

# Globalizing Humanistic Education at Soka University (Part 2)

Photo: Author  
The "Pond of Literature"



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New Century Bridge

Soka University has its origins in the ideas of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) who employed education to increase the happiness of both the individual and society. This idea was pursued by his disciple Josei Toda (1900-1958) and finally brought to fruition by his disciple Daisaku Ikeda in 1971 with the establishment of Soka University in Hachioji. The university therefore strives to promote peace in society and work for the welfare of all. The priority given to students is reflected in President Hideo Yamamoto's guiding principle "students first". Encouraging students to develop an all-round personality, conduct dialogue with others, and develop wisdom are important aspects of the university's thinking. In an attempt to widen its circle of dialogue Soka University has been internationalizing its educational model for the last 30 years, long before internationalization became a trend in Japan. With dedicated alumni who are conscious of doing something for their alma mater, Soka University is engaging with society to fulfill its ideals. We asked students the following four questions to measure the uniqueness and strength of the university and the challenges it faces in the coming decades:

1. What is unique about Soka University?
2. What does the slogan "students first" mean to you?
3. In what ways is the university international in character?
4. What are the goals and challenges for Soka University in the coming years?

The following are some of the integrated responses of students underscoring the ways Soka education has helped them to develop social and academic skills and given them a global perspective.

## Akiko Ogihara, 4th year student, Department of Economics

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Soka University can be compared to a salad bowl as there is a mixing of many cultures and people. Most students are interested in foreign countries, especially English-speaking countries, but some are also interested in Asian and African countries. Students show a strong allegiance to their *alma mater* and want to do something for it even after they graduate. They work hard to become

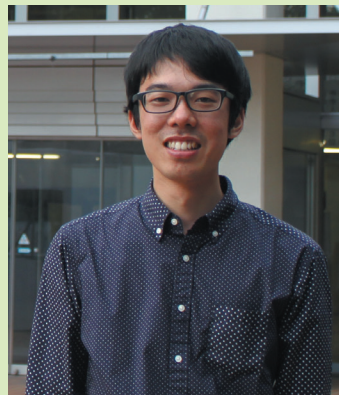
number one in some field, but they are trying to do this for the sake of the university not for themselves. For the students it is university first, for the teachers it is students first. Students study hard to understand the thought and culture of other countries by creating small groups that function as effective educational hubs. Students feel a sense of pride in belonging to the university and they try to develop the university through their own efforts and behavior. Often this pride prevents them from

interacting with students from other universities. Today in a globalizing environment we need to broaden the perspective in discussion groups or *taiwa* and include others who have different perspectives.

## Duong Daie, 4th year graduate student, Department of Economics

Photo: Author

When I first came to Japan from France I wanted to learn Japanese. As my mother is Japanese and my father Vietnamese I wanted to know a little more about my mother's culture. I wanted to study for one year at Soka University. I am from Descartes University in Paris where I studied biology but I wanted to shift the focus of my studies. After learning Japanese I met a lot of international students and learned new things and succeeded in acquiring a wider perspective. After one year I decided to stay and start my studies in



economics. Soka University is the opposite of the universities in France. In France, the general view is that the less you are actually at the university the better. At Soka University students are interested in clubs and want to contribute to university life. Even the seniors maintain the spirit of the university and want to do something for the next generation. In France, once you graduate you usually never return to the university. On the other hand, what I felt from the professors is that they really trust the students. In European universities you have more independence. The professors are there to deliver lectures. But in Soka University the professors invest their time in helping students to learn. They want the students to succeed in their studies. You always receive encouragement that you can succeed and you feel that you can go into society and contribute to it. When you look at the world you see the ways in which it doesn't work. But at Soka University you get lots of encouragement from both professors and the founder. I feel that if I compare it with France, Soka University is less academic. In France and Britain you have academic courses. What teachers expect from you is hard work and a good academic level. Here they focus more on how the students express themselves creatively, on the process of doing things more than on strong academic classes. Soka University helps us to know ourselves better. The fact that the professors give you liberty to do non-academic things may help you on the path to success. In learning that is important.

I felt that studying at Soka University was difficult in the beginning because of language and cultural barriers. International students get involved with Japanese students slowly. Lots of Japanese students go abroad in their 2nd and 3rd years, so they are learning about foreign cultures. When they return home they connect and integrate. Soka University has a slogan: "You should know why you study." You may be able to study but the goals of your study should become clear. It's a positive thing that students are involved in university life but this requires money. Soka education is based on a philosophy. Any problem produces two choices — positive and negative. The process of value is to create or extract something positive from it. Therefore Soka University is focusing on the reflective processes of the students — on how they organize things — as compared to European universities.



