

# Buddhist Humanism and Leadership of Japanese Business Administrators

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## ABSTRACT

Dr. Daisaku Ikeda's philosophy called "Buddhist Humanism" is described. D. Ikeda is the founder of Soka University and the leader of the Soka Gakkai. We pick out the three important features of his philosophy which are "Ordinary person as the most precious existence", "The totality of our personhood" and "Happiness of both oneself and others".

On the other hand, the Japanese-specific ways of management by top leaders of large Japanese companies are described. From 1995, over 200 business top leaders have visited Soka University and they have given lectures on their management. Presidents of Japan's leading companies, e.g., Toyota, Panasonic, Hitachi, NEC, etc., were the speakers for this lecture series. We pointed out some distinctive features of Japanese leaderships that are, for example, the "self-transformation power" and "family-style management".

We associate Japanese leadership with Ikeda's philosophy. And we show that the Japanese-specific management can be transformed to the universal management style by adopting the philosophy. Finally, we propose the concept of "Humanitarian Competition" to realize the sustainable development in the society of the future.

## 1. Introduction

At the beginning, we would like to show a warning against the current society of Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of Soka University <sup>[1]</sup>.

"What is important is 'the future'. What will you do to benefit all mankind and the world by the wealth and richness which were obtained by working hard ever. 'For what purpose' do human beings work and live? We lack the 'philosophy' and the 'human nature' which can answer this question. The philosophy which can answer above question would be a driving force towards true

prosperity”.

In this paper we propose the philosophy which could be the base of the society of the future.

D. Ikeda is the third president of the Soka Gakkai (Value-Creating Society) and the founder of SGI (the Soka Gakkai International) which is perhaps the largest, most diverse international Buddhist association in the world today<sup>[2]</sup>. He applies the wisdom of Mahayana Buddhism to a practical philosophy of our daily life.

The movement of Soka Gakkai is based on the 700-year-old tradition of Nichiren (13th-century Japanese priest) Buddhism which upholds the teachings of the Lotus Sutra of Shakyamuni Buddha. The movement is characterized by its emphasis on individual empowerment and social engagement to advance peace, culture and education.

The word “Buddhist humanism” is the phrase that D. Ikeda often uses to characterize his stance. It is a philosophical perspective that reflects the core spirit of the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Buddhism. We will pick out three important features of D. Ikeda’s “Humanism” philosophy. One of them is “Ordinary person as the most precious existence”, the second is “The totality of our personhood” and the other is “Happiness of both oneself and others”.

From 1995, over 200 business top leaders have visited Soka University and they have given lectures on their management. Presidents of Japan’s leading companies, e.g., Toyota, Panasonic, Hitachi, NEC, etc., were the speakers for this lecture series. We take up distinguishing speeches among the lectures. And we explore the relevance of D. Ikeda’s thoughts and top leaders’ wisdoms of the management.

## **2. Ordinary Person as the Most Precious Existence**

The first feature, “Ordinary person as the most precious existence”, is the essence of the idea of Lotus Sutra. Nichiren Buddhism teaches that “in the mind of ordinary person, there is Buddha nature. Every person has the potential to flowering it<sup>[3]</sup>”. By this reason, the ordinary person is the most precious existence. In Ikeda’s Humanism this idea is expressed as “human beings have unlimited potential”. And this is one of the principles of the movement of the Soka Gakkai.

On the other hand, many top leaders who visited Soka University cited “the self-transformation power” as one of the requirements of leadership. It is well known that Japanese companies are keen on the education of new employees. Another thing we want to point out here is that the Japanese company’s personnel changes have been made in terms of human resource development. The personnel changes in Japan are not determined in consultation with managers and employees but

are determined by the top-down. We will introduce some episodes which the top-leaders have experienced <sup>[4]</sup>.

Y. Tanahashi who was a chairman of the board of Nippon Steel Solutions Corp. (at the time of the lecture) said that “the turning point of my life was when I was appointed as a director in charge of Information and Communication Electronics Division at Nippon Steel Corp. When I received the appointment of the personnel, I was surprised and came very near to falling off the chair. Until then I was a man who hated the computer and did not even touch the keyboard”.

M. Sakurai who was a president of Ricoh Company said “I could tackle various jobs without falter and with the dictates of curiosity. Personally to experience a variety of sectors has become a foundation of my life. I changed my personality. Originally I was a person who made a plan with a dense analysis. But I became a person who tried to act anyway”.

M. Kusama who was a chairman of the board of Seiko Epson Corp. said “I raised my hand to all of the personnel changes. This has led to the development of my own leadership”.

