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The Roots of Ambivalence: Makiguchi Tsunesaburō's Heterodox Discourse and Praxis of "Religion"

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Abstract: In the post-World War II era, Sōka Gakkai has deployed the terminology and concept of "religion" (*shūkyō* 宗教) in a variety of contexts and to a variety of ends. Do these positions simply reflect a post-war strategic stance? Do they have deeper historical and philosophical roots? A careful reading of key texts by founding president Makiguchi Tsunesaburō 牧口常三郎 (1871–1944) suggests that, from its inception as the Value-Creating Education Society (*Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai* 創価教育学会) in the 1930s, the movement has occupied an ambiguous space, relative to the conceptualization and practice of "religion", as these were imported at the start of the Meiji Era (1868–1912), adopted and indigenized to respond to the cultural, social and political exigencies of modernizing Japan. Examples of Makiguchi's heterodoxy, relative to the established understanding of "religion" and its role, include: the rejection of specific ideas of "religion", in relation to education and science, as represented in the writings of such intellectuals as Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 and Ishiwara Atsushi 石原純; refusal to accept the official definition of Shintō as non-religion; positing an essential continuity between faith/trust among human subjects and faith directed at ideas and objects typically considered "religious"; promoting the idea of worldly benefit, as a result of faith in and practice of "religion". A careful reading of Makiguchi's complex, and often heterodox, discourse, relative to the conceptual category of "religion", can frame a more nuanced interpretation of his ultimate heterodoxy—his rejection of the Ise Shrine amulet, an act for which he was arrested and confined to prison in July 1943. It can also clarify the basis for the Sōka Gakkai's post-war deployments of the concept of religion, and create a more flexible and expansive interpretative space for considering the organization's discourse and praxis in the post-war era.



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1. Introduction: Sources of Post-War Sōka Gakkai's Approach to Concept of "Religion"

The Sōka Gakkai has had a complex and fluid relationship with the concept of "religion" (*shūkyō* 宗教). At times, it has drawn a deliberate distance between its own self-definition and the idea of religion/*shūkyō*, as received and accepted in Japan. At times, it has referenced non-Japanese, Western norms, of individual and corporate "religious" life, as a vehicle for criticizing the "corruption" of traditional Japanese Buddhism. In other cases, it has asserted a distinct Buddhist identity that stands in contrast with aspects of Western Christianity. It has further posited a universal ideal of religion, based on an assumption of common aspirations shared by the founders of the (Axial) traditions. Finally, the organization has interacted with the post-war democratic political dispensation in unique and complex ways (see Fisker-Nielsen on this issue). There has also been an embrace of these worldly results or benefits of faith, using such terms as "faith finds expression in daily life" (*shinjin soku seikatu* 信心即生活) or "actual proof or verification" (*jisshō* 実証).

Were these engagements with the concept of "religion" a post-war innovation and development, or do they have deeper historical and philosophical roots? A careful reading of key texts of Makiguchi Tsunesaburō 牧口常三郎 (1871–1944), founder of the pre-war

predecessor of the Sōka Gakkai, the Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai (“Value-Creating Education Society”), suggests that he held an ambiguous position, relative to the concept of “religion” as it was imported, adopted and indigenized to the cultural, social and political exigencies of modernizing Japan. This paper will look at the ways in which Makiguchi’s approach to “religion” was part of a larger program that included attempts to reframe key concepts of modernity, including belief, knowledge, science, and education.

2. Makiguchi’s Relationship with Prevailing Conceptions of “Religion” in Japan

In parallel with the global questioning of “religion” as a meaningful, analytical category (Asad 1993, 2003, 2018; Fitzgerald 2000), the process by which the concept was introduced to and received in Japan as *shūkyō* 宗教 has been analyzed in detail, by a range of scholars, among them Isomae (2012, 2014), Josephson (2006, 2012), and Horii (2016, 2018). Generally, and in ways that span both the conceptual frameworks as they developed in the West, and Japan’s particular adaptation, the secular has been understood to comprise the visible, the concrete and external, the material, the public, the legal, the rational and the scientific. Religion, in contrast, is defined as the realm of the invisible, the ephemeral, the spiritual, the private and interior, the moral, and affective. Religion’s claims of access to revealed truth have classically been contrasted with the confirmed hypotheses that are the ideal goal of scientific inquiry, and these two epistemological modes have been assumed to be incommensurate.

While religion/*shūkyō* represented a conceptual complex of foreign origin for Japan, like any such cultural material, it was received and adapted to the prevailing socio-political exigencies of the time, in order to develop what Yasumaru Yoshio 安丸良夫 (1934–2016) termed “Japanese-style separation of politics and religion” (Yasumaru 1979, p. 209). The lynchpin of this system, which grew up around the 1889 Constitution and the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education (*kyōiku chokugo* 教育勅語), was the status of Shintō as a non-religion (*shintō hishūkyō setsu* 神道非宗教説). This enabled the Japanese state to declare and implement a recognizable version of religious freedom, as demanded by the Western powers, as a condition for the renegotiation of the earlier unequal trade treaties, while still being able to insist on adherence to an emperor-centered worldview and performance of associated Shintō rituals, as the natural duty of citizens and rites of the state. Josephson has termed this “the Shintō secular” (Josephson 2012, p. 132). This language is apt, insofar as the secular is that which is simply assumed to be, to exist as the right and natural order of things. In modern societies, the secular is the realm where the parameters of our acceptable behavior are defined and enforced, and public education is the established venue for inculcating these secular values in the younger generations. In pre-1945 Japan, the secular that was transmitted and fostered in elementary schools was, to a large degree, this Shintō secular. The corollary was that “religion” and “education” constituted incommensurate realms and that, should they come into conflict, “education” must prevail. Makiguchi was involved in elementary education—as a normal school student and teacher, as a principal in multiple schools in Tokyo, and as author of works on pedagogical theory—throughout his career, and this positioning is relevant when thinking about his relationship to “religion”.

Makiguchi regularly used the term “religion/*shūkyō*” in his writings, including as a descriptor for the Buddhism he embraced and practiced. However, he does not seem to have accepted or been willing to remain within the conceptual bounds of either the putatively universal religious–secular binary or its Japanese implementation. As a most salient example, he consistently failed to accord Shintō a place of special privilege. Following his 1928 conversion to Nichiren Shōshū 日蓮正宗,¹ Makiguchi turned an increasingly critical eye to Shintō, for example, stating, in an essay published in December 1941, that:

We must strictly avoid following ideologies of uncertain origin that cannot be substantiated by actual proof—even if they may be the most time-honored tradition—and thereby sacrificing the precious life of the entire community of self and others. In this sense, the question of [compulsory worship at] Shintō shrines must be re-considered as a matter of great urgency. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, 10:26)

He also urged members of the Value-Creating Education Society to reject the amulets of the imperial progenitor deity, Tenshōdaijin 天照大神, issued by the Ise Shrine and personally engaged in acts of literal iconoclasm. It was statements and acts such as these that led to Makiguchi being arrested and charged with lese majesty and violation of the Peace Preservation Law (*Chian ijihō* 治安維持法), in the summer of 1943 (Origins 2017, pp. 433–36).

In a less overt, but still profound, stance of heterodoxy, he did not accept the idea that “religion” and “education” were fundamentally incompatible. The roots and implications of this approach will be examined in detail below, but Makiguchi’s views on this point, as well as his own long career in education, led him to see teachers as prime candidates for his Buddhist propagation activities. Given that elementary education was seen as the front line in the state’s efforts to instill desired models of citizenship, teachers were the object of particular and consistent concern and observation on the part of the authorities. Thus, the promotion among them of any interpretation of religion that did not now hew closely to the established parameters was a significantly transgressive activity.

