

## On the Opening of the Soka University Center for Dewey Studies

Larry A. Hickman

It is a great pleasure to welcome the new Center for Dewey Studies in Japan to the international family of Dewey research centers. The new Center in the Soka Education Research Institute at Soka University now officially joins its sister Centers at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, in the United States; Fudan University in Shanghai, China; the University of Calabria in Cosenza, Italy; the University of Cologne in Cologne, Germany; the University of Szeged in Szeged, Hungary; and Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. Each of these research centers is a focal point of research into the life and work of the great philosopher and educator, John Dewey.

It is highly appropriate that this new research center should be located in the Soka Education Research Institute at Soka University in Japan. This is because the ideas of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, whose life and work have so strongly influenced the course of humanistic education in Japan and elsewhere, and which provide the guiding lights of Soka University in Japan, are remarkably similar to the ideas of John Dewey, whose work established his worldwide reputation as an educational reformer.

Dewey (1859-1952) and his younger contemporary Makiguchi (1877-1944) lived and worked in very different cultural environments. Dewey enjoyed a long life during which he received many honors. Makiguchi died in prison as a result of his opposition to the militarism of his time and his refusal to renounce his basic principles.

Nevertheless, the key concepts and practices of these two educational giants exhibit extraordinary similarities. Both Dewey and Makiguchi formulated their basic ideas about human life as a part of their tireless efforts to understand how learning takes place, and how it can be encouraged and improved. For both of these great teachers, the goal of human life is the creation of value, and the means of creating value is lifelong education. Both denied that the principles of education are grounded in alleged dictates of some supernatural source, or in an alleged need to preserve unaltered tradition; they are instead grounded in the forward-looking, experimental practice of education itself. And for both, an attitude of informed

criticism of existing ideas and methods, with a view to continual improvement, is the only path to excellence in thought and deed.

I am convinced that both Dewey and Makiguchi would have been pleased with the manner in which the Center for Dewey Studies in Japan has committed itself to these principles, which they held dear. I am also convinced that both Makiguchi and Dewey would be pleased with the ways in which Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, founder of Soka University in Japan as well as many other educational institutions, has promoted and nourished their educational vision.

It is therefore an honor and a pleasure to participate in celebrating the inauguration of this important research center. On behalf of the staff of the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University, I send our warmest greetings and our best wishes for a brilliant and productive future.

Larry A. Hickman  
Director, Center for Dewey Studies  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale