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'Genderism vs. Humanism': The Generational Shift and Push for Implementing Gender Equality within Soka Gakkai-Japan

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Abstract: This paper investigates how young Japanese women in contemporary Soka Gakkai (SG) navigate Japan's continuous gender stratified society that remains culturally rooted in the 'salaryman-housewife' ideology. How are young SG members reproducing or contesting these hegemonic gender norms that few seek to emulate? While SG has long proclaimed that it stands for gender equality, its employment structure and organization in Japan until recently reflected the typical male breadwinner ideology that came to underpin the post-war Japanese nation-state and systemic gender division of labor. As shown here, this did not mean that SG women were without power; in fact, in many ways they drove organizational developments in the Japanese context. The recent imposition of the global framework for Sustainable Development Goals of 2015 has enabled SG to more substantially challenge its own patriarchal public front. Based on long-term fieldwork, in-depth interviews and multiple group discussions with SG members in their 20s, this article explores how SG-Japan is being challenged to follow its own discourse of 'globalism' and 'Buddhist humanism', promoted by Daisaku Ikeda since the 1990s. Using Bourdieu's analysis of symbolic power, the research shows how Japan's powerful doxa of 'genderism' that held sway over earlier generations is currently being challenged by a glocalized Buddhist discourse that identifies Nichiren Buddhism as 'humanism' rather than Japanese 'genderism'.

Keywords: globalism; glocalism; gender in Japan; Soka Gakkai; Nichiren Buddhism; Buddhist humanism; Daisaku Ikeda; SDGs; Pierre Bourdieu and symbolic power; the body as location of power

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1. Introduction

The construction of the modern Meiji nation-state from the mid-19th century onwards, as with many other modern nation-states, intertwined with new forms for gender division that came to essentialize a middle-class lifestyle of men as productive providers and women as reproductive housewives (Dasgupta 2003). Women in Japan gained the right to vote after 1945 and were constituted as equal citizens, but the male breadwinner ideology sharply came to underpin hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity. Even with the legislation for gender equality adopted in 1986, culturally and structurally the breadwinner ideology proved persistent. In Japanese, the term *kaikaku* 改革, "reform" usually refers to such institutional reform, while the word *kakumei* 革命, or "revolution" is used to point to some deeper transformation. This is how the term is used in Soka Gakkai's central terminology, *ningen kakumei* 人間革命, or human revolution. This refers to an 'inner revolution' in attitude and mindset. The notion of 'human revolution' expressed the idea of attaining 'Buddhahood' as a process of inner change on a deeper level of consciousness, which was presented as the objective of Nichiren Buddhist practice in Soka Gakkai (SG). Yet, institutional reform was clearly regarded as also important, as seen through SG's support for and establishment of its own political party in 1964. These two processes of fostering a deeper sensibility and awareness of one's inner life-state, and how inner attitudes and institutional organization of 'society' intersect was also expressed by the central idea of human revolution. Institutional reform in contemporary Japan is currently

spurred on by a steadily declining birth rate. This has spurred on a continuous rethinking but also reproduction of the male breadwinner ideology that was associated with Japan's post-war economic growth. As an organization that has long claimed to support an internationalist/global 'humanist' agenda, driven by Daisaku Ikeda's interpretation of Nichiren Buddhism, SG in Japan also rose to prominence in a society that culturally and 'legally' stratified men and women through a systematic gender division of labor. I loosely refer to these two processes as Japan's 'principles of gender', or 'genderism' (ジェンダー主義) and SG's promotion of global citizenship as the fostering of 'Buddhist humanism'. These are not used as analytical categories but rather to point to divergent discourses, attitudes and aesthetics that typically intertwine in complex ways in the case of SG in Japan.

Today 'Buddhist humanism' is finding renewed momentum within SG-Japan itself as a result of its promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper explores how changing gender dynamics play out in contemporary SG-Japan as an organization that wrestled with implementing its own equality agenda. The arguments presented here are based on the past four years of ongoing fieldwork in Japan, out of which also emerged around 50 open-ended ethnographic interviews and longer conversations with young SG members in their 20s and 30s; about ten group interviews/group discussions also took place in typically casual settings that emerged organically as part of fieldwork in Tokyo in 2021–2022; other specific but open-ended interviews with SG youths in Tokyo and Okinawa were organized through a 'snowballing' effect, some of these were also current employees of SG. All ethnographic interviews were centered on open-ended questions about people's life experiences in relation to gender, followed by questions about specific circumstances relevant to the details of the interviewee's narratives and all taking place in as casual a setting as possible. Mostly the youths came from middle-class backgrounds, and many of them had been or were Soka University (SU) undergraduate students. I also include some ethnographic interview material from overseas SG youth members who lived in Japan and studied at SU, as well as repeated interviews/discussions (about 3 times per year) with older staff and national SG representatives currently working for the SG. This research builds on other first-hand research carried out intermittently since my first year of fieldwork in Japan from 2003–2004. Most of my research, including the current research, focuses on youth members (see Fisker-Nielsen 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2018, 2020a, 2020b, 2021, 2022a, 2022b)[1].

Globalization in the post-Cold War era of the 1990s was facilitated by core global institutions—the United Nations, G8, G20, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and others. SG actively supported various UN-based initiatives in its capacity as a faith-based and increasingly global civil society. This included holding world-travelling exhibitions to raise awareness of human rights, ecological sustainability and the importance of nuclear disarmament. It saw itself as a member of a global civil society, and its social mission to that effect was adopted in the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) Charter in November 1995[2]. Arguably, a global outlook already underpinned Ikeda's broader framework for SG's collective support for the political party Kōmeitō that was established in 1964, and which, in the context of Japan brought 'internationalism' into the local context, although its status as a 'religion' was often criticized for overstepping presumed 'secular' boundaries (Fisker-Nielsen 2021, 2022b).

SG in Japan grew to become a ten-million-member organization at the end of the 1960s, and under the leadership of Daisaku Ikeda (b. 1928) it promoted an UN-based international form of governance; in the 1990s it cooperated with various UN initiatives, in particular with the call for the empowerment of women. Yet SG's own 'core' institutions in Japan mostly continued to reflect Japan's male breadwinner ideology, and Japan's typical gender division of labor. Some institutional changes began very slowly to happen from the late 1990s onwards, in particular in its international department, but it still took until around 2010 for female staff, for example, at the SG headquarters to no longer be required to wear skirts. This institutionalized view of gender as pertaining so intricately with appearance

is discussed in Section 2. The active promotion of gender equality under Ikeda in SG as a global civil society created tension with its own gendered social order in Japan, which is what is currently becoming increasingly visible at the structural and cultural level.

To understand the significance of the broader Japanese cultural context, in Section 2 I discuss in some detail the influence of the 'salaryman-housewife' breadwinner ideology and the way it remains a hegemonic source of social reproduction as part of Japan's gender stratified labor force (Macnaughtan 2020). I investigate the challenges this 'doxa' presents to transforming the strongly gendered performative scripts typically reproduced by a media-scape seemingly intent on pushing back on women in authoritative roles in public life and in the workforce. I here draw upon Pierre Bourdieu's concepts such as habitus and doxa to argue how investigating tacit normative rules and conventions are all important in understanding how gender hierarchies continue to stratify men and women throughout much of Japan's institutional life. To show this, Section 2 discusses some recent examples of attempts to recreate the 'naturalness' of the binary gender regime.

This is followed in Sections 3 and 4 by a consideration of the discourse of 'Buddhist humanism' and the extent to which it holds up as a 'counter-hegemonic' discourse (Crehan 2002) that can challenge those in the Japanese media with a seeming nostalgia for the 'traditional' heteronormative gender world order. More particularly, in Section 3 I discuss the institutional changes in SG, and in Section 4, I consider more ethnographically how these macro discourses intersect with the micro of everyday experiences of young SG members, who grew up with parents who had attained middle-class status through the breadwinner ideology. From extensive ethnographic interviews and conversations with young SG members, it is clear that few aspire to replicate the same gendered model. However, the picture is a complex one. The various interviews, numerous conversations, first-hand observations and group discussions reveal various aspects of 'glocalizing' processes whereby a more confident questioning of the dominant Japanese gendered life-model is underway. I consider this 'questioning' from the perspective of embodied practices and Bourdieu's core argument about 'symbolic power' as most powerfully operating through tacit attitudes and norms that maintain the established order. 'Symbolic power' is in this way seen as presenting the most formidable challenge to transforming hierarchical and unequal relations as they are being reproduced in everyday repetitive acts, what Butler (1990, 1997) referred to as gender performativity. I explore why and how young SG members, despite being equipped with an alternative 'cultural hegemony' namely that of 'Buddhist humanism', remain stacked against persistent gendered and male-centric environments that continue to characterize most institutions in contemporary Japan. How far can their Buddhist humanist discourse make for a different normative order?

The 2015 SDGs framework here seems to serve as a 'Trojan Horse' that is providing a legitimate way to question the normative gendered context of Japan and open up new cultural spaces. The paper shows how such dynamics play out in the context of young women in particular, who grow up surrounded by feminine aesthetics and sensibilities that essentially tell them to be subservient to men because they are women. Against such feminine aesthetics that are visibly being reproduced in almost all public spaces in Japan, how do young women then rise to become persons with authority in Japanese society? Kawahashi (2021) recently summed up the need for a sustained analysis of the way 'religious' discourse, societal norms and misogyny intertwine to affect men and women in Japan. This paper is one such attempt. At the same time, the challenge to the gendered order is simultaneously coming also from 'religious' discourse as SG struggles to more squarely align its organizational gender division of labour with its own Buddhist philosophy that has for long been promoted as a global framework for human equality.

The SG history in Japan highlights how transformation revolves around the site of the body, what Appadurai (1998, p. 244) has termed "the most local of globalized sites". As shown in this paper, the body is also the site where individuals are "constantly engaged in concrete forms of imagining communities, worlds, universes—the most local of globalized sites" (Dessì and Sedda 2020, p. 5). Growing up and living in Japan as young women

means being constantly reminded that their desirability and human worth are expressed through specific beauty standards, detailed and learned mannerisms, adhering to particular ways of speaking and acting in public spaces, all of which serve to reinforce the sense of binary gender differences and male superiority as natural. The global outlook of Ikeda's Buddhist humanism is here used to challenge such gender scripts by a broader appeal to a 'human' identity where individuals act with a global conscience of human equality. Dessì (2017, p. 5) argues that "the emergence of such global consciousness does not necessarily amount to the superimposition of global ideas on local religion", which, so far, SG in Japan seems to also have resisted to various degrees, alien as it was in many ways to Japanese post-war 'genderism'. At the same time, we see how SG reconfigured 'Buddhism' under Ikeda as something not confined to priestly rituals nor to patriarchal cultural mores but in acting with existential awareness of a mutual connection between self and other, and the proclamation of the significance of understanding the interconnection between inner state and outer social structures. This paper shows how the long promoted 'glocalized' Buddhist humanism is now 'returning' to SG's own core organizations in Japan, with the 2015 SDGs framework serving as the catalyst.

2. A Glimpse into Japan's Persistent 'Genderism'

According to the global gender gap index reported by the World Economic Forum, Iceland followed by Finland stood at the top of 156 countries as the most gender equal societies in 2021; Japan was ranked at 120 as one of the most unequal societies; the closest other OECD country was Italy, ranked as number 63[3]. Even though the rate of female employment now mirrors other OECD countries, no significant change in women's employment status and position in Japan has occurred. Women in management positions, economic participation and opportunity ranked 117, while their educational attainment stood as number 92, and political empowerment was close to the bottom, at number 147. Why would Japan, as an affluent, post-industrial society, find it so difficult to achieve gender equity on par with other OECD countries? Macnaughtan (2020) shows how employment law and work practices are underpinned by a systemic sexism built into employment structures, whereby men become prioritized as the regular core labor force. Despite more women working, the rate of regular employment for women in the past 30 years for married women with children remains the same (Abe 2013). While the typical gendered M-curve that shows how women stop working during childrearing years has flattened more recently in Japan, this primarily reflects the decreasing number of women opting for marriage and parenthood. Most data show that around 35% of women in their 30s and almost 40% of men are not in a relationship or married (Endo 2019; see also Nakano 2020), while as many as 48% of women resign from their job upon marriage (Macnaughtan 2015). The common dilemma for women in Japan seems to remain that of having to choose between a career or marriage. This reflects the extent to which women are still regarded as the primary caretaker, while men face no such dilemmas upon marriage or when they become fathers. The fact that men do not experience fatherhood as hindering the time they can devote to work and their careers while women continue to do intersect with women 'choosing' careers over marriage even if around 90% of both young women and men express a desire to get married (Endo 2019; Nakano 2020); no young SG men (or young women) could imagine men not working, even if all wished for a better work-life balance and a shared sense of responsibility for children and domestic chores.

