

Human Revolution and the Reconstruction of Nichiren Buddhism as a Living Philosophy in Daisaku Ikeda's Thought

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze Daisaku Ikeda's thought on human revolution, his critique and assimilation of the Western intellectual tradition, and his construction of *Nichiren Buddhism* as a living philosophy within the Soka Gakkai movement in modern Japan. This study is significant because Ikeda not only inherited Nichiren's teachings but also reconstructed them into a humanistic living philosophy that responds to the spiritual, moral, and social crises of modern society. This study employed a qualitative research design with a library research approach. The data were collected through an extensive review of Daisaku Ikeda's works and scholarly literature on Soka Gakkai, *Nichiren Buddhism*, modern Buddhism, and the Western intellectual tradition. The findings reveal four major themes. First, human revolution constitutes the ideological core of Ikeda's thought by positioning individuals' moral and spiritual transformation as the foundation of social transformation. Second, Ikeda adopts a dual strategy by critiquing the Western intellectual tradition while simultaneously assimilating selected elements, including the figure of Jesus, Kantian ethics, existentialism, modern science, and Marx's critique of capitalism into the framework of *Nichiren Buddhism*. Third, this strategy expands the universal claim of *Nichiren Buddhism* through dialogue with diverse modern intellectual traditions. Fourth, Ikeda's overall philosophical project culminates in the construction of *Nichiren Buddhism* as a living philosophy that integrates religious, humanistic, and social dimensions. The originality of this study lies in its critical interpretation of Ikeda's thought as an ideological construct that brings together human revolution, dialogue with the Western intellectual

ARTICLE INFO¹

Keywords:

Nichiren Buddhism; Daisaku Ikeda; Soka Gakkai; human revolution; assimilation of the Western intellectual tradition.

Article History:

Received 25th January, 2026

Revised 28th April 2026

Accepted 25th May, 2026

Published 29th June 2026

How to Cite in APA Style:

Skvortsova, E. (2026). Human Revolution and the Reconstruction of Nichiren Buddhism as a Living Philosophy in Daisaku Ikeda's Thought. *Smaratungga: Journal of Education and Buddhist Studies*, 6(1), 21-40. doi: 10.53417/sjeb.v6i1.169

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Published by Center of Research and Publication of Smaratungga Buddhist Collage

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<https://doi.org/10.53417/sjeb.v6i1.169>

tradition, and Buddhist humanism within a unified philosophical framework.

Introduction

The modern world is experiencing a multidimensional crisis. This crisis manifests not only in economic instability, declining public trust in democracy, environmental degradation, and the threat of nuclear war, but also in more fundamental challenges, including crises of meaning, morality, and human life orientation. The *Democracy Report 2026* indicates that, by the end of 2025, the world contained 92 autocracies and 87 democracies, with approximately 74% of the global population living under autocratic regimes (V-Dem Institute, 2026). At the same time, the global environmental crisis has become increasingly urgent. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) emphasizes that reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 42% by 2030 and 57% by 2035 is necessary to keep global warming within the 1.5°C target (UNEP, 2024). Meanwhile, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reports that approximately 12,241 nuclear warheads existed worldwide at the beginning of 2025 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2025). These data suggest that the crisis of modernity extends beyond technical or institutional problems and fundamentally represents an ethical and existential crisis.

Under these circumstances, religion and spirituality have regained social relevance. Modernity is often associated with secularization, rationalization, and the declining authority of traditional religions. However, contemporary social realities demonstrate that religion has not disappeared from modern human life. The Pew Research Center reports that approximately 75.8% of the world's population identified with a particular religion in 2020, whereas 24.2% reported no religious affiliation (Hackett et al., 2025). These figures indicate that modernity has not eliminated religion but has transformed the ways in which people practice and experience it. Religion now operates not only through formal religious institutions but also through new spiritual movements, transnational religious communities, and increasingly individualized searches for meaning. Within this context, religion functions as a symbolic resource that provides frameworks of meaning through which individuals interpret suffering, uncertainty, and the crises of modern life (Bella, 1972).

One significant manifestation of this transformation is the emergence and expansion of modern Buddhist movements. Among these movements, Soka Gakkai occupies a prominent position as a Japanese lay Buddhist movement rooted in the teachings of *Nichiren Buddhism*. Soka Gakkai has developed not only as a religious community but also as a social, educational, cultural, and peace movement. Globally, the organization reports a presence in 192 countries and territories, with

approximately 8.27 million member households in Japan and about 3 million members outside Japan (Soka Gakkai, 2026). These figures indicate that Soka Gakkai should not be understood merely as a local Japanese religious phenomenon but rather as part of the globalization of modern Buddhism.

Soka Gakkai reached its most significant stage of development under Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023), who became the organization's third president in 1960. Ikeda further developed Soka Gakkai's ideological foundations through his interpretation of *Nichiren Buddhism*, particularly by advancing the concept of human revolution. According to Ikeda, genuine social transformation cannot be achieved solely through changes in political systems, economic structures, or social institutions. Instead, it must begin with the inner transformation of human beings. Consequently, human revolution represents a process of transforming individual consciousness, morality, and life orientation that subsequently influences broader social life. Ikeda argues that the effort to identify and realize the Buddha nature inherent in every individual constitutes the core of the human revolution movement (Daisaku Ikeda, 1976).

