
The Journal of CESNUR



Volume 3, Issue 6
November–December 2019

⊗ The Journal of CESNUR ⊗

Director-in-Charge | Direttore responsabile

Marco Respinti

Editor-in-Chief | Direttore

Massimo Introvigne

Center for Studies on New Religions, Turin, Italy

Associate Editor | Vicedirettore

PierLuigi Zoccatelli

Pontifical Salesian University, Turin, Italy

Editorial Board / International Consultants

Milda Ališauskienė

Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

Eileen Barker

London School of Economics, London, United Kingdom

Luigi Berzano

University of Turin, Turin, Italy

Antoine Faivre

École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, France

Holly Folk

Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington, USA

Liselotte Frisk

Dalarna University, Falun, Sweden

J. Gordon Melton

Baylor University, Waco, Texas, USA

Susan Palmer

McGill University, Montreal, Canada

Stefania Palmisano

University of Turin, Turin, Italy

Bernadette Rigal-Cellard

Université Bordeaux Montaigne, Bordeaux, France

Instructions for Authors and submission guidelines can be found on our website at www.cesnur.net.

ISSN: 2532-2990

The Journal of CESNUR is published bi-monthly by CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions),
Via Confienza 19, 10121 Torino, Italy.

Contents

Articles

- 3 Soka Gakkai in Italy: Success and Controversies
Massimo Introvigne
- 18 Soka Gakkai's Campaigns for Nuclear Disarmament
Rosita Šorytė
- 32 The Limits of Religious Tolerance in France: The Case of Soka Gakkai
Yanis Ben Hammouda
- 48 New Religions and Lifelong Learning in Taiwan: The I Ching University of Weixin Shengjiao
Jimmy Ching Ming Chang
- 59 Tantric Traditions in the Spiritual Teaching of Guru Jára
Pavel Hlavinka

Soka Gakkai in Italy: Success and Controversies

Massimo Introvigne

CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions)

maxintrovigne@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Italy is the Western country with the highest percentage of Soka Gakkai members. This success needs to be explained. In its first part, the article discusses the history of Soka Gakkai in Italy, from the arrival of the first Japanese pioneers to the phenomenal expansion in the 21st century. It also mentions some internal problems, the relationship with the Italian authorities, and the opposition by disgruntled ex-members. In the second part, possible reasons for the success are examined through a comparison with another Japanese movement that managed to establish a presence in Italy (although a smaller one), Sūkyō Mahikari. Unlike Sūkyō Mahikari, Soka Gakkai proposed a humanistic form of religion presented as fully compatible with modern science, and succeeded in “de-Japanizing” its spiritual message, persuading Italian devotees that it was not “Japanese” but universal.

KEYWORDS: Soka Gakkai, Soka Gakkai in Italy, Buddhism in Italy, Japanese religious movements, Japanese religious movements in Italy.

Introduction

Soka Gakkai is the fastest-growing Buddhist movement in the world. The history and reasons of this growth have been investigated in Japan (McLaughlin 2019), as well as in the United Kingdom (Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994; Dobbelaere 1995), Quebec (Metraux 1997), and the United States (Dator 1969; Hurst 1992; Snow 1993; Hammond and Machacek 1999; for early studies of Soka Gakkai, see also White 1970; Metraux 1988; Machacek and Wilson 2000; Seager 2006). Few, however, have discussed how important has been the growth of Soka Gakkai in Italy, a country where religious minorities are all comparatively small.

In Italy, Soka Gakkai as of September 2019 has 92,769 members, or 0,15% of the total population. It is the largest such percentage in the West for Soka Gakkai, which is also the largest non-Christian group among Italian citizens (figures and historical data derive from interviews with leaders and early members of Soka Gakkai in Italy conducted in 2018 and 2019; see also CESNUR 2019).

Members	Countries
Below 300	Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Finland, Norway, Greece, Iceland
300–600	Poland, Russia, Ireland, Sweden
600–2,000	Portugal, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, The Netherlands
2,000–8,000	Spain, Germany
8,000–20,000	United Kingdom
20,000–30,000	France
More than 30,000	Italy

Table 1. Soka Gakkai members in Europe.

I will try to explain why this rather phenomenal success occurred by first examining the history of Soka Gakkai in Italy, then analyzing it through the lenses of sociological theories of growth and mainstreaming of religions.

Soka Gakkai in Italy: A Short History

The origins of Soka Gakkai in Italy date back to the year 1961. Sadao Yamazaki, a Japanese member who lived in Rome, was appointed as “correspondent from Italy.” The “Italian Sector” was officially established in 1963, when Soka Gakkai President, Daisaku Ikeda, visited Italy for the second time.

Yamazaki and his wife were soon joined by Ms. Toshiko Nakajima, who was studying in Italy, and in 1965 by her brother, Mr. Tamotsu Nakajima. In 1966, Amalia “Dadina” Miglionico (1927–2002) was the first Italian to receive the Gohonzon, i.e. the sacred scroll to which devotional chanting is directed in Nichiren Buddhism as practiced by Soka Gakkai.



Figure 1. Ikeda in Rome in 1963. Sadao Yamazaki is on the left, with a camera.

In 1969, Mr. Mitsuhiro Kaneda and his wife, Kimiko, also moved to Italy. Subsequently, Mr. Tadayasu Kanzaki (1943–2008: Violi 2014) moved to Bergamo, thus completing the number of the early pioneers of Soka Gakkai in Italy.

In 1970, Kaneda became the leader of a newly established “Italian Chapter.” In 1975, two American jazz musicians who were members of Soka Gakkai, Karl Potter (1950–2013) and Marvin Smith, also came to Italy and started spreading their religion among their students. A third jazz musician followed, Lawrence Dinwiddie (1950–1999).

Slowly, the number of Italian members started growing. In November 1976, the first Italian national gathering was organized in Poppiano (Florence), with sixty Italian members in attendance.



Figure 2. The first Italian gathering, Poppiano 1976.

The first summer course was held in Bardonecchia (Turin) in August 1979. Dadina Miglionico and Matsuhiko Kaneda were among those lecturing.



Figure 3. Dadina Miglionico lecturing in Bardonecchia.

A significant growth started with a new visit of President Ikeda to Italy in 1981. The visit inspired the creation, in February 1982, of a monthly magazine, *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (The New Renaissance). In 1984, the first Italian center was

opened in Florence. In April 1986, the cornerstone was laid for the national cultural center at the Villa di Bellagio, Florence, whose construction was completed in May 1987.

Year	Men	Women	Young Men	Young Women	TOTAL
2003	7,229	15,020	3,526	6,101	31,876
2004	7,740	16,355	3,778	6,655	34,528
2005	8,927	19,062	4,370	7,747	40,106
2006	9,768	21,256	4,494	8,251	43,769
2007	10,596	23,315	4,558	8,556	47,025
2008	11,906	26,028	4,057	7,950	49,941
2009	12,630	27,914	4,140	8,342	53,026
2010	13,403	29,984	4,273	8,594	56,254
2011	14,263	32,162	4,561	9,118	60,104
2012	15,830	35,769	4,235	8,789	64,623
2013	17,093	38,990	4,414	8,922	69,419
2014	18,130	42,166	4,510	8,850	73,656
2015	19,231	45,218	4,764	9,477	78,690
2016	20,733	49,501	4,514	8,809	83,557
2017	21,550	52,043	4,833	9,323	87,749
2018	22,220	54,163	5,065	9,805	91,253
2019 (Sep.)	22,584	55,220	5,084	9,881	92,769

Table 1. Members of Soka Gakkai in Italy (source: Zoccatelli 2015, updated 2019).

A phenomenal expansion followed from the 1990s on. Italian members were 13,000 in 1993, 21,000 in 2000, 40,000 in 2005, 56,000 in 2010, 78,000 in 2015, and more than 92,000 in 2019. Celebrities also joined, including football star Roberto Baggio, actress Sabina Guzzanti, and singer Carmen Consoli.

In 1981, the musical association Min-On, established by President Ikeda, brought a troupe from Milan's La Scala to Japan. In 1984, the Fuji Museum, also founded by Ikeda, exhibited in Japan more than 900 Greek-era archeological pieces from Sicily, in co-operation with Sicilian authorities. In 1989 and 1996, the Fuji Museum exhibited medieval and Renaissance treasures from Tuscany.

The co-operation with Tuscany's artistic institution went both ways, and in 1994, an exhibition of Japan's artistic heritage, *Il mondo dei Samurai* (The World of the Samurai), was organized at Palazzo Medici Riccardi in Florence (Beltramo Ceppi Zevi 1994).

From the mid-1990s, Soka Gakkai became well-known in Italy for its exhibitions about human rights and ecology, and its campaigns against the death penalty and the nuclear weapons. They were visited by hundreds of thousands of Italians of all faiths, and praised by politicians and leaders of several religions.

In 1992–93, sociologist Maria Immacolata Macioti conducted the first academic study of Soka Gakkai in Italy, which led to the publication in 1995 of a special issue of the scholarly journal *La Critica Sociologica* (Macioti 1994–95; Corrao 1994–95; Montemurro 1994–95; Semprini 1994–95a, 1994–95b; Rossi 1994–95; Spirito 1994–95; Ferrarotti 1994–95; Tedeschi 1994–95; Introvigne 1994–95). Macioti also published a book on Soka Gakkai in 1996 (Macioti 1996; see also Macioti 2001).

Other studies and dissertations followed (including Pastorelli 1998–99; Benzoni 1998–99; Mazzoli 2002–3; Falduzzi 2004; Poli 2005–6; Di Martino 2006–7; Barone 2007), and Belgian sociologist Karel Dobbelaere published in Italian in 1998 his book *La Soka Gakkai. Un movimento di laici diventa una religione* (Soka Gakkai: A Laypersons' Movement Becomes a Religion: Dobbelaere 1998). It is significant that such an important text on how Soka Gakkai was evolving was first published in Italy, before being published in English in 2001.

In 2002, Maria Immacolata Macioti blew the whistle on internal problems within Soka Gakkai, and widespread criticism about the management of Kaneda

and his main Italian co-worker, Giovanni Littera (Maciotti 2002). Although the political side of the controversy was over-emphasized by some Italian media and scholars (e.g. Cuocci 2002: see also the answer by Minganti 2002), Kaneda and Littera were accused of favoring conservative political positions and a puritanical approach to moral issues, while a majority of the Italian members could be defined as “liberal” (Scotti 2002; Arduini 2004–5).

In 2002, the crisis was solved by appointing Tamotsu Nakajima as the new general director for Italy. Kaneda and Littera remained in the movement, but without the same leading roles they had before. Most of the members supported the reform, but some manifested their dissent on the Internet, and a small minority joined the tiny but vocal Italian anti-cult movement, which added Soka Gakkai to its lists of “cults.”

Much more important, for the Italian Soka Gakkai, was the Intesa with the Italian government, signed by then Prime Minister Matteo Renzi on June 27, 2015 and confirmed unanimously by the Italian Parliament on June 14, 2016. The Italian Constitution reserves the name “concordat” to the agreement with the Holy See and the Catholic Church, but the “intese” are in fact concordats as well, making the signatories partners of the state.

A visible sign of the mainstreaming of Soka Gakkai was the opening, on October 27, 2014, of the Milan Kaikan, the Ikeda Milan Cultural Center for Peace, which became the largest Buddhist center in Europe. Symbolically, the mainstreaming process had been completed.

Analysis: Why the Success?

I have analyzed elsewhere (Introvigne 2016) the mistake several religious movements made about Italy. They believed that, as a Catholic country, Italy was an unfavorable ground for the missionary activities of other religions. In the 19th century, several new religions (including the Mormons and the Bible Students, later to be called Jehovah’s Witnesses) concentrated their missionary activities in the valleys of Piedmont where the majority of the population was Protestant (Waldensian). Only in the 20th century, they discovered that it was much easier to convert Italian Catholics than Italian Protestants.

Because of the Catholic Church's opposition to the political unification of Italy, decades of anti-Catholic propaganda, and the perception of the Church as an obstacle to the modernization of Italy—all feelings also fueled after World War II by the narrative proposed by the Italian Communist Party, the largest such party in the West—, there was a pool of potential converts to religions other than Catholicism in the country.

Among the educated classes, many in the 19th and early 20th centuries were progressive and pro-unification and, consequently, against the Catholic Church. Both atheism and liberal Protestantism appeared in Italy at that time but met with moderate success only. More important among the elites was the cultural role of Freemasonry and the Theosophical Society. Some Freemasons were atheists, but others, and all Theosophists, were interested in alternative forms of religion, including those coming from the East.

Buddhism and Eastern religions in general, had potential in Italy, particularly among the educated elites (disproportionately represented in Soka Gakkai according to Macioti's 1990s studies: Macioti 1994–95, 166).

This comment raises, however, another question. Several other Eastern groups sent missionaries to Italy. None was as successful as Soka Gakkai. If we do not consider Asian immigrants, the total membership of several hundred Buddhist communities present in Italy barely matches the numbers of Soka Gakkai alone. What distinguishes Soka Gakkai from other Eastern and Buddhist groups?

A good starting point may be a comparison with Sûkyô Mahikari, a non-Buddhist Japanese new religious movement that opened its first center in Italy in 1974. I studied the Italian branch of Sûkyô Mahikari in the late 1990s, and published a book on the movement in 1999 (Introvigne 1999).

Sûkyô Mahikari has been comparatively successful in Italy (6,500 initiations and some 1,500 active members today), but much less than Soka Gakkai. Both movements were founded in Japan, yet their degree of Japan-ness was somewhat different. This is also true for different Japanese Buddhist movements active in Italy, whose adaptation to the West (or lack thereof) may be very much different from Soka Gakkai's (Zoccatelli 2001–2).

Sûkyô Mahikari and Soka Gakkai do have elements in common. Both are joined by many seeking “practical benefits,” i.e. a solution to physical and psychological health problems through ritual (chanting in Soka Gakkai and

“receiving the light” in Sûkyô Mahikari). In both cases, surveys have noted that seeking practical benefits is a Stage I. While some stop at this stage, others become interested in the spiritual teachings, and enter Stage II, where they effectively join the movement (Maciotti 1994–95, 166–67; Dobbelaere 1998).

Both Sûkyô Mahikari (Tebecis 1982) and Soka Gakkai (Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994, 221–22) affirm that their religion is perfectly compatible with modern science, and both have scientists among their members. However, in Sûkyô Mahikari this remains a theoretical statement. Followers are requested to embrace an esoteric worldview derived from Japanese folk religion and implying, for example, that many forms of illness are caused by the influence of the spirits of deceased animals—particularly, foxes and badgers (Davis 1980). Remarkably, and contrary to the prediction of Winston Davis, who studied the movement in Japan in 1980 and declared it impossible to export in the West, Western followers come to firmly believe in these theories (Cornille 1991, 1992; Bernard-Mirtil 1998; Introvigne 1999). On the contrary, Soka Gakkai not only takes great care in explaining how all its core beliefs are compatible with mainstream Western science, but largely succeeds in this endeavor (Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994, 222).

The main difference, however, is cultural. Both Sûkyô Mahikari and Soka Gakkai insist that their teachings are universal rather than Japanese. However, Western members of Sûkyô Mahikari are asked to believe that humans were created in Japan, both Moses and Jesus studied in Japan (and Jesus, having escaped the crucifixion, also came back, died, and was buried there), and Japan has a central eschatological and apocalyptic role in the millenarian future of humanity (Introvigne 1999).

On the contrary, the message of Soka Gakkai has been progressively “de-Japanized.” Of course, it keeps references to Japan. But, compared to Sûkyô Mahikari and other groups, they are but limited and Italian members perceive themselves as devotees of Buddhism, a universal religion, rather than as followers of a “Japanese” movement.

In 1991, Soka Gakkai terminated its relationship with the monastic order Nichiren Shoshu, led by Nikken Shonin (1922–2019: see for a discussion McLaughlin 2019).

This event in fact made possible the “de-Japanization” in Italy and other countries. Certain typical Japanese traits and strictness mostly derived from the monks. Once the lay leadership of Soka Gakkai broke free of the original monastic cage, the possibility of mainstreaming reforms opened, which greatly benefited the Western branches.

What happened to Soka Gakkai in Italy was also the consequence of events in Japan. However, some developments related to the peculiar Italian situation. Sociological theory teaches that, in its beginnings, a religious group has a high level of strictness. Doctrinal and practical rigidity is needed to minimize the number of free riders, and clearly define boundaries with respect to pre-existing religious traditions and society at large (Finke and Stark 1992; Iannaccone 1992, 1994; Iannaccone, Olson and Stark 1995; Stark and Finke 2000).

As the group evolves, strictness, originally a resource, becomes a burden and limits the growth. Some religious groups keep the original strictness and cease to grow or lose members. Others progressively lower the level of strictness, and move from the margins to the center of the religious scene through a process of “mainstreaming” (Barker 2009). The Mormons, at least in the United States, are a good example of this process. They went from being regarded as a marginal Intermountain West “cult” to seeing an active member (and former bishop) of their church, Mitt Romney, becoming a credible candidate for the U.S. Presidency.

In the case of the Mormons, sociologist Armand Mauss noted that mainstreaming can be perceived by some members as too quick and generate reactions. In this case, a “retrenchment” may happen—or conservative schisms (Mauss 1994). An example of the latter are the “traditionalist” schisms in the Roman Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council.

These categories are helpful to interpret the story of Soka Gakkai in Italy. The conservative Kaneda-Littera administration, well beyond petty questions of personality issues and Italian politics, may be seen as an attempt at retrenchment after a process of mainstreaming had developed quickly in the Italian branch. While this process allowed for a spectacular growth, it also generated uneasiness among some of the earlier members.

Retrenchment, in turn, is normally provisional. Mainstreaming, once set in motion, is difficult to stop. In 2002, the change in the Italian leadership and the

reforms set mainstreaming back on track. The growth continued, and remarkable results were achieved such as the Intesa and the building of the large Milan *kaikan*.

Conclusion

The opponents of the 2002 reform never had the strength to organize a “traditionalist” schism, and the Nichiren Shoshu monks only gathered a handful of followers in Italy. However, some of the anti-reformist members joined forces with others who had left Soka Gakkai for different reasons and the Italian tiny anti-cult movement. As a result, alleged “victims” of Soka Gakkai started to be promoted, together with other “victims of the cults,” by media that often ignored both the history of Soka Gakkai and the reasons of internal dissent (see for examples of such literature Del Vecchio and Pitrelli 2011; Piccinni and Gazzanni 2018).

Although annoying for the members, who are insulted by their opponents through the social media and should occasionally face hostile press reports and TV shows, anti-cult criticism of Soka Gakkai in Italy has been so far largely irrelevant. It has not affected the generally good relations of the Italian Soka Gakkai with political authorities and the academia, and the growth of the movement continues unabated.

References

- Arduini, Laura. 2004–5. “La rete di Indra. La Soka Gakkai in Italia.” M.A. Thesis. Rome: University of Rome “La Sapienza.”
- Barker, Eileen. 2009. “Mainstreaming and Marginalization of Religious Movements.” Paper presented at the CESNUR 2009 International Conference, Salt Lake City, Utah. June 11–13.
- Barone, Carlo. 2007. “A Neo-Durkheimian Analysis of a New Religious Movement: The Case of Soka Gakkai in Italy.” *Theory and Society* 36(2):117–40.
- Beltramo Ceppi Zevi, Claudia, ed. 1994. *Il Mondo dei Samurai: tesori dell'arte giapponese dal Museo Fuji di Tokyo. Catalogo della mostra, Firenze, Museo*

- Mediceo, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, 28 maggio–18 Luglio 1994*. Ascoli Piceno: Artificio.
- Benzoni, Laura. 1998–99. “La Soka Gakkai nella città di Ravenna.” M.A. Thesis. Forlì: University of Bologna, branch of Forlì.
- Bernard-Mirtil, Laurence. 1998. *Sukyo Mahikari. Une nouvelle religion venue du Japon*. Trignac: Bell Vision.
- CESNUR. 2019 [last updated]. “La Soka Gakkai.” *Le Religioni in Italia*. Accessed September 27, 2019. <https://cesnur.com/il-buddhismo-in-italia/la-soka-gakkai>.
- Cornille, Catherine. 1991. “The Phoenix Flies West: The Dynamics of the Inculturation of Mahikari in Western Europe.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18(2–3):265–85.
- Cornille, Catherine. 1992. “Different Forms of Spirit Mediation in Mahikari and Shinnyo-en: Shamanism East and West.” *Syzygy: Journal of Alternative Religion and Culture* 1(4):355–66.
- Corrao, Francesca. 1994–95. “La Soka Gakkai Italiana.” *La Critica Sociologica* 111–12:155–63.
- Cuocci, Lucia. 2002. “Venti sui fiori di loto.” *Confronti* 11:24.
- Dator, James A. 1969. *Soka Gakkai: Builders of the Third Civilization. American and Japanese Members*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Davis, Winston. 1980. *Dōjō: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Del Vecchio, Gianni, and Stefano Pitrelli. 2011. *Occulto Italia*. Milan: RCS.
- Di Martino, Francesco. 2006–7. “Antropologia di un buddismo contemporaneo.” M.A. Thesis. Urbino: University of Urbino “Carlo Bo.”
- Dobbelaere, Karel. 1995. “Un tempo per l’autoanalisi religiosa. La Soka Gakkai in Gran Bretagna.” *DuemilaUno* 52:3–15.
- Dobbelaere, Karel. 1998. *La Soka Gakkai. Un movimento di laici diventa una religione*. Leumann (Turin): Elledici [English translation, *Soka Gakkai: From Lay Movement to Religion*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001].
- Falduzzi, Licia. 2004. “La mappa ‘culturale’ delle religioni e dei nuovi movimenti religiosi nati in Oriente ed estremo Oriente.” In *Diffusione e differenziazione dei modelli culturali in una metropoli mediterranea. Indagine sui gruppi e sui movimenti religiosi non cattolici presenti a Catania*, edited by Renato D’Amico, 239–51. Milan: Franco Angeli.
- Ferrarotti, Laura. 1994–95. “La I.S.G.: una ricerca. Leggendo *DuemilaUno*.” *La Critica Sociologica* 111–12:228–33.

- Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. 1992. *The Churching of America: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. New Brunswick (New Jersey): Rutgers University Press.
- Hammond, Phillip E., and David W. Machacek. 1999. *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hurst, Jane. 1992. *Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism and the Soka Gakkai in America: The Ethos of a New Religious Movement*. New York and London: Garland.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1992. "Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Free-Riding in Cults, Communes, and Other Collectives." *Journal of Political Economy* 100:271–92.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1994. "Why Strict Churches are Strong." *American Journal of Sociology* 99:1180–211.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R., Daniel V. A. Olson, and Rodney Stark. 1995. "Religious Resources and Church Growth." *Social Forces* 75(2):705–31.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 1994–95. "L'ora di punta degli dèi. Nuove religioni giapponesi di origine buddhista e non buddhista in Europa." *La Critica Sociologica* 111–12:102–18.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 1999. *Súkyó Mahikari*. Leumann (Turin): Elledici.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2016. "Jehovah's Witnesses in Italy: A Story of Success and Controversies." In *The Jehovah's Witnesses in Scholarly Perspective: What is New in the Scientific Study of the Movement?* [Acta Comparanda - Subsidia III], edited by Chris Vonck, 125–30. Antwerp: Faculty for Comparative Study of Religion and Humanism.
- Machacek, David, and Bryan Wilson, eds. 2000. *Global Citizens: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maciotti, Maria Immacolata. 1994–95. "Una ricerca sul movimento della Soka Gakkai in Italia. Primi risultati." *La Critica Sociologica* 111–12:164–69.
- Maciotti, Maria Immacolata. 1996. *Il Buddha che è in noi. Germogli del Sutra del Loto*. Rome: SEAM.
- Maciotti, Maria Immacolata, ed. 2001. *Sūtra del Loto. Un invito alla lettura*. Milan: Guerini e Associati.
- Maciotti, Maria Immacolata. 2002. "L'Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai a un bivio." *La Critica Sociologica* 141:89–96.
- Mauss, Armand. 1994. *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*. Urbana, Illinois and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Mazzoli, Silvia. 2002–3. "La Soka Gakkai: inquadramento storico dottrinale. Analisi sociologica di un campione lombardo." M.A. Thesis. Milan: IULM.
- McLaughlin, Levi. 2019. *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution: The Rise of a Mimetic Nation in Modern Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

- Metraux, Daniel. 1988. *The History and Theology of Soka Gakkai: A Japanese New Religion*. Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Metraux, Daniel. 1997. *The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Quebec: The Lotus and the Fleur de Lys*. Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Minganti, Roberto. 2002. "Ma la responsabilità è di tutti. Intervista a cura di Lucia Cuocci." *Confronti* 11:25–6.
- Montemurro, Francesco. 1994–95. "La I.S.G.: una ricerca. La codifica del questionario, con particolare riguardo alla 'chiusura' delle domande aperte." *La Critica Sociologica* 111–12:174–79.
- Pastorelli, Sabina. 1998–99. "Sette" e vita quotidiana. *Analisi di alcuni casi*. M.A. Thesis. Rome: University of Rome "La Sapienza."
- Piccinni, Flavia, and Carmine Gazzanni. 2018. *Nella setta*. Rome: Fandango.
- Poli, Stefania. 2005–6. "Il Buddismo della Soka Gakkai." M.A. Thesis. Ferrara: University of Ferrara.
- Rossi, Pier Giorgio. 1994–95. "La I.S.G.: una ricerca. Benefici materiali e interiori." *La Critica Sociologica* 111–12:187–214.
- Scotti, Simona. 2002. "La Soka Gakkai in Italia. Tracce di una crisi." *Religioni e Società* 44:116–17.
- Seager, Richard Hughes. 2006. *Encountering the Dharma: Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai, and the Globalization of Buddhist Humanism*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Semprini, Loredana. 1994–95a. "La I.S.G.: una ricerca. Il campionamento." *La Critica Sociologica* 111–12:170–73.
- Semprini, Loredana. 1994–95b. "La I.S.G.: una ricerca. Diffusione in Italia e caratteristiche socio-demografiche degli associati." *La Critica Sociologica* 111–12:180–86.
- Snow, David A. 1993. *Shakubuku: A Study of the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist Movement in America, 1960-1975*. New York and London: Garland.
- Spirito, Barbara. 1994–95. "La I.S.G.: una ricerca. Percorsi individuali. Desideri di mutamento." *La Critica Sociologica* 111–12:215–27.
- Stark, Rodney, and Roger Finke. 2000. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tebecis, Andris Karlis. 1982. *Mahikari: Thank God for the Answers at Last*. Tokyo: L.H. Yoko Shuppan.
- Tedeschi, Enrica. 1994–95. "La I.S.G.: una ricerca. Leggendo 'Il Nuovo Rinascimento.'" *La Critica Sociologica* 111–12:234–50.
- Violi, Adele. 2014. *Il sole che cammina*. Arezzo: Zona.
- White, James W. 1970. *The Sokagakkai and Mass Society*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

- Wilson, Bryan, and Karel Dobbelaere. 1994. *A Time to Chant: The Soka Gakkai Buddhists in Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Zoccatelli, PierLuigi. 2015. "Notes on Some Statistical Aspects of the Growth of Soka Gakkai in Italy." Paper presented at the CESNUR 2015 International Conference, Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia. June 17–20. Accessed October 4, 2019. https://www.cesnur.org/2015/plz_tallinn_2015.pdf.
- Zoccatelli, PierLuigi, 2001–2. "Forme di buddhismo in Italia. Il caso Shinnyoen." *La Critica Sociologica* 140:100–12.

Soka Gakkai's Campaigns for Nuclear Disarmament

Rosita Šorytė

ORLIR (International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees)

president@orlir.org

ABSTRACT: Soka Gakkai developed in Japan in the aftermath of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and few causes are dearest to its members than the campaign for the total elimination of nuclear weapons. The paper reviews the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and its consequences in Japan and internationally, noting the problems preventing the United Nations from effectively achieving the aim of nuclear disarmament. In the second part, it details the anti-nuclear activities of Soka Gakkai, starting from the seminal speech of September 8, 1957 in Yokohama by its second president, Josei Toda. It then summarizes the efforts of Soka Gakkai's third president, Daisaku Ikeda, on behalf of nuclear disarmament, and their results.

KEYWORDS: Soka Gakkai, Soka Gakkai's Anti-Nuclear Campaigns, Nuclear Disarmament, Josei Toda, Daisaku Ikeda.

A National and International Trauma: Hiroshima and Nagasaki

By mid-1945, Germany had been defeated, but World War II was not over. Japan was still fighting fiercely, and between April and July inflicted to the Allied Forces casualties amounting to half of those they had suffered in the previous three years of war in the Pacific. On July 26, 1945, U.S. President Harry Truman (1884–1972), UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill (1874–1965) and Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) met in Germany and issued the Potsdam Declaration, calling for Japan's surrender. Japan was asked to abandon all the territories it had occupied since the beginning of the war, accept the temporary presence of American troops on its soil, disarm its military forces, allow war criminals to be judged, and start a transition towards democracy. "Prompt and utter destruction" was threatened if Japan refused these conditions,

a wording later interpreted as an allusion to the fact that the U.S. were in possession of the atomic bomb.

Japan rejected the terms of the Potsdam Declaration and refused to surrender. The U.S. realized that a final conventional assault on Japan would have a heavy cost in terms of American casualties. Although how the decision was reached remains controversial among historians (Walker 2005), many agree that in the end it was the opinion of Secretary of State James Byrnes (1882–1972) that prevailed, and President Truman ordered the use of the newly developed atomic bomb (McNelly 2000).

The story of what followed is well-known (see Rotter 2008). On August 6, 1945, a B-29 bomber, piloted by Colonel Paul Tibbets (1915–2007) and named “Enola Gay” after the pilot’s mother, reached Hiroshima, a city in Japan’s Honshu island with a population of 300,000. At that time, Hiroshima hosted 43,000 Japanese soldiers. At approximately 8:15 a.m. local time, the Enola Gay dropped a 9,700-pound atomic bomb over the city. 70,000 died immediately, but the total casualties are estimated around 200,000, considering the radioactive fallout and the subsequent deaths due to cancer and other after-effects of the bombing (Sherwin 2003).

How the explosion was perceived in Hiroshima was later told to American psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton by a survivor:

The appearance of people was... well, they all had skin blackened by burns ... They had no hair because their hair was burned, and at a glance you couldn’t tell whether you were looking at them from in front or in back... They held their arms bent [forward] like this... and their skin—not only on their hands, but on their faces and bodies too—hung down... If there had been only one or two such people... perhaps I would not have had such a strong impression. But wherever I walked I met these people... Many of them died along the road—I can still picture them in my mind—like walking ghosts (Lifton 1967, 27).

Three days after Hiroshima, on August 9, another American plane carried a second atomic bomb to the city of Kokura. The city, however, was covered by heavy clouds and smoke from the conventional bombing of nearby Yahata, which the Americans had carried out the previous day. Major Charles Sweeney (1919–2004), who piloted the B-29 plane carrying the bomb, had orders to drop it visually rather than by radar. Since this was impossible, Kokura was saved and Sweeney dropped the bomb on his

secondary target, the city of Nagasaki (Sweeney, Antonucci and Antonucci 1997), whose population in 1945 was estimated at 263,000. The fact that Nagasaki had been built on a sequel of hills and narrow valleys reduced the impact of the bomb, notwithstanding the fact that it was more powerful than the one dropped on Hiroshima. Estimates of casualties in Nagasaki are a matter of discussion among historians. They range from 36,000 to 80,000.

On August 15, Emperor Hirohito (1907–1989) announced Japan's unconditional surrender, citing impossibility to resist the “new and most cruel bomb” (Asada 1996). The surrender was formalized on September 2, 1945, on board of US battleship Missouri. The deadliest war in human history officially ended, but the debate on the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had just started. It continues to this very day (Orr 2008). Certainly, the end of the deadliest war ever was a positive development, but the price innocent Japanese civilians had to pay remains a matter of contention. Brazilian scholar Bruna Navarone Santos has studied how history textbooks in different countries tell students the history of the two atomic bombs. Narratives range from a tragic necessity as the conflict needed to be ended to a war crime (Navarone Santos 2019).

In subsequent decades, the use of nuclear weapons against a civilian population would have been judged as a crime against humanity under the norms and principles of international law adopted after World War II. However, even in 1945, international law and the Geneva Conventions were in place. These conventions clearly stipulated the principle of a clear distinction between combatants and civilians. There were soldiers in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but the majority of those who died were civilians.

The debate on the nuclear continues. Paradoxically, in 2011, Japan lived another nuclear tragedy caused by the collapse at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant in Okuma, demonstrating that even nuclear energy used for civilian purposes may be unsafe and deadly.

The Aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Unfortunately, history is always written by the victors. A “revisionist” history still occasionally tries to justify the bombs (Maddox 2007). It is very

important to remember that the atomic bombings not only were the means to end World War II, but also gave the Americans and their Western allies decisive strategic advantages in the post-war global politics. The bombs played a role in paving the way to a new world order, build by the Western allied powers together with the Soviet Union, a global order in which, after 74 years, we still live in.

Even though, in the Spring of 1945, only 26 countries participated in drafting the Charter of the United Nations, it was a seminal document on the peaceful cohabitation between states, ideally preventing further conflicts and providing means for their peaceful resolution. The Charter was signed by 51 original member states, and entered into force on 24 October 1945, leading to the creation of the United Nations organization.

The Charter starts with the words “We, the People...” At least in words, the people were put at the center of the action of the United Nations. Certainly, the founding fathers of the United Nations included in the document positive and genuinely humanistic ideals, aimed at preventing another deadly war between states. Yet, there was one essential problem, which existed since the creation of the United Nations and has remained insurmountable to this day. The real, and legally binding, decisions are taken by one universally accepted organ only—the Security Council of the United Nations. In fact, by five permanent members: United States, Russia (back then, Soviet Union), Great Britain, France, and China (the Republic of China, i.e. Taiwan, until 1971, and the People’s Republic of China since that date). The Security Council would never be able to take any decision on peace and security in the world if one of the permanent members would oppose it, which means that all decisions can only be adopted if none of the five permanent members votes against them.

On many occasions, while the Security Council was unable to take necessary action to prevent war and bloodshed of civilians, the General Assembly of the United Nations, where all members have equal rights, passed resolutions exposing the incapacity and biasedness of the Security Council’s permanent members. However, these resolutions have a moral value only. It was always impossible to use them to take collective action and prevent human suffering, for the very simple reason that all decisions taken by the General Assembly are merely advisory and cannot be enforced.

Theoretically, the humanistic aim of the United Nations is to maintain “international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations, achieving international co-operation, and being at the center for harmonizing the actions of nations.” In practice, the reality is much less humanistic, and the states are not equal. The system has been created in the aftermath of World War II, and the only international body which has the legal and universally accepted power to take decisions to prevent and resolve international conflicts, the Security Council, is one of the most undemocratic entities we know of.

For many years, most of the United Nations’ member states requested a reform of the Security Council. Despite all possible compromises proposed, nothing happened, for the simple reason that a final agreement on reform should be approved by the same five permanent members of the Security Council, for which losing their exceptional privilege in international decision-making is simply too much to ask.

The Security Council of the United Nations has been created by the countries that won World War II. All five of them are legal possessors of nuclear weapons. Not that the United Nations is not concerned about atomic bombs. In 1970, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) entered into force. The NPT is a landmark international treaty, whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapon technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament. A total of 191 states have signed the Treaty.

It may look very good, but again, theory should be distinguished from practice. And in practice, no nuclear country believes that one day it will accept to give up its nuclear supremacy or disarm. Even non-proliferation so far worked only partially. Despite NPT obligations, some nuclear states shared their technology with Pakistan, India, and Israel. Pakistan and India have openly admitted that they do have nuclear weapons. Israel continues to vehemently deny it. Once Iraq tried to acquire them, its programs were stopped. The battle against Iran’s and North Korea’s nuclear ambitions is still ongoing.

The horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki shook human consciousness to its core. Some of the fathers of the United Nations, who actively participated in creating this global order in which we live now, sincerely believed that there was an historic opportunity to create a new and better world for generations to come. They spared no effort to save our world from another tragedy. Unfortunately, the narrow interests of some countries took over. Instead of a world of peace, a world of dominance, fear and war was created.

Nobody forgot the unspeakably horrific effect of the nuclear attacks against the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At that time, many believed that this horror would persuade the world and its leaders that everything possible should be done to ensure that another such tragedy will never happen again. And yet, today we are confronted with the same challenges. Some eight countries in the world may use nuclear weapons against anybody anytime. Military spending amounts to 1,7 trillion US dollars per year globally, an amount of money that could cover all humanitarian and development needs in the world. Rather than decreasing, this spending has been increased to develop more and more sophisticated weapons such as lethal autonomous weapon system (LAWS) using artificial intelligence (AI) and others. This is a clear indication that the dominant powers are not ready in any way to change their mindset and thus change the world.

The good news is that these countries are not the entire world. Their narrative of dominance is not the full story. There are also those, which from many years, backed by an active civil society, have been pushing the nuclear states to accept the principle of banning and eliminating atomic weapons, and diminishing military expenses with the final future goal of total disarmament.

The government of Japan, because of its military alliance with the U.S., is in a very delicate and precarious position. On the one hand, it cannot ignore its civil society's requests for disarmament, fueled by the tragic memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On the other hand, it must respect its obligations towards the U.S. and its nuclear umbrella.

The prevailing opinion of Japanese society about nuclear weapons is clear. The horror of the nuclear attacks against the population of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has not subsided. The use of these lethal weapons not only killed hundreds of thousands and razed both cities to the ground. It had a lasting

effect on those who survived, one that continued for many generations to come.

The devastating end of World War II gave birth to a new Japan. This was a Japan that largely accepted the blame for the atrocities committed during World War II. It was a Japan that said “never again” to the same mistakes, and at its core became deeply pacifist. Unhealable scars and the experienced horror engraved the very spirit of Japanese culture. The lesson had been understood and internalized by most Japanese. Some devoted themselves to warn the world about the dangers of nuclear weapons and promote global nuclear disarmament. Among them were the leaders and members of Soka Gakkai, the largest lay Buddhist movement in the world.

Soka Gakkai's Anti-Nuclear Campaign

On September 8, 1957, the second president of Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda (1900–1958) spoke about the “absolute evil” of nuclear weapons in front of 50,000 Soka Gakkai youth in Yokohama’s Mitsuzawa Stadium. The year was significant. Also in 1957, prominent German scientists and intellectuals signed the Göttingen Declaration, urging Germany to repudiate nuclear weapons forever.

The words pronounced by Toda in 1957 remains in the heart of Soka Gakkai members to this very day:

I would now like to share with you what I hope you will regard as the foremost of my instructions for the future.

As I have long said, the responsibility for the coming era must be shouldered by the youth... Today I would like to state clearly my feelings and attitude regarding the testing of nuclear weapons, a topic that is currently being debated heatedly throughout society. I hope that, as my disciples, you will inherit the declaration I am about to make today and, to the best of your ability, spread its intent throughout the world.

Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of atomic or nuclear weapons has arisen around the world, it is my wish to go further, to attack the problem at its root. I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons. I wish to declare that anyone who ventures to use nuclear weapons, irrespective of their nationality or whether their country is victorious or defeated, should be sentenced to death without exception.

Why do I say this? Because we, the citizens of the world, have an inviolable right to live. Anyone who jeopardizes that right is a devil incarnate, a fiend, a monster. I propose that humankind applies, in every case, the death penalty to anyone responsible for using nuclear weapons, even if that person is on the winning side.

Even if a country should conquer the world through the use of nuclear weapons, the conquerors must be viewed as devils, as evil incarnate. I believe that it is the mission of every member of the youth division in Japan to disseminate this idea throughout the globe (Toda 1957).

As Toda's successor, Daisaku Ikeda, noted,

As a Buddhist for whom respect for life was a core principle, Toda was adamantly opposed to the death penalty. His invocation here of capital punishment should therefore be understood as an effort to undermine and uproot the logic that would justify the use of nuclear weapons. For Toda, nuclear weapons, which fundamentally threaten humanity's right to survival, represented an "absolute evil." He was determined to counteract any attempt to justify them as a "necessary evil" whose use might be viewed as an extension of conventional warfare (Ikeda 2009, 12–3).

The historical context of Toda's speech should also be noted. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a large anti-nuclear coalition, known as Gensuikyo, had been formed in Japan. However, as it is now known, this coalition was infiltrated by agents of the Soviet Union, and the Japan Communist Party (JCP) came to obtain a hegemonic role in it. Gradually, the Gensuikyo started arguing that only the Western atomic bombs were evil. Those in possession of the Soviet Union served an acceptable defensive purpose. Not unexpectedly, this double standard discredited the Gensuikyo in the eyes of Japanese public opinion. By 1957, when Toda pronounced his speech, Gensuikyo was collapsing. Soka Gakkai tried to offer a more believable alternative (Urbain 2010, 71). Even apart from the specific context, the strength of Toda's words remains. They are also noticeable for the use of a religious language and metaphors.

When, in 1960, Daisaku Ikeda succeeded Toda as President of Soka Gakkai, the fact that the fight against atomic weapons was not humanitarian or secular only, but was grounded on Buddhist values, became even more clear. Later, he recalled his reaction to Toda's words:

In making this declaration, my mentor [Toda] indicated that this was to be considered first among his instructions to his youthful followers and to subsequent generations... The importance and value of this landmark declaration

have grown more evident with the passing years and will continue to do so, I am confident, into the future (Soka Gakkai International 2011).