Japan adopted the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) in 1986. However, rather than facilitating further equal opportunity, this enabled companies to segregate male and female employees into general (*sōgoshoku*) and clerical career (*ippanshoku*) track. The underlying rationale for this is rooted in the 20th century powerful ideology of women as 'good wives and wise mothers' *ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母 that cemented the notion of women's role as reproductive, 'naturally' dispositioned to be mothers and 'housewives'. Women as reproductive with domestic responsibilities was taken to be so 'natural' that placing the majority of women (today still some 80%) along the clerical tracks was seen as 'protecting'

and giving them 'preferential treatment from the demands of the regular employment of the core labor force, those on the general track which still today remain 80% men (Sugimoto 2021). As women were stratified along the *ippanshoku* track with few career opportunities while not seen as a violation of the EEOL (Yamada 2013; see also Macnaughtan 2020, p. 169), the systemic gender division of labor also resulted in women wielding often much authority in the home as 'professional housewives' (*sengyō shufu*); they tended to have much closer relationships with their children, were much more active in their community, were able to develop greater friendship networks or take up hobbies, while their full-time employed husbands on the *sōgoshoku* track functioned to provide financially. Cook (2020) shows how masculinity and labour continue to deeply affect adult men's sense of identity. This is not always a happy match but given the systematic gender segregation and the entrenched notion of men's rightful entitlement in work places, it is less surprising, as shown by Ehara (2013), that being a man in Japan increases the chances of becoming a manager tenfold. Moreover, adulthood for men does not include the experience of having to choose between a career or family.

As indicated adulthood for women, on the other hand, still intricately intersects with the discourse of the 'good wife, wise mother', which means that women tend to accept their periphery, disposable labor roles more readily as they seek to balance family and work. A total of 70% of part-time workers in Japan today are women (Sugimoto 2021). Adulthood for men meant becoming and remaining a *shakaijin*, a person '[working] in society'; in postwar Japan, the most recognized and sought-after 'man' was the 'corporate warrior', or *kigyō senshi* 企業戦士. Such hegemonic masculine ideals superseded earlier forms of militaristic masculinity (Ueno 2004; Dasgupta 2003) that were epitomized by Nitobe Inazo's *Bushido*: *the Soul of Japan* (warrior ethics). These seem outdated ideas, but versions of such masculine ideals continue to be reproduced in various complex ways, as also indicated by Endo's (2019) study of the 'marriage market' (*konkatsu*), where young people seek marriage partners based on such hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity.

In the introduction, I referred to the tension between *kakumei* 革命 that I used to indicate a deeper transformation in attitude and mindset, and *kaikaku* 改革 which here refers to structural reform. Following Bourdieu, I argue that the intertwinement of the two means structural reform, without inner transformation of the 'traditional' gender binary classification, mindsets and attitudes, remains difficult to actually implement; this reproduction of desire for the breadwinner ideology relates intimately to David Hume's question of "legitimacy" as fundamental to political philosophy. Bourdieu used these ideas to develop his notion of doxa (Bourdieu 1991, p. 127), to point to the way deeply held, shared cultural beliefs operate at a subconscious level to legitimize the stratification of people. As highlighted by Japan's systemic gender division of labour, despite legislation for equality, tacit rules and attitudes are what actually create or remove opportunities. Bourdieu described this conundrum people acting with a "kind of original adherence to the established order" (ibid.).

Doxa is the Greek term for common beliefs or popular opinion, the taken-for-granted-everyday reality, which forms the primary experience of the social world for the majority of people. The example of an SG student leader, a studious young woman in her early 20s, who was finalizing her graduation thesis at the time of the interview in November 2021, highlights this as she tells of her home situation: "It was so frustrating as a child when my mum, who is a *sengyō shufu*, told me to help her in the kitchen and with cleaning while my elder brothers didn't have to do anything. I was also told not to run around and sit in the same way as my brothers". The phrase *onna no ko rashiku shite*, or "behave like a girl" regulated her behavior in ways that naturalized and justified the different treatment of her brothers; meanwhile, she learned how deeply her sense of personhood lay in serving her brothers, her father and eventually a future husband. "I see now, after studying about this, that for my mother, this was just 'normal' and she was teaching me what she had learned was desirable behavior for a girl. It used to make me angry as a child, and then I guess I just got used to it. Now, I no longer agree with this". Yet, the embodied feminine

behavior is visibly more difficult to change, as also acknowledged by this young woman. In complicated ways, her identity as a 'woman' also intertwine with the Buddhist ethics of caring for others.

Bourdieu showed how, a person's *habitus*, their embodied dispositions, habitual ways of feeling and acting that seems 'normal' and 'natural' is actually where power operates; arguably without change at this level of embodied disposition and consciousness, wider structural reform may not succeed because the the normative social order at the level of doxa and habitus remain the same. As in the SG's use of the term 'human revolution', which reflect the theory of *ichinen sanzen* (Fisker-Nielsen 2018), Bourdieu developed Max Weber's central focus on 'social action' by which people are taken to be 'social carriers' (Weber 2002) rather than merely pushed by political or economic systems, the value-orientation of individuals themselves matter as they seek status and dignity within their specific contexts. Bourdieu developed such ideas through his notion of "cultural" and "social" capital that showed how deeply a person's *habitus* intertwined with twentieth century consumerist and capitalist societies (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Wacquant 2006). In this way, 'power' in itself is neither negative nor positive but a productive force that emerges in sets of relations that do not simply dominate but form the conditions of possibility. Butler (1997) further pointed to this paradox between agency and discourse, what she termed 'subjectivation', insomuch as the very processes and conditions that secure a person's subordination ('the good wife, wise mother' discourse) also renders the means by which a self-conscious identity and agency develop.

The SG older generation of women in Japan highlight this paradox as persons who, on the one hand, were subordinated (along with other Japanese women dominated by the male breadwinner hegemony), but who used their identity as 'housewives' and the 'freedom' in terms of time it awarded them to become key actors in SG's organizational development (Fisker-Nielsen 2012b); furthermore, they also became central political actors as supporters for the political party Kōmeitō (as described in the next section). The set of capacities, the abilities that define a person's mode of agency are thus not simply the residue of an undominated 'self' that existed prior to the operations of power but are also the product of those operations. Agency cannot be taken to be a synonym for resistance to patriarchal domination, but rather presents a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination also create and enable. As also found by McLaughlin (2019, p. 139), "Gakkai women are not passive followers who have been misled into obedience within an oppressive power structure but are instead self-conscious agents who emerge from a complex web of aspirations and values. In this regard, they resemble women in other religious communities who exercise power from below by learning to navigate and ultimately transform paternalistic authority". Yet, as indicated in the rest of this section and the sections that follow, young women today live in a different context to their mothers, who were presented with binary choices that stratified them by gender, which paradoxically did not always mean less life-satisfaction within Japan's hierarchical work culture and long-working hours (see Sasagawa 2004; Fisker-Nielsen 2012b).

In the rest of this section, I discuss some selected examples of how patriarchal conventions and normative gender scripts are reproduced in Japanese contemporary public life. These highlight the kind of 'symbolic power' used to legitimize certain forms for femininity that aim to reproduce the 'naturalness' of the conventional patriarchal order.

Due to space constraint the following is necessarily an incomplete discussion; academic critique of Japan's ethno-nationalist ideology (Liu-Farrer 2020) that constructed post-war Japan as a homogeneous, mono-ethnic nation of cultural exceptionalism also highlighted the gendered nature of nationalism (Murphy-Shigematsu 2003; McVeigh 2003); studies show how the breadwinner ideology was explained as 'natural' through culturalist theories of Japanese-ness (*nihonjin-ron*) (e.g., Mackie 2003; Befu 2001; Dasgupta 2003, 2013; Goodman 2005; Mouer and Sugimoto 2009; Hidaka 2011). I will not have the space to delve into the many important works that exist on this topic. Instead, I will take up specific examples to highlight some of the way symbolic power at the aesthetic level of desire seems intent

on turning-back or resisting the questioning of patriarchal gender tropes characteristic of Japan's modern era and gendered nation-state (Ueno 2004, 2009; Germer et al. 2014).

For example, Jennifer Robertson (2018) in her recent book *Robo Sapiens Japanicus: Robots, Gender, Family and the Japanese Nation* (Robertson 2018) discusses how a "reactionary post-modernism", led by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, began in 2006 in cooperation with businesses, technology firms and academics. The project, entitled the Innovation 25 Strategy Council (イノベション戦略会議)[4], envisioned technological renovation and social management by 'imagineering' the coexistence of humans, humanoids, androids, and animaloids. Robertson found that such technology is not used in a neutral way, but rather to reinforce conventional sex/gender division of labor and the political status quo. She shows how robot designers replicate gendered ideals of men's language and women's language, with 'female' robots speaking in a high-pitch voice and appearing to embody feminine ideals promoted in recent history by the government, in collusion with popular media, and now also reinforced by robot designers (Robertson 2018, p. 113). The 'harmonious' ideal of the heterosexual three-generational family can now be maintained with support from AI technology. In this new world, Japan has again risen to cultural and technological dominancy in Asia as the family is now assisted by a robot called Inobe kun. Inobe kun allows the mother/housewife to engage in moderate telework from home, earn some pocket money while fulfilling her main function as homemaker in a relaxed and calm manner supported by AI technology to help monitor the family's health situation, shopping and cleaning. Robertson shows how former Prime Minister Abe's nostalgically envisioned the myth of mono-ethnic and male-centric Japan becoming 'again' possible, with new technology that can ensure cultural and economic dominancy and the 'traditional' gender division of labor, both of which supposedly made Japan the great nation that it was in the past.

New versions of the 'good wife, wise mother' ideology is here being reproduced in innovative ways by an often assumed 'neutral' AI technology. This is also the case with the next example, the narrative of the *Himono Onna*, or "dried woman". This recent discourse originates from a TV drama carrying the central message of 'true' Japanese femininity as existing in seeking romance, interest in which is also portrayed as intricately related to a 'natural' desire to keep a tidy and clean home, and a neat appearance at all times. My research assistant, herself a young SG member and SU undergraduate student, first introduced this as an example of the 'Supremacy of Love' narrative that was emerging from discussions with young women, some of whom were complaining about the way romance was presented to young women as their main goal in life. The main character in the TV drama is based on the character *Hotaru no Hikari,* from the romance comic drawn by Hiura Satoru and adapted as a two-seasons drama series in 2007 and 2010, and later as a film in 2012. The most significant aspect of this drama series and film is how it created and popularized the word *himono onna*. *Himono onna* means "dried woman", which signifies a woman who does not engage in romance. The central narrative is that such a woman may make an effort to appear attractive in her workplace by wearing make-up and nice clothes, and giving the appearance of being a 'proper woman'. However, when she gets home, she relaxes instead of cleaning her apartment, which the drama portrays as untidy. The main character in the film is named Hotaru Amemiya, a 24-year-old woman who is introduced as a *himono onna*. Hotaru had romantic relations before, but now that she is busy working, she has lost interest in romantic love. When she gets back from the office, Hotaru changes into comfortable sportswear, grabs a beer and a snack while relaxing in her relatively messy room. Hotaru herself does not see her loss of interest in romance as a problem, and, together with her 'relaxed' lifestyle and 'untidy' room, this gives an impression of being 'careless'. Viewers are invited to see a woman who has 'let herself go', which symbolically represents the opposite of respectable middle-class femininity, where female morality and attractiveness are produced in acts of paying attention to appearance, by always being attentive to others, keeping tidy and in control and by seeing romantic relations and subsequent marriage as the central pursuits in life.

According to another main character, Seiichi Takano, when he looks at Hotaru he can feel no "moisture" from her. Seeing Hotaru through his male gaze, viewers are presented with men's supposed perspective on such 'careless' living. Seiichi at some points states, "The sloppy lifestyle you enjoy, your disheveled outfits, I cannot feel any moisture from you. You are like very dried food. Yes, you are *himono onna*"[5]. The metaphor is one of dried fish: she is "dried", unattractive, and impenetrable. In addition, Seiichi explains directly that Hotaru has already "dried up" because of her life style, and her way of not caring about romantic relationships, which means she is no longer a woman. Not only Seiichi, but also other characters including her female co-workers think that such a lifestyle is unattractive, and inappropriate for young women. Here we see the creation of another type of women, the *suteki jyoshi*, or "lovely young woman" who is represented as totally opposite to the character of *himono onna*. This is Hotaru's co-worker, Yuka Saegusa. Yuka is represented as the ideal type of middle-class Japanese femininity in her ability to care foremost for others; she even takes the time to learn *ikebana* (flower arrangement) after work, a symbol of respectability for middle-class woman in the 1980s. This signals Yuka's 'good' qualities as a future wife who knows her role in society. Yuka stresses, "For me, romance makes me shine", by which she portrays how the ideal *suteki jyoshi* are women who fall in love.

During this research, this TV drama became a point of discussion with a number of young female SG members and other Japanese women who attended a public talk I gave about this in June 2021[6]. Immediately after the presentation, a discussion evolved with around ten current and past SU students (who had supported the event), who said that relaxing when they get home rather than immediately cleaning their apartment was completely natural for most people, including themselves. They agreed with the way this TV drama turns such natural behavior into acts imbued with the symbolic meaning of "having let go", trying to reinforce the perceived notion that good housekeeping is an attractive aspect of femininity. In reality, everyone identified with Hotaru's lifestyle, now referred to as *himono onna* lifestyle because, as the young people here, as well as others who contacted me afterwards (about 10 people, and more students brought this up during classes) explain "this is how most people live". However, this natural way of living had now become a 'gamble with virtue' where women's very personhood was in question (Rosenberger 2000); Hotaru clearly had lost this 'gamble' by comparison to the *suteki jyoshi* character who remained 'bright', cheerful, and 'shining' as a result of her interest in romance, by always being attentive to others' needs and keeping a tidy appearance even in private.