Previous scholarship on Soka Gakkai and modern Japanese Buddhism has developed along several major trajectories. The first trajectory examines Soka Gakkai as a Japanese new religious movement. Studies in this category primarily explore the historical emergence of Soka Gakkai, its relationship with *Nichiren Buddhism*, the roles of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, and the organization's transformation within modern Japanese society. Dobbelaere (2001), Gebert (2016), and McLaughlin (2019) demonstrate that Soka Gakkai cannot be separated from the sociohistorical context of modern Japan, particularly regarding education, lay religious mobilization, and the construction of collective identity based on Nichiren's teachings.

The second trajectory investigates Soka Gakkai as a transnational religious movement. Research within this category focuses on the globalization of Soka Gakkai, its expansion beyond Japan, and its ability to adapt *Nichiren Buddhism* to diverse cultural settings. Hammond and Machacek (1999), Métraux (2004; 2010), and Seager (2006) demonstrate that Soka Gakkai has evolved beyond a national religious organization into a global Buddhist community that promotes peace, education, intercultural dialogue, and social transformation.

The third trajectory focuses on Daisaku Ikeda's thought, particularly his ideas concerning human revolution, Buddhist humanism, the dignity of life, education, peace, and intercultural dialogue. These studies demonstrate that Ikeda functioned not only as an organizational leader but also as a thinker who sought to formulate Buddhism as a living philosophy for modern society. His philosophy places human beings at the center of social change by emphasizing that social transformation must originate from the renewal of individual consciousness and morality (D. Ikeda, 1974; McLaughlin, 2019; Seager, 2006).

Despite these important contributions, a significant research gap remains. Most previous studies have examined Soka Gakkai primarily as a religious organization, a social movement, or a global Buddhist community. Meanwhile, research on Ikeda has generally emphasized the humanistic, educational, and peace-oriented dimensions of his philosophy. Few studies have specifically investigated how Ikeda interpreted the Western intellectual tradition—including Christianity, modern philosophy, science, Kantianism, existentialism, and Marxism—as part of an ideological strategy to establish *Nichiren Buddhism* as a universal worldview.

In response to this gap, this study aims to analyze Daisaku Ikeda's thought as the third president of Soka Gakkai, with particular attention to his concept of human revolution and his interpretation of the Western intellectual tradition. This analysis demonstrates how Ikeda's teachings represent a significant tendency within modern Buddhism by positioning *Nichiren Buddhism* as a humanistic living philosophy that addresses the spiritual, moral, and social crises of modern society.

This study argues that Ikeda's interpretation of Western thought extends beyond intellectual dialogue or comparative studies of religion and philosophy. Instead, it constitutes a strategy of ideological assimilation. Ikeda neither completely rejects Western religion, philosophy, nor science; rather, he selectively appropriates, critiques, and reinterprets them within the framework of *Nichiren Buddhism*. Through this process, he seeks to present Buddhism as a living philosophy capable of addressing the crises of modernity. Consequently, the concept of human revolution in Ikeda's thought should be understood as both a religious and an ideological project. It emphasizes the inner transformation of individuals while simultaneously claiming relevance for broader social, cultural, educational, political, and civilizational transformation. By examining this process, the present study contributes to the scholarship on modern Buddhism by demonstrating that Soka Gakkai's Buddhist humanism emerges through a dynamic interaction among critiques of the West, the adaptation of modern thought, and the universalization of Nichiren's teachings.

Method

The unit of analysis in this study is Daisaku Ikeda's thought as the third president of Soka Gakkai, with particular emphasis on his concept of human revolution and his interpretation of the Western intellectual tradition. The analysis focuses on how Ikeda interpreted religion, philosophy, science, Kantianism, existentialism, and Marxism within the framework of *Nichiren Buddhism*. Accordingly, this study does not examine the empirical behavior of Soka Gakkai members; instead, it investigates the ideas, arguments, and ideological constructions presented in Ikeda's writings and in scholarly literature on Soka Gakkai and modern Japanese Buddhism. This unit of analysis aligns with the study's

objective of understanding how Ikeda's teachings represent a significant spiritual tendency within modern Buddhism.

This study employed a qualitative research design with a library research approach. The design was selected because the study aims to understand, interpret, and critically examine the thought of a major intellectual figure rather than to measure social phenomena statistically. The study adopted a historical-philosophical approach to situate Ikeda's thought within the historical development of Soka Gakkai, *Nichiren Buddhism*, and modern Japan. Accordingly, this study is more appropriately characterized as qualitative text-based research than as empirical field research.

