

Value Creating Education's Role in Fostering Authentic and Social Justice Leaders

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Research Question:

“How do systems in co-curricular activities influence the authenticity and social justice narrative of international student leaders at Soka University?”

Abstract

Authentic leadership and social justice leadership are becoming popular practices especially among young student leaders at university level. How does critical pedagogy and diversity impact these leadership practices – positively or negatively, or both? This paper seeks to examine these leadership themes among international student leaders at Soka University, that is an active implementer of Value Creating Education (VCE) within its classroom settings. It is an analysis of how VCE is different, if at all, in propelling students to become authentic leaders for social justice?

Key Words

Authentic Leadership, Social Justice Leadership, Social Justice, Patriarchy, Colonialism, Decolonial Leadership, Critical Pedagogy, Value Creating Education, Student Leadership, University

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Introduction

2023, and we are yet far from understanding what years of colonialism and cis-heteronormativity has brought onto the world. The roots of patriarchy, far from being pulled out as nasty weeds, are still growing with just a limited part of the elite, privileged population benefitting from it. Evils of all sorts ranging from genderism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, slavery, have been birthed by patriarchy. Leadership is one field in particular that remains heavily dominated by patriarchal influences, not only because cis-gendered, heterosexual, White men are considered as the “ideal” leaders, but also because entry within and acceptance into the leadership role is limited based on *progressive patriarchal* structures. This is because people of color are only accepted as leaders or considered authentic when their behavior is colonized. Additionally, queer individuals are only permitted when they seem to be falling under the binary genderism that does accept women, but only those that are cis-gendered and perhaps White. Therefore, resulting in an illusion of patriarchal remedy, only to continue to exclude marginalized groups. The lens of *progressive patriarchy* will be used to examine the given narrative.

Leadership theories, such as authentic leadership and social justice leadership, have become increasingly appealing to activists and changemakers because of their characteristics that seem inclusive and driven toward political action. However, these theories are more accessible when a cis-gendered, heterosexual, White man or even White woman implements them to combat injustice rather than the “others” (Jourian, 2014; Davis, 2021). It is questionable, then, if authentic leaders of color or queer authentic leaders can really maintain their integrity in their struggle for marginalized social identities or its intersection when their followers have never accepted them as a leader, or must look for help from a White, cis-gendered, heterosexual comrade to make their voices heard.

This paper aims to explore the complex social identities of international student leaders at a private liberal arts university in Tokyo, Japan, who are faced with a deep-rooted patriarchal leadership system that challenges their authentic voice for social justice. This system involves different forms and appearances of privileges; however, the theoretical analysis of said system leads to the same root cause of patriarchy. Being a Japanese university, it has a dominant

majority of (1) Japanese and Japanese-speaking students, (2) students that belong to the same Buddhist faith – Soka Gakkai, and (3) students that are cis-gendered and heterosexual. Therefore, the concept of patriarchy is vividly evident in the form of oppression and lack of representation by minorities. Student leaders that are Japanese or at least speak the Japanese language while appearing *Asian*, belong to the dominant religious faith, and fall under the cis-gendered, heterosexual label are openly welcomed, while others are ostracized for their differing identities, or worse for the intersection of their minority backgrounds. My research interest in this study peaked because given that Soka University follows the critical pedagogy of Value Creating Education (Guajardo and Reiser, 2016), I want to examine how international students combatting the previously described systems of oppression, build on their own authentic and social justice leadership positions.

I was raised in Mumbai, India, with an abundance of privileges. Moving to Japan and studying at Soka University became a crucible moment of acceptance and realization in part because of my classes in the undergraduate Faculty of International Liberal Arts, while mostly through my lived experiences as a Desi, queer woman of color, from a “Third world” country, where one must be either Japanese or White to be accepted into the system. Being a member of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), I had read about student activities at Soka University before my enrollment and had high expectations in terms of equity and social justice because of its philosophical foundations. I enrolled into Soka University in the Spring of 2021, learning online for one year and finally stepping foot on campus in March of 2022. From the moment I arrived on campus, I was an active member of the Foreign Student Association (FSA), a form of international student council. With experiences within and outside my classes, I knew I wanted to change many systems involved in the student-led activities at the university, and I decided to challenge my leadership as the head of the FSA 2023. This paper is an attempt to explain the leadership implemented by international students in a VCE environment, using my own experiences and narratives captured through qualitative research from interviews and linking it to the existing literature on authentic and social justice leadership.

Leadership Concepts

The research question of: *How do systems in co-curricular activities influence the authenticity and social justice narrative of international student leaders at Soka University?* is analyzed in this paper using the leadership concepts of authentic leadership and social justice leadership. In that respect, a clear understanding of these two leadership theories is essential for this case study.

Social justice leadership can be described as “...engaging in a leadership stance that puts issues of race, class, gender, disabilities, and other marginalized conditions at the core of their practice” (Flores & Bagwell, 2021). Further, to view social justice as a means to reach true inclusion rather than its mere disguise (Ekpe & Roach, 2023), it can only become a reality when leaders have a common sense that is not the hegemonic common sense, and challenge power dynamics to exert a pressure of the removal of exclusive treatment of privileged individuals because power lies only within the dominant classes of society (Lewis, 2016). The aim of this leadership style is to go beyond the universal one-size fits all approach (Flores & Bagwell, 2021).

“Authentic leadership is an approach that looks at the authenticity of leaders and their leadership” (Northouse, 2018, p. 35) and has four main elements to it (Northouse, 2012, in Davis, 2021). These are inferred by Northouse (2012) as self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. These four aspects inform the authentic leader in the choices and decisions they make, allowing them to constantly reflect on their own beliefs and in their understanding of others, especially their followers. Authentic leaders are required to have a firm foundation of morals and values, while being open to listening and exploring other perspectives, because they are assumed to be accepting the authenticity of every individual. Finally, authenticity is not only expected intra-personally but also in the leader’s relationships and communication.

