

**SOKA GAKKAI IN CUBA:
GLOCALIZATION MODES AND RELIGIOUS CONVERSION PROCESSES
IN A JAPANESE RELIGION**

By

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Abstract

Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a Japanese religion that is becoming a global movement, began to develop in Cuba after the official visit of its President Ikeda Daisaku in 1996. Starting with a small group in the capital city, it received juridical recognition by the State in 2007 and has spread to most of the provinces in the country. This dissertation seeks to understand *how SGI achieves its glocalization in Cuba*. More specifically, it addresses these questions: *What are the main glocalization modes that SGI implements to negotiate its message and identity in Cuba? Why do Cubans join SGI? How does the religious conversion process occur?* The study further integrates the perspective of cultural globalization and religious conversion theory, by combining the conversion careers approach (Gooren, 2006, 2007, 2010) and the model of the global field (Robertson, 1992), as specifically adapted to globalizing religious movements (Warburg, 2005). Additionally, the analysis is enriched with some aspects of interaction ritual theory (Collins, 2004).

Based on fieldwork carried out in Havana in 2011 and document analysis, several glocalization modes are discussed: the hybridization of SGI with the figure of José Martí; the discursive duality of SGI as both a “rational” humanistic philosophy and a practical religion; the appropriation of SGI’s Japanese elements through a process of universalization of particularism; and SGI’s threefold attitude toward the local religious culture. Affiliation patterns can be explained partly as congruence between adherents’ own (non-) religious worldview and SGI’s supply capacity. The mechanism of pattern reformulation at the conversion level is explained through interaction rituals.

SGI achieves its glocalization in Cuba by virtue of its institutional capacity to provide simultaneously a utilitarian religious perspective, a non-theistic humanistic philosophy and an “Oriental” spirituality, which accounts for both continuities with and changes in converts’

religious life, and through which it builds a symbolic bridge to local particularism, the
“Mystic East” and the world.