

Research Article



***Sōka Gakkai Families in the UK:
Observations from a Fieldwork Study***

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This paper examines accounts of the experience of young people and their parents in families associated with Sōka Gakkai International in the United Kingdom. It disseminates data from a qualitative fieldwork study of Sōka Gakkai young people and their parents and considers what we can learn from this study about ways in which the practice is being passed from one generation to the next. In order to do this it makes reference to theories that help to illuminate the experiences of Sōka Gakkai children and suggest ways in which these young people might mirror young people associated with Christian families in the UK. SGI accommodates its young, but it requires effortful practice on their part if they are to become members in their own right.

Keywords: Sōka Gakkai International, second generation religious practice, contemporary UK religion, effortful practice, vicarious religion, religious gifts

Sōka Gakkai International has a positive, accommodating attitude towards children and young people and towards families. This global lay movement in the Nichiren tradition is focused on changing the world rather than escaping from it, and it therefore avoids some of the tensions experienced by parents in forms of Buddhism that promote renunciation as an ideal. In this paper I examine accounts of the experience of young people and their parents in families associated with Sōka Gakkai International in the United Kingdom (SGI-UK). In the early 1990s almost all SGI-UK members were first-generation converts (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 44). As the movement has matured so have its members, and families have grown. This paper disseminates data from a qualitative fieldwork study. It considers both what we can learn from this study about ways in which the practice is being passed from one generation to the next, and some of the ways in which this process reflects more general trends in the UK.

The paper begins by outlining the methods used in the study and then considers formal Sōka Gakkai teachings about young people. Analysis of the fieldwork data forms the main part of the paper. The accounts of young people and their parents are discussed in relation to the impact of SGI-UK membership within families and also in relation to capital theory and Grace Davie's notion of vicarious religion. The intention is not to

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develop those theories but to put them to use to illuminate the data and provide additional evidence of their usefulness.

The Methods of the Fieldwork Study

The fieldwork on which the analysis is based extends back to the 1990s and has been carried out in more or less intensive periods since then. Interviews with young people brought up by SGI-UK parents were recorded in the North and South of England and in Wales in the period between 2002 and 2006. These interviews were supplemented by interviews with parents and with youth leaders running events for children and older young people. A total of thirty interviews were carried out. The interviewees themselves were initially self-selecting following contact during participant observational fieldwork. One interview led to another as people heard about the research at meetings or on courses and put me in touch with practicing and non-practicing young people and with practicing parents. Informants for the study included families where all the young adult children practiced themselves, others where none of them practiced, and others still where one of two or three children of SGI parents practiced on their own behalf. Some of the interviews took place in sibling or family groups. None of the individual informants was under eighteen (the age at which adulthood is deemed to begin in the UK), although under eighteens were included in exchanges during participant observation and in family interviews. A range of responses emerged from the interviews and fieldwork, but I make no claims for statistical representation. It is not possible to know how many of the children of SGI parents in the UK continue in the practice. SGI-UK is interested in this data but does not keep statistics.

The study set out to consider second generation *members*, but it quickly became clear that the more interesting data concerned young people who are non-joiners or only partially attached. This is partly because the non-joiners raise issues that are also brought up by studies of children and young people in the UK raised in Christian households. A number of theoretical explanations have been offered to explain why individuals align themselves with religious movements that may be old or new in terms of their endurance, but are new to the converts themselves (see e.g., Stark and Finke, 2000; Corcoran, 2013). The focus here is not on first-generation converts who chose to join a religious movement or carry out a religious practice, but rather on young people who are associated with SGI-UK by virtue of having been brought up by practicing parents. There is no evidence to suggest that any of these young people would have been more or less welcome as members than others. SGI-UK is full of people with problems, issues, and challenges and does not shy away from them. There is evidence that those who choose not to join do not find sufficient reason to do so. Even without joining, these young people report that they benefit from their association.

The Buddhist Movement

Sōka Gakkai is a significant Buddhist movement in Japan and has been so successful in extending out of Japan that there is now no major area of the world where SGI is not

represented. Within this global spread, SGI has retained its ideological identity and successfully adapted itself to local circumstances. (Clarke, 2000; Machacek and Wilson, 2001; Seager, 2006; Waterhouse, 2002b). This is still a relatively new religious movement. Sōka Gakkai began in 1930 and the movement's international wing, SGI, was founded in 1975. Sōka Gakkai was formally inaugurated in the UK in 1960 (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 13), although some British practitioners began practicing in the early 1950s (*ibid.*: 44).