The data consisted of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included Daisaku Ikeda's works that discuss Buddhism as a *living philosophy*, the concept of human revolution, the relationship between religion and science, dialogue on life, and the idea of global human unity. These works include *Kagaku to shukyo (Science and Religion)* (1969), *Bukkyo tetsugaku daijiten (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Buddhist Philosophy)* (1966), *Kakumei to sei to shi (Revolution: Life and Death)* (1973), *Global Unity of Mankind* (1973), *Buddhism: Living Philosophy* (1974), *Watakushi wa kō omou (I Think So)* (1975b), *Dialogue about Life* (1975a), *Soka Gakkai: His Ideals and Traditions* (1976), *Life, Mystery, Gem* (1982), and *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra: Dialogue with Students* (2016). The secondary sources consisted of scholarly publications on Soka Gakkai, *Nichiren Buddhism*, Japanese new religious movements, modern Buddhism, and relevant studies of the Western intellectual tradition, including Kantianism, existentialism, and Marxism. These secondary sources also included studies on religion and modern society (Bella, 1972; Weber, 2017), *Nichiren Buddhism* and Soka Gakkai (Ignatovich, 1978), major works of Western philosophy used in the analysis (Kant, 1980), and reference works on Japanese Buddhist traditions and Buddhist terminology (Daito Shuppansha, 1965; Sanseido, 1977; Trubnikova, 2005).

The data were collected through library research. The researcher identified, selected, read, and documented sources relevant to the research objectives. Ikeda's writings served as the principal sources for identifying key concepts, whereas the supporting literature provided historical, philosophical, and theoretical contexts. The collected data were subsequently classified into several analytical themes, including Ikeda's position within Soka Gakkai, the concept of human revolution, his critique of Western religion, his interpretation of Western philosophy, his views on science, and the relationship between his thought and Buddhist humanism.

The study analyzed the data using qualitative thematic analysis. The first stage involved data reduction by selecting textual materials relevant to the research objectives. The second stage involved categorization by organizing the data according to the major themes of Ikeda's thought. The final stage involved interpretation by examining the relationships among Ikeda's ideas, the teachings of

Nichiren Buddhism, and the Western intellectual tradition. Through these analytical stages, this study demonstrates that the concept of human revolution in Ikeda's thought represents not only a spiritual teaching but also an ideological project that presents *Nichiren Buddhism* as a living philosophy capable of addressing the challenges of modern society.

Result

Daisaku Ikeda in Soka Gakkai: Intellectual Biography and Ideological Context

Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023) occupies a pivotal position in the development of modern Soka Gakkai because his leadership was not only organizational but also ideological. After becoming the third president of Soka Gakkai in 1960, Ikeda continued to develop Nichiren's teachings as the organization's ideological foundation. Under his leadership, Soka Gakkai evolved beyond a Japanese religious movement and emerged as a modern Buddhist movement engaged in education, culture, peace, and international dialogue (Trubnikova, 2005; *Shinmeikai Kogo Jiten*, 1977). Consequently, Ikeda became a key figure who connected Nichiren's teachings with the spiritual and social needs of modern society.



Figure 1. Daisaku Ikeda

Source: <https://www.daisakuiked.org/main/profile/bio/bio-01.html>

Ikeda's intellectual contribution is reflected in the breadth of his published works. Publications such as *Kagaku to shukyo* (*Science and Religion*) (1969), *Bukkyo tetsugaku daijiten* (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of Buddhist Philosophy*) (1966), *Kakumei to sei to shi* (*Revolution: Life and Death*) (1973), *Global Unity of Mankind* (1973),

Buddhism: Living Philosophy (1974), *Watakushi wa kō omou (I Think So)* (1975b), *Dialogue about Life* (1975a), *Soka Gakkai: His Ideals and Traditions* (1976), *Life, Mystery, Gem* (1982), and *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra: Dialogue with Students* (2016) demonstrate his sustained effort to position Buddhism as a system of thought capable of addressing the challenges of modernity (Ikeda, 1965, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1982, 2016). Through these works, Ikeda presents Buddhism not merely as a religious doctrine but as a living philosophy capable of engaging with questions concerning humanity, science, ethics, education, and social transformation.

The ideological context of Ikeda's thought also appears in his strong commitment to education. The establishment of Soka University and other educational institutions demonstrates that his ideas extended beyond the religious sphere and sought to cultivate individuals through education and culture. Soka University's collaborations with educational institutions across the United States, Europe, Asia, and Russia further illustrate Ikeda's vision of Soka Gakkai as a globally oriented movement (Trubnikova, 2005). Within this framework, education functions as a crucial medium for translating the values of *Nichiren Buddhism* into a modern humanistic project.

Academic recognition further reinforces Ikeda's position as a leading figure in modern Buddhism. A. A. Huseynov describes Ikeda as "an outstanding researcher of Buddhism, a widely known thinker and practicing humanist in the world" (Huseynov, 2014). This assessment is significant because it recognizes Ikeda not only as a religious leader but also as a humanistic philosopher. Accordingly, Ikeda's intellectual biography provides an essential point of departure for understanding how Soka Gakkai has constructed its identity as a modern, humanistic, and transnational Buddhist movement.

