

# To Fight for, Cooperate with, and Respect Ordinary People: Why Did Daisaku Ikeda Found Soka University and Esteem José Rizal?<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Daisaku Ikeda, Soka University, and José Rizal

Daisaku Ikeda (1928-) founded Soka University in 1971. Its Central Tower has a statue of José Rizal (1861-1896). In 1996, the Order of the Knights of Rizal kindly donated this statue, when Ikeda received the Knights of Rizal Grand Cross. In the dialogue with Rogelio M. Quiambao (1940-), the Supreme Commander of the organization, Ikeda promised to spread the spirit of José Rizal in promoting peace in the world and the happiness of humanity (Ikeda 1996). In fact, he has often encouraged students of Soka University by introducing them to the great life and philosophy of José Rizal.

Ikeda's great esteem for Rizal is connected with his determination to establish strong friendships with Asian countries, and to prevent fascist militarism from controlling Japanese politics again. In 1941, fascist Japan invaded the Philippines and other Asian countries. In a dialogue with José V. Abueva (1928-), Ikeda states, "Japan, despite establishing a long history of exchange with the Philippines as well as other countries in Asia, was the perpetrator of barbaric horrors under a militarist regime," and he continues determinedly, "Japan must never forget the lessons it learned from that period in its history and must continue to forge robust bonds of friendship with people throughout Asia so that we can earn the genuine trust and respect of our neighbors" (Abueva and Ikeda 2015: 15).

## 2. Intellectuals under fascist militarism regime in Japan

Why did fascist militarism obtain political power in 1930s Japan? At that time, there were many intellectuals who learned modern philosophy and political theory in universities. Why did

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they not effectively strive against fascism?

Masao Maruyama (1914-1996) states that the middle strata who supported the fascist movement in Japan consisted of two groups of intellectuals. The first group included “urban salaried employees, so-called men of culture, journalists, and men in occupations demanding higher knowledge such as professors and lawyers, and university and college students” (Maruyama 1947/1969: 57-8). Although Maruyama call them “intellectuals in the proper sense,” we call them “university-graduate intellectuals” because almost all of these intellectuals graduated from university-level schools (Nishimura 2016: 103). Japan has not had such a distinct group of educated people as the *Ilustrados* in the Spanish colonial Philippines. However, before the Second World War, “a certificate of graduating from a university-level schools served as proof that you belonged to the intellectual class” ; furthermore, the graduates usually obtained higher positions in the bureaucratic government (Maruyama 1977: 227). In particular, students of *kyusei-koukou* (old-education-system high schools) and Imperial Universities comprised only less than one percent of the total male population; therefore, they were greatly admired, and sometimes referred to as “academic career aristocracy” (Takeuchi 1999: 34).

In contrast, the second group of intellectuals were in a lower social class. It included “small factory owners, building contractors, proprietors of retail shops, master carpenters, small landowners, independent farmers, school teachers (especially in primary schools), employees of village offices, low-grade officials, [and] Buddhist and Shinto priests.” Although Maruyama called them “pseudo-intellectuals,” we call them “common intellectuals.” Maruyama insists that it is mainly these common intellectuals that provided the social foundation of fascism. Meanwhile, university-graduate intellectuals merely reluctantly accepted the movement; “they were certainly not positive advocates or the driving force of the fascist movement. Rather, their mood was generally one of vague antipathy toward it, an antipathy that amounted almost to passive resistance” (Maruyama 1947/1969: 57-8).

Certainly, we cannot say that university-graduate intellectuals are acquitted since they demonstrated a “vague antipathy” toward fascism. It may be asked why university-graduate intellectuals did not maintain in their liberal attitude and resist fascism although they had strong political power. There are three reasons. First, politicians and government officials who had graduated from top universities pursued, or at least seemed to pursue, their self-interest. Second, university graduate intellectuals were isolated from ordinary citizens. Finally, the intellectuals looked down on the masses. These points will be discussed in greater detail below.