At the same time, however, at no point did Makiguchi advocate for the teaching of Buddhist content in schools. Rather, he saw the “religious revolution” (*shūkyō kakumei* 宗教革命) that the practice of Nichiren Buddhism could bring about in teachers’ lives as enabling an “educational revolution” (*kyōiku kakumei* 教育革命) that would lead to the reorientation and rejuvenation of society. Approaches such as this show Makiguchi simultaneously remaining within, while standing well outside, the officially established parameters of “religion”.²

Professionally and personally, Makiguchi would have been fully aware of the negative limitations implicit in the official definition and positioning of “religion” in Japan. As discussed below, he would have experienced, at least peripherally, the fall-out from the 1890 Uchimura imperial disrespect incident and been directly subject to the prohibition on the teaching or promotion of specific religions in schools, issued by the Ministry of Education in 1899. From his earliest writings, however, there are no statements of outright rejection or dismissal of practices and attitudes that could fall into the heading of “religion” or “religious”. Rather, he consistently voices a recognition of “religion” as an important element of individual and social life.

As another example of where Makiguchi adhered to the general understanding of “religion”, he accepted the distinction between “religion” and “superstition”, with the former being marked by some degree of compatibility with science and scientific rationality (see Josephson (2006)). From the mid-1930s, however, he makes repeated reference to the fivefold comparison (Jpn. *gojū no sōtai* 五重相対) developed by Zhiyi 智顗 (538–97 CE), founder of the T’ien T’ai school, and frequently cited by Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–82). The first comparison in this system is between Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachings, and Makiguchi places both Christianity and Shintō in the latter category, noting that they are ignorant of the law of causality, which Makiguchi saw as central, both to Buddhism and to a scientific understanding of the world (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1937] 8:43–44).

Makiguchi explicitly rejected the Neo-Kantian philosopher Wilhelm Windelband’s (1848–1915) positing of “the sacred” as an independent realm of value, declaring in his four-volume *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy* (*Sōka kyōikugaku taikei* 『創価教育学大系』 (1930–34) hereafter *Pedagogy*) that:

Other than freeing people and the world from suffering, what meaning could there be for the existence of religion in society? Isn’t freeing people from suffering the value of gain? Isn’t freeing the world from suffering the moral value [of good]? (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1931] 5:356)³

The details of Makiguchi’s theory of value are discussed elsewhere (Gebert and Joffe 2007; Goulah and Gebert 2009), but in simplest terms, the value of “gain” was, for Makiguchi, that which expands and enhances the experience of life for an individual and the “good” was this realized in the context of an entire society. As the quoted passage

indicates, Makiguchi saw the collective social life of humans as the place where religions needed to prove their worth and justify their existence.

Makiguchi further saw an essential continuity between the trust and confidence that humans direct at each other in our social life and the trust and confidence that is directed at ideas or objects, typically considered “religious”.

As he wrote in 1935:

When we speak of religious faith, this may appear as the monopoly of religionists, and thus something that youthful educators wish to distance themselves from, but if we speak of belief, trust, confidence, or conviction, we understand that these form the necessary foundations for daily life. In relations between persons where trust has not been established, even if our caution is not as extreme as when faced by wild beasts, there is always the possibility that the other person will engage in hostile actions toward us, and we can never fully let down our guard. While it may be possible to initiate business relations where trust has not been established, these will be of no value to either party. In the same way, the educational efforts of teachers who do not have the confidence of students—however enthusiastic they may be—will not merely be futile, they will actually be harmful. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, 8:413)

Likewise, he considered the realm of daily life and living (*seikatsu* 生活) to be of such an expansive scope and nature as to embrace forms of experience that would typically fall under the rubric of “religion”. A necessary corollary to this stance is that, even truths assumed to be of a religious nature can and should be subjected to testing and verification, within the experience of daily life. In this sense, Makiguchi, thus, did not recognize the ontological division of natural and supernatural—a distinction historically central to the Western understanding of “religion” and one expressed in various ways in its Japanese localization.

3. Exposure to the Christian Worldview

The community of Christian believers, including a number of prominent intellectuals, active in Sapporo during the years when Makiguchi lived there, studying and teaching at the Hokkaido Normal School (1889–1901), offered him direct exposure to modes of belief and to teachings that were new, both to Makiguchi personally and to the Japanese cultural landscape generally.

Years later, in 1935, he noted that in his youth, many of the teachers and friends for whom he felt affection and admiration were Christians (Makiguchi 1981–1988, 8:405). Despite this personal contact and resonance, Makiguchi never became a Christian. It would seem that he was unable to bring himself to believe in an anthropomorphic creator deity, something he saw as lacking in objectivity and violative of the laws of causality (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1931; 1936] 5:359–60; 9:65).

Although he never converted, his exposure to these early Christians, who were among the most cosmopolitan members of their generation, had an important impact in opening him to larger, global perspectives. It also exposed him to modes of faith commitment—a sense of the necessary social relevance of faith and an uncompromising adherence to the tenets of personal belief in the face of opposition—that were harder to discern in the established schools of Japanese Buddhism.

The Sapporo Agricultural College was founded in September 1875, with the aim of introducing modern, Western agricultural practices to Hokkaido, facilitating its settlement and development. Through the influence of its first president, the American William S. Clark (1826–86), this institution also proved to be a conduit for the introduction of Christianity into the Hokkaido region. A community of Protestant Christians developed and was active in Sapporo during the years Makiguchi lived, studied and taught there. Among the famous Christian graduates of the college were the educator and diplomat Nitobe Inazō 新戸部稲造 (1862–1933) and the educator and author Uchimura Kanzō 内村鑑三 (1861–1930).

In January 1891, Uchimura was witnessed failing to bow to the Imperial Rescript on Education and the photographic portrait of the emperor at the unveiling ceremony for the Rescript held at the elite First High School in Tokyo, where he was a teacher. As a devout Christian, Uchimura was unable, despite his strong patriotic feelings, to engage in what he saw as idolatry. His apparent lack of respect for the imperial person outraged the student body, who verbally assaulted and physically threatened Uchimura, leading to his resignation.

The scandal of Uchimura's actions reverberated through Japanese society and sparked renewed debate on the respective roles of "religion" and "education". Like religion/*shūkyō*, education (*kyōiku* 教育) was a new category of lived experience in Japan, developed in response to the deep-reaching changes and upheavals of the Meiji Era. The 1889 Constitution and 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education represented the consolidation of elite consensus, on the broad outlines of the kind of nation Japan was to be and what was granted to, and expected of, her citizens, but much remained inchoate and fluid. The Uchimura incident occasioned the further clarification of key contours of the new dispensation, given authoritative expression by Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎, in his 1893 "Clash of Education and Religion" (*Kyōiku to shūkyō no shōtotsu* 『教育と宗教の衝突』). In this work, Inoue condemns any expression of Christian belief that could run counter to the amorphously defined natural duties of Japanese imperial subjects. As such, it represents a thoroughgoing confinement of "religion" to the private, interior realms of the individual.

Nowhere in his extant writings does Makiguchi make direct reference to Uchimura's refusal or the intense repercussions that followed. It is only natural to assume, however, that this incident, which was for some years, the topic of heated discussion in educational circles, would have impinged on Makiguchi's consciousness, both in his capacity as a teacher in training and as a resident of Sapporo, associating with members of the Christian community there. Makiguchi read and was influenced by Uchimura's geographical thinking, published first as Thoughts and Observations on Geography (*Chiri gakkō* 『地理学考』) in 1894 (Uchimura 1897), and in a second edition, retitled, On Humans and the Land (*Chijin ron* 『地人論』), published in 1897. The ultimate focus and message of Uchimura's book is that the providential hand of God has shaped Japan's geographical position and features, in order that it might fulfill its destined mission, to link and harmonize the civilizations of East and West. Such ideas are entirely absent from Makiguchi's writings on the subject of geography.