In September 1958, on the first anniversary of Toda's momentous speech, Ikeda had published a text called "A Way Out of the Burning House." The "burning house" was our world, threatened by the "unprecedented danger" of nuclear destruction. Ikeda found the "way out" in the Buddhist text that is at the very center of Soka Gakkai's religious experience, the *Lotus Sutra*. He quoted from there the parable of the three carts:

According to that parable, a wealthy man's house suddenly catches fire but, because the house is very spacious, his children who are inside remain unaware of the danger in which they are placed and show neither surprise nor fear. The man then finds ways to entice them to come out of their own accord, thus enabling all to exit the burning house unharmed (Ikeda 2019, 4).

Coming out of the burning house, here, involves something more than a mundane strategy. The children trapped into the burning house need a conversion of the heart. Ikeda emphasized this essential point in 2009:

If we are to put the era of nuclear terror behind us, we must struggle against the real "enemy." That enemy is not nuclear weapons *per se*, nor is it the states that possess or develop them. The real enemy that we must confront is the ways of thinking that justify nuclear weapons; the readiness to annihilate others when they are seen as a threat or as a hindrance to the realization of our objectives (Ikeda 2009, 32).

Soka Gakkai Buddhists believe in the possibility of an inner transformation of individuals. We can change ourselves not only by ceasing hostile acts but orienting our existence toward saving lives, thus transforming our societies at their core.

In 1973, Soka Gakkai youth members collected ten million signatures for nuclear abolition, which were sent in 1975 to the UN Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim (1918–2007). This was followed by the collection of another thirteen million signatures for a similar petition in 2000 (SGI Office of Public Information 2009, 4). In 1982, Ikeda organized the first exhibition "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World," in support of the UN's World Disarmament Campaign. The exhibition opened at the UN Headquarters in New York, and toured twenty-five cities in sixteen countries, including the Soviet Union and China. In total it was viewed by some 1.2 million visitors (Urbain 2010, 72). In 1996, Ikeda founded the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, which included the abolition of nuclear weapons as one of its main goals and research projects.

The memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was always in the background of these initiatives. In 2005, the Soka Gakkai Women's Peace Committee in Japan filmed 31 female survivors talking about their experiences and compiled a DVD of eight of their accounts for educational purposes. More generally, the youth division of Soka Gakkai Japan compiled and published 80 volumes of more than 3,000 individual war experiences from World War II during the period from 1974 to 1985. The Soka Gakkai Women's Peace Committee in Japan published a 20-volume work, *In Hope of Peace*, which chronicles the experiences of women who lived through World War II (SGI Office of Public Information 2009, 4).

From 1983, Ikeda wrote every year a Peace Proposal to the United Nations. These texts are very interesting. They show an unusual (for a religious leader) understanding of the political dynamics of United Nations. All too often, religions often only rhetorical platitudes about peace and disarmament, without a real grasp of the highly technical mechanisms of the United Nations. The opposite is true for Ikeda and Soka Gakkai, who show a full understanding of the issues and command of the UN jargon. This was confirmed when, in 2006, Ikeda wrote a detailed proposal for a reform of the United Nations (Ikeda 2006). He wrote it cautiously, trying not to challenge directly the members of the Security Council. However, the text makes it clear that without a deep reform of how the United Nations work, its noble humanitarian aims cannot be achieved. In 2007, Ikeda appealed again to the United Nations when he launched the first People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition campaign, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Toda's anti-nuclear speech.

The 2006 proposal for United Nations reform should be read together with what is perhaps the most important text by Ikeda on nuclear disarmament, the 2009 five-point plan for nuclear abolition, originally published in Soka Gakkai's Japanese newspaper *Seikyo Shimbun*. In this text, Ikeda went back to the very roots of Soka Gakkai:

Just over 100 years ago, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), the founding president of the Soka Gakkai, proposed a new mode of competition, “humanitarian competition”—in which “by benefiting others, we benefit ourselves”—as a means of overcoming conflict among nations. He called on each state to engage in a positive rivalry to contribute to the world through humane action, in order to spread the spirit of peaceful coexistence and build a truly global society (Ikeda 2009, 33).

Ikeda explained that his five points were “all rooted in Makiguchi’s concept of humanitarian competition” (Ikeda 2009, 34). They included,

1. The five declared nuclear-weapon states to announce their commitment to a shared vision of a world without nuclear weapons at next year’s NPT Review Conference and to promptly initiate concrete steps toward its achievement.
2. The United Nations to establish a panel of experts on nuclear abolition, strengthening collaborative relations with civil society in the disarmament process.
3. The states parties to the NPT to strengthen nonproliferation mechanisms and remove obstacles to the elimination of nuclear weapons by the year 2015.
4. All states to actively cooperate to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in national security and to advance on a global scale toward the establishment of security arrangements that are not dependent on nuclear weapons by the year 2015.
5. The world’s people to clearly manifest their will for the outlawing of nuclear weapons and to establish, by the year 2015, the international norm that will serve as the foundation for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (Ikeda 2009, 18).

The five points have been promoted by countless initiatives organized by Soka Gakkai throughout the world. In Italy, in 2009, ten Soka Gakkai youth members met to study the five-point plan. This was the origin of *Senzatomica* (Without Atomic), a project that matured in a first exhibition organized in Florence in 2011, that gathered 60,000 visitors. Since then, *Senzatomica* has become a household name in Italy. Visitors are in the hundreds of thousands, and conferences and rallies accompany the exhibitions. There are similar initiatives in several other countries.

What did Soka Gakkai achieve? In his Peace Proposal for 2019, Ikeda noted that “the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)—an undertaking whose achievement was long considered impossible—was adopted two years ago” (Ikeda 2019, 1). Also in 2017, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) won the Nobel Peace Prize. Understandably, Soka Gakkai was proud of this recognition, and published a document emphasizing the very strict co-operation it had developed with ICAN during the previous ten years (Soka Gakkai 2017).

Yet, awards and even international treaties are not effective if they are not followed by decisive action. In the Peace Proposal for 2019, Ikeda mentions Toda’s grand vision of a total abolition of nuclear weapons, and writes that, “the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is a forerunner of the

kind of international disarmament law that can help frame such a vision” (Ikeda 2019, 6). A “forerunner” is obviously not a done deal, yet Ikeda’s vision is based on a humanistic Buddhism teaching devotees never to lose hope.

Ikeda invites to “cultivate a mutual recognition of this pathology [of ‘peacelessness’] and join together in search of a cure. In other words, we must develop a common vision for a peaceful society” (Ikeda 2019, 6). In his latest Peace Proposal, Ikeda places nuclear disarmament within a larger framework based on “people-centered multilateralism,” going beyond the concept of national security, a “global compact on refugees,” and efforts to fight climate change. There is a clear sense that the campaign against nuclear weapons cannot be disassociated from a wider global effort for peace, solidarity, ecology, and justice:

The darker the night, the closer the dawn: now is the time to accelerate momentum toward disarmament by taking the present crises as an opportunity to create a new history. To this end, I would like to propose three key themes that could serve as a kind of scaffolding in the effort to make disarmament a cornerstone of the world in the twenty-first century: sharing a vision of a peaceful society, promoting a people-centered multilateralism and mainstreaming youth participation (Ikeda 2019, 2).

Once again, this effort is grounded on Buddhism.

Our sense that the sufferings of others bear no relation to us, the distaste we might even feel, was admonished by Shakyamuni as the arrogance of the young, the arrogance of the healthy, the arrogance of the living. If we reconsider that arrogance in terms of the connections of the human heart, we can clearly see how the apathy and lack of concern arising from arrogance actually deepens and intensifies the suffering of others (Ikeda 2019, 9).

Conversely,

our efforts to empathize with and support those struggling with difficulties help weave networks of mutual encouragement, giving rise to an expanding sense of security and hope. The focus of Buddhism is not confined to the inevitable sufferings of life, but takes in the reality of people confronting various difficulties within society. Thus, we find within the canon of Mahayana Buddhism (*The Sutra on Upāsaka Precepts*) encouragement to build wells, plant fruit trees and build water channels, help the old, the young and the weak to cross rivers and console those who have lost their land. This urges us to recognize that we are likely at some point to experience the suffering that afflicts other people—that there is no happiness which is our sole possession, no suffering that remains entirely confined to others—and to strive for the welfare of both self and others. In this, the essential spirit of Buddhism is expressed. Taking as one’s own the pains and

sufferings of others is exactly the philosophical wellspring for the SGI's activities as a faith-based organization (FBO) as we work to address global challenges... (Ikeda 2019, 10).

Ikeda is of course aware that in the international situation one can find ample cause for pessimism. He, however, mentions the example of the medieval Japanese monk Nichiren Daishonin (1222–1282), the originator of the Buddhist tradition to which Soka Gakkai belongs, when confronted with a deep national crisis in Japan in 1260.

At the time, the Japanese people suffered from repeated disasters and armed conflicts, and many were sunk in apathy and resignation. Society as a whole was permeated by pessimistic philosophies that despaired of the possibility of resolving challenges through one's own efforts, and many people's sole focus was on maintaining a sense of inner tranquility. Such ways of thinking and acting ran entirely contrary to the teachings animating the Lotus Sutra, which call on us to maintain unyielding faith in the potential existing within all people, to work for the full development and flowering of that potential and to build a society in which all people shine in the fullness of their dignity. Nichiren's treatise urges an earnest confrontation with the challenge of how to spark the light of hope in the hearts of people beaten down by repeated disaster, how to mobilize social change to prevent wars and internal conflicts. He thus stresses the need to root out the pathology of resignation that lies hidden in the deepest strata of our social being, infecting us all: "Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil." His treatise calls on us to reject resignation in the face of our deep social ills and instead to muster our inner human capacities so that we may together meet the severe challenges of our age as agents of proactive and contagious change (Ikeda 2019, 13).

References

- Asada, Sadao. 1996. "The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan's Decision to Surrender: A Reconsideration." In *Hiroshima in History: The Myths of Revisionism*, edited by Robert James Maddox, 24–58. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press.
- Ikeda, Daisaku. 2006. "Fulfilling the Mission: Empowering the UN to Live Up to the World's Expectations." August 30. Accessed October 10, 2019. <https://www.daisakuikeda.org/assets/files/unpp2006.pdf>.
- Ikeda, Daisaku. 2009. "Building Global Solidarity Through Nuclear Abolition." September 8. Accessed October 10, 2019. <https://bit.ly/35DgK7r>.

- Ikeda, Daisaku. 2019. "2019 Peace Proposal. Toward a New Era of Peace and Disarmament: A People-Centered Approach." January 26. Accessed October 10, 2019. <https://bit.ly/33HeFFJ>.
- Lifton, Robert Jay. 1967. *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*. New York: Random House.
- Maddox, Robert James, ed. 2007. *Hiroshima in History: The Myths of Revisionism*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press.
- McNelly, Theodore H. 2000. "The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb." In *Pearl to V-J Day: World War II in the Pacific*, edited by Jacob Neufeld, 131–70. New York: Diane Publishing Co.
- Navarone Santos, Bruna. 2019. "O ensino de história pelos testemunhos e memórias do ataque atômico em Hiroshima." In *Aprendendo História: Diálogos Transversais*, edited by André Bueno, Dulceli Estacheski, Everton Crema and José Maria de Sousa Neto, 48–54. União da Vitória, Brazil: Edições Especiais Sobre Ontens.
- Orr, James J. 2008. "Review of *Hiroshima in History: The Myths of Revisionism* and *The End of the Pacific War*." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 34(2):521–28.
- Rotter, Andrew J. 2008. *Hiroshima: The World's Bomb*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- SGI Office of Public Information. 2009. "Soka Gakkai International NGO Activity Report." Accessed October 7, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2pp8HKO>.
- Sherwin, Martin J. 2003. *A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and Its Legacies*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Soka Gakkai International. 2011. "Celebrating the History of Soka Gakkai's Antinuclear Weapons Movement." Accessed October 7, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2pwwDYh>.
- Soka Gakkai International. 2017. "SGI and ICAN—Partnership Underlined by Friendship." Accessed October 10, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2VYK8k9>.
- Sweeney, Charles, James A. Antonucci, and Marion K. Antonucci. 1997. *War's End: An Eyewitness Account of America's Last Atomic Mission*. New York: Quill Publishing.
- Toda, Josei. 1957. "Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons." September 8. Accessed October 10, 2019. <https://bit.ly/33Edir4>.
- Urbain, Olivier. 2010. *Daisaku Ikeda's Philosophy of Peace: Dialogue, Transformation and Global Citizenship*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Walker, J. Samuel. 2005. "Recent Literature on Truman's Atomic Bomb Decision: A Search for Middle Ground." *Diplomatic History* 29(2):311–34.

The Limits of Religious Tolerance in France: The Case of Soka Gakkai

Yanis Ben Hammouda

Ph.D. Student, Université Bordeaux Montaigne

yanis.ben-hammouda@etu.u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr

ABSTRACT: Recognized since 1983 as a consultant NGO to the United Nations, Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a lay Buddhist organization, aims at bringing about world peace through educational, cultural and spiritual activities. As such, it can be considered a form of engaged Buddhism, which can be defined as “the application of the Dharma, or Buddhist teachings, to the resolution of social problems”. However, SGI originally adopted a missionary approach that led to accusations of intolerance. Its religious foundation, rooted in the teachings of Nichiren (a Japanese monk of the 13th century), first led the burgeoning Japanese organization to be actively evangelistic in its method and exclusivist in its theological point of view. This religious organization thus underwent several adaptations to Western society, notably the development of a humanistic and pacifist ethos, in order to become the SGI we now know. But despite the tolerant and progressive values it promotes, Soka Gakkai France (SGF), SGI’s French offshoot, is, paradoxically, the victim of religious intolerance in a country famous for its separation of Church and State. Contrary to other European countries where SGI has established itself, various French authorities have considered SGI as a “cult.” Therefore, the objectives of this paper are twofold: (1) the first is to clarify how the evolution of SGI’s official discourse, from a certain religious exclusivism to universal tolerance, may be also a consequence of its acculturation to Western society, and to show to what extent this tolerance is practically implemented in France; (2) the second will be to offer an account of the difficult but perhaps changing relations between SGF and French society—be it with its political representatives, the media, or other French Buddhist organizations.

KEYWORDS: Soka Gakkai International, SGI-France, Religious Tolerance, Laïcité, Shakubuku.

Introduction

In countries where religious pluralism is the norm, and in Western countries in particular, representatives of religious groups are often encouraged for various

reasons and purposes to engage in religious dialogue and even religious cooperation. Such exchanges necessarily entail a certain openness towards religious groups that may be quite different from one's own religion. In other words, religious dialogue and cooperation require, at the minimum, religious tolerance. Tolerance is defined by the current edition of the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as "sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own" (Merriam-Webster 2019). However, religious tolerance does not concern only sympathetic relations between religious groups, but it also relates to a government's official and legal dispositions towards religious groups and the members affiliated to them. In many countries, religious tolerance has been legally established as freedom of religion, which confers the right to practice any religion, if one chooses to belong to any religion at all.

But obviously, reality is much more complex and nuanced than clear-cut definitions taken from dictionaries. Religious tolerance can often be limited, in the sense that some religions may accept certain religious groups and not others, or that a government will condone some religions and disapprove of others, by considering them "cults" for instance and by not granting them the legitimizing status of "religion." This paper thus aims at examining such limitations through the case study of a new religious group, that of Soka Gakkai, a Japanese Buddhist organization established in almost 200 countries. It will focus especially on its French offshoot, known as the Soka Buddhist Movement (*Mouvement bouddhiste Soka* in French). The study of this Buddhist group will hopefully underline the capacity of religions, new and old, to change overtime their behavior towards other religious groups. The case of Soka Gakkai is indeed an excellent example of the development of a new religious group that started as a highly proselytizing group, which led some critics to see it as intolerant, but which eventually grew into an international organization promoting peace and religious tolerance.

This change of behavior could be explained simply by changing circumstances in Japan and the expanding number of its members, thus making the conversion of new members less crucial to the group. Nonetheless, this paper will argue that it also has to do with its adaptation to Western culture. Hence, the first part of this study will be devoted to the analysis of the origins and the development of the movement, from Nichiren's teachings in the thirteenth century, to Soka Gakkai's current efforts to engage in religious dialogue in France, thus putting into perspective the "intolerance critique." Moreover, as was pointed out by

Pastorelli, “new religious movements highlight the politics and the attitudes of society and of State when faced with the growing pluralism occurring in European civilizations” (Pastorelli 2010, 165). The comparative analysis of the integration and the position of Soka Gakkai in France and Italy given in the second part of this paper will show how religious tolerance on the part of the local and national authorities, the media and society at large, can drastically vary from one country to another. Therefore, it calls into question the legitimacy of the categorization of religious groups as either “religions” or “cults.”

1. The Development of Soka Gakkai's Religious Tolerance

1.1. Origins of the Movement and its Relationship with Nichiren's Exclusivism

Soka Gakkai is a lay organization that was created in 1930 by Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944). Until 1990, it had been affiliated to the monastical Nichiren Shoshu sect. Like several other Japanese Buddhist sects, Nichiren Shoshu's (and thus Soka Gakkai's) doctrine is based on the teachings of Nichiren (1222–1282), a monk who lived in the thirteenth century. At this time, Japan suffered from various plagues and famines, earthquakes and typhoons, and an impending invasion by the Mongols. Nichiren attributed these disasters to the degeneration of the Buddhist teachings, brought about especially by the Zen, Nenbutsu (Amidism), Shingon and Ritsu sects (Stone 1994, 233; Machacek et al. 2004, 18). According to some sutras, the transmission of the teachings of the Buddha would deteriorate over time, leading to the “Final Dharma Age” or *mappō* (Stone 1994, 247). In the eyes of Nichiren, it was indubitable that he and his fellow men and women were living in that final age. He argued that only his teachings could lead again to the Buddhist illumination, or liberation, and avoid Japan's downfall. At the core of Nichiren's doctrine was the idea that the *Lotus Sutra* represents the culmination of the Buddha's teachings, inasmuch as it allegedly contains all his previous teachings in one sutra. Furthermore, Nichiren maintained that chanting the *daimoku*, that is to say the name of the Lotus Sutra (*Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō* in Japanese), was the sole path towards salvation (Stone 1994, 232).

It is clear how Nichiren's teachings may have been interpreted by critics as intolerant. After all, he also demanded that the Japanese government recognize

his version of Buddhism as the only truly valid one and that it reject all other teachings. However, as Jacqueline Stone has argued, it is more pertinent to use the term “exclusivism” rather than “intolerance” when speaking about Nichiren’s doctrine, since the latter carries a historical weight too much associated with European religious history (Stone 1994, 232). Indeed, according to Hobolt, Van der Brug, de Vreese, Boomgaarden and Hinrichsen, in their article “Religious Intolerance and Euroscepticism,” the

modern concept of intolerance developed out of the religious controversies between Protestants and Catholics in 17th- and 18th-century England. At the time, the doctrine of ‘religious toleration’ sought to remove religious opinions and dogmas from the political realm (Hobolt et al. 2011, 3).

It is true that Nichiren’s doctrine was exclusivist in nature, in the sense that it considered his teachings to be the only ones that were in fact true, but this kind of claim was not rare in Nichiren’s time. Therefore, our view of Nichiren’s doctrine needs to be nuanced and avoid anachronistic judgements based on 21st century values.

This exclusivism was carried down from Nichiren to the Nichiren Shoshu sect (日蓮正宗, its name meaning “True Nichiren Sect”), and from its monks to Soka Gakkai—even though Soka Gakkai operated a doctrinal shift after it split from Nichiren Shoshu, as I will explain in the following part. This exclusivism of Soka Gakkai is probably best exemplified by the stance Tsunesaburō Makiguchi took during World War II when he and some of his followers were arrested and imprisoned, in part for opposing the State Shinto and for refusing to install a Shinto talisman in their building (Dobbelaere 2001, 5). The exclusivist legacy can also be found in Soka Gakkai’s soteriology, and especially in its concept of *kōsen rufū* (広宣流布). This word refers to the idea that world peace could only be achieved if Buddhist values are respected, which implies the “vast propagation of Buddhist teaching” (Ikeda 1987, 160; Dobbelaere 2001, 89). Concretely, the diffusion of Buddhist values takes place through proselytism. In Nichiren’s Buddhism, there are two main proselytizing technique: *shakubuku* and *shōju*.

1.2. A New Way to Engage the World: From “Shakubuku” to “Shōju”

After the death of Makiguchi, Jōsei Toda (1900–1958) officially became the religious organization’s second president on May 3, 1951. Toda was one of

Makiguchi's disciples and was part of the group of members who were arrested in 1943. In his inaugural speech, Toda vowed to convert 750,000 families to Soka Gakkai before his death. He was successful in this endeavor as this number was reached in 1957. He called this large proselytizing campaign the "Great March of *shakubuku*" (Dobbelaere 2001, 9; McLaughlin 2019, 49). *Shakubuku* (折伏, "to break and subdue") refers to a Buddhist technique of proselytization that takes the form of a harsh refutation of someone's "false teachings" in order to convert them to "the True Dharma" (Paul and McRae 2004, 49; Stone 1994, 233). In a rally on October 31, 1954, Toda, who often used emphatic language in his public speeches, went as far as stating that "In our attempt at *kōsen rifu*, we are without an ally. We must consider all religions our enemies, and we must destroy them" (Kisala 2005, 144–45). The Soka Gakkai second president was then addressing the youth divisions of the organization. These divisions spearheaded the "great march of *shakubuku*" (Kisala 2005, 144). Because of this intense and somewhat overzealous proselytizing, Soka Gakkai began to be seen by its Japanese critics as an intolerant sect that was to be feared and castigated (McLaughlin 2012, 13; Melton 2004, 24).

