

SIGNIFICANT DATES
JUNE 6: THE BIRTH OF TSUNESABURO MAKIGUCHI
A LEGACY OF UNCOMPROMISED JUSTICE
BY JAMIE LIPTAN, STAFF WRITER

At the dedication of Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo on May 3, scholars from all over the world recognized the greatness of Soka education. The occasion had a feel of such grandeur, it was striking to remember that this movement of soka—value creation—began with one poor, underfunded and underappreciated school teacher.

On June 6, 130 years ago, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was born in a small, rural Japanese fishing village. After being abandoned at the tender age of 3, he was taken in by his uncle's family. Poverty prevented him from obtaining a normal education, and he scraped and borrowed to later attend a teaching college.

During his early days of teaching, he began to see the effect Japan's nationalistic educational system was having on children, reducing them to nothing more than puppets of the state. He realized that a vast change was needed to ensure the happiness of the students.

"Rather than devise complex theoretical interpretations," he wrote, "it is better to start by looking to the lovely child who sits on your knee and ask yourself: 'What can I do to assure that this child will be able to lead the happiest life possible?'"

His efforts to reform Japanese society found renewed vigor with his introduction to Nichiren Daishonin's writings at the age of 57. His theory of value creation was completely validated by the Daishonin's teachings, which express the inherent dignity and equality of all life.

"And just as I found myself moved by this discovery," he later wrote, "I experienced a number of inexplicable phenomena in my daily life, which accorded precisely with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra... With a joy that is beyond the power of words to express, I have completely renewed the way of life I had pursued for almost 60 years."

After establishing the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-creating Education Society, forerunner of the Soka Gakkai), he rigorously denounced Japan's war efforts, calling them "a national catastrophe." At a time of frenzied nationalism and the denial of individual liberties, Makiguchi stood firm in his convictions.

In 1941, facing pressure from the government to support the state-imposed Shinto religion, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood summoned Makiguchi and his disciple, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, to the head temple to urge the Soka Gakkai to accept the Shinto talisman and pledge complete allegiance to the emperor. Citing the Daishonin's own refutation of unjust authority, Makiguchi firmly refused.

Toda later recalled his mentor telling him that day: "What are they [the priesthood] so afraid of? Now is the time to admonish the state." Makiguchi continued building the organization for the next two years, attending more than 240 small discussion meetings, always under the scrutiny of the government's Special Police.

In 1943, along with Toda and 19 other leaders of the organization, Makiguchi was imprisoned as a thought criminal. Undaunted by fierce interrogation, failing health and malnutrition, he refused to recant his faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism and died in prison on Nov. 18, 1944.

While Makiguchi's theories and writings are now widely hailed as innovative and brilliant, it was his own actions in living a value-creating life that resulted in the SGI we

have today. His drive to provide each person he encountered with the means to revolutionize their life gave birth to Josei Toda's tenacious efforts to build the Soka Gakkai. It was Makiguchi's insistence on the value of each student that guided SGI President Ikeda in creating the Soka school system. And it was his uncompromising legacy of justice that was inherited by the SGI through its religious revolution in 1991, following the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood's excommunication of the organization.

By following his example, we are continuing to realize his dream of a world in which each person can live a truly valuable, happy life.