Members of this lay movement follow the teachings of Nichiren (1222–1282), a controversial and outspoken innovator who established a new form of Buddhism with a new perspective on well-established ideas. Nichiren's distinctive contribution was his claim that homage to the *Lotus Sūtra*, a practice previously associated with death rites, is the *only* practice necessary and effective for the age, in all ritual contexts (Stone, 1998: 119). The common practice that SGI Buddhists carry out takes the form of chanting both the title (*daimoku*) *nam myōhō renge kyō* and part of the content of the *Lotus Sūtra* in classical Japanese (Chapters 2 and 16 in Kumārajīva's version) in twice-daily liturgical ritual. They also embrace a philosophical viewpoint that lasting peace and happiness for all humanity can be achieved through chanting. This is based on the belief that *nam myōhō renge kyō* is the Ultimate Law or the true essence of life which permeates the universe.

It is often Japanese nationals who are the first to practice this kind of Buddhism in any new location, but SGI has attracted converts from multi-ethnic, indigenous populations wherever it has spread. The movement in the UK estimates that it has around twelve thousand active members (figure supplied by SGI-UK). Since the majority of these members are not Japanese, here as elsewhere, it is a minority religion but not the religion of an ethnic or cultural minority. In the UK, SGI is distinctive within a plethora of Buddhist convert groups in that it attracts a genuinely multi-ethnic following (Smith, 2008). This is evident at any large UK gathering, especially in London and its outskirts where the centre of gravity for the UK movement lies.

Children and young people have been important within Sōka Gakkai in Japan from the start. In its early days, Sōka Gakkai (Value Creating Society), called at that time Sōka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value Creating Educational Society), was an educational organisation affiliated to the Nichiren Shōshū sect and it was primarily interested in education (Murata, 1969: 80f). The President of SGI, Daisaku Ikeda (b. 1928), a prolific author, often writes about children and young people:

I have made it one of my aims in life to help young people to have hope and confidence in their future. I myself have infinite trust in young people, and so I say to them: You are the hope of humanity (Ikeda, 2000: xi)!

In Japan Sōka Gakkai is represented in the private education sector. It has its own schools and a university on the outskirts of Tokyo. There are other educational establishments in a handful of locations outside Japan. These include elementary schools in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and Brazil; and Sōka University of America in California. Young people are said to represent the future of the organisation, but, more

than that, they are also regarded as the hope for peace throughout the world. Supporting and nurturing young people is paramount because of that.

Stark has argued that successful religious movements make demands of their young people and provide them with opportunities to demonstrate their commitment. (1996). That is certainly the case in this successful movement. SGI consistently commends its young, makes provision for them, and expects them in return to take on practical responsibilities throughout the multiple layers of the organisation. This includes engaging with enthusiasm in their own activities, supporting in practical ways the meetings and courses of older, adult members, and leading activities for younger members.

Official SGI doctrine emphasises the karmic links that exist within families. The first UK director of SGI-UK, Dick Causton, expressed that in this way:

We are born, Buddhism teaches, to the parents and into the family we have deserved through the causes and effects of our previous lives. Hence our connection or life-link with our parents and grandparents, and to our brothers and sisters, is extraordinarily close (Causton, 1991: 4).

SGI teaches that because families are karmically linked, it is not necessary for every member of a family to chant in order for the collective fortunes of that family to change for the better. In a similar way, it is not deemed necessary for everyone in the world to chant in order for the world to change for the better:

Changing our own lives one by one will bring a change in our family, our community and the society in which we live. It will change the age we live in, our history, and indeed all aspects of our world.¹

Present day members may chant to be reborn into chanting families, or, conversely, to be born in difficult circumstances in order to gain opportunities for personal growth. Member parents, like other convert Buddhists (Scheible, 2012: 7f) report that difficult children can teach them vital lessons in patience and tolerance which will be useful in multiple futures. Within this form of Buddhism, nirvana or buddhahood is envisaged for the here and now; there is no emphasis on escape from samsara in the future. Sōka Gakkai is about creating value in society—thereby transforming society. The organisation's aim is no less than revolution such that the world becomes a peaceful and happy buddhaland.

