

Two Views of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's Attitude toward Japanese Militarism and Education

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I have just read Brian Victoria's intriguing research paper, "Engaged Buddhism: A Skeleton in the Closet?" Dr. Victoria, Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Asian Studies, University of Adelaide, is convinced that the founders and leaders of some Buddhist organizations supported Japanese militarism and its agenda of conquest before and during World War II. In his research, reported in this paper, he sets out to look for evidence in support of this conviction. He believes he found what he was looking for.

I am not a scholar of religion and am not qualified to comment or evaluate the accuracy of Dr. Victoria's allegations about the "distress that the Buddhist tradition (or at least its leaders) has produced, especially in the modern period?" Neither am I able to judge the accuracy of his research pertaining to the stance toward war and militarism upon the part of two of the three Buddhist leaders he refers to in the paper, Nittatsu Fujii and Haku'un Yasutani. I do, however, know something about the life and work of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the other Buddhist leader about whom he writes. Thus, I will confine my observations in this article to his comments about Makiguchi.

Briefly, Dr. Victoria concludes that (1) Makiguchi was a staunch supporter of Japanese militarism, and (2) he perceived education as a means of creating loyal subjects for the State, subjects who would willingly serve the State by helping to carry out its militaristic agenda. If Dr. Victoria is correct in these conclusions, it will mean that we will need to view Makiguchi in a different light. We are faced, then, with the task of determining the validity of Dr. Victoria's allegations.

I suggest we begin our inquiry by taking a close look at themes which were central to Makiguchi's life and work, as they are recorded in his writings, particularly *Jinsei Chirigaku*, his first major work published in 1903, upon which Dr. Victoria bases the bulk of his conclusions. I will rely primarily on Makiguchi's own words to express these themes. (For a summary of some of the themes and issues which were dear to Makiguchi's heart, see Appendix 1 of this article.)

How, one may wonder, did Dr. Victoria arrive at the conclusions he does in light of the ideals, values, and the deep yearning for a "more humanitarian way" which would assure the "well-being and protection of all people" which are so clearly revealed in Makiguchi's writings. If one compares Dr. Victoria's article carefully with what Makiguchi actually wrote, it becomes clear that he (Dr. Victoria) violated a cardinal principle of scholarly research by quoting passages from Makiguchi's writings out of context, and in doing so interpreted the original text to mean the exact opposite of Makiguchi's meaning. One example is this passage from "Engaged Buddhism: A Skeleton in the Closet?"

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. (Makiguchi 1903: 950-951).

This is Dr. Victoria's translation of the last paragraph of Makiguchi's discussion of humanitarian competition, taken out of context and interpreted to support his thesis that Makiguchi supported Japanese militarism and territorial expansion through military conquest. He completely disregards, for example, such statements in the same section as the following:

Selfish expansion of territory and the conquest of other states are not necessary. If the leaders of a state are persons of high moral character and virtue, justice and humanity will characterize the life and affairs of that state.

It may seem unrealistic to apply such an approach to the real world of current international relations. However, the effectiveness of this approach has already been demonstrated in interpersonal relationships. Thus, I submit that it is not as unrealistic as it may seem to expect that a humanitarian approach to international relations will triumph eventually in human affairs.

... The important thing is the setting of a goal of well being and protection of all people, including oneself but not at the increase of self interest alone. In other words, the aim is the betterment of others and in doing so, one chooses ways that will yield personal benefit as well as benefit to others. It is a conscious effort to create a more harmonious

community life... (Chapter 29, p. 286—for the entire section dealing with Humanitarian Competition, see Appendix 2 of this article. All references to page numbers, unless otherwise noted, are to *A Geography of Human Life*, the English language version of *Jinsei Chirigaku*.)

Neither, it seems, did he read in other chapters of *Jinsei Chirigaku* such statements as:

If the peoples of European nations continue to devote themselves solely to expanding their national power, by building arms and conducting armed aggression, disregarding the extent to which their conduct not only disturbs the peace and stability of other nations, but also creates crises in their own nations, ultimately they may end up witnessing the disintegration and destruction of their own nations. (Chapter 26, pp. 242–243)

Apparently, Dr. Victoria would have us believe that Makiguchi condoned and supported for his own nation a course of action which he was convinced would lead the nations of Europe to “disintegration and destruction.” A close look at “Engaged Buddhism: A Skeleton in the Closet?” leads one to suspect that the writer did not, in fact, read *Jinsei Chirigaku*. If he had, he could not have come to the conclusions he did.