Y. Fukuhara who is a honorary chairman of Shiseido Corp. said “I was born as an only child and I preferred academic study. I wanted to avoid interviews and speaking out in public, if possible. But, I changed myself. After then, I have actively received coverage of mass media such as newspapers, magazines and TV, and have been trying to speak more and more”.

When Daiei, the big supermarket chain in Japan, bought a professional baseball team, a person who was appointed in charge of the team was a man who had been responsible for a food sector of the market. When a hotel was build next to the baseball stadium, a store manager of the supermarket became a hotel manager.

Therefore Japanese companies are not composed with a collection of expert groups. Of course, experts group are required in business, but they train generalists as next leaders.

Konosuke Matsushita, the founder of Panasonic Corp., is called “god of management” in Japan. He was the most excellent business leader. And he had been an active leader throughout the life. He had experienced various positions from a manager of small factory to a president of global mega-corporation. He successfully transformed himself according to the change of his position.

His motto was to “make each day anew”. He founded the Matsushita Institute of Government and Management when he was 84. He loved the poem called “Youth” by Samuel Ullman, and he made a poem based on it <sup>[5]</sup>.

#### YOUTH

“Youth is a state of mind.

As long as you are filled with faith, hope and courage,  
and do the best you can in your ever-changing daily life,

youth will be yours forever”

This is a thought that matches Ikeda's Humanism that advocates “Be youth through your lifetime”. Ikeda and Matsushita had repeated dialogue for several years and they resonated mentally <sup>[6]</sup>.

Above episodes show the importance of “self-transformation power” of Japanese business leaders. This can be seen as one of the examples embodying the idea that “human beings have unlimited potential”. Dr. Ikeda expresses this power as “the power to break the wall of the mind”. The “impossible” is in your mind which decides that you would not be able to. If you could break this wall, a new world would be spread before you.

From the perspective of Buddhism, the species of their own success should be subjected to others. Therefore this leads to the training of successors. K. Matsushita was always in contact with the employees and he tried to grow employees as excellent managers more than himself.

Ikeda pointed out as follows. “The main point of the nation or of the company is whether the long-term human resource development is carried out. It is the key to growth and decay of one ethnic, one nation and one organization. The problem is whether young people who are responsible for the future are educated enough and how richly they store the energy for the future flight <sup>[6]</sup>”.

The word “self-transformation power” would be misleading. The leader need not change his original personality to new one. Nichiren Buddhism teaches that his old personality still exists inconspicuous in his mind, and the new personality which was originally present in his mind becomes conspicuous. Thus he can expand and extend the lesser self toward the ideal of the greater self.

Therefore, the thought of “Ordinary person as the most precious existence” is considered to be the basic idea of the process bringing forth our full human potential. In the Soka Gakkai, this is called “human revolution”.

### **3. The Totality of Our Personhood**

The idea of “The totality of our personhood” is one of the ways of thinking of Buddhism for our perception of things. Ikeda says as follows <sup>[7]</sup>. “Intellect, reasoning, and emotion are superficial attribute of the life force, but they are not the life force. They must protect the life force and work to the end that the life force can manifest itself in loftier ways”. From the point of view of Buddhism, the western thought is considered to lay disproportionate emphasis on reason.

This does not mean that Buddhism neglect reason. On the contrary, Buddhist thinks that everything works according to reason, and this reason can be universally understood. This is another essential aspect of Buddhism. The one area that Buddhism excels is that it is based on

reason. It is not dogmatic. Important is that Buddhism embraces life in its totality.

It is needless to say that Japanese business administrators give weight to reason and logic, but on the other hand, they put emphasis on emotion equally. The followings show some concepts of top leaders like this idea <sup>[4]</sup>.

M. Nakai, the president of Japanese restaurant chain, said “there is a leader who orders ‘Do it in this way. Make it in that way. When you do so this would happen’. He is a rational leader. In contrast, a leader who values the sensibility says ‘the point that I want to do is this. How do you think what we should do for that?’ The latter leader can capitalize the individuality of each person”.

A. Oze who was the vice-President of House Foods Corp. said as follows. “You cannot convince people if you cannot explain things logically. But you cannot move the person if there is no sympathy of the heart.

Therefore, a leader should expose the weaknesses of his own. How much can you show your true form? You have to show straightforwardly both sides of the strong and weak faces. People feel empathy and humanity to the story failed than successful story. People feel that our boss is also a human being, and would understand that he have been struggling just like them. They would gain a sense of confidence and of intimacy with their boss. This leads to a sense of unity of the organization”.

