

Critical Notes

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Critical Comments on Brian Victoria's "Engaged Buddhism: A Skeleton in the Closet?"

by

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Abstract

In "Engaged Buddhism: A Skeleton in the Closet?" (Vol. 2) Brian Daizen Victoria claims, among other things, that Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), founder of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (forebear of the Soka Gakkai and Soka Gakkai International), was an active supporter of the Japanese wars of aggression. In this response, Koichi Miyata argues that Victoria's claims rest on the highly selective use of quotes, and ignore key interpretative issues associated with Japanese imperial fascism and its underlying belief structures. Miyata discusses the significance of Makiguchi's arrest and imprisonment under a law specifically aimed at opponents of the war efforts, in his analysis of critical lapses in Victoria's article.

Having read the recent essay by Brian Daizen Victoria, I found its contents so problematic that, as someone who has studied the ideas of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) for many years, I feel compelled to respond.

While many studies and essays on Tsunesaburo Makiguchi exist in Japanese, researchers unable to read Japanese have had limited access to Makiguchi's ideas and actions. To help fill this gap, last year I edited a small collection of English-language essays for the 2000

special edition of *The Journal of Oriental Studies (TJOS)* which was devoted to the "Ideas and Influence of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi." In this response, I will refer to this research as I attempt to shed some light on the thoughts and actions of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi.

Turning to my first point: Victoria quotes a passage from Makiguchi's 1903 work *Jinsei Chirigaku* (The Geography of Human Life), in which Makiguchi notes that Russia was engaged in a policy of expansionism in the search for year-round harbors. Victoria asserts that this world view was identical to that of the government of Japan, a view used to justify the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), then the annexation of the Korean peninsula (1910) and the founding of the puppet state of Manchukuo (1932). Victoria's assertion, and his implicit criticism of Makiguchi, simplistically links analysis of the global situation with the policies taken in response to that. Makiguchi was merely voicing what was then the accepted understanding of the geopolitical motives for Russia's expansionist policies, a view held not only by the Japanese government, but shared by the British, with whom Japan had formed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Certainly I know of no scholar of political geography who rejects this commonsense view in favor of one that Russia posed no danger. If we were to extend Victoria's argument, the logical conclusion would be to find not only Makiguchi but everyone who studies political geography guilty of complicity with Japanese aggression.

Elsewhere in *Jinsei Chirigaku* Makiguchi points out that the countries of Western Europe had a great deal of trouble operating their colonies, and expresses doubts about the value of acquiring colonies, particularly from the point of view of the financial burden that they would entail. If Victoria had read *Jinsei Chirigaku* carefully, he would not identify the thoughts of Makiguchi with the expansionist doctrine of the time.

Secondly, Victoria quotes an extract from Makiguchi's book *Kyodoka Kenkyu* (A Study of Folk Culture), in which Makiguchi notes that the state plays an important role in the lives of citizens. From this, Victoria draws the conclusion that as the Japan moved closer to war, Makiguchi adopted the view that education should be "in service to the state". (Victoria states that Makiguchi added this section for the 1933 revised edition of the book. This is incorrect, as it appears in the first edition published in 1912.) Since the publication of *Jinsei Chirigaku* Makiguchi had consistently emphasized the formation of identity on three levels—that of a person's local community, the national and global levels. Within this context, and against a backdrop of global competition for empire, he placed particular importance on national independence. This is hardly unreasonable. Japan was one of only a handful of

countries in Asia that had maintained independence amid encroachment by the Western powers, and Makiguchi was well aware of the miserable circumstances of colonized peoples. What we may find problematic—in terms of the current view that controlling peoples is intrinsically wrong—is that Makiguchi did not say enough after Japan itself acquired colonies, omitting to comment on the issue of independence for these colonized peoples, and only suggesting that imperialism was not the optimal policy choice because of the financial burden involved. Here I refer Dr. Victoria to my essay "Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's Theory of the State" in *TJOS*, in which I discuss Makiguchi's view that imperialistic-military and economic-competition should be supplanted by a cooperative sense of community, what he called "humanitarian competition."

Further, in deciding that Makiguchi viewed education as a means of serving the state, Victoria completely ignores Makiguchi's argument in his 1930 *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy) that the goal of education must in fact be the happiness of the child. In the March 1942 issue of *Kachi Sozo* (Value Creation), the short-lived periodical of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, Makiguchi criticizes the ideologically central concept of *messhi hoko*—sacrificing the interests of the individual to those of the state. He noted that this was mere rhetoric to ordinary Japanese, impossible to put into practice. Rather, he stressed, it is natural to strive for the realization of one's own and others' happiness. In May 1942, he was ordered to halt publication of *Kachi Sozo*. While Makiguchi did view the state as having an important role to play, this is entirely different from holding the ultra nationalist view of education that people should be educated to ensure their uncritical acceptance of the policies of the state. Here I refer Dr. Victoria to "Value-Creating Pedagogy and Japanese Education in the Modern Era," in *TJOS*, by Kazunori Kumagai in which he compares Makiguchi's educational philosophy with the statist educational system.

Thirdly there is the problem of the emperor system. Quoting a section from *Kyodoka Kenkyu* in which Makiguchi argues that loyalty to the emperor is synonymous with love of one's country, Victoria implies that Makiguchi's view was identical to that of the military government. This, however, is a far too loosely framed argument that ignores the interpretative issues associated with the 1889 Meiji Constitution. The preamble to the Meiji Constitution recognizes the supreme authority of the emperor, while Article 3 declares the sacred nature of the emperor, and Article 4 his sovereign rights over the state—making the

state and the emperor system inseparable. If we stress the supreme authority of the emperor, the emperor is then cast in the role of absolute monarch. If we consider instead the role of the Constitution as a brake on the supreme authority of the emperor, he becomes a constitutional monarch. The former view is represented by the imperial fascism supported by the military regime, while the latter corresponds to Tatsukichi Minobe's theory of the emperor as an organ of the state. From the era of Taisho democracy through to the suppression of Minobe's theory in 1935, this view held sway among constitutional scholars and members of the Diet. The idea that loyalty = patriotism is common to both views, and by aligning Makiguchi with the imperial fascism of the military simply on the basis of his comments here, Victoria again appears determined to ignore the written record of Makiguchi's thoughts. From his earliest writings, Makiguchi viewed the emperor as a constitutional monarch, and was critical of moves to make the emperor's powers absolute.