While the content of Uchimura and other Christians' faith did not convince Makiguchi to the point of conversion, the record of his life and writings suggests that he absorbed important aspects of their mode of belief. Chief among these is the idea that the content of "religious" teachings—the truth claims to which assent is sought—matters. Different faith propositions are not interchangeable or equivalent, nor should they be easily trumped by the criteria of socio-political acceptability. Implicit in this is the possibility that commitment to "religious" beliefs may compel important displacements or sacrifices.⁴

Makiguchi's exposure to earnest and committed Christian faith may have acclimated him to the specific attributes of the deity of Abrahamic monotheism—not least a jealous insistence on exclusive loyalty. This appreciation may, in turn, have militated in Makiguchi against the kind of conceptually porous use of the term *kami* 神 that characterized much of Japanese intellectuals' discourse around religion. To offer an example of such usage, in his 1896 *Shūkyō shinron* (『宗教新論』), Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966) writes:

However, with a stance of mere atheism, one is limited to knowing negative, passive realms, the positive, active realms are not clarified, and it is for this reason that I assert the following pantheism: In pantheism, the universe itself is *kami*. There is no *kami* other than the universe. (quoted in Sueki 2004, p. 173)

Likewise, in his widely read and profoundly influential *A Study of the Good* (*Zen no kenkyū* 『善の研究』), Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945) uses the term to define the essence of religion as follows:

Religion is the relationship of *kami* and people. There are probably many different ways of thinking about *kami*, but I think the most apposite way is to look at it as the foundation or basis of the universe, with “people” here indicating our individual consciousness. (Nishida [1911] 1950, p. 186)

The term *kami* is notable for nothing if not its polyvalence, making it particularly suited to this kind of usage. In these, and many similar passages, essential aspects of the *kami*, including the degree of anthropomorphism, of transcendence/immanence, of natural/supernatural being, gender, number, insistence on exclusive loyalty, cultural provenance, etc., are largely left to the reader to determine. Perhaps the only thing that can be said about the term *kami*, as it was used in such contexts, is that it almost never referred to the *kami* of shrine Shintō. Confined within the definitional walls of “religion”, the *kami* of these intellectuals were kept safely quarantined from their Shintō namesakes, leaving the non-religious status of shrine Shintō undisturbed.

This usage can, in a sense, be seen as an expression of deference to—the impulse to communicate in the language of—an ascendant West. The adoption of a term that could be read as “God” can be seen as indicating, at least, a passive acceptance of the modern Western concept of “religion”, as it was finding its place in Japanese society.

The term *kami* is almost entirely absent from Makiguchi’s early writings. In his 1912 book, proposing a community studies-based curriculum, he refers to the “unadorned, *kami*-like purity of schoolchildren” (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1912] 3:20), and as a sociologically descriptive term for unseen powers to which people appeal, he, in several places, uses the standard phrase *kami* and Buddhas (*shinbutsu* 神仏). In his post-conversion writings, he uses the term in the syncretic sense of powerful forces that function to support and protect those who uphold the Buddhist Dharma—to which they are explicitly subservient. Specifically, in the 1943 record of his interrogation by the thought prosecutors (*shisō kenji* 思想検事), he cites the Nichiren teaching of *kami tenjō* 神天上, of the *kami* returning to their heavenly abodes, abandoning a land and people that have turned their backs on the correct Dharma. This represents one of Makiguchi’s most starkly transgressive statements, relative to the Shintō secular. How it was received by Makiguchi’s interrogators is hard to reconstruct, but at a time when Japan’s military fortunes were in decline and there was increasing rhetorical reliance on the idea of Japan as a land enjoying the protection of *kami*, a teaching that the *kami* had, in fact, abandoned the land would certainly not be welcomed, and the possibility of its wide reception among the public might well have been regarded with alarm.

4. Two Modes of Human Engagement with the World

Although Makiguchi references, and is clearly interested in, the relations among the categories of “religion”, “education”, and “science”, he does not treat these as having stably established meanings, much less passively accept their official definitions. Rather, the consistent structure of Makiguchi’s thinking seems to revolve around what he saw as two essential modes of human engagement with our surroundings. While I will refer to them here as “knowing” and “believing”, these English terms should be understood as standing in for two Sino-Japanese characters *chi* (知) and *shin* (信), that do not, in Makiguchi’s usage, correspond neatly to the way this pair functions in modern Western thought. That is, they do *not* indicate the certainty of factually ascertained knowledge and the corresponding indeterminacy of subjectively held and asserted belief. Rather, they represent the difference between a stance of disinterested observation and cognition, and one of invested engagement. In the writings of Makiguchi’s mature period (1930–44), these two modes of engagement correspond to the realms of “truth” and “value”.⁵

This positing of two core modes of human interaction—in places Makiguchi uses the term “negotiation” *kōshō* 交渉—with the world, is something present in Makiguchi’s earliest educational experience and thinking. In his first major work, the 1903 *Geography of Human Life* (*Jinsei chirigaku* 人生地理学), he refers to the idea of multifaceted interest, derived from the psychological pedagogy of Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841).

Makiguchi breaks the different forms of interests humans may hold in their surroundings into eight categories: (1) Cognitive, (2) Utilitarian, (3) Scientific, (4) Esthetic, (5) Moral, (6) Sympathetic, (7) Public and (8) Religious. These are further divided into two major modes: *keiken* 経験, a translation of the Herbartian term *Erfahrung*, indicating experience in the sense of knowledge gained through experience, and comprising the (1) cognitive through (5) moral interest; *kōsai* 交際, a translation of *Umgang*, meaning intercourse or interaction and comprising (6) sympathetic, (7) public, and (8) religious interest. The terms *keiken* and *kōsai* are no more a natural, contrasting pairing in Japanese than experience and intercourse are in English, suggesting the difficulties of translating specialized terminology into Japanese in this period. A pairing, perhaps more intuitively accessible to present-day sensibilities, is provided in the 1892 translation of Herbart's work, titled *The Science of Education*, under the rubric of "knowledge and sympathy".

Knowledge imitates what lies before it in Idea. Sympathy transports itself into the feeling of another.

In knowledge there is an antithesis between the thing and the idea. Sympathy, on the contrary, multiplies the same feeling. (Herbart 1892, p. 132).

These two major modes of interaction—the intellectual, cognitive, objective; the affective, engaged, subjective—are central concerns that track the development of Makiguchi's thinking over the course of his life. In *Pedagogy* (1930–34), and especially in the second volume, "Theory of Value" (*kachiron* 価値論 (1931)), Makiguchi devotes considerable energy to clarifying the proper relationship between the cognition of truth and judgments of value, where the former corresponds to the *Erfahrung*-experience-*keiken* complex and value corresponds to *Umgang*-intercourse-*kōsai*.

Interestingly, Makiguchi never suggests a simple correlation of, for example, an analytic/rational approach with the intellectual traditions of the West, and a unifying/integrating approach with those of the East. Perhaps the approach Makiguchi developed as a geographer made him resistant to any simple, linear identification of specific characteristics or patterns of thought with particular locations. Likewise, as a member of the Meiji generation that saw national life (including educational practice) dramatically transformed, through the importation and localization of Western modes of thinking, he perhaps found it impossible to disaggregate these influences within his own lived experience. Thus, even though the ground of his worldview became increasingly more Buddhistic from the early 1930s, he continued to frame his arguments in the philosophical and educational language of the West. In addition to his own experience and background, this can be understood in terms of his communicative strategy, relative to his anticipated readership, principally composed of those active in the field of elementary education.

Through the lens of these two modes of interaction with the world, Makiguchi triangulates the respective conceptual complexes of "science", "education/pedagogy", and "religion". That is, rather than accepting the knowledge (in the above sense)-based hegemony of science, as the observing and determining subject relative to the observed objects that constitute all other fields of experience, Makiguchi concerned himself with the question of what kind of science, existing or newly reconfigured, would be best suited to enter into and provide effective understanding of the types of human experiences typically subsumed under the headings of education/pedagogy and religion.

In the first volume of *Pedagogy* (1930), for example, he examines the different categories of science, into which the discipline of pedagogy might be classified, as it developed into an authentic "science". His conclusion is that it should be classed as *ōyō kagaku* 応用科学, a term that ordinarily corresponds to "applied science", in the sense of the intellectually rigorous effort to apply the findings of pure or natural science (in this case, psychology) to the actual work of education. However, Makiguchi is dissatisfied with this understanding and ends up redefining the term in a way that might be translated as "the science of application". Here he presents a distinction—one which parallels the two modes of interaction outlined above—between two major classifications in the sciences: those which take, as their object of study, phenomena in which the human will is, in principle, absent, and

those in which the workings of human will are a central feature. Both seek to develop an understanding of causal relations that will generate predictive power, something which Makiguchi considered the identifying element of any discipline worthy of the name of “science”.

In other words, to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, we prepare by assembling as much [evidence as can be found in] oral traditions, folklore, documents, and historic ruins in order to understand how human beings since ancient times have applied the causal laws of natural phenomena to forestall unhappiness and live a life of happiness. With this aim, and taking as our object of study the anthropogenic causal relationships in which human will has been appended to the causal laws of natural phenomena, we engage in comparative analysis so as to discover and abstract enduring and invariable laws of human causality from within the ceaseless change—the arising and extinction—of external appearances, thus deriving the standards and principles to guide a new way of life. We call such a system of knowledge applied science⁶ as opposed to the pure or descriptive sciences, which are sciences embodying the systematic knowledge of natural causal laws in which human will plays no part. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, 5:58)

In this way, he enlists the lived experiences of people, not only as observational data for the sciences, but as both active generators of knowledge and as sources of necessary reflection, for the further extension and refinement of the scientific method itself. As will be shown, Makiguchi considered a subjective, invested method to be the only authentically scientific approach to examining and evaluating religious truth claims.

5. “Daily Life” as a Key Concept

Another key concept that marks Makiguchi’s distance from the intellectual mainstream of his time, and that would play an important role in his reception, interpretation, and application of Nichiren Buddhism, is expressed in disarmingly simple language. This was the idea of daily life (*seikatsu* 生活). It is hard to overstate how unassuming and ordinary this term is in Japanese—or its centrality and importance to Makiguchi’s thinking, dating back to his earliest works.

In the introduction to *The Geography of Human Life*, Makiguchi explains the concerns he had regarding the title and the process by which he settled on *jinsei chirigaku* 人生地理学. He notes a number of the possible alternatives, including “political geography” (*seiji chirigaku* 政治地理学) and *jinrui chirigaku* 人類地理学 the Japanese translation of *Anthropogeographie* (1882), by the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904). Makiguchi finally settled on the term “human life”, explaining his decision as follows:

The same word, *jinsei*, would appear to be used in two different senses: to indicate the entire life of an individual (*hito no isshō* 人の一生) and to indicate daily life of human beings (*ningen no seikatsu* 人間の生活). In this work, I am adopting the second meaning to indicate both the material and mental life activities of humankind. This term therefore comprises daily life in its economic, political, military, religious, academic, etc., aspects. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1903] 1:4)

Seikatsu can be translated as daily life, living, life activities, quotidian existence, etc. For Makiguchi this was the indispensable site of experience and, therefore, learning; philosophically, it was where truth (propositions) was tested and verified, and, finally, it was where value—including the putatively absolute value of “religion”—was assessed and created. Rooted in experience, daily life, as Makiguchi understood it, is the realm of value—which he always considered relational—rather than that of abstract, disembodied truth. *Seikatsu*, thus, expresses something that is omnipresent—if we are the knowing subject at the center of a universe of potential meaning, there is nothing, in principle, that is unrelated to our life processes. The expansive nature of the concept threatens to disconnect it from any specific, identifiable referent. It can be narrowed and focused through the attachment of modifiers, such as economic, political, military, religious, as Makiguchi does in the above

quote, but even in its unmodified form, the term *seikatsu* does enclose something distinctly, if not exclusively, human.

Geography opens with Makiguchi describing himself, as author, in his study. Despite his poverty, he is able to wear clothes of South American or Australian wool, woven by English labor, using the steel and coal of that land; the lamp in his room burns oil extracted from the Caucasus region of Russia; the glasses he wears have lenses produced with skill and precision by German craftsmen. Makiguchi reflects on the various processes by which these products were raised, extracted, gathered, manufactured, transported, and sold before they came to him, describing how this makes him keenly aware of how his way of life is made possible through the efforts of many people throughout the world. “In this way, I realize that our lives extend to and are supported by the entire world, the world is our home, and all nations are the field of our daily life” (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1903] 1:13).

In his later writings on education and Buddhism, he would use the term a touchstone for his arguments. In a 1937 pamphlet, for example, he identifies daily life as something almost primordial, coeval with the actualities of religion, arts and creative techniques.

These forms of daily life did not begin only after having first waited for the researches of science and philosophy. The processes of daily life began with the advent of humankind itself, prior to any kind of organized learning or scholarship. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, 8:61)

For Makiguchi, the idea of daily life was not abstract or isolated, but concrete and shared. As daily life is the source of valid knowledge and understanding, it is not too much to say that it represented a space of autonomy and even resistance within the hierarchies of epistemological and material authority of his time.

In the final years of the war effort, the term *seikatsu* was, at times, the object of elite contempt, perhaps as the site of a self not fully consecrated to the state and its objectives.

In the December 1943 special issue of the literary journal *Bungakukai* (『文学界』), dedicated to the theme “in praise of Japan”, the novelist Hayashi Fusao 林房雄 (1903–1975) engaged in a dialogue with the literary critic Kobayashi Hideo 小林秀雄 (1902–1983). Hayashi had been a proponent of Marxist theory and proletariat literature in the 1920s. Following imprisonment and under official pressure, he recanted these beliefs to become an active supporter of the emperor-centric ideology of the militarist regime. His particular hostility to any valuation of “daily life” can be read as representative of both his own elite literary sensibility and the current of the times.

“Daily life” is always the trump card. And there is usually a modifier like “of the common people”, “of the people” or “of the national citizens”. . . . Wondering why [novels] like that stir up so much excitement, I read them and found they are about the dissatisfactions of young women. They are about young women who live in the backstreets complaining about their daily life, “objectively” described by Toyoda Masako, “subjectively” by Nozawa Fumiko. (Hayashi and Kobayashi 1943)

The mature form of Makiguchi’s thinking on religion and Buddhism is expressed in the phrase “The Daily Life of Great Good”, (*daizen seikatsu* 大善生活).

In the record of Makiguchi’s interrogation, published as “research materials”, in the August 1943 monthly journal of the Special Higher Police (*Tokubetsu kōtō keisatsu* 特別高等警察), responsible for “thought crimes”, what is perhaps striking is the fact that the processes of daily living (*seikatsu*) provide the context for approaching what is commonly imagined as a transcendent religious mystery: the Buddha’s enlightenment.

When we empirically verify this Lotus Sutra in our daily lives (*seikatsu*), we can understand that it is the culmination of the highest and unsurpassed laws/Dharma/principles (*hō* 法) with the greatest value for the lives (*seikatsu*) of human beings. If we compare the Medicine Buddha (Bhaiṣajyaguru) to a Doctor of Medicine, [we can see that] this is a system of principles for daily living (*seikatsu*) that brings together humankind’s evolution and progress in all fields of endeavor. And this is

not simply a study of these principles of daily living (*seikatsu*), but a clarification and realization of the goal and purpose of human life (*seikatsu*), as Shakyamuni applied the method and path which inherently embodies the power and capacity to live daily life (*seikatsu*), carrying out his daily life (*seikatsu*) undefeated by great opponents, thus demonstrating the highest ideal that can be achieved as a human being. A Buddha is one who concretely manifests a model and example for the realization [of this ideal]. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, 10:194)

6. Rely on the Dharma, Not the Person

The search for universal laws or principles was a driving interest for Makiguchi, clearly present in his earliest writings on human geography. There, Makiguchi eschewed the standard approach, focused on cataloguing the geographic features of specific (often administratively defined) places and instead encouraged his readers to consider such questions as: what is an island—peninsula, mountain, valley—and what does it mean for humans to live on or near one?

It seems that Makiguchi was never able to find the idea of a personal or anthropomorphic deity convincing. Even in his earliest writings on the subject of religion and its origins, such as the following passage from the 1903 *Geography*, in which he describes the feeling that “we, along with the rest of existence, are under the sway of a force of a higher order”, as the starting point in the development of religions, he does not refer to any kind of deity, but rather “precise and accurate laws or principles” (Makiguchi 1981–1988, 1:36). This was a stance he would hold throughout his life; he would later cite the focus on an impersonal law, rather than an anthropomorphic deity, as a factor in his reception of Buddhism (see Miyata 1993).

Likewise, Makiguchi’s clear awareness of the characteristics attributed to the creator deity of monotheistic Christianity enabled him to develop his conceptualization of the Dharma *hō* 法⁷, in clear contradistinction to such a deity.