The 25 or so young women in this research, who I spoke to about this over the month after the public event, saw their objective in life quite differently from one of pursuing only romance and they all recognized they were being presented with 'virtuous feminine' behavior. Such character portrayals are ubiquitously promoted in Japan and blend in complex ways young women deemed attractive when they are pleasing and pay attention to their appearance. Cuteness is another aesthetic and 'soft-power' that permeates every aspect of Japanese public and typically present young women as pleasing, non-offensive and non-disruptive. Cuteness is used also to 'soften' government campaigns, consumer objects or persons including the image of men. Although the young women in this research did not personally act in a performatively cute way, they recognize the influence as part of making it 'normal' for young women to appear 'soft' and not too outspoken. On the other hand, cuteness can also be used in a positive way for men to soften their image. For example, former prime minister Suga Yoshihide (2020–2021), who was perceived as serious, bureaucratic and lacking in charisma was able to soften his image with a display of his love for pancakes on Instagram, signaling that he also can be loveable as he indulge in the consumption of sweet food perceived as 'feminine' (Holtzman 2018)[7]. Cuteness relates to a particular form for affective power that carries connotations of child-like innocence. As Harris (2000, pp. 4–5) shows, "cuteness arises because a 'thing' possesses neediness, they appear to be "begging" to be rescued from their defenceless state". At the same

time, has found that feelings of empathy towards cute things easily turn to violence and aggression towards the cute both of which intermix in eromanga (Cather 2017). Many have written (e.g., McVeigh 2000; Harris 2000; Miller 2011; Bardsley 2010) about cuteness and the way it mediates relations of power via a combination of symbolic meanings of weakness, submissiveness and humility that intertwine with influence, domination and control (McVeigh 2014, p. 170). Teenage girls in school uniform are a long-fetishized object in Japan (see Kinsella 2002) and present an overall picture of the sexualization of girls as natural.

How this intersects with the everyday experiences of young women is a difficult question. The picture is undoubtedly complex, but with 70% of women reporting, in particular young women being molested on trains (Konishi 2000; see also Horii and Burgess 2012) it is part of an attitude towards young women that many young and women in this research (and those coming to the public talk mentioned in note 6) recognize as a problem. This common experience resulted in new legislation in 2000 and a policy of "women's only carriages" to be provided during rush hour, as well as the enactment of a bill against stalking. Horii and Burgess (2012) show that, by the 2010s, young women in their 20s tended to show disgust and rejection of the 'salarymen masculinity'. The famous men's studies scholar Ito Kimio continues to argue, as he did in a talk in May 2021 at the Soka University Committee for Gender Equality, that the typical attitude of men in Japan is one of fundamental disparagement towards women, as men grow up without empathy and without being able to feel gratitude for all the things that women do for them; the inability to feel respect for women is something, he argued, that can escalate into violence.

There are many sides to the cuteness phenomena in Japan, which do not always have to do with making young girls submissive. Kinsella (1995, p. 251; Miller 2004) argued in the mid-1990s that cuteness may have emerged as "anti-social; it idolizes the pre-social . . . cute fashion [that] blithely ignores or out rightly contradicts values central to the organization of Japanese society and the maintenance of the work ethic". Over the decades, and with the intensification of idol culture in Japan following the 2011 Fukushima disaster, Marx (2012) and Miller (2011) showed how commercial interests intricately link to the highly gendered nature of cuteness. Idol culture and 'cute girls' are today also international sensations and used to promote 'Japan'. The most famous idol group AKB48 is a commercial production that promulgates prepubescent cuteness as a fetish, a feminine aesthetic of innocence, acted by cute-looking school girls who simultaneously dance and act provocatively in bikinis (Luck 2017; Dent-Spargo 2017). Academic debates are ongoing about the extent to which the child-like cuteness of the ever-pleasing, pre-pubescent girl is a sexualized fetish or a desire for cuteness, or both. Many variations and contestations exist. The widespread proliferation of different versions of the *bishojo* 美少女—the cute lolicon figure, some call "lolliconization", is complex and not straightforward (see Galbraith 2019). However, the proliferation of the girl-like figure as attractive femininity intricately relates to constructing male identities and a normative gaze of desire for such girl-like cute figures. Members of the well-known idol group AKB48 must act publicly without contradicting the kind of fantasy they sell; if they are discovered to have a boyfriend, this carefully produced image of sexualized innocence requires a public apology and will make the national news (see Dent-Spargo 2017; see also Galbraith 2019). Such a commercially constructed consumer gaze rests upon the aesthetics of young women appearing desirable when they act child-like, ever-pleasing and non-threatening. This simultaneously constructs masculinity as desiring such a child-like and fetishized *bishojo*, who is now also available in a 2-D version for young single men who are guaranteed faithfulness and a bight homecoming as they return from work (White and Galbraith 2019).[8]

Japanese female cuteness as a fetish is also promoted through personas under the Cool Japan Initiative, where some idol groups have become official 'ambassadors of cute', engaging in highly gendered soft-power cultural diplomacy. AKB48 with their unrefined but alluring dance routines is what made them 'attractive' in Japan, and perceived as affective tools for goodwill on the international stage. How they are perceived by governments

outside of Japan will need further investigation. From a distance, the interaction can seem rather jarring, such as when AKB48 members, as 'soft power' ambassadors for Japan, entertained the Thai prime minister and his entourage in September 2018 (see also Miller 2011; Valaskivi 2012)[9]. Bardsley (2010) described this as modern 'Geisha Commodification'. Yet, this kind of "pimping of Japan" (Miller 2011) is ubiquitous on social media platforms that often rank desirable types of 'Japanese' girls. The representation of innocence, submissiveness and childishness serves as the ultimate sexual object in Japan. Popular social media communication tools, such as LINE, carry daily images of both real-life young women and manga girl figures who, with big innocent-looking eyes, appear to be begging the viewer as both shy and submissive yet sexually available figures whose real desire is to be pursued; such cute figures are frequently combined with soft-porn images or speech bubbles that say men in their 50s are also welcome. Such messages proliferate everywhere on social media or as ads in mainstream media, with commercial links to dating sites or adverts selling miniskirts and cosmetic products to young women. For people using LINE in Japan, some 86 million people, images of cute, submissive but sexualized school girls who, with big innocent-looking eyes with a childish appearance are also packaged into the tourist industry, that topped 30 million visitors to Japan in 2019.

The branding of Japan as 'cool' intricately genders the nation in particular ways. Muramatsu (1982, 1986, 2002; also cited in Valaskivi 2015, p. 69) showed how the role of women and men in advertising and TV programs was predominantly images of women in terms of either their appearance or as homemakers, while men were presented as active professionals. Valaskivi (2015) shows how women across the Japanese media are stereotypically relegated to domestic roles, and engaged in an entrenched reproduction of gender tropes central to 'Japan-making', domestically and internationally. The Cool Japan Initiative has become globally influential and illustrates how "all genuine power acts as symbolic power, the basis of which is, paradoxically denial" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 133) as social conventions regulate and silenced attitudes that go unquestioned in ways that can be "racist, sexist and xenophobic" (McNeil 2014, p. 69) without encountering any significant challenge domestically. These deeply interconnected functions of 'culture' show how cognition, communication and domination cannot be detached from relations of power but rather create their very possibility. Bourdieu maintained that the "the most successful ideological effects are the ones that have no need of words, but only of laissez-faire and complicitous silence" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 133).

Given the constructed-ness of gendered bodies and how femininity is the outcome of repeated performativity (Butler 1990), particular behavior symbolizes the way women enact the heteronormative gendered order. This is visible in Japan everywhere, from employees in department stores to receptionists across companies to TV anchors or popular entertainment to adverts on the train. Normative ideals of femininity are ubiquitously expressed through specific mannerisms and aesthetics of submissiveness, and McLaren (2020, p. 341) argues that sexism and misogyny permeate mainstream Japanese media culture and sustain a male-dominated media industry, and a male-dominated corporate society (Ishiyama 2013, p. 404). Women make up only about 20% of regular full-time employees (Sugimoto 2021), and just 1.4 percent of top-level management in the media are women (Ishiyama 2013, p. 411; see also Nemoto 2016). McLaren (2020) demonstrates that the prevailing characteristic of 21st century Japanese media culture is a form of "mediated misogyny" that maintains gender hierarchies and preserves patriarchal norms. Women are consistently placed in diminished and stereotypical sex roles in public, which also marginalizes non-normative masculinities and sexual minorities. Takenobu (2017, cited in McLaren 2020, p. 342) shows that female announcers are typically presented as younger assistants in their 20s and 30s to older male colleagues in their 50s and 60s, a pattern that is clearly visible to anyone watching Japanese TV programs. A group of three young women and four young men from SU discussed this persistent misogyny they recognize everywhere in the public realm; asking the young women present how they felt about this, "I am bothered and disturbed by it" was the general sentiment, but they said how

difficult it is for young women to speak out and generally to speak up in public settings. One young man also said how uncomfortable it made him feel to see women constantly objectified as cute, pleasing, and dumb as if they have no opinion of their own; typically, Japanese women were also represented 'as cute little things' in Italy where he was from where manga and other 'cool' Japanese products are popular, and he thought that would typically be "how most people in Italy think of Japanese women".

Observing just how Japan's media-saturated public spaces are filled with portrayals of highly prescriptive gender roles and the older male–younger female pairing—on TV shows, news programs, weekly news magazines, advertising on trains—how do young women then prepare to enter this adult world after graduating from university? For the young women interviewed for this project, many of whom were in the process of finding a job (*shūkatsu*) or had just been through that process, the following is a typical experience. As part of preparing students for job hunting to enable them to become successful *shakaijin*, or full-time employed members of Japanese 'society', students undergo training in 'proper' etiquette and manners. From Year 3 in university, students learn from widely sold behavioral manuals that inform students how they must dress, how they must carry themselves, how and when to speak and generally how to behave in ways that illustrate to prospective companies that they will be the obedient, 'mature' future workers that will fit in with Japanese company culture.

A person demonstrates such 'maturity' by showing they know how to comply with intricate rules of 'good' manners. Interviewees for this project tell of how specific these rules are. One popular manual (Oka et al. 2021) on a page entitled 'Learn the manners you need in society' (社会で必要なマナーを学ぶ), young female job seekers are told that they will appear rude to 'others' if they do not wear make-up; at the same time, the make-up they must wear should make them look 'natural'. The irony is not lost on the SU students telling me this, as they point to the next item on the list instructing them to tie their hair back if long, and that, if sporting a fringe, they must ensure it does not cover their face or eyes; the color should also not be too bright either. While wearing trousers is permissible and suitable for practical training, they are told they should wear a black suit, and are encouraged to wear a skirt, the length of which should be just above the knee. Next, their bag should be around an A4 size, and it should not be the soft type that cannot stand by itself if placed on the floor. Lastly, they should wear plain stockings and black shoes with heels between 3–5 centimeters, adjusted to their height so as to fit into the standard height of Japanese people (Oka et al. 2021).

When I asked young women why they thought such specific instructions were given and why this would be important to employers, they explained this to be a perceived 'common sense'—Japanese employers are perceived to be looking for employees who will fit into such company rules. Learning to fit in and demonstrating this can be a tiring process. While some are really excited about beginning a new job, many also dread this adult world for which all universities in Japan prepare their students to be able to display the correct mannerisms of the *shakaijin* which so significantly relate to sporting appropriate dress, hair and make-up, knocking on doors in the correct way to enter a superior's office, learning to stand next to the chair and waiting to sit until being asked, and to bow to the right degree to a superior (see also McVeigh 2014, p. 158). "I am exhausted, my feet hurt and it's highly tiring to walk around in a suit all day", says one young woman as she returns to class after attending a company's induction meetings. Another tells, "I was shocked, standing there in a large group of hundreds of job seekers all wearing black suits, looking exactly the same, and suddenly seeing all of them bowing deeply. I had to quickly think to myself, 'should I do that too?', and found myself bowing like everyone else, it was really strange". Young people laugh about these experiences and entertain each other by details of the rules they must obey during job interviews, but this is a serious business, as non-compliance means risking not being offered a job. Yet, one young woman when asked during an interview what specifically she was studying at university she told them "social anthropology, for example the meaning of why I wear a suit like this for a job interview, which tells us about

gender norms in Japan." The interviewer, herself a women, had never thought of that and was seemingly impressed by the student's ability to analyse society in this way; the student felt good about the interview and felt confident she would get offered the job.

The public gaze or *sekentei* is not usually, however, a realm for spontaneity or creativity. One young woman tells of the irony in having to give examples in a job interview of her leadership skills while simultaneously expected to sit, bow and speak in highly hierarchical ways to display the obedient employee she would become. Learning to become a *shakaijin* is exhausting, by all accounts. One young woman, fed up with the emphasis on appearance, opted to go back to her home city to find a job she liked; another decided to work for a smaller company that produce music which she liked, although it was not prestigious in the same way as the other job offers she had received from bigger companies. A 27-year-old young woman who is an active SG member in her local district in Okinawa tells of her experience working in a quasi-government related job; here she experiences the difficulty of having to behave in order to maintain the typical gender mannerisms including ways of speaking learned as appropriate for young women. She explains that, "for things to change it really depends on the boss. Actually, my manager is a woman, but gender expectations are still the same. Unless the boss is aware of gender discriminative behavior, and makes concerted effort to change the office culture, it is very difficult for those lower down to say anything; colleagues just talk amongst themselves if they are dissatisfied, but no one will speak up. Instead, if there is a bad older boss, they wait patiently (*gaman suru*) and instead count down the years to the person retires". To cope with the stress of social expectations, she opted for a part-time contract of 35 h per week. "I need to take care of my mental health, and there are other things I want to do such as have time to participate in SG meetings"(March, 2022).