In his book *Buddhism: The Living Philosophy* (1974, second edition in 1976), Daisaku Ikeda—the current honorary president of Soka Gakkai and the president of Soka Gakkai International (SGI)—seemed at first to follow the steps of his predecessors in presenting Nichiren's exclusivist doctrine. He justified the practice of *shakubuku* with the duress of times, but also emphasized that, like a father's attitude to rebellious children, *shakubuku* should be stern and loving at the same time:

When Buddhism has reached all people and is the recognized worldwide religion, it may be possible to employ motherly gentleness in winning new members. But the Latter Day of the Law is a stern time when the Buddhism of Shakyamuni has lost its hold on the popular mind. For this reason, methods must be stern, like the love of a father for his children. Shakubuku is imbued with that stern, but deeply concerned, love that is reflected in paternal affection. Shakubuku must be stern because people must recognize the danger of failing to see the truth (Ikeda 1976, 90).

On the other hand, starting from the second half of 1970s, under the leadership of Ikeda the religious organization moved away from "confrontational Nichirenist exclusivism" and towards a milder form of evangelization (Stone 1994, 254). In fact, this shift from severe proselytizing to an increased emphasis on religious tolerance has a doctrinal basis that dates back to Nichiren's

teachings. Indeed, *shakubuku* is one of the two techniques of proselytization suggested by Buddhist canonical sources. The second one is called *shōju* (摂受, “to embrace and accept”). For Nichiren, the propagation of the *Lotus Sutra* was to be adapted to the specific time and situation one would be in. While *shakubuku* was more appropriate to Japan at his time, the *shōju* technique would be more suited to a country where Buddhism was not already part of the religious landscape (McLaughlin 2019, 11–2). In that case, Nichirenists would not explicitly reject other people’s opinions and beliefs, as may be done with the *shakubuku* practice, but they would “[lead] others gradually without criticizing their position” (Stone 1994, 233–34). It is also true that Nichiren’s teachings advised for more leniency towards other religions than for other Buddhist sects. David Burton thus speaks of Nichiren’s doctrine as a combination of “intrareligious exclusivism” and of “interreligious inclusivism” (Burton 2010, 328).

For some members of the SGI, this developing religious tolerance is explained by the group’s emancipation from the control of Nichiren Shoshu’s conservative monks (Kisala 2005, 149; personal communication with members). But Stone suggests in her article (Stone 1994) that several reasons may explain Soka Gakkai’s pivotal turn from the 1970s onwards. The first one may be the increasing criticism Soka Gakkai faced from some Japanese opponents, especially because of its relations with the Komeito, a Japanese political party. It could also have come from a diminished sense of urgency since the hardships of World War II lessened as time went by. Concretely, while the term “*shakubuku*” is still the one that is used the most to talk about the dissemination of Nichiren’s teachings, its meaning has changed. The members of Soka Gakkai International now tend to talk about their religion with families and friends, rather than trying to convert people they barely know or do not know at all. They are also invited to present their own beliefs in a more cordial tone, in the form of a “dialogue,” mirroring Daisaku Ikeda’s dialogues with philosophers or political figures (Hurst 2004, 112–13; McLaughlin 2012, 17).

The change of attitude towards people who do not belong to Nichiren Buddhism and Soka Gakkai was probably also a way to adapt to Western countries, to the European socio-cultural context especially, where heavy proselytization is frowned upon (Dobbelaere 2001, 54), and as a way to blend more easily into the diversified religious landscape, or to become more

“mainstream,” as Stone and Kisala have argued in their respective articles (Kisala 2005; Stone 2014). At the instigation of Daisaku Ikeda, religious tolerance and religious dialogue officially became part of SGI’s precepts in 1996, the year the organization published its charter. The document details the main goals and principles of the organization, among which:

3. SGI shall respect and protect the freedom of religion and religious expression [...] 7. 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 (Liogier 2004, 495–96).

1.3. SGI and Inter-Religious Dialogue in France

The example of SGI in France (or SGI-France) is a good case in point of the larger history of SGI concerning proselytization and religious tolerance, insofar as SGI-France seems to have followed the same pattern of first, a vigorous *shakubuku* practice and then, a more moderate form of proselytization. A long-time member and representative of SGI-France recounted in an interview conducted for this research that, when he began practicing Nichiren Buddhism in the 1960s, he would argue for the benefits of his practice whenever possible and with whomever he would encounter, be it friends, acquaintances, or people he had just met in a bar. However, over time, he changed his practice and would only talk about his religion when asked to do so.

In France as in other countries, SGI’s change of attitude towards other religions is not just reflected by a shift towards a milder form of evangelization, to use a Christian term, but also in the literature published by the group (books, journals, official websites). Daisaku Ikeda’s books represent a significant part of this literature. Several of them have been translated in French, among which we can mention two that explicitly deal with religious tolerance and interreligious dialogue: *Bouddhisme et Islam, le choix du dialogue* (in English *Global Civilization: A Buddhist-Islamic Dialogue*, 2003, first French edition in 2004, second edition in 2008 [Ikeda and Tehranian 2008]), and *La Sagesse de la tolérance, une philosophie de générosité et de paix* (*The Wisdom of Tolerance—A Philosophy of Generosity and Peace*, 2015, French publication in 2018 [Wahid and Ikeda 2018]). It is worth noticing that in both cases Daisaku Ikeda’s dialogues take place with practitioners of Islam. Since in France (as in other

countries) the place of Islam has been at the center of intense public debates, Ikeda's books may be a way for Soka Gakkai International to position itself as a champion of religious tolerance, more so perhaps than if it had been with representatives of Catholicism for example. For the same reason, these books might appeal to French readers in particular, as some parts of the texts echo specific current debates around the notion of *laïcité* in France. This is the case of Ikeda's *Global Civilization: A Buddhist-Islamic Dialogue*, in which he and Majid Tehranian tackle the issue of the *hijab* worn by some Muslim women (Ikeda and Tehranian 2008, 40)—the wearing of the *hijab* has been one of the main points of contention regarding the place of religions in public spaces in France.

Since the early 2000s, SGI-France has also organized yearly inter-religious conferences in their centers, often in Paris, Nantes, Lyon or in Trets. The conferences generally gather representatives and lay practitioners of Islam, Protestantism, Buddhism, Catholicism, and Judaism. These events highlight the fact that, for a new religious movement, SGI-France is a rather unique example. In forty years, the group went from starting a completely new national branch, to being viewed by its opponents and certain state agencies as a “cult” (see part 2 of this article) to participating in inter-religious conferences along the most prominent religions in France. However, while these examples of religious tolerance and inter religious dialogues prove a tendency within the group to develop good relations with other religions, at the international level inter-religious dialogue does not appear to be the number one concern of the group. SGI seem to put a greater emphasis on the notions of education, peace, culture, and social engagement through art, which may be explained by its origins as an intellectual movement mainly concerned with educational and cultural questions (McLaughlin 2012, 21). And despite its efforts, SGI appear unable to get rid of the old accusations of intolerance, fueled by “anti-cultists” and other opponents (Kisala 2005, 150). This is all the more true for SGI's French offshoot, as I argue in the second part of this article.

2. SGI-France Faced with Religious Intolerance?

As Sabrina Pastorelli pointed out in her 2010 article,

new religious movements highlight the policy and the attitudes of the society and the state when faced with the increasing religious pluralism in European civilizations. The

analysis of the legal position and the reaction of the community facing these “new” movements may constitute an important element to understand the degree of openness of a given society [my translation] (Pastorelli 2010, 165).

This is why a study of SGI-France offers the possibility to put into question the strong tendency in France to consider new religious movements (NRMs) as *sectes* (the French word for “cults”) and not as religions in their own right.

2.1. A Quest for Governmental Approval

Before the split of 1991, Soka Gakkai was part of the Nichiren Shoshu France. It arrived in the early 1960s in France, the first European country in which the group created a national branch (Liogier 2004, 435). In terms of the number of practitioners, France ranks second in Europe, with more than 15,000 members, behind SGI-Italy (the largest branch in Europe) which has now around 93,000 members (CESNUR 2019; see also Introvigne’s article in this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*). The difference between the group’s status in France and Italy does not stop here. Surprisingly enough, the same religious group does not enjoy the same public image and the same relationship with the respective governments.

In France, Soka Gakkai has an ambiguous status. For a long time, it has been identified by parliamentary commissions and government agencies as a “cult.” It started in 1985 with the Vivien report, in which the Nichiren Shoshu France was mentioned as a *secte* (Vivien 1985). It is worth noting that the authors of the report based their judgment on the fact that it was not part of the French Buddhist Association. However, this association was created by a former member of Nichiren Shoshu with which he had difficult relations. The objectivity of the document can thus be questioned (Liogier 2004, 501). Despite this report, the then French president François Mitterrand (1916–1996) received SGI’s president, Daisaku Ikeda, in 1991. Five years later, the Gest-Guyard report listed 172 “cults,” among which Soka Gakkai (Gest and Guyard 1996), and in 1999 the report of the MILS, the *Mission interministérielle de lutte contre les sectes* (i.e. the Interministerial Mission to Combat Cults), published a report in which Soka Gakkai was mentioned several times (MILS 1999). Overtime, with SGI-France’s efforts to fight the “secte” designation, the religious organization started to be

recognized as a group that does not represent a threat for public order or for individual liberties, as some anticultists feared.

On December 23, 2003, the Minister of the Interior (in charge of relations with religious groups), after having received a letter from SGI-France, sent a letter to the group stating that “no cultic deviances have been observed in the activities of Soka Gakkai in France by the police or the *gendarmerie nationale* [national police force]” (Hourmant 2019, 118). This official recognition probably helped pave the way for SGI-France’s acquiring the legal status of “worship association” (*association cultuelle*) in 2007, which “provides public accreditation for legitimate religions” (Hervieu-Léger 2004, 55). And yet, despite all this, the MIVILUDES’ (the Interministerial Mission for Monitoring and Combatting Cultic Deviances) 2017 report (MIVILUDES 2017) again mentioned SGI-France as an example of a religious group that was still a source of problems, even though the president of this government agency had asserted the opposite in a letter in 2008 (the documents are available on SGI-France’s website: <https://bit.ly/323wv4o>).

What may explain this difficult acceptance on the part of the French official representatives may have to do in part with SGI’s sociocultural aspirations. The goal of the group is indeed to generate a “human revolution” and a world of peace thanks to the propagation of the *Lotus Sutra*. Among other things, SGI works as an NGO with the United Nations, focusing on nuclear disarmament, human rights and sustainable development. Because of its activities, SGI can be considered a form of engaged Buddhism, which can be defined as “the application of the Dharma, or Buddhist teachings, to the resolution of social problems” (Queen 1995, 1). However, Louis Hourmant and Raphaël Liogier have argued that SGI’s goals encroach upon the “territory” of the French state, which has, as a centralized state, the monopoly of issues regarding public health, education and culture. In other countries, such as the USA, religious groups (including non-mainstream ones) are not only spaces of worship and socialization, they are also engaged in educational and charitable activities to help people in need. Nobody finds this unusual. In France, this is the prerogative of the state and, while social activities by traditional religions may be tolerated, when new religions develop a sustained social activism this is perceived as invading the field reserved to the state (Liogier 2004, 444–45 and 560–63).

On the contrary, in Italy, SGI has had much less difficulty being recognized as a legitimate religion. This is evidenced by the *Intesa*, a sort of concordat established between the religious group and the Italian government, that SGI-Italy obtained in 2015. It allowed the NRM to appoint chaplains in the army (this is only possible for religions with an *Intesa*) as well as to be partially financed by taxpayers' money. For Massimo Introvigne, this difference of status between France and Italy may be explained for at least 3 reasons: 1) the anticult movement plays a much lesser role in Italy than the one in France (although, Italian anticultists websites are used by French anticultists); 2) Italy is generally speaking more tolerant towards NRMs; 3) there are famous members of SG in Italy, which participates to its good image and successful media coverage (Introvigne 2004 and Introvigne 2006).

2.2. The Role of the Media in Religious Tolerance

The media are occasionally hostile to Soka Gakkai in Italy too, when they are influenced by anticult activists, but the difference is that in France hostile media accounts have broader social and political consequences. It is not rare for new religious movements to be portrayed by the French media as *sectes*. Famous newspapers (*Le Figaro*, *L'Humanité* for instance) and TV talk-shows (*Des Racines et des Ailes*, *Zone Interdite*, *Enquête Exclusive*) often feature exposes of *sectes*. However, their accounts are often lacking in objectivity and even simply in accurate information. The usual depiction of *sectes* is that of a *gourou* (a deprecatory term in French) who brainwashes his/her followers in order to steal their money and to quench his sexual desires, often directed at children (Palmer 2004; Hervieu-Léger 2004).

The media did not spare SGI-France either. It has actively participated in creating SGI-France's image as a "cult." The best example is probably the case of the Army Castle of 1988. At that time, SGI-France (then Nichiren Shoshu France) planned on buying the Army Castle for the creation of one of their new centers. On February 10, 1988, the weekly magazine *Le Républicain* published an article titled "A Japanese cult purchased the Château d'Arny." But the fact is that this castle is located near a nuclear energy center. This drew the attention of the DST (Directorate of Territorial Surveillance, a domestic intelligence agency). Moreover, the negotiations for the purchase of the building were made by

Mitsubishi's real estate department, which fed into some anticult conspiracy theories regarding Japan's supposed desire for the cultural and political conquest of Western countries. On top of that, on January 21, a Japanese engineer and nuclear physician was spotted near the nuclear energy center taking photographs. Quickly, this "spy" was linked to Soka Gakkai. The "information" was taken up by big French newspapers and in television news on major channels (TF1, FR3, La 5). Rumors of SGI as being financed by the Japanese mafia also circulated. In the end, SGI-France's reputation took a big toll because of this case (Liogier 2004, 508–9).

SGI-France has continually challenged these accusations by some media outlets, both by using the *droit de réponse* (a legal disposition in France requiring that newspapers and magazines publish a response from parties who felt vilified by an article) and by taking legal action against newspapers. Between 1992 and 1998, the group has won eight lawsuits for defamatory libels against seven different newspapers and one book. Extracts of the rulings are made available by SGI-France on its websites. Despite that, newspaper articles presenting SGI and SGI-France as a "cult" or at least questioning their activities continue to be published. This is the case, for instance, of *La Croix*, a famous French Catholic daily paper, who published in 2018 an article about Japanese new religious movements in which the journalist talked about the MIVILUDES' report and chose to interview the president of an anticult group, without offering a differing view on the matter at hand (*La Croix* 2018).

2.3. Soka Gakkai Not Fitting the French Archetypal Vision of Buddhism

It does not help either that only certain specific traditions of Buddhism are represented in the French media. Most of the time, when the media talk of Buddhism, they interview members, or report on, Tibetan or Zen Buddhism. This has created a collective mental image that is almost automatically related to these forms of Buddhism. But obviously, Soka Gakkai does not meet the same criteria. Louis Hourmant was struck by these differences:

Compared to Zen practitioners and more still to Tibetan practitioners, members of Soka Gakkai...blend into their surroundings because of the complete absence of exotic traits: they do not display saffron—or black—colored robes, they do not shave their head, they do not meditate in the lotus position but seated in a banal chair, they do not build

pagodas or stupas ... but they meet in apartments or in anonymous halls rented for the occasion [my translation] (Hourmant 1999, 196).

Paradoxically, SGI's inherent secularism works against the group in France, where exoticism is still a defining trait of Buddhism in most people's imagination. Their acceptance by the wider French community is thus dependent on a stereotypical view of Buddhism. This is also evidenced by a criticism often made against the group: for a lot of critics, SGI is not truly a form of Buddhism since it is not part of the French Buddhist Union (UBF). UBF is a federation of various Buddhist associations, often regarded in France as representing French Buddhism. It is the main interlocutor for the government. As such, Buddhist associations that are not part of this group are generally regarded as part of "non-traditional" Buddhism, and thus is one of the main arguments of anticultists that one can find on anticult websites. This might explain why in 2007 SGI-France changed its name for *Le mouvement bouddhiste Soka* (the Soka Buddhist movement), as it was perhaps an attempt to make it clear that the group is indeed a Buddhist one. Only time will tell, however, whether these efforts at changing the French public perception of Soka Gakkai International will bear fruit.

Conclusion

Religious tolerance is at the basis of any action taken towards the creation of peaceful relations between different and sometimes opposing religious groups. On that point, SGI demonstrated a capacity to change the manners in which it engages other Buddhist sects and other religions, notably through a reinterpretation (or perhaps a rediscovery) of Nichiren's teachings regarding the propagation of the *Lotus Sutra*. SGI-France offers a good example of SGI's attempts at promoting inter-religious dialogue at a national level, thus pushing away the limits of its former exclusivist stance. What is perhaps surprising is the group's ability to create such inter-religious dialogues despite their hard-earned official legitimation as a "association culturelle" and the negative public image still promoted by anticult opponents. These last two elements are a reminder that religious (in)tolerance also takes place between a religious group and society at large, be it through official representatives, official or quasi-official national religious associations, or even the media. The latter plays a sizable role in the public perception of a given religious movement, which in turn points to the

problem of fixed collective images of certain religions. These constitute obstacles to the acceptance of the actual plurality of forms in the French religious landscape, since they automatically reject groups that do not meet the archetypal view of a given religion. This would indicate that religious tolerance and the acceptance of new religious movements may be partly limited on the extent of one's ability and desire to put into question her/his view of religion(s).

References

- Burton, David. 2010. "A Buddhist Perspective." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, edited by Chad Meister, 321–36. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- CESNUR. 2019 [last updated]. "La Soka Gakkai." *Le Religioni in Italia* (online encyclopedia). Accessed October 22, 2019. <https://cesnur.com/il-buddhismo-in-italia/la-soka-gakkai>.
- Dobbelaere, Karel. 2001. *La Soka Gakkai. Un movimento di laici diventa una religione*. Leumann (Torino): Elledici.
- Guest, Alain, and Jacques Guard. 1996. *Les sectes en France*. Rapport fait au nom de la Commission d'enquête sur les sectes. Paris: La Documentation Française.
- Hervieu-Léger, Danièle. 2004. "France's Obsession with the 'Sectarian Threat.'" In *New Religious Movements in the 21st Century: Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*, edited by Phillip Charles Lucas and Thomas Robbins, 49–59. New York: Routledge.
- Hobolt, Sara B., Wouter Van der Brug, Claes H. De Vreese, Hajo G. Boomgaarden, and Malte C. Hinrichsen. 2011. "Religious Intolerance and Euroscepticism." *European Union Politics* 12(3):359–79. DOI: 10.1177/1465116511404620.
- Hourmant, Louis. 1999. "La Soka Gakkai, un bouddhisme 'paria' en France?" In *Sectes et démocratie*, edited by Françoise Champion and Martine Cohen, 182–204. Paris: Seuil.
- Hourmant, Louis. 2019. "La Soka Gakkai." In *Les minorités religieuses en France*, edited by Anne-Laure Zwillling, 105–20. Paris: Bayard Culture.
- Hurst, Jane. 2004. "Une réforme bouddhiste au XX^e siècle: Causes et conséquences du conflit entre la Soka Gakkai et les moines de la Nichiren Shoshu." In *Citoyens Du Monde: Le Mouvement Bouddhiste Soka Gakkai au*

- Japon*, edited by David Machacek and Bryan R. Wilson, 86–119. Paris, Budapest, and Turin: L’Harmattan.
- Ikeda, Daisaku. 1976. *Buddhism: The Living Philosophy*. 2nd ed. Tokyo: East Publications.
- Ikeda, Daisaku. 1987. *La révolution humaine*. Trad. fr. Monaco: Éditions du Rocher – J.-P. Bertrand.
- Ikeda, Daisaku, and Majid Tehranian. 2008. *Bouddhisme et Islam: Le choix du dialogue*. Trad. fr. Paris: L’Harmattan.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2004. “Italy’s Surprisingly Favorable Environment for Religious Minorities.” In *New Religious Movements in the 21st Century: Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*, edited by Phillip Charles Lucas and Thomas Robbins, 75–84. New York: Routledge.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2006. “Livre: panorama des Religions en Italie – Entretien avec Massimo Introvigne.” *Religioscope*, November 28. Accessed October 22, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2pnO027>.
- Kisala, Robert. 2005. “Soka Gakkai: Searching for the Mainstream.” In *Controversial New Religions*, edited by James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen, 139–52. New York: Oxford University Press.
- La Croix*. 2018. “Au Japon, les ‘nouvelles religions’ attirent toujours des fidèles.” March 22. Accessed October 22, 2019. <https://bit.ly/36czta5>.
- Liogier, Raphaël. 2004. *Le bouddhisme mondialisé: une perspective sociologique sur la globalisation du religieux*. Paris: Ellipses.
- Machacek David, Bryan R. Wilson, Louis Hourmant, and Nathalie Hourmant-Le Bever. 2004. *Citoyens du monde: le mouvement bouddhiste Soka Gakkai au Japon*. Paris, Budapest, and Turin: L’Harmattan.
- McLaughlin, Levi. 2012. “Sōka Gakkai in Japan.” In *Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions*, edited by Inken Prohl and John K. Nelson, 269–308. Leiden: Brill.
- McLaughlin, Levi. 2019. *Soka Gakkai’s Human Revolution: The Rise of a Mimetic Nation in Modern Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.
- Melton, J. Gordon. 2004. “An Introduction to New Religions.” In *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, 16–35. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Merriam-Webster. 2019. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* [online]. Accessed October 22, 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.
- MILS (Mission interministérielle de lutte contre les sectes). 1999. *Les sectes et l’argent*. Rapport n° 1687. Accessed October 30, 2019. <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dossiers/sectes/sommaire.asp>.

