

## Article

# A New Home for New Immigrants? A Case Study of the Role of Soka Gakkai in the Integration of Japanese and Mainland Chinese Immigrants in Hong Kong

Ka Shing Ng

School of Global Humanities and Social Sciences, Nagasaki University, 1-14 Bunkyo-machi, Nagasaki, Nagasaki Prefecture 852-8521, Japan; ngkashing@nagasaki-u.ac.jp

Received: 14 September 2018; Accepted: 29 October 2018; Published: 31 October 2018



**Abstract:** In the discussion of migrant integration into local settings, most scholars agree on the positive linkages between religion and the construction of ethnic identity. However, beyond church and mosque, there appears to be a gap in the research of the roles played by other religions in the process of migrant integration. This paper attempts to fill this gap by studying the role of a new religion Soka Gakkai (SG) in the integration of Japanese and Mainland Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong. I argue that the social and spiritual support and the ideas of a “big family” and individual empowerment (i.e., empowering oneself to overcome challenges) are important resources for immigrants when starting a new life in Hong Kong. However, the controversial image of SG might also have negative effects on SG members’ effort at integration.

**Keywords:** Soka Gakkai; Hong Kong; migrant integration

## 1. Introduction

The demographics of Hong Kong are characterized by a huge population of ethnic Chinese and diverse ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup> The continuous movement of people into and out of Hong Kong affects the population dynamics of this small city. The migration patterns and demographics of Hong Kong have attracted a lot of scholarly attention. Many provide excellent analysis of the ties between migration and the issues of identity, integration, and adaptation, but less is discussed from the perspective of religion (e.g., [Sussman 2010](#); [Salaff et al. 2010](#); [Shen and Dai 2006](#)). In particular, the possible role of religion in the social integration of migrants into Hong Kong society remains a topic of further exploration. This paper attempts to fill this gap by focusing on the relationships between religion and migration in Hong Kong, using a new religion, Soka Gakkai (SG), as a case study.

Religion and migration has been a topic widely discussed in the United States, the “nation of immigrants”, as the interplay between ethnic groups and faith has strong social, economic, and political implications. In *The Churching of America*, for example, [Finke and Stark \(1992\)](#) showed how parishes are dominated by ethnic groups in cities where ethnic neighborhoods are solid, linking the factor of ethnic minorities to the complexity of religious development in the States. From an economic perspective, [Iannaccone \(1998\)](#) reflected the delicate relationships between religious participation and religious

<sup>1</sup> In 2016, Hong Kong had a total population of 7,336,585, of which 92% were ethnic Chinese and 8.0% ethnic minorities. The latter comprised Filipinos (2.5%), Indonesians (2.1%), White (0.8%), Indians (0.5%), Nepalese (0.3%), Pakistanis (0.2%), Thais (0.1%), Japanese (0.1%), Other Asian (0.3%) and Others (0.9%) (2016 Population By-census, [Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong 2016](#)).

contributions, and sex, age, income, etc. These studies show changing demographics as a result of migration will lead to changes in religious behaviors of a particular society and further complicate the dynamics of religious markets.

In the discussion of migrant integration into local settings, it seems that most scholars agree on the positive linkages between religion and the construction of ethnic identity. They contend that religion helps immigrants to establish their identity, community, and settle in the new land. In particular, [Wuthnow and Hackett \(2003\)](#) argued that religion has allowed newcomers to cross social boundaries and forged ties with the people, creating linkage with the host society and a form of identity. [Yang's \(1999\)](#) analysis of Chinese immigrants in America showed how the church has become a place where Chinese can selectively assimilate into American society while simultaneously preserving Chinese values and cultures. [Baumann and Salentin \(2006\)](#) also highlighted the role of religion in the integration process because religion may foster the building of social networks and a sense of community belonging. Even if immigrants are faced with an unfamiliar environment and challenges of settling in an unfamiliar environment, religions in some way “ease the difficulty of adjustment in the host country” ([Bonifacio and Angeles 2010](#), p. 1).

There has been a lack of academic consensus on the definition of integration. Some sociologists (e.g., [Gordon 1964](#)) suggest integration as a form of assimilation. Supporters of this idea believe that ethnic groups would become part of the mainstream culture, sharing similar norms and values embraced by the “larger society” over generations. However, assimilation theory tends to focus too much on the homogenization of society and overlook the fact that integration is more than a one-way straight-line progress. Therefore, this paper defines integration as “the process by which individuals become members of society and their multilevel and multiform participation within it” ([Anthias et al. 2013](#), p. 3). Following this line of thought, it could be argued that the success of migrant integration depends whether migrants receive enough resources, both tangible or intangible, that could facilitate their participation in society in general. For example, information about job (for participation in workplace), guidance about legal rights (for participation in civil society), emotional support (for maintaining mental health for social and economic participation), social relationships (for participation in social activities), etc. In this sense, it is interesting to see whether the resources offered by a religion may be helpful in promoting migrants’ participation within a society.

The relationships between religion and migrants in the Hong Kong context have been examined by a few scholars. For example, [Cruz \(2010\)](#) discussed how Christian groups may facilitate the incorporation of Filipina domestic workers (DHs) into Hong Kong society by offering social activities, hotline services, counseling services, legal advice, leadership training, livelihoods courses, and shelters for distressed DHs. [Constable \(2010\)](#) also suggested many Hong Kong religious organizations are involved in providing support to migrant workers, and that the church has been playing an important role in the lives of many of Hong Kong’s Filipino migrant worker activists. Besides, [Knowles and Harper \(2009\)](#), p. 124) revealed that the mosque in Hong Kong supports new Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and, increasingly, from northern Nigeria, Somalia, and other Muslim African countries by providing spiritual support, refreshments, and running supplementary Koran classes, and Arabic classes.

However, beyond church and mosque, there appears to be a gap in the research of the roles played by other religions in the process of migrant integration. As [Bonifacio and Angeles \(2010\)](#), p. 1) argued, “our understanding of the role of religion and faith-based beliefs in the integration of diverse groups of immigrants [ . . . ] seems a bare scratch on the surface of scholarly discourse”. In view of this, this paper intends to offer a modest contribution to the study of migrant integration from the perspective of religion using a Japanese new religious movement (NRM), Soka Gakkai, as a case study.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> According to Helen Hardacre, “new religions” (shinko shukyo) appeared around 1800 in Japan. They have a great variety of doctrines, but “share a unity of aspiration and worldview significantly different from those of secular society and from the so-called established religions”. They emphasize “this-worldly-benefits” by improving spiritual health, family relationships,

The globalization of SG has drawn a lot of scholarly attention in the US, Brazil, Britain, Italy, and Southeast Asia, US, and Britain (e.g., [Metraux 1988, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2010](#); [Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994](#); [Dobbelaere 2001](#); [Machacek and Wilson 2000](#); [Hammond and Machacek 1999](#)). These studies focus on the development of SG in different regions and argue how SG has applied the Buddhist concept of *zuiho-bini* (spread of Buddhism according to local cultures) in the localization process. In USA, for example, SG meetings are held on Sunday to suit the church-going habit of westerners, whereas meetings are usually scheduled on weekdays in Japan. In this way, [Hammond and Machacek \(1999, p. 282\)](#) argue that SG's "tranquil experience in the USA lies in SGI USA's compliance with American social institutions and a history of reforms designed to make this Japanese religion look as American as possible". Hammond and Machacek also touched upon the issue of migrants in their study. They found that, in the early development of SGI-USA, it mainly targeted Japanese immigrants and SG acted as a community to connect Japanese immigrants together. Meetings were held in traditional ways in which "participants spoke Japanese, removed their shoes at the door, and knelt on the floor to chant" and sat "in sex segregated groups" ([Hammond and Machacek 1999, pp. 25, 98](#)). Their study hints that SGI-USA has a role in helping Japanese migrants maintain their Japanese traditions and religious identity in a society where Christian cultures are prevalent.

