

**The Translation and Domestication of an Oriental
Religion into a Western Catholic Country:
The Case of Soka Gakkai in Italy**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is premised on the fundamental notion of religious translation as a process of interpretation and adaptation that arises out of a complex linguistic and cultural interplay. Its aim is to examine the types of interpretative problems one encounters as a society deeply rooted in Biblical and Christian practices struggles to integrate the rituals and formulae of Buddhism. As part of a cultural system, the translation of a religion cannot be explored in a vacuum, but needs to be viewed in the mutual interdependence with other elements of such system. Starting from Giambattista Vico's hypothesis that whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand (1744) this thesis aims to look at the interplay of local and foreign traditions in the translation and domestication of a Japanese new religious movement, Soka Gakkai, that has migrated from East to West.

Through the notion of cultural repertoire, i.e. the aggregate of options utilized by a group of people for the organization of life, this work explores the extent in which Catholicism in Italy has influenced the formation of both religious sense and religious vocabulary. It will be argued that in Italy, the translation of an entire set of Japanese key-concepts pertaining to the sphere of religion has been measured on the yardstick of Christian vocabulary, and thus influenced by the search of perfect equivalences. This operation has, in time, secured the successful dissemination of Soka Gakkai in the territory. At the same time, however, the overlap of Catholic and Buddhist practices has given rise to a peculiar form of hybrid religion that can be defined as Catho-Buddhism."