Victoria also quotes from a report produced by the special police on their interrogation of Makiguchi as proof that Makiguchi acknowledged the divine status of the emperor. Again, this assertion arises from a distortion of the relevant passage. Victoria quotes a reference by Makiguchi to "praying" to the emperor. He could hardly, however, have been more distorting in selecting the passage he quoted, deliberately excluding the following extract, which I have underlined:

"The august virtue of His Majesty the Emperor is manifested in the security and happiness of the people, through the organs of his civil and military officials. Should these be deficient in some way, the people can petition him through the Diet or other bodies. In light of this, who is there, apart from His Majesty, the Emperor himself, to whom we should reverently pray?" ("Pray" is Victoria's translation; "beseech" is probably more accurate in this context.)

It is obvious that "beseech/pray" and "petition" have the same meaning in this context. The manner in which Victoria has misused Makiguchi's choice of a term normally used in a religious context, but with a special meaning in this context, to claim that Makiguchi supported emperor worship, is not what one would expect from a serious scholar endeavoring to document his claim. Surely in examining the interrogation report Victoria must have encountered the following statements by Makiguchi:

"His Majesty the Emperor is an ordinary man, who went to the Peers' School as Crown Prince, and studied how to be an emperor. The Emperor too makes mistakes. They say that in the early years of the Meiji era Tesshu Yamaoka admonished the Meiji Emperor and pointed out his mistakes on many occasions." [*Tokko Geppo* (Monthly bulletin of Special Higher Police), August 1943 issue, p. 152]

These comments indicate clearly that Makiguchi rejected completely the deification of the emperor. Victoria mentions the military indoctrination of soldiers that "the orders of one's superiors are the orders of the emperor," and asserts that Makiguchi supported this view. In fact, however, Makiguchi commented: "The orders of the emperor could be mistaken, mind you", thereby rejecting the absolute authority of the emperor. This point is an important one when we come to consider the next, that of the relationship between Makiguchi's criticism of the religious policies of the military government and his anti-war activities. I refer Dr. Victoria here to Hiroo Sato "Nichiren Thought in Modern Japan: Two Perspectives" in *TJOS* in which he discusses the relationship between Makiguchi and the emperor system from a religious-historical perspective.

My fourth point concerns the significance of Makiguchi's persecution by the military government for criticizing its policy on religion. This is also relevant to the arguments of Robert Kisala, which Victoria cites in developing his own argument. We must remember that when Makiguchi was persecuted by the authorities for instructing members of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai to burn talismans provided by the Ise shrine, regarded as home of the ancestral deity of the imperial family, it was not under any law dealing with religious matters, but the Peace Preservation Law. Neither Victoria nor Kisala appear to understand the significance of this. The Peace Preservation Law was demanded by the Privy Council in exchange for approving the Universal Manhood Suffrage Law in 1925 to ensure that the newly enfranchised populace did not begin criticizing the emperor system. It was originally designed for the suppression of anti-Establishment groups such as socialists, communists and anarchists. Having all but eliminated anti-Establishment activity of an overtly political nature with a massive crackdown on the Communist Party in the early years of the Showa era (1926-1989), the military government next targeted liberals and religious movements as impediments to implementation of their war policies. By completely obliterating Tatsukichi

Minobe's liberal view of the emperor as organ of the state in 1935, the militarists established the absolute authority of the emperor, brooking no opposition whatsoever their policies, now fully shielded by imperial authority.

Next they turned to the religious movements. Religions having as their object of worship gods, or the Buddha, which their teachings accord a position in the cosmic order far superior to that of the emperor, religious groups tended to have less regard for his authority. The year 1936 saw a crackdown on Ohmotokyo, a new Shinto movement that preached the restoration of peace and order to the world under a mythical god. To enable more systematic repression of religious movements, the military government revised the Peace Preservation Law in 1939 to provide for punishment of religious groups found to be committing blasphemy against the Ise shrine. This shows the military government viewed religious movements that rejected the authority of the emperor as the last remaining impediments to rallying the nation behind its war policies. It was against this political and social backdrop that Makiguchi came to criticize the religious policy of the military regime. His arrest under the Peace Preservation Law shows that the regime judged his actions a hindrance to their conduct of the war. Thus, Makiguchi directly opposed the militarist ideology of imperial fascism for its religious policies, and because this opposition constituted an impediment to conduct of the war by the military regime, there is no doubt that he was persecuted for implicitly anti-war activities. I refer Dr. Victoria to my Introduction to *TSOJ* in which I examine the historical background and significance of Makiguchi's wartime persecution.

I have responded to the views of Brian Victoria on four fronts. I can only imagine that in order to prove Tsunesaburo Makiguchi cooperated with the war effort, Victoria has shaped his arguments to fit his pre-established conclusion, willfully quoting only those passages of Makiguchi's writings that would seem to support it. I cannot imagine he studied all ten volumes of Makiguchi's writings in Japanese to reach this conclusion. While there is ample room for the frank exchange of academic views, including highly critical ones, it is important that a tendentious agenda, clothed in the guise of academic research, not stand unchallenged.

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