In his case study of SGI-Canada, Metraux also held a similar argument. He wrote "the sizeable growth of immigrants have left any Canadians with an uncomfortable feeling that they are without firm roots and a group to belong to" ([Metraux 1996, p. 81](#)). Especially, Canada is a major educational center which attracts many overseas students, who usually come to Canada on their own and are living separately from their families and friends. Some see SGI-Canada as a "home" for them to make friends, where they can find a sense of home and community. In addition, SGI-Canada has tried to portray itself as a migrant-welcoming organization by emphasizing its multi-ethnic memberships with people of different origins and colors. This strategy seems to be rather effective as seen from the large number of foreign immigrants in SGI-Canada (45% white, 24% Asian and 19% black people) ([Metraux 1996, p. 82](#)).

The case of Singapore Soka Gakkai (SSA) is also worth discussing. One of the characteristics of SSA, as pointed out by [Metraux \(2001, p. 47\)](#), is a strong sense of national pride of Singapore. Singapore is a young nation that gained its independence in 1965. The Singaporean government therefore puts a lot of effort into build a national identity. Numerous ceremonies and festivals are organized by the government to develop a sense of patriotism among its young citizens. To echo with the national policy, SSA portrays itself as an organization which promotes patriotic values. Its members have been active in The National Day Parade and Singapore Youth Festival. Singaporean members, especially the young ones, believe that they are working for the better future of society. In fact, Singapore has attracted many new migrants working in the financial sector as it has established itself as an international financial center. SSA may appeal to these new migrants who agree with the "Singaporean identity", which emphasizes excellence and hard-working.

From the above case studies, we can see SG is related to migrant integration in different ways. It may serve as an ethnic community preserving the traditions and a sense of identity of migrants (Japanese migrants in early SGI-USA), as a multi-ethnic community where migrants of different origins feel free to get together (SGI-Canada), or as a facilitator to help migrants identify themselves with the values and identities in that country (SSA). These studies suggest that SGI branches show different strategies in migrant integration as these regions possess different social, cultural, and demographic features. The reason for choosing HKSGI in this study is therefore to fill the gap in the studies of SGI

---

and material prosperity. The founders of these religions are always charismatic individuals who attract followers through faith healing (see [Hardacre \(1986\)](#)).

and migrant integration, where the number of Japanese migrants and Mainland Chinese migrants is increasing due to rapid cross-broader economic activities and migrations.

In addition to the above reason, the amounts of research on SG in the Chinese contexts in general remains inadequate. Through the case study of HKSGI, we may understand the internationalization strategies of SG in the Chinese settings.

This paper starts with an introduction of the immigration patterns in Hong Kong, which is followed by an overview of SG development in Japan and Hong Kong. Then, it discusses how the resources provided by HKSGI may facilitate the integration of Japanese and Mainland Chinese immigrants. In particular, this paper argues that the informational, social, and spiritual support provided by HKSGI, particularly the ideas of a “big family” and individual empowerment, are important resources for immigrants when starting a new life in Hong Kong.

## 2. Immigration Patterns in Hong Kong

Many migration theories hold that working opportunity and higher wages are one of the main incentives for migrant workers to travel to a new environment (e.g., [Ravenstein 1885](#); [Sjaastad 1962](#); [Todaro 1969](#); [Piore 1979](#); [Sassen 1988](#)).<sup>3</sup> Hong Kong has been one of the popular destinations for a large amount of workers from the Philippines, Thailand, Nepal, Indonesia, and other less developed regions to seek jobs. For instance, at the end of 2017, there were 369,651 domestic helpers working in Hong Kong, of whom about 43.2% were from Indonesia and 54.4% from the Philippines ([Hong Kong Government 2017](#), p. 117). According to Asian Development Bank (Asian Development Bank), the largest migrant-sending country to Hong Kong is the Philippines (142,000), followed by Indonesia (108,000), United States (not available), Thailand (30,000), and other Southeast Asian countries such as India, Japan, and Nepal ([Asian Development Bank 2006](#), p. 4). The remittances they send to their homelands not only can improve their families’ living standards, but also provide the labor exporting country with steady inflows of external income.<sup>4</sup> After working in Hong Kong for an average of five (Indonesia) to eight (the Philippines) years, most of these temporary workers return to their homeland after fulfilling their role of *dekasegi* (working away from home) ([Asian Development Bank 2006](#), p. 56). Some may wish to reside permanently in Hong Kong after seven years of stay.<sup>5</sup>

Another type of migrant workers is self-motivated individuals and expatriate workers sent by their host companies to stay in Hong Kong on a temporary or semi-permanent basis. In fact, many Japanese migrants in Hong Kong fall into this category. For instance, the number of Japanese nationals who work or live in Hong Kong in 2017 amount to 25,527, of whom 17,834 work in the business sector, 49 in media, 1256 are self-employed, and 691 are students, researchers, or teachers ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan 2018](#)). These Japanese workers may return to their home country after a short period of stay, or eventually settle permanently in Hong Kong. Two well-established Japanese communities can be found in Whampoa Po and Taikoo Shing where Japanese restaurants and shops run by ethnic Japanese can be easily seen. The Hong Kong Japanese Club, and the Japan Society of Hong Kong are organizations that aim to promote cultural exchanges between Hong Kong and Japanese people, but less is concerned about the social and religious well-being of Japanese migrants.

Migration in Hong Kong is also characterized by the emerging population inflow of Chinese from the Mainland in recent decades. As of 2017, there were 47,000 Mainland Chinese who moved to

<sup>3</sup> [Ravenstein’s \(1885\)](#) laws of migration (economic opportunity), [Sjaastad \(1962\)](#) and [Todaro’s \(1969\)](#) neoclassical economic theories (global supply and demand of labor), [Piore’s \(1979\)](#) segmented labor-market theory (immigrants to fill secondary market), and [Sassen’s \(1988\)](#) world-systems theory (migration as a by-product of capitalism) offer some explanations to the large amount of foreign workers in Hong Kong.

<sup>4</sup> According to the [Asian Development Bank \(2006\)](#), Filipino and Indonesian migrants living and working in Hong Kong transact an average of US\$300 each time with an annual average number of transactions of 11 and 15, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> The original Japanese word *dekasegi* (出稼ぎ) means “working away from home”.

Hong Kong with the one-way permit (Hong Kong Government 2017, p. 286).<sup>6</sup> These new immigrants mainly come for work, education, and family reunion, but they also constitute a major proportion of Hong Kong's impoverished underclass (Law and Lee 2006). Governmental surveys reveal that many of them still receive little education and engage in low-wage jobs. According to a report released by the Research Office of the Legislative Council Secretariat (2018), the median monthly family income of new-arrival households is HK\$ 17,500 in 2016, while that of all households is HK\$ 25,000. The same report also suggests the poverty rate of new-arrival households is 30.1%, compared to 14.7% for all households.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the public impression on Mainland Chinese immigrants varies among Hong Kong people. Some criticized them as unproductive and dependent on social welfare and public assistance, and even label them as "locusts" (which travel great distances, rapidly stripping fields and greatly damaging crops), whereas some employers recognized them as hardworking and trustworthy.<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of the forms of migration, new immigrants may have to face new challenges in the unfamiliar environments. Separated from their homelands and detached from the original social networks and cultural settings, they lose the attachment once they enjoyed and may feel lonely, lost, and long for various forms of support. Before examining how SG may function as a source of social and spiritual support to new immigrants, the following offers an overview of the history and teachings of SG and the methodologies adopted in this study.

### 3. Overview of SG

The steady and non-threatening patterns of migration, institutions of religious diversity, and various social structures and organizations have promoted religious harmony in Hong Kong (Bouma and Singleton 2004). Religious pluralism not only gives rise to the flourishing of indigenous religions but also the steady development of new religious movements (NRMs). SG is one of the latter, and its growth in Hong Kong is partly attributed to the open religious market and a high degree of religious freedom enjoyed by Hong Kong residents and religious producers.

Tracing back to the Kamakura period of Japan, series of disasters (domestic strife, natural disasters, and Mongolian invasion) that hit the island country made Nichiren (1222–1282), the founder of Nichiren Buddhism, subscribe to the belief that Japanese people were living in the age of *mappo* 末法 (the age of degeneration of the Dharma) when people turned away from the saving truths of Buddhist scripture and turned to evil and violence (Kirimura 1980, p. xxiii). He prescribed a simple mantra, *nam-myoho-renge-kyo* 南無妙法蓮華經 (literally meaning "devotion to the mystic law of the Lotus Sutra", also known as *daimoku* 題目) and a mandala, *Gohonzon* 御本尊. Based on his teachings, all individual may attain perfect enlightenment through chanting *daimoku* (Kirimura 1980).