As human intelligence and wisdom continue to develop, the subjective and emotional elements grow progressively more dilute and the workings of rational intelligence grow denser and more salient. . . . The object of consciousness that provides the driving motivation for the processes of daily life is no longer simply those [things and persons] in which we have a direct, material interest as individuals, but the laws, rules, governing principles, reason, truth, norms, standards, etc.—there are many different terms for this—of nature and society that apply universally and equally to all of humankind. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1931] 5:364)

As the above quote indicates, the idea of law or lawfulness was part of a complex of concepts that included ideas of regularity, predictability, universality and rationality. The term *hō* 法 itself, comprises a wide range of meanings and implications. In modern Japanese, it typically indicates a law in the scientific or juridical sense, but it further points to such concepts as means, methods, ways of doing or being. It has also served as the translation of the Hindu-Buddhist concept of Dharma, with its vast scope of meanings and associations, which entered the Japanese ecology of ideas, with the arrival of Buddhism in the sixth century CE, and has undergone evolutions and permutations ever since.

Makiguchi found the Buddhist idea of a universal law of causality convincing and of important explanatory power. For him, it was both compatible with present-day science and vastly expanded the scope and reach of human rationality and, thus, agency.

The ultimate essence of Buddhism lies in its verification of the means and methods of daily life that produce maximum value based on the law of causality that embraces the infinite reaches of time and space, the entire cosmos in both its material and mental aspects. This law of causality is not limited to the material elements that are the object of research in the natural sciences; rather, it is the law of the simultaneity of cause and effect that manifests itself as value through the mutual interrelationship of mind and matter. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1937] 8:61)

Following his reception of Buddhism, Makiguchi only gradually introduced Buddhist concepts and terminology into his writing, often taking advantage of the semantically layered nature of Sino-Japanese characters, to enable both a more generic “secular” reading and a specifically Buddhist one. An example of this can be seen in one Buddhist phrase that appears early and often in Makiguchi’s post-conversion writings: the Nirvana Sutra’s injunction to “rely on the Dharma, not on the person” (Jpn. *ehō fu enin* 依法不依人). As Makiguchi uses this, it can be read as both a general call to a principle-based way of life and as a particular encouragement to base one’s life consistently on the Buddha’s Dharma. For Makiguchi, both readings may have been equally important. Put differently, his understanding included a broad range of “secular” values, including his commitment to a constitutional order, in which even the monarch is bound to follow the provisions of the laws.

In the era of despotic politics, all countries were governed by men rather than by law. . . . As the people have developed in their knowledge and understanding, the law has come to be seen as more weighty than any individual. Once a constitution has been adopted, even the sovereign pledges to respect it and not to override it arbitrarily. This is the essence of today’s constitutional politics. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1931] 5:361–62)

Ito (2009) analyzes the different ways in which Makiguchi defines the Dharma (*hō* 法) of the Lotus Sutra in the record of his interrogation. Here, the different translations of *hō* already noted will be given, suggesting the degree to which Makiguchi’s usage remained open to both “secular” and “religious” readings.

“The highest and greatest Dharma/law/principle/method for the daily life of humans”.

“The system that is the result of the entire evolutionary process of humankind”.

“The system of Dharma/laws/principles/methods for the daily life of humans”.

“The study of the Dharma/laws/principles/methods for the daily life of humans”.

“The Way and Dharma/laws/principles/methods comprising the vital energy of daily life”.

“The highest ideal which humans can realize”.

“The objective of the daily life of humans”. (Ito 2009, p. 153)

As Ito argues, this is of particular importance because Makiguchi’s argument, while firmly located in the Nichiren tradition and of a distinctly religious-prophetic nature—the assertion that the dire straits in which the Japanese nation found itself was the result of the nation’s rejection of the true Buddhist Dharma—it also represents a critique of the Japanese militarist state for turning against things fundamentally and universally human [1975].

7. Makiguchi’s Social Theodicy

Between the years 1924 and 1929, Makiguchi lost three adult sons to tuberculosis. In 1932, his youngest daughter, aged thirteen, also died of the illness (Origins 2017, pp. 481–84). In a post-war essay, “Makiguchi’s Motivation for Taking Faith”, the folklorist Yanagita Kunio 柳田国男 (1875–1962), who first met Makiguchi around 1910 (Origins 2017, 190–91) and was later active with him in the Kyōdo-kai 郷土会 community studies group, led by Nitobe Inazō, wrote as follows:

Makiguchi was unhappy in his family life, with a number of his children falling ill and dying. His wife was a good person, but the two of them struggled. I think the sufferings of poverty and illness were probably the cause for him entering into faith. Before then, he was certainly not a religious person. (Yanagita [1958] 1975, Sup. Vol. 3:466)

Nowhere in his extant writings does Makiguchi refer to the deaths of his children. This can be understood as part of his general silence on matters of a personal or private nature;

he seems to have considered the act of writing to be of a fundamentally public/social nature. It might also be a reflection of his appreciation of his responsibilities as an elementary school teacher and principal. In his two decades as a principal, he would have had many occasions to interact with the family of pupils who died of illness or accident, and he may have considered it unseemly to draw attention to his personal losses (Origins 2017, p. 270).

Nichiren's writings expound both a personal and a social soteriology. The balance of the appeal these, respectively, held for Makiguchi cannot be surmised definitively from his extant writings. In his public statements, there is a clear focus on the societal dimension. Evidence that Makiguchi's motivation for incorporating Nichiren's teachings into his own was his concern for the direction of society and can also be gleaned from the process by which his conversion was effected. Nichiren's most famous text is no doubt the treatise he wrote and had transmitted to a key personage in the Kamakura Bakufu 鎌倉幕府 in 1260, "On Establishing the Correct [Dharma] for the Peace of the Land" (*Risshō Ankoku Ron* 立正安国論, hereafter, "On Establishing"), in which he called on government to withdraw all patronage from Pure Land and other Buddhist schools and instead devote themselves exclusively to the Lotus Sutra; only then would earthquakes, pestilence, threat of Mongol invasion—the panoply of natural and human disasters confronting Japan at the time—be overcome. (See Fisker-Nielsen, this issue, for the Sōka Gakkai's post-1945 engagement with this text.)

While Nichiren's sense of crisis and his national frame of reference resonated with many post-Meiji intellectuals, concerned for the fate of Japan and Japanese society, his active criticism of other sects and his stress on the real-world impacts of different belief systems created a heritage that complicated the efforts of the various Nichiren sects, to develop an accommodation with the newly normative secular–religious binary and division of labor. This stands in contrast to representatives of Pure Land Buddhism, such as Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911), who, as early as 1873, was able to provide an almost textbook definition of the respective roles of the religious and the secular.

Government and religion are distinct and should not be confused. Government is a human affair and exerts control only over form. Further, it is limited to the national territory. Religion is a divine affair and exerts influence over the human heart and mind. Further, it is universal in all countries and lands. (Quoted in Shimazono and Tsuruoka 2003, pp. 202–3)

Given this, it is not difficult to understand why the locus of energy and activism among modern adherents of Nichiren's teachings was to be found in lay movements, rather than the established priesthood. It was, in fact, the reluctance of the Nichiren-shū sect to engage in the refutation of other schools (the practice of *shakubuku* 折伏) that motivated the most famous of the modern followers of Nichiren, Tanaka Chigaku 田中智学 (1861–1939), to leave the priesthood and become a lay practitioner and progenitor of a movement he called "Nichirenism" (*Nichirensyugi* 日蓮主義).

Tanaka adopted the core outlook of Nichiren's analysis in terms of seeing Buddhism as properly engaged in the affairs of this-world, describing it as a guiding principle, spanning all realms, "a correct driving force giving rise to actual benefit in all things in the human world, whether political, economic, social or the affairs of people" (quoted in Ōtani 2019, p. 16). However, where Nichiren, on many occasions, asserts the ultimate precedence of the Buddha's Dharma (*buppō* 仏法) over the system of secular authority (*ōhō* 王法), referring, for example, to "the ruler of this little island country" (Yampolsky 1990, p. 322), Tanaka has been described by Sueki (2005) as constitutionally incapable of imagining the possibility of conflict between the Japanese state, the emperor, the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren (332). The complexity of Nichiren's texts opens them to a variety of readings, especially to a mind as agile as Tanaka's, and he seems, always, to have arrived at a safely harmonized conclusion, even after traversing passages that could easily provoke anxiety, or even doubt.

