

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA MALAYSIA—EXTENDING THE CIRCLE OF FRIENDSHIP

‘Our Soka Gakkai Malaysia members have extended the circle of friendship in a multiethnic culture...without any friction or conflict,’ writes SGI President Ikeda. They have used ‘dialogue to faithfully communicate their sincerity and the truth, and to win people’s hearts.’

In the morning, my wife and I sat before the Gohonzon, which we had set up in our hotel room, and prayed earnestly for the health, longevity and good fortune of our SGI members in Malaysia. We also prayed for the health and well being of all SGI members around the world, that they would be happy and enjoy good fortune.

After we finished gongyo, I picked up the folder containing the diploma of the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters I received from the Universiti Putra Malaysia and placed it before a framed photograph of my mentor Josei Toda, humbly presenting the award to him. I then opened it and looked at the diploma with my wife. As I did so, I fondly recalled the many discussions Mr. Toda and I had on educational issues.

The great French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau said: “Men, be humane. This is your first duty. Be humane with every station, every age.... What wisdom is there for you save humanity?” We must always be humane and serve humanity. This is the SGI spirit.



The stunning sight of the Petronas Twin Towers, the world’s tallest building. Rows of new skyscrapers under construction, vying with one another to reach the heavens. An abundance of green that seemed to grow more lush with each rainfall. Malaysia shining with ever more hope, glowing with an indestructible golden brilliance. These were some of my impressions during my short stay in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia’s capital, after my arrival on Nov. 27. It was my first trip to the golden peninsula of Malaysia in 12 years.



Soka Gakkai Malaysia has also made astonishing progress. Next year, the much-anticipated SGM Grand Culture Center will be completed in Bukit Bintang (meaning Star Hill), a short distance from the Kuala Lumpur central city area. I am filled with deep emotion when I think of the galaxy of talented champions of culture and social contribution that this new “citadel of culture” will produce in the 21st century.

I am prompted to recall one of our pioneer members of the early days of our movement in Malaysia: Mr. Koe Teng Leng. He was the older brother of present SGM General Director Koe Teng Hong. As the first Malaysia Headquarters leader, he worked tirelessly for the happiness and welfare of others. Unfortunately, he passed away suddenly in 1982 due to illness. He was only 58 at the time.

Teng Leng was more than just an older brother to Teng Hong; he was also, in many ways, a father. For when their father died, Teng Leng went to work to support the family. Teng Hong was still an infant at the time.

Eventually, Teng Leng decided to emigrate from China to Penang on the Malay Peninsula, because he believed he could earn better money there to provide for his family.

He sent all of his wages back home, allowing Teng Hong to attend school. At 16, thanks again to his brother's support, Teng Hong was able to join Teng Leng in Malaysia. He also learned about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism from him. Theirs is truly a beautiful story of brotherly love.



When Teng Hong lost his beloved brother, who had been a central pillar of his being, he was tremendously saddened, but he rose up with firm determination from the depths of his grief to carry on his brother's mission. He became the second Malaysia Headquarters leader.

Then in June 1984, SGM was incorporated and Teng Hong became its first general director. A man of integrity and purpose, he has continued to work energetically for *kosen-rufu* to this day.

Nov. 28, the day after I had arrived in Kuala Lumpur, my wife and I performed memorial gongyo for Koe Teng Leng, his wife, Teh Goik Dee, who passed away after him, and other deceased members who had worked so hard in the early days of our movement in Malaysia.

Teng Hong remains deeply grateful to his brother, who raised him and cared for him. As general director, he has striven, in turn, to be like an older brother and father to the younger members, doing his best to support and nurture them.

The future rests in the hands of the youth. When we carefully nurture the youth as our greatest treasure, the sun of hope will shine brightly.



Raising aloft the banner of peace, education and culture, SGM has been striving actively to contribute to society and to play a positive role in shaping the 21st century.

The *soka* of Soka Gakkai means value creation. War, which destroys everything in its path and robs people of their precious lives, is the most barbarous of acts and is an activity of the greatest anti-value. That is why first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi fought against Japan's militarist government, was imprisoned, and died in jail for his beliefs. We, his successors, have inherited this spirit and aspire to create lasting peace.

Education that fosters humane individuals is the foundation of value creation. This was one of the reasons why the Soka Gakkai originally started out as the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Education Society) and its membership was comprised mainly of educators. When value is created it comes to bloom as culture, which in turn nourishes and enriches society. In this respect, promoting activities for peace, education and culture is the social mission of the Soka Gakkai, which bases itself on the humanistic philosophy of Buddhism.



During this visit, I met with Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad for the first time in 12 years. On that occasion, he spoke of his belief in the importance of living a socially contributive life.

The SGM has brought beautiful flowers of humanistic culture to bloom in Malaysian society, and as a result has earned widespread trust and praise.

Especially, the participation of SGM members in the opening ceremony of the 16th Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur in September 1998 won the organization great accolades. Athletes from seventy countries and regions gathered to take part in the games,

and 5,000 SGM members performed a magnificent card stunt during the opening ceremony in the National Stadium—a celebration of the ideal of peace. In the audience were then Malaysian King Tuanku Ja'afar, Prime Minister Mahathir, and some 100,000 spectators. Sending the message “*Malaysia Boleh!*” (“Malaysia Can Do It!”), their performance of beautifully seamless unity gave courage, confidence and joy, not only to their fellow SGM members, but all Malaysian people. The Minister for Youth and Sports, who was in charge of the Games, praised the performance, saying that the SGM members possessed the noble spirit of Malaysia.

The opening ceremony was broadcast by satellite to some 500 million viewers around the world. What enormous encouragement and inspiration it must have given to SGI members all around the globe!

SGM has become a light illuminating the world!



An old Malaysian proverb says, “The sea embraces all rivers that flow into it, the forest accepts every leaf that falls.” What a generous, accepting wisdom this expresses!

Indicative of the broadminded spirit found in Malaysia, our SGM members extended their circle of trust and friendship in the multiethnic culture of this country without any friction or conflict. I am deeply moved by the wisdom our Malaysian members have shown, using dialogue to faithfully communicate their sincerity and the truth, and to win people’s hearts.

Sincere and earnest dialogue is the key to forging understanding and heart-to-heart bonds between people. I am reminded again of Rousseau’s words: “Talent at speaking holds first place in the art of pleasing.”

—*From Malaysia*

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