

Courageously Champion the Cause of Justice

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at the Joint Executive Conference of the SGI of Hong Kong and the SGI of Macau, in Hong Kong, Feb. 13.

Congratulations on holding this Joint Executive Conference! Today is the seventh day of the new year, according to the Chinese lunar calendar. This day has traditionally been known as People's Day. It is the day on which human beings were believed to have first been born on Earth — our shared birthday as a species.

In the Chinese lunar calendar, the first eight days of the new year were respectively regarded as the days of birds, dogs, pigs, sheep, oxen, horses, human beings and grains, in that order. The weather on each day was thought to predict the fortunes of that category of living things for the coming year. The seven herbs of spring were also customarily eaten on the seventh day, People's Day.

The Land of Eternally Tranquil Light Is Everywhere

I am so happy to be with you all today on this traditional Chinese holiday. Meeting with my beloved friends from Hong Kong and Macau is one of the great pleasures and joys of my life. The SGI of Hong Kong and the SGI of Macau are making solid and steady progress. You have gained deep and broad trust in your local communities and society. You are setting a fine example for the rest of the world.

When you embrace and live your life based on the Mystic Law, wherever you dwell is the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light. The four leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth — Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, Pure Practices and Firmly Established Practices — are always at your side, protecting and assisting you in everything you do. I hope you will have absolute conviction in your great good fortune.

21st-Century Citizens

At this momentous juncture when Hong Kong will be returned to China in July, I am engaged in a continuing dialogue with the respected Hong Kong writer Jin Yong [Louis Cha] concerning the territory's future.

Jin Yong has long regarded the activities of the SGI of Hong Kong very highly. Despite his extremely busy schedule, he honored us by speaking at the opening of the Hong Kong SGI Cultural and Recreational Centre last May 3. "I remember my discussing with President Ikeda in one of our dialogues that to become true citizens of the 21st century, we must open our hearts and work for understanding between those of different views, while also nurturing the spirit of compassion," he said at that time.

Partly as an expression of gratitude and respect for Jin Yong's warm support, I will speak today about the great tradition of Chinese literature.

Jin Yong's heroic tales are often compared to the famous Chinese novel *The Water Margin*.¹ The young men's division training group Suiko-kai, which studied directly under second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, began by reading that novel.

Though beloved by the people, *The Water Margin* was often despised by the authorities, who went as far as declaring that it didn't deserve to be called literature at all. The reason for this antipathy is that the novel pleads the case of the people; it speaks out for their cause. One of the book's main themes is anger toward irresponsible and unethical rulers.

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Defending the Weak, Fighting Oppression

The Water Margin is set at the end of the Northern Sung Period (960–1127). The country's rulers, from the emperor on down, care only for satisfying their desires. As a result the land is in chaos. Other nations, spotting the dynasty's weakness, are preparing to invade.

A Chinese proverb says, "Duty first, pleasure later." This is the way rulers should behave, putting their concern for the people and society first and their personal comfort and pleasure later. But in the Northern Sung Period, the opposite was the case. *The Water Margin*, the story of a group of heroic individuals who defend the weak and fight oppression, can be said to express the people's anger at such authorities.

Jin Yong has always written from the viewpoint of the people. Most of his historical novels are, like *The Water Margin*, stories of resistance to oppressive authorities. His critical writings and his fiction share this commitment to the people. In that regard, I truly admire and applaud him as a writer who has inherited the spirit of Chinese literature to articulate the needs and hopes of the people.

Moral Literature Vs. Personal Literature

Japanese literature and Chinese literature display very different tendencies. Many have said that Chinese literature is moralistic. It describes the moral path that the individual and society should take.

Japanese literature, on the other hand, is personal and confessional. It describes the individual's feelings and experiences, often without reference to a larger moral structure. In Japan, the so-called I-novel, in which the author writes in the first person, predominates. Most novels describe a character's inner sufferings and private confessions.

Of course, we can find this aspect of human experience described in Chinese writing as well, but a greater concern with social issues characterizes Chinese literature in general. It is a literature that remains constantly aware of its influence on the individual and society.

Emperor Wen of the ancient state of Wei once said, "Literature is an important national endeavor and immortal enterprise." Literature has tremendous power, and Chinese civilization has always been deeply aware of this truth. That awareness has given Chinese literature the great strength of conviction. The general focus in Japanese literature on the small picture, the concern with individual feeling rather than moral truth, is no doubt partly a result of these different views of the role of literature.