Rationale

In the introduction, I aimed to touch upon some of the prevalent systems of oppression invading daily life experiences for most, if not all, learners of higher education. Despite its

colonial and oppressive structure, for me, university study has been a means to encounter and engage in issues of social justice through finding my own authentic voice. However, when education fails to take into account social identities and student experiences, learning becomes but just a means of reproducing the status quo and its privileges. Systems of oppression have been enforcing ways of being and leading students to deny the right to one's own authenticity and fight for social justice. The coloniality of universities is not just in the format of being a Western dominant structure of education but also a system that creates certain "ideals" for how a learner or a product of such education must be (Regmi, 2022). Ekpe and Roach (2023) assert that even educators with marginalized identities, such as themselves, find it difficult to navigate the oppressive realities of higher education wherein a good student is "White" and "Heterosexual." The complexity of belonging to more than one unideal identity, or the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989 in Ekpe and Roach, 2023), is the bigger issue in universities today. This is when looking at marginalized identities becomes a matter of "managing diversity" and "prejudice reduction" (Mohanty, 1990). Voices of non-mainstream students are then seen as representations of their entire mass community, such as their entire ethnic group, those with similar sexual orientation, or all genderqueer individuals seen as the same. This leads to tokenization and students in the majority culture assuming a single story (Adichie, 2009) of an entire group because of one or more of their minority backgrounds.

Putting all of this into perspective, I wanted to find out how students address all these topics in autonomous activities. In other words, outside classes, within co-curricular engagements. Literature ranged from exploring theories on race and gender, to testing these variables in different student settings. Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Crenshaw, 1995 in Ekpe and Roach, 2023), and Queer of Color Critique (QOCC) (Ferguson, 2003 in Manalansan, 2018) are two such theories I have found to be of extreme relevance when exploring student's engagement with social justice and authenticity within co-curricular environments. While Davis (2021), studies the colorblindness of White students even when they are present in a multiracial setting, Miller and Vaccaro (2016), attempt to display that even within diverse and open settings such as a Queer Student Group (QSG), those that are queer and persons of color, still have challenges they must face. Therefore, Jourian (2014) and Jourian and Simmons (2017) examine the impact gender non-conformity plays within authentic leadership for social change. Even though this may all seem to be enforcing systems of oppression rather than fighting them, other studies,

including those by Regmi (2022), Mohanty (1990), and Ekpe and Roach (2023), iterate the importance of decolonial, personalized counter-storytelling to not only empower oneself but gain the advocacy and agency to work towards finding one's own authentic voice for social justice.

As proven by Davis's (2021) study, when students, even those who belong to the majority culture, are consciously allowed to comprehend the structures of inequity, they become agents of social change and use their voice for the benefit of both them and humanity. Leadership within university settings, like everywhere else, is not separate from social privileges and oppression (Jourian, 2014). Hierarchies and social identities create an environment where only those with conforming identities are allowed to be themselves, in their practice of authentic leadership. In this sense, young individuals are empowered to be just as they are, just to encounter a "guise of inclusion", wherein only certain leaders are really included while the others have to either fake their identities or are not even aware of their true selves because of the depth of colonialism and cis-heteronormativity that has prevailed in their learning experiences. However, education pedagogies such as Value Creating Education (VCE) have allowed students to find their purpose of education to use their lives for the sake of humanity (Gebert and Joffe, 2007). When learners are propelled to take action for society, toward the happiness of all humanity, they are seen to engage more with issues relating to social identities, privileges, oppression, and justice. Through the existence and support of educational methods like that of VCE, students are able to explore authentic leadership and social justice leadership.

Literature has shown that Japanese universities have lower numbers of students believing in their own leadership potential, this is in particular true of female students (Smirles et al., 2020). In that respect much research is needed on student leadership within Japanese universities, and especially leadership among international students in Japan, which has not yet been explored by major studies. Especially in universities that are comparatively highly diverse such as Soka University, that has a 10% international student population, this becomes even more important to analyze (Soka University, n.d.). Within the international students themselves, there is more diversity in various aspects of gender, ethnicity, country, languages, economic and mental states. And hence, this paper is designed to explore the phenomenon of student leadership among international students at a Japanese university. However, there is one more specificity within this study. Soka University is not just any Japanese university, but a university grounded

in the philosophical foundations of Value Creating pedagogy and a setting that actively embraces and implements VCE, as mentioned and explained above. In this context, this research aims to explore student leadership in diverse settings embedded with critical pedagogy.

Soka University was established in the spring of 1971 in Hachioji, Tokyo (Ikeda, 2019, p.168-9). Along with the first building, the founder of the university – Daisaku Ikeda, who has a strong influence and inspirational presence on the students, erected two statues that continue to stand tall on campus. One of those statues depicts an angel flying high with a trumpet blowing and a blacksmith sitting below, as if looking intently at the students passing by. The blacksmith is meant to represent that vast majority of society that does not have access to the privilege of education, while the angel represents the founder's hope for students of Soka University, that use their own opportunity as a means to use their own voice for the sake of those that cannot do so for themselves (Guajardo and Reiser, 2016). “The proud mission of those who have been able to receive education must be to serve, in seen and unseen ways, the lives of those who have not had this opportunity,” (Ikeda, 1996) With such messages of representation and justice, Soka University students are naturally pushed to examine issues connecting to social justice. Furthermore, VCE also promotes learners to grow towards the best version of themselves through the process of an internal transformation, in other words, promoting one's own authentic identity and empowering one to strive towards it on a regular basis through interpersonal interaction. With VCE being a strong propagator of social justice leadership and authentic leadership, how do international student leaders enact these leadership practices in their co-curricular activities, outside classrooms that are spaces for VCE to be operationalized.