Based on this position, Ikeda can be understood as the principal ideological architect of modern Soka Gakkai. He connected Nichiren's teachings with contemporary issues, including the spiritual crisis of modern society, materialism, science, education, and social transformation. Therefore, the discussions of human revolution, the critique of Western thought, and *Nichiren Buddhism* as a humanistic living philosophy cannot be separated from Ikeda's role in shaping the ideological direction of Soka Gakkai.

Human Revolution as the Foundation of Individual Transformation in Ikeda's Thought

The concept of human revolution occupies a central position in Daisaku Ikeda's philosophy because it serves as the ideological foundation of Soka Gakkai's activities. The primary objective of Soka Gakkai, both in Japan and internationally, is to promote the realization of human revolution. Rather than focusing primarily on transforming social, political, or economic systems, this concept emphasizes the

inner transformation of human beings. Accordingly, human revolution provides the principal framework for understanding how Ikeda connects religion, humanity, and social transformation (Daisaku Ikeda, 1969).

Table 1. Components of the Concept of Human Revolution in Daisaku Ikeda's Thought

Aspect	Description
Philosophical foundation	Rooted in <i>Tiantai Buddhism</i> and <i>Nichiren Buddhism</i> , both of which maintain that every individual possesses <i>Buddha nature</i> .
Primary objective	To awaken and realize <i>Buddha nature</i> as the foundation of individual transformation.
Critique of modernity	Material civilization encourages limitless human desires, resulting in an inner spiritual crisis.
Nature of revolution	Social transformation is insufficient without the renewal of human character and consciousness (<i>reforms of human nature are necessary</i>).
Orientation of change	Revolution begins with the spiritual transformation of the individual before generating broader social transformation.

Source: Compiled by the author based on Ikeda (1966, 1974, 1975, 1976).

The foundation of human revolution lies in the moral teachings of *Tiantai Buddhism*, which constitute an important basis of Nichiren's teachings (see Table 1). Within this framework, every human being possesses an inner potential that can be directed toward enlightenment. Ikeda identifies this potential as *Buddha nature*, which exists within every individual. In *Soka Gakkai: His Ideals and Traditions*, Ikeda describes the essence of the movement as the effort to achieve the "identification and realization of the Buddhist nature" within every individual (Ikeda, 1976, p. 17). This statement demonstrates that human revolution represents not merely a general moral ideal but a religious process through which individuals awaken their inherent Buddhist potential.

Ikeda further clarifies the significance of this inner transformation through his critique of modern material civilization. In *I Think So*, he argues that "material civilization stimulated an infinite number of desires" (Ikeda, 1975, p. 183). This observation indicates that, from Ikeda's perspective, modernity produces individuals driven by unlimited desires. Consequently, the crisis of modernity should be understood not only as a social or institutional crisis but also as an inner crisis that arises when individuals lose control over themselves.

This critique of modernity subsequently leads Ikeda to reject models of revolution that emphasize only external transformation. In *Bukkyō tetsugaku daijiten (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Buddhist Philosophy)*, he argues that revolutions

in social and political systems have failed to achieve genuine human happiness because "*reforms of human nature are necessary*" (Daisaku Ikeda, 1966, p. 650). This statement demonstrates that Ikeda does not dismiss the importance of social transformation; rather, he contends that political and social reforms remain insufficient unless they include the moral and spiritual renewal of human beings.

For this reason, Ikeda places the individual at the center of the transformative process. In *Buddhism, Living Philosophy*, he states, "The road of spiritual revolution is extremely close—it is inside you" (D. Ikeda, 1974, p. 94). This statement clarifies that the revolution envisioned by Ikeda does not begin with external social structures but with the spiritual transformation of individual consciousness. Accordingly, human revolution shifts the focus of change away from social structures and toward the cultivation of consciousness, moral responsibility, self-discipline, and the realization of *Buddha nature* within every individual.

Table 2. The Evolution of the Conceptual Argument of Human Revolution in Daisaku Ikeda's Thought

Stage of Argument	Ikeda's Main Idea	Implication
Human potential	Every individual possesses <i>Buddha nature</i> .	Transformation begins within the individual.
Critique of modernity	Materialism generates limitless desires.	The modern crisis is fundamentally an inner spiritual crisis.
Critique of external revolution	Social reform is insufficient without human transformation.	Revolution must encompass moral and spiritual dimensions.
Human revolution	Revolution represents the spiritual transformation of the individual.	The individual becomes the primary agent of change.
Social impact	Individual transformation provides the foundation for societal transformation.	Social transformation originates from human transformation.

Source: Developed by the author based on Ikeda (1966, 1974, 1975, 1976).

Table 2 illustrates that Ikeda constructs the concept of human revolution through a progressive sequence of interconnected arguments. The argument begins with the recognition of *Buddha nature* as the fundamental potential inherent in every individual. It then develops through a critique of modern materialism and the assertion that social transformation cannot produce genuine happiness without the renewal of human character. Within this framework, human revolution functions as a process of spiritual transformation that serves as a prerequisite for broader

societal change. Consequently, Ikeda locates the starting point of transformation not in changes to social structures but in the transformation of human consciousness as the foundation of enduring social progress.