One of the words frequently used by Japanese business persons is “uchi”. Originally this is a word that refers to a family home. But, Japanese business persons often call their own company by the word “uchi”.

E. Shoyama, the chairman of the board of Hitachi Ltd., said the followings <sup>[4]</sup> : “Family-style management is a good system that brings out the power of the Japanese people. In the system, employees are working with affection for the company. They share the vision with executives, and will go together. At the core of the Japanese management there is the Japanese strong ethics, and the spirit to carry through to the end in any way.

A major premise of Japanese companies is steady employment. They are characterized by ‘mutual trust’ and ‘hands-on approach’. We have to return to the origin of Japanese management that makes the best use of the teamwork. This is a key to survive the current wave of global mega-competition”.

Putting emphasis on the family-like affection of employees is considered to be Japanese unique management. We will show another example of Japanese leaders who value the sensibility.

The activities of NPO and the social enterprises are prominent in Japan for recent 20 years. A lots of women social entrepreneurs have led these organizations. When we study the management of these women leaders, we can find that their management-styles are clearly different from the

male's ones. They originally conceived the businesses for their families or for their region, and they will do what they really want to do. As a result their jobs contribute to the society. It can be said that women's sensibilities and sympathy with the people around, are effectively utilized for social enterprises <sup>[8]</sup>.

Since these resonance and sympathy are rooted in human nature, the leadership that put emphasis on human sensibility is not limited to certain country. Ikeda pointed as follows <sup>[7]</sup>. "Although some sociologists describe the family-style approach to business as a purely Japanese phenomenon, it seems to me that, as business everywhere tends to internationalize, closer family relations between management and labor will become increasingly important". Ikeda generalized these concepts and proposed the idea called "inner universality". To explain the "inner universality" he presents an example story about the early Edo-period politician Doi Toshikatsu (1573-1644) <sup>[9]</sup>.

One day, Doi picked up a discarded scrap of Chinese silk and handed it to one of his samurai retainers. Many laughed at this seemingly insignificant gesture. Several years later, when Doi asked the samurai about the piece of silk, he produced it, having carefully stored it. Doi praised the samurai and increased his annual stipend by 300 *koku* (the standard unit of wealth in Japan at the time). Doi then explained his actions:

This fabric was produced by Chinese farmers who plucked mulberry leaves to raise silkworms and spin thread. It came into the hands of Chinese traders, crossed over the great distance of sea to reach Japan, passed through the hands of the people of Nagasaki, was purchased by merchants in Kyoto or Osaka, and finally reached Edo [present-day Tokyo]. One cannot but be struck by the enormous human effort by which it reached us, and thus to discard it as a worthless scrap is a fearful thing inviting the rebuke of heaven.

Doi explained logically but important is his sensibility. Ikeda said "to empathetically connect, through a scrap of fabric, with the lives of farmers working in mulberry fields in distant China — this is precisely what I am referring to as inner universality. If we develop such fresh and vital imagination, a keen sensitivity to daily life and to life itself, we will be able to experience not only close friends but even the inhabitants of distant lands whom we have never met — and even the cultures and products of those lands — as neighbors".

And Ikeda argues as follows. "Human progress is not caused by the reason but caused by the deepening of intuition which controls the reason <sup>[10]</sup>". "Only intuition can provide insight into realms where reason cannot penetrate <sup>[7]</sup>".

#### 4. Happiness of Both Oneself and Others

The third feature of Ikeda's Humanism is "Happiness of both oneself and others". This is the idea that human beings secure true happiness by making others happy. This is not the spirit of self-sacrifice. Nichiren Buddhism teaches the principle called "oneness of life and environment <sup>[3]</sup>". Life and its environment, though two seemingly distinct phenomena, are essentially non-dual. They are two integral phases of a single reality. Although we perceive things around us as separate from us, there is a dimension of our lives that is one with the universe. At the most fundamental level of life itself, there is no separation between ourselves and the environment.

Buddhist studied our consciousness and found that below the realms of conscious awareness there is "Alaya-consciousness" in which all of the actions and experience of life are accumulated as karma. There "an enduring flow of life energy" is flowing like a torrent. The flow also intersects with the other person's "flow of life energy". Therefore, our lives constantly interact, exerting a profound influence on each other. This concept grasps the nature of the relationship that exists in this world. A wisdom arises which enables us to perceive the fundamental equality of all living beings and to deal with them on an unchanging basis of respect.