First, politicians and government officials were sometimes faulted for being motivated by self-interest. In 1929, Sakuzo Yoshino (1878-1933), a professor of Tokyo Imperial University, deplored the fact that the major political parties were captured by a selfish “connection of interests” such as zaibatsu conglomerates, although the primary purpose of democracy was to protect the welfare of the nation’s people (Yoshino 1929; see also Gordon 2003: 169). By the end of the 1920s, the democratic political system had deteriorated. Instead, during the 1930s, military officials obtained political power. After the Great Depression, many peasants and laborers fell into poverty. Rural society was particularly severely damaged. However, government officials and members of parliament did not offer an efficient solution. In this situation, on May 15, 1932, young military officers attempted a coup d’état and assassinated Prime Minister Tsuyoshi Inukai; many ordinary people did not criticize their attack and instead supported it. During the officers’ trial, more than 700 thousand people signed to request the reduction of their punishment. A local newspaper in Yamagata prefecture stated, “Villages are in great peril···, but political leaders are swayed by partisan interest and zaibatsu just pursued self-interest. Meanwhile the officers had patriotic, self-less, chivalry, and virile motivation, although they broke the law,” (Mori 1993: 104). Furthermore, in 1934, the Army Ministry issued a pamphlet titled *Kokubo no hongii to sono kyokka no teisho* (A Proposal for the Significance and Enhancement of National Defense). It began with the words, “War is the father of creation, and mother of culture,” and stated that in order to reinforce national defense, “it is necessary to protect national livelihood by securing laborers’ income and saving peasants and fisheries from damage” (Kato 2009: 316-7). Many poor people who had been disappointed with the “selfish and incapable” politicians welcomed the suggestions made by military officials.

Some intellectuals did protest the military’s gain of power. However, they were not able to fight effectively since they did not gain support from common people. The alienation and isolation of university-graduate intellectuals from ordinary people is the second reason they were not able to prevent fascism. Yoshino (1932) condemned Manchurian Incidence as “imperialistic invasion.” Also, Tatsukichi Minobe (1873-1948), another professor of Tokyo Imperial University, fiercely criticized the aforementioned Army pamphlet. He stated that the pamphlet, “without proper reasons praised and advocated wars contrary to the imperial will” (Minobe 1934; see also Furukawa 2011: 77). Nevertheless, the military was not defeated. Instead, in 1935, they attacked Minobe based on the rationale that his theory of the Emperor as an organ of government violated imperial sacredness. Minobe had advocated his theory to establish constitutionalism in Japan. He stated that the emperor’s role was defined in the constitution; therefore, the emperor was not “a sacred source of legitimacy that stood outside and above

the state” (Gordon 2003: 199). Many legal scholars had supported this theory for around thirty years. However, in the middle of the 1930s, the military and some fascist politicians tried to abolish the theory to allow the Imperial Army and Navy to take actions beyond the limits of the constitution and independently from the parliament and cabinet. In the House of Peers, Takeo Kikuchi condemned Minobe as “an academic tramp.” Although Minobe continued to insist on the legitimacy of his theory, the Houses of Peers and Commons censured Minobe and the government banned several of his books (Furukawa 2011).

In the crisis of constitutionalism, however, common people did not support Minobe but sympathized with the military since it succeeded in persuading the ordinary people that this was a struggle between snobbish intellectuals and poor and vulnerable people. In fact, when he criticized Minobe, Kikuchi pretended that he represented poor people by deploring the poverty in villages. Also, when a nationalist organization became agitated against Minobe’s legal theory, it claimed that “traditional nationalistic mentality posed unconsciously by common people” had to defeat the “liberalism” advocated by “intellectual class” (Tsutsui 2018: 225-237). At that point, the nationalistic militarism obtained support from ordinary people. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that before the military attacked Minobe’s theory the discourse of intellectuals had been isolated from the daily life of ordinary people. In Japan, the university students usually studied philosophy and the history of western countries rather than those of Japan; therefore, they were essentially European in culture. Such education in top universities was sometimes blamed for being “colonial” (Takeuchi 1999: 261). Yasumaru (1968/2013: 67) says “In modern Japan, revolutionary new ideas were imported from western advanced countries. Therefore, the ideas were accepted only by intellectuals and alienated from common people. Furthermore, the intellectuals did not confront the western ideas with Japanese traditional ones and just let the two types of ideas cohabitate.” In contrast, the discourse of military officials was more familiar and understandable to less educated people since many military officials came from rural society and praised traditional Japanese culture and customs. Indeed, many nationalist militants hated the westernized and sophisticated culture of university graduate intellectuals. Indeed, In 1936, in an interview with young military officers, they blamed government officials by insisting that bureaucrats graduating from Imperial Universities did not understand the mentality of common people and that peasants and wage laborers hated their “lofty attitude and academic snobbery” (Takeuchi 1999: 274-5).