Methodology

Soka University Japan (SUJ) has two major leadership opportunities for international student leadership activities. One is the Foreign Student Association (FSA) – which is the equivalent of a foreign students' council active throughout the academic year– and the other is the International Student Café (ISC) – which is only active during the Soka University Festival period (June to October every year). The context for the research question posed in this paper is answered through an understanding of student leadership within the ISC 2023 at SUJ's annual festival. The structure of the ISC involves 12 departments headed by one department head each,

who then connects to the overall person in-charge, the representative of the entire ISC (see Appendix A).

Having served as the overall person in-charge for the ISC 2023, I decided to use purposeful sampling to conduct this study by interviewing eight student leaders who come from eight different countries (see Appendix B for details). The interviews were semi-structured, conducted face-to-face in December 2023 and May 2024, used English and/or Japanese as the medium of exchange, about 45-60 minutes long, and included seven main questions plus follow-up questions. Students were kept anonymous and given the following fictitious names: (list the names). In addition, I also participated and recorded my autoethnographic responses to the interview questions in the form of 10-minute-long journal entries per question. The responses from the seven participants were recorded in the form of audio recordings and hand-written notes and were later analyzed in the form of Venn diagrams and an Excel data sheet (Appendix C and Appendix D).

Findings

Data from the interviews was sorted out for each question and then analyzed to see if there were any similar trends or patterns that were prompted by more than one respondent. To that end, I chose to analyze the data in the form of Venn diagrams (for the first phase) and an excel sheet (for the second phase) that could either link all, some, or none of the participants to one another.

Overall, the results display that while Value Creating Education (VCE) does lead to some aspects of social justice and authentic leadership, there are challenges present within the system and surrounding the context in which it exists that make it difficult for student leaders to fully realize their voices. Of the factors that the participants shared that linked to the root of VCE were a sense of belonging, non-hierarchical/democratic structures, and the bond between senior students with their juniors. However, VCE itself and the context surrounding its existence at Soka University Japan (SUJ), which is Japanese culture, do seem to be impacting some subjects in feeling a pressure to continue and/or create harmony, stick to traditions and traditional approaches of leadership, a *no-rest* culture in the name of sacrifice, and gendering (personal communication, December 9, 2023 – May 29, 2024).

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Community that comes from a sense of belonging, agency that arises from realizing one's potential, and the establishment of responsibility among students to become successors are all attributes of VCE that push students to develop authentic leadership and social justice leadership. While VCE can be said to propel students towards the leadership practice of authenticity and social justice, there are many challenges that still hinder its success in the form of patriarchal systems of oppression discussed earlier.

How do systems in co-curricular activities influence the authenticity and social justice narrative of international student leaders at Soka University? Systems here refer to the philosophical foundations of VCE at SUJ, as well as the contextual systems of Japanese society's linguistic, gender, and ethnic divisions, privileges, and hierarchy. In this sense, how does the system of VCE help students to establish their authentic and social justice leadership so they can overthrow the given systems of oppression within their leadership arena of co-curricular engagements at SUJ. The concepts of authenticity and social justice will be examined below.

Authenticity

All eight respondents agreed that the ISC led to a sense of belonging, and this can be linked to VCE for Seoul, Seremban, and Dalian as they describe that the historic purpose of the ISC and the Soka University festival itself is rooted in VCE and because others around them were educated with the same purpose, they could unite to create a community for one another. Seoul and Colorado also said that their leadership styles could be more democratic, which is closer to their authentic self (personal communications, December 9, 2023 – May 29, 2024). Their reasons varied from the study of VCE to disagreeing with past education systems they have encountered that taught them to value authority and hierarchy. However, seven of the eight participants also concluded that while VCE is seen in action, it is not completely represented as some of the realities do not match with the values of VCE. Mumbai suggests that while linking the goal of the festival to bigger themes like world peace is good, it's disappointing when not everyone acts upon the same ideals. She explains by stating, "you say you are going to do this, but you are not actually doing what you said or what you say is good" (personal communication, December 11, 2023). While criticizing the ISC she also iterates that having a sense of purpose overall aids activities by easing deeper conversations or "dialogues" (Guajardo, 2023, p. 51) and

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reducing conflicts that may occur in group activities. Seoul and Seremban also shared about the purpose of having a purpose itself, through their examination of VCE and pushed forth through their religious practice in the SGI. However, Mumbai, Seremban and Seoul sharing the same feeling during the ISC implies that membership of the SGI does not lead to any significant differences when it comes to authentic leadership practice emerging through VCE.

Finally, Shizuoka, Colorado, and Caracas, who all embarked on their journey as a department head with low self-esteem, were able to overcome their fears of becoming a leader. As they noted, this belief in themselves came through their community, and this key concept of succession prevailed throughout the historic existence of the ISC. A senior student who had served as her department head in the past year (2022) helped Shizuoka gain the confidence and agency to believe that she, too, could be a leader (Shizuoka, personal communication, December 13, 2023). Further, Caracas notes that through his Korean male community group at SUJ, he could build his community and regain the confidence that he had lost due to his familial experiences (Caracas, personal communication, May 29, 2024). Such fostering relationships are a key aspect to VCE, and their implementation can result in learners authentically voicing their leadership practice. “I just observed how amazing my leader was,” Shizuoka states when talking about her department head – her senior that she wishes to succeed in terms of the ISC leadership (personal communication, December 13, 2023).

Social Justice

Seoul, Mumbai, Shizuoka, Colorado, Dalian, and Seremban suggested that linguistic privileges and barriers were a huge part of their experience in the ISC. With Seoul's native skills in English and particularly Japanese, and Mumbai's multilingual ability in English, Japanese, plus two other spoken languages popular among the participants of ISC, which are Korean and Chinese, had a huge impact on her being “emotionally at ease,” (Mumbai, personal communication, December 11, 2023) Such privileges were not available in particular to Shizuoka, and Dalian, who spoke some Japanese but were more comfortable in English, but also to Seremban, who regardless of conducting all activities in Japanese, was yet always only considered an “English-speaker” until the end. Despite the difference in their experiences, all six shared that if VCE is truly to be seen emerging within the ISC, language cannot and must not

remain a barrier. Mumbai argues that in achieving world peace, language is the compassion and the effort one displays in understanding others. Therefore, if language continues to become a barrier in leadership positions, true VCE values are far from being actualized.