Tanaka was a prodigious generator of texts, who exerted a potent impact on many individuals, Takayama Chogyū 高山樗牛 (1871–1902), Miyazawa Kenji 宮沢賢治 (1896–1933), Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873–1949), Kita Ikki 北一輝 (1883–1937) and

Ishiwara Kanji 石原莞爾 (1889–1949), among them. He formed a number of groups and societies, including: Lotus Society (蓮華会) (1880), Risshō Ankoku Kai (立正安国会) (1884) and National Pillar Society (Kokūchukai 国柱会) (1914). In the years following the end of World War I, often described as the heyday of Nichirenism, the National Pillar Society boasted a large membership. Tanaka himself was much in demand as a speaker, often addressing a series of overflow crowds at multiple venues (Ōtani 2001, p. 244). He inspired an active lay movement that revived a proselytizing energy that had long been absent within the Nichiren schools. As such, Tanaka left an enduring mark on the way Nichiren has been understood and received in the modern period.

It has been suggested that Makiguchi attended National Pillar Society lectures in the years after the end of World War I (Miyata 1993). His later reception of Nichiren, however, was mediated by an individual, Mitani Sokei 三谷素啓 (1878–1932), a fellow educator, whose interpretation of Nichiren differed in important ways from Tanaka's.

In his 1929 *Detailed Interpretation of "On Establishing the Correct [Dharma] for the Peace of the Land"* (Risshō Ankoku Ron Seishaku 『立正安国論精釈』), Mitani discusses a passage from Nichiren's text that often served as basis for (ultra-)nationalistic readings of Nichiren's thought: "One must first of all pray for the safety of the nation and then work to establish the Buddha's Dharma" (Yampolsky 1990, pp. 30–31). While Mitani's interpretation maintains the importance of the state for Buddhism, he redefines the state, not as the transcendent locus of supreme value (as Tanaka did), but as the site of life, the place where people live their lives.

If there were someone who asked what a state is, I think the correct response is that it is a place where human beings live. If there is territory, but no people living there, that cannot be called a state. If the humanity living in a state become extinct, it is no longer a state. Even if the Buddha or the Buddha's Dharma exist, if the nation is destroyed and there are no people, who will have faith in the Buddha or pay reverence to the Dharma? In other words, the great worth of the Buddha's Dharma only becomes clear when there are people who believe and uphold it. The Dharma is precious only because there are people. This is why one must first of all pray for the safety of the nation and then work to establish the Buddha's Dharma. (Mitani 1929, pp. 310–11)

This interpretation would seem to be largely compatible with Makiguchi's ideas about the state, which he consistently relativized—referring, for example, to the national self (*kokka teki jiga* 国家的自我) as one stage within the social self (*shakai teki jiga* 社会的自我), whose development was the goal of education (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1896] 7:157). It was, rather, the granular realities of daily life that were Makiguchi's central concern and the focus of his sense of social crisis. This is expressed in the introduction to the first volume of *Pedagogy* (1930):

I am driven almost to distraction by the intense desire to prevent the present deplorable situation—ten million of our children and students forced to endure the agonies of cutthroat competition, the difficulty of getting into good schools, the "examination hell" and the struggle for jobs after graduation—from afflicting the next generation. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, 5:8)

Makiguchi accorded great weight to humans' social nature and their social life. Given this, locating this sense of crisis as central to Makiguchi's motivation, in determining his commitment to Nichiren, does not seem like an excessive leap of logic.

In a pamphlet, published in 1935, that expanded on a 1929 pamphlet, outlining his value-creating pedagogy, by appending a chapter on the relationship between his educational ideas and the Lotus Sutra, Makiguchi includes several pages of reflection on his conversion. These passages constitute almost the totality of autobiographical writing—and certainly the most intimate reflection on his inner processes—in his extant corpus.

As my research into *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy* advanced and I was preparing to publish the first volume, I was moved by chance to research the

Lotus Sutra, and my attitude to religion underwent a profound transformation. Although born into a family of adherents to the Zen sect of Buddhism and raised in one belonging to a Lotus Sutra school, I lacked any sentiment of faith. In the years of my youth, when I was struggling in the effort to study and learn, the teachers and friends whom I most loved and respected were for the most part Christians, but I never reached the point of actually taking faith. After coming to Tokyo as an adult, I found that Confucian virtues alone could not relieve feelings of intolerable anxiety and so I again engaged in Zen meditation, listened to the teachings of Christianity, learned the methods of deep breathing and looked into other religious teachings. While I developed some feelings of faith for these, I never entered deeply into any of them. For more than ten years, I participated in either summer or winter *misogi* [ritual water purifications] based on ancient Shintō, and as a result even now I take cold baths on a daily basis. But I was never able to believe in this from my heart. In none of them could I sense the power that could either overturn my scientific and philosophical orientation, or harmonize with it. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1935] 8:405)

He then describes his reception of Nichiren's Buddhism, and the aspects that he found convincing.

But when I encountered the Lotus Sutra, I was astonished to discover that it in no way contradicted the scientific and philosophical principles which form the basis for our daily lives, and that it differed fundamentally from all religious and moral practices which I had studied to date. And just as I found myself moved by this discovery, I experienced a number of inexplicable phenomena in my daily life, which accorded precisely with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. When I eventually made the firm determination to adopt this faith, I was able to affirm, in the actualities of daily life, the truth of the words of Nichiren Daishonin: "When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated. Similarly, when one knows the Lotus Sutra, one understands the meaning of all worldly affairs". With a joy that is beyond the power of words to express, I completely renewed the basis of the life I had led for almost sixty years. The sense of unease, of groping my way in the dark, was entirely dissipated; my lifelong tendency to withdraw into thought disappeared; my sense of purpose in life steadily expanded in scope and ambition, and I was freed from all fears; I became possessed with the irresistible and bold desire to effect the reform of national education with as much haste as was humanly possible. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1935] 8:405–6)

A number of points are significant. First is the fact that it is changes in the experience of daily life (*seikatsu*) that prove decisively convincing. There is also the basic continuity of Makiguchi's sense of purpose, prior to and following his conversion. That is, his commitment to the reformation of education in Japan—the social and "secular" goal toward which he had worked for some three decades—was deepened and strengthened by his "religious" commitment, rather than supplanted by it.

Further, as this passage indicates, Makiguchi did not see those entities, recognized as "religions", as the sole competition for his loyalty. Rather, the systems of thought and belief that had to be "overturned or harmonized with" included, most prominently, science, which he defined as the "basis for our daily life". In other words, the key fields noted above—belief (and by implication, some form of "religion"), daily life, scientific rationality and education—are all in play and interaction, in a kind of multivariable equation. This indicates the ways in which Makiguchi's approach does not map easily onto the religious–secular binary, whether in the form in which it was carried by Western missionaries, anthropologists and others to the world, or in which it found its place in the imaginaries and practices of modernizing Japan.

Makiguchi's view that his Buddhist/religious commitment and practice should effect change in the this-worldly realm of daily life can be contrasted with Japanese intellectuals,

who often used the term *gense riyaku shinkō* 現世利益信仰 (faith in pursuit of this-worldly benefit), as a signifier for debased, popular and irrational “religions”. This attitude might be understood as a kind of synergy between forms of class consciousness that far predate the modern era and their particular integration of the Western model of “religion”, and the secular–religious binary. Here, the mental and immaterial is seen as the proper province of religion and any effort to use faith to directly affect or alter the conditions of the world are seen as vulgar misappropriations of “religion”.

Nishida Kitarō, for example, in *A Study of the Good*, dismisses popular expressions of religious sentiment, the desire for tangible, this-worldly benefits, as “not worthy of mention”. In the same vein, he states that to chant the Nembutsu with the desire for rebirth in the Pure Land is not “the real spirit of religion”. Nishida further uses this conceptualization of religion to criticize practices in its place or origin, declaring that Christians who pray for God’s aid or fear his punishment do not represent “genuine Christianity” (Nishida [1911] 1950, p. 181).

It also would seem that the question of good and evil—of theodicy, to use the language of Christian theology—played an important role in Makiguchi’s decision to take faith in Nichiren Buddhism.

