

Sōka Gakkai Founder, Makiguchi Tsunesaburō, A Man of Peace? 創価学会の創立者・牧口恒三郎 平和を愛する男?

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Introduction

Readers familiar with my research will know that its focus has been on the wartime actions and statements of Japan's institutional Buddhist leaders, most especially those affiliated with the Zen school. Nearly to a man, their actions and statements were strongly supportive of Japanese aggression and imperialist actions. In the postwar era many of these same Zen leaders played a seminal role in the introduction of Zen to the West. Thus, it came as a shock to their Western adherents to learn that their beloved Zen masters had once been fervent advocates of aggressive war. They believed, or wanted to believe, that "enlightened" Zen masters were unlike those priests, rabbis, chaplains of other faiths who, with but few exceptions, have always expressed their unstinting support for the wars fought by their nations.

Having revealed the "dark side" of wartime Japanese Buddhism,, I was, as a Buddhist, initially glad to learn of the putative war resistance of Makiguchi Tsunesaburō (1871-1944), founder of a Nichiren sect-affiliated, lay Buddhist organization today known as Sōka Gakkai (Value-Creating Society). When I first learned that Makiguchi had died while imprisoned for his religious beliefs, there seemed to be no question that he was a genuine martyr for Buddhism's clear doctrinal commitment to peace. Thus, my investigation of Makiguchi's wartime record began within the context of sincere respect for his actions. I hoped to discover what enabled

this man to sustain his commitment to peace when the overwhelming majority of his fellow Japanese Buddhists, both lay and cleric, had been unable to do so.



Makiguchi Tsunesaburō

My interest in Makiguchi and his organization only increased when, in September 1999, I attended a reception in the library of the University of Adelaide where I was then teaching. The reception was held to acknowledge the donation of some forty Sōka Gakkai-related books to the university by the Australian branch of Sōka Gakkai International (SGI). As I glanced at the titles of the donated

books, I could not help but notice how many of them related in one way or another to “peace.” One of the books was entitled *A Lasting Peace*, a second *Choose Peace*, and a third, *Women Against War*. What further proof was needed of Makiguchi and Sōka Gakkai’s longstanding commitment to peace than these books?

Nevertheless, as a longtime student of the wartime era I had at least to consider the words of Yanagida Seizan (1922-2006), widely recognized as Japan’s greatest 20th century scholar of early Chan (Zen) Buddhism in China. Yanagida had described the reaction of Japan’s institutional Buddhist leaders to the end of the Asia-Pacific War in August 1945 as follows:

All of Japan’s Buddhist sects -- which had not only contributed to the war effort but had been of one heart and soul in propagating the war in their teachings -- flipped around as smoothly as one turns one’s hand and proceeded to ring the bells of peace. The leaders of Japan’s Buddhist sects had been among the leaders of the country who had egged us on by uttering big words about the righteousness [of the war]. Now, however, these same leaders acted shamelessly, thinking nothing of it.²

Was it possible that Yanagida’s comments might extend to the leaders of lay Buddhist organizations like Sōka Gakkai as well? Sōka Gakkai adherents, of course, vehemently dismiss this possibility, pointing out that Makiguchi and his chief disciple, Toda Jōsei (a.k.a. Jōgai, 1900-1958), were clearly victims of Japanese militarism, arrested by Japan’s military-dominated government in 1943. Not only that, unrepentant and unyielding, Makiguchi died in prison of malnutrition on November 18, 1944. How then could Makiguchi been anything other than a genuine Buddhist

martyr to the cause of world peace?



Toda Jōsei

It will come as no surprise to learn that this is exactly the position Sōka Gakkai currently takes: “The Sōka Gakkai . . . is a peace organization, and it was one of the very few groups in Japan in the 1940s to oppose World War II. Its founding president, Makiguchi Tsunesaburō, died in a Japanese prison during the war rather than compromise his religious and pacifist beliefs.”³

Similarly, the narrator of a Sōka Gakkai-distributed videotape extolling the life of Ikeda Daisaku (b. 1928), current president of Sōka Gakkai International (SGI), described the wartime imprisonment of Makiguchi and Toda as follows: “In 1943 they [Makiguchi and Toda] were arrested and jailed for their antiwar

beliefs. In the face of maltreatment and abuse, Makiguchi died in prison at the age of seventy-three.”⁴



Ikeda Daisaku

Ikeda writes that Toda’s wartime imprisonment was the critical factor influencing his decision to join this organization:

The initial reason I joined the Sōka Gakkai was because I thought I could believe in Mr. Toda since he had spent two years in prison during the war for opposing militarism. I didn’t understand anything about the content of the Buddha Dharma. I believed in the person of Mr. Toda, and following “the path of unity between master and disciple” with Mr. Toda became “the path of [my] human revolution.”⁵

The above statements notwithstanding, the question must still be asked, *why* had Makiguchi and Toda been arrested, especially in view of the fact that they were not arrested until July 1943, six years *after* Japan had begun its full-scale invasion of China and a year and a half after attacking the United States. As this article will reveal, there is much more to the story of these two men’s imprisonment than mere “antiwar beliefs” or opposition to Japanese militarism.

Before exploring this issue further, however, let us briefly look at the life and thought of Sōka Gakkai’s founder, Makiguchi Tsunesaburō. Special emphasis will be placed on those secular ideas which initially garnered him the respect of some of Japan’s top military and political leaders in the 1930s as well as those later religious beliefs which eventually brought him into conflict with Japan’s wartime ideology.

The Life and Thought of Makiguchi Tsunesaburō

Makiguchi Tsunesaburō was born on June 6, 1871 in the small and impoverished village of Arahama-mura in Niigata Prefecture in northwestern Japan. Little is known about his childhood other than that his father abandoned both him and his mother soon after birth, eventually leading his mother to attempt murder-suicide by throwing herself into the Japan Sea while holding Makiguchi in her arms.

The end result was that an uncle, Makiguchi Zundayu, raised Makiguchi until he was about fourteen years of age. At that point the young Makiguchi decided to move to Hokkaido to live with a second uncle, Watanabe Shiroji. Hokkaido, Japan’s northernmost main island, was then in the process of being rapidly developed by migrants from Japan’s more southern islands. Eventually Makiguchi succeeded in gaining entrance to Sapporo Normal School where he trained to become a primary school teacher.

Following graduation in 1893, Makiguchi began a career in education. While he quickly became recognized as an able teacher, his pedagogical views led to frequent clashes with officials of the Ministry of Education, school inspectors, ward assemblymen, city councilmen, and top officials in the city of Tokyo where he eventually moved. This in turn resulted in frequent transfers from one school to another. For example, in Tokyo he served as principal at a total of six primary schools from 1913 to 1932 at which point his teaching career came to an end.⁶

Writings

In late 1903 Makiguchi published a 995-page book entitled *Jinsei Chirigaku* (The Geography of Human Life). This book is distinguished by its focus on the mutual relationship between nature and man, rather than simply describing the physical features of the earth that was the typical approach toward geography at the time. It met wide acceptance, including among government officials, despite the fact that its author, as a normal school graduate, was seen as lacking the proper academic credentials to have written such a work. Makiguchi's book became the standard reference in geography for students studying to take the government teachers' exam.