The analysis of Daisaku Ikeda's writings demonstrates that human revolution represents an ideological construct that positions individual transformation as the prerequisite for social transformation. Within this framework, societal change does not primarily result from political, economic, or institutional reforms but emerges as the consequence of renewing human consciousness through the realization of *Buddha nature*. Accordingly, Ikeda reorients the concept of revolution away from external structural change and toward the moral and spiritual transformation of individuals as the central driver of change. This construction demonstrates that human revolution functions not only as an ethical concept or religious teaching but also as a philosophical foundation that connects the practice of *Nichiren Buddhism* with Soka Gakkai's broader vision of social transformation.

Ikeda's Critique and Assimilation of Western Intellectual Traditions

Daisaku Ikeda interpreted the Western intellectual tradition through two complementary strategies: critique and assimilation. He employed critique to expose the limitations of Western religion, philosophy, science, and social theory, while he used assimilation to incorporate selected elements that he considered compatible with *Nichiren Buddhism*. Through this approach, Ikeda neither rejected the Western tradition outright nor accepted it uncritically. Instead, he reinterpreted it through a Buddhist philosophical framework.

In the field of religion, Ikeda criticized the spiritual dominance of Christianity, particularly the role of the medieval Church, which he believed had suppressed intellectual freedom and hindered the development of scientific knowledge. In *Science and Religion*, Ikeda argued that "mysticism and the religious influence of Christianity" had suppressed science and caused Western philosophy to enter a period of stagnation (Daisaku Ikeda, 1969, p. 71).

This critique suggests that, from Ikeda's perspective, institutional Western religion failed to address the needs of modern humanity because it remained bound to transcendent authority and dogmatic structures. Nevertheless, Ikeda did not reject Christianity entirely. In his dialogue with Arnold Toynbee, he interpreted Jesus Christ as a figure closely related to the *Bodhisattva* because both embodied the altruistic principle of "benefit for others" (Toynbee & Ikeda, 1975).

This interpretation cannot be separated from Ikeda's understanding of the role of the *Bodhisattva* within *Mahayana Buddhism*. In the same dialogue, Ikeda explained that the purpose of a *Bodhisattva* extends beyond attaining personal enlightenment to guiding all humanity toward Buddhahood. He stated:

"Northern Buddhist thought teaches that all life by nature includes the Ten States of Life. Consequently, all life, including human life of course, has concealed within it the supremely worthy universal life force. This means that all life deserves respect. All human beings, by practicing the Buddhist Law, can manifest the life of the Buddha state. This idea is the basis of the concept of the kind of human revolution that, I insist, is needed by all mankind." (Toynbee & Ikeda, 1975, pp. 281–282).

This passage demonstrates that Ikeda did not regard the *Bodhisattva* as a figure detached from ordinary human existence. Instead, he understood the *Bodhisattva* as an ethical model that encourages every individual to awaken *Buddha nature* for the benefit of others. On this basis, Ikeda identified a common ethical foundation between the *Bodhisattva* and Jesus Christ, viewing both as embodiments of a life devoted to service and the welfare of humanity.

The same pattern also appears in Ikeda's interpretation of modern Western philosophy. He criticized rationalism and empiricism because, in his view, they excessively absolutized human cognitive capacity. For example, he criticized Descartes for separating humanity from nature and for portraying living beings as complex machines governed solely by mechanical laws (Daisaku Ikeda, 1976). This critique indicates that Ikeda regarded modern philosophy as one of the roots of the crisis of modernity because it elevated reason and sensory experience as the primary sources of knowledge while neglecting humanity's spiritual dimension.

Nevertheless, Ikeda selectively appropriated elements of Western philosophy that he considered compatible with Buddhism. He regarded Kant as the Western philosopher whose thought most closely paralleled Buddhist epistemology, particularly regarding ethics, duty, self-discipline, and conscious moral activity. Within this framework, Kantian ethics represents a point of convergence between Western morality and Buddhist morality (D. Ikeda, 1974; Kant, 1964). Beyond Kant, Ikeda also interpreted existentialism as a philosophical tradition that shared a partial affinity with the Buddhist concept of *tyutai*. In *I Think So*, he stated that existentialism bears a "partial and superficial resemblance" to *tyutai*, particularly regarding concepts of humanity, individuality, and existence (D. Ikeda, 1975b). These observations demonstrate that Ikeda not only criticized Western philosophy but also appropriated selected concepts to reinforce his own Buddhist framework.

In the field of science, Ikeda criticized modern science because it focused excessively on the material dimension of existence, namely *shiki*, while neglecting the spiritual dimension, *shin*. He argued that genuine harmony can emerge only through the unity of *shiki* and *shin* within the concept of *funi* (Daito Shuppansha, 1965; D. Ikeda, 1974). Ikeda further asserted that *Nichiren Buddhism* does not conflict with science and, instead, contains universal principles capable of explaining the fundamental laws of reality (Daisaku Ikeda, 1966). Accordingly, he

criticized modern science for its materialistic orientation while simultaneously employing scientific discourse to strengthen his claim that Buddhism offers a more comprehensive worldview.

