972, Sadanaga finally became a US citizen and celebrated the event by anglicizing his name. He was from that point on known as George Williams. In 1963, Ikeda visited the US for a second time and formally named Williams the America General Chapter Chief and oversaw the opening of the first official headquarters for North America in Los Angeles. Simultaneously, it was determined that enough English-speaking members had been attracted to the movement, beginning with the husbands of the initial members, and Williams readied himself to lead a focused effort to recruit more non-Japanese.

Through the mid-1960s Ikeda visited America annually. He was present, for example, to receive the first issue of the American chapter's periodical under what will be its longstanding name, *World Tribune*. He also regularly celebrated the movement's expansion by officially designating each new district. That expansion reached a notable plateau in 1966 when the American work as a whole assumed a new name—the Nichiren Shoshu of America (NSA).

Ikeda was back in 1967 to celebrate the opening of two traditional Nichiren Shoshu temples, the Hosei-ji Temple in Hawaii and the Myoho-ji Temple east of Los Angeles in Etiwanda, California (now a part of Rancho Cucamonga). President Ikeda was accompanied by Nichiren Shoshu High Priest Nittatshu Shonin (1902-1979). These temples, together with the Washington, D.C. temple opened in 1972, became important ritual centers for the NSA as places where new members could officially receive their personal *Gohonzon*, before which they will chant daily, as well as celebrate weddings and funerals.

The 1970s

While the 1960s became the time of initially establishing the Soka Gakkai as a growing movement across America, the 1970s became the decade of it making new thrusts in its upward trajectory that will herald its impact upon American popular culture.

In 1972, jazz music superstar Herbie Hancock was introduced to chanting. Just a month later his friend and colleague Wayne Shorter (1933–2023) attended a lecture by President Ikeda at UCLA (Hancock and Dickey 2014). They were the first of a cadre of A-list celebrities to pick up the practice and affiliate with NSA (Hancock, Ikeda, and Shorter 2017). Possibly the most notable was singer Tina Turner (1939–2023). Quietly suffering a great deal of physical abuse from her husband Ike Turner (1931–2007), she was introduced to chanting in 1973 by singer Valerie Bishop (1940–2017), who was employed by Tina's husband at the time. Valerie was an acquaintance of Hancock. Immediately drawn to the chant *Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō*, soon afterward Tina received her *Gohonzon*, and the *butsudan* in which to keep it. She utilized the chant to assist her in building her own inner strength, and eventually leaving her husband and continuing her own record-breaking career independently of him (Turner and Loder 1987; Turner, Davis, and Wichmann 2018).

After getting her life and her career back together, and winning a favorable divorce from her husband, Turner wrote a best-selling autobiography, *I, Tina: My Life Story* (Turner and Loder 1987) which would be turned into a movie *What's Love Got to Do with It* (1993), both of which covered the role of Soka Gakkai in providing the strength to recover from her abusive situation and go on to new

heights as an international star performer. Turner would put her celebrity status to use as a star performer at NSA national events, and eventually emerge as an accomplished public advocate for Soka Gakkai (Turner 2020). Additional celebrities who became quite open in discussing their adherence to SGI would include musician Courtney Love, television star Patrick Duffy, and movie stars Chow Yun-fat, Patrick Swayze (1952–2009: Swayze and Niemi 2009), and Orlando Bloom—to name a few.

The adherence of celebrities to NSA was indicative of both the movement's success at integrating itself into American culture and its growth beyond the Japanese American diaspora. That integration in American life was on full display in its July 4th events, the most notable being the celebration in 1976 of the American Bicentennial during which NSA organized events in New York City, Boston, and Philadelphia. In New York, the NSA Bicentennial Convention projected a theme of "Toward the Dawn of World Peace." It featured a parade down Fifth Avenue, for which it mobilized some 10,000 members and attracted a million spectators. An additional "Spirit of '76" show filled Shea Stadium.