Makiguchi identified two new trends emerging in the world. The first of these was already well established: the struggle for survival that in the past had led to war was gradually changing into economic rivalry between nations. In addition, Makiguchi claimed to see a day coming when economic competition would give way to what he described as "humanitarian competition" (*jindōteki kyōsō*) in which competition would be based on *mutual* benefit.⁷

His future ideal notwithstanding, Makiguchi recognized that the world of his day was very much one based on economic rivalry. Employing military terminology, Makiguchi described this economic rivalry as follows:

Merchants should be regarded as the chief soldiers on the battlefield of real power, i.e., the battle infantry, while their merchandise constitutes the bullets. In addition, industrial manufacturers are like artillerymen, while their manufacturing sites are the cannons. Farmers and others engaged in primitive production are the quartermaster corps providing both military rations and ammunition. . . . The current government should be seen as the Imperial Military Headquarters, concentrating much of its peacetime efforts on drawing up battle plans [for the economy]. Similarly, government officials and other parasitic professions are like specialized soldiers of various types who are responsible for protecting and assisting the main fighting force.⁸

The above passage suggests that Makiguchi was very much a realist when it came to the military-like nature of economic competition. One is tempted to see in Makiguchi's writings the blueprint for what came to be popularly known in the postwar era as "Japan, Inc." This said, it should not be forgotten that similar thinking lay behind the 1930s mobilization of the nation's human and economic resources to fight "total war," with all production workers assuming the title of "industrial warriors" (*sangyō senshi*).

If in one sense Makiguchi was a man ahead of his times, in another sense he was very much a man 'of his times'. That is to say, Makiguchi singled out Czarist Russia as one of the nations blocking the world's transition to purely economic rivalry. Additionally, its expansionist policies posed a military threat as well. According to Makiguchi:

Nations like Russia still employ the authoritarian methods of old to enlarge their national territory. . . . It is my view that the sole cause of the present danger to world peace is Russia's promotion of its own viability. That is to say, in the present age of economic struggle for existence, Russia seeks to exploit weaknesses among the international powers in order to acquire what it must have -- access to the oceans. Thus it is in the process of expanding in three directions, from the Dardanelle Straits in eastern Europe to the Persian Gulf in western Asia and the Yellow Sea in the Far East.⁹

In identifying Russia as *solely* responsible for endangering world peace, Makiguchi allied himself with the views of the Japanese government of his day. The following year Japan launched a surprise attack on Russia, ostensibly to “protect Korea’s independence” and prevent further Russian encroachments on Chinese territory, especially Manchuria. Following its victory over Russia in 1905, Japan started to take over Korea for itself, turning it into a full-fledged colony in 1910. As for Manchuria, Japan steadily increased its control of this area so rich in the natural resources Japan needed to develop its economic and military might.

Did Makiguchi, perchance, view Japan’s own colonial expansion as a threat to world peace?

A second book

The answer to this question is contained in a second book Makiguchi wrote that was published in November 1912. Entitled *Kyōdoka Kenkyū* (Study of Folk Culture), this volume was an extension of the ideas contained in *Jinsei Chirigaku* with special emphasis on their relevance to the life and structures of local

communities. The publication date is significant because two years had already elapsed since Japan’s annexation of Korea. If Makiguchi were an ‘anti-imperialist,’ or in any way opposed to Japan’s expansion onto the Asian continent, this would surely have been his chance to say so.

Makiguchi’s new book, like its predecessor, enjoyed a wide readership resulting in ten reprintings over the next twenty years. Significantly, the tenth reprinting, appearing in April 1933, was both a revised and expanded edition. Moreover, the publisher of this new edition was Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai, with Toda Jōsei listed as the organization’s representative. Although in 1946 Sōka Gakkai dropped the word *kyōiku* (education) from its title, journalist Murata Kiyooki notes: “Sōka Gakkai considers November 18, 1930 . . . the founding date of its prewar predecessor although formal inauguration came later.”¹⁰

Murata’s quotation is significant because it means that the new 1933 edition of *Kyōdoka Kenkyū* must be considered representative not only of Makiguchi’s own thinking in 1912 but that of Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai in 1933. The 1933 date is also important because, as historian Hugh Borton states, “By February 1932 Japan was already well along the fascist road.”¹¹ Were Makiguchi and his followers, including Toda Jōsei, taking the same road less than a year later?

In Makiguchi’s defense, the preface to the 1933 edition supports an assertion made by Murata that Makiguchi’s approach to education “was bound to clash with the ‘orthodox’ theory of government educational authorities, who wanted to establish a highly centralized educational system.”¹² That is to say, while in his new preface Makiguchi expressed satisfaction that interest in issues related to rural education had increased significantly since his book was first published in 1912, he nevertheless lamented the fact that this newfound interest was being fostered not by

local educators themselves but “as always, the impetus is coming from bureaucrats in the central government . . .”¹³

Makiguchi explained that his goal was to see rural educators take the lead in developing educational initiatives attuned to their own communities. Nevertheless, the critical question concerns the end to which Makiguchi believed rural education should be directed. In the book’s concluding chapter Makiguchi wrote:

Regardless of social class, everyone should be conscious of the nation’s destiny, harmonizing their lives with that destiny and, at all times, prepared to share that destiny. It is for this reason that the work of national education is to prepare us to do exactly this, omitting nothing in the process. . . . However, in order to do this, and prior to placing ourselves in service to the state, we should first contribute to the local area that has nurtured us and with which we share common interests.¹⁴

In reflecting on these words, it should first be noted that Makiguchi wrote the above specifically for the enlarged 1933 edition.¹⁵ Despite championing rural education under local control, in 1933 both he and Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai shared a vision of education that was ‘state-centered’ as any of his contemporaries. Only a few years later, millions of young Japanese would be called on to sacrifice their own lives, not to mention those of their victims, in the process of “placing [them]selves in service to the state.” Makiguchi’s quarrel with the central government’s bureaucrats was thus not about whether or not service to the state should be promoted, but simply how best to attain that goal.

Emperor

If, as the above quote suggests, Makiguchi believed the ultimate goal of rural education was to serve the state, what was the emperor’s role in this? Though critical of patriotism based on “superficial reasons,” Makiguchi wrote:

His Majesty, the Emperor, on whom is centered the exercise of Imperial authority, exercises this through his military and civilian officials. The reason he exercises this authority is definitely not for his own benefit. Rather, as leader and head of the entire nation, he graciously exerts himself on behalf of all the people. It is for this reason that in our country, the state and the emperor, as head of state, should be thought of as completely one and indivisible. We must make our children thoroughly understand that loyal service to their sovereign is synonymous with love of country. . . . I believe it is only by so doing that we can clarify the true meaning of the phrase “loyalty to one’s sovereign and love of country” (*chūkun aikoku*).¹⁶

In urging his fellow educators to make the nation’s children “thoroughly understand that loyal service to their sovereign is synonymous with love of country” we once again find Makiguchi situated squarely in the mainstream of the ultra-nationalism that increasingly characterized the 1930s. In May 1937, for example, the Ministry of Education published a pamphlet entitled *Kokutai no Hongi* (True Meaning of the National Polity). School children were admonished “to live for the great glory and dignity of the emperor, abandoning the small ego, and thus expressing our true life as a people.”¹⁷ By July 1941, in a second Ministry of Education tract called *Shinmin no*

Michi (Way of the Subject), the entire Japanese people were instructed that “even in our private lives we always remember to unite with the emperor and serve the state.”¹⁸

As of 1933, Makiguchi advocated the widely held proposition that loyal service to the emperor and state was of paramount importance, synonymous with love of country. It was exactly this educational ideology that provided the foundation for the Japanese military’s demand for absolute and unquestioning obedience from its soldiers, claiming “the orders of one’s superiors are the orders of the emperor.”