As mentioned, Makiguchi considered the social aspects of the human being to be dispositive, finding the sources of morality in the mutual obligations of social relations and shared commitment to the general good (not the emperor’s embodied virtues). In the “Theory of Value” (second) volume of the *Pedagogy*, he expressed the view that each society is the ultimate arbiter of morality, as practiced within its bounds:

As a value, gain or loss is an evaluation of those aspects of reality that serve as means for the attainment of the individual objective of continued existence. The value of good or evil is an evaluation of the willed human actions that serve as the means for the attainment of the objective of the continued existence of society, a unified whole composed of individual humans. The judgment in this case is valid only for and within that society. For another society whose interests differ from the one that made the judgment of good and evil, this is evaluated as gain or loss equivalent to that in disputes between individuals. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1931] 5:226)

In other words, Makiguchi’s view of human society—and the sovereign importance he placed on it—meant that he did not have a locus of moral judgment that stood above or outside any individual society. It is my contention that it was Makiguchi’s sense of living in a society in profound crisis—a feeling shared in different senses and degrees by many of his contemporaries—that impelled his engagement with Nichiren Buddhism.

Writing several years later, in the same autobiographical passage cited above, Makiguchi suggests that Buddhism did, indeed, provide him with a new and more expansive understanding of good and evil, one that transcended individual societies and, thus, provided him with a workable social theodicy.

Of course I did not deduce this [confidence in the correctness of my ideas] from the Sutra from the outset. In the midst of [writing the *Pedagogy*] or, rather, as I was just approaching completion after the release of the first volume, through the faith and understanding of the Lotus Sutra I was able to develop, I was astonished to see that the unconscious progress of my thinking corresponded with the teachings of the Sutra. As I continued to advance in this, I came to realize, with an even greater surprise and joy, that the essential core of the Lotus Sutra represents the totality and basis of the Dharma/laws/principles/methods⁸ of daily life and that, relative to this, the rational educational methods called for in my value-creating pedagogy are only partial and peripheral. As I examined the matter more closely, I noticed that there was a crucial lapse in the criteria for the judgment of value I had been proposing. Now, for the first time, my ascertainment of good and evil became fully accurate. As a result, many additions and revisions [to the text] had

to be made, and it was through this that I gained the self-confidence described above. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1937] 8:411)

Among other things, it is interesting that the discovery of the incomplete nature of his theories to date should be met with astonishment and joy, and further, that he should describe his conviction that the true basis for his theories is the Lotus Sutra, in terms of “self-confidence”, suggesting that he did not experience the Buddha’s Dharma as something external or extrinsic to himself, but as something with which a fusion is possible because it is not ultimately “other”.

8. “On Science and Religion” (1936)

The March 1936 issue of the influential educational journal *Imperial Education* (*Teikoku kyōiku* 『帝国教育』) was dedicated to the theme of religion and education; it repeatedly referenced, and can be seen as a response to, the 28 November 1935 directive, issued by the Ministry of Education, encouraging “cultivation of religious sentiment” (*shūkyōteki jōsō no kanyō* 宗教的情操の涵養) in the schools. This directive eased the ban, in place since 1899, on religious education in schools and can be understood as an effort, on the part of the educational authorities, to enlist “religion”—as it functioned in its officially defined role—in the effort to counter various forms of “dangerous thought” (*kiken shisō* 危険思想). The directive includes language that indicates where the boundary between officially sanctioned “religion” and “superstition” was seen at this juncture: “In addition to respecting correct religion, with regard to superstitions that in any way might be harmful to public order or good morals, all efforts should be made to refute and break these down”.

Among those contributing an article to this special issue was the theoretical physicist Ishiwara Atsushi 石原純 (1881–1947). Ishiwara had studied in Germany from 1912 to 1914, and included Albert Einstein among his teachers, accompanying the latter when he traveled to Japan in 1922. Makiguchi attended and would have heard Ishiwara interpret for Einstein’s lecture on the theory of relativity at Keiō University in November 1922 (Origins 2017, p. 481).

In his article “Science and Religion” (“*Kagaku to shūkyō*” 『科学と宗教』), Ishiwara sought to define what he considered the necessary characteristics of a scientific religion. For him, the sense of awe felt by humans in the face of the inscrutable (*fushigi* 不思議) is the original impetus giving rise to what is known as “religion”—a view compatible with Rudolf Otto’s (1923) idea of the numinous, or holy, as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.

In confronting the inscrutable, humans’ thoughts turn, inevitably, to the being that created the universe and its mysteries, which Ishiwara describes using the rather interesting term *nōryokusha* (能力者), which might be rendered as powerful, capable or competent being. Although Ishiwara does use deity/*kami* later in the article, he is more restrained regarding this polysemous terminology than Nishida or Suzuki in the examples cited above; he seems to have wanted to present a less ambiguous concept, one more compatible with the creator God of the Abrahamic traditions.

And we were able to know just how skillfully the world of nature was formed through the existence of such certain and precise natural laws. The more we explore the inner depths of nature, the more we understand the existence of a reality that is governed by exact rules in which there is not the slightest hint of disorder. From the perspective of science, this reality itself is a magnificent world of God.⁹ (Ishiwara 1936, p. 46).

Ishiwara asserts that there are clearly defined realms of interest and responsibility for religion and science. Here, the knowledge affirmed by science and the scientific method represents the highest degree of certainty to which we have access. That which lies beyond that realm, the unknown, must be recognized and accepted as unknown. Religion has no business crossing the lines that demarcate these respective realms of authority and responsibility to intervene in “this worldly” matters.

To pray to God solely for one's happiness and benefit, and to assume the actual existence of a God who will receive those prayers is something that is far too self-serving and must be subject to strong personal reproach (Ishiwara 1936, p. 48).

Ultimately, Ishiwara's conceptualization of religion does not extend beyond a sense of awe at the observable laws of nature and reverence directed at the being said to be their architect.

In the final analysis, the core of our most pure scientific religion must be in nature itself, especially in our sense of true religious mysteries within their known and lawful truths. When we encounter nature with a reverent heart, everyone will feel a certain astonishment, and here is the coming into being of a correct religious spirit. If we could eliminate all distracting and worldly thoughts from this state of mind and foster it in its purity, there we would establish the purest kind of religion. (Ishiwara 1936, p. 51)

Makiguchi responded to Ishiwara's article in a two-part essay, published in the May and June 1936 issues of the Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai publication *New Teachings* (*Shinkyō* 『新教』 "On Science and Religion" ("Kagaku to shūkyō wo ronzu" [科学と宗教の関係を論ず]), reproduced in Volume 9 of the Makiguchi (Makiguchi 1981–1988) complete works.

Makiguchi first frames his response by positioning religion and science as human activities that both arose with the goal of educating and enlightening (*kyōka* 教化) society (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1936] 9:58), placing them, in this sense, on equal footing. Makiguchi then goes on to dispute Ishiwara's claim to be describing a universal category called "*shūkyō*/religion", by pointing out the distinctly Western and Christian aspects of Ishiwara's presentation. Criticizing Christianity from a Buddhist perspective was not a particularly unusual act; many of the publications that carried Inoue Tetsujirō's 1893 "The Clash of Education and Religion", with its strongly anti-Christian rhetoric, were associated with Buddhist schools. However, to do so in a way that was potentially disruptive of the carefully constructed definitional boundaries of "religion" carried other, larger implications.

What Makiguchi next does, having noted limitations in Ishiwara's framing of religion, is, thus, both unusual and bold. He challenges Ishiwara's authority in his area of internationally recognized expertise: science and the nature of scientific truth. As a physicist and student of Einstein, who largely shared the latter's views on "religion", Ishiwara could be said to be giving voice to a mainstream form of scientific rationalist deism.

In the essay "The Religious Spirit of Science", Einstein wrote:

But the scientist is possessed by the sense of universal causation. The future, to him, is every whit as necessary and determined as the past. There is nothing divine about morality; it is a purely human affair. His religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of the natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection. (Einstein [1934] 1954, p. 40)

Like Einstein, Ishiwara accepts the hegemony of natural science, as the source of certain, actionable knowledge, reserving religion as a kind of repository for human feelings of awe and wonder in the face of things and events in nature that surpass normal understanding. In this way, he works within the established secular–religious binary, with its particular mental and social divisions labor.