The 1970s would bring to the fore the leadership efforts of George Williams. As NSA's General Director, Williams had dedicated himself to the movement's growth. In 1968, he inaugurated a set of seminars at university campuses across the country aimed at explaining the basic affirmations of Nichiren Shoshu practice and teachings. By 1971, he had given 70 such seminars on some 40 campuses stretching from UCLA to Harvard (Williams 1972b). He followed by organizing NSA's leadership across the country to motivate members to join their peers to engage the street people who had come to live much of their life on the streets of America. This effort at disseminating Buddhism came as the Jesus People and numerous new religions, both homegrown and from Asia, were already engaged in similar activities (Williams 1972a, 1972b, 1986).

As the membership grew, Williams also nurtured their own commitment to Nichiren by organizing *tozans*, pilgrimages through which believers were able to come face to face with the religion's source of faith and practice, the original *Dai-Gohonzon*, enshrined at Nichiren Shoshu's Head Temple Taiseki-ji, located at the base of Mount Fuji in Japan. The early *tozans* set the stage for a proposal by President Ikeda that resurrected a plan originally suggested by President Toda, to construct a new main temple at Taiseki-ji, designed to physically house the *Dai-Gohonzon*. A formal effort to raise the necessary funds began in 1965 and

raised some 35 billion Yen (100 million in US dollars). Construction was initiated in 1968 and completed in 1972. Many Americans, including Williams, participated in the giant Sho Hondo Convention in 1973.

For Americans, the 1973 Convention both celebrated NSA's growth and began to make visible some tensions within the larger Nichiren Shoshu movement. Some traditionalists within the Nichiren Shoshu, for example, opposed the idea of moving the *Dai-Gohonzon* into the new Sho Hondo (Great Main Temple) at the Head Temple. One result of this tension would be the forced resignation of Ikeda from his presidency of Soka Gakkai in Japan.

While political considerations were playing out in Japan, Soka Gakkai's international growth, spearheaded by its success in the United States, led to the formation of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a global association, formally networking the otherwise independent Soka Gakkai organizations around the world that had previously been linked primarily by the visits of the globe-trotting Ikeda. The organizational meeting of SGI was held in the US territory of Guam. Guam was selected as a symbolic gesture referencing its history as the site of some of World War II's bloodiest battles, and its proximity to Tinian Island, the launching place of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This meeting location, and indeed the formation of SGI, would herald the increasingly central role that peace will come to have in Soka Gakkai life.

The organization of SGI (officially on January 26, 1975) also signaled a coming reorganization of Soka Gakkai. In 1979, as Ikeda relinquished his role as president of Soka Gakkai in Japan, the presidency of SGI became his base of operation. Henceforth, for American members, he will no longer be simply the leader from Japan who drops in for occasional visits to fine tune the local organization. He was emerging as an international Buddhist statesman of global stature, was exchanging insights with political and intellectual leaders, and positively influencing their actions in an increasingly conflicted world. Among the first significant figures with whom he would meet would be the US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1923-2023), then in the midst of ending the Vietnam War, opening relations between the United States and China, and negotiating the end of the Yom Kippur War between Israel and its neighbors. Kissinger's activity culminated in his winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973.

The 1980s would begin with a singular event, the celebration of the NSA's twentieth anniversary. Ikeda led the main events of the celebration in

San Francisco. Nichiren Shoshu High Priest, Nikken Shonin (1922–2019), also visited the United States for the anniversary, the highlight of his journey being the enshrinement of a *Gohonzon* at NSA's World Culture Center in Santa Monica, California. For members, the twentieth anniversary confirmed the NSA's unique place in the global Nichiren Shoshu movement, among other important attributes being its integration of democratic processes in its structure, a very American understanding of Ikeda's call for a more democratic organization of Soka Gakkai's national entities.

Through the decade, many of the programs initiated earlier, such as the pilgrimages to Japan, would continue. The patriotic emphasis that emerged in the Bicentennial celebration would find a new expression when the members in Honolulu organized the two-day *World Peace Culture Festival*, featuring the appearance of actor Patrick Duffy, one of the stars of the very popular TV series *Dallas*. The event culminated with a July 4th parade, featuring 13,000 flag-carrying marchers, a floating (and erupting) volcano stage, a 200-person roller-skating human pyramid, cowboys, Native Americans, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, fast food restaurant workers marching in uniform, and the Liberty Bell.