In 1928, the Japanese educator Makiguchi Tsunesaburō became a truthful believer of Nichiren Buddhism. Two years later, he founded the education reformist group Soka Kyōiku Gakkai (SKG, literally "Value-Creation Education Society") to promote the reformation of the educational system in Japan. The group criticized the educational system at that time for being centered too much on obedience and rote memorization and promoted critical thinking as a key to achieve personal goals and interests. He thought that students should also be taught to pursue values and make positive contributions to society (Nishihara 2008, p. 54).

After World War Two, Toda Josei reorganized SKG by dropping the word *kyoiku* (education) from the name and formed SG. An organization originally with an emphasis on educational reform became

<sup>6</sup> "One way-Permit" is a document issued by the People's Republic of China allowing residents of mainland China to leave the mainland for permanent residence in Hong Kong. Before 1995, 75 permits were issued on a daily basis. The number has since increased to 150.

<sup>7</sup> New Chinese migrants had often been associated with the image of being poor and uneducated. In recent years, however, the number of Chinese migrants who belong to the well-off class is increasing. Some of them make investments in real estate and start businesses in Hong Kong.

<sup>8</sup> While the term has been widely used in anti-Chinese movements in Hong Kong, many criticized it for being discriminative and fueling hatred and intolerance.

a religion following the teaching of *Lotus Sutra* and Nichiren Buddhism. Under the Leadership of Toda, the organization successfully recruited over one million households in the postwar era through vigorous recruitment strategies known as *shakubuku* (approaching strangers in public places and coaxing them to visit SG meetings), and massive rallies, and parades (Yano and Shimada 2010, p. 81). In the 1960s, Toda's successor Ikeda Daisaku successfully developed this Japanese religion into a world religion by establishing Soka Gakkai International (SGI) with its headquarters located in Shinjuku, Japan, to coordinate overseas branches in North and South America, Europe, and Asia.

Starting with only 15 members in 1961, the membership of Hong Kong Soka Gakkai International (HKSGI) has reached 50,000 nowadays (HKSGI 2011). The steady growth in membership may be attributed to its localization policies and recruitment strategies (Ng 2012), as well as the socio-political and religious background of Hong Kong. The organization has also built a very strong grass-roots network by organizing different cultural and social activities. Recently, the organization has successfully recruited more social elites, such as businessmen, lawyers, professors, and doctors; their participation further legitimizes SG development in Hong Kong.

Nowadays, HKSGI has eleven community headquarters all over Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and New Territory. Nine headquarters serve the ethnic Chinese, one serves non-Chinese English speakers including Filipinos, Indians, Americans and British, and the remaining one serves Japanese speakers. HKSGI runs four cultural centers in Kowloon Tong, Causeway Bay and Tuen Mun, and Sai Wan Ho; one kindergarten in Kowloon Tong; and a recreational center in Tai Po.

#### 4. Research Methods

HKSGI shows a diverse ethnic make-up in its membership. From the latest figure, there are around 400 Japanese and 400 English-speaking foreigners among the 50,000 members (HKSGI 2011). The number of members migrating from Mainland China, however, is not available. The 400 Japanese members in the 11th headquarters can roughly be classified into three categories: (1) first generation that joined SG in Japan and settled in Hong Kong; (2) second and third generation who were born in Hong Kong, mostly from SG family; and (3) few Japanese exchange students and temporary workers who only stay in Hong Kong for a short period of time. Due to the high proportion of ethnic Japanese registered to the 11th headquarters, it is one of the main focuses of my study. However, the facts that Mainland Chinese immigrants are assigned to the first to ninth headquarters based on their place of residence in Hong Kong, and that the organization does not record whether members came from Mainland, pose difficulty in locating this group of people. Therefore, my study focuses on the Tuen Mun Cultural Center, which mainly serves members living in Tin Shui Wai and Tuen Mun, where the number of Mainland Chinese immigrants are said to be high.

The methodology adopted in this paper includes participant observations in SG activities, semi-structured interviews of SG members and staff conducted from 2009 to 2011, additional follow-up interviews from 2011 to 2015, and analysis of official publications of SG. In this paper, pseudonyms are used for all informants.

#### 5. HKSGI: A Home for New Immigrants?

SG views migration as one of the many common social phenomena nowadays which volume, scale, and speed are further catalyzed by modernization and globalization. To Ikeda, however, migration may also be harmful to human civilizations. He is concerned about the "intolerance based on ethnic or national differences, often aggravated by international movements of population" which "has been the cause of conflict and criminal violence, and many societies are experiencing severe divisions" (Ikeda 2006). On this account, Ikeda envisions a sense of global citizenship that promotes an interconnecting humanity bonded by Buddhist teachings. He believes that "the only way to create global unity is to build a world civilization linking together all humanity which, while preserving and making positive use of local traditions" (Ikeda 1981–1987, pp. 32–33). To him, Buddhist ideas are the important antidote to the problems associated with migration.

At the organization level, however, HKSGI does not have a specific supporting system or recruitment strategy targeting new immigrants. This point is clearly and repeatedly mentioned by both SG staffs and members.

HKSGI does not have special preferences in recruiting or supporting new immigrants. Our organization sees every human being equally. And our members are encouraged to promote SG teachings to all people regardless of their ethnicity and social status. (Interview with Miss K, SG staff)

HKSGI is not providing support to migrant at all because it is a matter related to the laws and administration of a nation. And we, SG members do not specifically target new immigrants. (Interview with Mr. I, SG member)

We do not offer material or financial support to them [new immigrants]. We help them through religious means, such as chanting *daimoku* and sharing Buddhist teachings. Encouraging them to apply the teachings of SG to their life is the fundamental way to achieve real happiness instead of offering temporary monetary or material assistance. (Interview with Miss Y, SG staff)

In addition, SG applies what Dawson (1998, p. 68) called the “friends recruit friends, family members each other, and neighbors recruit neighbors” strategy. Only for the very close people and at the very appropriate timing (when they are stressed out or suffering illness), members will try to introduce SG to them.

The official stance and recruitment policy stated above tend to suggest one thing: SG plays a passive role in the integration of new immigrants. In this paper, I try to offer some arguments supporting the opposite. I want to discuss three *resources* provided by HKSGI that Japanese and Mainland Chinese new immigrants consider useful in promoting their participation and integration in Hong Kong society: (1) promoting a strong network between local and overseas SG branches and members; (2) providing religious support; and (3) upholding the ideas of a “big family”, human dignity, and human revolution.

### 5.1. A Strong Network among SG Branches and Members

The efficiency of migrant integration into a new environment depends strongly on whether supporting agents and social networks are available when one arrives in the host country. In the case of SGI, communication networks among SG branches in Japan and overseas are very well-established, which ensure that the movements of members are informed to the new branches in advance so that the concerned members will be taken good care of in the new place. In this way, whenever there is a foreign member going to Hong Kong, the headquarters in Hong Kong will get informed and members can get prepared to offer support to the new-coming members from the very first day of their arrival. The following interviews with Mr. I and Miss T show how such a strong network among SG branches and assistance from local members were helpful during their stay in Hong Kong.

Mr. I is an ethnic Japanese who was born in a SG family in Japan. His parents registered him as a SG member when he was only a child. In his younger days, although he actively participated in SG meetings and cultural activities, he was not a devoted believer of SG and sometimes even doubted whether chanting could really achieve personal goals. At the age of eighteen, he failed his university entrance examination. Since then, he chanted more frequently and studied hard in the hope of entering a good university. A year later, he successfully passed the entrance examination of Soka University, a university affiliated with SG. Believing it was the reward of his intense chanting, he became more devoted to SG teachings and activities.

In 2002, Mr. I came to Hong Kong and started teaching Japanese language in a few local universities and several Japanese language schools. Prior to his departure from Japan, he consulted some senior members and SG staff and was given a reference letter that proved his SG membership.

The staff also gave him the contacts of HKSGI, therefore he was able to inform the Hong Kong staff of the date and details of his arrival, and exchange some personal information for future contacts. Once Mr. I arrived in Hong Kong, he was able to resume his religious practice and make new friends within the new organization quickly thanks to the smooth transition of his membership.

