

SHARING THE SPIRIT OF SOKA UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Dr. Daniel Habuki, president of SUA, shares his vision for the new Aliso Viejo, Calif., campus – that it will develop students of great character who will fight for peace.

The World Tribune asked Daniel Habuki, president of Soka University of America, to share the story of how he came to be SUA's first president. Habuki also comments on the graduate program at the Calabasas campus and what his hopes are for the new four-year liberal arts college now under construction in Aliso Viejo, Calif.

WT: As a member of the first graduating class from both Soka High School and from Soka University of Japan, what are your memories of your own Soka education?

Daniel Habuki: In 1968, I entered Soka High School. The opening of this high school was the actualization of a promise Mr. Ikeda had made to Mr. Toda. I remember that Mr. Ikeda, who was 40 years old at the time, visited our class of 16-year-olds to share experiences. He often brought food to share and one time he brought one of the best sweet rice cakes in Tokyo. He told us he wanted to share it with us because President Toda had loved it.

I have a wonderful memory of the time he visited the summer camp we were attending at the beach. He swam with us and we played a traditional watermelon cutting game (you might call it the Japanese version of a Mexican piñata). As we ate together, Mr. Ikeda encouraged us to become great leaders for world peace.

I have several friends who were classmates of mine in that first class who are now also working in the United States.

In 1971, I entered Soka University of Japan as one of the first 500 students and lived in the dorm for two years. My memories are of many precious friends and seeing Mr. Ikeda at many college ceremonies.

WT: What was the feeling on campus about your Soka education?

DH: I think pride — that we were pioneers. We wanted to contribute something to the school, and share the spirit of the founder of the school. Most of us had a strong commitment to being good students because we knew people would evaluate the school based on what we did. We wanted to show the spirit of Soka education through our lives.

WT: What did you do after graduating from Soka University of Japan?

DH: I spent a year in Minnesota because I had a scholarship to study at Gustavus Adolphus College. Then I went to USC for my M.A. in economics and on to Washington State University for my Ph.D. in agricultural economics. I saw Mr. Ikeda in 1980 and again in 1981 while I was struggling with my Ph.D. courses, and he told me to get my degree because in the future he would like to build a university in the United States. I thought he was simply encouraging me. I didn't take it literally!

WT: How did you get involved with Soka University of America?

DH: In 1987, I participated in the ceremony when Mr. Ikeda founded what was then called Soka University at Los Angeles. It began as an SUJ branch campus for intensive training in English. I was involved in preparing summer and spring programs while still teaching at SUJ.

In 1993, SUA was incorporated and I was named president. The graduate school opened in 1994 at our Calabasas campus with Tomoko Takahashi, Ph.D. as our dean, and the first year we filled our class with students from four countries: Panama, France, Japan and the United States. Last December we graduated our fourth class.

Today we also have year-round English language programs for hundreds of students who stay from 10 days to three months for intensive study. SUA, Calabasas also has a respected Human Rights Lecture Series and a beautiful botanical garden that is shared with the community through nature walks.

WT: SUA is currently constructing 14 buildings on its second campus in Aliso Viejo, California (south Orange County near Laguna Beach). This new four-year liberal arts college will open with its first 100 freshmen students in fall 2001. What is your vision for this campus?

DH: One of my favorite quotes is from Mr. Ikeda's Rajiv Gandhi Foundation lecture in New Delhi, India in 1997. He said: "What the world most requires now is the kind of education that fosters love for humankind, that develops character — that provides an intellectual basis for the realization of peace and empowers learners to contribute to and improve society."

That is my vision for SUA, Aliso Viejo. It will be a very special place for learning and growing. SUA, Aliso Viejo has a small 100-acre campus surrounded by a beautiful wilderness park. SUA, Aliso Viejo will never be a huge university. If you are a student, you will be able to have your "own face" here. Every faculty and staff member will know your name. They will influence you and you will influence them. I hope this campus will give our students the opportunity to develop their full potential and to contribute to the development of others.

In our first year we will have only 100 students and 20 faculty members, so we will have a 5:1 student faculty ratio. That will gradually change as we grow. Our first year will be very special in many ways.

WT: What is the greatest difference between SUA and other colleges?

DH: There are many great universities in this country. I'm not saying that our university will be better — but I think we will be different because as a private university we will share the spirit of Mr. Ikeda on campus. He shared his vision with us in the three mottoes he gave to us in November:

Be a philosopher living a new renaissance of life.
Be a world citizen creating the solidarity of peace.
Be a pioneer forging a global civilization.

WT: What majors will SUA, Aliso Viejo offer?

DH: SUA, Aliso Viejo will offer a strong liberal arts curriculum, with emphasis areas in humanities, international studies, and self, culture and society. All of our students will take three years of a second language and everyone will participate in an international internship designed to let them live that second language and culture.

WT: What will it cost to attend SUA, Aliso Viejo?

DH: We are still establishing our tuition and fee levels. We expect them to be near the average for good private colleges in California. We know that a lot of parents reading this are concerned about costs and we recognize that many fine students will need financial assistance in order to attend SUA. That's why we have started a scholarship endowment fund. We hope to raise enough money by the time SUA, Aliso Viejo opens in Fall 2001 to help every qualified student who needs assistance. We've already had several donations made before we've even asked — so I am very encouraged that many people share our vision.

WT: I understand that SUA, Aliso Viejo expects to have a majority of its students come from the United States and other Pacific Rim countries. What is the significance of being an international university?

DH: One of the mottoes given to SUA by Mr. Ikeda is “Be a world citizen creating the solidarity of peace.”

One of the best ways to learn to be a world citizen is to experience other cultures. Living and learning on an international campus — and perhaps rooming with someone who speaks the second language you are studying — are wonderful ways to expand horizons.

WT: What has been the greatest effect of Soka education on your life?

DH: In addition to the knowledge acquisition provided by good faculty and staff, I carry with me the memories of Mr. Ikeda's visits to campus during which he offered and shared his vision for the future — peace for society. Soka education gave me the opportunity to awaken to this mission, to have a sense of why I was studying and why I was living. I developed my basic values because of Mr. Ikeda's encouragement.

My hope is that Soka University of America will give that opportunity to future generations — so that they may also share this spirit.

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