The Hawaii event set the stage for the NSA celebration of the bicentennial of the US Constitution two years later. Beginning in April, celebrants toured more than 40 cities with a replica of the Liberty Bell, gathering some 200,000 signatures on a pledge "to work for the principles of freedom embodied in the Constitution." The effort culminated on July 4th with the NSA presenting the bell to the city of Philadelphia (where the original Liberty Bell is located), following a massive Independence Day parade.

While the patriotic display mobilized the largest numbers of people, possibly the decade's most important event for the long-term future of the movement was the establishment of the first American Soka University at Calabasas (near Los Angeles, California). It was the first full extension of Soka Gakkai educational practice to the United States (and thus globally). The focus of this campus was to train Japanese students in English (and later other international students in English language education). As a result, the Calabasas campus did not offer undergraduate degrees. It does have a small master's degree program in foreign language education, as well as offering non-degree-granting English-as-a-second-language classes for students from Japan, and other foreign language classes for students from a wide range of countries. Its curriculum has

received approval from the California State Bureau for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education (Storch 2015).

From NSA to SGI-USA

In the wake of the founding of Soka University of America in Calabasas, the NSA appeared to be on a steady upward course; however, trouble had been brewing both within the American movement and within the larger Nichiren movement. A longstanding issue existed over the very different self-image held by the Nichiren Shoshu leadership, which viewed itself as the true bearer of the Nichiren tradition and saw Soka Gakkai as simply a lay organization (lacking in ritual powers). In stark contrast, Soka Gakkai envisioned itself as an independent (albeit lay) organization, which possessed its own realm of action and a program on a global scale that ultimately drew its authority from Nichiren (1222–1282) himself. Metraux described the basic difference thusly,

The priesthood claims that it is the sole custodian of religious authority and dogma, while the Soka Gakkai leadership argues that the sacred writings of Nichiren, not the priesthood, represent the ultimate source of authority, and that any individual with deep faith in Nichiren's teachings can gain enlightenment without the assistance of a priest (Metraux 1992, 326).

As the 1990s began, issues between the Nichiren Shoshu administration and Soka Gakkai led the former to excommunicate the latter, effectively ending their forty years of working together. A war of words through 1991 reached a new plateau on November 8, 1991, when Soka Gakkai learned of the Nichiren Shoshu leadership's ordering the dissolution of Soka Gakkai. Rejecting the request, a few weeks later, the Soka Gakkai and its overseas organizations were formally excommunicated, and its 11 million members worldwide were encouraged by High Priest Nikken to resign and reaffirm their loyalty to Nichiren Shoshu (Metraux 1992).

In response, the Soka Gakkai countered by outlining Nichiren Shoshu's deviation from their own interpretation of Nichiren's doctrines, along with accusations of simony and hedonism among its ranking priests. The Nichiren Shoshu leadership condemned Ikeda's disrespect and his attempt to assume the teaching role properly held by the priesthood. Once the break occurred, a continuing verbal war would characterize the relationship between the

two organizations. The ongoing polemics would be punctuated by occasional actions such as occurred in the late 1990s, when the Nichiren Shoshu leadership at Taiseki-ji tore down the recently constructed Sho Hondo (Grand Main Temple), largely built with Soka Gakkai dollars, and built a replacement temple. In 2014, the Soka Gakkai edited its bylaws by adding a statement that emphasized its lack of any relationship with the Nichiren Shoshu.

Meanwhile, even as the Nichiren Shoshu leadership and Soka Gakkai fought, in the United States another scenario was unraveling. Through the 1980s, criticism had been building over George Williams' leadership. Having been appointed to office as a young man, he had been General Director for more than a quarter of a century and showed no signs of leaving office to make room for others to demonstrate their talents and implement their ideas for the organization's future direction. In particular, some complained that in showing himself a dedicated student of Ikeda, Williams had abandoned his Japanese heritage. Others thought that in his enthusiasm for *Kōsen-rufu*, he often overworked the members in evangelistic endeavor and drove them from the movement. Meanwhile, since the late 1970s, some capable new leaders from Japan, including Fred Zaitzu and Danny Nagashima, had arrived, assumed duties at local centers, and waited in the wings to move center stage.

