

**SGI President Ikeda's Essay**  
**China and Japan: Toward an Age Of Peace**  
**By DAISAKU IKEDA, SGI President**

*SGI President Ikeda remembers how, 30 years ago, he called for the normalization of China–Japan relations. ‘To break down the walls of mistrust and unreasoned hatred,’ he writes, ‘someone needs to be the first to speak out, to take the initiative.’*

The Soka Gakkai's greatest commitment is to move the world from an age of war to an age of peace. That is why Josei Toda made his Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons on Sept. 8, 1957.

On that same day, 11 years later in 1968, seeking to pave the way to peace, I made a proposal at the 11th Student Division General Meeting calling for the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan. This years marks the 30th anniversary of my appeal.



China is Japan's neighbor, a country to which we Japanese owe a great cultural debt — including the transmission of Buddhism. Mr. Toda was deeply concerned about the happiness of the Asian people; while discussing his ideas for achieving world peace, he would often say to me, “China will play an increasingly important role in world history, and friendly relations between Japan and China will be most vital.”

After Mr. Toda's death, I was determined to carry on his vision and build a golden bridge of friendship between China and Japan.



But that was during the Cold War. The Japanese and U.S. governments viewed China as an enemy. Refused membership to the United Nations and with the Cultural Revolution in full swing, China was isolated internationally.

At that time, anyone who suggested the idea of Japan normalizing relations with China was regarded as left-leaning and had to be prepared for attacks from all sides — and the real risk of being in personal danger. Inejiro Asanuma, head of the Japanese Socialist Party, sought to restore relations between the two countries and was stabbed to death at a political rally in 1960.



Yet even under these circumstances, there were people working hard to normalize ties. One was the businessman and former Minister of International Trade and Industry Tatsunosuke Takasaki. When he met Premier Zhou Enlai in China in the early 1960s, he told him about our organization, saying: “There is a group that, although it may not be a big force in society, is winning support among the people. It is called the Soka Gakkai.”

Mr. Takasaki lived near Shinanomachi. Just six months before he died, he presented me with a painting of Mount Fuji to commemorate the completion of the new Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Shinanomachi in September 1963.

In our conversation on that occasion, I sensed his strong desire for the restoration of diplomatic relations between China and Japan, as well as his expectations for me. I will

never forget his warm handshake as I made a silent pledge to fulfill the mission with which he had entrusted me.



It is wrong for people to be separated from one another by ideology. Peace begins with communication and exchange among people. To break down the walls of mistrust and unreasoned hatred, someone needs to be the first to speak out, to take the initiative.

I decided, based on my Buddhist beliefs, to make a declaration, to say what had to be said. I was determined to offer new ideas to change existing public opinion, to help create a new age — even at the risk of my life.

I also believed that our student division members would follow my lead and advance bravely along the great path of friendship.



My declaration calling for normalization stirred a tremendous reaction. There were even threatening telephone calls and letters. Cars with speakers attached to their roofs kept up a continual verbal assault.

Detractors asked, “Why is a religious leader suddenly donning a Red necktie?” I was also criticized for interfering with the Japanese government’s foreign policy.

I knew that this would happen, but I also knew that history would be my true judge.

And at the same time, many who cared deeply for Japan’s future praised my declaration. The political leader Kenzo Matsu-mura, who had worked hard to improve China–Japan relations, paid me a visit, even though he was then 87.

“Will you come to China with me?” he asked. “Given my age, this will probably be my last visit. I want to introduce you to Premier Zhou as the person to whom I entrust the task of normalizing relations. For the sake of Japan...” Unfortunately I could not accompany him, but I did continue to make every effort to build a bridge between China and Japan.

And the times began to change.

In 1972, Japan and China issued a joint communiqué restoring diplomatic relations. In 1978, the two nations signed a peace and friendship treaty.



I first visited China in May 1974. On my second visit, in December 1974, I met Premier Zhou at the hospital where he was receiving medical treatment.

I have now visited China more than 10 times. And since that first trip, many Soka Gakkai members, not the least those of the youth division, have paid goodwill visits to China as well.

The first, tentative bridge that we built has become a strong, golden bridge of friendship that will endure for generations.

Let us be courageous and live according to our beliefs, always following the path of friendship. The great humanistic movement of the Soka Gakkai is just this: building bridges to link the hearts of people, in every region, all across the globe.

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