- MIVILUDES (Mission Interministérielle de vigilance et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires). 2017. *Rapport d'activité 2016 et 1er semestre 2017*. Accessed October 30, 2019. <https://bit.ly/34oL3gE>.
- Palmer, Susan J. 2004. "The Secte Response to Religious Discrimination: Subversives, Martyrs or Freedom Fighters in the French Sect Wars?" In *New Religious Movements in the 21st Century: Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*, edited by Phillip Charles Lucas and Thomas Robbins, 61–73. New York: Routledge.
- Pastorelli, Sabrina. 2010. "Témoins de Jéhovah et Soka Gakkai en France et en Italie: deux façons d'aborder les nouveaux mouvements religieux." In *Pluralisme Religieux et Citoyenneté*, edited by Micheline Milot, Philippe Portier, Jean-Paul Willaime, 165–80. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes.
- Paul, Diana Y., and John R. McRae, eds. 2004. *The Sutra of Queen Śrīmālā of the Lion's Roar*. [BDK English Tripiṭaka 20–I, 26–I]. Berkeley, California: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research.
- Queen, Christopher S. 1995. *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications.
- Stone, Jacqueline. 1994. "Rebuking the Enemies of the Lotus: Nichirenist Exclusivism in Historical Perspective." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21(2–3):231–59. DOI: 10.18874/jjrs.21.2-3.1994.231-259.
- Vivien, Alain. 1985. *Les sectes en France: Expression de la liberté morale ou facteurs de manipulation?* Paris: La Documentation Française.
- Wahid, Abdhurrahman, and Daisaku Ikeda. 2018. *La sagesse de la tolérance: Une philosophie de générosité et de paix*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

New Religions and Lifelong Learning in Taiwan: The I Ching University of Weixin Shengjiao

Jimmy Ching Ming Chang

Xiamen University Education Research Institute, Xiamen, Fujian, China

video8885@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: In the past three decades, more and more students have enrolled in lifelong learning institutions operated by religious non-profit organizations in Taiwan. Under the conditions of lifelong learning policies, laws, and regulations, the types and courses of these institutions have become more and more diversified. The management of the organizations, the development strategies, and the quality of the organizations are different, calling for individualized case studies and in-depth research. The paper focuses on a pioneer lifelong learning institution, I Ching University, created by Taiwanese new religion Weixin Shengjiao. Its unique development model of the lifelong education system has been examined by using interviews and observation methods to collect qualitative data. The I Ching University has successfully applied five basic principles of lifelong learning: (1) the long-term talent training model; (2) access to learning regardless of age; (3) a curriculum oriented towards the practical needs of life; (4) a certification system; and (5) a self-built teacher training system. However, the research suggests, the effectiveness of lifelong learning at I Ching University may be improved by (1) applying for non-formal learning accreditation; (2) performing a satisfaction survey on learning, followed by informal discussions; (3) implementing a self-evaluation mechanism; and (4) establishing a process to evaluate learning effectiveness.

KEYWORDS: Lifelong Learning, I Ching University, Weixin Shengjiao, Non-profit Organizations in Taiwan, New Religions in Taiwan.

Introduction

Taiwan is proud of its religious freedom, granted to both traditional and new religions. Confronted with rapid social changes, traditional religions try to readjust their organization and communication strategies, to be able to keep up with times and meet contemporary needs. Traditional religions may use

substantial financial resources to create non-profit organizations and set up networks of formal educational institutions, ranging from kindergarten to university. However, few of them have developed lifelong learning institutions in Taiwan. New religions are a more recent phenomenon. They may show greater flexibility in using modern media, innovative organizational management methods, and cutting-edge cultural and educational models.

1. Research Background

One reason non-profit organizations created by new religions in Taiwan established adult lifelong learning institutions is that they are less expensive than formal educational institutions, for which newly established religions may lack funds. Another reason is that adult education may be used as a tool to spread and promote religious beliefs and strengthen religious movements. There are several non-profit organizations in Taiwan created by new religions, and many offer lifelong learning courses. Among the most important are the Bliss and Wisdom Foundation of Culture and Education, the Taiwan Tzu-Chi Foundation, the Heavenly Teaching Foundation, Weixin Shengjiao's Merit Foundation, and several foundations created by Yiguandao.

Research Questions

More and more adult students attend lifelong learning institutions. The management of the organizations, the development strategies, and the quality of the organizations are different, calling for individualized case studies and research.

Literature Review

The term “lifelong learning” was first used by Paul Legrand at one of the meetings held by UNESCO in 1965 (Legrand 1972; Wu 2004) The concept and practice of lifelong education began to develop around the world, thanks to the vigorous promotion by international organizations, such as the UNESCO, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the

European Union. In the 1990s, it became a significant educational trend in developed countries. After Yang Guoci (1984) introduced lifelong learning in Taiwan, many scholars proposed lifelong learning theories suitable for the local community (Yang 1992, 1995; Deng 1991). Seven main principles emerged:

1. Whole-person education
2. Self-directed learning
3. Role and qualification of teachers
4. Cooperative modality
5. Value clarification teaching
6. Confluent education
7. Flexibility of the education system.

All scholars insisted on the paramount importance of teachers in the lifelong learning process. The Taiwanese Ministry of Education officially promulgated the Lifelong Learning Act in 2002 (Ministry of Education 2002). The Act also defined the meaning of “lifelong learning institutions” and “lifelong learning models.” With this legal basis, the development of institutions began to diversify. At present, the major institution is the National Open University. There are also 87 community colleges and 66 learning camps for senior citizens. Community development organizations have 6,881 associations in Taiwan and nearly 100 institutions devoted to adult education programs for senior citizens. They are committed to develop community education and to launch lifelong learning courses in various parts of the island. Several non-profit corporations and non-profit organizations established by new religions have also set up lifelong learning institutes (Ministry of Education 2016) The percentage of lifelong learning participation in Asian countries in 2016 was 46% in Singapore, 39% in Japan, and 35.83% in Taiwan. Taiwan, thus, ranked third in Asia (Ministry of Education 2016).

2. The Research

Research Design

This paper focuses on the study, as a representative example of a lifelong learning institution created by a non-profit organization operated by a Taiwanese new religion, on I Ching University, established by Weixin Shengjiao (on which see Introvigne 2016, 2017b; Chang 2014, 2017; and, for a self-presentation, Hun Yuan Chanshi 2016). Interviews and observation (through personal participation in curricular lessons) were the methods used to collect qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the founder of the institution, the heads of the University, and the students who had studied there respectively for one year, three years, five years, and more than ten years. After compiling the interview data, a final analysis was performed, and recommendations were offered based on mainline lifelong learning theories.

I Ching University

I wanted to research an institution with more than ten years of operations and classrooms all over Taiwan as a representative model of lifelong learning. I selected I Ching University, a lifelong learning institution established by Weixin Shengjiao Merit Foundation. I Ching University was founded in 1992. It has 42 branches in Taiwan, with classrooms all over the island. There are currently 524 classes, with nearly 20,000 students, and more than 200 lecturers. There are also nine overseas branches, San Francisco and New York in the United States, Vancouver and Toronto in Canada, Melbourne in Australia, Madrid in Spain, Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, Johor in Malaysia, and Osaka in Japan.

As of September 2019, more than 100,000 students have completed the course known as Fundamental Class at I Ching University. Every year, the University offers a variety of summer college student camps, teacher counseling training camps, I Ching camps for children (Chen, Li, Lin and Lin 2015), and classes for overseas Chinese. The fact that I am a member of Weixin Shengjiao, the parent new religion of I Ching University, made the research easier. On the other hand, I Ching University is clearly a representative example of lifelong learning institutions operated by new religions in Taiwan.

Data Analysis

In 1992, the founder of Weixin Shengjiao Grand Master Hun Yuan Chanshi (see Introvigne 2017a; Huang 2016; Fang 2018), established Weixin Shengjiao Merit Foundation as a non-profit organization. Since its operation, the foundation upholds the principles of cultivating talents for society, promoting moral education, enhance spiritual wisdom, and promoting world peace. Its classes are open to public enrollment, and everyone can register to learn. Education focuses on Chinese culture, I Ching, Feng Shui, and religion. Grand Master Hun Yuan proclaims that the Foundation's aim is to help students to apply ancient Chinese wisdom to modern-day problems, both individual and social, from peace issues to economic betterment, based on the principle that when every family is at peace, the world can be at peace too (Hun Yuan Chanshi 2014).

The Foundation does not cater to members of Weixin Shengjiao only. Students of different religions are encouraged to participate in the study of I Ching and Feng Shui. After this study, they can return to serve others in their respective religious groups. Several devotees of folk religions and traditional religions attended the Foundation's courses (Chen, Li and Lin 2015a, 2015b). Then, the Foundation gradually established a lifelong learning education system, offered by Weixin Shengjiao's I Ching University. When this started, it was an innovative educational strategy in the milieu of Taiwanese new religions. At the same time, I Ching University continued to promote the twin missions of Weixin Shengjiao, to teach members how to cultivate themselves for the benefit of the country and to pray for humanity.

The teaching strategy of I Ching University is based on graduality. After the initial stage, students can attend one Intermediate Class per year. Weixin Shengjiao Merit Foundation also organizes free I Ching Feng Shui seminars in various communities, which enjoy a large popularity. Weixin Shengjiao also uses television to broadcast every day the program, *View All Perspectives of I Ching Feng Shui*, which has proved very successful. In 2009, Weixin Shengjiao created its own TV network to broadcast I Ching-Feng Shui programs 24 hours per day through satellite. These activities were widely advertised through printed, electronic, and online social media. They increased significantly the popularity of Weixin Shengjiao and promoted the lifelong learning programs of I Ching University.

Grand Master Hun Yuan selected the lecturers, completed the training programs, and recruited volunteers to conduct seminars in various communities in Taiwan and set up classrooms allowing students to learn near their homes.

Every evening, from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m., thousands of students listen intently to lessons in more than one hundred classrooms in Taiwan. There are no restrictions of faith, age, or gender. All those interested can sign up for the courses. This, from the point of view of Grand Master Hun Yuan, serves in fact a moral purpose. I Ching University should provide students of all faiths with teachings of both spiritual and practical significance, empowering them to live better lives and help those in need (Hun Yuan Chanshi 2014).

Weixin Shengjiao's I Ching University has a curriculum of 24 years, and the percentage of students who try to complete the whole course is very high. The University uses what it calls a "virtuous fellow certificate system," in which every three years students who have attended the prescribed courses advance to the next level. There are eight three-year levels, for a total of 24 years. Every year, a solemn graduation ceremony is organized, which is also a religious event. All teachers and students wear Weixin Shengjiao sacred robes, and the solemn atmosphere emphasizes the importance of the learning achievements.

Grand Master Hun Yuan also established Weixin Shengjiao College, a college-level accredited institution that offers academic education in the form of a theological seminary. Thus, Weixin Shengjiao created a unique system combining lifelong learning with academic education.

The lifelong learning system of I Ching University and Weixin Shengjiao College is summarized in Figure 1:

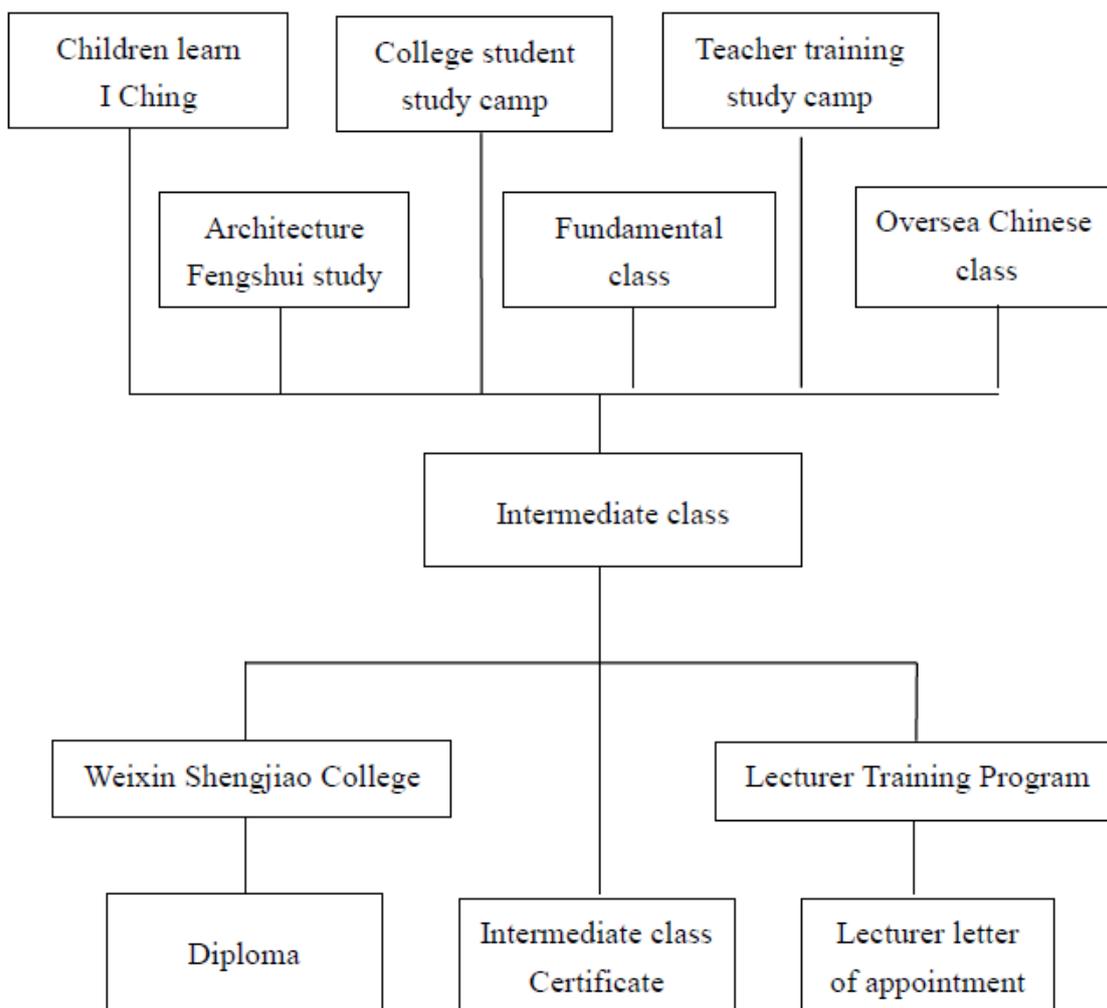


Figure 1. The lifelong learning system of I Ching University and Weixin Shengjiao College.

3. Conclusion

Research Findings

The findings of my study of the lifelong learning system of I Ching University show that this model successfully spread Chinese traditional culture, I Ching, and Feng Shui through multimedia technology, attracting more and more students who are also introduced to the religious worldview and practices of Weixin Shengjiao. At the same time, I Ching University provides courses fully in line with mainline theories of lifelong learning, permanent and wholistic education, self-directed learning, and value clarification teaching.

I regard the following as five factors explaining the success of I Ching University:

1. *A long-term talent training model.* I Ching University has a 24-year long-term curriculum, which gives students a perspective for continuing their studies for a significant part of their lives.

2. *Freedom of learning regardless of age.* I Ching University students may enroll in the courses regardless of age, gender, or academic qualifications. People from all walks of life can participate in the learning process.

3. *A curriculum covering the practical needs of life.* The main contents of the I Ching University courses are based on traditional Chinese culture, I Ching, Feng Shui, and religion. They advocate the use of ancient wisdom for solving modern-day problems and address the real needs students experience in their daily lives.

4. *An appropriate certification system.* The learning certification system can provide the students with a sense of accomplishment. As mentioned earlier, I Ching University's virtuous fellow certification system covers eight learning stages in 24 years. The graduation ceremony also strengthens the students' feelings of loyalty and pride.

5. *A self-built teacher training system.* The curriculum of I Ching University is very specialized. Teachers would not be easily recruited from outside. The University has established a self-built teacher training system, whereby outstanding senior students are selected and trained to become teachers.

Recommendations for I Ching University

My research also suggests that the effectiveness of lifelong learning at I Ching University may be improved by adopting four measures.

1. *Applying for non-formal learning accreditation.* Under Taiwanese law, I Ching University lifelong learning program may apply for accreditation from the Non-formal Education Programs Accreditation Center of the Ministry of Education. This would provide students with the option to choose the accredited course, which would enable them to receive a certificate issued by the Accreditation Center.

2. *Performing a satisfaction survey on learning, followed by informal discussions.* Each year, students should be interviewed to review the organization and gathered in informal discussion. This would both offer information to the principals on how to improve the courses and bolster the students' cohesiveness.

3. *Implementing a self-evaluation mechanism.* More broadly, I Ching University should establish a self-evaluation system based on the mission of the institution. Such a self-evaluation mechanism should be periodically re-examined and reviewed.

4. *Establishing a process to evaluate learning effectiveness.* Lifelong learning institutions are schools where students learn independently, pass no exams, and attend classes in mixed-age groups. It is recommended to establish a simple checking method, to enhance learning effectiveness, and provide remedial teaching and classes for students whose learning progress fell behind their class' average.

Assessment

I Ching University is a unique educational institution, with a learning model covering formal learning, non-formal learning, and informal learning. Since its establishment 27 years ago, the lifelong learning system helped countless students to learn about Chinese culture, I Ching, and Feng Shui, and at the same time strengthened the development of Weixin Shengjiao. The University successfully organized students and volunteers to provide educational and social services throughout Taiwan and abroad. Such integration of religion, education, and social services is a successful example of how new religions in Taiwan establish, and operate through, non-profit organizations and lifelong learning institutions. The results of the study can serve as a reference for examining other lifelong learning institutions established by new religions through their non-profit organizations.

References

- Chang, Hsin-Fang Fiona. 2014. “唯心聖教的經典、教義與實踐—以《唯心聖教安心真經》為主” (Scriptures, Teachings, and Practices of Weixin Shengjiao: The Perfect Scripture for Calming the Mind). Master’s Thesis, National Chenchi University, Taipei.
- Chang, Hsin-Fang Fiona. 2017. “New Religions in Taiwan and Korea: A Comparative Study of Weixin Shengjiao (唯心聖教) and Daesoon Jinrihoe (大巡真理會).” *The Journal of CESNUR* 1(2):40–65. DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2017.1.2.3.
- Chen, Li-Yuen, Li Chen-Mei and Lin Po-Chang. 2015a. “Motivation for Learning I-Ching Among Adult Lifelong Learning in I-Ching University.” Paper presented at the Asian Conference of Education of The International Academy Forum, Kobe, Japan, 21–25 October 2015.
- Chen, Li-Yuen, Li Chen-Mei and Lin Po-Chang. 2015b. “The Relationship Between the Motivation for I-Ching Learning, Life and Family Satisfaction in a Lifelong Learning Program of I Ching University.” Paper presented at the Asian Conference of Education of The International Academy Forum, Kobe, Japan, 21–25 October 2015.
- Chen, Li-Yuen, Li Chen-Mei, Lin Sung, and Lin Po-Chang. 2015. “The Effect of I-Ching Education on the Temperament of Elementary School Children, Lifelong Learning Capability, and Bullying Behavior.” Paper presented at the Asian Conference of Education of The International Academy Forum, Kobe, Japan, 21–25 October 2015.
- Fang, Pengcheng. 2018. *和平文化史者-混元禪師*. 台中: 唯心宗南天文化院 (The Culture of a Peacemaker: Hun Yuan Chanshi). Taichung, Taiwan: Weixinzong Nantian Cultural Center.
- Huang, Chun-Zhi. 2016. *Promoter of World Peace Grand Master Huen-Yuan: How Propagating Chinese Culture Contributes to World Peace*. Taichung City, Taiwan: Wei Xin Zong Cultural Communication Co. Ltd.
- Hun Yuan Chanshi. 2014. *古智今用-混元禪師心法*. 南投: 禪機山仙佛寺 (The Ancient Wisdom Is Applied Today: The Dharma of Hun Yuan Chanshi). Nantou City, Taiwan: Hsien-Fo Temple of Chan-Chi Mountain.
- Hun Yuan Chanshi. 2016. *世界新興宗教-台灣唯心聖教*. 南投: 唯心聖教學院 (The World’s New Religion: Taiwan Weixin Shengjiao). Nantou City, Taiwan: Weixin Shengjiao College. English translation, *The New Religion of the World Taiwan Weixin Shengjiao*, Guoxing, Taiwan: Weixin Shengjiao Hsien-Fo Temple of Chan-Chi Mountain; New Taipei City, Taiwan: Weixin Shengjiao Charity Foundation; and Nantou City, Taiwan: Weixin Shengjiao College.