Chinese poetry, too, gives broad expression to the sorrows and sufferings of the Chinese people. Most of the poems in the *Classic of Poetry* fall into this category, as do the great works of such master poets as Ch'ü Yüan and Tu Fu. Compared to Chinese poetry, very few Japanese poems deal with social issues. Dr. Burton Watson, a leading scholar and translator of Chinese philosophy and literature, has made the same observation.

Writing for Understanding

Po Chü-i was a Tang Dynasty (618–907) poet who wrote of the sufferings of the people. Nichiren Daishonin mentions this poet's name in his writings (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 173). Po Chü-i believed very strongly that a writer must stand on the side of the people. As a result, he avoided difficult words in his poems. Instead, he used words familiar to all.

Though he was a high-ranking official (equivalent to a minister of justice today), whenever he composed a poem he would read it aloud to his old, illiterate serving woman and ask her if there were any parts she didn't understand.

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The *Classic of the Way and Its Power* states: “The highest good is like water.”² The best things are as clear and flowing as water, and the best writing flows naturally and easily into the hearts of the reader.

Standing on the People’s Side

One of Po Chü-i’s poems is titled “Heavy Taxes.” It reads in part:

*Mulberry and hemp are planted in the earth
To help the people;
The people weave cloth
To sustain their lives;
If they have any surplus
They give it to the Emperor above.*

• • •

*But why is it that, when days have passed
The greedy officials, as they always have,
Oppress us and flatter the Emperor?
Year-round, they oppress us.*³

The authorities forget to carry out their duties, yet they extract heavy, punishing taxes from the people. Po Chü-i was enraged, for the people’s sake, by such rulers. He was an ally of the people, of the oppressed. He made the people’s cause his own. This is the tradition of the great writers of Chinese literature.

It is also the solemn mission of all those who devote themselves to the literary arts.

Keeping Promises — No Matter the Cost

Jin Yong’s historical novels are often called novels of chivalry in Chinese. *Chivalry* here refers to the courage and conviction to uphold the trust placed in one by others, even at the cost of one’s life. A relationship based on such chivalry is not a relationship of superior and inferior or a relationship of profit and loss. It is a free and equal relationship that transcends social position and considerations of personal gain.

Many compare the world depicted in Jin Yong’s novels to the stories collected in the *Records of the Historian* of Ssu-ma Ch’ien (c. 145–85 B.C.E.). Ssu-ma Ch’ien, whose work the renowned 20th-century Chinese writer Lu Xun praised as a historical tour de force, followed the code of chivalry.

When Ssu-ma Ch’ien’s friend Li Ling incurred the wrath of Emperor Wu, no one dared rise to his defense. Everyone feared getting involved. But Ssu-ma Ch’ien did not desert his friend. He ardently pleaded his friend’s case, even though as a result he was sentenced to the terrible punishment of castration. As Confucius says in *The Analects*, “When there is no trust, the common people will have nothing to stand on.”⁴ Trust is the foundation upon which all human societies rest.

Today there is a sad dearth of the spirit of chivalry in the very best sense of the word — in other words, a commitment to keep one’s word, even at the cost of one’s life, and a refusal to betray the trust of others. We need literature that teaches us the way to live ethically, that implants the seed of firm moral action in readers’ hearts. I believe that the enormous popularity of Jin Yong’s novels of chivalry is an indication of a deep yearning in the depths of people’s hearts for lives based on mutual trust and compassion.

Reading Great Works of World Literature

Mr. Toda always urged the youth to read the great works of world literature. They broaden and improve the mind. When one reads a monumental work of literature, a vast new world opens up. The fresh revelations it brings can transform one's life forever.

A certain Japanese scholar of Chinese literature said that, ironically, if parents want their child to become a politician or a tycoon, they should forbid him or her from reading literature. The reason is, he said, that through literature the child would learn how shameful it is to pursue his or her selfish aims at the expense of others. That is the sustenance that literature can provide the human spirit.

The Chinese philosopher Mencius said, "Those without constant means will not have constant hearts."⁵ His meaning here is that unless one's life is sufficiently comfortable materially, one cannot hope to enjoy spiritual tranquillity and richness. Japan, however, has attained material wealth but lost its spiritual wealth. Our "constant means" have overwhelmed our constant hearts. This portends a dark future. And worse, now even our "constant means" are in jeopardy.

What can be done? The first Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, used to say, "When you reach a dead end, return to your starting point!" What is our starting point? It is humanity. We must restore humanity to our society. We must open a huge window in our hearts and widely embrace others. Literature can play a major part in achieving this.

Jin Yong and I intend to continue our in-depth discussions on literature, history and life.