Mumbai, Seremban, and Dalian also shared that through their past experiences in the ISC, they have learned that Japanese students tend to favor certain international students over others, and this also creates a system of hierarchy among the nationalities of ISC participants. With South Korean students being actively engaged and favored by the Japanese side, there is more possibility for a sense of belonging, feeling at ease, and overall preferential treatment. Seoul also pointed out this when she shared that one of the South Korean department heads could manage her leadership without much chaos because she had her own “community.” As Caracas is our Korean subject representative, we can also see that he mentions the prevalence of a community that he has due to his being Korean and male, both identities that form the most privileged part of the ISC. Mumbai, Seremban, and Dalian all share a sense of the guise of inclusion (Ekpe and Roach, 2023) mentioned in the literature.

Further on these three continue to touch upon other forms of stereotyping and discrimination occurring in the form of gendering within and beyond the ISC. These, too, they say, do not align with VCE and must be challenged. As they begin to examine the future and what their ideal leadership for the ISC is, Dalian and Seremban hope for someone who can stand up, fight against the patriarchal system, and hears and makes heard the voices of marginalized students.

Summary

Although all these ideas may seem like negative influences within the ISC, they demonstrate that student leaders within the ISC are vigilant, observe inequities and systems of oppression, and are willing to take action to change and speak up about it. This is the portrayal of agency that can be found among some of the participants, based on analysis of their responses to their social identities corresponding to the patriarchal system described in the introduction. Caracas, being the only Korean, cis/het male student, proposes that at SUJ “anyone can be a leader” and that his ideal leadership qualities match the ideal image of a leader presently at the university level. All other participants, nevertheless, share opposing views and show hope for

what can make things better. Dalian and Seremban declare that their entire purpose of becoming a leader in the 2023 ISC was because they experienced bad leadership in the previous year and wanted to do better by creating representation for those like them (personal communication, May 29). Seremban goes as far as saying that her experience of oppression and restrictions itself became the foundation of her leadership praxis. Tokyo, the only participant that belonged to the dominant Japanese student population, is queer, but unlike Seremban that experiences the intersection of her identities with being both queer, a woman and a Brown Indian in Japan, he does embody many social privileges. However, due to the rigid heteronormativity, he has neither spoken openly about his romantic orientation, nor been blinded to the oppressions present regardless of being a cis-gendered Japanese male. He clearly states that his two foundations for leadership are VCE, based on his knowledge of it through the founder and his mom, along with his gay identity. Although Caracas seems privileged enough to ignore social identities of his fellow leaders, he does talk about social change in his mention of capitalistic tendencies ruling out his high school years. Further, he mentions the role VCE and SUJ have played in helping him rid his own classist and capitalist ideologies to put human interaction first, making patience, honesty, and courage his core values in leadership within and beyond the ISC. Based on these findings, I would like to suggest that even those student leaders who have not yet started to form an understanding of social identities do see a necessity for social change in the present and the future. And while those that can see this within the protected space of SUJ and the ISC are closer to the definition of social justice and authentic leadership as described in this paper, all of them including Caracas, show signs of the same.

Another key finding would be that among those that are discriminated upon, subjects with barely any privileges and almost too many privileges were more likely to notice the social system and contribute to change. Seremban and Dalian, with identities as complex as being Brown-skinned, Latina Mestiza (Mixed) Ecuadorian and Queer Indian, have been the fiercest in critically analyzing the ISC while also being actively engaged in making it better for juniors with similar complex identities. Seremban states, “So that the system would conform, rather than having our juniors conform” (personal communication, May 29). She adds, “Had I been in the dominant groups, I may not have led in a way that was so true to my identities, my own culture and my own truth.” Contrastingly, Seoul and Mumbai, while having experienced no language barrier, spoke more fiercely and assertively about the linguistic inequality. On the other hand,

Shizuoka hesitated to say that language was the only factor that restricted her leadership, especially when it was a systemic factor. She answers the interview question of obstacles in the ISC by saying, “I don’t want to say this – but I think it’s language.” When followed up asking to state why she said that, she added, “because I think it shouldn’t be an obstacle” (personal communication, xxx). The question of whether one wants to stand up and speak for themselves is a question of social justice. In that sense, when Shizuoka, Seoul and Mumbai shared that they do not feel included in the ISC, their choice of wanting to still engage and make improvements to the given system is a step towards social justice and authentic leadership that can be seen to derive from their commitment to align VCE values to the ISC and the university’s festival overall. Though some may not yet display acts of resistance, they are already aware of their identities and social locations in the ISC – and that itself is the beginning. What links the two groups of Dalian and Seremban, and Seoul and Mumbai, can be seen in their past leadership experiences and lack of self-doubts in their confidence and abilities. Particularly, these four subjects can be seen to recognize that they made changes to the system and could be said to be proud of it too.

Discussions

Soka University was born out of protests against Japanese University systems, in the late 1960s (Ikeda, 2019, p.118). The aim of founding this university is grounded in the means of using education for the sake of peace and happiness of all humanity. In that sense, the philosophy of Value Creating Education (VCE) encourages each student to undergo their own internal transformation to become global citizens that are ready to use their authentic selves to work for transformation on bigger scales (Ikeda, 1996). Dwyer et al. (2014) have researched intergroup dialogue in higher education and shown examples of how authentic leadership can be a result of mindful practices. These mindful practices can be seen in the responses of my research participants that stress the importance of dialogues, succession, reflection, personal transformation, and other such self-reappraisal procedures (personal communication, Dec 2023 – May 2024). As they state, these practices have allowed them to come one, two or several steps closer to their own truer, more authentic version of oneself.