- Introvigne, Massimo. 2016. "Weixin Shengjiao." *World Religions and Spirituality Project*, November 10. Accessed September 29, 2019. <https://wrldreels.org/2016/11/12/weixin-shengjiao>.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2017a. "Grand Master Hun Yuan." *World Religions and Spirituality Project*, October 25. Accessed September 29, 2019. <https://wrldreels.org/2017/10/25/grand-master-hun-yuan>.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2017b. "Weixin Shengjiao: An Introduction." *The Journal of CESNUR* 1(2):3–19. DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2017.1.2.1.
- Legrand, Paul. 1972. *Introduction à l'éducation permanente*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Ministry of Education [Taiwan]. 2002 [revised 2018]. *Lifelong Learning Act*. Accessed September 29, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2oUyo5u>.
- Ministry of Education [Taiwan]. 2016. *Adult Education Survey Report*. Taipei: Ministry of Education.
- Wu, Minglie. 2004. 終身學習—理念與實踐。臺北：五南 (Lifelong Learning: Ideas and Practices). Taipei, Taiwan: Wunan.
- Yang, Guoci (1984). 終身教育的理念 (The Concept of Lifelong Education). 社教 (Social Education) 1 (inaugural issue):31–7.

Tantric Traditions in the Spiritual Teaching of Guru Jára

Pavel Hlavinka

Palacky University, Olomouc, Czechia

hlavinka.pavel@post.cz

ABSTRACT: In this text, I discuss some traditional approaches to Tantra, focusing on the spiritual paths that use the physical union of a woman and a man to achieve sacred sexual unity. I then look at some key features of the Tantric doctrine of Czech esoteric master, Guru Jára. I examine in detail his views on how Tantric energies manifest and are experienced in human life and relationships. I present the sources of Guru Jára's Tantric doctrine in the Kaula and Todala Tantra lineages, in the worship of the Dasa Mahavidya, and in his claims of direct access to ancient Egyptian mysteries. Finally, I mention some examples of Tantric exercises proposed by Guru Jára to individuals and couples.

KEYWORDS: Guru Jára, Tantric Faith Healing, Hooks, Unhooking, Tantra, Dasa Mahavidya, Sacred Yoni, Kundalini Shakti, Kaula Tantra, Todala Tantra, Guru Jára Path.

Introduction

I should start this discussion of the Tantric teachings of Czech esoteric master Jaroslav Dobeš, Guru Jára (on whom see Introvigne 2019), by disclosing that I am both an academic and a disciple of the Guru Jára Path. I present here an emic perspective, although one informed by my experience and studies as a scholar. In July 2019, I had my most recent personal meeting, or *darshan*, with Guru Jára behind the bars of the detention camp in Manila where he currently resides (for reasons described in Introvigne 2019, 20–5).

Guru Jára has now been kept for four and a half years in what he calls himself a “heavy metal ashram,” among running rats, where he still managed to write eight new books. Personally, I regard him as an inexhaustible source of spiritual energy, an example of optimism and joy of life. He is experiencing the same

feeling as a prisoner behind his “metaphysical bars” he had already experienced in his childhood in Communist Czechoslovakia, in the gloomy atmosphere of an era in which Leonid Brežněv (1906–1982) was in power in the Soviet Union. For a child with a naturally and deeply spiritual nature, the all-pervasive militant atheism and materialism was unacceptable. As an eleven-year-old boy, he nearly left this world through a near-death experience. As an eighteen-year-old man, he abandoned his native Czechoslovakia to experience how life can taste in a free country such as the Italy of the 1980s and 1990s. It was in this country, by a fountain in the town of Arco (Trento), where he, as a twenty-year-old man, claimed to have reached the Nirvana of the ascetic spiritual path. A few years after that, he claimed he had also reached the *mahamudra* of the Tantric spiritual path.

Guru Jára mastered Tantric teachings through a long practice and study. He studied a Shakti form of Tantrism for several years in India in the second half of the 1990s with a master called Guru Anahdan (?–2005). Another Indian master, Guru Nágananda (1951–2006), was an important spiritual reference as well.

The fundamental pillars of Guru Jára’s Tantric doctrine are rooted in the Hindu Shakti tradition Kaula-tantra, which worships the Ten Great Goddesses of Wisdom, in Sanskrit called the Dasa Mahavidya. According to the tradition, these goddesses are not only present at the level of the macrocosmical *yoni*, but at the same time in the microcosm of a woman’s body, i.e. in her vagina, which is thus able—as a sacred *yoni*—to mirror the macrocosm. Every woman bears in her vagina her own dominant goddess, which is evoked during her Tantric practice, as taught by the Kaula-tantra. This evocation requires not only the woman’s belief and full respect towards the particular goddess, but also a strong Tantric energization and a deep meditative state of immersion and spiritual surrender. Later in this article, I will examine these theories, their interconnection with other Tantric doctrines, and their implication for Tantric practice in more detail. My aim here is not to present a complete list of Guru Jára’s Tantric teachings, but rather to offer a closer look at some selected aspects of what I regard as a very complex and profound doctrine.

Devotees perceive the Tantric tradition as presented in the spiritual doctrine of Guru Jára as both an appeal to humanity and its celebration. Since it shows the man and the woman in their divine, transcendental, and immortal origin, to which the path of return is still open, it claims that every human is an unfading star glowing with the light of eternity.

Forms of Spiritual Sexuality Experienced in Relationships

Right at the very beginning of my last conversation with Guru Jára, behind the multiple bars of the detention camp in Manila, I realized that, from a philosophical perspective, his Tantric teaching distinctly combines an approach to reality focused on the physical and the material with spiritual and idealistic doctrines perceiving the material world as an illusion or a product of the mind.

By “the physical and the material,” Guru Jára means the common conception of a body as a brain carrier, which is influenced by gravity, viruses, bacteria, and the passage of time, i.e. aging. The brain, which is included in the box known as skull, performs basic biological functions—eating, reproducing, creating a “fight or flight” response—, without being able to directly affect the world and others. This is one aspect of reality. On the other hand, the body is also perceived as a prison, and a burden for the higher consciousness or a soul, as proposed by old masters such as Plato (429–347 BCE) and Buddha (5th century BCE), as well as Shankara (788–820) and other propagators of the Advaita Vedanta.

Guru Jára teaches that in relationships, and indeed in the life of every human, these two contradictory streams, materialism and idealism, are fused into the single alloy of Being by moments like the following:

The first love, in whose infatuation the material world surrounding young lovers is transformed into a garden of Eden or into an inessential background, where the lovers perceive the culmination of [Sigmund] Freud’s [1856–1939] libido, also known as the Tantric energy *kundalini*.

The first orgasmic excitement. During this stage, even the most materialistically-based persons experience, together with a strong physical lust, a sequence of states of higher consciousness which were described as similar to the union with God by Spanish mystic Saint Teresa of Ávila [1515–1582], or *nirvikalpa samadhi* by Yogi Ramakrishna [1836–1886], or as losing yourself in the light of God’s heart (*Aham*) by Kaulachara Tantra (Guru Jára 2017a).

The sources of these teachings include modern presentations of Tantra by Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe, 1865–1936), John R. Dupuche, and David Gordon White (Avalon 1965; Dupuche 2003; White 2000).

Further, Guru Jára mentions a third crucial moment, the Tantric ritual called *maithuna*, during which lovers experience a kind of sexual union where the material and idealistic aspects merge together. As Guru Jára explains,

From my point of view, the journey of spiritual energy starts at the Light of Creation and is led from the divine source towards our material world. *Maithuna* is therefore considered a religious ritual, because the Shakti energy is strongly activated, and it enables the transformation and uplifting of the physical body (Guru Jára 2017a).

In the left-hand Tantra, this religious ceremony is put into practice through the physical connection of the *yoni* and the *lingam*, in most cases in a position when a woman sits astride on her partner to experience their love-making as a form of meditation.

Shri Barbara Durga (Barbora Plášková), the closest student and now a co-teacher of Guru Jára, points out that we should not try to equate the left-hand Tantra (*Vámachara-marga-tantra*, meaning a physical Tantric exercise, where penetration occurs) with a common sexual intercourse, because

There is a fundamental difference between the coitus and the *Vámachara-marga-tantra*, because in the latter the energy of arousal and desire is under control, and is primarily determined to be transformed into spiritual energy that is directed at the Great Mother and not at the material world. The connection of the static principle with the dynamic principle, when a woman is the dynamic principle and her position is on top, stands behind the origins of the whole life and Universe (Plášková 2017).

According to these teachings, the direction of the spiritual energy is therefore first led from the Light of Creation, i.e. from the divine source, into our material world. Specifically, it is manifested in a way where a Tantric initiate first follows the centrifugal flow of energy (in a counter-clockwise direction). This allows the flux of energy to go from the seventh chakra down to the first chakra. Devotees are then able to direct the spiritual energy towards the “ground,” i.e. into their daily lives.

The world, as well as humans, are part of the same existence at all times, but the human mind is often unable to fully perceive this whole reality. In the Tantric teachings as presented by Guru Jára, the fall into the “matter of creation” ends in the first chakra, where—in the earth element—the metamorphosis of Shakti-Maya into *kundalini* takes place. With this energy, humans can rise up again, “clockwise in the centripetal direction.”

During the Tantric practice, Jára teaches, this energy is transformed in the first chakra, from Maya, which forms the world we and all human beings live in, into Kundalini-Shakti, i.e. the divine creative energy, which is at this moment led

via the ladder of chakras towards the highest chakra, Sahasrara. Making love is thus compared by Guru Jára to an elevator ride to Heaven. Guru Jára adds that,

Tantra is about searching for the everlasting in the transient world. That is what makes our path most different from the path of dry meditations, which seeks realization in waking up from the transient (Guru Jára 2018, 291).

Guru Jára asked us a very practical question during a conversation in the detention camp in Manila: “How many partners have you slept with so far?” In fact, this question had deeper implications. The answer would be important for Kaulachara-tantra practitioners, in whose doctrine a woman, through the *shakti* energy in the so called *kaula* (family), connects between themselves all the people with whom she has ever made love in her life.

“What was the human quality of these lovers of yours?”, Jára went on asking in Manila. This second question did not really ask what the quality of their lovemaking was, but what are or were their characters, health, life values, and karma, or how much they are or were thriving in their lives. Before I come back to this theme, which is closely related to Jára’s much debated teachings about Tantric hooks and thorns, I will conclude my preliminary overview of the Tantric moments that connect the material with the metaphysical in everyone’s body.

Sexual Tantric Energy in Long-Term Relationships

Jára teaches that in long-term relationships, where our ego learns the ascetic compromises of worshiping somebody other than ourselves, we are rewarded by experiencing high spiritual states of shared consciousness with another person, and empathy through the energetic harmony of two bodies and two brains.

It means in practice that, in Tantric yoga, we learn how to control every single essence of all the elements, and how to direct and tame the flow of the energetic fibres. These can then become a living stream of love, which—through the desire towards the partner—is not directed to a pelvic orgasmic climax, but to a constant, deeper and deeper, mutual awareness. Such mutual awareness can be expressed in the following way: “I and my partner are not only this physical body.” If a Tantric couple manages to go beyond the borders of their naked nature, they would find themselves in a superior sexual and spiritual harmony, and come to form one undistinguished consciousness. While a common orgasm, Jára

argues, is sought for its ability to make us forget about ourselves during the flow of pleasure and under its imperative, a Tantric sexual connection is determined by a conscious and intentional control of this imperative of frictional movements. The reward is a liberating oblivion, free from compulsive sexual intercourse, and also a reminiscence of a state that we know from Plato's mythic concept of androgyne, a sexually undistinguished soul in an harmony consecrated to God (Hlavinka and Jirasek 2010; Hlavinka 2014).

This analogy is not totally unequivocal, since Plato did not transcend sensuality through Tantric yoga practices but through rational mental procedures, for which dwelling in the sensual world is related to desire and to the affective part of the soul. In his metaphysical discussion of a "good" higher reality versus a "bad" lower bodily sensuality, Plato argued that humans are endowed with a rational soul. For the wise, this soul can free humans from the prison of earthy sensuality and move them upwards to the area of true life and the Good.

This ideal of a perfect and long-lasting relationship between the partners led to the glamorization of romantic love as a model of the most perfect connection with the Deity. Ramakrishna raised this partnership relationship called *madhura* high above human-God relationships, and equated it with the love between God the Father and God the Mother, an image that is widespread well beyond India.

In his book *Atomic Amrit*, Guru Jára derives from Ramakrishna a typology including four types of divine loving relationships:

The limitations of human mind allow a human to establish a relationship with God only through one of the four types that we know from the common life, because we do not have the capacity to perceive the spiritual and super-human entities in a direct way (which would be the right way):

- *Dásya* / *Dásja*: "My lord," "My lady"

- *Sakhya* / *Sakhja*: "My boyfriend," "My girlfriend"

- *Vátsalya* / *Vátsalja*: "My father," "My mother"

- *Madhura*: "My love," "Sweetheart"—this is the best connection we can have within, "God's Internet."

Parakiya-Rasa, the amorous relationship to God among Vaishnava Sahajiyas is superior to the legalized *kanta-bhava* marriage. Not only because by following the example of their beloved God who seduced a married woman, they wish to awaken Krishna, whose essence, according to their doctrine, every man hides inside himself, just as every woman carries the essence of Radha. But mainly because they noticed that the union of semen—

rasa—with *yoni* fluids—*rati*—works in marriage rather like discharged batteries. At least in comparison to the sacred mixture blended by sexual intercourse in the original battery voltage before the marital stereotype, here we are with Krishna and Radha, spiced up by the tension stemming from what would happen if they were caught during *maithuna* (Guru Jára 2019a, 7–11).

As a unique day-to-day practice of the amorous relation with God, *madhura* is a natural partnership between a man and a woman. But at some point, Jára admonishes, we also have to face the sad fact that spontaneous Tantric energy disappears from our lives as quickly as it had entered there—a few days, months, or years ago through the cycles of human experience: infatuation, love, orgasm. Unfortunately, these stages and great relationships in general are only temporary passes to enter the spiritual states that German Christian mystic Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) reported as a permanent fruit of her long-lasting monastic isolation:

Heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and inflamed my whole heart and whole breast, not like a burning but like a warming flame, as the sun warms anything its rays touch (Hildegard von Bingen 1990, 59).

Living Traditional Tantric Doctrines in Relationships

While monastic cells, mountain hermitages, and other traditional spiritual loci where practicing mystics attained in seclusion their states of higher consciousness, similar or identical to Hildegard's experience, are now rarely available to the hurried modern humans, the contact with Tantric doctrines still remains possible everywhere and is within our everyday reach. According to Guru Jára, our task is to cultivate these spontaneous Tantric manifestations of our body and convert them into the path of liberation of our consciousness from the Matrix. Sometimes, even a little change creates an important step towards the liberation. A student of Tantra may initiate his or her lover, and deepen the love-making by experimenting various positions and extending the contemplative phases in between these positions.

At other times, Jára teaches, our way towards liberation requires the reconstruction of all aspects of a Tantric daily life, including the transformation of the remnants of previous love relationships—not mentally, as psychotherapeutic sessions do, but in a healing way through energies.

Guru Jára remarked in another interview in Manila:

On the spiritual level, when love hurts, and I mean, it hurts so painfully that some jump off the bridge, or when you can't get into a former physical shape after an erotically wild period, and you feel drained and exhausted in the long term and without any motivation, etc., or in a harsh relationship you lose courage and confidence, which does not return even after a break up, we believe, since the first Kaula Tantrics, that it is due to the connection through Tantric hooks, thorns, and other forms of Tantric connections with ex-partners; whose flow of information energy is currently working to your disadvantage. You don't always want to "disconnect" a former partner who currently needs your zest, perhaps because of an illness they are currently fighting, but everyone I have met wants to understand what happens to his or her energy (Guru Jára 2017a).

Sri Amritanandanatha Saraswati (1934–2015), the visionary guru who founded Devipuram, wrote in 2011:

In God's creation 50% are male and 50% female. Therefore, God/dess who expands in all of the creation is called Artha Nari Iswara, female (left half), male (right half). Those who worship the female Goddess (Shakti) follow the left path called Vama Achara. Those who worship the male God (Siva) follow the right path called Dakshina Achara. There are worshipping God in female, male and also combined forms follow both right and left hand paths called Kaulachara, Kaula Achara. The word Kaula is derived from Kula which means total. Separately as female and male, and also both together in union are worshipped as dieties. Thus Kaula Achara is a mix (misra) of right and left hand paths. It has been acclaimed as the highest natural path (sahaja) since it does not debar anyone from practice on the basis of gender: female—male—neutral (rivers, hills, trees, earth, water, fire, air, space, time, health, wealth, etc. which cannot be assigned any gender) (Sri Amritanandanatha 2011).

As the Tantric Kaulachara teachings, as presented by Guru Jára, argue, we deal with our *kaula*, "families," where the man is connected through Tantric "thorns" with all the lovers his sexual female partners have ever made love with. Women are connected through Tantric "hooks" only with all the men whom they have made love with, and not with the female lovers of their former male lovers. Yet, hooks are stronger than thorns.

The Goddess says, in the *Devī Mahatmya*: "I am alone here in the world. What second is there, not being of me? Behold these, you villain, my many existences going back into me alone" (Einarsen 2011, 9).

The Goddess here draws attention to the Tantric superiority of women, as the beings capable of bringing new life to the world. In some Tantric schools, such as the Chandra Maha-Roshana, a man is unable to reach higher spiritual states

without the help of a woman, whom he excites by Tantric techniques into altered states of consciousness. The rule is, the stronger the orgasm or physical manifestation of the woman's excitement, the more the Goddess is present in her, and the more beneficial *śaktipāta* is received by the man through the female body (see Csoma de Kőrös 1836, 496).

In his book *Medicine Man of Nirvana*, Guru Jára refers to the Chandra Maha-Roshana Tantra:

Women are heaven, women are the biggest sacrament, women are Buddha, women are a community of *sangha*, women are the absolute wisdom *prajñāparamita*, and women are *dharma*, therefore the absolute truth, and the one who tries to suppress and devitalize one's own desires and passions, lives a life in lies (Guru Jára 2019b, 89).

He also quoted:

"You'll kiss and hug the naked body of this young widow as if you were kissing and hugging me, Bhairavi. Then she lets you suck and breathe the scent of the pollen of her lotus. And then push hundred times, thousand times, hundred thousand times," Bhairavi takes a breath. "Just move your penis in her—i.e. in my enlarging interstice, in the flesh, until I endow you for this connection of a *vajra* and a lotus with Nirvana" (Guru Jára 2019b, 94–5).

Other Sources of the Tantric Teachings of Guru Jára

Another Tantric teacher Guru Jára makes reference to, both in his theory and practice, is a Vajrayana Buddhist, Machig Labdrön (1055–1149), who freed more than 5,000 people from the matrix of consciousness during her life. The phenomenal path of this Tibetan woman began when, as a young nun, she was caught, scandalously, making love with a wandering Tantric practitioner from Southern India. Machig, after her *yoni* was penetrated by this Tantric, called Töpa Bhadra, immediately achieved the highest knowledge of *vidya*, and rays of light started exuding from her body, which attracted the villagers.

Guru Jára added during one of our interviews:

The young Machig Labdrön was not only caught with a Tantric lover but she got pregnant on top of that. Not only did she have to leave the monastery, but because of contempt of her chaste fellow villagers she had to leave her homeland. According to the *Lakulīśa Sutra*, one of the oldest Tantric doctrines, it is why she was able to bring thousands of people to enlightenment. A text attributed to one of the founders of

Pàshupata Tantra prods into seeking for scorning by mainstream society because those who offend, criticize, attack you, take away your bad karma and in exchange for it they give you their good destiny (Guru Jára 2017a).

In the book *Stigmata of Karma*, Guru Jára mentions the teachings of Lakulíša (the ancient master of Pàshupata Shivaism, whose biographical data are unknown) in this connection:

The biggest obstacle on the path to enlightenment is a social interconnection with an illusory world of collective consciousness, where we are imprisoned. Nevertheless, despite the hypotheses of some explorers, that among the gymnosophists whom Alexander's [356–323 BCE] expedition met in India, there were also Shivaistic *sadhus* worshiping Rudra, for now we do not have a proof that in this era Tantra and yoga were together present in India. Lakulíša, the 28th incarnation of Shiva who established the "Pàsúpata Sadhus," the first yoga-Tantric school of a similarly extreme type, appeared on the scene no sooner than centuries later (Guru Jára 2018, 769).

