

**A RECORD OF MY LIFE**  
**BY DAISAKU IKEDA**  
**PERSEVERANCE AND COOPERATION**

**‘The people of Okinawa knew that with perseverance and cooperation, in time they could surmount any obstacle; SGI President Ikeda writes. ‘And that without such optimism, tomorrow would never come. They possessed the strength to never abandon hope.’**

Emigrants from Okinawa have made remarkable contributions throughout the world, particularly in South America. Within the SGI, as well, the efforts of members from Okinawa shine brilliantly. To name but a few, these members include General Director Yoshimasa Chinen of Chile, General Director Takeshi Kamiya of Bolivia and Women’s Leader Marina Kiyoko Nakajima of Brazil.

An event to commemorate the centennial of Japanese immigration to Peru was held in May last year, with Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori, a second-generation immigrant himself, attending. At the request of the organizing committee, the event opened with performances by 800 SGI of Peru members.

The first of these was a group of young women performing an Okinawan harvest dance called the *Mamidoma*. Both natives and nonnatives to Okinawa danced. This is evidence of the important roles that Okinawans are playing in Peruvian society.

Next, a harvest dance from the Andes was performed. The stadium erupted with thunderous applause as the dancers illustrated the exquisite fusion of the people and the land.

In June 1998, a celebration of 90 years of Japanese immigration to Brazil was held in the South American country with the attendance of Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso. The organizing committee had invited me to attend, but I was unable to; my eldest son, Hiromasa, went in my place.

As in Peru, the youth of Brazil put on an electrifying performance. And in June last year, President Hugo Banzer Bancel of Bolivia attended an event in which the SGI of Bolivia brass band and five-and-drum corps performed.

Throughout South America, the *Uchinanchu* [what the Okinawans call themselves] are making significant contributions to their respective societies as upstanding citizens. Their efforts, which reach beyond the local Japanese community, far surpass any narrow-minded nationalism or ethnocentrism.

**The Okinawans’ spirit to help others is not mere formality.**

Why have the people of Okinawa been so well received throughout the world? According to Kumihiro Mitsumori, the central figure in the Soka Gakkai organization in Okinawa, it is because they are culturally international by nature.

Many generations ago, Okinawans boldly set out on the open sea in small vessels called

the Okinawan people's fearlessness regarding the unknown.

The migration of Okinawans to other parts of the world dates back to Kyuzo Toyama, who is regarded as the father of Okinawan immigration. Even with the installation in the 19th century of the Meiji government [which abolished feudalism and began Japan on a rapid course toward becoming a unified modern state], the old customs of the previous Edo Period were preserved in Okinawa.

While in form the system of government had changed, the Okinawan people continued to suffer. The poll tax, an atrocious law without parallel in the world, continued to be in force. And the land tax system was not revised until 36 years after similar revisions had been made elsewhere in Japan.

Furthermore, it was a long time before the first national legislative assembly elections were held on the islands. The citizens of Okinawa continued to be robbed of even the opportunity to express their opinions.

Poor economic conditions persisted. Not only was there no rice, but there was even a shortage of potatoes. The Okinawans staved off their hunger by eating cycads [Japanese sago palms], which can be lethal if not prepared carefully. People talked about living in a “cycad hell.”

Having grown frustrated with the lack of efficacy of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement [an early Meiji Period effort to reform the government along the lines of Western democracies], Kyuzo Toyama threw himself passionately into promoting emigration. He saw emigration as a realistic means of saving people from the dire circumstances that gripped Okinawa.

A hundred years ago, in 1899, he organized the first group of immigrants to Hawaii. It was a party of 26 people primarily from his native village, Kin. Four years later, he led a second group there.

Witnessing the spirit of the Okinawan immigrants with his own eyes, Toyama composed the following poem:

*Let us go!*

*The five continents  
are our home.*

*Sincerity is all we have.*

*The stones of Kin adorn the entire world.*

How lofty! Planting roots around the world — with sincerity as their only possession — Okinawan immigrants have worked and toiled in earnest. The foundation for their current global activities was laid a century ago.