In February 1990, NSA celebrated its 30th anniversary at a gathering in Malibu, California, which President Ikeda attended. He had canceled a previously scheduled trip to South America to extend his time in the United States, during which he attended a variety of meetings and training sessions in various locations. These meetings were tied together by his focus on fostering youthful successors to the current leadership (Ikeda 1995, 2001). In the midst of these meetings, somewhat to Williams' surprise, Ikeda openly criticized the General Director in what became a moment of public humiliation. Though he remained in office for two more years, Williams had lost much of the power he had accumulated over the years. The events of these weeks took on greater significance the following year when Soka Gakkai was excommunicated by the Nichiren Shoshu leadership. Ikeda also announced that Eiichi Wada, the vice president of Soka Gakkai, would become its new executive advisor.

In July 1991, the Nichiren Shoshu of America changed its name to SGI-USA (short for Soka Gakkai International-USA). Then in November 1992, in another open meeting, Williams was publicly removed from office. His final act as General

Director was a brief recounting of what he saw as his accomplishments intermixed with multiple apologies for times he had fallen short. Williams was named General Director Emeritus and remained in his position as the vice-president of the Soka Gakkai, neither position carrying any real leadership duties.

Williams was replaced by Fred Zaitso, who had originally joined Soka Gakkai as a college student in Japan in 1962. Zaitso studied Trade at Kanagawa University. Upon graduating, although he was offered a job by a trading firm, he chose to work for the Asia People's Association, an affiliate of Soka Gakkai. Since 1967, he worked for the *Seikyo Shimbun* newspaper, mainly as a reporter. Zaitso served SGI-USA through the remainder of the 1990s and completed his time in office as the decade ended (December 1999).

Ikeda continued his frequent visits to the United States through the 1990s. In 1993, for example, he visited twice, the first time in January and February, moving to South America and then back to the U.S. in March, the second time in September. In that year, he addressed an SGI-USA representatives conference in Miami. Here, he picked up the polemics with the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, whom he accused of appearing to embrace the *Gohonzon* but in fact abusing the faith to serve their own ends. He claimed that they were undeserving of any respect.

Later in the years, Ikeda addressed the SGI-USA Executive Conference held in Malibu. In his important speech, "Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism Lives Only in SGI," Ikeda confronted the immediate problem faced by SGI-USA in that the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood had served a vital function in welcoming new members that included the official presentation of their personal *Gohonzon*. Ikeda made his initial mention to American members that SGI would henceforth confer the *Gohonzon* on its new members. The new *Gohonzons* will be based upon a *Gohonzon* transcribed by a Nichiren Shoshu high priest in 1720. This action by SGI marked a new era of worldwide *Kōsen-rufu*. In the same speech, he declared the *gojukai* ceremony (in which the new believers accepted the basic precepts), which had previously accompanied the bestowing of the *Gohonzon*, unnecessary. Henceforth, SGI-USA would assume the priestly role and began conferring *Gohonzons* to members (Ikeda 2001, 287–312).

In September 1993, Ikeda delivered a lecture titled "Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-first Century Civilization" at Harvard University. He highlighted the contributions Mahayana Buddhism can make to the peaceful evolution of humanity

(Ikeda 1993). Soon after, he established the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC) in Cambridge as a tangible commitment to the spirit behind his talk—the spirit to engage diverse voices in contributing value to humanity. In 2009, the BRC changed its name to the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue.