In the socio-political sphere, Ikeda also engaged Marxism selectively. He acknowledged Marx's strength in analyzing capitalism but rejected Marxism because it emphasized structural transformation while failing to address the transformation of human nature itself. In the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Buddhist Philosophy*, Ikeda argued that revolutions in social and political systems had failed to achieve genuine human happiness because "*reforms of human nature are necessary*" (Daisaku Ikeda, 1966). Likewise, in *Revolution: Life and Death*, he maintained that socio-political revolutions cannot guarantee the existence of individuals as autonomous and meaningful subjects (D Ikeda, 1973). This critique demonstrates that Ikeda used Marxism primarily as a comparative framework through which he presented human revolution as an alternative to Western socio-political revolution.

Table 3. Ikeda's Pattern of Critique and Assimilation of Western Intellectual Traditions

Western Tradition	Ikeda's Critique	Assimilated Elements	Purpose within the Framework of Nichiren Buddhism
Christianity	Criticized the dominance of the Church and its dogmatic authority for restricting intellectual freedom.	Interpreted Jesus Christ as sharing an ethical affinity with the <i>Bodhisattva</i> through the principle of "benefit for others."	Demonstrated the common altruistic values shared by Christianity and Buddhism.
Modern Philosophy	Criticized rationalism and empiricism for neglecting humanity's spiritual dimension.	Regarded Kantian ethics and selected existentialist ideas as compatible with Buddhist morality.	Expanded the philosophical legitimacy of Buddhism through dialogue with Western philosophy.
Modern Science	Criticized materialism for emphasizing only <i>shiki</i> while neglecting <i>shin</i> .	Viewed science as compatible with Buddhist principles when interpreted holistically.	Demonstrated the compatibility of Buddhism with scientific development.

Marxism	Criticized social revolution failing to transform human nature.	Accepted for critique capitalism redirected it toward the concept of human revolution.	Marx's of but transformation constitutes the foundation of social transformation.	Affirmed that
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Source: Developed by the author based on Ikeda (1965), Ikeda (1966), Ikeda (1973), Ikeda (1974), Ikeda (1975), Kant (1965), Toynbee and Ikeda (1976), and Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary (1965).

Table 3 demonstrates that Ikeda's engagement with Western intellectual traditions does not follow a pattern of complete rejection or unconditional acceptance. Instead, he adopts a selective approach that combines critique and assimilation simultaneously. He does not position Christianity, modern philosophy, science, or Marxism as intellectual opponents to be dismissed. Rather, he treats them as traditions that can be critically evaluated while also providing concepts that clarify the principles of *Nichiren Buddhism*. Within this framework, critique exposes the epistemological and moral limitations of Western traditions, whereas assimilation enables Ikeda to incorporate values that he considers compatible with Buddhist teachings into the framework of human revolution. This pattern indicates that the universality of Ikeda's philosophy does not arise from rejecting Western modernity but from reinterpreting it through a philosophical framework that positions *Nichiren Buddhism* as capable of engaging with, accommodating, and ultimately transcending diverse modern intellectual traditions.

Daisaku Ikeda's writings demonstrate that the relationship between *Nichiren Buddhism* and Western intellectual traditions rests upon a dual strategy of critique and assimilation operating simultaneously. Ikeda employs critique to reveal the limitations of Western religion, philosophy, science, and social theory in explaining the nature of humanity, while assimilation enables him to incorporate ideas that he regards as compatible with Buddhist principles without compromising the fundamental identity of Nichiren's teachings. Through this strategy, Ikeda does not treat the West as a tradition to be rejected but rather as an intellectual dialogue partner whose ideas can be selectively adopted, reinterpreted, and reconstructed within the framework of human revolution. Consequently, Western thought functions in Ikeda's writings neither as an external source of legitimacy nor merely as an object of criticism. Instead, it becomes an integral component in constructing a philosophical framework that broadens the universal scope of *Nichiren Buddhism* in responding to the challenges of modern humanity.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that Daisaku Ikeda's thought cannot be separated from his position as the third president of *Soka Gakkai* and the movement's principal ideological architect. Ikeda not only expanded *Soka Gakkai* as a religious organization but also transformed it into a modern Buddhist movement engaged in education, culture, peace, and international dialogue. Through his writings, Ikeda presented *Nichiren Buddhism* not merely as a religious doctrine but as a value system capable of addressing questions concerning humanity, science, ethics, education, and social transformation (D. Ikeda, 1973, 1974; D Ikeda, 1973, 1975b, 1975a, 1976, 1982; Daisaku Ikeda, 2016, 1966, 1969, 1976).