Moreover, Japanese members in the 11th headquarters has formed a strong network and community for promoting mutual support, such as sharing jobs and housing information, which Gordon (2009, p. 259) also found in SG Japan. From this network Mr. I received information about housing and could eventually share an apartment with another Japanese SG member (coincidentally, he was also a Japanese language teacher) with a lower rent where they lived for almost a year.

The 11th headquarters is also a place where he could communicate effectively with other Japanese members in his mother tongue, and exchange important news and useful information about living in Hong Kong, easing most of the inconvenience he encountered. The SG community as a source of information is especially important for Japanese members like Mr. I who have not yet mastered the Cantonese and English languages. Similarly, when Mr. I went to the U.S. to further his studies in 2008, he could receive support from the American members, which was made possible because of the strong network among SG branches and members.<sup>9</sup>

Miss T, who is also ethnic Japanese, shared a similar experience with Mr. I. When she was an undergraduate student at Soka University, she went on a one-year exchange at a local university in Hong Kong in 2010. She received a reference letter from the SG branch office in Japan to which she had belonged and contacted the Hong Kong branch office before she set off. When she arrived in Hong Kong, members of the HKSGI Student Division, where college students also belong to, were helpful in providing her with various kinds of assistance, such as taking her to different spots and teaching her about Hong Kong cultures, and a little bit of Cantonese language skills. According to another SG staff that I interviewed, there is also a “supporter system” for newcomers. Supporters are local Hong Kong SG members recruited from the organization who usually live in the same district as the newcomers. They are responsible for informing and reminding the newcomers of the meeting time and places and providing spiritual support by sharing Buddhist teachings. Eventually, some supporters and newcomers develop a close friendship, going out together very often for social activities (e.g., refreshments, dining out, and going to the movies) and giving a helping hand to each other when necessary (e.g., going to a clinic together).

The majority of members in the 11th headquarters of HKSGI are ethnic Japanese.<sup>10</sup> Having gone through similar adaptation process, these *senpais* (seniors) can often give useful advice to their new-coming *kouhais* (juniors). For instance, Mr. O, a senior Japanese member working in the SG Translation Department, and Publication Bureau of HKSGI noted:

In our gathering, members share their worries with others. These worries can sometimes be spiritual and sometimes practical, for example, being unemployed. After listening to their worries, we will offer our own opinions. Depending on the situations, some members may ask the person ‘what kind of job can you do?’ and even introduce a job to him. (Interview with Mr. O, SG staff)

He also added that some Japanese members complained to him over “everyday life” issues in Hong Kong. For instance, a member asked Mr. O “Cantonese food is too spicy and oily. What can I do?” He told the member that “no specific Buddhist teaching can help you solve this problem”. He then asked the member to “try his best to adapt to local cultures” and suggested that he “go and eat Japanese

<sup>9</sup> According to another Japanese informant, there are actually many ways to transfer membership from one branch to another, depending on different regions and circumstances. In his case, he had to return his SG membership card to the current branch, which was then sent to the new branch on behalf of him. Regardless of the methods, the important idea behind this is that new members would be able to resume their religious and social life in a new place as soon as possible.

<sup>10</sup> There are also a few ethnic Chinese who are the spouses of the Japanese members in the 11th headquarters.

food” because there are plenty Japanese restaurants available in Hong Kong. Their conversation then moved naturally to the discussion of where they could find the best Japanese cuisines such as *ramen* and *sushi* or nice *izakaya* (Japanese pub) in Hong Kong. They also talked about the cultural shocks they encountered and what it is meant to be living in Hong Kong as Japanese people. These conversations did not necessarily have any conclusion, but most members, especially newcomers, looked relieved after attending these sharing sessions.

From this example, we can see the difficulties experienced by members range from the most basic needs, such as housing and job, to something more casual, like appetite. The practical advice from these *senpais* are helpful for these newcomers to solve daily problems. What is more important is probably the presence of someone who are experienced and could understand the difficulties facing the newcomers because they all shared life journeys, cultural identities, and religious backgrounds. In this sense, the Japanese community in HKSGI also serves as a source of reaffirmation of identity for Japanese members whose cultural identity might have been challenged in their everyday life in Hong Kong.

Although Japanese SG members in HKSGI may often rely on their Japanese counterparts and *senpais* for guidance, it is unlikely the 11th headquarters will become an ethnic enclave that hinders their interactions with Hong Kong people and the wider society. It is because HKSGI is an organization that actively promotes social engagement and cultural exchanges. For instance, Ikeda, the Honorary President of SGI, strongly believes in the power of dialogue in enhancing mutual understanding and solving conflicts among different civilizations. In *Embracing the Future*, he wrote “the distances between people need not act as barriers that wound and harm. Rather, these very differences among cultures and civilizations should be recognized and appreciated as creating richer value for all” (Ikeda 2009, p. 160). Practicing what he believes, Ikeda has been traveling to different places to conduct peace dialogue with various renowned political (e.g., Zhou Enlai), cultural (e.g., Jin Yong), and academic figures (e.g., Bryan Wilson) (Bauhinia Magazine 2007).

Following Ikeda’s lead, HKSGI highly encourages its fellow members to link up with and spread the teachings of SG to local people through dialogue. Japanese members in Hong Kong are also mobilized to participate in many public activities, such as exhibitions and cultural festivals, in which they have many opportunities to cooperate and work with local Hong Kong people and other foreign members.

The following is an interview with Miss M, an ethnic Japanese who has lived in Hong Kong for almost 20 years. Miss M was assigned to lead the 1600 person choir in the Cultural Festival 2011. Since the choir is composed of various sub-groups containing members from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Japan, and South Korea, she was worried that the huge size of the choir would make it difficult to coordinate, and that language barriers would cause misunderstanding among members. To take on this challenge, Miss M and the choir members formed the “confidence-filling station”, a temporary group for members to get to know each other, chant, and share ideas, to unite members of different ethnicities and burst their confidence to work for the best outcome.

During the preparation, Miss M travelled to different headquarters regularly to meet with various sub-groups of the choir. She wanted to make sure that performers from different districts, divisions, or groups were delivered the correct instructions, thereby minimizing any mistake or confusion that might arise due to misunderstanding and miscommunication. Eventually, the large and multi-national choir was able to “turn the poison into medicine” (convert risks into opportunities) and accomplished this difficult task.

From the perspective of SG, the success of the choir in the cultural festival may as well be attributed to the power of dialogue, which brought culturally diverse members together to strive for the same goal. Believing in the power of dialogue as a key to peace and harmony may also be one of the reasons why many Japanese members are more than willing to interact with the local communities through education (e.g., teaching Japanese language), business (e.g., opening Japanese restaurants), and participating in voluntary activities (e.g., Japanese festivals). Isolating themselves by forming an

ethnic enclave is not the case among Japanese members in HKSGI, although it may be true for some other ethnic-religious groups.

It is also worth noting that HKSGI organizes peace exhibitions and cultural seminars at local universities on a regular basis. SG members visit various universities and share with local students and teachers about the importance of peace. While no direct evidence is available at this time, this kind of outreach activities might have the potential to serve as a bridge between members and the larger Hong Kong society as members may build new social networks beyond the SG circle. The effects of participating in outreach activities on the social inclusion of Japanese members in Hong Kong society is another topic that needs to be explored in the future.

In short, the support Japanese members gain in the 11th headquarters is mostly emotional and religious, and in the form of experiences and information (e.g., housing and job). Senior members can help frustrated members through giving guidance and sharing. The organization also encourages Japanese members to bring their skills into full play by mobilizing them to participate in various SG activities. Through working and having dialogues with Hong Kong members, they understand better the local cultures and expand their social networks beyond the Japanese community. Although HKSGI enjoys high autonomy in terms of administration, management, recruitment, and finance, it still maintains a close relationship with the Japanese headquarters that allows rapid information exchanges. This communication mechanism, together with the supporter-system, ensure members who travel overseas are taken good care of by the local SG branches.