Thus, the westernized and sophisticated culture of university graduates was alienated from ordinary people. However, the intellectuals did not care. Rather, they seemingly assumed

that less educated people were not able to understand highly intellectual statements. The contempt for ordinary people is the third weakness of the university graduate intellectuals. Indeed, Furukawa (2011: 88) criticizes Yoshino and Minobe for the fact that they did not want to enhance people's rights and welfare since they were skeptical about the political and ethical abilities of common people, while she highly praises their firm intention to continue protecting constitutionalism. Yoshino and Minobe were not exceptional. University students usually looked down on less educated people, who simply enjoyed their lives without concerning themselves with social problems. This may be a negative aspect of the sense of noblesse oblige. They had a paternalistic notion that they were obliged to protect ignorant people. In the collage song of *Daichi-Koto-gakko*, or former general education courses of Tokyo University, students sang:

“ Looking down on the people who just lead an apolaustic life  
without worrying about its fragility,  
We are in the college on Mukougaoka hill, and  
have a great ambition [to enhance the prosperity of the country].”

University graduates continued to hold this attitude after the Second World War. As mentioned before, Maruyama (1947/1969) calls university-graduate intellectuals and common intellectuals “intellectuals in the proper sense” and “pseudo-intellectuals” respectively. This terminology may reflect his disrespect for less highly educated people.

Moreover, many Japanese Marxist intellectuals also looked down on ordinary people. Around 1920, Marxist theory became popular in top universities. In 1918 some Law Faculty students in Tokyo Imperial University set up an association called *Shinjin-kai* to study left-wing theories. In 1920, an associate professor published an article supporting socialism. Because Marxism was regarded as a unification of British classical political economy, German classical philosophy and French socialism, many students studied the theories of Marx and Lenin as a highly intellectual subject (Takauchi 1999: 240-1). Furthermore, Kazuo Fukumoto (1894-1983) advanced the intellectualism of Japanese Marxists. He graduated from Tokyo Imperial University and in the mid-1920s, insisted on the necessity of a “vanguard party,” according to Lenin. He did not believe in “the natural growth of proletarian conscious;” thus, “only a ‘true vanguard party,’ a Communist Party, would be a veritable source of socialist consciousness.” Since he equated such a consciousness with the possession of Marxist “knowledge,” he glorified ideological purity and prioritized intellectual struggle. Although, in later years, the Japan Communist Party denounced Fukumoto's theory, they continued to emphasize the role of theory. For this

reason, the Marxist movement of Japan became “the most theoretically sophisticated in the world” (Duus and Scheiner 1988: 702-5). Intellectuals in a vanguard party may have dedicated themselves sincerely and selflessly to working for the proletariat, or ordinary people. However, at the same time, they despised ignorant people who neither comprehended Marxist theory nor indicated interest in developing a class-consciousness. In 1926, a Japanese writer Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1882-1927), a contemporary of Lenin, said to him: “You [Lenin] who more than anyone loved the mass/ Are you who more than anyone despised the mass” (Akutagawa 1927/2006: 198) Ikeda states that Akutagawa properly describes one aspect of Bolshevism (Gorbachev and Ikeda 1996: v.1, 227). Marxist intellectuals worked for the people but also felt contempt for them.

Thus, university-graduate intellectuals were criticized for pursuing their self-interest, for being isolated from ordinary citizens, and for looking down on the masses. Therefore, the intellectuals did not, or were not able to, cooperate together to protest against fascism in Japan.

### 3. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Daisaku Ikeda, and Soka University

While university graduated intellectuals were alienated from ordinary people, common intellectuals had daily interaction with the masses and held positions of leadership in small, local associations. Therefore, they “substantially formed the backbone class of the nation and were far more practical and active.” Maruyama (1947/1969: 66) says: “From the viewpoint of the Japanese political and social structure as a whole, they [common intellectuals] clearly belonged to the class of the ruled. Their standard of living was not very high, being scarcely different from that of their subordinates.” Hence, they effectively supported Japanese fascism.

