

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA SINGAPORE—TRANSCENDING BARRIERS OF LANGUAGES AND ETHNICITY

In this essay in praise of the Singapore Soka Association, SGI President Ikeda explains that ‘kosen-rufu is the name we give to our undertaking to transcend barriers of language and ethnicity and all other differences to bring people together, forge harmony, and create peace and happiness for all humanity.’

It was truly a journey into the 21st century. On the evening of Nov. 22, 2000, I arrived at Changi International Airport in Singapore, the beautiful Lion City.

When we arrived at our lodgings, we were welcomed by the lively, joyous rhythm of the silver rain playing a divine melody.

The next morning, the city was fresh and green after the rain. The palm fronds swayed in the breeze, and bougainvillea and myriad other flowers bloomed brightly everywhere. Skyscrapers, symbols of economic development, towered in the sky, and the city pulsed with dynamic energy. The winds of the future always blew here.

It was my third trip to Singapore, and my first in five years. And with this visit, our celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai’s founding behind us, I launched my 70th journey for peace—a journey to finally raise the curtain on the Century of Soka.

On Nov. 23, the day after my arrival, I paid a courtesy call on Singaporean President S. R. Nathan at the Istana, the president’s official residence. The next day, Nov. 24, I received, as a representative of all SGI members, the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from the University of Sydney, Australia’s oldest institute of higher education, at a graduation ceremony conducted here in Singapore.

I am overjoyed at being able to create another new golden page of history together with all of my fellow members of this nation of lions, and I hope we will continue to do so in the future.



This year marks the 40th anniversary of the start of my travels for world peace. It therefore seems appropriate for me to share with you a little of the history of the early days of our kosen-rufu movement in Singapore.

Although it was not an official visit, I set foot on Singaporean soil for the first time on Jan. 29, 1961. It was during a stopover on my way to India, a journey embarked on with the determination to realize the westward transmission of Buddhism that was predicted by Nichiren Daishonin and was also the dearest wish of my mentor, Josei Toda.

Darkness began to fall over the airport as we landed for refueling. Waiting inside the airport, I gazed up at the stars in the sky, visible through the windows. They were beautiful. But when I recalled Singapore’s painful history, its invasion by Japan, the countless innocent people who were killed, and the cruel suffering that had been inflicted on so many, my heart ached as if it were being ripped apart.

I decided right then and there that, as a Japanese, I would devote my life to bringing peace and happiness to the people of Singapore. I prayed, deeply and strongly, “Emerge, Bodhisattvas of the Earth! Assemble, my comrades of profound mission!”—so that a new glorious dawn might be ushered in for Singapore.



In August 1963, approximately two-and-a-half years later, our first district was formed in Singapore.

On Aug. 9, 1965, Singapore became an independent nation.

In June 1967, Mr. Koh Kian Boon—who later went on to become general director of the Singapore Soka Association—was appointed district leader.

In August 1969, four years after the country gained independence, Singapore Chapter was established.

The first chapter leader and chapter women's division leader were Toshio and Haruko Oshiro, who had moved to Singapore from Japan due to Toshio's work. Cooperating closely with Mr. Koh, they persevered tenaciously and steadily in Soka Gakkai activities.

Our records show that in January 1970, there were 324 member households in Singapore. Later that year, the Oshiros returned to Japan to live. I am happy to share with you that they continue to be active on the front lines of our movement in Hachioji, Tokyo, as vice headquarters leader and vice chapter women's leader, respectively.

Mr. Koh, meanwhile, went on to become chapter chief of Malaysia's Kuala Lumpur Chapter and worked hard for kosen-rufu in that country. After laying a solid foundation for the Soka Gakkai organization in Malaysia, Mr. Koh returned to Singapore, Lion City, where he once again assumed a central leadership position (first as headquarters leader and then as general director) and exerted himself tirelessly for the happiness of his fellow members.

In January 1972, SSA was incorporated.

Mr. Koh was succeeded as general director by Mr. Ong Bon Chai, who has continued to inspire the youth—the young lions—of SSA to stand up resolutely and fill the land with their resounding song of truth, justice and victory.



Today, the network of people striving for peace and humanism based on the spirit of Buddhism has spread widely throughout Singaporean society, and the SSA is looked upon as a source of hope and a pillar of trust.

How did this come about?

Mr. Koh, who is now honorary general director of SSA, explains: "We all pledged to sincerely practice the teaching of the Lotus Sutra that says 'You should rise and greet him from afar, showing him the same respect as you would a Buddha' (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 324). And we have done just that. This is the spirit shared by all our members in Singapore."

Buddhism teaches that we are all endowed with the supremely noble life-state of Buddhahood. As such, we should treat every person with the utmost respect, recognizing that they possess a profound mission and diamond-like brilliance within. This is the path of Buddhist humanism, the path Buddhism teaches we should follow as human beings.

This spirit of respecting every individual has made it possible for SSA to build the harmonious and indestructible unity of many people joining together, one in heart and mind. It is this spirit which has allowed SSA to produce an uninterrupted stream of confident, youthful successors, who are able to advance freely and give full play to their abilities.



Buddhism teaches the principles that faith reveals itself in daily life and that Buddhism is manifested in society. This means that the humanistic philosophy of Buddhism, as the shared legacy of all humanity, must be put into action in our lives and contribute to our respective societies. Indeed, Buddhism teaches that true faith lies only in such an active and engaged practice.

And *kosen-rufu* is the name we give to our undertaking to transcend barriers of language and ethnicity and all other differences to bring people together, forge harmony, and create peace and happiness for all humanity.



Our members in Singapore, a citadel of global citizenship, have always been in the forefront of these activities.

Since 1981, SSA has participated in the National Day Parade—held annually on Aug. 9—a total of fifteen times. And it is particularly noteworthy that since 1988, it has played a major role in the grand finale of this event.

And this year, on the occasion of the National Day celebrations, commemorating the thirty-fifth anniversary of Singapore’s independence, the spectacular performance of a thousand spirited SSA youth captivated the crowd.

During our recent meeting, President Nathan also had high praise for SSA’s annual performances in the National Day Parade.

Furthermore, SSA has continually striven to contribute to the local community in many areas. Its activities have included promoting education and activity programs for senior citizens in cooperation with local community service bodies, visiting nursing homes, holding concerts in collaboration with cultural organizations, and organizing various charity events.



Singapore is a land of youth. It is a country filled with energy, harmony, unceasing development and construction.

My mentor Josei Toda once said, “It is the passion and power of youth that creates a new era.” At the dawning of a new century, I present these words to the youth of SSA, who are the pillar of Singapore.

The new century belongs to the youth. As long as the youth remain vital and energetic, their eyes shining brightly with hope, a country will continue to grow and prosper.

Young lions! Comrades of shared mission! Let us set forth!

With pride, confidence and composure, let us loudly signal our departure and set sail toward the vast open sea of the third millennium that sparkles with dancing waves of hope.

Glory to Singapore!

Majulah Singapura! (Onward, Singapore!)