Korea and China

In the 1933 edition, Makiguchi also touched on Japan’s colonization of Korea. Makiguchi claimed that Korea, prior to being annexed by Japan in August 1910, had long been in a state of anarchy, leaving it unable to either defend itself or protect its citizens. Not only that, the Chinese people presently found themselves in exactly the same situation.¹⁹

The clear implication of the latter claim was that China, like Korea before it, would greatly benefit from Japanese control. Needless to say, this was a sentiment shared by the Japanese government as seen, for example, in the Amai Statement of April 1934 issued by its Foreign Ministry. China, the statement declared, was not to avail itself of the assistance of any country other than Japan. As Hugh Borton notes: “Any individual or concerted action by the Western powers to bolster the faltering resistance of China would not be countenanced by Japan. If China was to be a unified nation, it would be so at the sufferance of Japan and under its tutelage.”²⁰

This said, it is equally clear that Makiguchi’s chief concern in writing favorably about Japan’s expansion onto the Asian continent was, as ever, directed toward the manner in which Japan’s children were to be educated.

Makiguchi saw in a discussion of Korea’s recent past and China’s present, a golden opportunity to demonstrate to Japanese children just how fortunate they were to be living in Japan. Makiguchi continued:

It is when we look at these concrete examples [of Korea and China] that thoughts about our own country emerge. . . . The result is that we cannot help but feel grateful and want to repay the debt of gratitude we owe [the state]. . . .

The practical application of the study of folk culture is to provide the fundamental basis for an understanding of the state by having [our children] look at situations like these that are right before their very eyes. I feel very deeply that we must vigorously seek to create persons of character who will in the future lead a state-centered life, having first acquired the germ of the idea of serving the state at the town and village levels.²¹

Makiguchi demonstrates yet again that his ultimate concern was implanting in Japan’s children a willingness to serve the state. Makiguchi simply believed he knew how to do this in a more effective way than the central government’s bureaucrats who showed such little concern and understanding of local conditions.

Makiguchi was not alone in his opinions, for at the time of the creation of *Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai* in 1930 he enjoyed the support of some of Japan’s most prominent citizens. For example, when he published the first volume of his *Sōka Kyōikugaku Taikei* (Value-Creating Pedagogical System) in 1930, then Prime Minister Inukai

Tsuyoshi (1855-1932), who presided over the Japanese invasion of Shanghai in January 1932 and the establishment of Japan's puppet state of *Manchukuo* the following month, provided a calligraphic endorsement in classical Chinese.

Further evidence showing the support Makiguchi enjoyed is contained in the ninth issue of *Kankyō* (Environment), a magazine created to promote his ideas on educational reform. Dated November 20, 1930, the ninth issue contained a statement endorsing Makiguchi's efforts signed by twenty-eight prominent individuals, beginning with Inukai Tsuyoshi, but also including Imperial Navy Admiral Nomaguchi Kaneo (1866-1943), Minister of Justice Watanabe Chifuyu (1876-1940), Supreme Court Judge Miyake Shōtarō (1887-1949), and many other prominent political and business leaders. Their endorsement concluded:

In recognition of [Makiguchi's] merits and with deep respect for his character, and to show our respect for his efforts toward the perfecting of his invaluable educational system, it is our duty, and is moreover a great privilege allowed those of us who know him, to extend him our moral support. To this end we are herewith honored to establish this group to support Value-Creating Pedagogy.²²

Nichiren Shōshū

In June 1928 Makiguchi converted to Nichiren Shōshū (Orthodox Nichiren sect). At the time of his conversion, Nichiren Shōshū was a very small branch of the overall Nichiren sect. In a government survey conducted at the end of 1939 it had only seventy-five affiliated temples and fifty-two priests. This compares with a total of 4,962 temples and 4,451 priests for all other

Nichiren branches.²³ Its small size, however, did not deter this branch from claiming that it alone had faithfully preserved Nichiren's teachings, teachings which represented the *only* authentic religious truth extant in the world.

Nichiren Shōshū's claim to unique possession of universal religious truth did not prevent its clerical leaders from participating in the ultranationalist frenzy of the day. Representative of these is Arimoto Kōga (1867-1936), former director-general of religious affairs for the branch and abbot of Myōkōji temple in Tokyo. In September 1929 Kōga created the "Society to Protect the Nation through the Orthodox Teaching" (*Seikyō Gokoku-kai*) with headquarters at his temple. This was in direct response to a decree issued by the Ministry of Education earlier in the same year calling for a general spiritual mobilization of the people.

The prospectus Kōga drew up for the new organization ended with the following injunction:

Now is unquestionably the time for we religious leaders to be active, to advance, and to struggle. . . . We must not only stand in the front echelons but in the second and third echelons. We must move forward, doing our utmost to develop a fighting spirit that will guide the entire military.

Protecting the state is our duty. Guiding the people is our responsibility. That is to say, we have created this association in order to rally all the people of this nation, totally devoting ourselves to using the power of the orthodox teaching [of Nichiren] to maintain law and order in the state. Furthermore, we seek to employ

the majesty of the true [Buddha]-Dharma to preserve social order, thereby sweeping back the tide of rapidly falling public morals. Isn't this the original mission of Buddhism?²⁴

Kōga's ultranationalist activities by no means ended with the creation of the above organization. On March 25, 1933, he published a thirty-five-page pamphlet entitled "Proclamation for the Celebration of the Flag Festival." The first chapter contained the following statement:

It is the state that the people must protect with their blood and defend to the death. Similarly, the people must protect the national flag with their blood and defend it to the death. The national flag is sacred and therefore no one, under any circumstances, can be allowed to insult or encroach upon it.²⁵

Branch Leadership

There is, of course, a danger in reaching conclusions about the political orientation of an entire branch based on the actions of only one priest, no matter how powerful a figure he may have been. Yet, as religious critic Ōki Michiyoshi notes: "There is general agreement between Kōga's thinking and that of the branch as a whole. . ."²⁶ The truth of Ōki's assertion is nowhere better illustrated than in the following "exhortation" (*kun'yu*) issued by Suzuki Nikkyō (1869-1945), head of Nichiren Shōshū, on December 8, 1941, the date (in Japan) of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor:

Today we are truly carried away in everlasting emotion and stand awestruck at the glittering

Imperial Edict declaring war on the United States and Britain that has been so graciously bestowed upon us. . . . We are fortunate in having an army and navy that is incomparably loyal and brave under the August Virtue of His Majesty, the Emperor. Our gratitude is boundless for the wondrous fruits of battle that have already been achieved on the first day of the war and look forward to a bright future. However, in view of the environment we find ourselves in, this next great war requires that we be prepared for the inevitability of a long struggle.

Therefore, adherents of this sect must, in obedience to the Holy Mind [of the Emperor] and in accordance with the parting instructions of the Buddha and Patriarchs, brandish the religious faith acquired through years of training, surmount all difficulties with untiring perseverance, and do their duty to the utmost, confident of certain victory in this great war of unprecedented proportions.²⁷

In January of the previous year, for example, Nikkyō had expressed his sect's "unending gratitude and enthusiasm" for the imperial military's accomplishments in its war against China, urging his fellow Japanese to work ever harder "to accomplish the goal of constructing a new East Asia."²⁸

Shinto

Having noted this branch's fervent endorsement of Japan's war effort, it is important to examine just what it was about the emperor that made his mind "holy" as quoted above. That is to say, did Nikkyō, as the branch's head, subscribe to the then prevalent

belief that the emperor was a divine descendant of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu Ōmikami?

