

Educating a New Type of Individual

SGI President Ikeda made the following speech on receiving an honorary professorship from China's Jilin University, Hong Kong, Feb. 20.

Please allow me first to offer my deepest regrets and condolences at the unexpected and very sad news of the passing of the great Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. I met with Mr. Deng on two occasions, and I remember as if it were yesterday his far-reaching vision for the development and prosperity of China he shared with me. Many concur that his distinguished accomplishments will shine in history for all time. I offer my sincerest prayers for his repose.

Dr. Liu Zhongshu, president of Jilin University; faculty of the university; Mr. Li Ling, division chief of the Department of Education, Science and Technology of the Hong Kong branch of the Xinhua News Agency; and honored guests:

Deng Xiaoping established the goal of your fine university by declaring that the unity of labor and education is the fundamental path for the education of tomorrow's youth. I find this a deeply moving, highly worthy educational ideal for the 21st century and the future.

Now, in the presence of SGI representatives from around the world, I humbly accept this honorary professorship from Jilin University, a citadel of human potential destined to lead the great nation of China in the new century of hope. I express my deep appreciation for the great honor bestowed upon me.

By rights I should travel to Jilin University to receive it, yet the university's president and others have traveled all the way from snowy Changchun, in Jilin Province in China's northeast, to present it to me. I am deeply honored. I will not forget this as long as I live.

I must also thank Mr. Li and other distinguished guests from the Xinhua News Agency, who have taken time from their busy schedules to attend. I have received a congratulatory message from President Liu's brother, Chinese Minister of Culture Liu Zhongde, for which I express my deepest gratitude.

More than 20 years have passed since I sat talking with a top Chinese leader in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, voicing my opinion that China would certainly experience fantastic development in the future, far surpassing Japan. The entire world, I said, would watch the great nation's growth with keen interest.

And today, many speak of the 21st century as the Chinese century. Above all else, I am overjoyed at the tremendous strides China has made. It goes without saying that Jilin University has made outstanding contributions to that growth, especially in the areas of science and technology.

One of your university mottoes is "Seek the practical!" The American educator and philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952), who also emphasized practical results and experimentation, foresaw China's fantastic development many years ago. Incidentally, the New York Culture Center of the SGI-USA, from which several representatives are with us today, is located in a building where Dewey once taught.

After World War I, Dewey visited both China and Japan. It is interesting that based on his observations, he criticized Japan and supported China. He said that Japan, though it had evidenced rapid growth, had only borrowed elements of foreign cultures and tacked them on to its own, with no fundamental change to its system. China, on the other hand, was striving to change from the foundation up — even if it took a long time to do so.

In other words, an entirely new breed of individual was beginning to be born in China, Dewey believed. These new Chinese would provide the base for the emergence of a truly modern state. Jilin University was founded in 1946 to accomplish just that: to cultivate and educate a new type of individual.

The following year, 1947, I first met my mentor, Josei Toda, the second president of the Soka Gakkai. Mr. Toda was always firmly antiwar. While the Japanese military crushed and destroyed Changchun,¹ the beautiful city of culture, academy and forests where Jilin University is located, Mr. Toda stood up against that immoral, inhumane militarism, utterly rejecting it. For that he spent two years in prison. He was a true champion of peace.

His wish was that the Japanese join hands with the Chinese people, to whom we owe so much of our culture and Buddhism — as well as with the rest of our Asian neighbors, advancing toward happiness together. This was the task that he left to me when he died. My greatest pride is that for five decades I have unswervingly followed the path set forth by him.

That is another reason why I am so impressed by the academic atmosphere at Jilin University, where the bonds between student and mentor are highly valued. Dr. Liu, who carries on the noble tradition that regards promising young minds as precious as life itself, has said, “All of the Jilin University leaders are eager to completely devote themselves to assist and support new young talent.”

With more than half of its faculty under age 40, Jilin University is clearly opening doors for deserving, talented youth. I am certain that the light of Jilin University, aimed as it is toward the first decade of the coming century, will brilliantly illuminate the coming Chinese century.

The great 6th-century Chinese Buddhist teacher T’ien-t’ai said, “The deeper the roots, the more prolific the branches” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4, p. 272). Only when people learn the importance of firmly putting down roots to develop and educate themselves can future prosperity be realized.

The Chinese premier Zhou Enlai and his wife, Madam Deng Yingchao, whose friendship I will never forget, also strongly believed that. They placed their faith in me based on that shared belief. Premier Zhou said: “The Soka Gakkai has a broad base of support among the people. That is why it has my respect.”

In 1974, I walked across the Hong Kong border, setting foot in China for the first time. A little girl asked me, “Why have you come to China?”

I replied without hesitation, with utter and complete truthfulness: “To meet you.” That was my goal: to meet and befriend individuals.

All existence resides within each individual. That is where all things begin as well. In fact, only friendships forged on the individual level are real, grounded and lasting.

My goal has always been to nurture individuals, to create harmony among them. I fervently wish to usher in a spring of hope for the 21st century that is adorned by the sublime, lofty presence of individuals whose inner treasure tower of life shines with unsurpassed brilliance.

Please allow me to reaffirm my commitment to that goal, here today with my friends from around the world, as a member of the Jilin faculty, as an eternal friend of the Chinese people.

In closing, I pray for the greater development of Jilin University, the glory and prosperity of China and the health and success of all gathered here today. Thank you.

WT

1. Changchun: The city served as the capital of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo between 1933 and 1945.