## 5.2. Religious Supports

Immigration can be considered as a “theologizing experience” since immigrants often make sense of the alienation that is inherent in migration in religious terms (Smith 1978). Casanova also argued that “The uprootedness which accompanied emigration meant that ‘faith’ could no longer be taken for granted. It had to be actively and voluntarily ‘kept’ or ‘revived’” (Casanova 1980, p. 177), and that “the uprootedness it entails from traditional ways, the uncertainty of the journey and the anomic experience of being strangers in a new land calls forth a religious response” (Casanova 2007, p. 66). Similarly, SG members seek explanations for their new adventures and definitions of identities in the new place from the teachings of Nichiren and Ikeda, which eventually leads to the enhancement of faith towards SG. The following presents some examples of how SG teachings might serve as important resources for members to facilitate their new journeys in Hong Kong.

Lee Kon Sau, an ethnic Japanese whose original name was Kajiura Hisashi, was the president of HKSGI from 1966 to 2009. Lee first came to Hong Kong as a university exchange student at New Asia College, Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) in 1964. The two-year university life in Hong Kong enabled Lee to acquire knowledge of Hong Kong culture and Cantonese language. This experience also laid a good groundwork for the next mission appointed to Lee in 1966: to lead SG development in Hong Kong. Motivated by Ikeda in 1974, he changed his name to Lee Kon Sau, which means “just became 35 years old” in Chinese (Lee 2009, p. 185). His familiarity with and respect for Cantonese dialects and cultures, as well as the social networks established with the locals, has facilitated his leadership in Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, promoting a new religious organization in a foreign environment is more challenging than just being an exchange student. When he recalls his life journey in Hong Kong (Lee 2009, p. 192), Lee quotes the words of Nichiren in *Risshōankokuron* (Treatise on securing the peace of the land through the establishment of the correct, 1260): “A blue fly, if it clings to the tail of a thoroughbred horse, can travel ten thousand miles, and the green ivy that twines around the tall pine can grow to a thousand feet” (Nichiren 2003, p. 17). It seems that the vitality of blue fly and green ivy that allows them to travel a long distance and develop to the fullest, which also symbolizes the unbounded potential and power of life, has been one of the many Nichiren’s words that maintained his faith throughout his 45-year mission of *kosen-rufu* (promotion of Buddhism). Lee’s life journey in

Hong Kong also resembles Nichiren's vivid analogy of the blue fly and green ivy, as he carried the seed of Nichiren Buddhism from Japan and cultivated it in new soils.

Mr. I, a SG member mentioned above, regarded Nichiren's teachings in *Gosho* (the individual and collected writings of Nichiren) as important resources for him to "define" himself when he was lost and regain confidence in the time of difficulties. "Whenever I have doubts in my life, especially when I just arrived in Hong Kong and everything was unfamiliar to me, chanting and reading Nichiren's teachings helped me a lot" said Mr. I. His favorite chapter is "On Rebuking Slander of the Law and Eradicating Sins":

I am praying that, no matter how troubled the times may become, the *Lotus Sutra* and the ten demon daughters will protect all of you, praying as earnestly as though to produce fire from damp wood, or to obtain water from parched ground. (Nichiren 2003, p. 444)

Neither producing fire from damp wood nor obtaining water from parched ground is an easy task in reality, but Mr. I believes that through chanting *daimoku* with a strong determination to convert the impossible into possible, he could overcome challenges in his life and stand up from where he falls. At the time of the interview, he was also planning to have three children after getting married to his Hong Kong girlfriend in the near future. In the midst of uncertainty and countless challenges, Mr. I referred to the teachings of Ikeda and Nichiren for a source of power to stay optimistic about his future.

SG teachings are also important guidance for Japanese people who are starting business in Hong Kong. The experience of Mr. H provides us an illustration in this regard (Lung 2011, pp. 22–23). Mr. H was ethnic Japanese who joined SG in Japan when he was two years old. In 1989, he traveled to Hong Kong with his wife and started working in a sushi restaurant. After a long period of planning and intensive chanting, he successfully opened his own sushi restaurant in 2002. He also attributed his recovery from heart disease to chanting *daimoku* and encouragement from other SG members. After the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, however, Mr. H's sushi restaurant was badly affected because the public feared that food imported from Japan might be contaminated by radiation. Facing this unheralded business crisis, he resorted to chanting *daimoku* and the teachings of Nichiren and Ikeda. For example:

Employ the strategy of the *Lotus Sutra* before any other. (Nichiren 2003, p. 1001)

[The *Lotus Sutra* is] like a great physician who can change poison to medicine. (Nichiren 2003, p. 146)

The following two incidents made him believed that his intense chanting moved the *shoten-zenshin* 諸天善神 (gods in heaven): on 21 May, the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China Wen Jiabao visited Fukushima and ate the local agricultural products; on 23 May, Chief Executive of Hong Kong at that time Donald Tsang attended a banquet which promoted Japanese food safety. In the banquet, Tsang, who was not a fan of sushi, went to the sushi counter and ate one made by Mr. H. These events helped relieve some public fear of Japanese food products in Hong Kong and restore people's confidence in dining in Japanese restaurants. He concluded by quoting Ikeda's words: "the greater challenges and difficulties we face, the greater opportunity we have to grow." The teachings of SG and Ikeda have been, and will still be, the "medicine" for Mr. H whenever he faces difficulties in the future. From these examples, SG may serve as "confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and comfort suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries"<sup>11</sup> (Tweed 2006, p. 54).

---

<sup>11</sup> In the end of the American occupation of Japan in the 1950s, some American soldiers returned to the US with their Japanese wives. Some of these wives were SG believers and thus they brought their religion to the US. However, these Japanese wives

In the 1990s, when Hong Kong was about to be handed over from Britain to China, many Hong Kong people worried that the transition would bring about drastic changes to their lifestyles and living standards. There was even a mass migration to Canada, Australia, and the US because of the fears of the Communist takeover. Seeing the social unrest in Hong Kong, Ikeda encouraged members to be more optimistic, as he strongly believed that Hong Kong would have a better future after the transition of sovereignty because of this city's energy and vitality (Jin and Ikeda 1998, pp. 46–47). Ikeda's positive attitude toward Hong Kong's future eased the anxiety of many including the Japanese members, who decided to stay in Hong Kong because they realized this small city has already become not only their new homes, but also an important window to further promote SG to the world.

### 5.3. Ideology of *Itaidōshin*, *Dai-Ga-Ting*, and *Ningenkakumei*

SG emphasizes a sense of family and that members are spiritually linked together based on the idea of *itai-dōshin* 異体同心 and *dai-ga-ting* 大家庭. *Itai-dōshin*, literally meaning “different bodies, same soul”, emphasizes that the idea that different individuals could work together and create the desired outcome. This expression is constantly used by members and leaders in both private conversation and public speech.

*Dai-ga-ting*, or the big family analogy, which also symbolizes a sense of collectiveness and solidarity, is also frequently used by members to describe their organization as family-like. For example, “my life has improved a lot after joining the SG big family” or “I feel very warm in this big family,”. While Confucianism has been heavily shaken in the encounter with the modern age (Chan and Lee 1995) and the idea of a big family is losing some of its importance, SG fosters the community bonding and strengthens social cohesion by linking members under a family ideology. As Metraux (2000, p. 425) put it, “SG has succeeded in Asia also because it provides members with a new extended family”.

It also seems that the ideology of family and a sense of collectiveness are especially attractive to those new immigrants who are suddenly detached from their previous social networks. Many foreign members found it more enjoyable and comfortable to spend time in the HKSGI big family since members share the same beliefs and can mutually support each other through the discussion of Buddhist teachings. They also felt that the positive and warm atmosphere cultivated in SG contrasts with the competitive and individualistic environment found in their workplaces.

While SG does not particularly intend to convert new immigrants, it always encourages members to promote Buddhist teachings to their acquaintances such as neighbors, colleagues, classmates, relatives, etc. Derived from Mahayana Buddhism and embracing the teachings of *Lotus Sutra*, SG has the grand objective to improve the well-being of all people and enlighten all mankind, based on the idea of equity and that everyone bears the seed to enlightenment. When asked about their recruitment strategies, a SG staff noted:

We do not force our members to promote SG, like forcing them to convert ten people a day. No. We never do this. Instead, we hope our member would take the initiative to promote Buddhist teaching to people around them [ . . . ] it is because one can only gain real happiness by experiencing the power of Buddhist teachings. And we are happy to let more people experience this mighty power. (Interview with Miss K, SG staff)

---

were struggling in the new host country due to language barriers and cultural shocks. On 5 October 1960, Ikeda visited North America and encouraged these frustrated SG members to respond to the challenges positively by doing three specific things: to get a green card, to learn how to drive, and to learn English well. He believed that only by achieving these they could settle well in America. In this case, Ikeda's advice is practical and strategically targeting the difficulties facing the Japanese migrants. What is more important is also the symbolic meaning of Ikeda's visit. Another story happened in France in which a Japanese member was frustrated because he could not afford to buy his own house. Ikeda asked him to reflect on his intention of buying a house: whether it is just for his own happiness or for the spread of Buddhist teachings (as a meeting place for members). Significantly inspired by Ikeda's words, the member recognized that his goal of buying a house is for the latter purpose and he worked harder and finally realized this ultimate objective.