The answer to this question is contained in yet another article written by Nikkyō appearing in the April 1942 issue of the sect's monthly organ, *Dai-Nichiren* (Great Nichiren). Entitled "The True Meaning of Religious Faith" (*Shinkō no Hongi*), Nikkyō described the relationship between Nichiren, Japan and the Imperial family as follows:

Because of his love for his birthplace, Saint [Nichiren] referred to it as *Awa no kuni* [lit. "province of safe refuge"]. Were I now to speculate what he meant by these words, I suggest that he wanted us to realize just what a joy it is to have been born in this Imperial land, with its unbroken line of emperors reigning over an incomparable national polity, the Imperial ancestress of whom is Amaterasu Ōmikami, the object of our respectful reverence.²⁹

As the above makes clear, the leadership of Nichiren Shōshū had no difficulty in revering Amaterasu, a Shintō goddess, or recognizing the emperor as her descendent and therefore partaking of her divinity. This said, it is noteworthy that the only way Nikkyō was able to connect Nichiren directly to his emperor-centric viewpoint was by *speculating* on what the latter had in mind when he referred to his birthplace as a "province of safe refuge." The fact that *Awa* (safe refuge) is actually a place name, used in pre-modern Japan to refer to the southern part of present-day Chiba Prefecture where Nichiren was born, makes this connection even more tenuous. No matter how flimsy the pretext, Nikkyō was willing to employ it in his effort to turn Nichiren into an advocate of modern Japanese ultra-nationalism.

Let us turn next to Nikkyō's opinion of American and English society by comparison with that of Japan:

Why is it that the Americans and British are being defeated, i.e., why are they so weak? It is because, unlike we Japanese, they have an unhealthy national polity, lacking in the concepts of loyalty and filial piety serving to unite together as one all segments of their societies. The Japanese people, on the other hand, enjoy total unity between the front lines and those in the rear, all harboring the desire to repay the debt of gratitude they owe the state with their death. All the people of this country, having become soldiers, possess a spirit united in accomplishing the goals of this holy war through becoming balls of fire. It is exactly for this reason that the imperial military has been invincible in its advance through the Philippines and Malaya, the object of admiration by the whole world.³⁰

What is striking here is just how similar Nikkyō's view of the Western enemy is to that held by such figures as Yasutani Haku'un or the many other institutional Buddhist leaders introduced in my book *Zen at War*. In one sense this is not surprising, for despite its image as a "new religion," Nichiren Shōshū, unlike its lay subsidiary Sōka Gakkai, has had a long history and was very much a part, albeit a small part, of traditional institutional Japanese Buddhism. Its roots can be readily traced back to Nikkō (1246-1333), one of Nichiren's six chief disciples, who shortly after his master's death quarreled with his fellow disciples over doctrinal matters. Over time this led to the formation of Nichiren Shōshū, the head temple

of which remains Taisekiji located in Fujinomiya near Mt. Fuji.



Taisekiji temple

During Japan’s long medieval period, Nichiren Shōshū, like the branches of all traditional Buddhist sects, accepted its role as one element of a *de facto* state religion. Furthermore, with the existence of institutional Buddhism as a whole threatened by the Meiji government’s adoption of an emperor-centric version of Shinto, i.e., “State Shinto,” it is not surprising that institutional Buddhist leaders of whatever sect ended up promoting an extreme form of nationalism that emphasized absolute subservience to the state, emperor worship, and ethnic chauvinism. In this sense, Nichiren Shōshū was no different than the other branches of traditional Buddhist sects that sought to demonstrate their ongoing usefulness to the state.

Government Intervention

In one respect, Nichiren Shōshū did differ from its fellow institutional Buddhists. This difference surfaced in 1940 when the government enacted the Religious Organizations Law designed to further enhance its use of religion in the war effort. One result was a governmental demand that those sects like Nichiren, which were divided into numerous branches, should unite. While other Nichiren branches agreed to do so, Nichiren Shōshū leaders objected, for in their eyes *all* other branches and sects, whether Nichiren-affiliated or not, were “evil religions” (*jashū*), and they wanted nothing to do with them. Both

lay and clerical Nichiren Shōshū adherents were in agreement on this point, and in April 1943 they successfully petitioned the government to remain independent. Makiguchi supported this petition and urged his followers to take it for granted that the government would authorize the branch’s independence, stating that it was the duty of all believers to “exhort the government, ban the evil religions, and spread the correct faith.”³¹

Nevertheless, it was not long before a serious difference of opinion erupted between Makiguchi and the branch’s clerical leaders. The split, it must be emphasized, was not related to the war effort per se, but centered on the proper response to the government’s directive that all Japanese families enshrine an amulet (*Jingū taima*) of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, within a small Shinto altar placed in their homes. Toda Jōsei has described what happened next:

In June 1943 the leaders of Sōka Gakkai were ordered to come to Taisekiji. Upon arrival, Watanabe Jikai and two other clerical leaders suggested that it would be best that we direct our members to accept amulets of the Sun Goddess. . . . However, Makiguchi, our president, replied that he would never do such a thing and left the temple.³²

Watanabe Jikai (1896-1967) was then the branch’s director of administration (*shomubuchō*). Of critical importance is the question of what prompted Makiguchi to spurn the advice of Jikai and the other clerical leaders. In an article written in 1951 entitled “The History of Sōka Gakkai and an Unshakable Faith” (*Sōka Gakkai no Rekishi to Kakushin*), Toda explained the rationale behind Makiguchi’s refusal as follows:

The military leaders of the day had been deceived by historical claims that it was the Sun Goddess who made “the wind of the gods”(kamikaze) blow at the time the Mongols attempted to invade Japan [in the thirteenth century]. The state, unaware that it was slandering the Dharma, neither thought of listening to, nor speaking of, St. Nichiren’s teachings. Neither did it realize that it was the prayer of St. Nichiren, the true Buddha, that caused the wind of the gods to blow. The United States followed the [educational] philosophy of [John] Dewey while the Japanese military attempted to unify the people’s spirit on the basis of the evil morality taught by Shinto. It was this that determined who would win and who would lose [the war], not the amount of material goods [on each side]. . . .

President Makiguchi taught that worshipping amulets of the Sun Goddess was opposed to the spirit of Nichiren Shōshū and strictly forbid our membership from doing so. . . . He repeatedly and forcefully said: “The only thing that can save this country is the spread of faith in the ‘great object of worship’ (*daigohonzon*), which is the true intention of St. Nichiren. How can one save this country by praying to the Sun Goddess?”³³

Here then is the true source of Makiguchi’s conflict not only with his branch leaders, but, ultimately, with the Japanese government itself. In essence, it amounted to a debate on who or what would “save” Japan in its hour of need, for by mid-1943 it was clear, though never openly

expressed, that Japan was losing the war. Just as at the time of the thirteenth century Mongolian invasion, the only thing that could save Japan from the feared Allied invasion was the intervention of supernatural or divine power. Thus, the real struggle was over the source of that intervention, i.e., was it to be faith in the *Lotus Sutra* as propagated by Nichiren or the Sun Goddess as propagated by State Shintō? The Japanese government had made up its mind and the clerical leaders of the Nichiren Shōshū concurred, or at least acquiesced, to that decision. Makiguchi would not.

Arrest

The immediate result of Makiguchi’s refusal was that he and his followers were barred from worshipping at the sect’s head temple. No doubt the clerical leadership recognized that, sooner rather than later, Makiguchi’s obstinacy would bring the government’s wrath down on both him and his lay society. Thus, if only as a means of self defense, the sect’s clerical leaders sought to distance themselves from the entire affair.