A member in Okinawa related to me how his grandfather had been part of the second migration from Kin village to Hawaii. The arduous labor involved in harvesting the sugar cane and carrying it on his shoulders caused the top of his grandfather's right ear to fold downward permanently. That is how hard they worked.

new homes under the scorching sun, they supported one another and overcame all their struggles.

The spirit of the people of Okinawa to help their fellows is not mere formality. They have learned with their very lives the importance of aiding others.

Typhoons strike. Fields are laid to waste before the wrath of Nature. But when the storms have cleared and the snarling waves subsided, a serene, bountiful sea stretches out far and wide, bringing a cornucopia of treasure.

The people of Okinawa knew that with perseverance and cooperation, in time they could surmount any obstacle. And that without such optimism, tomorrow would never come. They possessed the strength to never abandon hope.

It is now a hundred years since the first group of Okinawan immigrants left the shores of their homeland. The *Uchinanchu* of Brazil number 80,000, accounting for approximately 10 percent of the country's citizens of Japanese descent. There are 45,000 living in Peru, making up more than half of the ethnic Japanese community in that country. In Argentina, where the number of people of Japanese descent comes to approximately 30,000, those who trace their origins to Okinawa make up 70 percent.

### **The destiny of a land is changed by its people.**

The strength of the Okinawan people to stand alone and rise above severe hardship enabled them to overcome what must have looked like hopeless situations and to show actual proof of their victory through hard work and effort. They show the true mettle of human beings.

They continue, without any support or status, to uncompromisingly proclaim the nobility of peace based on their firsthand experiences. Prior to World War II, the use of the Okinawan dialect was prohibited in elementary schools, and those caught using it were forced to wear a “Dialect Disgrace Tag” around their necks. It was a shameful past, in which they were made to detest themselves and their culture.

But through this experience, the people of Okinawa have stood up determined to risk their very lives to protect human rights. They rely on no one. And they have an instinctual intolerance for discrimination.

Buddhism has steadily spread throughout Okinawa because its philosophy, which strengthens people's foundation of self-reliance and independence, resonates with the strong indigenous spirit of *Uchina* [another name for Okinawa]. This surely stems from the Okinawan abhorrence of temporary fads and the intervention of power and authority.

Okinawan people keenly view things without judgment—they look at grass-roots movements with a discerning eye and recognize good for what it is. Of course, it goes without saying that the noble contributions of Soka Gakkai members in Okinawa have also played a significant role in solidifying this traditional spirit.

When I visited Okinawa in 1988, I spoke extensively about the principle in the Lotus Sutra of the three transformations of the land [referring to the scene in the “Treasure Tower” chapter where Shakyamuni transforms the land three times, thereby purifying it].

consideration” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1579).

Stressing this idea that the prosperity of a land depends on the activities and development of the individuals who live there, I encouraged the members in Okinawa to polish themselves through faith in the Mystic Law. This, I said, is the fundamental way leading to the revitalization of society and to making Okinawa a model for Japan and the world.

There is a large bell that adorned the main building of Shuri Castle during Okinawa’s Great Trading Age. The inscription on it reads, “As a bridge linking all nations, we have brought forth ever-abundant treasures.” It is within this spirit of the Okinawan people to live as global citizens, appreciating cultural differences and finding beauty in diversity, that the greatest reward of international exchange is found.

Okinawa is truly a bridge linking all lands. It possesses the unsurpassed mission of conveying to the world the tremendous importance of culture and peace. The 21st century will without a doubt be the time when the genuine ability of the *Uchinanchu* shines forth.

The 2000 G-8 Summit of industrialized nations is being held in Okinawa. Most suitably, the Bridge to All Nations Pavilion will serve as the main venue of the event.

*Eleven in a series*