The aspiration of saving oneself and others has become a strong motivation for individual members to preach SG within their social networks. For instance, some Hong Kong members, especially women, promote SG teachings to new immigrants regardless of their ethnicity or social status, including those migrants from Mainland China. Many SG members approach these new immigrants kindly, showing their care and concern through home visits, gatherings (dining and chatting), and telephone calls. They then invite these potential converts to SG *zadankai* (sit-and-talk meeting) and “seminars of Buddhist teachings for new friends” if they show interests in the religion. Although no official record has been made available, the presence of Mainland Chinese immigrants in HKSGI, who include university students, businessmen, and housewives, is growing gradually.

In response to the increasing number of Mainland Chinese immigrants and the growing anti-Chinese sentiment in Hong Kong, a SG staff that I interviewed replied in a positive way:

We treasure the dignity of all human lives. We do not see Mainlanders as trouble-makers. Actually, people of other origins are causing some kinds of social problems in Hong Kong. We do not have a bias towards Mainlanders. Everyone bears the seed to enlightenment according to *Lotus Sutra*. (Interview with Miss K, SG staff)

The ideas of anti-discrimination and respect for human dignity found in *Lotus Sutra* are also emphasized in Toda's essay *Ningen-kakumei* (Human Revolution) and Ikeda's book series *Shin-ningen-kakumei* (New Human Revolution) (Ikeda 1995–2018). The concept *ningen-kakumei*, or human revolution, refers to the process of inner transformation from a self-concerned and egoistic “lesser self” toward an altruistic “greater self” capable of caring all humanity. Following this idea, the human revolution of all individuals will lead to the revolution of the whole society, and that the world will become the paradise depicted in Buddhist teachings.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, according to SG teachings, the path to human revolution is indiscriminate because everyone bears the seed to enlightenment.

Human revolution also bears a strong this-worldly orientation that promote positive thinking and actions to improve one's current conditions (Ikeda 1995–2018). According to SG teachings, any physical benefits brought by chanting are regarded as proofs of the ongoing process of human revolution in one's life and society. Therefore, chanting and working hard for this-worldly benefits such as wealth, health, and love is not only acceptable but also preferable as receiving benefits implies one's human revolution is in progress.

Throughout my study, I found that the idea of individual empowerment has played an important role in the life of some Mainland Chinese immigrants. Especially, the financially less-privileged tend to find the idea of human revolution especially charming, as they want to seek a religious explanation and solution to their current financial difficulties. They want to believe that the challenges facing them are just temporary and changeable, and that they have the potential to achieve a better life through hardworking and chanting.

Mrs. L, an ethnic Chinese who migrated from the Mainland to Hong Kong in 2001 for family union, was deeply attracted by SG teachings, especially the notion of individual empowerment. Living with her husband in Tin Shui Wai,<sup>13</sup> one could hardly see any sorrows from her face, even though the district is also known as the “city of sadness” for its high rate of unemployment, suicides, and spousal and child abuse. Mrs. L was satisfied with her family and social life, and she described her encounter

<sup>12</sup> “We can change our own lives and the world for the better. While the role of institutions or governments is important, change that starts with each person's life is seen as the surest way to tackle the problems facing the world in the 21st century. Many people feel hopeless about these issues, but SGI stresses that people have the power to change their circumstances, and its public education and outreach projects aim to inspire people and equip them with information that they can use to make a difference in their communities” (see [Soka Gakkai International 2018](#)).

<sup>13</sup> From 2000 to 2007, about twenty people died in six suicides in this city. For instance, in April 2004, a man attempted suicide after killing his wife, a Mainland Chinese migrant, and two children in a quarrel. In November 2007, a mother, also a Mainland Chinese migrant, tied her nine-year-old son and eleven-year-old daughter up and dropped them from the twenty-fourth floor. The mother, who committed suicide afterward, and the two children were found dead.

with SG as miraculous. Her life did not seem to be smooth in the early 2000s. Similar to many less well-off families, both she and her husband (local Hong Kong person) had to work in order to support the family. She recalled how the life of her family has changed after joining SG:

One day I was really stressed out because of money. Then one of my colleagues, who I didn't know she is a SG member before, came to comfort me and asked me to try chanting at home. Coincidentally, I received a small rise in salary after I chanted and the financial problem was somehow solved. Although it might seem mysterious to some people, I regard it as a miracle. After a few months of chanting and learning from my SG colleague, I found this religion can give me power and confidence, and I eventually became a member in 2003. My husband also tried chanting after seeing the positive changes in my life. The bad-tempered man is gradually becoming gentler. Our family is also filled with more "positive power". I understand that everything we have faced in the past, are facing now, or will face in the future, including happiness, sadness, difficulties, or success, is related to our *shukumei* (past fates). It is only through chanting, our fates can be transformed and life improved. (Interview with Mrs. L, SG member)

SG also teaches its members to stay confident, optimistic, and positive toward life when facing challenges. A SG staff said:

If they [new immigrants] face difficulties in a new environment, it doesn't mean that the problems will disappear when they return to their own countries; other problems may arise instead. It is only through practicing Buddhist teachings, one can transform their past fate and live a happy life. (Interview with Miss K, SG staff)

Convinced of the power of chanting *daimoku* in bringing about *shukumei-tenkan* 宿命転換 (transformation of one's fate), not few Mainland Chinese immigrants that I encountered in HKSGI believe they could achieve both spiritual and material happiness in this life. In the sharing session, they gratefully gave testimonies of how practicing SG teachings enabled them to overcome illnesses, get rid of frustration, improve family relationships, get better jobs, enter universities, etc. Although the benefits reported by members varied according to age, sex, occupations and some other attributes, these testimonies all pointed to and reinforced the very core belief of SG: all kinds of rewards are revelations and consequences of the transformation of past fates and the ongoing process of human revolution, as a result of chanting. In this way, SG provides a way for individuals to experience a sense of empowerment in their lives throughout the continuous process of chanting *daimoku*, transforming one's *shukumei*, and undergoing *ningen-kakumei*.

To take the discussion further, the participation of Mainland Chinese immigrants in HKSGI may be related to a "hunger for religion" among Mainland Chinese people. In his study on the religious market in China, Yang (2005, p. 432) argued that many Chinese people, who are struggling in "the wild market with existential anxieties", begin to seek "peace, security, and meaning in religion". However, religion remains a very controversial and sensitive issue in China and its religious market is still highly regulated. Although basic religious freedom is guaranteed according to the Constitution, religious seekers in China can only participate in the five approved religions (Christianity, Protestantism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam) under the umbrella of "patriotic associations". However, since these religions have strong communist color, and their operation and beliefs are subject to government regulation and censorship, some Chinese lost their interest in these "compromised" patriotic religions and take the high risk to join illegal underground religious groups. Contrary to China, in a free market such as Hong Kong, citizens are free to practice any form of religions and are not exposed to any fear or risk of government suppression. Living in a vibrant marketplace of religions founded on cultural pluralism and a high degree of religious freedom, these "spiritually starving" Mainland Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong are happy to shop in the religious market and try various religious goods and services in a censorship-free and fear-free environment.

Mrs. C, who migrated from the Mainland to Hong Kong in 1998, was uncomfortable with the busy city life and a sudden detachment from her original social networks. Born in the 1970s China, she also experienced the breakdown of social norms and moral values as a result of rapid modernization. To compensate for her spiritual lost, she started to explore the religious market.