At the time, Makiguchi claimed his society had approximately 1,500 members nation-wide.³⁴ While this was a fairly sizable membership, it should be noted that there had been a significant change in the nature of that membership. As biographer Dayle Bethel points out, starting around 1937 Makiguchi began to place increasing emphasis on faith in Nichiren Shōshū in addition to educational reform.³⁵

In 1941 this new emphasis led to the creation of a monthly periodical entitled *Kachi Sōzō* (Value Creation). Makiguchi used this new periodical to encourage his followers to engage in *shakubuku* activities, a militant and forceful method of converting people to Nichiren Shōshū. On the one hand, Makiguchi’s turn toward sectarian religious concerns attracted new members, but it also led to a loss in support, especially from Japan’s political,

business, and educational leaders. Without backing from his own sect, and no longer enjoying the support of the power elite, the next step was all too predictable. On July 7, 1943 Makiguchi, Toda and nineteen other lay leaders were arrested on suspicion of having broken the Peace Preservation Law (*Chian Ijihō*). As if on cue, he and his fellow leaders were then formally expelled from Nichiren Shōshū.³⁶

But why, exactly, had Makiguchi and his leading followers been arrested? The answer to this question lies in Makiguchi's police records, beginning with the July 1943 issue of the then top secret *Tokkō Geppō* (Monthly Bulletin of the Special Higher Police Division). On page one hundred and twenty-eight we learn that Makiguchi and his fellows were suspected of "having desecrated the dignity of the Grand Shrine at Ise (earthly home of the Sun Goddess) and shown disrespect [toward His Majesty]"³⁷ Following on this, the August 1943 bulletin contained a twenty-five page summary of Makiguchi's interrogation.

Interrogation

What is most interesting about the record of Makiguchi's police interrogation is not so much what it contains, but what it does not. That is to say, of the eighteen questions his interrogators asked, not one of them evidences the least concern about Makiguchi's loyalty to his country let alone possible pacifist sentiments or opposition to the war effort. For the police, these were simply never at issue.

What was of concern, however, were Makiguchi's *religious* views, especially those having to do with the emperor and the Shinto mythology surrounding the emperor. The police were particularly interested in hearing the rationale for Makiguchi's criticism of the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education, for over the years the Rescript had served as one of the government's most effective means of thought control. Makiguchi responded to police

questioning by admitting that he was critical of one passage in the Rescript, i.e., the passage requiring Japanese subjects to be loyal to their sovereign.

Sōka Gakkai apologists have long sought to portray Makiguchi's criticism of the Rescript as proof of his opposition to both the emperor system and, by extension, the war. Yet, was Makiguchi really opposed to loyalty? Makiguchi answered his interrogators as follows:

The Imperial Rescript on Education clearly states that one should "be filial to father and mother." However, for His Excellency [the Emperor] to state that his subjects ought to be loyal to him is something that actually impairs His Virtue. That is to say, even without saying such a thing *I think it is, for we Japanese, the Way of the subject to be loyal*. This is what I have realized from my study of the truth of the *Lotus Sutra*.³⁸ (Italics mine)

As the above passage clearly reveals, Makiguchi's criticism of the Rescript, when placed in context, had nothing to do with disloyalty. On the contrary, Makiguchi elevated loyalty to a sublime level where it was only natural, i.e., the "Way of the subject" (*shinmindō*), to be loyal to the emperor. The emperor's virtue is such that he should never have to demean himself by requesting his subjects to render something that is his birthright as sovereign. Makiguchi further clarified his intent when he added that it would be a simple matter to correct the Rescript by inserting the words "to the sovereign" in the passage mentioning the importance of loyalty. This would make it clear, he felt, that the emperor was not personally requesting loyalty from his subjects.³⁹

Sun Goddess

This said, the major source of conflict between Makiguchi and the government was without doubt his opposition to enshrining amulets of the Sun Goddess in the homes of Sōka Gakkai members. A corollary of this was his equally vehement opposition to making religious pilgrimages to the Grand Shrine at Ise, the Sun Goddess' earthly home. Yet having said this, was Makiguchi's opposition to worshipping the Sun Goddess connected with a lack of respect or loyalty to the emperor? Not surprisingly, this was *the* critical question for the police. Makiguchi responded as follows:

The Sun Goddess is the venerable ancestress of our Imperial Family, her divine virtue having been transmitted to each successive emperor who ascended the throne up to and including the present emperor. Thus has her virtue been transformed into the August Virtue of His Majesty which, shining down on the people, brings them happiness. It is for this reason that Article III of the Constitution states: "The person of the Emperor is sacred and inviolable."

Just as we [Society members] recognize the fundamental unity of filial piety and loyalty, so it is our conviction that it is proper to reverently venerate His Majesty based on the monistic view that "His Majesty the Emperor is One and Indivisible" (*Tennō Ichigenron*), thus making it unnecessary to pay homage at the Grand Shrine at Ise. . . .

In light of this, who is there, apart from His Majesty, the Emperor himself, to whom we should reverently pray?⁴⁰

Once again, when placed in context, Makiguchi's refusal to worship the Sun Goddess had nothing to do with any lack of respect for, or loyalty to, the emperor. If anything, his "monistic view" is even more thoroughgoing than the Shinto orthodoxy of his day, for the emperor becomes the *sole focus* of "reverent venerat[ion]." This said, it must be admitted that Makiguchi's monism is very much a part of the Mahayana philosophical tradition, especially as formulated by the Madhyamika school where it is typically described as the principle of "not two" (*fu-ni*) or simply non-duality. D. T. Suzuki in particular often identified non-duality as a distinguishing feature of not only the Mahayana school but of "Oriental thought" in general.

Philosophy aside, perhaps the most surprising aspect of the previous quote is Makiguchi's acknowledgement that the Sun Goddess is not only the ancestress of the Imperial family but possessed of "divine virtue" as well. The reader may well wonder if, in expressing this degree of respect for a Shintō deity, Makiguchi wasn't contradicting the exclusive claims to truth of the faith that had brought him into conflict with the state in the first place.

In point of fact, Makiguchi was not, for it was Nichiren himself who had first presented sacred, *mandala*-like, handwritten scrolls (*gohonzon*) to his followers that included the name of Amaterasu as one of a number of Shinto deities and Buddhist *bodhisattvas* worshipping and/or protecting the sacred title of the *Lotus Sutra*, i.e., "*Nam-myōhō Renge-kyō* (Devotion to the *Lotus Sutra*). However, for Nichiren, Amaterasu, as a Shinto deity, was never more than a relatively minor figure as shown by both the small size of her inscription and its placement at the bottom right-hand corner of the scroll. Thus, as an object of veneration, Amaterasu could never compare with the centrality and size accorded the *Lotus Sutra's* sacred title inscribed at the scroll's centre.⁴¹

Given this, it is not surprising, let alone contradictory, for Makiguchi to have accorded Amaterasu some degree of recognition and respect even though it was unthinkable that she could ever, as in State Shinto, become the chief object of worship -- that honor was reserved exclusively for the sacred title of the *Lotus Sutra* and no one or nothing could alter or replace that.