Photo: Author

### Mako Miyoshi, freshman, English Literature

My first impression is that all students have their own characteristics and motivation to do something. Some are keen to study while others are eager to do club activities. So everyone has their own goal. I was thinking of seeking admission to one of four

universities — Hosei University, Yokohama University, International Christian University or Soka University. But I wanted to apply for the Dual Degree (DD) program at Soka University and my father also graduated from this university. He told me this is a good university and he had many good memories. So he recommended me to come here. When I was a high school student I was very busy with club activities but I wanted to know more about Dr. Ikeda. There are many students who attend this university from overseas. I want to know more about relations with other countries and want to take more classes to improve my English. It is often said that Japanese cannot speak English well even if they study a lot. I think we should practice a lot to speak English. In the DD program I have learned discussion strategies and note taking. The style of a Japanese meeting is "archery" style. One speaker talks a lot and other speakers say *so desu ne* in agreement. In English everyone speaks equally — like a game of tennis — in giving their opinions. Earlier I did not know how to take notes in class while the professor was speaking, but now I can do this in Japanese and English classes. I think

"students first" is important as some universities do not care about their students. Professors provide information without considering the students and the students are not interested in the professors' lectures and therefore get nothing. At Soka University the professors think about the students and change their strategies. When a student's English ability is not very high, professors lower their level so that more students can keep up with the class. I like this university because the teachers are kind. My friends are also kind and fun to study with.

### Minako Kitamoto, freshman, English Literature

I can meet many kinds of people here, for example from South Korea and other countries. Maybe compared with other universities Soka University has more facilities to support students, for example the Career Center and English Forum. Most students believe in Dr. Ikeda, our founder, and cultivate his ideas here. They help other people. I want such people to smile and live happily and peacefully. In the Career Center the administrative staff listen to our problems and help us. So they spend time on us and other students. Professor Williams took us to dinner in Shinagawa. Maybe teachers want to enjoy doing things together with students. I want to be big and cultivate myself and someday I want to change the world. For this I have to study hard. In the DD program I will never give up. I will always do my homework.



Photo: Author



Statue of Study & Light

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*The Angel & the Blacksmith*

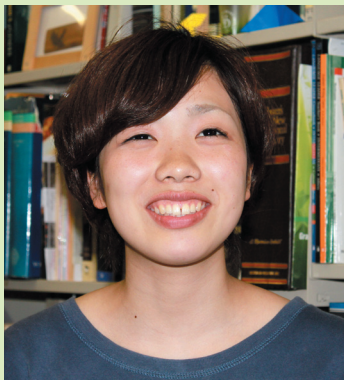
### Sachiyo Ikarashi, graduate student, Law Department

Every student works hard for his or her dream, and every student thinks that everyone is a friend. Everyone is considerate and helpful. Almost all students want to help others to go abroad, and students also think about what they can do for world peace. Only Soka University has a clear slogan that puts its students first and because of this slogan we can realize our responsibility towards our founder Dr. Ikeda. I came here on the recommendation of my parents. When I was a junior high school student I faced some difficulties that I could not overcome. Men can build relationships easily but women find it difficult to build good relationships. I had superficial relationships but I wanted to have a deep relationship. Dr. Ikeda's book *Dialogues* encouraged me when he said that even when a friend does not think of you as a friend you should still think and deal with him or her as a real friend. Even today there are many shallow friendships amongst female students but I try to communicate with them as real friends. I am from Niigata where the population is low but in Tokyo there are many *jinzai* or capable people. In such a good environment I want to develop my abilities, find my goal, broaden my perspective and become a capable person, even though it is tough.



Photo: Author

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### Nanayo Tsuda, freshman, English Literature

Soka University students study really hard but we can see that in other universities as well. But here the students do not study just for self-interest but also to contribute to others, to help others and contribute to world peace. I have a strong motivation to study as I have not studied

Photo: Author

*"Sakura Road" inside the Campus*

as hard as some other Soka University students. Many students get encouragement from reading Dr. Ikeda's books. I entered Kansai Soka High School in order to go to Soka University of America in the future. Then I took a special course but failed within a few months. But I couldn't throw away the dream of going to a foreign country, so I kept studying English hard for three years. In Kansai High School there were many opportunities to meet with foreigners. Some of them came to the school as friends of Dr. Ikeda. The more I met foreigners the more I wanted to go to a foreign university. After entering Soka University I joined the DD program and became a member of the Rock Music Club.