The findings of this study center on three major arguments. First, human revolution constitutes the core of Ikeda's philosophy because it positions the inner transformation of the individual as the foundation of social change. Second, Ikeda interpreted Western intellectual traditions through a dual strategy of critique and assimilation. He criticized the West for contributing to the crisis of modernity while simultaneously incorporating selected elements—including Kantian ethics, the figure of Jesus as a *Bodhisattva*, existentialism, modern science, and aspects of Marx's critique of capitalism—into the philosophical framework of *Nichiren Buddhism* (D. Ikeda, 1974; D Ikeda, 1973, 1975b; Daisaku Ikeda, 1966, 1969; Toynbee & Ikeda, 1975). Third, Ikeda ultimately reconstructed *Nichiren Buddhism* as a living philosophy grounded in modern humanism, placing human dignity, inner renewal, and social transformation at the center of its teachings.

This pattern emerged because Ikeda sought to address two objectives simultaneously: strengthening the ideological foundation of *Soka Gakkai* while establishing the relevance of *Nichiren Buddhism* for modern society. Internally, human revolution provided *Soka Gakkai* with a doctrinal foundation by asserting that social transformation must begin with the realization of *Buddha nature* within each individual. In *Soka Gakkai: His Ideals and Traditions*, Ikeda stated that the movement of human revolution consists of the struggle to identify and realize *Buddha nature* in every individual (Daisaku Ikeda, 1976). Externally, his critique and assimilation of Western thought enabled him to construct a universal intellectual language that could be understood beyond the Japanese cultural context while preserving *Nichiren Buddhism's* claim to be a comprehensive philosophy of life.

The relationship between human revolution and Ikeda's critique of the West also becomes evident in the way he distinguished his concept of revolution from modern socio-political revolutions. For example, although he acknowledged Marxism's analytical strength in explaining capitalism, he rejected it because it failed to address the fundamental nature of human beings. Ikeda argued that revolutions in social and political systems had not succeeded in achieving genuine human happiness because "*reforms of human nature are necessary*" (Daisaku Ikeda, 1966).

Accordingly, human revolution emerged as an alternative to external revolution. Rather than advocating structural transformation as the starting point, Ikeda emphasized the renewal of human beings as moral and spiritual subjects.

This study supports previous scholarship that identifies *Soka Gakkai* as a Japanese new religious movement that underwent modernization and expanded its social influence. Dobbelaere (2001) described *Soka Gakkai* as a lay Buddhist movement that evolved into a religious organization with a strong social structure. Similarly, McLaughlin (2019) demonstrated that *Soka Gakkai* constructed its collective identity through the narrative of human revolution and intensive organizational practices. However, the present study offers a different emphasis by examining *Soka Gakkai* not only from organizational and sociological perspectives but also through the ways in which Ikeda established its ideological legitimacy by engaging with Western intellectual traditions. This perspective constitutes the principal contribution of this study: it interprets Ikeda's critique and assimilation of Western thought as an intellectual strategy for presenting *Nichiren Buddhism* as a universal philosophy of life.

Furthermore, this study extends Seager's (2006) analysis of the globalization of *Soka Gakkai's* Buddhist humanism. Seager argued that Ikeda played a pivotal role in expanding *Soka Gakkai* globally through dialogue, education, and peace initiatives. The present study supports this interpretation while adding that the globalization of *Soka Gakkai* occurred not only through institutions and international networks but also through discursive construction. Ikeda transformed Western religion, philosophy, science, and social theory into both dialogue partners and objects of intellectual assimilation in order to reinforce the philosophical position of *Nichiren Buddhism*. In this respect, the findings also resonate with the arguments of Bella (1992) and Weber (2017), who maintained that religion can function as an ethical force capable of transforming secular society.

The findings of this study can be interpreted through three principal dimensions: historical, social, and ideological. From a historical perspective, Ikeda's thought forms part of the postwar transformation of Japanese Buddhism. *Soka Gakkai*, founded in 1930 as the *Value-Creating Education Society*, underwent substantial reorganization after World War II and expanded through conversion campaigns under Jōsei Toda, who connected the *Lotus Sutra* with Japan's postwar reconstruction (Stone, 2023). Under Ikeda's leadership, this transformation evolved from religious exclusivism and the practice of *shakubuku* toward a more adaptive, educational, dialogical, and transnational strategy (Ignatovich, 1978). The expansion of *Soka Gakkai International (SGI)* after 1975 to more than 190 countries, its reported membership of more than eight million households in Japan, and the establishment of *Komeito* in 1964 demonstrate that *Soka Gakkai* extended its activities beyond the religious sphere into the broader arena of modern social and political life (Baffelli, 2010; Benod, 2015; Michiaki, 2010). Within this historical

context, Ikeda reformulated Nichiren's teachings into a universal language centered on education, peace, and interreligious dialogue (Gebert, 2022; Kim & Kim, 2024).

From a social perspective, Ikeda's philosophy positions modern human beings as subjects confronting spiritual, moral, and existential crises. His critique of materialism, limitless desire, and socio-political revolution indicates that he interpreted the problems of modernity not merely as structural issues but also as problems concerning the formation of the human person. Consequently, human revolution functions as a social concept that connects individual inner transformation with social renewal through self-empowerment, moral consciousness, and collective well-being (Ehrhardt, Klein, McLaughlin, & Reed, 2014; D. Métraux, 2013). The global development of *SGI* further demonstrates that this concept can adapt to diverse cultural and social contexts beyond Japan (Barone, 2007). Accordingly, religion in Ikeda's philosophy extends beyond the private sphere and becomes a moral force that supports education, peace, sustainability, social reconciliation, and societal transformation (Fisker-Nielsen, 2021; D. A. Métraux, 2012).