Finally, a brief comment on the paper's other main argument, that Makiguchi perceived education as a means of creating loyal subjects for the State, subjects who would willingly serve the State by helping to carry out its militaristic agenda. Dr. Victoria bases this argument on a paragraph from a 1933 reprint of Makiguchi's second major work, *Kyodoka Kenkyu* (Study of Folk Culture), first published in 1912:

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 ourselves 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 (Makiguchi 1933: 460–461).

Here, again, is an example of a passage interpreted in isolation and without regard to the context and the entirety of the author's works. Dr. Victoria apparently assumes that when Makiguchi refers to the “Japanese State,” he has in mind the same understanding and concept of the “state” as he (Victoria) does, that is, the then existing Japanese militaris-

tic state, in the context of which Makiguchi lived and worked during his entire adult life. When one reads Makiguchi's writings in their entirety, however, a very different image and perception emerges.

If one reads all three of Makiguchi's major writings, including his last and highly important work, *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (the English version of this work is entitled "Education for Creative Living," of which Victoria makes no mention), it becomes clear that Makiguchi was calling the Japanese to envision an ideal Japanese society, a society that he fervently believed could be, if children and young people could learn and grow, not within the elite created factory schools of his day that had been imported from western cultures, but in a holistic, community based educational system drawn from and related to the natural environment and Japanese traditional wisdom. It was for responsible participation in this kind of society that Makiguchi wanted to prepare children and young people.

The writer of "Engaged Buddhism: A Skeleton in the Closet?" completely missed, it appears, or deliberately ignored, such dimensions of Makiguchi's writings on education as these statements in *Education for Creative Living*:

The aim of education is not to transfer knowledge; it is to guide the learning process, to put the responsibility for learning into the student's own hands. It is not the piecemeal merchandizing of information; it is the provision of keys that will allow people to unlock the vault of knowledge on their own. It does not consist of pilfering the intellectual property amassed by others through no additional effort of one's own; it would rather place people on their own path of discovery and invention. The words have been resounding in the ears of educators like ourselves since the days of Comenius and Pestalozzi, but they have yet to be put into real practice.

Education consists of finding value within the living environment, thereby discovering physical and psychological principles that govern our lives and eventually applying these newfound principles in real life to create new value. In sum, it is the guided acquisition of observation, comprehension, and application.

Thus if one possesses the keys to unlock the vault of knowledge, it becomes possible to obtain for oneself all the learning one will ever need in life without having to memorize endless volumes of scholarship. What with the highly developed state of printing and publishing these days, all one needs are powers of comprehension to search out

information on one's own. Furthermore, given today's advanced divisions of labor, who can say just when a particular bit of information might come handy? There is no reason to overload our lives with mountains of useless and trivial information that we may never need.

Again, it is clear, if one reads Makiguchi's work in its entirety, that in his passionate commitment to education and educational change and transformation his aim was to prepare children and young people for living fully and productively, and as socially responsible participants, in a Japanese State committed to a "more humanitarian way" which would assure the "well-being and protection of all people." To suggest, as Dr. Victoria does, that Makiguchi's sole aim in education was to create fodder for the Japanese militarists' suicidal battles is a gross misinterpretation of what Makiguchi wrote and what he stood for.

APPENDIX 1

Central Themes in Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's Writings:

1. Respect and Appreciation for the Earth

For Makiguchi this was central. His concerns in this regard can be grasped by comparing his view with that of the view stemming from Western (predominately U. S.) culture, which was flooding into Japan at the time he wrote. That view, as Alvin Toffler has succinctly summarized, is that "nature is an object waiting to be exploited." In contrast, in Makiguchi's thought, being human meant to live in harmony with the earth: "... it is through our spiritual interaction with the earth that the characteristics that we think of as truly human are ignited and nurtured within us." (Chapter 3, p. 25)