In the next section, I discuss the alternative discourse that SG members relate to as the discourse of 'Buddhist humanism', which presents the importance of fostering a global mindset as key to being a 'global citizen', something which is increasingly experienced as incompatible with Japan's 'genderism' by young people in SG. I discuss how the Buddhist humanist discourse intercepts in the Japanese context where, as indicated, the societal gaze tends to be felt as an unavoidable 'social fact' of genderism in everyday experience.

3. Buddhist Humanism, Gender Equality and Institutional Changes in Soka Gakkai

The excommunication of SG by its more conservative Nichiren Shōshū priesthood at the end of 1991 (see Bocking 1995 for details) was a tumultuous time. However, it also 'freed' SG to follow further Ikeda's reading of Nichiren Buddhism that was presented as a life philosophy to be practiced in society, and with a global outlook rather than a narrower reading of the text and focus on special rituals, as carried out by the priesthood. More generally, the notion of 'global citizenship' took on a new prominence amidst a rising optimism brought about by the end of the Cold War, and the new imagined role for civil society aiming to increase international cooperation. The SGI was increasingly promoted as a Buddhist civil society whose global outlook followed the example of Ikeda, who stressed the importance of dialogue and the advocacy of human dignity and active 'global citizenship' to foster a human rights culture. Iconic for the time in SG was Ikeda and Michel Gorbachev becoming friends and publishing a dialogue together. During the 1990s, Ikeda continued to meet with international leaders from various fields, something he began in the 1970s when he met with Arnold Toynbee and members from the Club of Rome. This extensive dialogue series included meetings also with, for example, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks, Joseph Rotblat, Wangarii Maathai, Hazel Henderson and a range of other leaders from various fields. Points of discussion would typically focus on advocacy for nuclear abolition, ecological sustainability and human rights. Publications of these dialogues approached a range of broad topics aimed at a general audience, and served to educate at least the SG membership, who may otherwise not have paid attention to such issues.

Moreover, Ikeda's yearly peace proposal to the UN was followed by SG support for various UN global initiatives[10]. This included holding events leading up to the UN 1992 Rio de Janeiro Convention on Biological Diversity, and supporting the empowerment of women. SG sent representatives to the ten-day Fourth UN World Conference in Beijing on Women in 1995, which aimed to ratify a platform for action, subsequently becoming a blueprint for achieving gender equality around the world. The theme promoted by Ikeda of 'the 21st century as the century of women' evolved into everyday parlance in SG, as it engaged in holding public exhibitions and educational campaigns in cooperation with UN initiatives to promote gender equality, human rights and ecological sustainability. SG also partnered with the newly established Earth Charter[11] and initiated a seven-nation tour of Asia in early 2000, to raise awareness of the Earth Charter framework for understanding the interrelatedness of ecological sustainability, human rights, gender equality and other issues. This initiative was instigated in corporation with Gorbachev and the Green Cross and resulted in a world-travelled exhibition entitled The Seeds of Change.[12] Other initiatives could be mentioned, including recent prominent global advocacy for gender equality and a women's leadership initiative undertaken by the SGI Office of UN Affairs, which was playing a leading role in the NGO Committee of the Annual UN Commission on the Status of Women, and undertaking various initiatives for young women's leadership[13].

While many of these exhibitions and activities were also held by SG in Japan, as discussed in the last section, institutions in Japan generally (including SG) changed little in terms of their male-centric work practices as indicated by the World Economic Forum data. Even as exhibitions to raise awareness of gender equality were held by SG under the promotion of a global agenda, somehow the SG's own gender division of labor in its core institutions was assumed to uphold deep respect for women, even as it discriminated based on the typical gender division of labor. In this way, the SG organization functioned until more recently as a typical 'religious' organization in Japan, which relied heavily on the volunteering of women to sustain itself. SG women members could be said to have actively built and maintained the organization, but without advocating for change to its own patriarchal structures. Aspiration for a male breadwinner life-style may still be desired by a significant number of women in Japan (see Endo 2019; Sasagawa 2004), even if this never was the reality for people from the lower-middle-class economic strata. This includes, for example, the majority of SG members in Okinawa, where, while the breadwinner model continues to underpin SG' employment practices there, the reality is that most married couples consist of double-income families; all young women, both SG and non-SG members interviewed (apart from one person in Okinawa), wanted to continue in full-time employment after marriage (interviews with ten Okinawan SG female members and ten non-members in Okinawa in March 2022).

The discourse of 'Buddhist humanism', however, has taken on renewed significance through SG's active support for the SDGs since 2015, which it took on as a natural extension of its support for the previous UN-led initiatives of the Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015). Ikeda (2018) states, in his 2018 peace proposal:[14]

> "Gender equality and empowerment should not be regarded as just one of the seventeen SDGs, but rather should be recognized as key to accelerating progress toward the achievement of the entire spectrum of goals. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women[15], the lead organization for gender equality, made the following statement to the UN Security Council in October 2017: 'The women, peace and security agenda continues to expand its footprint on global policymaking. It is now an essential pillar in global affairs.' [. . .]Women's empowerment cannot be an optional agenda: It is an urgent priority for many people in dire situations".

This language will come as no surprise to most members in SG-Japan. Yet, how to implement this is always the challenging part. Despite actively promoting human rights including gender equality, SG in Japan maintained largely a male-centric employment

culture. To understand what the gender division of labor meant in practice, it is important to distinguish between the SG central office, or headquarters (SGHQ) which employs some 3000 individuals and maintains about a thousand branch centers, and the SG voluntary organization that consists of some 7–8 million households across Japan and which is run by volunteers in each local area[16]. Even if SG may be one of the biggest private organizations in Japan, the core work force by comparison is much smaller than the SG organization as a whole. Core regional or national male leaders were typically employed and remain employed as core workers on the general track, while until more recently the equivalent female leaders employed by the SGHQ would retire from paid employment upon marriage, and continue 'unpaid' leadership positions in the local area.

SGHQ consists of the central leadership of the organization, but as an employer was built on the model of a typical Japanese company. This meant male employees were stratified as the core labor force and female employees as periphery, disposable labor. This thinking, on the one hand, reflected assumptions about women's role as homemakers and mothers, which meant that SG female staff upon marriage would stop paid employment. In reality, this did not mean 'retirement' to become homemakers, but rather that married women continued 'working' for SG as leaders in the local voluntary organization. The vast majority of female and male members of SG never work for the organization as employees, including most of its women leaders. The organization throughout its post-war period relied heavily on the women's division or *fujinbu* 婦人部 (see also McLaughlin 2019 who translates this more narrowly to refer to married women). However, particularly those women trained through working for the SGHQ moved onto become effectively unpaid staff and leaders in local areas once they had married and were economically supported by a husband. Women in SG, both those who were employed at the SGHQ and those that were in employment in other places before marriage—a much larger number—could be said to have been and still today remain the key driving force behind SG's development in Japan: women organize, execute and lead a range of activities that involve the majority of members in the voluntary organization. These women leaders and members have built vast grassroots networks across Japan, while also being the main actors behind election campaigns to garner votes for Kōmeitō (see Fisker-Nielsen 2012b). It is fair to say that without these very socially active and committed female leaders and members who galvanize and support other members in the local communities, SG and Kōmeitō would not have reached the presence they enjoy across Japan today; neither would Kōmeitō as a national, regional and local political party have been able to maintain a consistent presence, which now includes being part of a coalition government for most of the past 20 years. It is also fair to say that neither would SG have been able to so effectively respond to natural disaster situations, such as the 11 March 2011 Tohoku, had it not been for this grassroots' voluntary organization that exists across Japan (Fisker-Nielsen 2012a).

The deeper question for SG today, as it pushes internally through a new SDGs committee within the SGHQ in order to transition to an organization that is less characterized by Japan's gender division of labor, is who will take up the mantle of organized voluntary efforts that characterized the activities of millions of female members in the past; with a current decline in young women, who also mostly do not seek to become full-time 'housewives,' how will the organization maintains its presence in Japan? The only answer seems to be that men take on more domestic and organizational responsibilities and strive for a better work-life balance. This is indeed what is increasingly visibly in many SG districts today. Another answer may be changing labor laws so that proper pay and career options are provided for part-time work, which is also something being pushed by Kōmeitō. In reality, in Japan working around seven hours a day, which could be considered full-time work in a European context, and was a key factor in improving gender equity in Denmark (Christensen and Jensen 2014), this is still seen as part-time work in Japan. Whichever the way forward, it is clear that changing the employment, parental and organizational patterns are needed, if SG is to maintain its current presence.

This research suggests that this will require deep cultural changes, something of course not alien to SG's understanding of Nichiren Buddhism. In fact, as seen from Ikeda's comments below on gender norms, at least theoretically, are viewed essentially as cultural systems and the product of specific historical contexts rather than as unchanging, ahistorical or biological essences. The below quote is from a much-read study series of the 1990s[17]:

> "It is a fact that cultural traditions developed over long periods of time have deeply influenced images of masculinity and femininity in our consciousness. The influence of these traditions thoroughly pervades every aspect of the social ethos, including language, religion, systems of organization, education and scholarship. Therefore, it seems to me that the important thing is not that society come up with a particular model for how men and women ought to behave, but that people first and foremost make tenacious effort to live as decent human beings and allow others to do the same.
>
> In Buddhism, too, there are various explanations about the roles of men and women. But these naturally are coloured by the views of men and women prevalent when these teachings were expounded. They cannot be taken as having universal application. The important thing is that both women and men become happy as human beings. Becoming happy is the objective; everything else is a means.
>
> Anytime someone decides the way people ought to be, no matter how correct the idea might seem, what good is it if in the implementation people become miserable? Nor is it possible that only one sex could become happy at the expense of the other." (Ikeda et al. 1997, p. 115).

Even if this 'awakening' to gender as a cultural system seems to be occurring more fundamentally in SG-Japan only now, this interpretation of Nichiren Buddhism as a philosophical practice was part of the universal appeal to human equality, and, moreover, to the notion that 'humanity' could be expressed in an open-ended way, as long as it maintained and upheld human dignity. It goes without saying that evaluation of this 'equality' and 'humanity' deeply intertwine with specific contexts, and may manifest in different ways as is evident with how Japan's 'genderism' is increasingly seen as problematic in SG.

The SG as a movement for 'human revolution' advocated that all individuals possess infinite potential that can be developed through chanting and the effort to study and change; this now includes the more systematic transformation of current Japanese cultural mores that are now recognized as characteristic of a particular historical period. This ability to transcend Japanese cultural mores overseas is what attracted individuals to join SGI. Such a reading of Nichiren Buddhism (see Fisker-Nielsen 2018, for a detailed discussion) was coupled with fostering a global outlook, framed through Ikeda's peace proposals and SG's support for a UN human rights agenda, including gender equality that were organized by local members in various vicinities. For example, in 2017, Ikeda (2017) states the importance of gender equality, that is:

> "deeply relevant to constructing a culture of human rights. Gender equality is the assurance of the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys, without discrimination. The goal is, as UN Women emphasizes, to create a society in which the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are valued, and the diversity of different groups is recognized. One of the SDGs is the achievement of gender equality everywhere on Earth and the elimination of all forms of discrimination by 2030."[18]

The universal equality taken to be promulgated in the doctrine of the Lotus Sutra[19] is based on the SG view that Nichiren saw his female practitioners on equal terms, if not even at times as superior to men in their capacity for living 'enlightened' lives. Nichiren writes in 1275: "Only in the Lotus Sutra do we read that a woman who embraces this sutra not only excels all other women, but also surpasses all men" (Nichiren 1999, p. 464).

About a third of Nichiren's hundreds of letters to his followers were written to women practitioners. As Mori (2003) argues, Nichiren refuted much of the common discriminative attitudes towards women, and regarded them as equal practitioners in light of all people being subject to the 'law' of cause and effect as presented in the theory of *ichinen sanzen*, a theory that sees a single moment of life (ichinen) as comprising three thousand realms (*sanzen*) of possibilities, including the state of 'Buddha' consciousness (see Fisker-Nielsen 2018). As discussed in the lecture series on the Lotus Sutra mentioned (Ikeda et al. 1997), the theory of *ichinen sanzen* that is derived from Zhiji's (538–597) reading of the Lotus Sutra is promoted in SG as a philosophical praxis without gender prescriptions in soteriological terms; it proclaims that all individuals carry the potential to bring their 'humanity' to full bloom through revealing a 'Buddha' consciousness.

This presents a distinct action-oriented focus for what 'enlightenment' is perceived to be. As indicated, the practice of 'Buddha' consciousness as expressed in human behaviour'[20] necessarily intertwines deeply with specific historical contexts and circumstances; 'enlightened' behavior presents a complex intersection with other cultural frameworks, norms and conventions. Mori (2003) argues that this is also visible in Nichiren's own writings that are colored by the feudal societal norms of his time. The specific tension explored in this paper is indeed between such Buddhist ideals of universal capacity for 'enlightened' behavior that underpin the notion of human equality, but which are necessarily implemented within social contexts, such as, in the case under study, a highly gendered place such as postwar Japan. How the global SDGs framework is currently being used to intersect in new ways with Nichiren's claim to universal human equality is a key point[21], which now includes spearheading a focus on inclusivity and diversity, and involves, for example, the powerful monthly Culture of Peace series of articles published in the *Seikyo Shimbun* and organized by the SG Women's Peace Committee. This series brings prominent international women[22] into increasing central visibility, as well as the experience of international SG members whose stories present Buddhist practice beyond the idealized male breadwinner-female housewife ideology that previously prevailed as 'success' and 'aspiration' in Japan.