A relevant example of social change can be seen from the history of the Soka University Festival, wherein students were not only leaders in the organization and planning of the event but also in acting as changemakers to make the festival's purpose a reality. The students wanted the founder of the university to visit the campus however, the faculty had opposing perspectives. Unlike the Japanese culture of adhering to ageist power dynamics and self-protection (GLOBE, n.d.), the students became critical actors in inviting the founder and organizing an entire festival to welcome him. This festival has continued ever since. And while several traditions followed, most participants (n=7) agreed that we need to make anew, rather than replicate (personal communication, Dec 2023 – May 2024). As Scharmer mentions (Saxena et. al, 2014), once participants in a system break the silos between the *self* and the *others*, what they can truly concern themselves with is the “us,” rather than the “me and you.” This can be seen particularly in the actions of Seoul and Mumbai, who despite having it the easy way – thanks to their privileges – fight the systemic hierarchies because their self- and social-awareness becomes their empowerment to use their voice for not the *others*, but for their *own* system. Guajardo, a prime figure of VCE in the lives of most participants in this study, links it to VCE’s dialogic learning to state that “empowerment is...a social act,” (2023).

The first Soka University festival was an exhibit of the students’ authenticity and their passion and devotion towards operationalizing social justice. Unlike other university festivals, it was not just a space for random, unplanned events but one that incorporated intentional and socially aware exhibits and showcases. Students researched the Minamata disease in depth, which was a huge issue in the late 1960s Japan (Ikeda, 2019, p.194-5). Further, students did not fail to represent voices from marginalized communities and regions of Japan, like those from Okinawa, that had been heavily impacted and grief-stricken by the aftermath of the war. These pioneering Soka University students were not only ready to raise their voices for raising awareness but address and tackle these worldly evils, like war. In a time when Okinawan people were marginalized and forced out of the Japanese community, Soka University students used their own microcosm within the university setting to extend their privileges and seek social justice for their Okinawan counterparts through a university festival.

As previously mentioned, dialogues – or the attempt to hold one – form a big part of the Soka culture. Guajardo (2023) notes, “Dialogue is essential in nurturing and supporting the

development of critical consciousness” and that “this transition to critical consciousness allows for a systematic understanding of one’s lived reality.” The findings also display that those students who chose to use their own social identities, whether of non-privilege (Seremban and Dalian) or privilege (Seoul and Mumbai), seemed to be showcasing the direct link between social identities and their leadership praxis. Social justice leadership, as explained in the rationale is also about leading through one’s own social identities. Guajardo (2023) expands on this, “Dialogic learning entails moving from a state of conformity or invisibility to a state of vulnerability.” This vulnerability is seen in the leadership praxis of those participants who chose to defy the social norms and lead as their authentic selves. Thereby, authentic leadership in this sense does become a social justice leadership praxis. Because authenticity, as quoted in Dwyer et al. (2014), is the self-awareness of one individual seeking to make their entire group come closer to social awareness. And through the actions of this one individual – especially with the culture of community and succession that permeates the Soka system – everyone else in the system too is inspired to discard their normative and embrace their authentic (Scharmer & Yukelson, 2015).

Conclusion

The year is 1980, Ikeda visits the ISC for the first time. It is only the second ISC since its official inception in 1979, eight years after the founding of Soka University (SUJ). Society has yet to see the fall of the Berlin wall, and Vietnam has only barely seen negative peace since its 20 years long war. The ISC and its participants however, committed to the vision of VCE knew that this was their chance to make a difference and build their own ideal. Six students from eight countries gathered and cooked their own cuisines to sell at the Soka University Festival. With weeks and months of preparation on hand, their efforts finally bore fruit when Ikeda, their founder and mentor, visited their stall. A Vietnamese student and an American student, among the six others. Ikeda spoke to the students, sat down, ate at the stall, and gifted the ISC its timeless name, “a microcosm of world peace,” (personal communication, Oct 2023).

Each year, international students at SUJ take on this imperative mission of accomplishing this ideal of becoming “a microcosm of world peace.” And while the influences from Japanese society and its power structures and racist, sexist, classist, homophobic dynamics have become stronger, SUJ needs to keep up with the pace. Value Creating Education (VCE) is a critical

pedagogy because it was born out of a revolt against the militarist Japanese government in the early 20th century (Gebert & Joffe, 2007). Nevertheless, western education models and structures have increased their influence on VCE, making it a safer space for dominant groups, and an enraging space for those that belong to sub-cultures. As a recipient of VCE, I have learned that I too possess my personal power, despite being only a student; I can use my voice and have the potential to influence so many others.

This study has only sparked more questions for me, in terms of what is next? Why is there so much difference between research subjects that have the awareness of social hierarchies and the history of VCE, and those that do not? How can VCE bridge this gap? Perhaps a future research on VCE and its impact on student awareness, empowerment, and action is another step into the vast possibilities of this pedagogy. Future research in the field of leadership and VCE is crucial to understand the scope of this research. Since VCE is described as an ethos, it would have been of good reference to question the type, method, and subject in which VCE is being used for the participants. Do all Soka University professors use VCE? Has there been any training in VCE for the faculty? Perhaps differences in the teaching methods and/or subjects being taught that embody VCE could provide more insight into the difference in leadership styles and praxis among the participants. Some of these participants, for instance, have taken several courses on leadership itself. And how those participants that took these VCE leadership courses differed from those that did not, is a great starting point of further examination and research.

Scharmer states that leadership is not only about individual transformations but that of relationships, or better, the transformations of systems (Saxena et al., 2014). A transformation that allows “holding spaces” of “innovation and creativity” that have not existed until today. By this means, there is no limit in leadership as a field, or the leadership praxis of a single individual. And with VCE basing its pedagogy in each learner’s discovery of their potential (Soka University, n.d.), positive references between social justice leadership and authentic leadership and VCE can be seen, regardless of the systems of oppression in place on campus and within Japan.