2. A Sense of Awe and Respect for the Wonders of Nature

There seemingly is no end to the blessings of rivers for our lives...
 ... When I observe the heads of these rivers, I marvel at the work of nature. Here is the wisdom of nature visible and apparent for any sensitive and alert person to see. But what is the basis of this splendid natural phenomenon? The answer, of course, is the forest. Whether a river is a source of blessing for us or a source of suffering and disaster depends to a very great extent on the condition of the forest at its headwaters. While the wise elder statesmen of former years valued the forest, took measures to preserve it, and enabled us to receive the river's blessings, our recent, short-sighted politicians neglect it, and permit deforesting

without thought. Thus do we experience the wrath of the river and suffer its revenge. (Chapter 9, pp. 80–82)

3. Respect and Appreciation for Human Society and a Corresponding Sense of Indebtedness to and Responsibility for Society

It is our nature as human beings to form societies. No one can live totally alone. It is through association in society that we can provide not only for our basic needs and security, but for everything that makes our lives fulfilling and rewarding. This realization leads to the universalization of sympathetic feelings initially directed toward a specific individual or object. Growing awareness of our indebtedness to our society gives rise to feelings of appreciation and a sense of social responsibility within us. It is this realization of our indebtedness to the society we call our homeland and our appreciation for its rich contribution to our lives which produces feelings of patriotism and love of country. Beginning in our very personal relationships in our homeland, our sympathetic concern and appreciation expands to include the larger society and, ultimately, the whole world. (Chapter 3, pp. 29–30)

4. The Local Community, One's Homeland, as the Arena of Childhood Learning and Education, and Geography as a Tool Available for Teachers to Use in Teaching

... I arrived at a conviction that the natural beginning point for understanding the world we live in and our relationship to it is that community of persons, land, and culture which gave us birth; that community, in fact, which gave us our very lives and started us on the path toward becoming the persons we are. In other words, we must start from that community which has given us our rootedness as human, cultural, beings. The importance of this rootedness and personal identity which are given to us by our native cultural communities, our homelands, can scarcely be overemphasized.

If we think seriously about it, we can see that every aspect of this universe can be observed in the small area of our homeland. Furthermore, because our homeland is the place where we live, where we walk, where we see and hear and gain impressions, where we perform, it is possible for us to observe everything directly. Thus, it is possible to explain the general nature of highly complex phenomena anywhere in the world through use of examples found in abundance even in the most remote village or hamlet. (Chapter 2, p. 20)

... let me stress my basic position again: every aspect of the entire uni-

verse can be found in the small, limited area of one's home community. But we have to be sensitive to these untold riches all around us, and we must learn how to be effective observers. (Chapter 2, p. 22)

5. Child-Centered Learning

Makiguchi believed deeply that children must be allowed to learn naturally through direct observation and intimate participation in their natural and social environments, rather than being torn out of family and community and isolated in schools, as had been the practice in his day, since the introduction of Western culture following the Meiji Revolution of 1868. He reflects on this in his third and last major work, published in four volumes between 1930–1932:

In the days before there were schools, the prevailing method of guiding young people to the proper roles in the general scheme of life was an extended home life, whereby one apprenticed at the family trade throughout one's formative years, with this training supplemented by things learned from the local community. Then came the Meiji period with its modern education and the spread of schools... Everyone was taken by the hand and dragged off to schools, and soon the other two schemes of learning fell into disuse. This was the age of the school reigning unchallenged and supreme. Only in recent years have we come to see the error of our ways and tried to fill in the gap with various kinds of education and youth groups for extracurricular activity... From this point on... these three areas of education (home, community, and school) must link together in an orderly system of mutual complementarity. (From *Education for Creative Living* (the English translation of Book 4, Vol. 5, Chapter 4, "Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei,"), p. 181.)

6. Humanitarian Competition

Makiguchi observed that in the world of his day—the early years of the 20th century—the various nations of the world were ever “on the alert for opportunities to overpower and gain control over neighbors. In seeking to satisfy their ambitions they do not hesitate to exercise aggression and commit atrocities. They even contend that this imperialistic model is natural and appropriate.” He believed that nations which continued to devote themselves solely to expanding their own national power would ultimately “end up witnessing the disintegration and destruction of their own nations.” (Chapter 26, p. 243)

... Ironically, this is a time when a man who steals from an individual will be arrested and punished as a thief, but a man who robs people of their state and their culture is hailed as a hero. (Chapter 1, p. 14)