In the era of cultural capitalism, Sugimoto (2021) shows how in Japan concerns became less with survival and the subsistence characteristic of previous decades of industrial capitalism, and more with issues of the precariousness of identity and purpose in life. While it could be said that many in Japan still struggle with economic 'survival' (Chiavacci and Hommerich 2017), existential questions intertwine in SG with the discourse of Buddhist humanism. We can see this expressed amongst members and as an organization through concerns for local and global issues such as poverty, gender disparity, ethnic conflict or ecological breakdown, but also informed by broader global perspectives. Many of the current SG youth in their 20s and 30s talk about such global issues when they say they want to contribute to 'society'. For their parents' generation and those in their 50s and 60s who were driven more by the immediate post-war context and life-course model of the salaryman-housewife ideology, such broader global objectives, and in particular gender equality, may have seemed aspirational but also more theoretical. Young SG members today generally face fewer economic hardships, but they live in a more globally connected world where existential threats such as climate change feel very real, and they have more exposure to alternative life-styles. Unlike their parents and most of their grandparents, they live economically better off lives, attend university and have opportunities to study abroad. Greater comfort and choice may indeed also have resulted in a lack of incentive to practice Buddhism, compared to their parents' generation. At the same time, the global issues brought to their attention by Ikeda's peace proposals to the UN, in particular, also resonate seemingly on a deeper level of global consciousness in face of ecological break down, rising geo-political tension, intensifying identity politics, the potential and subversive power that AI technology brings and a tense social media-scape. Here the male breadwinner ideology, while perpetuated in new AI technology as shown by Robertson (2018) and re-enacted

across institutions in Japan (as discussed in Section 2), is not perceived to provide a viable promise for the 'good' life, nor to offer solutions to any of these global issues.

SG youths in their 10s and 20s have dwindled significantly in Japan, largely due to the demographic shift occurring. At the same time, increasing number of youths are joining SGI overseas. These youths are now visible in SG-Japan due to overseas members coming to study and work in Japan; they are also frequently featured in SG publications and other arenas to tell their story of why they practice Nichiren Buddhism. As told by Japanese young women in a group interview in Okinawa (March, 2022), 'international' youths are seen as:

> "having real life-changing stories to tell, how they use their Buddhist practice to turn the direction of their lives around, change their karma to achieve incredible things at work or in study. They are like first generation members here in Japan. We (third generation) just take the practice for granted, or don't really have serious challenges. It's so inspiring to see them."

This is a common sentiment found expressed amongst members in Japan. These 'international' SGI members have appeared increasingly regularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, telling of their response and how they do their 'human revolution' as a way to transform challenges and achieve their aspirations. This includes facing challenges such as racism or financial hardships. These life experiences in some way always take the position of 'creating value', the meaning of *sōka*; through the process of chanting and 'doing human revolution' they tell of how they as individuals become more tolerant, compassionate and courageous, often with the aim of contributing to the people around them or their wider community. The stories are thus of people acting 'positively' as a response to their situation. Millions of such life experiences were also told by Japanese members in the past, and continue in the present. They resonate with a general narrative of using Buddhist practices to move beyond constraints or circumstances to achieve one's goals, through having an attitude of also contributing to others in the process. Such sensibilities and increasing diversity of circumstances also move Japanese members who sense an increasing connectedness as a global network of people who share this humanist global outlook.

With around 2.8 million members outside of Japan and SG existing in 191 countries and territories apart from Japan (see note 16), SG is developing into a more formidable global human network that provides support and a sense of community locally, and which aims to be accepting of difference and diversity. When I inquired in an interview with an Italian young man in his mid-20s studying at SU about why the membership in Italy has grown so significantly over the past ten years or so, from a membership of around 35,000 to 125,000, he puts this down to youths focusing on creating a really open and democratic space for discussion. This meant inviting anyone to make suggestions for how to conduct meetings; sometimes this did not go smoothly, but youth members were able to create a generally supportive environment for people to feel comfortable sharing their inner thoughts, feelings and personal struggles. Ironically perhaps, these young people joining SG often say they are interested in philosophy, and not in 'religion', which they equate with rigid thinking, rituals and formality and associate with the Catholic Church. Perceptions of Nichiren Buddhism as a philosophy and a practice open to all people equally in ways that enable individuals to express themselves seems to have opened up an attractive interactive space.

This greater absence of conservatism in SG organizations overseas has also resulted in overseas members, in particular national SG leaders over the past two decades or so, raising concerns about the impression of conservatism with regards to gender in the Japanese organization. For example, for overseas members watching the monthly SGHQ leaders meeting, Japanese cultural mores, such as gender segregated seating arrangements, made for an 'uncomfortable' sight that seemed to them to be out of sync with their understanding of Nichiren Buddhism; as a result, intermittent questions about why men and women in Japan seem to play different roles would arise. Although men and women in local meetings since the 1990s in Japan have not adhered to such gendered seating arrangements (and also were not visible in the early post-war decades), the SGHQ monthly meetings were

organized as such until about two years ago. The Coronavirus pandemic seems to have offered an opportunity to change such ingrained organizational habits and a noticeable change in both seating arrangements and a less formal dress code are now visible in these large meetings that continue to be broadcast monthly. These may seem to be superficial changes but they reflect an overall shift that is being pushed from within against long-established organizational practices.

Significantly, there is now a visible change in employment practices. As discussed, those employed by SG in the past followed typical Japanese patterns of employment that saw men remain as core workers also after marriage while women gave up their paid role. This meant that, every year in April when the SGHQ welcomed new employees such as university graduates, they hired more women than men because it was assumed that female employees would leave their job upon marriage. In fact, an unwritten rule had developed in conjunction with pressure from the female SG leaders in local areas who strongly 'encouraged', and still do to a varying degree, young female SG employees to quit their job after getting married to become local leaders. In the past, as they transferred to the women's division (*fujinbu*) they would thus give up paid work, but used the training they had received from being employed at the SGHQ to become '*kōsen-rufu* warriors' [23]. This was an endearing title for those seen to devote their life at the 'front line' of the SG local organization. Until now, this gendered pattern created the active momentum that drove the SG voluntary organization. We can find here many socially active women who are often very knowledgeable about Nichiren Buddhism, eloquent and jovial public speakers as well as knowledgeable and interested in social issues and Japanese politics. Within the SG, the women's division carried a reputation for being unbeatable in any area of life, and those active in SG know that it is impossible to get anything done without the support of the women's division. Thus, the various ways that gender played out did not necessarily mean that women were without agency and power.

The generational shift underway shows an increasing numbers of young female SG employees remain in full-time work, which is the case generally amongst female SG members as university graduates, according to the interviewees, who see it as a natural step for them to pursue a career. It is now increasingly common for SG women who take on leadership positions to also hold down a full-time job, which was uncommon in the past. The shift in women's employment practices has resulted in more sharing of responsibilities with male co-leaders and other members in the local district. This is more in line with how many districts are run overseas. In the past, often the model was that the female leaders would do the bulk of the work, on the understanding that the male leaders had to stay late at work and often could not attend. SGHQ female employees are beginning to follow a similar trend, with around 50% choosing to remain working and around 50% who quit their job to take on leadership roles in the local voluntary SG organization. There are no exact data for these numbers (which will be the topic of a future research project), but casual observations indicate that about half remain and half become full-time leaders in the local organization upon marriage. The SGHQ today thus retains many more women after they get married and have children than was the case in the past; that women (and men) take maternity leave is now becoming a normal pattern/ whereas in the past they would have quit their job. There is now also much more flexibility for both male and female employees to finish work early to pick up children from school. In comparison to ten years ago, when the vast majority of female SG employees left their job to become full-time '*kōsen-rufu* warriors', this change reveals a cultural shift. This was expressed by the sentiment of one young female SGHQ employee interviewed for this project (June, 2021): "I certainly would be very upset if asked to leave my job after marriage". The current changes reflect bigger changes in young women's own career aspirations, as well as older women leaders' attitude towards the role of these young women, some of whom now go on to head SG departments; three out of some thirty departments are headed by women, while increasing numbers of deputy female heads are visible in most departments.

This cultural shift in the outlook towards women is reflected in the newly established (3 May, 2021) SG Women's Division (WD), *joseibu* 女性部. The WD replaced the former Young Women's Division, *jyoshibu* 女子部 (unmarried women and women under the age of 40) and Women's Division, *fujinbu* 婦人部 (married women and women over the age of 40). The decline in young members is part of this picture, but more poignantly these structural changes reflect the cultural shift that was underway, and which now make many feel that distinguishing women according to marital status is anachronistic. All the young women interviewed valued positively this obliteration of demarcating women based on marital status; however, as the prominent way to organize human relations of modern and postwar 'Japan', this is a reorganization of its very nation-state project; as shown in Section 2 of this paper, the breadwinner ideology remains influential in many institutions in contemporary Japan.

Men, of course, were also stratified along the breadwinner ideology. In SG, this meant, that unlike their female counterparts, men stayed in the Young Man's Division (YMD), *danshibu* 男子部, typically until their early forties, even when married with children. This reflected the assumption that, unlike women and mothers, men even with children were not assumed to have domestic or childcare responsibilities (see also Fisker-Nielsen 2012b). The YMD activities were typically organized late at night to accommodate long-working hours. Over the past ten years, this situation has visibly shifted amongst young fathers; while men currently in their 30s still remain in the YMD, and are still constrained by the bread winner ideology, they can now be observed appearing frequently with their children at SG activities. Although the YMD structure remains in place for now, young fathers with a child on their back greeting people at meetings is now a common sight. This also reveals a shift towards a more child-centric meeting style where children take more part in meetings and more efforts are made to include them. For example, children can be seen to function as MCs in local district meetings, reading a Buddhist passage, displaying their artwork or organizing a performance. In addition, older men who are grandfathers commonly are now busy with childcaring responsibilities. The establishment of a Men's Division along the lines of the new Women's Division is likely to be the next step.

Today many Japanese institutions, including the Japanese government, state their commitment to gender equality; since 2015, this includes the SDGs framework, which is widely promoted across business and educational institutions in Japan. Interviews in March 2022 in Okinawa revealed also how common it is for young people to learn about SDGs in schools. Such goals are familiar to Soka Gakkai as an organization, to Soka University, and to the political party Kōmeitō as institutions that have promoted similar goals for a long time in line with similar UN frameworks. However, transforming the long-held and deeply ingrained mindsets rooted in the breadwinner ideology in Japan remains a formidable challenge, as indicated by the gender gap index of the World Economic Forum. In the next section, I look more closely at these challenges in terms of social expectations and embodied gender 'performativity' (Butler 1990) at the level of *habitus* in the case of SG members. Embodied, micro-level interactions influenced by prevalent aesthetics that underpin expectations towards women and men, as discussed in Section 2, arguably remain the most challenging to achieve a gender equitable society, also for SG youths.

4. 'Genderism' versus Buddhist 'Humanism' in Everyday Interactions

The notion of equality was central to Ikeda's interpretation of Nichiren Buddhism, presenting it as the ultimate form of 'humanism' that encourages people to believe in themselves and in others' capacity for creating positive value. This sensibility can be found amongst SG organizations throughout the world, including Japan. However, as discussed, men and women in SG in Japan under the influence of the breadwinner ideology have also been constituted as playing different social roles. This 'genderism' also structured the SGHQ, and is what is currently being challenged through the SDGs framework for gender equality. This has taken the form of two dual processes that include an active educational process and a systematic look at organizational work culture. The SG's daily newspaper,

the *Seikyo Shimbun*, took on this educational role and began featuring regular articles related to SDGs including much focus on gender equality and issues related to sexual minorities. For example, female success stories at work include high profile achievements as experts, entrepreneurs, business or IT leaders while the SG LGBTQ members are featured to discuss the heteronormative environment that they had grown up in. These regular articles were published together with interviews with non-SG academics and societal leaders, including various civil society groups with an aim of educating the five million or so daily readers. Featuring these articles has also had the effect of showing more deliberately the actual diversity of the SG community, while raising awareness of the prominence of SG women in certain areas of Japanese society.

Overseas SGI female leaders have also appeared regularly to share their experiences via video link at the monthly headquarters' leaders meeting. This monthly meeting is broadcast across the organization over a period of 5–7 days, and is now also handily available to download and watch at leisure via smart phones. This give the impression of powerful and impressive persons in leading roles, including the female SG leaders who head their SG organization while simultaneously holding career jobs; placing women more into the central public sphere of SG-Japan is a concerted effort to change common perceptions of the roles women play and can play in Japan. The *Seikyo Shimbun* over the past two years can be observed to have developed from a newspaper largely reporting on SG meetings and events to become a platform that during the COVID-19 pandemic educated its readership and discussed evolving social issues, and promoted the SDGs. Firstly, this new focus began as the newspaper took on the task of providing accurate information about COVID-19 and to combat the quick rise of disinformation in Japan, and then took up problems such as mental health issues related to self-isolation, domestic violence, child abuse and discrimination against front-line workers portrayed as 'contaminated' by their close contact with the virus, which soon turned into social problems in Japan (see Fisker-Nielsen 2020b).