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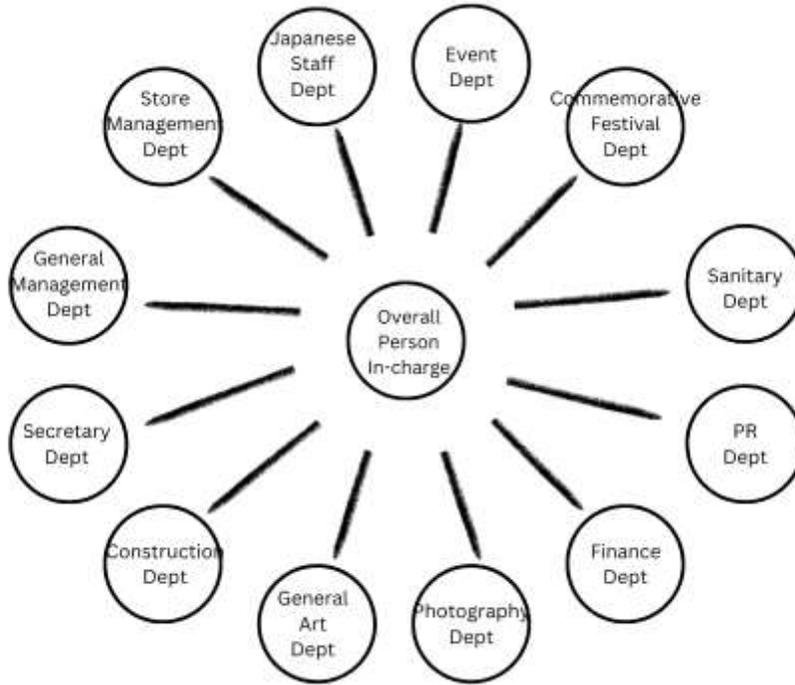
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Appendix A Structure of the International Student Café (ISC)

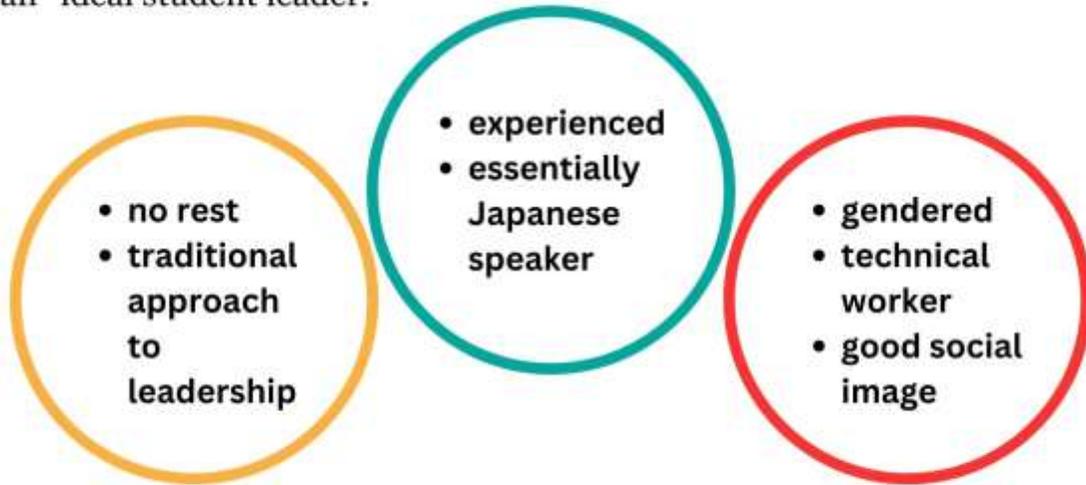


Appendix B Table of Participants of the Research

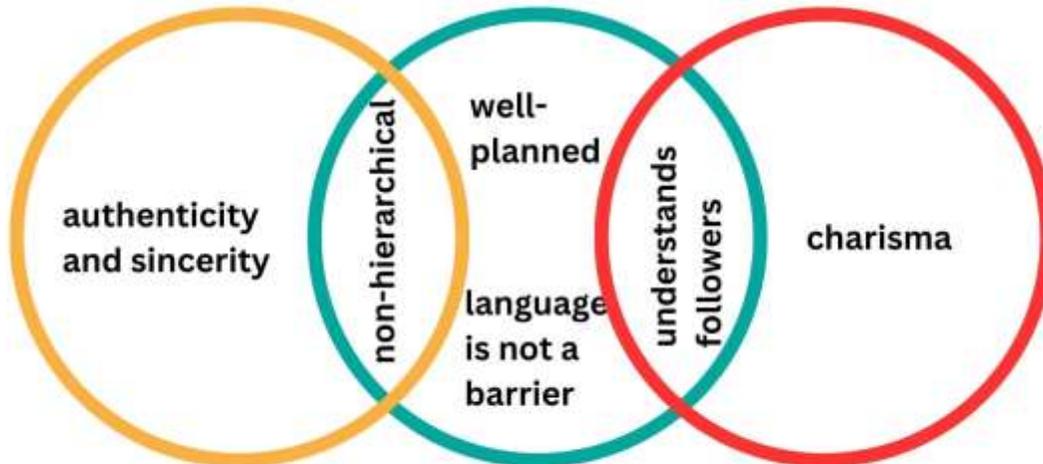
	Country and Ethnicity	Religious Faith	Sex
Seoul (Yellow circle)	Half Japanese and Half Caucasian – lived in US (dominant) and Japan	Soka Gakkai International – Nichiren Buddhism	Female
Mumbai (Red circle)	Chinese – born and raised in Hong Kong	N/A	Female
Shizuoka (Cyan circle)	Chinese – born and raised in Indonesia	Soka Gakkai International – Nichiren Buddhism	Female
Colorado (Excel)	Chinese – born and raised in Malaysia	Soka Gakkai International – Nichiren Buddhism	Female
Caracas (Excel)	Korean – born and raised in South Korea	Soka Gakkai International – Nichiren Buddhism	Male
Dalian (Excel)	Latina Mestiza (Mixed Latina) – born and raised in Ecuador	Soka Gakkai International – Nichiren Buddhism	Female
Tokyo (Excel)	Japanese – born and raised in Japan	Soka Gakkai International – Nichiren Buddhism	Male
Seremban (Excel)	Brown – born and raised in India	Soka Gakkai International – Nichiren Buddhism	Female

