

Three Purposes of History
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SGI President Ikeda and a noted historian today shared memories of British historian Arnold Toynbee and discussed the importance of studying history. Dr. Wang Gungwu, the director of the East Asian Institute of the National University of Singapore, received an honorary professorship from Soka University earlier in the day.

Discussing the purpose of studying history, President Ikeda quoted Dr. Wang as stating that in his view the compilation and study of history has three purposes. First, through studying its common history, a family, community, country or ethnic group can strengthen its solidarity. Second, through history, which he characterizes as the accumulation of human experience, people can learn to judge between right and wrong and determine the proper course of action. Third, studying history helps people come to grips with the meaning of life and death and, by extension, the nature of existence.

Dr. Wang points out that while these three purposes are all closely related, the third, the inquiry into issues of philosophy and religion, is the most important. The SGI leader voiced his belief that, if the Japanese wish to win the trust of their Asian neighbors, they will need to develop a correct understanding of Asian history, especially of World War II.

Dr. Wang served as vice-chancellor of the University of Hong Kong from 1986 to 1995 and has been director of the EAI since April 1997. Under his leadership, the institute has directed its attention to analyzing the dynamic changes taking place in East Asia and is aiming to become a major center for regional studies.

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