Nevertheless, we should know that not all common intellectuals provided support for fascism or militarism. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) is a prominent exception. He is classified as a common intellectual since he worked as a classroom teacher and principal in primary schools after he graduated from the Hokkaido Normal School, a teachers’ training facility in Hokkaido’s capital, Sapporo. However, Makiguchi did not support fascism; in contrast, he was resolutely opposed to Japan’s militarism and as a result, he was imprisoned on July 6, 1943. During the interrogation by Special Higher Police, Makiguchi stated “the Emperor is a common mortal. When he was crown prince, he attended Gakushuin University, where he studied in order to be emperor. Nor is the emperor without error” (Home Ministry 1943/1987). As Ito (2009: 136) states “he [Makiguchi] was directly challenging the central political orthodoxy of wartime Japan, the divinity of the emperor.” Furthermore, by examining the contemporary

political situation, Ito (2009) reveals that Makiguchi's words reflected the idea of Minobe's constitutionalism. Makiguchi also suggests that if the current emperor (Hirohito) were to practice Buddhism, he would "develop the wisdom needed to conduct politics without error" (Home Ministry 1943/1987: 203). Here, Makiguchi showed his belief that Japan's Asia-Pacific Wars represented a "national crisis" (*kokunan*) brought on by political errors made in the emperor's name (Ito 2009: 138). Even after he was arrested, Makiguchi did not stop faulting the underlying belief structures of Japanese militarism. In his succession to Minobe, Makiguchi protected constitutionalism and fought against militarism.

Makiguchi, however, did not share the three weaknesses with university graduate intellectuals. First, he selflessly worked for the happiness of children and ordinary people. Between 1913 and 1932, Makiguchi served as the principal of a succession of elementary schools. In 1920 he began working in Mikasa elementary school; this was one of the special schools built in slums (*hinmin-kutsu*) in Tokyo. An educator visited the school and stated, "Makiguchi does not worry about the cold treatment for him. But, he devotes himself assiduously to the education of miserable children." Furthermore, a newspaper reported that Makiguchi began giving free school lunch to the pupils from the poorest families (HSSE 2015: 240-4). Second, Makiguchi was not isolated from ordinary people, but encouraged many people through everyday communication by organizing associations. He published *The Geography of Human Life* in 1903 and *The System of Soka Pedagogy* in 1930. The word Soka literally means value-creating. He believed that "children could open their minds and interact creatively with their environment, rather than serving as a tool to mold a docile and obedient population" (Gebert n.d.). However, unlike many intellectuals graduating from top universities, he was not satisfied with developing a sophisticated theory. To put his Soka pedagogy into practice, Makiguchi organized the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, where he encouraged many children and ordinary people through everyday communication, not to promote fascism ideology, but to practice the philosophy of developing everyone's potential. Finally, Makiguchi never looked down on ordinary people, but believed in the potential of every child and person. This belief came from the philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism, which holds that all people possess the inherent potential for enlightenment, and calls for a compassionate way of life—the way of the bodhisattva dedicated to awakening people to that potential. Makiguchi had been drawn to Nichiren Buddhism in part because its stress on the patient nurturing of human potential accorded with his own ideas and practice as an elementary school teacher. (HSSE 2015; Gebert n.d.)

Makiguchi was killed in prison in 1944. However, his determination and philosophy were

carried forward by Josei Toda (1900-1958) and Daisaku Ikeda. Based on Makiguchi's pedagogy, Ikeda founded Soka University. One of its founding principles is "Be a fortress for the peace of humankind." As we have discussed, in pre-war Japan, university-graduate intellectuals did not cooperate with the people to prevent fascism. Therefore, Ikeda founded Soka University to educate students who would then eagerly work for world peace and fight against militarism and fascism as Makiguchi did.

First, Ikeda taught students not to solely pursue their own self-interest but to serve the people. He stated that "Academic snobbism makes you lose the true value of life. If graduates said 'I am great because I graduated from a famous university' and looked down on people, we would wonder for what purpose we had educated them" (Ikeda 2008). "Soka University is an institution built by ordinary people and their toil, tears and sincerity," therefore, we should express deep gratitude to them and work hard for their happiness; "Universities exist to serve those who sought to pursue higher education but never had the opportunity to do so."