SGI-UK Family Life

I turn now to analysis of the data collected in the fieldwork study. This analysis is grounded in the interview data but also informed by sociological theory. Within Sōka Gakkai and its international wing, birth into a chanting family is perceived as auspicious and babies born to chanting parents are referred to as 'fortune babies'. An

¹<http://sgi-uk.org/buddhism/buddhist-concepts/human-revolution-and-overcoming-obstacles>

eighteen-year-old interviewee, whose mother was a chanting Buddhist long before she was born, remembered sitting on her mother's lap as a tiny child. She said, "I used to listen to her heart beat, and it sounded different in her chest ... when she was chanting."

The movement might see birth into a chanting family as a fortunate birth but it can also bring with it embarrassment and inconvenience. SGI-UK members are connected by the fact that they have the *gohonzon* (the SGI focus for practice or 'object of worship') in their homes and chant in front of it, ideally twice daily. Chanting therefore requires space within the home for the *butsudan* (Buddhist altar) that houses the *gohonzon*. This can mean anything from a corner of a bedroom to a place at the centre of the household or even a dedicated room. The family *butsudan* may be in the main living area of the home, and interviewees reported that they were embarrassed as children when explaining it to their friends.

The only interviewee to express the fact that her embarrassment tipped over into resentment about aspects of her childhood (although not necessarily the only interviewee to feel resentment) recognised that children brought up within other religious traditions could have comparable experiences. "I'm sure if my father was a vicar I would feel the same." Discussing her experience at school this twenty-six-year-old interviewee said, "It was difficult being a Buddhist kid ... you were normally the only Buddhist kid." She talked about her experience of sitting with the Muslim children and the fact that neither they nor she could understand why she had been excluded from school prayers. She also talked about the frequency with which meetings took place in the family home.

It's quite stressful when you're a kid and every Sunday morning thirty people turn up at ten thirty ... When thirty to fifty people chant, it's loud and all the neighbours know about it.

Chanting is a vocal activity, not a silent meditation. It may be heard by the neighbours and it will certainly be heard within the household. It is a public act and difficult for children to avoid public association with it. The majority of the young interviewees described times when they had hustled their friends upstairs to get away from a meeting.

Younger children who cannot be left at home on their own also tend to be taken about to meetings in the homes of others. Since those others may be geographically distant this can mean extensive travel on a regular basis, especially if parents have leadership responsibilities and especially in rural areas where populations are, therefore, members are widely spread. Some of the young people knew as soon as they were old enough to be left safely at home, that they wanted nothing more to do with SGI-UK meetings or practice. Others found that the friendship groups formed when they met together in each other's houses became important to them. Those who subsequently became SGI-UK members in their own right reported that these early friendships became significant networks. Friendships have been maintained as the young people graduate through the groups for children and young people into the adult men's and women's divisions.

SGI-UK members do not understand their religion as divisive, and certainly not as a potential source for conflict within families. They are not cut off from their extended families because they chant. Practice requires commitment but members are free to enjoy all aspects of UK work and cultural life alongside their chanting practice. This is not a sub-cultural organisation. It teaches a specific practice and articulates doctrine. It holds *nam myōhō renge kyō* to be central, but, in the UK at least, although it promotes faith in the practice, it does not discourage critical thinking, and there are no ‘no-go’ areas for members and young people brought up within this movement. SGI-UK is an evangelistic movement, but in this respect it contrasts with some Evangelical Christian families in the UK where parents want to keep their children safe within the Christian fold (Ward, 1996: 19).

An example of this difference—one that is central to family life—is that there is no pressure for members to marry or have partners who are practitioners. Even senior leaders in the UK may have non-practicing partners, and young members expressed surprise at being asked whether they are expected to have a partner from, or marry within, the movement. In contrast, young women in Japan explained during fieldwork there that when they are ready to marry, and at their own request, there may be an element of arrangement by Sōka Gakkai in the choice of partner. The UK movement is small and the choices restricted. More than one member offered an anecdote about the first UK General Director, Richard Causton, who, they claim, said that if you need a plumber you get the best plumber available regardless of his religion and that the same holds for a life partner. Even so, religion can be a cohesive factor within a family and it can be challenging for a practicing parent with a non-practicing partner to find a balanced role for their religious practice within a family unit. Expressions of distress about this particular tension were heard at SGI-UK residential courses when members had a chance to relax in each other’s company.