### Daigaku Murata, doctoral student, Business Administration

The uniqueness of our university is in the philosophy of Soka which pervades every aspect of academic life. For example, we believe that students should contribute to those who could not go to university. So students are very passionate about studying not only for their own success but also to contribute to others — to friends, society and world peace. Students interact with many kinds of people so that they can consider their views. There is no discrimination based on sex, intelligence or color. This is one good aspect. We have a "students first" philosophy. Professors make great sacrifices for their students; they do not use students for their self-interest. Students also appreciate what their teachers do. The trust between professors and students is really strong and this trust encourages study. Even after graduation we can maintain close connections with professors. We do not evaluate success through a single criterion such as intelligence or good scores. We can see a variety of people who become successful. This is a new university, so we need to develop more academically. By studying at the Graduate School I want to create an environment where my juniors can prepare for their future by thinking of others. I would like to become a university teacher and develop capable students who can contribute to society.

Photo: Author



### Shinji Robin Takeda, freshman, Department of Literature

Speaking both English and Japanese, I find I can express myself

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The Main Gate of Soka University

Photo: Author



better in Japanese than in English. There are lots of universities in Japan and Soka University is obviously not just about studying and going to clubs, but about training ourselves — how to grow up as a human being. It's more than mere education, it's about how to become a human being, how to stand up in society and fight against problems. Soka University is like a peaceful

navy as it focuses on peace. It focuses on dialogue, speaking, and face-to-face communication. Both the media and computers have developed so much that we are losing face-to-face communication, but at Soka we engage in dialogue. This is part of the character of the university.

The main characteristic of the university is its “students first” approach. So Soka education is for the true happiness of the students. The teachers have to lead the students towards happiness. From listening to the teachers’ lectures students have to discover meaning in their lives, and to develop through others. Soka education means that one must be honest. This depends on the teachers letting the students speak out. My way is to seek through my own experience. You can speak out in a lesson. When you conduct a dialogue you need to have your own opinion. There are many social issues in Japan and they are connected to other issues. To create a true Soka value-creating education we need to be experienced. The Career Center provides a good way for students to move forward. Society itself is moving so rapidly, and the future in the 21st century looks dark. Dark means you cannot see what’s going to happen. But for foreign students, Soka is like heaven. We are well treated and there are many ways to interact with students. Some students from other countries make their own food during the Soka University festival and sell it, showing their own culture in that way.

### Kaoruko Abe, 3rd year student, Sociology

Many students here ask the purpose of everything — the purpose of their activities, their circle, clubs or festivals. It is because the founder thinks that purpose is important. They participate in festivals as *gakusei yushi* or voluntary staff, and try to contribute to *soka kensetsu* or Soka Construction of Culture. Another thing is the dedication of the alumni. Many of the old boys come back to

Photo: Author



Soka University and speak to students and provide financial support. They want to help students realize the founder’s dream of making the university world famous. This is a unique point. Soka University students are very good students but they hesitate to go outside the university. They don’t have so many friends in Hachioji or outside, even though they have good abilities. I think they need to go outside more. I think most students like talking to others but often mistake this as dialogue. Dialogue is not just talking to others with similar views but to those with a different perspective. Students must talk with exchange students from other countries who have different ideas. In order to do so they must read the news and study hard. By studying harder we can understand the reality of Japan and the reality of the world.

The concept of “students first” is important. Professors have to take care of students more and more. Since I entered the special honors program called the Global Citizenship Program many teachers have come to know me. So when the great Tohoku earthquake took place last year and my parents living in Miyagi lost everything, my teachers encouraged me and told me it is okay “to study slowly” and even took me out for dinner. I felt relieved that I didn’t have to push myself so hard. Many of us depend on the kind words of our teachers. But when one professor was interviewed he said the students of Soka University have to “respect professors more and more” and I agree. Though it is good for teachers and coaches to think of putting the students first, it is not good for the students to think likewise. Students must respect professors and be humble. In Japanese society the number of children is decreasing, which in turn reduces the number of applicants to Soka University. We must expand the intake of students to include everyone. Though the university has excellent facilities for developing English skills like the Chit Chat Club, the World Language Center, and the Global Village, many students don’t use these facilities very often. Many students want to be international but don’t want to take action. Maybe they are shy.

### Conclusion

As both students and teachers testify, Soka University has evolved into a socially-conscious society that aims at promoting the welfare of others both nationally and internationally. With its ever-increasing body of international students it is extending its influence not only in Japan but into other parts of the world. In this sense the university is globalizing some of the finer aspects of Japanese culture. It is also transforming itself through interaction with other cultures. The aim of creating truly global citizens may be a lengthy process but the desire for world peace propels both its students and teachers to make greater effort in the direction of both human relations and academic studies.

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