From an ideological perspective, Ikeda sought to position *Nichiren Buddhism* as a value system that offers a more comprehensive worldview than Western intellectual traditions. His critiques of Christianity, rationalism, empiricism, materialistic science, and Marxism function as strategies for presenting Buddhism as a universal philosophy of life. This pattern corresponds with *Soka Gakkai's* capacity to adapt ideologically across diverse cultural contexts—including South Africa, Argentina, South Korea, Italy, Cuba, and Hong Kong—while maintaining its core principles of the dignity of life, self-empowerment, peace, and human interconnectedness (Dessi, 2020; Ng, 2018; Rodriguez Plasencia, 2015). Under Ikeda's leadership, this strategy became evident through religious pluralism, interfaith dialogue, peace advocacy, support for international humanitarian law, nuclear disarmament, and environmental sustainability (Han & Yoo, 2025; Kinoshita, 2021). Accordingly, Ikeda's ideological project operates by criticizing the West as a source of the crisis of modernity while simultaneously appropriating selected Western ideas and global values to reinforce the universal claims of *Nichiren Buddhism*.

Accordingly, Ikeda's philosophy performs an important function by offering a model of transformation that places human beings at the center of social change. The concept of human revolution emphasizes moral responsibility, self-discipline, and inner renewal. In modern societies characterized by materialism, competition, and crises of meaning, this concept serves as an ethical critique of dehumanization. Nevertheless, the philosophy also presents several potential limitations. Ikeda's strategy of assimilation risks reducing other intellectual traditions to the conceptual framework of *Nichiren Buddhism*. When figures such as Jesus, Kant, existentialism, modern science, and Marx are interpreted primarily as stages approaching Buddhist

truth, the original complexity of these traditions may become oversimplified. Furthermore, the claim that *Nichiren Buddhism* can resolve all crises of modernity may encourage an excessively comprehensive ideological vision. This tension becomes apparent when a humanism grounded in respect for human dignity moves too quickly toward a religious-humanistic utopia by attributing structural problems—such as social inequality, political power, and the dynamics of modern economic systems—primarily to deficiencies in individual moral renewal.

In light of these limitations, future scholarship should approach Ikeda's philosophy critically, dialogically, and contextually. The concept of human revolution remains an important contribution to modern Buddhism because it emphasizes inner transformation, human dignity, moral responsibility, and humanistic education. However, scholars should examine this philosophy as a historical and ideological construct rather than accepting it uncritically as a normative doctrine. Consequently, Ikeda's engagement with Jesus, Kant, existentialism, modern science, and Marxism should be interpreted as an invitation to dialogue among intellectual traditions on an equal footing rather than as an effort to position those traditions merely as preliminary stages leading toward Buddhist truth. Furthermore, scholars should balance the concept of human revolution with structural analyses so that social, economic, and political problems are not reduced exclusively to questions of individual morality. Within educational contexts, Ikeda's humanistic values can support reflective, critical, and non-indoctrinative pedagogical approaches, thereby allowing *Nichiren Buddhism* to be studied as a source of modern ethical thought while remaining open to pluralism, intellectual freedom, and scholarly criticism.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Daisaku Ikeda's thought positions *Nichiren Buddhism* not merely as a religious doctrine but as a living philosophy grounded in modern humanistic values. The principal finding demonstrates that the concept of human revolution constitutes the ideological core of *Soka Gakkai* because it places individual inner transformation at the foundation of social change. Through this concept, Ikeda argues that modern crises cannot be resolved solely through political, economic, or institutional reforms but must begin with the moral and spiritual transformation of human beings.

The primary scholarly contribution of this study lies in its critical interpretation of Ikeda's thought as both a humanistic project and an ideological construction. The findings demonstrate that Ikeda constructed *Nichiren Buddhism* as a universal value system through two complementary strategies: criticizing Western intellectual traditions and assimilating selected Western ideas into a Buddhist framework. He criticized Christianity, rationalism, empiricism, materialistic science, and Marxism because he believed that these traditions could

not adequately address the crises of modern humanity. At the same time, he incorporated elements such as the altruism of Jesus, Kantian ethics, existentialism's concern for the human condition, modern science, and Marx's critique of capitalism to reinforce his claim that *Nichiren Buddhism* represents a humanistic *living philosophy*.

This study also has several limitations. It focuses primarily on textual and historical-philosophical analysis and therefore does not examine how members of *Soka Gakkai* understand and practice Ikeda's ideas in their everyday lives. In addition, the study does not systematically compare Ikeda's philosophy with other forms of modern Buddhism outside Japan. Future research may therefore employ ethnographic, comparative, or reception-based approaches to investigate how the concepts of human revolution and Buddhist humanism are received, negotiated, and practiced within *Soka Gakkai* communities across diverse social and cultural contexts.

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