Salvation

Finally, there is one passage in Makiguchi's interrogation that, more than any other, suggests that he was at odds with the fervent adoration of the emperor so typical of his day. Expressed in words, this popular adoration saw in the emperor not simply a wise and virtuous ruler but a direct descendant of the gods who was therefore a "god incarnate" (*arahito-gami*). While Makiguchi clearly accepted the idea that the emperor was a descendant of the Sun Goddess whose "divine virtue" he had inherited, even the emperor could not be allowed to usurp center stage. Thus Makiguchi had the following to say about the emperor:

During discussions held with Society members both collectively and individually, I have often had occasion to discuss His Majesty. At that time I pointed out that His Majesty, too, is an unenlightened being (*bonpu*) who as Crown Prince attended Gakushūin (Peers' school) to learn the art of being emperor.

Therefore, His Majesty is not free of error. . . . However, were His Majesty to become a believer in the Supra-eternal Buddha (*Kuon-honbutsu*), then I think he would naturally acquire wisdom and conduct political affairs without error.⁴²

In seeking to understand this passage, it is first necessary to point out that, as far as Nichiren Shōshū doctrine is concerned, the "Supra-eternal Buddha" referred to is identified with Nichiren himself, at least in this present age of the "degenerate Dharma" (*mappō*).⁴³ Thus, Makiguchi is calling on the emperor to place his faith in Nichiren (as understood by Nichiren Shōshū) as the necessary prerequisite for "conduct[ing] political affairs without error."

Secondly, while in popular usage the Japanese word "*bonpu*" simply means an "ordinary person," or even an "ignorant person," its Buddhist meaning refers to someone who has not yet realized enlightenment, or at least is unacquainted with the teachings of the Buddha. Since Makiguchi fervently believed that the teachings of Nichiren Shōshū represented the *only* "true Dharma," it is axiomatic that the emperor, as a non-believer, could not have been enlightened. This doctrinal position would hold true whether Japan was at war or not. Thus, while Makiguchi's position certainly ran counter to the Shinto-based orthodoxy of his day, the fact that Makiguchi embraced it in no way reflected his opposition to the war any more than it reflected his disloyalty to the Imperial institution.

Significantly, Makiguchi's parting words to his interrogators reveal just how uncompromising he remained, even in prison, toward all other religious faiths: "As a direct result of my guidance, I would guess that up to the present time some five hundred people or more have broken up and burned the Shinto altars in their homes together with paper amulets from the Grand Shrine at Ise and the talismans and charms issued by other Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples."⁴⁴ Makiguchi's quarrel was not just with Shinto but with *every* branch and sect of Buddhism other than his own.

Conclusion

In evaluating Makiguchi it is difficult not to admire the steadfastness of his faith in the face

of imprisonment and eventual death from malnourishment and advanced age. This is especially the case when one considers that of the twenty Society leaders originally arrested with him, nineteen were released after having renounced their faith. In light of this it is reasonable to assume that Makiguchi and Toda would also have been released had they done likewise. But they would not.

Yet, as both the police interrogation records and Makiguchi's previous writings reveal, there is not the slightest hint that Makiguchi opposed Japan's military aggression any more than he had earlier opposed the ultra-nationalist pronouncements of his sectarian leaders. On the contrary, the sectarian leadership's fervent endorsement of Japan's attacks on both China and then the U.S. did not deter Makiguchi from his ongoing and energetic proselyting activities, at least up until the time of his arrest in 1943.

In February 2000, a Sōka Gakkai International (SGI) spokesperson claimed, in light of my research, that as far as Makiguchi is concerned "to criticize and reject State Shintoism with full awareness of the ramifications of such actions was, in our view, tantamount to rejecting Japanese militarism and imperialism."⁴⁵ This claim, however, cannot be sustained, for the real cause of Makiguchi's imprisonment is to be found in his and the state's *mutually exclusive and absolutist religious faiths* and had nothing to do with his criticism, let alone rejection, of either Japanese aggression or emperor-centric imperialism.

In fact, one could argue that by admitting Makiguchi's imprisonment was due to his criticism and rejection of State Shinto rather than a pacifist or antiwar stance, the SGI representative has proven the thesis of this article. To demonstrate this, suppose there was a country at war in which Roman Catholicism was the official state religion. In hopes of unifying the citizens of that country in the war

effort the government decreed that all Protestant churches had to replace their "empty" crosses with a Catholic-style crucifix and those failing to do so would be imprisoned. Would those Protestant pastors who refused, and were therefore imprisoned, be considered "pacifists" or even necessarily opposed to the war their nation was fighting? The answer is clear.

Like Nichiren some seven hundred years earlier, Makiguchi was convinced that there was only one path to salvation for individual, nation and even emperor, descendant of the Sun Goddess and recipient of her divine virtue as the latter was believed to be. The path to salvation consisted of nothing more, and nothing less, than faith in the *Lotus Sutra* as interpreted and expounded by Nichiren, whom Makiguchi esteemed as the one and only "true Buddha" of the present age.

In pursuing his goal, Makiguchi was fully prepared to be persecuted, for as George Tanabe, Jr. has noted, persecution has long played an important role in the Nichiren tradition, the origins of which can be traced back to the mentality and religion of Nichiren himself.⁴⁶ In this sense, Makiguchi was doing no more than following in the footsteps of his illustrious predecessor.

It must be reiterated that Nichiren's own persecution as well as that of his later followers was consistently brought about by their own intolerance of other faiths. Not only did Nichiren and his followers attempt to forcefully convert others, but, even more importantly, they also constantly denounced the government for not adhering exclusively to the *Lotus Sutra* as propagated by Nichiren. Since the *Lotus Sutra* itself predicted that those who propagated it would be persecuted, Nichiren followers have long viewed persecution as actually vindicating the truthfulness of this sutra and their faithfulness to it.

What distinguished Makiguchi from his

contemporaries, including even the clerical leaders of his sect, was his absolute faith in Nichiren and his teachings as preserved and taught by Nichiren Shōshū alone. He would brook no compromise, for in his view only this faith could save both the individual adherent and Japan as a whole, the latter necessarily implying destruction of the invading Allies just as the invading 13th century Mongols were claimed to have been destroyed through Nichiren’s prayerful intercession. Faith in any other religious teaching was, by definition, an evil practice that had to be eradicated. In other words, despite postwar SGI claims to the contrary, Makiguchi had no sympathy for ‘freedom of religion’ for anyone other than himself and those who strictly adhered to his sectarian viewpoint.⁴⁷

Intolerance

It should be noted that in the immediate postwar era Sōka Gakkai’s extreme intolerance of other religious faiths did not change in the least. For example, on October 31, 1954, Toda Jōsei mounted a white horse (previously the exclusive prerogative of the emperor) on the Taisekiji parade grounds and addressed assembled members of the Young Men’s and Young Women’s divisions as follows:

In our attempt at *kosen rufu* [converting the entire world] we are without an ally. We must consider *all religions our enemies*, and *we must destroy them*. Ladies and gentlemen, it is obvious that the road ahead is full of obstacles. Therefore, you must worship the *gohonzon* (sacred scroll), take the Sōka Gakkai spirit to heart, and cultivate the strength of youth. I expect you to rise to the occasion to meet the many challenges that lie ahead.⁴⁸ (Italics mine)

Like his mentor, Toda was not

speaking metaphorically when he urged the destruction of all other religions. Nevertheless, Sōka Gakkai representatives now claim things have changed. While admitting that “Sōka Gakkai used to require new members to discontinue worshipping any other religious objects” they assert that “today, removal of the religious objects of [one’s] previous faith is still encouraged but is not an absolute prerequisite.”⁴⁹

Outwardly at least, Sōka Gakkai’s religious intolerance appears to have mellowed in recent years, most especially as it seeks converts in religiously pluralistic societies outside of Japan where “there is no standard rule that has been laid down concerning the treatment of objects of other religions.”⁵⁰ Yet, well into the 1960s, if not later, official Sōka Gakkai publications warned adherents:

Wanting to keep relics of other religions on the pretext that you don’t worship them indicates your attachment to evil religion. Then you can’t say your faith is unadulterated. There are cases of people who mistakenly thought they had disposed of tablets and talismans of evil religions. Because these objects remained in their houses, however, these people suffered *severe divine punishment*.⁵¹ (Italics mine)

Mellowed or not, given its ongoing intolerance of “evil religions,” it is nothing short of mind-boggling to note the success that Sōka Gakkai leaders, most especially Ikeda Daisaku, have enjoyed in recent years in projecting themselves to the world as worthy representatives of Buddhism’s longstanding

tradition of religious tolerance. This is only slightly less amazing than the success Sōka Gakkai has had in marketing itself as an organization dedicated to world peace as proven by its founder's opposition, even unto death, to Japanese militarism.