Guru Jára mentions several traditional Tantric schools, and despite their myriads of differences, they might have one thing in common. The students embark on a journey that takes them far away from everyday life, into the Absolute that transcends reality. A case in point is the phenomenal Abhinavagupta (950–1016), the author of *Tantrāloka*, who at the end of his life disappeared into a mountain cave with his disciples to reach Nirvana and remain beyond the natural universe for eternity.

Modern students of Tantra seek practical results. They want to transform the forces of libido, *kundalini*, to make themselves healthier, happier, or more successful. Guru Jára combines both traditional and modern approaches to Tantra. He is not the first modern master to attempt this fusion. Sir John Woodroffe, the British judge and scholar who wrote under the pen name of Arthur Avalon, more than 100 years ago, translated ancient texts to show that this is possible. If Avalon translated Tantric texts outrageous for the morality of his time, sexual magicians such as Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), went from theory to practice and reported success in generating powerful energies through various forms of lovemaking. Italian esoteric teacher Julius Evola (1898–1974) combined Avalon with the will of power of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) in his *L'uomo come potenza* (Man as Power), published in 1925; in the third revised edition (1949), the title was changed to *Lo yoga della potenza* (The Yoga of Power), to which in later editions a subtitle was added, *Saggio sui Tantra* (Essay on Tantra) (Evola 1949).

Avalon, Crowley, and Evola are just a few of the masters whose doctrines Guru Jára encountered at the very beginning of his life journey, when he emigrated from the materialistic Communist totalitarianism of Czechoslovakia to Rome. And there, accompanied by his new friends, he met Catholic monks as well as parish priests and bishops—and esoteric masters. As he states in his biographical book, *Stigmata of Karma*, they often helped him and other friends from Eastern Europe to cope with their life as refugees. Even more often, they preached sermons to them about sin, shame, shyness, Platonic love, or celibacy. Over the years, Guru Jára concluded that all these are just different techniques through which humans deal with what he calls Tantric energy.

Like a difficult breakup, the unwanted separation from a loved partner or the loss of a loved one expose the depth of the Tantric bonding of lovers in the absence of one of the two bodies. The poignancy consuming our body when we visualize our lost love in bed with someone else is one of the most powerful magical operations a human is capable of. Such a magical operation, Jára teaches, is able through Tantric techniques to turn jealousy into a positive energy that could “miraculously” heal an acute health issue, or help an athlete break a personal record, or bring a Tantric adept into a precious deep *samadhi*.

Valentinus (100–161) was one of the most famous teachers of Gnosticism. According to Tertullian (160–220), Valentinus abandoned the mainline Catholic Church when he failed to be chosen as a bishop, something he had expected (Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos*, IV, in Riley 1971, 28). Guru Jára believes his school taught a path similar to Tantra and even influenced the subsequent developments of Tantra in India and similar teachings in China.

Scholarly sources describe how Valentinian Gnostics proposed a classical ascetic path by refusing the sensual world and ignoring the body altogether (see e.g. Quispel 1974). According to Guru Jára, however, after reaching enlightenment and holiness through the dry path, Valentinians moved to the wet path. Their Tantric path at its highest level, Jára suggests, was similar to the motto of Aleister Crowley, “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law,” i.e. it integrated and transformed in itself all contradictions through experiencing them (Guru Jára, 2019c).

But what about modern students? What attracts them to Tantric paths? Guru Jára answers:

A few come for a spiritual awakening, while others want to attain better physical and mental states or magical powers, and of course many wish to break the bondage of their Tantric links with ex-lovers. Another reason is *káma*, pleasure, which has a great representative in the goddess Kamakhya, who is easily remembered thanks to the famous book *Kamasutra* (Guru Jára, 2019c).

Surprisingly, in our modern times full of pornography, sexologists, and sex shops, many people experience problems with physical pleasure. Many tend to exhaust their sexual appetite. Within marriages, despite a daily friendly comradery and love, intimate intercourse often occurs just once, twice, or three times a year. This is a special problem in Japan, as confirmed by both scholars of sexuality and Guru Jára's own experiences with his Japanese students.

At the same time, Guru Jára believes that there is a specific Japanese Tantric tradition. He teaches that Bengali Vamachara Tantra and Tibetan Hevajra Tantra, as well as Chinese Inner Alchemy Taoism, influenced the birth of an important Japanese Tantric stream known as Tachikawa-ryu. In this teaching, Jára argues, a copulating man is invoking the microcosm, while the woman invokes the macrocosm, meaning the whole universe. The clitoris was called here *hoju*, the magic jewel of the *dharma*, and according to Jára these Japanese practitioners used 48 sexual positions from their 900 year-old textbook, the *Sutra of Secret Bliss*, which teaches a secret method enabling a man and a woman to experience the bliss of Buddhahood in their bodies (Guru Jára 2017a).

This Tantric ritual, Guru Jára continues, starts with a prayer where Tantric lovers pay respect to the traditional Shingon mandala. The woman, who is now the embodied Aizen Myo-o, says, "I want to receive the Diamond Realm," and the man says, "I want to enter the Womb Realm" (Guru Jára 2017a).

Guru Jára argues that there are parallels between this Japanese way and certain Indian paths:

The names change, but the principle stays the same. This makes it possible to adapt these precious traditional teachings to the modern human, who has got different structures of the mind and different "idols," but in principle they are not different from our ancestors. Similarly, then, the wisdom of the Gnostics, Sophia, that we have in the West, whose spark is in each of us like a higher consciousness or a soul, the Kabbalistic Sefhira of wisdom, Chochmah, the Tantric *vidya*, or the Buddhist *prajñā*, which in its perfect state of *prajñāparamita* is the emptiness that lighted up the original uncreated light in the experience of Machig Labdrön, all these across cultures, despite their differences, carry

inside the essence of the same knowledge of the highest truth about ourselves and the meaning of all what is around us (Guru Jára 2019b, 38).

Among the important sources of the Tantric teachings of Guru Jára, I would like to mention also Tamil Siddhas, such as Bhogar (550–300 BCE), traditionally believed to be an accomplished alchemist who achieved the nectar of immortality, *amrit*, and Tirumular (whose dates are controversial: he probably lived in the 8th century CE).

Holy Yoni

Some of the Tantric texts assign Ten Great Wisdom Goddesses to ten zones of the most sacred temple, the female *yoní*. In certain Tantric texts, there is no higher spiritual activity than *yoní puja*, where the woman's genitals receives the highest marks of respect. Guru Jára, in his meditation on celibacy included in his book *Tantric Transformations*, celebrates the *yoní* as the entry gate to real Nirvana:

There is no other place in the material universe more sacred than the *yoní*. Not even symbols leading to the infinite Divine Light, because to reach the state of salvation or enlightenment, you have to be born first, you have to enter the material world via the gate of *yoní*. It is then obvious that reasonable people regard *yoní* as the object of worship, meditations, prayers, the gate to highest initiation and universal transformation (Guru Jára 2017b, 48–9).

A materialized emptiness is the essence of Nirvana in its attractive form, i.e. in the form that contains a potency of existence, a possibility to be born, i.e. a female vulva, a *yoní*. A common man realizes his existence by an utterly tenacious effort to experience a taste of a stay in a paradisiac nirvana at least for a few moments, which are provided to him by a common physiological orgasm. However, for a male Tantric initiate, who is able to overcome his urgent animal compulsion, a *yoní* is not only a door to life but an altar of sainthood as well. Once he perceives a *yoní* in this way, he perceives even sex as a holy act (see Hlavinka forthcoming)

Already a sacrificial ritual from ancient Vedas put into the holy space of the *yoní* (Sanskrit: *upastha*) of goddess Aditi the so-called *sóma*, which was supposed to represent a nectar of immortality—*amrit*. At full moon or at new moon, an incendiary offering was put on this altar in the form of ritually burnt flowers, foods, and so on (see Hlavinka 2014, 135).

In the Tantric doctrine of Guru Jára, the *yoni* is perceived not only in the figurative sense of a symbolic entry into Nirvana, but as a real object—a holy altar for meditation and worshipping. A *yoni* is, from its divine nature, endowed to gently “pull” the prepared aspirant into a higher state. According to Guru Jára, this only happens if both partners are capable of such perception of themselves, and abide by a sexual abstinence or celibacy for a specific time, e.g. one lunar cycle, or 40 days.

Nevertheless, Guru Jára maintains that a long-lasting celibacy—except within the context of specific monastic paths—, when practiced without maintainig a healthy Tantric energy in the body, does not help spiritual progress.

Celibacy is effective only because of Tantra. (...) An impotent man doesn't have to practice celibacy, because it doesn't change him at all. Celibacy does not work because of celibacy itself, but thanks to sexual energy, which is stopped, because most people are unable to use it in a better way than to store it. This doesn't concern initiated Tantrics. (...) Celibacy is a sexual position, which is related to a yoga *asana*, “dead body”—*shavasana*... That is why this is the hardest *asana*, because you lie on your back in this exercise. Therefore, as well as in the case of celibacy, only very advanced practitioners should practice it, because the others would only waste their time by purposelessly lying on the ground (Guru Jára 2011, 94).

The Todala Tantra tradition is one of the main sources of Guru Jára's Tantric teachings. Here, the ten sovereign forms of Goddess Mahavidya are described.

Listen, O Devi, I will speak concisely of the essence of yoga. The body resembles a tree, with the root above and the branches below. In the macrocosm there are tirthas (bathing places) which also exist in the body. The macrocosm is like the microcosm (Sarma 1961, II).

In fact, the ten forms of Goddess Mahavidya are fundamental not only in traditional Indian paths, for example in the Kali-Kula Shaktic tradition, but also in many contemporary Tantric schools. The origins of the worship of the ten forms of Goddess Mahavidya date back to a period between the 9th and the 12th century CE. These teachings often emphasize the connection between the Ten Tantric Goddesses and Buddhist teachings that were dominant in India at that time, but later quickly disappeared due to the Muslim invasion. Each form of the Goddess Mahavidya is also represented by her own sacred geometrical mandala, known as a *yantra*. These *yantras* stacked on top of each other also represent a sexual intercourse, in the form of a Tantric union between a man and a woman. “Every

woman should know the Goddess Mahavidya, whose temple she carries in her *yoni*, to be able to interconnect and identify with her” (Guru Jára 2019b, 100).

DHUMAVATTI’s *yantra* symbolizes the initial contact with a *lingam* (penis), but not with the inner parts of the *yoni*. BHAIRAVI’s *yantra* includes contact with the *lingam* and vulva, and other reversed triangles of this *yantra* symbolize the potential path to the heart of the *yoni* through Bhairavi and the eight Goddesses inside. KALI’s mandala pictures the moment in which the *lingam* meets the vagina’s entrance, in a position called Tantric Kiss. The *yantra* of TARA pictures a shallow penetration, approximately 3 cm. of the penis, i.e. up to its head. CHINNAMASTA’s *yantra* is a hymen, or the invisible energy around the space where the hymen was broken. Due to the elasticity of the hymen, this is often behind the Tara mandala. However, in the virgins, Chinnamasta’s *yantra* is on the same level as the Kali mandala, and both remain united till the hymen is broken. The head of the goddess Chinnamasta, which is chopped off, although contented, considering her facial expression, symbolizes the loss of hymen and blood caused by such an act, which triggers the karmic activity of two of Chinnamasta’s dancers who also represent meridians—*ida* and *pingala* (Guru Jára. 2019b, 90-1).

Chinnamasta is linked to life energy distribution and to the hymen. Guru Jára emphasizes that Sri Shodashi-Tripura Sundari is the power of perfection. She is the most beautiful woman who has ever existed in the world. Her place in the female body is at the vaginal cervix. If the vaginal cervix is very gently and systematically stimulated by the male *lingam*, the sovereign place of this Goddess is gradually being activated. The most popular symbol of Shakti Tantrism, Sri Yantra, is also related to the Goddess Sri Shodashi-Tripura Sundari.

A great goddess transformed her body, energy, and psyche of her consciousness into Shri Yantra. Through her, you can fully get to know Tripura Sundari, including all rhythms of the Moon, because she is also the goddess of fifteen sounds, the phases of time, and the secret sixteenth sound transcending an ocean of libido, *káma*, and of time *kála*, as taught in the *Kámakálavilaja-Tantra*. There, *káma* is a motion, of which *kála* is a side product, and without them an empty space of full vaginas become vacant into the emptiness (Guru Jára 2019b, 319–20).

I have not yet mentioned the remaining Goddesses in this series, Bagalamukhi, Matangi, and Kamala. They are discussed by Guru Jára in his books *Medicine Man of Nirvana* and *Atomic Amrit*. In my 2019 interview, he explained which specific Goddess’ awareness is being stimulated during the Tantric union:

The lovemaking positions have an essential impact on the hooks and on the types of conception, through one of the stimulated and activated types of Wisdom. Technically, the uppermost pressure during the man’s ejaculation or the woman’s orgasm is the most

decisive aspect, due to the “atomic reaction” of the connection of chakras and “antichakras,” microcosm and macrocosm, during the lovemaking, when a child is conceived or a hook is created (Guru Jára 2019c).

Tantra in Practice in the Guru Jára Path: (1) Startantra

One specific area of Guru Jára’s Tantric teachings is called Startantra. It is inspired by the *Todala Tantra*, but Jára claims it is mostly based on knowledge and experience of ancient Egyptians teachings he gained through revelation (see Introvigne 2019, 5 and 9–10). The “Egyptian Sacrament” also revealed how souls enter the Earth from different planets, stars, and dimensions. The lovers’ position during lovemaking, Jára claims, essentially impacts the energy charge and Tantric quality of the intercourse, but also the possibility of conceiving a child whose soul may come from the Pleiades, Sirius, and so on.

Startantra includes suggestions about what lovemaking positions are most appropriate to increase the quality of a relationship, to overcome infertility, and more importantly for the ritual purposes of merging with the Deities, the Universe, and other dimensions.

From a Tantric point of view, Jára insists, the power behind the conception of a new life (as well as the creation of a so-called “hook”) is comparable to the atomic breakage in physics, as contemporary scientists have also suggested. However, there are some spiritual conditions for Startantra to work. One of these fundamental conditions is described by Jára in the book *Medicine Man of Nirvana*,

The energetic integrity of what the penis brings into a vagina would decide whether the vagina becomes a *bhaga mandala* or just a place for animal mating (Guru Jára 2019b, 418).

Guru Jára’s Startantra is based on the well-known esoteric and alchemical doctrine of correspondences, “that which is below is like that which is above and that which is above is like that which is below.” Astrology is also connected to different sexual positions. Startantra, Jára claims, leads to spiritual growth through the use of Tantric energy, which also requires the knowledge of what positions in the couple’s lovemaking are most appropriate to support the partnership and its development.

In Startantra, the “tip of the 8th house” is the type of sexual position derived from the astrological sign where the 8th house begins in the practitioner’s horoscope. This is the immediate area of sexual transformation and, according to Guru Jára, the most suitable position in lovemaking and the most satisfying in terms of sexual ecstasy, as well as for spiritual growth and overall improvement of karma. Both partners will benefit from raising *kundalini* energy, through the “rose and flute exercise” that I will discuss later in this article.

To give only one example, Guru Jára offers these suggestions, very much in the style of a classical Tantric *maithuna*, for the sign Leo.

The female partner should sit on the lap of a sitting or squatting or kneeling man face to face. (...) Some women cannot conceive because in the past life they had promised their cosmic gate, the womb, to a particular person. This karmic reservation blocks other space travelers, but because no one gives the woman advice regarding a sexual position—the Tantric seal leading to the star on which the soul mate resides—, there is unnecessary torment on both sides of the universes. Yet it is sufficient that in these cases the initiated StarTantric gives advice, according to the horoscope, on the appropriate sexual position—the Tantric seal—, and the cosmic path through pregnancy and birth can begin. If you are in such a situation and want to help yourself, try the following:

- a) the position of the astrological sign in which you have your ascendant;
- b) the position of your astrological sign;
- c) the position in which the people who have the ascendant in your sign, Leo, were conceived, because this is the most spiritual and therefore, from the atomic perspective, the most effective sexual position of humanity (Guru Jára 2011, 478–83).

Thus, the different sexual positions of Startantra are not primarily used to search for *káma* (delight), as opposed to the current understanding of the *Kamasutra*, but to find the most appropriate Tantric energy.

Guru Jára suggests that the twelve basic positions corresponding to each astrological sign should be extended, in what he calls the “Initiation Version for Advanced Tantrics,” to sixty-four positions corresponding to all available energy variations of the existence in the Chinese Book of Changes *I Ching* (which in turn have their parallels in India, including the Lila Squares).

Humans are classified by Guru Jára into four categories, according to the kind of energy hook left by their fathers in the womb of their mothers during conception:

1. *“Those conceived through a gate ‘hooked’ by a ‘hereditary sin’ and the energy of an incubus.”* They were conceived in some variant of the missionary position by a man who was neither an initiated Tantric nor a virgin. They do not have the strength and, as a rule, the need to overcome the shackles of family or karma, and they are most disposed to live a mainstream way of life, because they are not sufficiently developed to be aware of their own uniqueness. They prefer conventional sports and entertainment, and choose studies and occupations according to social conventions without any significant personal interest.

2. *“Those conceived through a gate ‘hooked’ by a ‘hereditary sin’ and the energy of a succubus.”* The position of the woman on top causes these so-called “succubus hooks,” in order to give birth to people who will be either admired or marginalized and hated by mainstream, moralistic society. These beings, who suffer under the pressure of the majority, began to be born more often in an era of emancipation of women. The fact that women no longer waited patiently for what they were allowed to do or dare among men, both in their professional careers or in bed, generated this second human type.

3. *“From female-virgins, or male-virgins, ideally when both are still ‘pure,’ exceptional individuals are born, but they will be a bit lost in this harsh world.”*

4. *“The fourth type of people are avatars, Sons of God. They are born immaculately. Either as the Bible describes in the conception of Jesus, the mother being a virgin and the father the Holy Spirit, which is the highest ideal, or as the Bible describes in the Book of Samuel, when the father, King David, was a Tantric initiate and the mother was unhooked, that is, free of incubi or succubi”* (Guru Jára 2011, 178–79).

However, in the last part of his most important book, *Casanova Sútra*, Guru Jára describes a fifth category. It includes advanced souls, not at the supreme level of the Avatars, but still very spiritually aware, who enter the womb willingly and consciously. And this could be highly influenced by the knowledge and practice of Startantra by the couple conceiving these children (Guru Jára 2011, 481).

For Guru Jára, the incubus is a hook coming from the positions with man on top and woman down, a succubus is a hook coming from the opposite positions. The incubus type of hook in the woman’s womb originates when the woman was not impregnated after the ejaculation, and the man was on top. The succubus type of hook is an energetic *vasana* (connection between partners) that occurred in

the positions when the woman was on top and the ejaculation did not lead to pregnancy. Guru Jára maintains that for each couple relationship there is only one hook, no matter how many times they made love. The predominant type of the hooks, and of course their quality, can deeply influence the psyche, behavior, but also the fate of the woman. Jára teaches that,

Sex is the most powerful energy transformer and connects the content of “antichakras” with the content of chakras. And this triggers the atomic reaction of transforming what is in us into the karmic events of the world around us. And this is the supreme power of Tantra as the spiritual method of growth, the linking of the microcosm with the macrocosm, and their merging into one. During the sexual union of the two microcosms, a new macrocosm is formed, which is affected by the third aspect, namely the sexual position (Guru Jára 2011, 229).

(2) “*Antichakras*” and *Un-thorning*

As chakras may be seen and used as “stairways to heaven” from the crotch upwards, it is also possible to perceive and use what Guru Jára calls “antichakras” as “stairways to hell.” In the book *Poetrie—Liberation of the Soul* (Guru Jára 2003), in the chapter “Secret Gates of Ganga and Shiva’s Mantra” (Guru Jára 2003, 68), and in the book *Casanova Sútra* (Guru Jára 2011, 246), specific examples are offered:

1. *Atala* (somewhere under the *muladhara* on our hips), associated with lust and chronic fear. It can lead to promiscuity.

2. *Vitala* (in the middle of the thighs)—negative anger and frustrated anger towards the whole world.

3. *Sutala* (in the knees)—caustic jealousy and envy deriving from psychological complexes. It often brings constant criticism and sarcastic remarks about everything. It can lead to materialism and atheism.

4. *Talatala* (calves), or “usurer’s chakra,” where everything—including relationships—is subject to calculation and converted into material valuables. Greed and avarice here are the basic instincts and the spiritual mottoes.

5. *Rasatala* (in the ankles)—animal instincts and the search for material benefits, the type of life that affirms itself “over the dead bodies” of others. The

sharp elbows of the beast bring a constant fear of others. There is a fear that other beasts will get on better than us in life.