Appendix C First Half of the Responses to the Interview Questions as Venn Diagrams

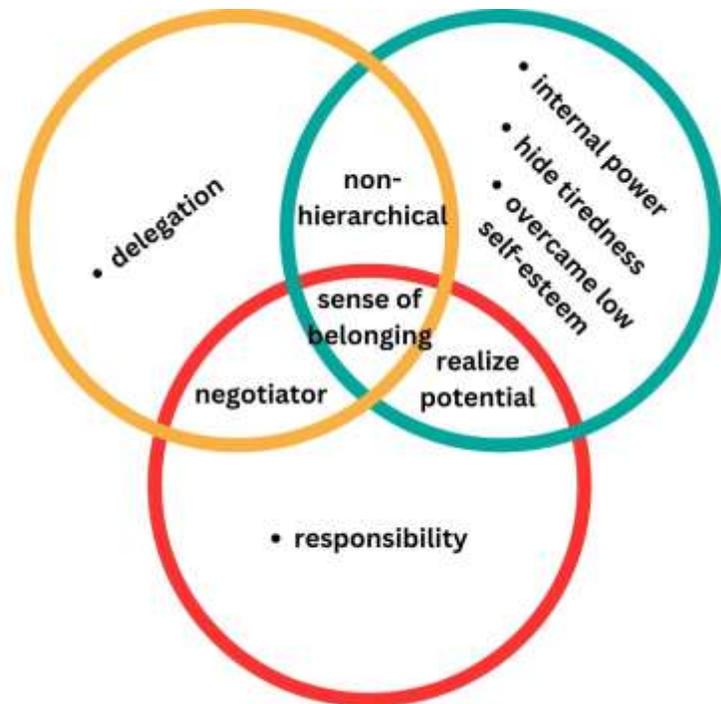
Question 1: Please describe how the university's mass culture perceives an "ideal student leader."



Question 2: Now, please describe the "ideal student leader" you have in mind for the International Student Café.



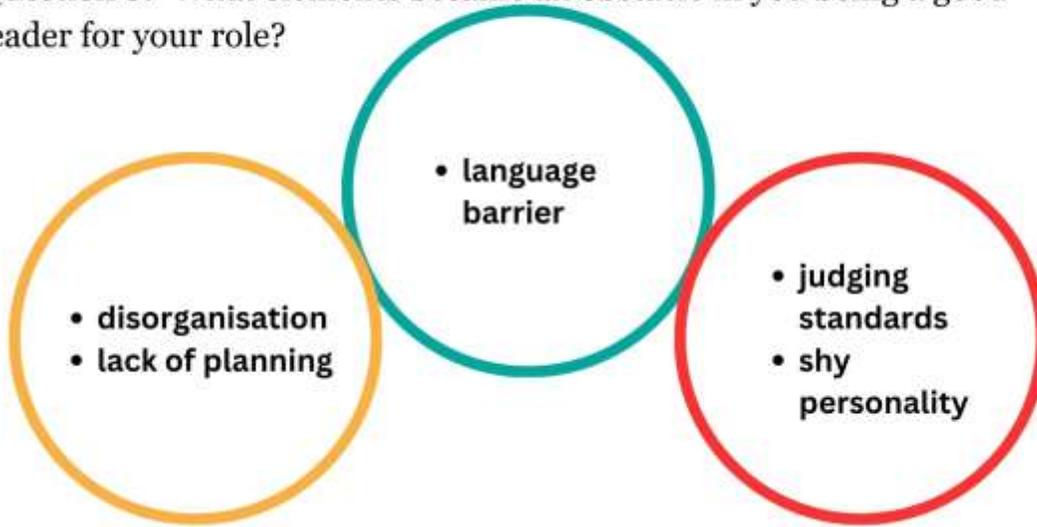
Question 3: How was your experience as a student leader for the international student café 2023?



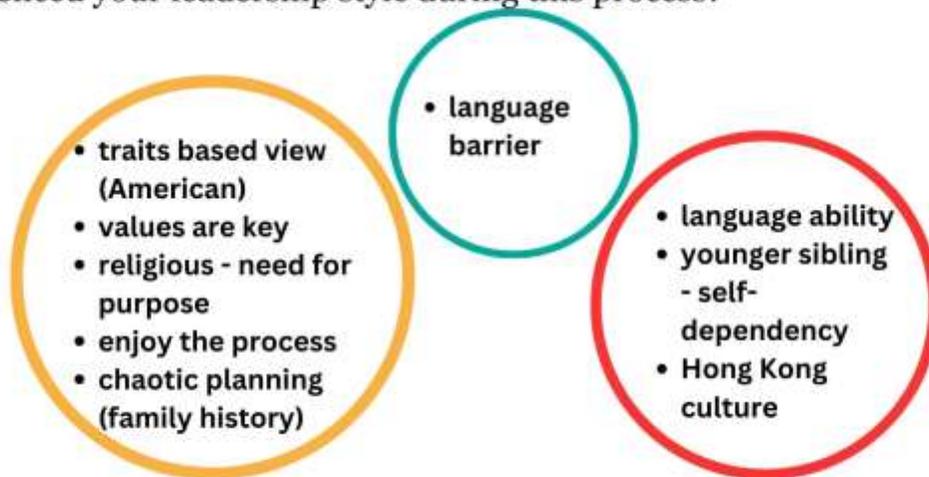
Question 4: What elements allowed you to be a good leader for your role?



