

Soka Gakkai and Temple Cemeteries

During the past several years there have been more than a hundred cases of disputes between the followers of Sōka Gakkai and temples which have charge of these followers' ancestral graves.

Although there are now public burial grounds, most Japanese families are connected with some temple which historically has had charge of their ancestral graves. They are registered with these temples and, irrespective of the personal affiliation of some individuals with other temples or religious organizations, they have expected such temples to conduct funeral and memorial services for members of their families. Naturally there is a fee for each service.

The system has worked satisfactorily and except for some difficulty involving Christians, which has arisen now and then, there has been no particular problem. Sōka Gakkai, however, insists that it has a monopoly on truth and its devotees are not permitted to allow the priests of other Buddhist

temples to conduct memorial services for their ancestors. Consequently, difficulties have arisen and the temples have had resort to counter-actions.

One remarkable case arose some three years ago when a former supporter, having become a member of Sōka Gakkai, notified his ancestral temple that he no longer wished to have memorial services conducted for his ancestors. On hearing this the chief priest, acting on the assumption that the deceased was without relatives, exhumed the urn of the ancestor involved and placed it with the ashes of those who had died without relatives. This angered the person concerned and he brought suite into the Kiryu branch of the Maebashi District Court. On February 4, 1959, the court ruled that the priest had no right to remove the urn without the permission of the owner and sentenced him to four months imprisonment with a two-year stay of execution.

In June, 1959, a similar case oc-

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curred in Tochigi Prefecture. There a man is suing Keisokuji Temple which refuses to permit a burial because the owner of the grave has become a member of Sōkai Gakkai. This case was still pending at the end of the year, but Buddhists throughout the area, angered at the aggressive actions of Sōka Gakkai in resorting to forced conversion (*shaku-buku*) to secure new adherents, have collected funds to fight the case in support of Keisokuji.

Still another case, which was left pending at the end of the year in Honjo, Saitama Prefecture, involved Taishoin, a Shingon Temple, and a Sōka Gakkai devotee. When his father died, the devotee asked Sōka Gakkai to conduct the funeral service but wanted to bury the ashes in the temple burial lot. But the temple refused to allow it, claiming that, since the individual concerned was no longer an ad-

herent of the temple but a follower of Sōka Gakkai, which regards the ancestral temple as heretical, said individual should bury his father in a burial ground provided by Sōka Gakkai. To support the temple's position, the priest sought and secured an injunction from the local court to prevent the individual from using the temple burial ground. The temple claimed that the graveyard is for the adherents of the temple and not a general community burial grounds. Sōka Gakkai, however, argued that there are adherents of many faiths buried in the temple graveyard and that the individual owner of the lot has the right to use it without interference from the temple.

There was a similar case in Zushi involving a Christian woman who was not allowed to bury her husband in the temple burial grounds. This also was pending at the end of the year.