6. *Mahatala* (in the insteps)—the total dullness of the soul, conscience, joy of life. “The world is here for their comfort, and so they steal from the world and from others, and if they fail, they fall into blunt depression.”

7. *Patala* (on soles, feet)—a killer and tyrannical instinct. Revenge, destruction of material values and harming others. Life is lived in hatred, enjoying when others are suffering.

Every man is interconnected through his thorns to the wombs of his ex-partners. In the book *Casanova Sūtra*, Guru Jára offers very detailed descriptions of thorns and suggestions and meditations for removing these energetic *vasanas*, particularly in the first chapter, “Thorny Phallus.”

Jára describes thorns as energetic connections to all female lovers in whose *yoni* the man has ever ejaculated. It is through these thorns that the man is in contact with the corresponding hooks in the womb of his female ex-lovers. At the same time, through their wombs, he is interconnected with the hooks of all other male lovers of his former and present female lovers. The strongest (energy-wise) man currently draws energy from other men through the hooks of their common (over time) female lovers. The strongest takes everything. If a man has difficulties in his personal life, however, he becomes an easy prey for stronger men. These are matters that an ordinary person has, of course, very little chance of influencing, unless he is practicing a wide range of Tantra exercises.

Thorns cannot be removed from men in the same way as in the Tantric rituals for unhooking women. However, in the system of Guru Jára, there are techniques where women can assist their partners in removing thorns. Meditations and visualizations are essential because, when identifying and trying to remove male thorns, there is a risk that an inexperienced female partner may take them over to her energy circle. Thorns are found in men in the area of phallus, its root, on the perineum, and around the anus. If a man has too many of them, they will begin to fall into the area of the “antichakras,” which would negatively alter his personality and put a great strain on his karma. The doctrine of thorns and their dangers shows that in fact, Guru Jára does not encourage promiscuity (Hlavinka forthcoming).

A man can also get rid of thorns from his former partners by using certain Tantric instructions from Guru Jára. They are described in the already mentioned chapter “Thorny Phallus” of the book *Casanova Sútra* (Guru Jára 2011, 37–46), whose instructions can be summarized as follows. The man must recall the seven most important ex-lovers of his life, into whose *yoni* he has ejaculated. The steps are the following:

1. The first woman he ever made love to in his life. The man should think of the partner’s *yoni* as a red rose blossom. His penis is the stalk of the rose with pikes and thorns. The number of thorns indicates the number of partners the ex-lover had before him. The idea is that he is sitting inside this stalk, and can see green colors everywhere, but he has a red blossom of his ex-lover’s rose over his head. Then, he should imagine the red color of his mother’s energy when he was conceived through the green stem to the rose blossom, which then turns green.

The following is Guru Jára’s description of the cleansing fire:

The King of Zahor set on fire the eight-year-old Padmasambhava, but when the fire was over, he was found seated on a lotus where eight female Tantrics were taking care of him. The Fire of Zahor is the best purgatory for the thorns you have from sexual connections, but if you are not ready, in the Fire of Zahor you can hurt yourself (Guru Jára 2011, 40).

2. Then, he should imagine his most repulsive ex-partner and visualize his love-making with her, just as he was watching a pornographic movie about himself. At the same time, he should remember that he is still sitting inside his green penis (stalk), which he is pushing up above himself into the repulsive partner’s red rose, which is above his head. He will thus realize how many more thorns his stem has.

3. Then, he should imagine

the lover with whom you had the strangest breakup. The lover with the most beautiful body. Then, the lover with the strongest scent. Then, the lover with the nicest voice. And the lover in whose company you had the worst experience (Guru Jára 2011, 42).

He should try to calculate the number of thorns from these seven ex-partners, of whom it is most desirable to get cleansed, as his precious life energy of seven chakras is drained through their wombs and the hooks towards their other lovers, who can profit from his energy in a very dangerous way.

4. The thorns of the men who are weaker, in terms of energy, can be removed by the help of a caring girlfriend. With her tongue, she may gradually suck the

thorns in the direction of coccyx, anus, perineum, and scrotum. If there are too many thorns, it is also necessary that she licks the feet and knee pits.

The thorns of the men who are stronger, in terms of energy, can be successfully mastered by the ritual related to the Fire of Zahor:

Enter the red uterus with a flash of light from your father's semen. Then turn it into a green penis, and as you sit inside it, use it to make love to your first lover again and then transform the red rose that remains after her and make love to it in the other six chakra partners we had picked up. And then, when you are done... I will purify you through the Fire of Zahor, so that your destiny finally begins to move forward as it is supposed to (Guru Jára 2011, 46).

While making love, however, not only is there an intense energy connection at the level of the chakras, but the negative karmic currents of the mentioned antichakras from the area of the lovers' legs can also be transmitted to each other (Guru Jára 2011, 239).

(3) Tantric Meditations for Couples and Individuals

According to Guru Jára, the true Tantric union of a woman and a man in a sacred *maithuna* transforms our physical body of flesh and bones into a luminous body that is able to step outside our known three-dimensional reality. Before doing so, however, Guru Jára recommends practicing the “rose and flute exercise,” which is suitable both for couples and singles.

ARTantra considers the respiratory space of the central part of body, from the throat down to the lower abdomen, as the flute, and the area between the coccyx and the pubic bone as the red rose, which opens up with inhalation to the state of an unfolded bloom, and closes to the state of a bud with exhalations. The Tantric practitioner then tries to contract the individual muscle parts (buttocks, vagina, thigh muscles) at the moment of full flowering—i.e. exhalation. The rose thorns remain in the buttocks (around the rectum) and can be pulled out using nails (gentle pinching). The fallen leaves of the rose then fall into the calves, where they must be raked out (massaged out) of the feet. The butterfly of the flower will remain in the nipples, where it must be sucked (at least 20 minutes each nipple), or rubbed out by using moist fingers (thumb-forefinger-middle finger). Finally, the scent of the rose is aspirated from the mouth or lips by either kisses (at least 20 minutes) or touches using two moist fingers (forefinger + middle finger) (Guru Jára 2003, 72).

Guru Jára adds that the rose and flute exercise, when practiced by a woman, consists in inhaling the excited energy upwards from her rose region (the first chakra) through the very center of the body up to the throat. She exhales this

unique and healing energy into the space above her head, through the seventh chakra upwards, or into the aura space by exhaling through the heart chakra. In doing so, the woman continually imagines her own body as an empty space filled with a shining crystal light entering her from above her head.

The exercise is similar for men, with the difference that the excited energy is inhaled either through the first chakra, using the crotch muscle contraction (*mula bandha*), but also directly through the *lingam*, leading the energy through the central axis of the body to the heart chakra, and exhaling it towards his partner through a beam of love. Or, similarly, as with women, by exhalation men lead the energy above their heads and surrender it to the higher consciousness (*buddhi*) for the purpose of their spiritual growth, for the suffering beings, or for the successful completion of a certain project.

By far, Jára teaches the strongest way to strengthen the first chakra is to tighten the pelvic floor muscles. This is the exercise called *mula bandha* in Tantric yoga. With the inhalation, the practitioners tighten their muscles, and with the exhalation, they relax the muscles in the area of *yoni* or *lingam* and rectum.

This systematic daily tightening of the crotch muscles strongly activates sexual energy, and the lovers can also indulge in a stronger experience of interconnection of their first chakras. For the first two weeks of practice, both men and women learn to contract the muscles of the buttocks and the genitalia simultaneously, in cycles of ten contractions and 30-60 seconds of rest, where one inhalation and exhalation corresponds to one contraction. After a few weeks, they can contract the muscles up to 108 times a day or more, starting with ten repetitions. Guru Jára claims that this is a sure path for the life energy to rise up.

Guru Jára also describes “the mystery of hidden souls in our being” in his 2003 text “Tantric Hindsight with Casanova,”

A man has his hidden female soul in his foreskin, and a woman has her hidden male soul in her clitoris. If a man needs more tenderness, he regularly cherishes his foreskin, and if a woman needs more strength, energy, vigor, she regularly reaches clitoridal orgasms. The excitation of the foreskin and the clitoris with Tantric visualizations (e.g. the rose exercise), either with the help of another person or by masturbation (in the case of men, by masturbation without subsequent ejaculation) awakens the energy of the rainbow snake (Guru Jára 2003, 71).

For women, “*bodhichitta*, the seed of enlightenment in us, is like exciting the clitoris of the heart” (Guru Jára 2011, 199).

(4) *Hooks and Thorns—and Unhooking*

Massimo Introvigne, a leading Italian scholar of new religious movements who has written extensively on sexual magic, summarizes the roots of Guru Jára's unhooking in a way I agree with:

According to Jára, several problems ... are due to “hooks” and “thorns.” These concepts have not been invented by Jára. They have a venerable tradition in both Tantrism and esoteric Buddhism and Taoism, and are present in the teachings of other contemporary neo-Tantric groups. Jára mentions a quote attributed to Kūkai (Kōbō-Daishi, 774–835), the Japanese monk who founded esoteric Shingon Buddhism: “When you visit your former mistresses, you will see white worms eating through the vagina and blue flies flying in her mouth. This scene will give you deep regret and unspeakable shame.”

Jára's interpretation is that, “in cases where new life was not conceived during sex, the ‘living’ remnants of this union of the two bodies will remain in the mistresses through a life-giving act. Only those who have attained at least a degree of samadhi through meditation can see it” (Introvigne 2019, 13; the reference is to Guru Jára 2013).

According to Guru Jára (2003), with every ejaculation men lose a part of their reservoir of life energy hidden in the *amrit*, the elixir of life. In contrast, women can temporarily acquire this desirable energy for themselves through the man's orgasm. But the price is the energy *vasanas* (hooks) that every ejaculating partner leaves in their womb, even if he uses a condom. For clairvoyants, these “hooks” look indeed like luminous worms that take the best life energy from the woman's womb and transfer it to her former partners. In addition to that, after every male orgasm, when she gets another dose of the male fire energy, the woman's first and second chakras, which are already very strongly influenced by the generative water energy, are once again flooded with the spilled pleasure of orgasmic fluids. They then turn her two bottom chakras into an essence similar to a swamp, where both the woman and her partner, unaware of the Tantric principles at work, can drown both emotionally and energetically.

Taisha Abelar, a student of the American cultural anthropologist and shaman Carlos Castaneda (1925–1998), also mentions the energetic connections to former partners (hooks) in the woman's womb:

Men leave specific energy lines inside the body of women. They are like luminous tapeworms that move inside the womb, sipping up energy... Those lines of energy, established through sexual intercourse, collect and steal energy from the female body to benefit the male who left them there... The worms just die out if she can resist having sex for seven years (Abelar 1992, 52–4).

Guru Jára believes that this term of seven years can be shortened to three years of celibacy, and sometimes even less, depending on whether the woman is intensively practicing spiritual exercises, through which her fine subtle bodies are purified and the energy hooks or worms, which are stealing her most precious life energy, are removed.

Guru Jára teaches that, if this practice is accompanied by a ritual Tantric ceremony, a form of faith healing also known as “unhooking,” the whole process of energetical cleansing from former partners can be reduced to 40 days, or 21 days in less serious cases. Details are described in Jára’s book *Casanova Sútra* (Guru Jára 2011), and in the second chapter, “Excerpts from the Life of Guru Jára,” of my own book *Evangelium Guru Jary podle Pavla* (Hlavinka 2018). Based on interviews with Guru Jára, I present there an overview of certain rituals and ceremonies, including a nine-day fast from food, drink and sleep, coupled with continuous Maha Nirvana Tantra meditations. Guru Jára claims that he learned, from the Indian and Himalayan holy men (*sadhus*) with whom he studied, the techniques for a perfect accumulation of the substance of unadulterated primordial light into his spine. He then became able to transfer these light healing vibrations to a Tantric partner in both spiritual and therapeutic rituals in various forms, through his body, *lingam*, touch, or crystal. He also claims he acquired the skill of being able to precisely diagnose the state of sexual *vasanas* (energy hook-type interconnections) before starting a Tantric ritual.

These faith healing rituals are extremely demanding in nature, and not the slightest hint of self-indulgence is present in the therapeutic process. His followers believe that Guru Jára first attained the holiness of the enlightened being through his dry path, and only after a few years later did he realize the *mahamudra* of the Tantric Nirvana. In him, according to his devotees, there is therefore by definition no residue of a human ego bound to bodily desires. He claims he went through the difficult path of the initiation into the healing of energy *vasanas* and related Tantric techniques because, as he says, he wanted to know how to pass on the light of enlightenment to modern men and women, for whom the traditional ascetic spiritual paths look distant and unfamiliar. He offered therapeutic help throughout this Tantric ritual, he claims, from the place of pure compassion and with a great deal of self-sacrifice (Hlavinka 2018, 399).

I would add that, although Guru Jára’s teachings are based on the spiritual traditions of Tantra, in my opinion they are not incompatible with modern

science. There are scientists who believe that in sexual intercourse male DNA is transmitted to the woman, and may leave trace in her body for more than fifty years (Chan, Gurnot, Montine, Sonnen, Guthrie and Nelson 2012; Yan, Lambert, Guthrie, Porter, Loubière, Madeleine, Stevens, Hermès and Nelson 2005: these studies include additional bibliography).

During the Tantric liturgy of unhooking, erection is not triggered by a reflexive reaction to the lustful desire for an animal stimulus, but is initiated through the seventh chakra down to the first and second chakras, clearly as a manifestation of divine will and grace, not as a sign of lust. In order for this Tantric connection to be able to occur at all, the woman in question must be fully aware and introduced into what is specifically going to happen. She must be relaxed and fully cooperative because this therapy can last for more than an hour. It is certainly not a recreational activity for the guru, because all negative energies from the former partners of the woman are being passed onto him, and he must subsequently undergo several cleansing rituals that last for many days. This is a very exhausting set of exercises, to which Guru Jára claims he submitted himself because of the vows he pronounced when he was initiated into the wet path (see Hlavinka 2018).

Conclusion

The Guru Jára Path includes both new and traditional approaches to Tantra and sacred sexual union. I have introduced here some of the key features of Guru Jára's Tantric doctrine, including its theoretical bases and main practices. I have also investigated the sources of Guru Jára's Tantric beliefs, which originate in the lineage of Kaula and Todala Tantra, and in the traditions connected with the worship of the Dasa Mahavidya.

Guru Jára's teachings, on the other hand, cannot be reduced to its Eastern sources. The tradition is interpreted and transformed in order to make it relevant for modern men and women. Jára believes that the ancient teachings connected with sexuality may all be interpreted, discussed, and even rejected, and we should remain open-minded to new ideas, new explanations, new possibilities. Criticizing Guru Jára by claiming that his interpretation of ancient Tantric texts is not philologically accurate would amount to a basic misunderstanding of his whole spiritual enterprise.

French post-structuralist Michel Foucault (1926–1984) also took an interest in Tantra, which he believed can free a mature individual from one of the most hidden political-economic manipulations of European history, the one connected with the control of sexuality. Foucault distinguishes very sharply between *scientia sexualis* and *ars erotica* (Foucault 1990). The initiation to Tantra is to *ars erotica* and its techniques, which for the Western man and woman is a new way of approaching our sexuality. It is profoundly revolutionary. It is perceived as provocative and controversial in the mainstream society, as evidenced by the experience of Guru Jára himself:

Tantra is a faith which urges you not to let your penis be erected by the Lies of the Darkness, but always by the Light of the Truth. Only then, it can penetrate directly to the heart of the Goddess that bore our Universe (Guru Jára 2018, 388).

Tantric transformations, and the techniques and explorations of traditional Tantric spiritual paths, reveal that Tantra has always been an art. Foucault notes that an artful way of exploring sexuality (*ars erotica*) has been cultivated in Eastern cultures since ancient times, while Western societies opted for developing a scientific approach to the study of sexual activity (*scientia sexualis*), as part of the expansion of modernity and capitalism.

Referring to Western Christian societies, Foucault concludes that:

Our civilization possesses no *ars erotica*. In return, it is undoubtedly the only civilization to practice a *scientia sexualis*; or rather, the only civilization to have developed over the centuries procedures for telling the truth of sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret (Foucault 1990, 140–1).

References

- Abelar, Taisha. 1992. *The Sorcerer's Crossing: A Woman's Journey*. New York: Viking.
- Avalon, Arthur, ed. 1965. *Kularnava Tantra*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Chan, William F.N., Cécile Gurnot, Thomas J. Montine, Joshua A. Sonnen, Katherine A. Guthrie, and J. Lee Nelson. 2012. "Male Microchimerism in the Human Female Brain." *PLoS ONE* 7(9):e45592.

- Csoma de Körös, Sándor. 1836. *Chandra Maha-Roshana*. [Asiatic Researches, or Transactions of The Society Instituted in Bengal, for Enquiring into the History, the Antiquities, the Arts and Sciences, and Literature of Asia, volume 20]. Calcutta: The Society Instituted in Bengal for Enquiring into the History, the Antiquities, the Arts and Sciences, and Literature of Asia.
- Dupuche, John R. 2003. *Abhinavagupta: The Kula Ritual as Elaborated in Chapter 29 of the Tantraloka*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Einarsen Silje Lyngar. 2011. "The Devī-Māhātmya: Translation and Commentary of Selected Verses, and a Study of Its Importance in Hindu Tantrism." *Totem: Tidsskrift ved Afdeling for Religionsvidenskab og Arabisk- og Islamstudier, Aarhus Universitet* 7:1–33.
- Evola, Julius. 1949. *Lo yoga della potenza*. Milan: Fratelli Bocca.
- Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.
- Guru Jára [DJ Jjaz]. 2003. *ARTantra, Tantrické ohlédnutí s Casanovou*. [Poetrie Ideální pocit]. Zlín: BestCeler.
- Guru Jára. 2011. *Casanova Sútra*. Liberec: BestCeler and HLAWA creative s.r.o. [2nd ed., 2013; quotes in the text are from the first edition]. English translation of the first part, *Tantric Trekking*, Manila: Paradise of Etz Tree, 2017.
- Guru Jára. 2013. "Guru Jára: Don Juan Sútra aneb Recepty na vymotávání se ze sítě minulých vztahů. Kapitola: Meditace na vlastní sexuální minulost." Accessed August 2, 2019. <http://www.aurarelay.com/wordpress/?p=5844>.
- Guru Jára. 2017a. Interview with the author in the Manila Detention Center, February 16.
- Guru Jára. 2017b. *Tantrické transformace*. Praha, Nakladatelství BestCeler.
- Guru Jára. 2018. *Stigmata Karmy*. Manila: Paradise of Etz Tree.
- Guru Jára. 2019a. *Atomic Amrit*. Manila: The Author [privately printed].
- Guru Jára. 2019b. *Medicinman nirvány*. Manila: The Author [privately printed].
- Guru Jára. 2019c. Interview with the author in the Manila Detention Center, July 18.
- Hildegard von Bingen. 1990. *Scivias*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press.
- Hlavinka, Pavel. 2014. *Dobro a ctnost pohledem etických a náboženských koncepcí*. Prague: Triton.
- Hlavinka, Pavel. 2018. *Evangelium Guru Járy podle Pavla*. Zlín: Jan Stacke.
- Hlavinka, Pavel. Forthcoming. "Sex Education and Tantra." In *Exploring Sexuality and Spirituality: Introducing an Interdisciplinary Field*, edited by Phil Shining and Nicol Michelle Epple. Leiden: Brill.

- Hlavinka, Pavel, and Ivo Jirásek. 2010. "Gymnosophy: The Wisdom of Nakedness." *Filozofia* 65(7):683–90.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2019. "Sex, Magic and the Police: The Saga of Guru Jára." *The Journal of CESNUR* 3(4):3–30. DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2019.3.4.1.
- Plášková, Barbora (Sri Barbara Durga). 2017. "Tantrická lázeň BD." Accessed October 18, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2ootUEL>.
- Quispel, Gilles. 1974. "Origen and the Valentinian Gnosis." *Vigiliae Christianae* 28(1):29–42.
- Riley, Mark T. 1971. "Q.S.Fl. Tertulliani *Adversus Valentinianos*: Text, Translation, and Commentary." PhD Diss. Stanford University.
- Sarma, Bhadrasila, ed. 1961. *Todala Tantra*. Prayaga: Kalyana Mandira Prakasana.
- Sri Amritanandanatha. 2011. "Kaulachara." May 18. Accessed October 8, 2019. <http://phenomenal-luminosity.blogspot.com/2011/05/kaulachara.html>.
- White, David Gordon, ed. 2000. *Tantra in Practice*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Yan, Zhen, Nathalie C. Lambert, Katherine A. Guthrie, Allison Porter, Laurence S. Loubière, Margaret M. Madeleine, Anne M. Stevens, Heidi M. Hermes, and J. Lee Nelson. 2005. "Male Microchimerism in Women Without Sons: Quantitative Assessment and Correlation with Pregnancy History." *The American Journal of Medicine* 118(8):899–906.

⊗ The Journal of CESNUR ⊗