Parental Viewpoints

An SGI parent with a Jewish family background said he thought that, for emotional and sentimental reasons, it would be lovely for his whole family to chant together in a way that would be reminiscent of family meals in his childhood home. He regretted that this did not happen in practice. Chanting is a cohesive act and it clearly aids harmonious family life if religious practice is shared. As understandable as this is, the desire for children to chant is more widely expressed by SGI parents in terms of their desire to see their children happy and as good and useful citizens.

The academic literature distinguishes between regarding children as objects of ‘passive socialisation’ and as ‘active makers of meaning’ (Coleman, 1999: 71). SGI doctrine presents young people as active makers of meaning. The young are believed to have their own karmic trajectory and agency to make their own choices. The cyclical nature of life relieves parents of the need to be especially zealous in the promotion of the practice to their children. SGI is an evangelistic movement with an interest in passing on the practice to others, and there is a perceived urgency to improve the social and environmental conditions of the globe. In the UK, members are encouraged to be

effortful in increasing membership, for example, by inviting friends and acquaintances to attend meetings. There is a desire for the UK movement to grow, but no perceived urgency for any individual to start chanting, including the individual children of practitioners; there is always another life in which this can happen. Newcomers are welcome and there is enthusiasm for them to stay within the group and take up the chanting practice, but members are taught that a connection with the practice in this life will be inevitably developed in a future life. Those who do not join are not regarded as lost.

In any era, a detailed understanding of happiness is culturally constructed (Benjamin, 1973: 245), but practicing members of SGI-UK associate happiness and positive change with chanting *nam myōhō renge kyō*. Most therefore regard this as the best way to achieve these benefits, even though they may also express a liberal attitude to other religious practices. One father went so far as to say that he would be disappointed if his daughter did not rebel initially and try other religious paths. Liberal SGI-UK parents may want their children to chant at some point in the future, but they generally recognise that there are limits to the extent to which they can persuade them to do so, and several parents expressed the view that their children ought to try other options including other religious traditions. Parents may recommend chanting to their children during discussions of problems. Examples of such problems that emerged in the interviews with parents included bullying at school, and problems with friendships. All the parents in the study recognised that they risked censure from outside the movement and rebellion from their children if they appeared too persuasive. Unlike most other Buddhist convert traditions, Sōka Gakkai can be associated in the public mind with religious movements that are deemed to be dangerous, such as Aum Shinrikyo. That association can have negative connotations for children that parents are anxious to avoid.

As we would expect, the parents interviewed reported that the best way to teach children about SGI practice and the ideas behind it is by example (cf. Scheible, 2012). None of the parents or young people in the fieldwork study taught or learned about the philosophy of the movement at home in a structured way. It was not, for example, a normal part of the conversation at the meal table. Young people may be taught about Sōka Gakkai ideology at special groups, set up for their benefit, which hold regular monthly meetings and summer residential courses. These meetings and courses are informal, with a focus as much on entertainment and enjoyment as on opportunities to discuss Sōka Gakkai teachings. Children are encouraged to talk about their own experiences and aspirations at these events, but such conversations are not routinely steered into discussion about why and how to chant. The young people interviewed who had experienced the courses said that they were fun. The fact that SGI-UK attracts many creative young adults from artistic and media professions is highly advantageous in terms of such events, at least in London. Events can have a polish and professionalism to which other religious groups might aspire.

Of more significance in passing on Buddhist principles might be that children hear their parents talking to others about the practice, for example when talking to, or, in the movement's discourse, 'giving guidance to', other members. In one three-generation SGI family a thirty-year-old woman, who practiced regularly and had organisational

responsibility for the young women in her area, said she learned about the application of SGI teachings to daily life by listening to her own mother giving advice to members on the phone. She was conscious that she was passing on the teachings to her own children through the same method.

Passing on Gifts

Many of the interviewees articulated the idea that their early years as the children of SGI practitioners were the only early years they had experienced. Understandably, they could not envisage what it might have been like to have been born into different families, even though they were aware that their families were distinctive. These young people learned about chanting and about the philosophy of the movement as an integral part of growing up. Their familiarity with the symbols of SGI and their knowledge about what the symbols represent were part of the cultural capital their parents gifted to them. They learned about these aspects of life in ways that have ensured that, although they may not embrace them on their own account, these ideas have had a lasting impact on the ways in which they think about and relate to the world.