Ikeda explains as follows. "Everything is connected. Nothing can exist independently of other things, and nothing arises in isolation on earth. Any organism cannot fulfill its own lifetime by alone. If you do not improve the whole society, you cannot ensure the prosperity and the Happiness of yourself. At the same time, prosperity at the expense of individuals is not a true prosperity in any society, any nation or any company. There cannot be 'misfortune of others only' and there cannot be 'happiness of own only' <sup>[11]</sup>".

From the point of view of individual behavior this principle is expressed as follows. "If you change yourself, your circumstances will inevitably change also. If your mind hopes to do so, the reality will begin to move along your will <sup>[1]</sup>". The following is Ikeda's famous quote at the beginning of the novel named "human revolution <sup>[12]</sup>". "A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation, and, further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind".

It is important to construct the network of human solidarity, which should start at a familiar and concrete place. After then, step by step and without interruption, you should change your surroundings as near "neighbors". This idea is the basis of the peace movement of the Soka Gakkai.

This thought can be called as "Happiness of both oneself and others". In Nichiren Buddhism this idea is expressed as "If you light a fire for others, front of you will also be obvious". Our life expands, as does our capacity for joy, to the degree that we take action for the Happiness of others.

K. Eguchi, vice president of PHP Inc., who served as a secretary to Konosuke Matsushita for many years, concluded that the reason for Matsushita's success is as follows <sup>[4]</sup>. "Konosuke Matsushita was the person who was delighted in making people happy. A person, who is called as an excellent leader, thinks earnestly about the people around him. Only the person, who has the quality to feel the joy when people around him become happy, can be a successful manager. This is the reason why Mr. Matsushita succeeded". This is a remarkable example of the idea of "Happiness of both oneself and others".

D. Ikeda said "The sharp ability of the entrepreneurs and of managers to understand the era has been the major driving force for the economic development of Japan. And their 'foresight' and the 'ability to act' could be changed to a more robust leadership if their thoughts intended for 'contribution to others' <sup>[1]</sup>".

Further I should add one more important point. At the base of this idea there are the philosophy of "symbiosis" and "praise of diversity". Humans, nature and the universe coexist and are fused as one life form. We should recognize the diversity of human beings, and admire it. Each human being, race and nation must recognize the individuality of each one, and live together.

The movement of Soka Gakkai based on above mentioned thought is naturally linked to the movement for world peace. It has become a movement to take advantage of a variety of thought beyond the ideology. Though it is the movement of the religious organization, it is no longer something exclusive.

The idea of "Happiness of both oneself and others" is inextricably linked with the thought "oneness of life and environment". In the global society, everything is more closely linked than before. For example, in fierce economic competition for survival, even if one company temporarily became a winner, everyone eventually would be a loser. To beat other companies equals to hurt their environment and hurt their own company. Further it can be said that "to hurt the environment equals to hurt your life".

The business form of social enterprises can be said to be an illustration of these ideas. Many social enterprises are trying to make their own environment be a better world <sup>[8]</sup>. They have challenged to the eradication of poverty or resolved the gender discrimination, parenting support, and regional revitalization. Their purpose is not to get benefit but to solve the social problems like these. Their purpose is to improve the environment of the people around them and they also feel happy in achieving their purpose.



## 5. Humanitarian Competition

Based on the idea of “Happiness of both oneself and others”, the thought named as “humanitarian competition” was proposed by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), the founder of Soka Gakkai <sup>[13]</sup>. He surveyed the grand flow of human history and identified the forms of competition — military, political and economic — that have prevailed in different periods. T. Makiguchi described “humanitarian competition” as follows: “To achieve the goals that would otherwise be pursued by military or political force through the intangible power that naturally exerts a moral influence; in other words, to be respected rather than feared”. And he explained: “What is important is to set aside egotistical motives, striving to protect and improve not only one’s own life, but also the lives of others. One should do things for the sake of others, because by benefiting others, we benefit ourselves”.

T. Makiguchi described the value of competition as a source of energy and vitality. “We find progress and development where competition is strong and powerful; where it is hampered, either by natural or human factors, we find stagnation, immobility and regression”.

Ikeda noted as follows: “As a concept, it compels us to confront the reality of competition while ensuring that it is conducted firmly on the basis of humane values, thus bringing forth a synergistic reaction between humanitarian concerns and competitive energies. It is this that qualifies humanitarian competition to be a key paradigm for the twenty first century <sup>[9]</sup>”.