This new role of the *Seikyo Shimbun* was part of creating a new 'momentum' in SG that pushed for raising awareness amongst its readership, largely SG members, but also reaching into their circle of friends. Such public information also invited new thinking on the normative notions about the role of men and women. At the same time, the challenge of entrenched gender norms that are perpetuated most deeply at the personal level, that is at the level of embodied 'habits' (as discussed earlier) remains, arguably, the most fundamental challenge across Japanese society, as well as in SG. Bourdieu argued that this is why inequalities are systematically reproduced, despite legislation and rhetoric to the contrary. In this section, I consider some of the 'dual' processes of 'glocalization' (Dessì 2020) that are on the one hand spurring on concrete changes at the 'core' SG institutions, while, expectedly, also interacting with Japanese 'cultural schemas' (Bourdieu 1991). This presents a kind of 'push-and-pull' between 'glocalized' Buddhist Humanism and Japanese 'genderism'. In SG, legitimation of 'norms' is not happening through a 'supernatural component' (see discussion in Dessì 2017, p. 3) but through reference to 'humane' behavior that, as already indicated, presents the essence of 'Buddhism', or purpose of Buddhist practice as an inner transformation subsequently displayed in action. The very 'human component' that legitimizes and normalizes the idea of 'Buddha' as not 'super-human' but as a person acting 'humanely' leaves, of course, much room for interpretation as to what is considered 'humane' behavior.

I now turn to some ethnographic interview material to explore the way Japanese cultural practices of 'genderism' remain a formidable underlying doxa and sensibility in daily interactions. As discussed, I use Bourdieu's analysis of 'culture' as entailing symbolic, embodied and communicative influence. He used this framework to explain why hierarchical relations of power repeat themselves despite public rhetoric to the contrary. The current generational shift that is being sought in SG will necessarily entail a challenge to this fundamental level of doxa, which means a change to the kind of symbolic value attributed to Japanese gender norms that rendered the 'traditional' role of men and women

as 'natural'. To capture the complexity of this, it is important to go beyond an approach that depicts women as pitiful victims of patriarchy who depend on their 'religion' for salvation and relief from daily challenges (Kawahashi 2021) and include a more sustained analysis of how 'religious' discourse, societal norms and misogyny intertwine to affect men and women in Japan, which is the kind of analysis I am attempting here. There are many voices, opinions and diverse experiences of young SG members, some of whom have already been discussed; many of these mentioned in this paper were also Soka University students. The voices below, to various degrees, represent regular conversations going on amongst SU students who intersect often closely with ideas about 'global citizenship' and SDGs in many of their classes. While space will not allow me to discuss all of these voices and the many nuances and issues they contain, the current youth generation in SG, members in their 20s and 30s, and also in their 40s, show how the now three decades-long promotion of a 'global mindset' under the discourse of Buddhist humanism is currently creating a more systematic tension with the status quo of Japanese gender practices.

Young people growing up in Japan today tell of the social 'gaze' or *sekentei* as a force whereby gender expectations remain strongly felt; all people interviewed are deeply aware of this 'social force', and most interviewees felt the pressure to follow 'appropriate' behavior in public situations; as indicated in previous sections, 'appropriate' behavior remains typically ruled by hierarchical notions of masculine and feminine norms. Everyone relates to the tension between social pressure to adhere to Japanese gender and age hierarchical sensibilities; even with an intellectual understanding of such gender norms, the bodily experience of identity is something practiced through social expectations—how a person is expected to speak, communicate and carry themselves in public spaces—and which is challenging to change. The power of such norms and attitudes emerges in the use of language, mannerisms and the symbolic display of widely accepted 'natural' hierarchies that a person with 'good' manners as a 'Japanese' person should adhere to. As people growing up in Japan, everyone in this project agreed that it is impossible not to know or to feel the hegemonic societal 'gaze'. This is summed up by a twenty-two-year-old SU student (not an SG member) in the following way (February, 2021):

> "it could be said that Japanese people mostly are not concerned about a relationship between God and the individual, nor with the existence of a god (herself a Christian). Rather there is *seken-sama*世間様, or "Mr. Society", or *Hitosama* 人様, "Mr. Person" the imagined generalized Japanese Other 'who' people worry about. Japanese people tend to take care of the relationship between the individual and others in terms of *soto* and *uchi*, or one's public face and private face. People tend to be highly sensitive to others' evaluation of themselves according to this *seken-sama*."

In group discussions and follow up interviews conducted in 2021, these young people discussed how maintaining 'harmony', or 'wa' is expressed as the sensibility of *hitosama ni meiwaku wo kakenai*, 人様に迷惑をかけない, or 'do not bother *hitosama*'. In discussing the example of Minegishi Minami, a famous AKB48 member who became globally (in)famous for shaving off her hair[24] to demonstrate how apologetic she was for having a boyfriend, a taboo that shattered the fantasy she was selling of being an innocent, virgin-like cute-girl (see Dent-Spargo 2017), another SG young woman and SU student continued:

> "In Japan, there is a feeling that "I'm sorry for the trouble", people apologize to a third party who was not the victim, or to whom they did not cause any harm. The phrase *seken wo osawagase shite mōshiwake gozaimasen*, 世間をお騒がせして申し訳ございません, (I am terribly sorry for bothering 'you' due to my fault) is used when Japanese celebrities get arrested because of drugs, or cause a traffic accident or when their adultery is revealed. Production companies and celebrities apologize in this way to show their concern about having offended *seken-sama*, which as we study now, is this imagined 'social/moral order' that must not be offended as a Japanese person."

All the young people interviewed related to this societal 'gaze' as an internalized sensibility toward the 'relationship' between the perceptions of one's public self that should not offend *seken-sama*, and the way, as they explain, the gravest offence is the disruption to this public order rather than the offence itself. While these young people are not famous AKB48 members whose personas are produced to sell a fantasy of male superiority to their male fanbase, they are very much aware of how the social order is maintained under the ideology of *seken-sama* that deeply intertwines with the Japanese notion of *wa* or 'harmony', and which as mentioned earlier makes it difficult for women to speak up, or voice their actual opinion. These young people study such issues, and learn social and anthropological theory, they can laugh at the ironies and contradictions they find themselves subject to as persons who have internalized the moral judgment of keeping '*wa*' or harmonious relations alongside perceived expectations of *seken-sama*; yet, they feel the internalized pressure to reproduce the same patriarchal order, and the difficulty of breaking these tacit rules that operate in daily interactions and in the institutional cultures around them, including their own SG meetings.

The issue of 'comportment' is central here and the constraint of girls wearing skirts as school uniform. In the following excerpt from an interview with a 21-year old SG member and SU student, to wear a skirt 'organizes' experiences in profound ways. While cleaning duties are equally distributed between male and female students, all Japanese females interviewed experienced the following daily routines in Japanese school settings:

> "I always wore a skirt to school, including for six years of middle school and three years in high school. It forced me to behave in very limited ways. For instance, I faced a dilemma when I had cleaning duties at school (which are part of daily school life across Japan). I had to put my hands on the cloth to clean the floor, but I had to also ensure my skirt was kept in place and stopped from sliding up to avoid exposing me. Consequently, I had no choice but to move slowly, while boys ran around and finished cleaning in an instant. Besides this, I could not sit on chairs like I naturally do at home. Or, when students sit on the floor for assembly, teachers typically say, "please relax", and boys immediately sit cross-legged, which is much more comfortable; ironically, girls would have to bend their legs in a very painful way because they were wearing skirts and could never sit cross-legged. One of my male friends asked me "How can you sit in that way? My legs can't bend like that". At the time, I didn't know what to answer, but now I see that it is just because we (girls) get used to it; it is not because I was born this way as a woman."

This young woman finds Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity particularly useful to understand the way gender is learned and produced through repetitive acts, the performance of learned bodily behaviors where femininity is expressed as wearing a skirt and sitting 'properly', being attentive to thers and not to speak in contrary ways that may break the 'harmony'. At the same time, when taken as essentialist aspects of the person designated such "womenhood", disciplinary practices have ramifications (Foucault 1977; see Bartky 2015) where schools produce 'governable' citizens. Thus, while change is being pushed more generally in SG-Japan under the SDGs' banner, and the majority of the young people I speak to inside and outside of SG do not want or intend to reproduce Japan's 'gender regime', such 'governmentality' and 'technologies of self' (ibid.) reveal the complex internalized and externalized ways the normative order is kept in place. At the same time, unlike the first wave of *kokusaika* or 'internationalization' under Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro in the 1980s and his cultural nationalist enthusiasm for creating a *kokusai kokka*, 'international state' (see Itoh 1998), the current push for change under the global SDGs framework in Japan reflects for many youth groups, including SG and SU students, more concrete involvement in finding ways to implement change for a more ecologically sustainable and gender equitable society. As indicated in Section 2, Japanese public places and media remain typically filled with public messaging to young women that their place in the social order relates to bodily disciplining

to express their 'moral' standing and 'attractiveness' that is still seen as essentially lying in being pleasing to men.

Soka University has exchange programs that support hundreds of students each year to study overseas (as do other universities awarded "Super Global University" status). This has resulted in an increasing number of young people coming to view their own society and the way they are socialized in a new light. The following comments from six young female SG members in their mid-twenties tell of how studying abroad in the UK in many ways completely changed their outlook on life and how they saw themselves (from conversations in 2020–2021). Upon their return to Japan, after a year and a half of study abroad, their experiences can be summed up by the questions they came to ask. One critically states, "why are we (young women) in Japan taught to be weak, not to be strong, to be silent rather than opinionated, to be pleasing rather than demanding". Another student questioned, "why do we (women) come to think and behave in ways that seem to me now to be to all about supporting men; why have we grown up to protect their masculinity". A third young woman, after realizing just how she was influenced by the breadwinner ideology that had dominated her upbringing began to wonder, "why was I not taught to ask more seriously about what I want to do with my life; now I see that I was being taught that to behave 'like a good girl' was the most important thing". A fourth young woman from the same exchange program explained that, "when I was in the UK, I deeply experienced that it was not okay for me to just sit there and say nothing, that it was not normal to behave like a little girl with no opinion, that this was in fact rather odd". A fifth young woman explains:

> "I realized from studying overseas that cuteness is part of subordinating women in Japan, to make them look and feel weak. In Japan it is attractive not to have any strong opinions. (How does this make young women feel do you think?) It makes them feel like they belong in the home. When I went to study abroad I realized that I had to be someone, say something, that it was normal to voice my opinion. That it was not okay to just sit there."

A sixth student struggled overseas because people thought she looked much younger than she was. This she had experienced as cute and attractive in Japan, but in the UK, she felt people saw her as a child; she experienced difficulty in coping in social settings where she was expected to speak up. These SU students who study abroad, and also tend to participate in SG activities when abroad, experience a noticeable less gendered interaction pattern. These various experiences subsequently created the desire to find a job overseas to "escape Japan"; some try to find ways to find a job overseas; some hope to work for a foreign company perceived to judge them for their talent rather than their gender; others, simply cannot stand looking at the Japanese corporate world dominated by patriarchal conventions, nor the misogynistic adverts they constantly confront; some of them come to want to actively change it while some lose interest in 'Japanese' men when perceived as no different from how they are portrayed in such adverts.

Personal experience of overseas studies, interaction with foreign students and alternative media exposure such as presented currently in the Seikyo Shimbun of a more diverse 'humanity' are giving rise to new cultural spaces opening up whereby Nichiren Buddhism, also in SG-Japan, should be the kind of philosophical practice that can forge inner fortitude, 'awaken' to one's own 'Buddha' consciousness to be able to make new choices also when it comes to gender. While in the past SG women were clearly stratified as 'housewives' this was also perceived as a successful middle-class life-style, and, as discussed, did not mean women were without agency. The paradox of 'subjectivation' (Butler 1997) explains the means by which a person becomes a self-conscious agent even within discourses that subordinates them in other ways, which highlights the very active women's division in SG, who in many ways built the organization, not least because they could take the time to do so. Nichiren himself proclaimed 'time' as a vital criterium, writing in 1276, he states: "If one hopes to learn and master Buddhism, then one cannot do so without devoting time to the task" (Nichiren 1999, p. 690). These women took upon themselves the 'task' to study Buddhism, chant abundantly, organize SG activities and to reach out and support

others through the time afforded them as 'housewives'; their menfolk had similar objectives, but had to devote most of their time to work. Under the breadwinner ideology, they were awarded social prestige, status superior and purpose in life as breadwinning 'men' in the Japanese capitalist order, while women led the SG and led lives as active citizens (Fisker-Nielsen 2012b).