Religions, Buddhism included, have their own internal explanations for processes that operate when children are socialised into the religious viewpoint of their parents and other close associates. Such explanations may be based on theological positions or on specific cosmological and/or soteriological viewpoints. One benefit of referring to sociological theory as well as to Buddhist theory is that sociological theory is widely applicable to social/religious groups and has been applied to numerous minority and closed groups. Openness to such analysis helps us avoid seeing Buddhism as too much of a special case in terms of societal processes, thereby missing out on useful insights.

Social capital is usually understood as giving rise, through various means, to economic benefits. For example, ordinary members of social groups, including religious groups, may use their membership to procure for their children access to educational benefits leading to increased earning power. They may tap into the economic wealth of other members to access job opportunities for their offspring. The interview study detected no evidence of this occurring on a widespread basis in SGI-UK, although there will be individual examples, as in all social networks. Membership of groups also provides access to capital resources that may lead to goods other than economic goods (Portes, 1998). These goods include happiness and emotional stability. Davies and Guest argue that the capital that is transmitted between generations takes a wide range of forms, “not just knowledge as such, but experience, making itself manifest in a range of skills, predilections, tendencies and frameworks of meaning” (2007: 7).

Beyond the capital transfer that takes place inter-generationally in all families, there are two specific gifts that SGI-UK parents pass to their children. These are the notion of karma and the chanting practice. These two gifts do not rest on whether Sōka Gakkai practice is true or effective in the terms that are claimed for it. Stark argues that religious groups guard their capital and that groups that allow for cultural capital to be retained are more likely to be successful (1996). He argues that this is so because such

groups do not require their members to hold positions that are contrary to the faith positions of the society at large. In SGI-UK it is not continuity with the *faith position* of the society at large, but rather continuity with the *values* of the society at large that accommodates practitioners and allows SGI-UK a degree of success. Wilson and Dobbelaere argue that SGI-UK is “a movement in tune with the times in its stance regarding personal comportment” (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 221). The doctrine of cause and effect, as articulated within SGI, is not the basis of the values of UK citizens, but it is the foundation for the values, ethics and, indeed, theodicy that leads to personal comportment that is in tune with the times.

Ethical understanding in Sōka Gakkai is not based on Buddhist lay precepts—as it would be in other Buddhist sects—but only on karma. Karma is emphasized in the exegesis of Nichiren’s writings, in Ikeda’s writings, in the UK monthly SGI journal, *UK Express*, and in local meetings. Karma as a basis for value judgements and ethical behaviour is the first gift that the fieldwork data suggests has been transferred to these young people. It provides them with an ethical framework and gives them a lens through which to understand justice and what happens around them. In SGI, karma is normally referred to as cause and effect. Regardless of the process by which children learn about SGI teachings, they are likely to understand and internalise the idea that good causes lead to good effects and bad causes to bad effects. A young woman brought up in an SGI-UK family who subsequently rejected the organisation and the practice, when asked about her upbringing said,

When I was little ... I thought everybody was a Buddhist ... [but] a lot of people did not understand some of the concepts because they had not been brought up with them. They did not realise that if you do something wrong there might be consequences.

We see here that this young woman, who did not identify as a Buddhist and did not practice her parents’ religion, apart from occasional chanting, nonetheless had internalised karmic principles. She observed that people ‘did not realise’ that there are karmic consequences of wrong doing, implying that she did not question the veracity of the principle that wrong actions produce bad consequences. Another young woman who has rejected the movement but internalised the idea of karma said that she has no doubt that life operates according to karma and that people can expect to be reborn. She also mused, good-naturedly, as she discussed these ideas during the interview, that she may have been indoctrinated after all. The notion of karma has been familiar to her throughout her life and she may not have realised until she spoke about it that this is an idea that emanates from her religious heritage.

A second gift that SGI parents pass on to their children is the chanting practice itself. SGI children become familiar with the meditative chanting practice, often from birth. Whether or not these young people believe that chanting *nam myōhō renge kyō* taps into the power of the universe or can bring them the things they want, this is a resource they can and do use for their physical and emotional wellbeing. They do not have to learn the chant because it is part of their life experience. Typically they described chanting when they experienced problems, and they chanted even if they did not accept the doctrinal

explanations for the benefits the practice is said to bring. All those who had not joined SGI on their own account described chanting ‘in their heads’ or ‘under their breath’, perhaps on the way to school or when lying in bed in the morning. Using the chant does not require them to sign up as members or to accept the doctrinal explanations for the benefits the practice is said to bring, and it does not require them to commit to effortful practice. Even for those without faith in the power of the practice, chanting can be calming and a way to stop negative thoughts or provide mental space for adjusting to change or to problems (see e.g., Harvey, 2013, 243–244 on devotional chanting.) The practice is useful to these young people even without the ideas behind it or the exertion of regular chanting.