This article has at least begun to set the record straight. It remains to be seen, however, whether Sōka Gakkai, let alone Nichiren Shōshu, will ever acknowledge their own "war responsibility." Robert Kisala identifies a major impediment to this acknowledgement in his 1999 book *Prophets of Peace*. It is very comforting, he notes, to portray Makiguchi and his followers as victims, not supporters, of Japanese militarism, for "their victim consciousness might also serve to absolve Sōka Gakkai believers of any direct responsibility for what Japan did during the war. . ."⁵²

In this connection it should be mentioned that it is only in recent years that materials documenting Nichiren Shōshū's wartime complicity have been made public. The disclosure of these materials is closely connected to the internal dispute that erupted between Nichiren Shōshū and Sōka Gakkai in 1991, resulting in Nichiren Shōshū clerics taking the extraordinary step of excommunicating Sōka Gakkai's entire lay membership. Ostensibly the excommunication was the result of doctrinal differences but issues concerning decision-making authority between the sect's clerical leaders and Soka Gakkai's lay leaders, especially Ikeda Daisaku, were integral to the very acrimonious split. Both parties also charged the other with financial corruption and other forms of malfeasance. While a detailed discussion of this clash is beyond the scope of this article, further details are available [here](#).

Suffice it to say, since then it has become in Sōka Gakkai's self-interest, if not self-defense, to portray the parent body as having long betrayed Nichiren's teachings, not least of all

by its support for Japanese military aggression. This support is, of course, portrayed as the very antithesis of anything said or done by its own martyred founder Makiguchi and his faithful disciple Toda.

As attractive as this interpretation is on the surface, it remains, at best, a partial and one-sided disclosure. As we have seen, not only did Makiguchi justify Japan's colonial takeover of Korea (and earlier war with Russia), but he also devoted much of his life to developing a more effective way of instilling "service to the state" in Japanese children. He further advocated that these same children "thoroughly understand that loyal service to their sovereign is synonymous with love of country." Even while imprisoned he affirmed that loyalty to the emperor was but a natural part of "the Way of the subject." And as if that were not enough, Makiguchi asked: "Who is there, apart from His Majesty, the Emperor himself, to whom we should reverently pray?"

Until and unless Sōka Gakkai can admit its own history of support for, or at least collaboration with, Japan's emperor-centric militarist actions, it is difficult to understand how those affiliated with other faiths, Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, can recognize it as a genuine force for world peace.

Addendum

Establishing "cause and effect" is, most especially in the humanities, a challenging task. It is even more difficult to justify the claim that a study of the past allows one to predict future events. For these reasons, the ideas expressed in this addendum should rightly be considered as "academic speculation," to be proved or disapproved by future events.

That said, the first item of interest is a verifiable fact that occurred as recently as July 1, 2014. It was on this date that Kōmeitō, the political arm of Sōka Gakkai and junior partner of the Liberal Democratic Party in the current

governing coalition, formally endorsed Japan's right to send combat troops abroad once again. For the first time since Japan's wartime alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy nearly seventy years ago, Japan will be able to *officially* dispatch combat forces to fight wars of "collective self-defense" (*shūdan bōei*).⁵³ Significantly, this unprecedented postwar policy change came about not as a constitutional revision ratified by the people of Japan but simply as the ruling coalition's "reinterpretation" of Article Nine of Japan's Constitution. The last sentence of Article Nine states: "The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized."

Thus, if Sōka Gakkai were truly dedicated to peace as it claims, this major revision *by government fiat* to Japan's postwar "Peace Constitution" would have been the ideal time to demonstrate that commitment. For example, it could have directed its political wing, the Kōmeitō, to exit the government under the control of dominant, conservative Liberal Democratic Party headed by Prime Minister Abe Shinzō. However, as the following article in the July 2, 2014 edition of the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* newspaper explains, this is not what happened:

Sōka Gakkai Appreciates Kōmeitō's Efforts Regarding the Right of Collective Self-defense

The Public Relations Office of Sōka Gakkai, supporter of Kōmeitō, responded to a request for an interview from the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* on July 2, 2014. The topic of the interview was Kōmeitō's agreement to an interpretation of the Constitution that allows for the right to exercise collective self-defense. The Public Relations Office commented: "We appreciate the Party's efforts to maintain the pacifism of Article 9 of the

Constitution." Additionally, "We hope that in the future, the Party will make every effort to explain its actions to the people, thereby maintaining its commitment to the strictly defensive policy of a peace-loving nation in the upcoming session of Diet deliberations focused on amending related laws.

In May [of this year] Sōka Gakkai had commented: "Even in the event of the exercise of the right of collective self-defense on a limited scale, it is essential that it undergo the procedures for formally amending the Constitution."⁵⁴

Sōka Gakkai's words, e.g., "maintain the pacifism of Article Nine," "strictly defensive policy," "peace-loving nation," etc. all sound so reassuring as if nothing had changed. Yet it is clear that Sōka Gakkai made a major policy change between May and July of this year, for it had initially demanded any change to the Constitution go through the formal process for constitutional revision. This process would have included an opportunity for the Japanese people to vote on the question of whether they wished to allow their nation to engage in war overseas, i.e., participate in "collective self-defense." Sōka Gakkai's policy change clearly contributed to denying them this opportunity and could well lead to an untold number of deaths.

Needless to say, Sōka Gakkai's policy change does not in itself prove its commitment to peace is mere pretense, readily discarded when the need arises. Still less does it show that Makiguchi's alleged opposition to wartime Japanese aggression was equally fraudulent. For one thing there are any number of religious organizations professing loyalty to the creed of their founder who subsequently violate that creed, especially in regard to issues of war and peace. Yet, at the very least it does present an

interesting area of inquiry for future researchers and opens the *possibility* of such a link.

At a time when Japan lay in ruins, it was clearly an effective recruiting tactic for a then small religious organization like Sōka Gakkai to adopt a pacifist stance. This commitment made a substantial contribution to its attractiveness to a disillusioned populace, including to its longtime leader and promoter, Ikeda Daisaku.

Today, revanchist forms of nationalism can be found throughout the world, Japan included. One expression this takes in Japan is the increasing number of voices calling for a policy of either confronting or at least “containing” China, this time in collaboration with the U.S. Given this, the question is whether Sōka Gakkai, like Makiguchi himself, will once again come full-circle to claim that Japan’s only hope of ‘salvation’ from possible wartime disaster is absolute, exclusive faith in the *Lotus Sutra* as they interpret it? Only time will tell.