I did have some interest in traditional Buddhism and Taoism, but they are quite detached from the society and social life. It is not so good for a new-migrant like me to further isolate myself from the society . . . Some of my housewives friends took me to a local Church. The people there were very nice and I could make friends inside the organization . . . I admit that Christianity is a good religion but I am not convinced by the idea that human beings can only achieve salvation in the afterlife . . . One day, I was invited by a friend to a Buddhist seminar organized by SG. I wasn't very interested at first and wanted to reject her. But my friend said "this seminar welcomes non-believers, and this religion is quite different from traditional Buddhism. So please come with me and try to experience something different". In fact, the meeting was not very different from Christian fellowship; people talked about how their lives are improved by chanting and so on. But what caught my attention is the confidence and happy faces shown by the members. When I knew that people can indeed achieve enlightenment in this life through human revolution, I realized that this religion may be the religion that I have been seeking. (Interview with Mrs. C, SG member)

A religion which is not yet approved to operate in China succeeded in attracting Mainland Chinese religious seekers in Hong Kong, whose religious demands had long been suppressed by the strict religious policies imposed by the Chinese government.<sup>14</sup>

In short, the idea of a big family, the emphasis of human dignity and respect for all mankind, and the idea of individual empowerment are three important backbones in SG teachings that make SG "approachable" and "attractive" to Mainland Chinese immigrants. SG teachings are world-affirming and suggest the possibility of changing one's misfortune, which is the source of faith and courage to live a better life in Hong Kong for many newcomers who tend to be less well-off. In this sense, the deprivation theory may also explain the conversion of some new immigrants to SG because of their marginalized social status. The stories of Mrs. L and Mrs. C further show that the idea of human revolution is particular charming as it provides a religious worldview to explain the causes of their misfortunes (i.e., bad karma) and offer them possible solutions to fulfill their potential and achieve happiness (transformation of bad karma into good ones through chanting).

## 6. Problems Facing SG Members

One of the challenges faced by SG members in their integration in Hong Kong society is the negative images associated with the organization. SG is often criticized for its relationship with the political party *Komeito* (Clean Government Party). In Japan, SG was involved in the controversial "freedom of the press incident" in which Komeito tried to obstruct Professor Fujiwara Hirotatsu (Meiji University) from publishing a book called *Soka Gakkai wo Kiru* (Critic of Soka Gakkai). The political participation of SG in politics is also criticized for violating the idea of separation of religion from politics stated in Article 20 of the Constitution of Japan. Apart from the connections between SG and politics in Japan, Ikeda Daisaku, the President of SGI, is criticized as a "fame and power seeker" for he has received honorary doctorate degrees from more than 380 universities.

<sup>14</sup> In addition, HKSGI refrains from proselytizing Mainland Chinese people who do not have a Hong Kong Identification Card (HKID), since it violates the verbal agreement Ikeda made with Zhou Enlai that SG would enter China only if it is permitted by the government and the people of China "welcome" them.

People in Hong Kong who are aware of the news of SG have a negative perception of HKSGI as well as its members. For instance, SG's donation to a local university stirred up a serious debate in 2009. Two donors wanted to donate 10 million Hong Kong dollars to a local university in Hong Kong. However, they also demanded the university to rename one of its student hostel to "Ikeda Daisaku Hostel". When this plan was announced, students, teachers, and alumni of that university expressed their concerns about the incentives of the donors and fear of political interventions from SG. At the end, the two donors and the university agreed to receive the donation but instead rename the hostel to "Sun Yat-se Hall" in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of Xinhai Revolution. Similarly, SG's donation to another local university in Hong Kong also drew opposition from their students and teachers because they feared SG was a "cult".

The negative perceptions on SG hold by some people in Hong Kong might become an obstacles in migrant integration. For instance, at least two migrants told me they have experienced being treated unfairly in workplace when their colleagues knew of their SG identity. Mr. I, for example, was mocked by his colleague because of his belief, asking why he chose to join a "strange" organization when there are so many other options such as Christianity. While many migrants I encountered in my study agreed that the various kinds of support from HKSGI can promote their participation in society, their SG identity, if exposed, may cause them unnecessary pressure in the workplace.

## 7. Conclusions

Existing SG literature on migrant integration has centered on the role of SGI in countries with high ethnic and cultural diversities. These studies hint that SGI branches in different demographic and cultural settings may adopt different strategies to respond to the needs of migrants. For instance, SGI may promote migrant integration by serving as: (1) an ethnic community to preserve migrants' traditional cultures (Japanese migrants in early SGI-USA); (2) a welcoming multi-ethnic community (SGI-Canada); or (3) a community fostering migrants' identification with the host society (SSA). However, the role of SGI on migrant integration in societies dominated by a single ethnic group is yet to be examined. Hong Kong, where the majority of population are ethnic Chinese and is witnessing an increase in the number of Japanese migrants and Mainland Chinese migrants due to rapid cross-broader economic activities and migrations, serves as an important case study to fill the gap in the current SG literatures.

Besides, existing studies on migrant integration in Hong Kong have primarily focused on the various kinds of support offered by churches and mosques. The role of other religions in the process remains unclear. This paper contributes to the studies of migration and integration by evaluating how non-Christian and non-Muslim groups in Hong Kong, such as SG, have played a part in the lives of new migrants.

This paper shows Japanese and Mainland Chinese migrants found the informational, social, and religious resources offered by HKSGI helpful in starting their new life in Hong Kong. The integration of Japanese members is largely facilitated by the Japanese-speaking community in the 11th headquarter of HKSGI. Japanese newcomers receive such information as housing, job, and food from their Japanese counterparts, which is useful for them to start a new life in Hong Kong. Emotional support from senior members is also important when they experience cultural shocks and seek reaffirmation of a Japanese identity. For Chinese newcomers who are frustrated about their current financial conditions, SG teachings, especially the idea of human revolution, which serves as a source of energy to improve their lives, are considered appealing and helpful. The idea of SG as a "big family" is also appealing to some newcomers who became detached from their original social networks.

In terms of religious beliefs, both Chinese and Japanese members believe that the challenges they encounter in Hong Kong are the consequences of their past fate, which can be transformed by chanting *daimoku*. The idea that one is able to convert bad karma into good ones is appealing to those who wish to unleash the burden of the past and starting a new life in Hong Kong. Moreover, SG teachings suggest that the path to human revolution is open for all, something all mankind can achieve through

chanting and hardworking regardless of ethnicities and origins. In this sense, openness of theology and simplicity of practice make SG look more approachable to religious seekers. On many occasions, the words of Nichiren and Ikeda are perceived by the migrants as sources of power to help them stay positive and confident when facing ups and downs in life.

Two important remarks can be made based on the above findings. First, instead of being a welcoming multi-ethnic community or fostering a new identity among migrants as in the case of the North America and Singapore, HKSGI's strategies on migrant integration are inclined to the provision of informational, social, and religious resources. In particular, the ideas of "a big SG family" and "human revolution" are constantly emphasized. In brief, as Japanese migrants in Hong Kong are usually dispatched workers or exchange students who stay in Hong Kong alone on a short-term basis, many see HKSGI as a "temporary" family for them where they can seek information, guidance, and emotional support. In this sense, HKSGI may play a similar role to SGI-USA in the social integration of Japanese migrants in the US. In addition, some Japanese migrants who encounter difficulties in their business or workplace, and Chinese migrants who are financially challenged, always find the idea of "human revolution" as a source of confidence for them to overcome these challenges.

Second, this case study also suggests HKSGI has applied different strategies in migrant integration compared to churches and mosques in Hong Kong. Christian and Islamic groups have organized specific programs targeting migrants in Hong Kong, such as counselling services, legal advice, leadership training, and language classes. On the other hand, HKSGI has not been engaged in these kinds of programs. One of the possible explanations is that the notion of "equity" in SG teachings may have hindered the organization from targeting a specific group of members in society. If everyone is equal and can achieve a better future through their own efforts, they may see no reason to purposely "single out" a group.

This study suggests the positive influences of HKSGI on migrant integrations. However, the image of SG may affect how SG members are received in Hong Kong. How HKSGI should improve its public image in Hong Kong remains an important topic for the organization.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Acknowledgments:** The author gratefully thanks the editors and anonymous referees for their constructive comments and recommendations.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declare no conflicts of interest.