Dasgupta (2013, p. 7) has argued that, "Masculinity (. . .) rather than being a fixed, biologically determined essence, is constructed, shaped, 'crafted' in response to socio-cultural, economic, political, and other conditions", "rather than a singular form of masculinity, just one way of 'being a man', there are myriad masculinities, at any one time, both within society and within an individual". At the same time, as shown by for example Kimmel (2000), masculinity is typically about not doing 'femininity' when set within a binary cultural system of gender, even when what that means differ from place to place. Although changes in gender relations are visible in Japan, this is a complicated change (see for example Street 2010; Vassallo 2017) and link into a commercial market of self-help books for men, which tell them to pay attention to their appearance, to show they are good listeners, and to be careful not to speak all the time. Not doing so are the '*no nos*' for today's 'cool' businessmen who are now compared to the old salaryman man type, the now rejected and disparaged '*oyaji*' man; here men are presented as having been oblivious to such sensitivities, and, most importantly, did not take care to smell nice or have a fresh-looking haircut (see also Horii and Burgess 2012). As argued by Tso and Nanase (2017), grooming, paying attention to appearance and listening were traits assumed in the past as unimportant for men, and perceived as 'feminine' behavior. At first glance, this seems to indicate a change in gender relations; a closer look, however, reveals that the previously presumed 'feminine' traits are carefully represented as 'non-feminine'. Tso and Nanase (2017, p. 121) show that emphasizing such traits do not reflect a decline in hierarchical gender relations or improved attitudes towards women but rather the way to avoid the *oyaji* image: the nicely groomed 'cool' businessman is not one who strives for gender equality but a person who seeks to become a successful businessman, and may in this way reinforce old gender roles.

Interviews and conversations with SG men's division members in their 60s who grew up within the employment structure and breadwinner ideology do not easily fit into any neat stereotype of the tired, old *oyaji* salaryman whose lack of attention to appearance must now make up for the sluggish economy of the 1990s. Many SG men in their 60s and 70s appear jovial, energetic and friendly; many that I have met are easy to talk to in informal ways, and discuss animatedly Buddhist principles or tell of their experiences of chanting. I have also seen them sometimes perform funny skits, or entertain others with songs (sometimes as a group in the community); even if not particular musical, such performances conjure up good cheer and laugher at SG meetings. Of course, any such generalizations are impossible to make as a huge variety of men exist in SG, as well as generally in Japan, even if the breadwinner model remains a hegemonic ideal in its various versions. As described below by a couple in their 60s, their generation's way of life and thinking was rooted in the breadwinner husband and homemaker wife ideology, which for them did not feel the same way as a hierarchy, but it did mean living fairly segregated lives.

The husband introduced himself as from the 1976 intake of Soka University, which means he was born around 1957. Discussing with them the issue of gender in SG, he tells (June, 2021) how he grew up within a society that regarded the salaryman-housewife model as totally natural; his two daughters in their 20s had both attended university, one of them SU, and he tells how they see things quite differently and do not seek to become housewives. Looking back at their gendered life-style, he recognizes the inequality of the gender division of labor, yet finds it hard to imagine that such deeply ingrained patriarchal norms will change easily into a kind of European-American model of equality. "Japanese men's thinking," he explains honestly, "has for so long been built on feeling superior to women. I guess that is why Ikeda Sensei keeps repeatedly telling men they must respect women. We also know the women's division are the practical driving force in SG and work hard behind the scenes." His wife who is sitting next to him interrupts to explain

that, although she grew up in this unequal society, she could eventually fulfil her dream of becoming a teacher even as the person who was responsible for domestic chores and childrearing. Today she leads a busy life; she works part-time, is active in their local community and maintains a wide social network of acquaintances and friends. For four decades she was politically active in grassroots campaigns to support Kōmeitō to win in elections, and she has an extensive network of people who support the party because of her, and whom she keeps informed of Kōmeitō's policies, and will ask to vote for the party come election time. Her social status is that essentially of a 'housewife', but her life does not resemble what one may imagine by the '*suteki joshi*' narrative of women as devoted to good housekeeping and romantic love.

The older WD members are known for their outspokenness and their energetic presence, which can be often sensed when these SG leaders speak, chant or give lectures. Yet as the quote below from a young 21-year-old SG female member and SU student from central Tokyo highlights, young women today do not really feel that kind of self-confidence, and somehow seem more worried about 'performing' the gendered expectations they perceive prevalent in Japanese society and their surroundings (interview February, 2022):

> "When I am at a (SG) discussion meeting (*zadankai,* where all four divisions participate) I feel the need to present a smiling self. It's kind of tiring, because I can't just be myself; I have to keep moving my jaws (so it does not start to hurt). This I think is not really what Ikeda sensei means when he encourages women to be like the sun; I think this kind of smiling has more to do with Japanese society that infiltrate as a norm in our organizational culture; this at times can make certain meetings rather formal. There is a view in Japan that women should appear bright; in Japan the ideal woman is always that of being bright. I have grown up with this, so like Bourdieu says it's difficult for me to change that habitus of 'smiling' behavior; Sometime, of course, I feel like smiling, but when I do this every day, and it is so ingrained in Japan as an expectation toward women, those who are not smiling seem like as if something is wrong, or they appear unattractive. (How about the men?) I think many men in Soka Gakkai do not smile like the women, because men should be seen as *daikokubashira* (the breadwinner). Therefore, they need to look serious, like a strong pillar, so they don't smile as much. This is more prevalent at bigger meetings, and not so much at smaller meetings which are less formal. (There seems to be a different understanding of what defines strength for men and women?) Yes, women through their 'smiling' show their brightness which symbolizes strength for them—they are able to smile despite possible hardships. For men it is totally different they show their strength by expressing how serious they are, they show they are ready for anything by their serious expression. Women through their performance of brightness show how their role is to comfort, and make things alright between people, and their smile also show they are wise; men's non-smiling faces show they are ready to lead and take responsibility."

Certainly, in the past, typically men could be seen taking on what may have been considered the more 'prominent' roles in SG meetings, such as delivering the study section from Nichiren writings, not least, as some women explain, "because they need to feel they also have some special responsibilities". Women give lectures in front of men, and give guidance at meetings if they are the more senior leader present, but gendered roles are still visible even if women district leaders are known to be the person in charge behind the scenes. In the same interview, we talk about how formality also depends on context, such as the type of meeting:

> "Well, in reality 'formality' such as smiling (when expected) relates to public (*tatemae*) behavior, which changes with the context of the meeting. When I am at a district *zadankai* with many older people, the older generation expect me—actually I don't know if they expect this, but this is how I feel—to be this kind of smiling young woman. But when I am at a young women's meeting I can be

> myself; if I don't feel like smiling, I don't need to present a smiling self. We just say what we think. (So patriarchal expectations towards women seem to intersect with particular contexts?) Yes, especially for older people who grew up with such gender conventions that was important in their time; but for the younger generation like myself, people in their 20s and 30s, we don't always feel we need to follow such gender ideals, so it is easier to talk between us, to be myself when I am with my peers. I like SG meetings, also the district meeting (*zadankai*) even if it is more formal. People are always very friendly and try to encourage you; but the younger generation want to change the more conservative norms of the *daikokubashira* and *sengyō shufu* ideas—they think it is more important to live truer to yourself rather than fulfilling social expectations just for the sake of the *tatamae* social order. But it is difficult to say this directly to the men's and women's division who built Soka Gakkai and for whom those are still prevalent norms and what made their life successful. Also, we have to respect that several generations are working together. In work places, as far as I have seen or heard from my friends, it is much more difficult to challenge these old gendered expectations, you are at the mercy of your boss, usually a male one who is older than you, and you will be viewed as a nuisance, someone causing trouble to others if you speak up about these norms. That takes a lot of courage" (ibid.).

Even as this young woman finds it difficult to act differently from the perceived social expectations in certain situations and to openly voice her dislike of patriarchal norms to the older SG men and women, the actual complexity of this calls for moving beyond an image of women as pitiful victims of patriarchy who depend on their 'religion' for salvation and relief from daily challenges (Kawahashi 2021, p. 97). At the same time, it also points to not romanticizing women's agency but to the necessity of investigating how patriarchal norms entangle women (and men) in ways that reproduce hierarchies that no one may want.

Another young woman whose mother is a local Kōmeitō councilor tells of her mother's reaction when she complained about the gender division of labor in SG and the relative few female Kōmeitō politicians. Her mother tells her that if she feels this strongly enough, she should make it her mission to create an organization that represents her generation's way of doing things. She reminds her daughter of a well-known episode in SG when the second SG president Josei Toda (1900–1958) told Ikeda in the 1950s that he should change what he did not like about SG and create an organization of which he would want to be part. This young woman was told to follow the same advice. In her mid-twenties and in the process of completing her masters in gender studies at the time of the interview in May 2021, she was involved with various initiatives to promote gender equality in Japan, together with like-minded young people. She wished deeply that gender equality could be reflected in her own organization. Unlike, her feminist activist groups, however, that consisted of like-minded young people, SG is a much larger organization with several generations, and stretching across Japanese society, and with layers of its own bureaucratic challenges; in the same way as a big ship, it takes time to turn. Yet, young SG members mostly want things to change, and this young woman felt frustrated with perceived lack of progress in her own organization and with Kōmeitō's relatively small number of female representatives (which is around 10% and similar to other political parties in Japan). Around 20 years ago, Kōmeitō had more female politicians relative to most other parties and also a prominent female deputy leader, Hamayotsu Toshiko. She was a much-admired lawyer turned politician with a long track record of working to improve minority rights and for various social issues, including gender equality and better health care for women, and at the time represented the ideal politician for many Kōmeitō supporters (see Fisker-Nielsen 2012b). This included the 100 or so young people I interviewed and talked to during my PhD fieldwork of 2003–2004, where Hamayotsu was favored by many male and female supporters alike to succeed as party leader. Due to illness, she later retired from politics; meanwhile Kōmeitō has not increased the percentage of female politicians nor produced similarly prominent female leaders, even if several are currently on their way into central leadership positions.

From observations and interviews conducted for this research, it seems clear that people invest much energy into what they consider to be important, and meaningful, efforts which have the effect of maintaining, protecting, preserving or contesting certain ideas, objects and relations. Graeber (2001, p. 45) shows how the example of "the highest level of control over space and time is concretized simply as 'fame', that is the fact that others, even others one has never met, consider one's name important, one's actions significant". The salaryman doxa in Japan presented one of the highest levels of 'control' in Japanese society in the perception of the 'stability', 'economic safety' and social status that could be thereby obtained. Yet, as men's actions were legitimized in relation to the overall 'success' of corporate Japan, the reality of often unhealthy lifestyles, lack of exercise, mental exhaustion, generations of children growing up without a father (Street 2010) and even death by overwork (e.g., North and Morioka 2016) this capitalist, gendered work order also meant many women in their housewife roles often enjoyed a better-quality life. For past generations of SG married women who lived the 'housewife' lifestyle, they remained typically socially active as SG members, became relatively knowledgeable about Japanese politics and societal issues and were politically engaged through their support for Kōmeitō. Many undoubtedly led a more satisfying life than had they spend their time commuting to distant offices, with few career opportunities and serving tea for male colleagues. Studies have found that, even for highly educated women who had the choice, women would opt twenty years ago for becoming housewives, where they had control over their own time and led a better-quality life (Sasagawa 2004; Fisker-Nielsen 2012b; Goldstein-Gidoni 2012).

A soon to retire man's division district leader recently (March, 2022) summed up a similar sentiment at a SG discussion meeting (*zadankai*); he reflected on the positive side of the Coronavirus pandemic, in that the situation had shaken up the salaryman lifestyle he and his generation had led where he personally had spent four hours a day commuting. At this meeting, he told of observing the men around him on the train who seemed to him to be in a state of mental breakdown. He went on to ask whether a new work-life balance would not be a much-needed step forward to create a more humane society. The breadwinner ideology, however, seems to remain the key challenge to this, also when women participate in seeking the 'breadwinner man' as indicated by Endo (2019). Overcoming these binary notions of the role men and women 'ought' to play or what is 'desired' of a person perceived as the 'other' vis-à-vis one's gender expectations represents a formidable challenge, as suggested in this paper. Even as young people know the old salaryman lifestyle may never be possible, when seeking a partner they play on the old masculine-feminine stereotypes (ibid.). From the current research, perhaps by contrast to Endo's findings it is clear, as claimed more speculatively by McLaughlin (2019, pp. 167–68) who did not include young women in his research, that, "Women coming of age within SG today may find the Gakkai's gendered expectations increasingly alien. It is difficult to imagine that an entire generation of women will willingly take on the conflicting domestic and institutional priorities that shaped their mothers' lives". It is indeed difficult to imagine, but, as this research has shown, it is not simply a case of women gaining equal opportunity to participate in perpetuating the salaryman world but rather a call for a deeper shift in consciousness about the narrow definitions of 'humanity' upon which the nation-state, capitalist model was built. Japan's "mediated-misogyny" that characterize Japan's media-scape and public visibility of women as shown by (McLaren 2020), a highly gender stratified labor market (Macnaughtan 2020) and a breadwinner model that continue to be hegemonic (Dasgupta 2013) and demand commitment to extreme work-life imbalance to stay in a career-track job (see Nemoto 2012) present systemic challenges to being simultaneously an involved parent and living a dignified life. These issues also intricately relate to the sustainability of Soka Gakkai as an organization and the purpose of members' Buddhist practice. Here Ikeda's Buddhist humanism may receive increased traction in Japan in its 'glocalized' format, particularly as SG-Japan strive to more concretely implement its own gender equality agenda that more fundamentally challenge the notion of 'humanity' as of a gender binary character.

