

THIS BEAUTIFUL EARTH: PHOTO ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA 'THE CASTLE OF OSAKA, THE CITY OF PEOPLE'

The clouds parted; the sun peeked through.

Dolphin-shaped ornaments glistened on the roof of the castle tower.

Willow branches swayed in a wind gust that swept down from above.

While talking with several people, I strolled through Osaka Castle Park. There were people fishing from the bank of the moat and middle-aged men on bicycles. It was the season of crimson foliage. Gold ginkgo leaves covered the ground.

On a bench, school children were drawing pictures on paper.

"You are very good!" I said.

They showed me their drawings, and we chatted for a while.

"Are you from Tokyo? I've never been there."

"When you get a little older, please come see me."

It must be the wisdom of Naniwa—as Osaka has been called for centuries—to have this park in the midst of downtown for people to enjoy and relax in. Osaka Castle's main tower was rebuilt in 1931 with donations from the public.

Our Fife and Drum Corps and Marching Band have often used this park to practice, as have other SGI culture-festival performers. As they practice, beads of sweat, sparkling in sunlight, roll down their youthful faces and seep into this ground.

Osaka is a city of ordinary people. Some have called it "the people's capital," in contrast with Tokyo, once called "the imperial capital."

Osaka has long nurtured a culture of challenging authority. People here laugh inwardly at the haughtiness of the powerful or the rigid rules of stuffy bureaucrats; they see things with the sober eye of a realist.

People in Osaka dislike and refuse to kowtow to officialdom. Independent and self-motivated, they rely on their own efforts and strengths. Unfettered by traditional values, they are constantly creating something new.

The energy of ordinary people that gave rise to the flowering of Japanese popular culture in the late seventeenth century is still vibrant in Osaka. People here are frank and casual, unconcerned with conventions and formalities of the past. Good-hearted and generous, they are apt to give what they have worked hard for to others and end up empty-handed, starting from scratch.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98), who rose from a humble birth to become chief imperial minister and the de facto ruler of Japan, composed a poem on his deathbed:

*A dewdrop falls and
Vanishes without a trace,
And so is my life.
Even Naniwa's grandeur
Fades like a dream in my dream.*

What did this hero of a turbulent age see before his death? Was it the bottomless chasm of nothingness?

When Hideyoshi built Osaka Castle, it was literally a golden palace. Gold adorned the interior of the main tower. Even the frames of shoji screens and the roof tiles were gold-

plated. It was a dazzling display of opulence. One French visitor to Japan at the time is said to have remarked with astonishment at this scene: “The sun on earth has overcome the sun in the heavens!” Hideyoshi built this grand castle to demonstrate his power; but today only shattered remnants of the original structure rest quietly more than 30 feet beneath the ground. The Tokugawa clan, which usurped power from the Toyotomi clan, destroyed and buried it. Upon those ruins, the Tokugawas built the present structure, including the stone base.

The wind that shook the willow branches was now gone. Where it went I could not see. Was Hideyoshi like the wind? Was Oda Nobunaga (1534–82) like fire and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616) like the earth? [Oda Nobunaga, who overthrew the Ashikaga shogunate and unified more than half of Japan, was killed when one of his retainers rebelled against him. Toyotomi Hideyoshi completed the unification. After his death, Tokugawa Ieyasu founded the Tokugawa (or Edo) shogunate, which ruled Japan from 1603 through 1867.] History moves on—destructive like fire at times, turbulent like the wind or stable like the earth at others—weaving a seamless tapestry of humanity to the present. Giving the appearance of constancy, but constantly changing, or advocating change while shrewdly scheming to protect the status quo, the agents of history ceaselessly transmigrate through the six lower paths, sometimes loving, sometimes hating, and plotting with shrieks of laughter and streams of tears.

This is why justice must prevail. The righteous must triumph. The chain of suffering and misery must be severed. Ordinary people, looked down upon until today, must fight back and create an era in which they rule with pride. We are their vanguard, and one of our decisive battlefields is Osaka, city of people, and the surrounding Kansai area.

Nobunaga, Hideyoshi and Ieyasu—those warlords of feudal Japan fought for power, but they did not share the spiritual legacy of mentor and disciple. Hideyoshi destroyed the Oda clan, and Ieyasu broke his ironclad promise to protect Hideyoshi’s son and heir.

In the constant flux of human history, power is an illusion. So are gold, fame, and even ties of blood. Only through the legacy of mentor and disciple is an eternal history born, leaving the names of ordinary people to shine for ten thousand generations and more.

My mentor loved castles. Therefore, he named himself Jogai, which means “outside the castle,” and later Josei, “sage of the castle.” He also once gave me the formal name Daijo, “great castle”—words that appear in the Lotus Sutra.

My mentor used to say: “Let’s build an impregnable castle!” “The Gakkai must build a great castle of capable people!” His voice still rings in my ears.

With like-minded friends, I poured my heart and soul into building the “Castle of Kansai.” My mentor, with whom I was resolved to share life and death, was watching over my efforts, and I wanted to make him happy and proud. The Soka Gakkai in Kansai is a castle of the people that I built with my youthful passion and power. My mentor called it “Chin-chou Castle.”

Chin-chou was a walled castle-city in China. The whole city was a fortress. Unlike the castles of Japan, which were designed to protect only the powerful, the castle of Chin-chou existed to protect the entire community and its people.

The base of Osaka Castle is made of half a million stones, large and small, fit together tightly with not a gap between them. The same holds true of our castle of capable people in Kansai; it is unshakable.

We must allow no gap among people—no discrimination or distance. Nothing in this world is stronger than the solidarity of people joined by mutual love and friendship. Such

unity is more solid than granite.

In “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” Nichiren Daishonin states, “‘A great city gate’ [in the “Emergence of the Treasure Tower” chapter of the Lotus Sutra] indicates the two phenomenon of body and mind” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 741). Our life itself, then, is like “a great city gate,” a “great castle.”

“Castles of arrogance” in this world will eventually fall like rotten fruit from a tree. The great castles of Buddhahood that we are building within our lives, on the other hand, will endure for eternity. The work of building such an inner castle is called “human revolution.”

Winds blow, scattering and driving away clouds. “Now Nichiren and his followers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as a great wind blows” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 742). So long as there is an unhesitating outcry of the Kansai spirit, all dark clouds before us will be swept away, and our magnificent golden castles of victory shall stand even taller!

This is how we have triumphed until today, and so shall we for all eternity.

Our blue sky is high and clear today and ever victorious.

Nineteen in a series