## References

- Anthias, Floya, Maria Kontos, and Mirjana Morokvasić, eds. 2013. *Paradoxes of Integration: Female Migrants in Europe*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Asian Development Bank. 2006. *Workers' Remittance Flow in Southeast Asia*. Manila: Asian Development Bank.
- Bauhinia Magazine*. 2007. Special edition vol. 2. Hong Kong: Thousand Wisdom Ltd.
- Baumann, Martin, and Kurt Salentin. 2006. Migrant Religiousness and Social Incorporation: Tamil Hindus from Sri Lanka in Germany. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 21: 297–323. [CrossRef]
- Bonifacio, Glenda Tibe, and Vivienne S. M. Angeles, eds. 2010. *Gender, Religion, and Migration: Pathways of Integration*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Bouma, Gary, and Andrew Singleton. 2004. A Comparative Study of the Successful Management of Religious Diversity: Melbourne and Hong Kong. *International Sociology* 19: 5–24. [CrossRef]
- Casanova, José. 1980. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Casanova, José. 2007. Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism: A European Union/United States Comparison. In *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*. Edited by Thomas Banchoff. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 59–84.
- Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong. 2016. 2016 Population By-census. Available online: <https://www.bycensus2016.gov.hk/en/> (accessed on 11 September 2018).
- Chan, Hoiman, and Rance Pui Leung Lee. 1995. Hong Kong Families: At the Crossroads of Modernism and Traditionalism. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 26: 83–99.

- Constable, Nicole. 2010. Telling Tales of Migrant Workers in Hong Kong: Transformations of Faith, Life Scripts, and Activism. *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 11: 311–29. [CrossRef]
- Cruz, Gemma Tulud. 2010. It Cuts Both Ways: Religion and Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong. In *Gender, Religion, and Migration: Pathways of Integration*. Edited by Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Vivienne S. M. Angeles. Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 17–36.
- Dawson, Lorne. 1998. *Cults in Context: Readings in the Study of New Religious Movements*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Dobbelaere, Karel. 2001. *Soka Gakkai: From Lay Movement to Religion*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books.
- Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. 1992. *The Churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Gordon, Milton Myron. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gordon, Andrew. 2009. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hammond, Phillip, and David Machacek. 1999. *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hardacre, Helen. 1986. *Kurozumikyo and the New Religions of Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hong Kong Soka Gakkai International (HKSGI). 2011. *Brochure of HKSGI Cultural Festival 2011*. Hong Kong: HKSGI.
- Hong Kong Government. 2017. *Hong Kong Year Book 2017*. Available online: <https://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2017/en/> (accessed on 11 September 2018).
- Iannaccone, Laurence Robert. 1998. Introduction to the Economics of Religion. *Journal of Economic Literature* XXXVI: 1465–96.
- Ikeda, Daisaku. 1981–1987. *A Lasting Peace: Collected Addresses of Daisaku Ikeda*. New York: Weatherhill.
- Ikeda, Daisaku. 1995–2018. *The New Human Revolution*. Santa Monica: World Tribune Press, vol. 1–30.
- Ikeda, Daisaku. 2006. 2006: Peace Proposal. A New Era of the People: Forging a Global Network of Robust Individuals. Available online: <http://www.daisakuikeda.org/assets/files/pp2006.pdf> (accessed on 11 September 2018).
- Ikeda, Daisaku. 2009. *Embracing the Future*. Hong Kong: Bauhinia Publication.
- Jin, Yong, and Daisaku Ikeda. 1998. *Looking for a Bright Century*. Hong Kong: Ming Ho Publications Corporation Limited. (In Chinese)
- Kirimura, Yasuji. 1980. *The Life of Nichiren Daishonin*. Tokyo: Nichiren Shoshu International Center.
- Knowles, Caroline, and Douglas Harper. 2009. *Hong Kong: Migrant Lives, Landscapes, and Journeys*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Law, Kam-Yee, and Kim-Ming Lee. 2006. Citizenship, Economy and Social Exclusion of Mainland Chinese Immigrants in Hong Kong. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 36: 217–42. [CrossRef]
- Lee, Kon Sau. 2009. A Blue Fly, If It Clings to the Tail of a Thoroughbred Horse, Can Travel Ten Thousand Miles. In *Cherry Blossom Memories: CUHK Alumni in Japan*. Edited by CUHK Alumni Association in Japan. Hong Kong: Comos Books, pp. 182–92.
- Lung, W. Y. 2011. Defeat the 311 Disaster with the Strategy of the Lotus Sutra. *New Century Monthly* 215: 22–23.
- Machacek, David, and Bryan Wilson. 2000. *Global Citizens: the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Metraux, Daniel Alfred. 1988. *The History and Theology of Soka Gakkai: A Japanese New Religion*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Metraux, Daniel Alfred. 1994. *The Soka Gakkai Revolution*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Metraux, Daniel Alfred. 1996. *The Lotus and the Maple Leaf: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Canada*. New York: University Press of America.
- Metraux, Daniel Alfred. 1997. *The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in Quebec: The Lotus and the Fleur De Lys (Canadian Studies)*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Metraux, Daniel Alfred. 2000. The Expansion of Soka Gakkai into Southeast Asia. In *Global Citizens: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World*. Edited by David W. Machacek and Bryan R. Wilson. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 402–29.
- Metraux, Daniel Alfred. 2001. *The International Expansion of a Modern Buddhist Movement: The Soka Gakkai in Southeast Asia and Australia*. Lanham: University Press of America.

- Metraux, Daniel Alfred. 2010. *How Soka Gakkai Became a Global Buddhist Movement: The Internationalization of a Japanese Religion*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan. 2018. Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas 2017. Available online: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000368754.pdf> (accessed on 11 September 2018).
- Ng, Ka Shing. 2012. The Development of Soka Gakkai in Hong Kong. *Journal of the Graduate School of Letters* 7: 77–85.
- Nichiren. 2003. *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. Edited and translated by The Gosho Translation Committee. Tokyo: Soka Gakkai.
- Nishihara, Kentaro. 2008. *Soka kyoiku no genryu: makiguchi tsunesaburo* (The Origin of Soka Education: Makiguchi Tsunesaburo). Tokyo: Ushio Suppansha.
- Piore, Michael. 1979. *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor in Industrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ravenstein, Ernst Georg. 1885. The Laws of Migration. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 48: 167–235. [CrossRef]
- Research Office of the Legislative Council Secretariat. 2018. Livelihood of New Arrivals from the Mainland. Available online: <https://www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/1718issh18-livelihood-of-new-arrivals-from-the-mainland-20180323-e.pdf> (accessed on 11 September 2018).
- Salaiff, Janet, Siu-Lun Wong, and Arent Greve. 2010. *Hong Kong Movers and Stayers: Narratives of Family Migration*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Sassen, Saskia. 1988. *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shen, Jianfa, and Erbiao Dai. 2006. *Population Growth, Fertility Decline, and Ageing in Hong Kong: The Perceived and Real Demographic Effects of Migration*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies.
- Sjaastad, Larry. 1962. The Costs and Returns of Human Migration. *Journal of Political Economy* 70: 80–93. [CrossRef]
- Smith, Timothy. 1978. Religion and ethnicity in America. *American Historical Review* 83: 1155–85. [CrossRef]
- Soka Gakkai International. 2018. Human Revolution. Official Homepage. Available online: <https://www.sgi.org/about-us/buddhist-concepts/human-revolution.html> (accessed on 12 September 2018).
- Sussman, Nan. 2010. *Return Migration and Identity: A Global Phenomenon, A Hong Kong Case*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Todaro, Michael. 1969. A Model of Labor Migration and Urban Unemployment in Less Developing Countries. *American Economic Review* 59: 138–48.
- Tweed, Thomas. 2006. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
- Wilson, Bryan, and Karel Dobbelaere. 1994. *A Time to Chant: The Soka Gakkai. Buddhists in Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Wuthnow, Robert, and Conrad Hackett. 2003. The Social Integration of Practitioners of Non-Western Religions in the United States. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42: 651–67. [CrossRef]
- Yang, Fenggang. 1999. *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Yang, Fenggang. 2005. Lost in the Market, Saved at McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44: 423–41. [CrossRef]
- Yano, Jyunya, and Hitomi Shimada. 2010. *Soka Gakkai: mou hitotsu no nihon* (Soka Gakkai: One More Japan). Tokyo: Koudansha. (In Japanese)