The founding of the Boston center can be seen as a major symbol of the changes that had overtaken the American Soka Gakkai as it transitioned from being the Nichiren Shoshu Academy to becoming SGI-USA. In its first generation, Soka Gakkai had vigorously pursued a program of membership recruitment that by the end of the 20th century had made it by far the largest Buddhist group in the United States. Essential to its growth was its exclusivist claims that emphasized Nichiren as the greatest teacher of Buddhism and his teachings as the most pristine presentation of the Buddha's message. Beginning with the founding of SGI, and without backing away from its earlier position, the movement began to pivot toward a new emphasis on Buddhism's role in promoting more general human values and especially the religion's potentials in promoting global peace and human welfare. Rather than proselytize, members were called upon to use dialogue with fellow Buddhists, the faithful of other religions, and secular women and men of good will everywhere as the instrument of furthering the goals of Nichiren's teachings. As many observers of the movement have noted, this has the effect of presenting the movement not so much as a new religion out to change the world but viewing it as a relatively large global religious community ready to cooperate fully with the larger religious world in "creating value."

The new focus on dialogue would be embodied in SGI new charter adopted by the representative of the global movement, including SGI-USA in 1995. The relatively brief document includes in its ten "Purposes and Principles" the affirmation that

SGI shall promote an understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism through grassroots exchange, thereby contributing to individual happiness... SGI shall, based on the Buddhist spirit of tolerance, respect other religions, engage in dialogue and work together with them toward the resolution of fundamental issues concerning humanity (Soka Gakkai International 1995 [2017]).

These two affirmations were retained largely unchanged in the revised Constitution of Soka Gakkai, which was adopted in 2017.

Conclusion

Soka Gakkai has been an enigma in the American religious community. On the one hand, from a minuscule community informally transplanted to the United States after World War II, in one generation it became the largest of the 200-plus groups that now represent Buddhism to the American public. By 2010, when SGI celebrated the 50th anniversary of Ikeda's initial visit to the United States, SGI-USA reported more than 300,000 members, a figure based on the issuance of individual *Gohonzons* to new adherents. Simultaneously, of the hundreds of new religious movements that have appeared in America through the last half of the twentieth century, it is among the very few that have established itself as national religious communities and have found acceptance among the older more-established religious communities, even as its leadership have been welcomed as partners in conversation with the country's intellectual leadership.

Much of the credit for SGI present status must be attributed to the work, persistence, and lengthy tenure of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, who guided the movement to accept his vision of Nichiren Buddhism. It now remains to be seen how the next generation takes that vision into the future and actualizes Ikeda's hopes and dreams of the world to come.

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APPENDIX

The History of Soka Gakkai in America: A Selective Bibliography

The items cited below have been assembled from the extremely large collection of material on Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism in general (including the extensive writings of Daisaku Ikeda), to focus exclusively upon materials especially related to the origin, growth, and development of the movement in the United States, the first country outside of Japan in which Soka Gakkai formally organized. Now reporting some 300,000 members, the American branch of the movement is also one of its largest branches outside of its country of origin.

SGI-USA is one branch of an international movement and has often acted in concord with the international thrusts of the global SGI leadership, most notably in following up on the efforts toward world peace initiated by President Ikeda during his long tenure in office. This bibliography has limited its coverage to materials that focus primarily on the particular activity of the American branch of SGI.

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Celebrities Affiliated with SGI-USA

Through its first half century, Soka Gakkai International—USA developed a following among a number of A-list celebrities who made public acknowledgement of their participation, some including accounts of their adherence to the

organization in their interviews, autobiographies, and other writings. Of the celebrities, Tina Turner has been the most outspoken and in her later years became an active and capable apologist for the faith.

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Tina Turner meets with SGI President Daisaku Ikeda in 1987.

Secondary Materials

The secondary materials on Soka Gakkai discuss the variety of issues that animate the movement's history in America including its relation with the Nichiren Shoshu establishment, the role of its first General Director George Williams, its status as a new religion, its methods of membership recruitment, SGI's changing relation to the larger Buddhist community, and its ability to create and maintain a functional racial and cultural diversity among its members. The large amount of attention paid to SGI by scholars is a testament to its relative success among the hundreds of new religious movements that arose in the United States in the mid-twentieth century.

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