In the creation of their business model, social enterprises can be seen to be competing ideas of social contribution. And they are exposed to the harsh economic competition. In this sense, a social enterprise is considered to be an embodiment of the “humanitarian competition”.

Ikeda analyzed the current society as follows <sup>[9]</sup>. “The processes of globalization, buoyed by deregulation and technological innovation, have encountered a fierce backlash in the form of globalized recession”. “The global financial system requires some regulatory framework, and this is where governments and political processes must play a major role. Political leaders should exercise their talents for the greater good and from a broad and impartial perspective”. “In this connection, I would like to explore the idea of ‘humanitarian competition’ which I feel can serve as a fresh paradigm to guide us out of the present deadlock”.

Today, there are widespread calls for a paradigm shift from the pursuit of material wealth to sustainability. In the society of the future we should try to increase the level of satisfaction of human life which does not depend on the excessive consumption. When we adopt this concept as the basic philosophy of the future, orientation toward the realization of a sustainable society is determined.

The report of the Club of Rome proposed some visions for the realization of the sustainable

development in the society of the future. Next is a part of them <sup>[14]</sup>.

“Sustainability, efficiency, sufficiency of needs, justice, fairness and the community should be important social values. The economy should serve for the happiness of human society and the environment. It should be the society where we are able to live without the need for the accumulation of material things”.

Dr. D. Ikeda and Dr. Aurelio Peccei (1908-1984), the founder of the Club of Rome, concluded through repeated dialogues as follows <sup>[15]</sup>. “Only the human revolution is what enables the selection of a new path to the future and to recover the fortune of mankind. It is the key to our positive action to the society of the future”.

There is a good historical experiment in Japan. Tokugawa shogunate during the Edo Period (1603-1868) took the policy of seclusion. In the period the foreign trade was negligible. Almost everything was produced and consumed in the country. During this period Japan had an ideal recycling-based society. The distinctive culture flourished instead of consuming the substances. Japanese original art such as “ukiyo-e” was developed and a variety of sciences were also progressed. Especially mathematics has its own development in Japan.

An American named James. C. Hepburn came to Japan at the end of Edo Period. He tried to teach English language and mathematics to young samurai (children of high-ranking officials of the shogunate). After he came back to U.S, he wrote the following article in a magazine <sup>[16]</sup>. “It was very difficult to teach them the correct English pronunciation. But, everyone knew well the algebra, including quadratic equations, plane and spherical trigonometry. In fact, college graduates in the United States would not be able to defeat these young Japanese”.

During the same period, a delegation was sent to the United States by the Shogunate, and they were welcome in the United States. In order to welcome the people who came from the barbaric country in the Far East, Americans were performed factory tours several times. At the factory a guide described why this machine was running and explained the structure and the principle of the steam engine. Later Yukichi Fukuzawa who was a servant of the delegation wrote that “All of us were so boring at that time”. Because the principle of Watt’s steam engine was already common knowledge among these samurais. And they had enough knowledge of physics which young person of the West had to learn.

These episodes show that human growth does not need a larger consumption. If human beings gave up such lives that depend on the excessive consumption of the substance, the human race would be able to grow a lot in other fields. The principles of Humanitarian competition come alive as the thought of such a time.

Ikeda stated as follows <sup>[17]</sup>. “Although physical resources are finite, human potential is infinite,

as is our capacity to create value. The real significance of sustainability is, in my view, as a dynamic concept in which there is a striving or competition to generate positive value and share it with the world and with the future”.

## 6. Conclusions

Dr. Daisaku Ikeda’s “Humanism” philosophy based on Nichiren Buddhism is described. We pick out the three important features of his philosophy which are “Ordinary person as the most precious existence”, “The totality of our personhood” and “Happiness of both oneself and others”.

On the other hand, the Japanese-specific ways of management by top leaders of Japan’s leading companies are shown. We describe the “self- transformation power” as one of the requirements of Japanese leadership, “family-style management” or employees’ affection for companies, and Matsushita’s management style which makes employees happy.

Since Ikeda’s Humanism is based on the belief in the infinite possibilities of human beings, the thought is not restricted to certain religious organization. It is beyond the ideology and could be universal. We show that at the point of view of Ikeda’s Humanism, the Japanese-specific managements above mentioned can be transformed to the universal management style. Especially the thought based on “contribution to others” is shown to be able to bring about qualitative change of the leadership. And a leader who embodies this idea would be the person required for the next era.

Finally, we propose the idea of “Humanitarian Competition” by T. Makiguchi as one of the methods to realize the sustainable development in the society of the future.

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