Attitude Toward Gongyo Reflects Faith

On the first New Year's Day Mr. Toda ushered in as Soka Gakkai president [1952], he spoke on the essential practice of our faith, gongyo: "When you do gongyo in front of the Gohonzon, it is the same as if you are sitting before Nichiren Daishonin himself. You should never have a careless or sloppy attitude, nor should you doze off or yawn while doing gongyo.... Chant daimoku resonantly and joyfully."

Mr. Toda is not saying that we have to be rigid and tense when doing gongyo. The Daishonin is "the Buddha originally endowed with the three enlightened properties"⁶ (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 759), so we should just be ourselves, in our "originally endowed" form, as it were, in his presence.

The Buddhist scriptures state that we should sit upright and think of the true nature of all things.⁷ Sitting upright means to sit in a dignified manner facing the Gohonzon. Weaving and swaying back and forth in an extreme manner is not sitting upright.

We should also focus on specific prayers as we do gongyo. Gongyo is the most basic practice of faith. And considering the principle of the true entity of all phenomena, our attitude toward gongyo reflects our faith. Therefore, I hope you will get into the habit of doing gongyo in such a solemn yet invigorating manner that anyone seeing you will be struck by your dignity and vibrant life force.

The Voice of Conviction

All of the recipients to date of the Hong Kong SGI Award have asked me to express their thanks and gratitude to the Hong Kong members. Hanako Anraku,⁸ a pioneer member of our Japanese organization whom I mentioned in my speech at the most recent Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting [Feb. 8], is one of those recipients. Mrs. Anraku will be 88 this year and, in spite of failing eyesight, continues her devoted efforts to spread the Daishonin's teachings. She proudly declares her determination to support and protect the

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Soka Gakkai for the rest of her life. What a noble sentiment!

All of the pioneer members in Hong Kong and Macau, too, are still active and healthy. They continue to exert themselves tirelessly for the SGI's development, working harmoniously — many in body, one in mind — with the great number of new members who have joined them over the years. I can't tell you how happy this makes me.

What was it that led Mrs. Anraku, who had married into a well-to-do and illustrious family, to join the Soka Gakkai in its early days some 40 years ago?

One day, Mrs. Anraku saw a woman walking along the street. Suddenly the thong of one of the woman's *geta* (Japanese-style wooden clogs) broke, and Mrs. Anraku helped her reattach it. As they were talking, the woman asked whether Mrs. Anraku wouldn't like to join a faith that would answer all her prayers.

"Have all your prayers been answered?" asked Mrs. Anraku. "They have indeed!" replied the woman. At this unhesitating, confident response, Mrs. Anraku decided to start practicing. What a sublime meeting of minds!

Such unshakable conviction and vibrant energy on the part of SGI members are what have spread the Daishonin's Buddhism throughout all corners of society and have been the driving forces behind the development of our movement.

I know that SGI of Macau Chairman Lei Loi Tak, his wife, Lei Vong Yin Leng, and all the other representative leaders from Hong Kong and Macau here today are showing splendid actual proof in their respective societies. Nichiren Daishonin asserts, "When one who is able to show clearly visible proof in the present expounds the Lotus Sutra, there will also be persons who will believe" (MW-7, 102). Nothing is more eloquent, more persuasive, than actual proof.

Each of you possesses a truly noble mission and embodies the life of the Buddha. There is nothing in this world more significant or profound than the real-life stories of your attaining good health, boundless happiness and success in all endeavors.

In closing, I thank the staff members who are working so hard behind the scenes to make all the events during my visit here in Hong Kong such a great success. I am praying for your good health.

Please give my regards to all those who could not attend today. Thank you.

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1. Many Chinese versions of this novel exist. One version has been published in English under the title *Outlaws of the Marsh*, trans. Sidney Shapiro (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1993). Another English translation is titled *All Men Are Brothers*.
2. *Chinese Civilization*, ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey (New York: The Free Press, 1993), p. 27.
3. Translated from Japanese. *Shinshu Chugoku Shijin Senshu* (New Selected Poets of China), ed. Shoichi Takagi (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1984), vol. 4, pp. 209–12.
4. Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau (London: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 113.
5. *Mencius*, trans. D. C. Lau (London: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 97.
6. Three enlightened properties: the three properties, or bodies, that a Buddha may possess. They are: 1) the property of the Law, 2) the property of wisdom, and 3) the property of action.
7. Fugen Sutra (Sutra of Meditation on Bodhisattva Fugen); regarded as a conclusion to the Lotus Sutra.
8. SGI President Ikeda introduced Mrs. Hanako Anraku, who was present in the audience, at the Soka Gakkai's 8th Headquarters Leaders Meeting in Tokyo on Feb. 8. Mrs. Anraku, a long-standing Soka Gakkai member, has introduced more than 60 households to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

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