Insider status is measured according to multiple measures in this movement, as in others (Waterhouse, 2002a). For example, although it is possible to be a formal member of SGI-UK, it is also possible to be active or inactive in terms of private, personal practice and to be active or inactive in terms of communal practice. These distinctions operate for first generation converts for whom the practice is a conscious choice. They may subsequently reject it but children brought up in SGI-UK families take for granted the chanting practice. Their relationship with it cannot be the same as the relationship developed by a first generation convert to whom the practice is new. The UK general director, at the time of the study, a father himself, articulated a view commonly expressed within convert sanghas,

Just because you are born to Buddhist parents doesn’t make you a Buddhist because Buddhism is a practice first and foremost ... so you can’t just say I’m a Buddhist and not *do* anything. It’s got no meaning.

But he also recognised that the distinction between practicing and not practicing is not clear-cut when individuals have Buddhist practice in their family backgrounds.

Second generation kids don’t have to make such a thing about it because it’s a natural thing, and if they want to chant occasionally they do it because it’s there. They don’t have to think, ‘I’m chanting’ or ‘I’m not chanting’.

Many of the young people in the study exemplified this attitude. Even those SGI young people who felt ambiguous about their parents’ chosen religion admitted when asked that there were periods when they chanted the mantra *nam myōhō renga kyō* even if they did not, in any other sense, identify as members of the movement. Even those who were most vehement in their rejection of the organisation may chant *in extremis*.

As the UK Director General quoted above acknowledged, the chanting habits of these young people are not expressive of insider or outsider status. Young people from SGI-UK families who reject the movement or its doctrines chant when they are in difficulty, and, without exception, they reported that they found this beneficial. Those who chant only sporadically do not find it sufficiently beneficial nor, perhaps, sufficiently necessary for it to become a regular practice, but they can tap into a helpful strategy or resource when they need it.

Like the majority of young people in the UK (Savage et al., 2006: 123), the children of practicing SGI-UK members are generally not dissatisfied with life, and they need a compelling reason to start any religious practice, including chanting. Here is an extract from a family interview. The interviewee here was just sixteen.

Interviewer: Do you chant at all?

Interviewee: Not very much; sometimes if I feel like it I will chant, but I don't chant regularly.

Interviewer: What might make you feel like it?

Interviewee: If something really bad happens or if I am worrying about something. Sometimes I just feel that I want to and then I do. I just don't do it very much.

Interviewer: If you feel that you get benefit from doing it, why don't you do it regularly?

Interviewee: I don't know. I can't be bothered really.

Her mother said, "They like the philosophy but they are young people, and unless they have got major problems, they don't see the need to chant."

Vicarious Practice and the Diminution of Zeal

Second generation members who have taken up the practice in a committed way reported remembering a time when they made a positive decision to start. One young person remembers a time when, at just fourteen and unable to sleep, he decided to heed his mother's advice and to start chanting: "My mum said, 'you know, you could chant', and that was it, I started learning how to do it." Another referred vaguely to problems and again reported that she can remember deciding that she would commit to the chanting discipline, partly at her mother's suggestion. The decision to chant was a positive and determined decision. This is necessary because being a chanting Buddhist is effortful. *Gongyo* means assiduous practice.

The problems and difficulties that prompted these personal decisions to start putting effort into chanting were not qualitatively different from some of the issues identified by those who choose not to practice regularly. All young people experience pressures and challenges. Among those challenges identified by interviewees were the pressure of school examinations, the death of family members, and an unplanned pregnancy. Those who have taken up the practice on their own account have made a decision about coping with life that includes the commitment of twice daily effortful chanting, a degree of acceptance of a set of doctrinal premises, meeting with other members, and telling other people about the practice.