Makiguchi looked forward to a time when the peoples and nations of the world would interact and co-exist with each other on a basis of mutual respect and cooperation. The term he coined to describe this condition was that of "humanitarian competition." However, in his thinking, this was the fourth or culminating stage of a four-stage process of moral development in human evolution. (The earlier stages were: military competition, political competition, and economic competition.) (Chapter 29)

But what, one may ask, is humanitarian competition? In answer to this question Makiguchi replied:

... I would describe it as the endeavor to achieve individual and social goals through invisible moral influence, rather than military force or naked economic power. In other words, instead of forcing submission through force, intimidation, and fear, humanitarian competition seeks the voluntary cooperation and loyalty of people by gaining their respect. Selfish expansion of territory and the conquest of other states are not necessary. If the leaders of a state are persons of high moral character and virtue, justice and humanity will characterize the life and affairs of that state.

It may seem unrealistic to apply such an approach to the real world of current international relations. However, the effectiveness of this approach has already been demonstrated in interpersonal relationships. Thus, I submit that it is not as unrealistic as it may seem to expect that a humanitarian approach to international relations will triumph eventually in human affairs.

It should be understood that "humanitarian approach" does not imply that there is a specific method which can be designated as such. Rather, it is an effort to plan and conduct whatever strategies, whether political, military or economic, in a more humanitarian way. The important thing is the setting of a goal of well being and protection of all people, including oneself but not at the increase of self interest alone. In other words, the aim is the betterment of others and in doing so, one chooses ways that will yield personal benefit as well as benefit to others. It is a conscious effort to create a more harmonious community life, and it will take considerable time for us to achieve. (Chapter 29, pp. 285–286)

APPENDIX 2

Humanitarian Competition

Although humanitarian competition is not yet conspicuous in the international arena, persons who have gained some level of insight are beginning to realize that the ultimate winners in the competition for survival are not necessarily the winners of the economic race. It may be reasonable, then, to expect that the next form of competition will be humanitarian in nature. But what, one may ask, is humanitarian competition? I would describe it as the endeavor to achieve individual and social goals through invisible moral influence, rather than military force or naked economic power. In other words, instead of forcing submission through force, intimidation, and fear, humanitarian competition seeks the voluntary cooperation and loyalty of people by gaining their respect. Selfish expansion of territory and the conquest of other states are not necessary. If the leaders of a state are persons of high moral character and virtue, justice and humanity will characterize the life and affairs of that state.

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In the real world of international competition, each state employs its own approach, depending on specific, given conditions. Russia, for example, seeks to expand its territory through old power-oriented measures, while other European states are trying to gain more substantial interests primarily through economic measures. The United States seems to give signs of moving toward a slightly humanitarian approach.

But overall, we must face the fact that we are now at the stage of economic competition. Thus, in our present world the complete energy of states is focused on building wealth and military strength. Individual states cannot afford to explore a higher form of competition. Consequently, the forces which either link or separate states all derive from selfish economic interests. In this situation, there is a constant danger of military clashes erupting when conflict of interests cannot be settled through other means.

Several forms of economic competition can be identified, depending on the degree of a state's development. In cases of primary economies, such as Japan's and China's, force or labor is the major means. In these countries, workers go abroad to work for minimal wages. The United Kingdom and the United States, using their natural resources, primarily iron and fuel, and trained manpower, are manufacturing and exporting many kinds of products, which contribute to the national wealth. This means of increasing national wealth is closed to Germany and France because their domestic conditions do not allow it. However, they invest capital in other states and receive interest. Other states invest manpower.

Each state is thus prepared to take advantage of whatever opportunities it sees to expand its economic and political influence. Just as air flows from high atmospheric pressure zones into lower ones, the flow of power can be observed on the international map. Those states which are mainly dependent on economic measures also utilize political measures and vice versa. The difference is in their relative importance. However, since open, unsophisticated political power expansion is now generally recognized as being disadvantageous in comparison with the use of economic competition, most states use political power mainly for defending existing territory, while being aggressive in expanding economic influence. Today, only Russia still depends mainly on the political power approach. Thus, there is concern that Russia's aggressive policies may endanger the current world peace. Russia is now trying to expand its influence in all three directions, the Dardanelles Strait, the Persian Gulf, and the Yellow Sea, in order to become a major economic power in the world. (Chapter 29, pp. 285–287)