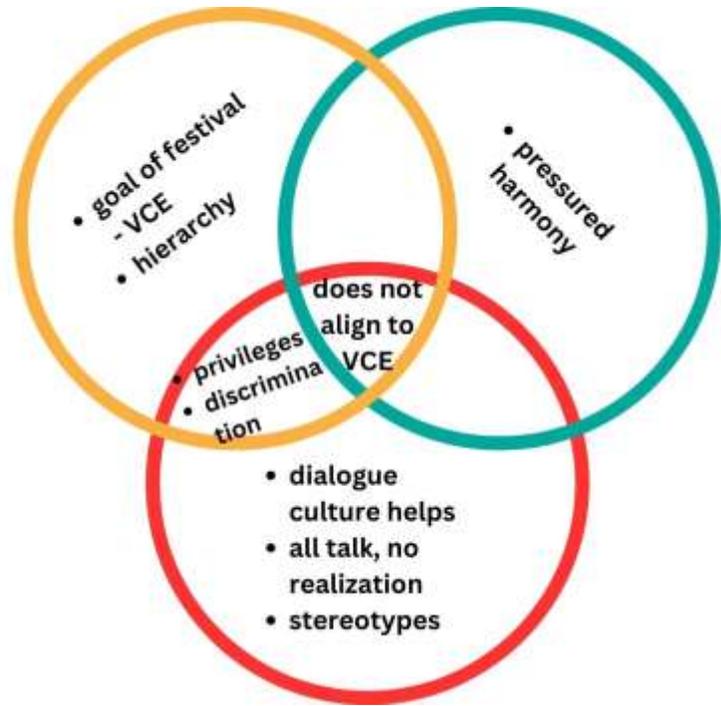
Question 5: -What elements became an obstacle in you being a good leader for your role?



Question 6: -How has your culture (or any aspect of your identity) influenced your leadership style during this process?



Question 7: How has the university's philosophical foundations of Value-Creating pedagogy affected you during your role as a leader? It could be positive or negative.



Appendix D Second Half of the Responses to the Interview Questions as an Excel Sheet

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	
Colorado	Goal driven, contribution	open-minded, good listener, human connection	lacked confidence and time management, good at connecting one-on-one, dialogues - for building trust and sharing struggles, democratic L, could overcome biases, became aware of lack of self-reflection	empathetic, opened her heart to others, good listening skills	being risk-averse (scared, apolitical, acritical), lack of innovation, falling into traditions	family background - difficulty in finding her own voice, religion - SGI, thinking of other's happiness as base, languages - EN, JPN, CHN, schooling - no compassion or community, learned the importance if relations not as transactional	difficult to distinguish religion from founding spirit, but happiness is community seems true compared to happiness alone, bigger purpose than selfish desires	
Caracas	privileged identity in Ryukitsu; "anyone can be a leader"	same as his three standards for an ideal leader as per the uni & his personal ideal	staff's happiness is the most important	community leading to his personal courage (Korean male discussion meeting - privileged group)	parenting background - leading to self-hate due to their lack of praise	Influence of Soka education: to counter societal capitalism and classism; friends; experience pressure: since he was the only one who had experienced pre-COVID ryukitsu and so he should advise others but he learned to not compare the two years	wants to lead like the founder	
Dalian	for the sake of Soka; respect for all; difference in views: Jpn and those that speak Jpn through Bekka (mainly), and intl students that speak Eng	ISC is separated from the dominant; someone who stands up, understands and fights for the rights and expression of intl students; Student activity is not "work"	could see her own leadership praxis; Agency: her impact on others and overall team play of her dept showed her the power of her own L; challenging: to not let herself fall into the "work of being a dept L"; Authoritative/Lack of democracy that she witnessed: Luna case - she witnessed how L became the power of denying	Purpose was defined for her: due to her past experience being negative, she determined to make it better herself by showing proof of Ikeda's views/hopes; knowledge of true VCE helped ground her praxis	Past experiences: power hierarchy; anxiety because of the difference in treatment of Bekka students and Eng speaking students	Nationality: represent, and be her own culture; Gender: fear of not being perceived "feminine enough" from other Asian Men in the dept; Age: since most members were older than her, but she could get rid of ageism	Showcases criticality and agency in reflection and critical thought on the founder's words alongside the ISC activities, themes, etc.	
Tokyo	Ikeda's words and thoughts; too hardworking; better to also treasure oneself; to the point of sacrificing personal life and freedom	dialogue, diplomacy, and TRUST as key	difficulties: different opinions and cultures; direct communicative style; different from JPN homogenous groups in SUJ; the training camp helped build trust, others reaching out helped, he could finally find his authentic self through this process	n/a	language barriers: english; communication with those outside the uni	reaching out: serving others as his L, lead as oneself: to always speak one's mind and the importance of that in teambuilding, free spirit identity: being gay, allowed him to be positive and excited; VCE: founder and his mother, act of giving back what he received	statue quotes as guidelines: in finding purpose and trust	he found his L through his identity and VCE
Seremban	JPN, if not East Asian, colonized, apolitical, "nice", dresses modestly, good mental wellbeing, fits the body standard, and cis/het MALE	someone who can fight against the patriarchal system, hears and makes heard the voices of marginalized people	representation as main, my community to back me up, chose my own community - showing my agency, example to be used for SJ part	personalize L, relational, encourage and empower through empathizing with others; spirit of the founder at hand; experience helped shape L praxis;	restrictions and oppression rather than obstacles; language: skin color and nationality, queerness	social identities that merged with my purpose led to my L praxis, quotes from this part for SJ (agency)	VCE or founding spirit of SUJ allowing a vivid idea of L itself, purpose of having a purpose, goal of microcosm of world peace, quote for agency, belief that it has the ability of it to become a fortress	

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							of equal rights and community bonds.	
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