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Notes

¹ In his book *Prophets of Peace*, Robert Kisala introduces the wartime records of two other Nichiren-related "new religions": Risshō Kōseikai

(co-founded by Niwano Nikkyō) and Nipponzan Myōhōji (founded by Fujii Nichidatsu). See pages 103-4 and 50-51 respectively. As in this chapter, Kisala finds that the respective founders of these two organizations, despite postwar claims to the contrary, generally supported Japan's war efforts.

² Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 159.

³ Quoted on the official website of [Soka Gakkai International](http://www.sokagakkai.org) (accessed on 1 August 2000).

⁴ Narrated in "Daisaku Ikeda -- Close Up (New English Version)." Kimura Keiko, Executive

Producer. Videotape, 60 minutes, distributed by the Sōka Gakkai Public Relations Office, 1999.

⁵ Ikeda Daisaku. "Seishun Taiwa" (Discussions on Youth) in *SGI Gurafu*, August 2000, p. 36.

⁶ Murata. *Japan's New Buddhism*, pp. 73-74.

⁷ Makiguchi, *Jinsei Chirigaku*, p. 947.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 946.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 948-51.

¹⁰ Murata, *Japan's New Buddhism*, p. 74.

¹¹ Borton, *Japan's Modern Century*, p. 379.

¹² Murata, *Japan's New Buddhism*, p. 74.

¹³ Makiguchi, *Kyōdoka Kenkyū*, rev. 10th ed., p. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 460-61.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 411-12.

¹⁷ Quoted in Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, p. 314.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁹ Makiguchi, *Kyōdoka Kenkyū*, rev. 10th ed., p. 412.

²⁰ Burton, *Japan's Modern Century*, p. 383.

²¹ Makiguchi, *Kyōdoka Kenkyū*, rev. 10th ed., p. 413.

²² Bethel, *Makiguchi -- The Value Creator*, p. 73.

²³ See details in Murata, *Japan's New Buddhism*, pp. 70-71.

²⁴ Quoted in Ōki, *Bukkyō-sha no Sensō Sekinin*,

p. 204.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 195.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 198.

²⁷ Suzuki Nikkyō, “Kun’yu Dai Nijū-go” (Exhortation, Number Twenty-Nine) in the monthly publication *Dai-Nichiren*, January 1942, p. 1.

²⁸ Quoted in Ōki, *Bukkyō-sha no Sensō Sekinin*, p. 116.

²⁹ Suzuki Nikkyō, “Shinkō no Hongi” (The True Meaning of Religious Faith) in the monthly publication *Dai-Nichiren*, April 1942, p. 13.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

³¹ Quoted in Murata, *Japan’s New Buddhism*, p. 82.

³² Toda Jōsei, “Sōka Gakkai no Rekishi to Kakushin” (The History of Sōka Gakkai and an Unshakable Faith) in *Daibyakurenge*, No. 16, July 1951, p. 1-2.

³³ Ibid., p. 1. The “great object of worship” or *daigohonzon* refers to the sacred tablet on which Nichiren himself is claimed to have inscribed the holy phrase, “Nam(u)-myōhō-rence-kyō” (Homage to the *Lotus Sutra*). This tablet is enshrined at Taisekiji temple and forms the chief basis for the sect’s claim to orthodoxy in the transmission of Nichiren’s teachings.

³⁴ Membership numbers vary. Makiguchi put his membership at 1,500 during his interrogation by the police in July 1943. See Akashi Hirotaka & Matsuura Sōzō. *Shōwa Tokkō Dan’atsu-shi 4 -- Shūkyō-jin ni taisuru Dan’atsu (ge)*, p. 179. According to Murata Kiyooki, however, Sōka Gakkai had 5,000 members as of mid-1943. See *Japan’s New Buddhism*, p. 84.

³⁵ Bethel, *Makiguchi -- The Value Creator*, pp. 96-98.

³⁶ See details in Ōki, *Bukkyō-sha no Sensō Sekinin*, pp. 64-65.

³⁷ Quoted in Akashi Hirotaka & Matsuura Sōzō. *Shōwa Tokkō Dan’atsu-shi 4 -- Shūkyō-jin ni taisuru Dan’atsu (ge)*, p. 154.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 172. The passage in the Imperial Rescript on Education that Makiguchi referred to reads as follows: “Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects *ever united in loyalty and filial piety* have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof.” (Italics mine)

³⁹ Ibid., p. 172

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 174-75.

⁴¹ Interestingly, as early as 1938 all Nichiren-related sects came under suspicion of having committed *lese majesty* exactly because of the marginal position they accorded Amaterasu on the sect’s central object of worship, i.e., *gohonzon*. In response, the main Nichiren sect headquartered on Mt. Minobu actually deleted Amaterasu’s name altogether from their *gohonzon* thus eliminating any appearance of disrespect to the Imperial ancestress. Nichiren Shōshū, on the other hand, never went so far as to alter their *gohonzon* even though they eventually called on their followers to accept amulets of the Sun Goddess.

⁴² Quoted in Akashi Hirotaka & Matsuura Sōzō. *Shōwa Tokkō Dan’atsu-shi 4 -- Shūkyō-jin ni taisuru Dan’atsu (ge)*, pp. 171-72.

⁴³ For further discussion of the Nichiren Shōshū view of Nichiren, see Murata, *Japan’s New Buddhism*, pp. 63-67. *Mappō* refers to the Mahayana belief that following Buddha Shakyamuni’s death there would come a time

of decline, dissension and schism in the Buddha Dharma. The last stage (out of three) in this process would be the age of the degenerate Dharma lasting, according to some sources, for some 10,000 years. During this time only a diluted form of Buddhism would exist, and enlightenment rarely attained. Nichiren was convinced that the world had already entered this final stage.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Akashi Hirotaka & Matsuura Sōzō. *Shōwa Tokkō Dan'atsu-shi 4 -- Shūkyō-jin ni taisuru Dan'atsu (ge)*, p. 179.

⁴⁵ This statement was made by Tokihisa (Andy) Sumimoto, SGI Office of Public Information, in a letter to the author dated 14 February 2000.

⁴⁶ Tanabe, "The Matsumoto Debate" in Lopez (ed.), *Buddhism in Practice*, p. 241.

⁴⁷ In its webpage entitled "[The Three Founding Presidents](#)," Sōka Gakkai International claimed the following: "His [Makiguchi's] humanistic, student-centered views and *defense of religious freedom* often brought him into conflict with authority. Arrested with other top Soka Gakkai leaders in 1943 as a "thought criminal" for his unyielding opposition to the militarist regime and its forced imposition of state-sponsored

religion, Makiguchi died in prison at the age of 73 in November 1944." (accessed 13 July 2014).

⁴⁸ Quoted in Murata, *Japan's New Buddhism*, p. 100.

⁴⁹ This statement was made by Tokihisa (Andy) Sumimoto, SGI Office of Public Information, in an e-mail message to the author dated 24 November 2000.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Quoted in Murata, *Japan's New Buddhism*, p.106.

⁵² Kisala, *Prophets of Peace*, p. 91.

⁵³ As Tessa Morris-Suzuki revealed in her article, "[Lavish Are The Dead: Re-envisioning Japan's Korean War](#)," although Japan was not officially involved in the Korean War, inasmuch as it was under Allied Occupation until April 1952 and not yet a member of the United Nations, it nevertheless supplied an estimated 8,000 or more Japanese nationals to the war zone in military related-roles. (accessed on 29 August 2014).

⁵⁴ Available on the Web [here](#) (accessed on 11 July 2014).