Second, Ikeda told students not to be isolated from ordinary citizens, but to work together with them. In the fourth entrance ceremony of Soka University, Ikeda shared the experience of his visit to San Maros University in Peru where he was impressed with one of their maxims: "Professors and students alike must work with the mass. Together they must meet and overcome all difficulties until we reach the goal of wisdom and peace and happiness for humankind." Ikeda said:

The trouble with many contemporary intellectuals is that they habitually try to avoid such difficulties. This is something I am determined never to do. To justify its existence today, a university must strive with ordinary people to overcome difficulties and realize the most sublime objectives of humankind. (Ikeda 1974)

Finally, Ikeda educated students not to look down on the masses but to have the highest respect for them. Ikeda states: "Only effort to overcome hardships and devotion to one's mission give life its worth." Everyone has several problems in their lives. The strength to face difficulties depends not on whether they are well educated, but on whether they have strong determination to carry out their mission in life. Tireless and sincere efforts by ordinary people to surmount obstacles teach us about the courage and dignity of human beings. This great trust in the strength of people is based on the philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism, which states that "Buddha" is not "a superhuman, sacred condition endowed with a fixed status," but "the

highest form of humanity” ; hence, “people who cultivate their humanity and constantly seek self-perfection through serving and guarding life are Buddha” (Gorbachev and Ikeda 2005: 72). Therefore, Ikeda states that we should have the highest respect for people struggling to overcome obstacles and appreciate their sincerity and cordiality; “this is the most important in [Buddhist] faith” (Gorbachev and Ikeda 1996: v.2, 46).

#### 4. Rizal as a great model of intellectuals

Thus, Ikeda insists that university-graduate intellectuals should work for, cooperate with, and respect ordinary people; then, he states that Rizal is a great model of this type of intellectual. Rizal was possessed of a brilliant intelligence and devoted his life to the happiness of Filipinos. Furthermore, he worked and fought in the midst of the masses. While, in nineteenth century Philippines, *ilustrados* graduating universities usually distanced themselves from the world of *pobres y ignorantes* (poor and ignorant masses), Rizal himself had a strong connection with them (Ileto 1998: 45-46). Rizal believed that each Filipino had great potential to improve in intelligence and morality and insisted that this potential should be developed to achieve the country’s independence from Spain. In Rizal’s novel, *El Filibusterismo*, Father Florentino says:

I do not mean to say that our liberty will be secured at the sword’s point, for the sword plays but little part in modern affairs, but that we must secure it by making ourselves worthy of it, by exalting the intelligence and the dignity of the individual, by loving justice, right, and greatness, even to the extent of dying for them—and when a people reaches that height God will provide a weapon, the idols will be shattered, the tyranny will crumble like a house of cards and liberty will shine out like the first dawn.

Our ills we owe to ourselves alone, so let us blame no one. (Rizal 1891/1912)

Rizal’s attitude toward ordinary people is totally different from that of many intellectuals who disrespect uneducated people.

Rizal’s humanism is based on the sincere faith of Christianity. Virtues and values such as human dignity and fundamental equality are based on the status of all humans as God’s children, who are made in His image. Rizal states:

To me man is the masterpiece of creation, perfect within his conditions, who cannot be deprived of any of his component parts, moral as well as physical, without disfiguring him and making him miserable. (Rizal 1892/1962: 188)

Rizal's humanism does not contradict Ikeda's humanism, which is based on Nichiren Buddhism. Ikeda states: "religions should both compete in an amicable manner and cooperate closely in fulfilling their responsibility to society as they seek to advance the shared goal of safeguarding life and its inherent dignity and worth" (Abueva and Ikeda 2015: 136-7). Ikeda praised Rizal for respecting and encouraging ordinary people. He said, "Dr. Rizal awakened within the people their pride as individuals and unlocked the door to an era of victory for all people to enjoy."

In the entrance ceremony of Soka University in 1997, Ikeda encouraged freshmen to study hard to enhance the happiness of the masses by quoting an excerpt from the letter of Rizal to his nephew:

To live is to be among men and to be among men is to struggle. In this battlefield, a man has no better weapon than his intelligence, no greater strength than that of his own heart. Sharpen, perfect, polish then your mind and fortify and educate your heart. (Rizal 1893/1976: 30)

## 5. Conclusion

Before the Second World War, the fascist militarism ideology dominated Japan and drove the invasion of other Asian countries. University graduates did not protest effectively against the movement because they were blamed for pursuing self-interests, were isolated from ordinary citizens, and looked down on the masses. Makiguchi, the father of Soka education, fought against fascism and militarism for his entire life. Based on his pedagogy, Ikeda founded Soka University to educate students to work for world peace and people's happiness. Ikeda told students to fight for, cooperate with, and respect ordinary people, and shows them the example of José Rizal as a respectable model of leadership. Rizal devoted his life to the people and continued to believe in the strength of each Filipino. Ikeda always asks us, "For what purpose do you cultivate wisdom?" The answer lies in the life of José Rizal.

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