5. Conclusions

So how do we tie the above together to make some kind of conclusion about these various processes of globalization and localization, or 'glocalization' involved. A further structural step was taken in November 2021 that consolidated the 'glocalizing' forces of Ikeda's narrative to foster citizens with a global outlook that could be said to currently be 'returning' to chisel at the core of SG's gendered institutions in Japan. Over the past five years in particular, a new momentum was building that led to a new SG Charter. The series of articles promoting the SDGs and featured regularly in the *Seikyo Shimbun* which increased during the COVID-19 pandemic reflect a parallel internal process going on in the SGHQ as well. This process is setting new directions for the future of SG-Japan as the core institution of the global Soka Gakkai movement. On 16 November 2021, a SG global executive meeting for the SGI board members was held in a teleconference and attended also by SG President, Minoru Harada. What took place was the final agreement of the Soka Gakkai Charter, a new document outlining the social mission of the organization. On the following day, 17 November, the enactment was officially adopted by the SG Executive Council, the highest decision-making body in the organization. Enforced officially on November 18, the founding day of SG in 1930, the new SG Charter states ten points as its "Purpose and Code of Conduct"; amongst other issues the SG will work for peace and a world free of nuclear weapons, promote sustainable development and achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women[25].This may in the first instance seem inconsequential, as compared to the 1995 SGI Charter it does not appear significantly different. Yet, working for gender equality and women's empowerment was not specifically included in the 1995 SGI Charter, nor was the Japanese organization 'covered' officially by the SGI Charter; the new SG Charter officially covers the organization in Japan as well. To decide on this new SG Charter, two rounds of official consultation with the leaders of the SG/SGI international organizations took place. Interestingly, the Charter was drafted in English and then translated into Japanese, which meant some concepts were quite hard to render in Japanese, such as "well-being". There is now an initiative to have the Charter, in both English and Japanese, framed and displayed in SG cultural centers across Japan as a way to remind staff and members of the core values to which SG is committed.

The adoption of the SG Charter by the organization in Japan reflects both the push for and the wider cultural shift that is taking place. Here the new SDGs Committee that was recently formed within the SGHQ is serving as a significant platform to find new ways forward to deal with conventional gender practices that, as indicated in this paper, have often proven difficult to change. The new SDGs committee invites outside speakers to present on issues related to the framework of the SDGs, and serves to open up discussions on key issues such as gender equality. This process was a means to educate older leaders; the younger employees are aware of the various issues involved, generally seek to move forward more rapidly, and without this process now in place, it may have been difficult to change long-established practices. The SDGs committee with its global framework for creating a sustainable and equitable world is thus serving as a 'Trojan horse' to move things forward, to find more concrete ways to act for the climate and to achieve gender equity. This is now part of an internal process within the SGHQ, and as told to me (March, 2022) by a prefectural SG leader when asked if they were changing the long-standing practice of expecting female employees to quit their job upon marriage, "if the HQ give us clear guidance on this, it's much easier to implement". As of February 2022, the SDGs committee has met three times with all the head of the various departments, of which there are around 30. Each head of department now involves younger and female staff without whom it is seen as impossible to progress on the SDGs objectives. This includes a fundamental re-orientation of progress for gender equality within the SGHQ. Many staff seem to welcome this direct focus on implementing the SDGs, which reflect a longer-term cultural shift at the level of doxa. The SDGs framework thus was used as an opportunity to discuss anew the fundamental issue of structural gender inequality.

Thus, in terms of *kaikaku*, or organizational reform, over the past 2–3 years a team within the SGHQ was also created to work on raising awareness about gender equality. Efforts to raise more detailed knowledge about human rights in relation to gender have started with educating staff. Training on gender equality for all employees is now being implemented, and a formal process was set in motion for staff to voice their opinions to the executives on matters of gender equality. Visible changes are still few but more leaders in SGHQ seem to understand that unless attitudes rooted in Japanese 'genderism' are somehow transformed they cannot be suitable leaders for a global Buddhist movement. The Board of Governors, the highest decision-making body in SG, consists currently of around 30% women and 70% men. The executives seem willing to appoint more women and more representatives from the younger generation to achieve more diversity. The other central body, the Central Council, which is the highest executive body for administrative matters, is already made up of almost 50% men and 50% women; this in itself, however, does not mean more diversity unless there is a cultural shift away from Japan's breadwinner ideology.

As a 'value-creating (Soka) study association (Gakkai)', current youth members ask themselves what it means to 'create value' if not to act to implement SG's own philosophy of equality also in Japan. David Graeber (2001) called for considering all spheres from primarily the domain of action, following here the thesis of Max Weber who saw 'society' as that of creative action; it is clear that 'creative action' simultaneously cannot be separated from the concrete, material medium of social and economic positioning. Members in SG are told by the Buddhist humanist discourse that 'value' ultimately lies in action, not the forms themselves but as shown by Munn (1986) by "ultimately the power to *create* social relations" (Graeber 2001, p. 47). 'Value' may indeed be the way people represent the importance of their actions to themselves, what they consider "desirable", as defined by Kluckhohn (1951), that is, what is desirable in terms of "ideas about what they *ought* to want" (Graeber 2001, p. 3). However, 'value' in SG is ultimately as Graeber (2001, p. 47) suggests not simply "the process of public recognition, already suspended in social relations, but the way people could do almost anything"; that 'value' is expressed through one's commitment to potentially entirely new social relations is also what ultimately defines the concept of 'human revolution'.

The consciousness of young SG members who grew up with Ikeda's Buddhist humanist framework and a more concrete global outlook that was also prompted by escalating global existential threats are happy to push further to change conventional norms to better reflect the framework for achieving the SDGs. Amidst still prevalent sexist attitudes visible across Japan, and statistically indicated by the World Economic Forum data, paradoxically, it may be SG, although seemingly slow in achieving gender equality, which more substantially may be able to overturn the normative consensus. In this way, a new consciousness of Ikeda's long promotion of the need to foster a culture of human rights, now promoted as intricately intertwining with women's equality, may come into its own, even amidst Japan's persistent 'genderism'. Young SG women in Japan know their mothers never spent all their time on cleaning and housekeeping, but neither did they directly seek to overturn the gender division of labor that also characterized Japan-SG. In January 2021, as I attended a student-organized event at Soka University as part of a serious of talks focusing on Human Rights and Gender, around 150 SU students had gathered to question their gender socialization; they could be seen discussing and questioning the way that they were brought up with certain gendered expectations of them as boys and girls, and as eventual future 'breadwinners' and 'professional housewives'. Led by a group of mostly young women, but also a few young men, their discussion seemed enhanced by the digital format of Zoom perhaps helping to undo some of the embodied conventional gender scripts; everyone seemed able to relate to their gendered upbringing, and wanting to move beyond such binaries so as to learn to embody a more 'human' rather than 'gendered' social practice.

Thus, it is possible to conclude, tentatively, that a transformation at the deeper level of doxa, or in SG terminology, 'human revolution', is going on in the SG organization in Japan, which appears to be taking onboard what many SG organizations overseas did during the

1990s when Ikeda first pushed for 'globalism'. Nichiren Buddhism originates in Japan, but SG became a global Buddhist civil society based on a 'glocalized view' that sought most fundamentally universal equality. This proved quite alien to modern Japanese cultural mores. This is what is now finding its way 'back' in more concrete ways to SG-Japan and illustrating the way globalizing and glocalizing processes deeply intertwine as historical forces. It also illustrates how SG-Japan is in the process of becoming an actual international movement that potentially can create new forms for social relations that contribute to defining human potentiality in less gendered terms to achieve the SDG16 for 'peace, justice and strong institutions'.

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Notes

1 Other recent research on SG, in particular Levi McLaughlin's (2019) book brought important new insights in particular from the periphery of the organization; by contrast, my own ongoing research has concentrated more on the center of the organizations, and in many cases on young women. In terms of gender, McLaughlin importantly points out that "women are prohibited from occupying Gakkai's administrative posts outside the Young Women's and Married Women's Divisions" (McLaughlin 2019, p. 18). He also presents insightful ethnographic material into selective older women's experiences. No young women, however, were included in his study, which makes his work less relevant for understanding the current generational shift that is the focus here.

2 https://www.sokaglobal.org/resources/sgi-charter.html (accessed on 4 February 2022).

3 https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf (accessed on 15 January 2022).

4 https://www.eduardocastello.com/innovation-25-a-retro-futuristic-world/ (accessed on 10 January 2022).

5 「君が好きでやっているという、君の生活スタイル。君のその恰好。いや、これほっちも潤いというものを感じられない。まるでカラカラに乾いた干物だ。うん、君は干物女だ。」.（主人公の上司である高野誠一）(Seiichi Takano, a boss of the main character).

6 I also gave a public talk about this in Japanese and English, which subsequently generated discussions amongst SG students who came to talk to me about this narrative (see Fisker-Nielsen 2022a for this talk in Japanese).

7 Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga utilized pancakes to create a sense of softness, cuteness and friendliness within a cultural setting where sweets are seen as something feminine (see Holtzman 2018). Suga, a member of the House of Representatives of the Liberal Democratic Party served as Cabinet Secretary and Prime Minister, became temporarily a hot topic due to his love for pancakes. As he posted images of himself eating pancakes on Instagram, he presented his character as a "sweet tooth who loves sweets". The comment section on the post was filled with comments saying "cute" (Suga Yoshihide Office 2019). Suga could thus soften his image of seriousness to one of cuteness by creating a friendly image thus making himself an 'object' to be protected and loved. According to Suzuki (2020), Suga's use of pancakes to present a "cute" image to the public was one of the reasons he could gain more public during his premiership of 2020–2021.

8 Made by Gainax Studio, this is a 2-D glass version of AI technology that can be placed at home to function to light up an otherwise lonely home existence, available for around 150,000 yen.

9 Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha meets with members of AKB48 at the Government House in Bangkok (September, 2018). Available here https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1969893169735817 (accessed on 1 May 2022).

10 For details, please see https://www.sokaglobal.org/in-society/action-on-global-issues.html (accessed on 20 February 2022).

11 https://earthcharter.org/ (accessed on 14 February 2022).

12 See "A series of seminars about the Earth Charter were held in Osaka, organized by the KEEP group of Soka Gakkai International (SGI) between 2001 and 2002, with speakers including Earth Council Executive Director Mr. Maximo Kalaw and Mr. Eiichi Yamashita, Vice Minister for the Environment. In 2002, SGI in collaboration with the Earth Charter International Secretariat produced an Earth Charter exhibition entitled "Seeds of Change: The Earth Charter and Human Potential" which was first launched at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development and has been translated into 11 languages. The Earth

Charter is one focus of the Soka Gakkai's "21st Century Environment Exhibition", launched in 2006. By 2009, this had been seen by over 500,000 people in 65 locations in Japan". https://earthcharter.org/the-movement/ (accessed on 2 February 2022).

13 See https://sgi-ouna.org/our-work/gender-equality-and-empowerment (accessed on 2 February 2022).

14 Peace Proposal available here https://www.daisakuikeda.org/main/peacebuild/peace-proposals/pp2018.html (accessed on 2 March 2022).

15 UN Women refers to the UN organization that delivers programs and policies on upholding women's human rights https://www.unwomen.org/en (accessed on 24 February 2022).

16 Assessing exact membership numbers are difficult. The recent statistics announced in November 2021 will include in Japan members who may be members in name only, i.e., not practice or participate in SG activities listed as part of family members https://www.sokaglobal.org/about-the-soka-gakkai/at-a-glance/a-global-organization.html (accessed on 4 February 2022).

17 This was part of a six-volume series that discussing chapters of the Lotus Sutra with two (male) leaders of the SG study department published in the 1990s.

18 Peace Proposal 2017—https://www.daisakuikeda.org/main/peacebuild/peace-proposals/pp2017.html (accessed on 2 March 2022).

19 In Japan in other contexts the Lotus Sutra and the Devadatta chapter have been interpreted as the denial of women being able to attain Buddhahood. In SG that the Dragon King's daughter is the only one to attain Buddhahood in the sutras indicated the universality of Buddhahood, without which the theory of ichinen sanzen would collapse, "the dragon girl's enlightenment signifies not only the enlightenment of all women but the enlightenment of all men as well" (Ikeda et al. 1997, p. 99). In the Devadatta chapter (chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra), the eight-year old daughter of the dragon king Sagara conceives the desire for enlightenment when she hears Bodhisattva Majushri preach the Lotus Sutra. She manifests her enlightened state of Buddhahood without changing her dragon form and preaches the Lotus Sutra to all living beings (see Ikeda et al. 1997, pp. 93–126).

20 Nichiren (1999, p. 852) writes, "The heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is found in the Never Disparaging chapter. What does the Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being".

21 The idea that Japan has its own framework for equality (to the surprise of the presenters) and not simply a Western imposed discourse was discussed recently in a four series NHK program on Nichiren by Koichi Sakai, a Soka University professor in Kamakura history (NHK, 27 February 2022).

22 For example, such as an interview with Mamphela Ramphela who is the Co-president of the Club of Rome, which is well known in SG as an institution often talked about and brought into SG conscious history through the early Toynbee-Ikeda dialogue https://sgi-ouna.org/interview-with-dr-mamphela-ramphele-co-president-of-the-club-of-rome (accessed on 16 December 2021).

23 *Kōsen-rufu* 広宣流布refers to wide propagation or wide proclamation. It is a term from the Lotus Sutra, and that Nichiren used to identity as his life-long mission.

24 Link to Minegishi Minami's public apology that went viral globally https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkJ4_RsxPss (accessed on 28 February 2022).

25 https://www.sokaglobal.org/resources/sg-charter.html (accessed on 4 February 2022).

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