Related to this is that some parents expressed the view that if their offspring drift into the practice without making a positive, individual decision, which includes informed

choice, they will be less dedicated and effective members. Within SGI-UK, but outside of official sources, there is a perception that dedication to the practice is diluted as it passes through the generations. A similar concern has been expressed in relation to the children of Wiccan practitioners (Sontag cited in Berger, 1999: 13). Stark has argued that “the retention of offspring is not favourable to continued growth, if it causes the group to reduce strictness” (Stark, 1996: 144). Like Stark, SGI-UK members understand diminution of strictness in terms of ‘freeriding’ and diminution of zeal for the practice itself and for its spread. UK members who fear this dilution as the practice passes to future generations may be influenced by what they know of the majority religion in the UK where there is plenty of evidence that children are lukewarm about traditional religious practice (e.g., Savage et al., 2006; Crockett and Voas, 2006). Young people have been rejecting the Christian churches in the UK at a steeper rate than adult leavers throughout the twentieth century (Stanton, 2013: 93). In recent decades, churches are said to have been ‘haemorrhaging’ or ‘bleeding to death’ because of the lack of young people (Brierley, 2000; 2002: 4).

In spite of the fact that many of the young people in the study did not want the commitment of belonging, all of them, whether they practiced on their own account or not, said they were glad that their parents practice. They thought the practice and the social involvement was good for their parents. This came over most clearly in the account provided by the eighteen-year-old daughter of a single mother, who had been practicing long before her daughter was born. This young woman and her mother affirmed in separate interviews that she gave her mother support with respect to organisational responsibilities. She encouraged her mother, a local women’s leader, to attend meetings and reassured her that the Buddhist lectures she prepared would be well received. She knew that her mother chanted for her happiness and valued the fact that when she faced challenges, for example illness or an exam, her mother would chant for her. She said, “I feel like I’m protected by my mum.” She valued the organisation, saw benefit in chanting, and was glad that others chanted, but she seldom chanted herself and did not regard herself as a Buddhist. Other young people also liked the idea that their parents chanted for them. Some expressed the view that their parents’ practice took away the need for them to practice on their own behalf.

We see in these accounts evidence of what Grace Davie has called vicarious religion (Davie, 2007; 2010). Davie defines vicarious religion as “the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing.” (2007: 22). Davie does not intend that this analytical tool should replace other variables at play within contemporary religion (2010: 262). Like the theory around social/religious/spiritual capital, vicarious religion has been developed mostly within populations where the majority religion is Christianity. Nevertheless, there is evidence in these accounts from SGI-UK of the operation of vicarious religion at this micro level. These young people’s accounts suggest not only that they approve of what their parents are doing, and may put themselves out to support their parents practice, but also that they think their parents are doing something in which they share the benefit.

If meditative practices are principally about the individual development of mindfulness, there is little space for vicarious practice. Scheible argues in relation to North American convert sanghas (2012), that children may benefit from their parents' practice if mindfulness makes for better parenting. In SGI, however, this vicarious benefit is considered to be broader and not at odds with doctrine since beneficial changes in individuals are said to benefit families and society more broadly. "This change in individual lives will bring about a profound effect in society" (Allwright, 1998: 99).

Conclusion

In the UK as elsewhere in the world, SGI harbours ambitions for continuing growth in order to bring about 'Human Revolution' and a better world. Growth achieved thus far has relied substantially on practitioners introducing friends and family members to the practice. Opportunities for recruitment to full membership of second and third generation children increase as the international movement matures. Second generation members, brought up in Buddhist homes, have learned the practice from a young age and have also internalised doctrinal assertions. There is no evidence that the fact that they have been brought up with the practice will necessarily make them any less dedicated to it if they make a personal decision to chant assiduously. Those who do take up the practice have made judgements about what they want and how they can best achieve it. There is evidence, however, that many children of practitioners are not convinced that the rewards the practice offers are worth the effort. In this, SGI-UK is no different from other religions in the UK, including the stated religion of the majority. The reasons why many SGI-UK children do not take up the practice seem to be that they do not aspire to the things it offers or at least that they do not regard the things it offers to be worth the commitment of belonging or the time commitment required by assiduous chanting. Young people may have the benefits they want already or may see other ways of getting them. The competitor of religion in the UK, whether of the majority or of this minority, may be that the goals the young look for may also be available through hard work and education.

SGI families provide benefits for children that they can embrace partially. They may not choose to develop faith in the chanting practice and the ideas that accompany the practice, but, on this evidence, and in accordance with their status as active makers of meaning, the children of SGI-UK families have opportunities to select as they choose from the distinctive practices and ideas the movement offers.

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