In criticizing this, Makiguchi was challenging the science that occupied the commanding heights of epistemological authority of his era. According to Makiguchi, Ishiwara's stance represents a very limited view of natural science, one confined to traditional concepts of linear, invariable causality that is, by implication, beyond and outside the workings of human will (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1936] 9:61). Ishiwara, indeed, expresses disdain for any non-material idea of causality (Ishiwara 1936, p. 45).

Rather than looking solely to nature for the inscrutable and mysterious, Makiguchi declares that we can find these in the development of civilization and culture, in forms of technical¹⁰ and artistic achievement that seem to exceed human capacities, as these are normally understood. Makiguchi notes that if even material civilization contains elements that can be deemed mysterious in this way, how much more is this the case for phenomena in the realm of mental/spiritual/immaterial civilization (*seishin bunmei* 精神文明).

If these things and events, recognized as being outside the limits of natural science, should merit being the objects of scientists' attention, it must of course become necessary to review and revise our understanding of the essential nature of religion along the lines of all technical and artistic skills—as something in which people trust nature with an extremely reverent attitude, faithfully and compliantly following its laws and, while enjoying its blessings, use and guide its forces to engage in the creation of value for humans—a creativity that should be recognized as of the same character as that of nature's creativity—in this way meeting the needs of daily life and assisting the activities of nature. This would then bring us to the question of whether it is possible, using only natural science or the methods of natural science, to make these value-creating activities the object of renewed understanding and cognition. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1936] 9:70)

Here Makiguchi introduces a new category of science, one which he had not described to that point: value science (*kachi kagaku* 価値科学). There was a rich discourse around value and science in Japan, much of it referencing German Neo-Kantian philosophy, reaching back to the first years of the twentieth century, and Makiguchi himself cites similar ideas, including that of the human or normative sciences (see Ito and Yamaguchi 2022). His understanding of value science here, however, seems to be something largely his own. It derives from his early insight into the two modes by which humans interact with their surroundings: disinterested cognition and personally invested engagement. He describes this latter mode now using the term *shinge* (信解) that combines the characters for “believe” and “understand” and is also the title of a chapter of the Lotus Sutra in the Kumārajīva (344–413) translation into Chinese. He contrasts this with a corresponding character combination, composed of the characters for “know” and “understand” (*chige* 知解).

He further uses the term *shingyō* 信行 “believe and act”, in reference to the method he is propounding here. This is methodologically consistent with Makiguchi's earlier views. He not only saw the constellation of belief, trust, and faith directed at our fellow humans as the essence of social cohesion, the thing that makes our shared lives possible, but considered belief a prerequisite for all action in life. As he wrote in 1935, “Our fateful issue is not the question of whether or not we will believe, but what we should believe” (Makiguchi 1981–1988, 8:416). He likewise saw practice and experience as an essential source of understanding and knowledge. Here he is taking that idea and bringing it to his own contestation of the categories of religion and science. Near the end of the second installment of his article, Makiguchi offers this explanation:

The natural sciences seek, through analytic research of things and events that express a certain outcome, to trace back and arrive at the cause that gave rise to that result. Following the basic principle that the same cause will manifest the same result, the natural sciences seek to produce or prevent the given outcome by producing or preventing this cause. In this way science seeks to clarify the principles that can guide a life of happiness and thus contribute to society. In contrast, all technicians and artists exert themselves to profit self and other through the discovery of better methods of living. They do this through the repeated honing and developing of their skills, the accumulation of experience unconsciously gained in the practice of actual life, without giving any real thought to research.

The science of value takes as its object of research the accumulated experience of technicians and artists. Collecting, comparing and integrating these, it discovers the best possible methods. Based on the principle that it is necessary to generate the same cause in order to obtain the same result, the science of value seeks to make available guiding principles that will enable people to produce the fundamental causes for achieving a life of the highest happiness. (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1936] 9:83)

Makiguchi concludes his two-part article with the Table 1:

Table 1. Makiguchi’s comparison of research methods.

Object	Analytical	Objective cognition method	Method of knowing and understanding	Natural science
		Subjective cognition method		
	Unifying/integrating	Evaluative cognition	Method of believing and understanding	Values science

9. Concluding Remarks: The Daily Life of Great Good

From the mid-1930s, Makiguchi started to associate the term *seikatsu hō* (生活法) with Buddhism, asserting that the practice of Nichiren Shoshū Buddhism represents its highest and most value-creative expression. Both elements of this expression, *seikatsu* and *hō*, have been discussed above, and from this, it should be clear that a number of interpretations (and corresponding English translations) are possible, including: “the means and methods of daily living”, “the laws and principles guiding daily existence”, and “the Dharma of daily life”.

As discussed, the idea of daily life as the field of experience, judgment, and learning is encapsulated in the term *seikatsu* 生活, and it forms a kind of leitmotiv, a connecting thread running through Makiguchi’s writing.

The expression “The Daily Life of Great Good” (*daizen seikatsu* 大善生活) starts to appear in Makiguchi’s writings from the final period of his life, in essays and transcriptions of talks given at meetings of the Value-Creating Education Society, and carried in *Value Creation* (*Kachi sōzō* 『価値創造』), the organization’s publication launched in July 1941 and suppressed by the authorities in May 1943. “The Daily Life of Great Good” can be seen as a culminating expression of Makiguchi’s thinking, bringing together the all-important field of daily living and a Buddhism-inspired reworking of Makiguchi’s theory of value. As described above, Makiguchi posited three forms of value: Beauty, Gain, and Good, with the last defined as that which enhances and extends the shared life of humans in community. In his original formulation of this system, Makiguchi assumed that judgments regarding the value of Good could only be made by and within individual societies. This appears to be the “crucial lapse in the criteria for the judgment of value” that came to Makiguchi’s attention through his study of the Lotus Sutra. While Makiguchi does not explicitly indicate the content of this discovery, he clearly celebrates it: “Now, for the first time, my ascertainment of good and evil became fully accurate” (Makiguchi 1981–1988, [1935] 8:411). From the text—and the subsequent actions that resulted in his being charged with thought crimes—it can be seen that the standard of good and evil that became clear to him was one that transcended the contemporaneously prevailing values of his society and, in this sense, aspired to the universal. The addition of “great” (*dai* 大) to what had until then been Makiguchi’s highest value—socially defined and experienced “Good”—can, likewise, be read as indicating this. Makiguchi’s embrace of Buddhism, thus, brought him to a position proximate to that which Inoue Tetsujirō had identified decades earlier, as one of the more problematic aspects of Christianity—as a potential source of non-statist ideology (*hikokkashugi* 非国家主義) (Inoue 1893, p. 34).

“The Daily Life of Great Good” was further linked with a term that expressed Makiguchi’s commitment to his understanding of the scientific method, to generate the name of the small-group gatherings that were the principal venue for the activities of the

Value-Creating Education Society: “The Discussion Meeting for the Empirical Verification of the Method/Means/Dharma of the Daily Life of Great Good” (*daizen seikatsu hō shōmei zadankai* 大善生活法証明座談会). Held in the homes of members of the society, *ryokan* hostels and similar venues, these meetings were the prime site for the study of Nichiren doctrine, pastoral guidance, and proselytization, typically through the sharing of testimonials, in the form of “experiences” (*taiken* 体験)¹¹. From the early 1940s, these meetings came under the scrutiny of the Special Higher Police. Makiguchi’s arrest warrant cites his attendance at more than 240 such meetings, between May 1941 and June 1943; it also records heterodox statements made by him at these meetings regarding the status of emperor and the Tenshōdaijin amulets issued by Ise Shrine ([Japanese Ministry of Justice 1943](#), pp. 102–6).

Makiguchi’s relationship with the concept of “religion”—both as a universal template derived from Abrahamic monotheism (in particular Protestant Christianity) and as it was adapted and localized in Japan as *shūkyō*—was complex and, I would argue, importantly atypical. On the one hand, in his final years, he arrived at a position of confidence, regarding a universal standard for the judgment of good and evil, one that exceeded the limits of a given society (and, thus, state). At the same time, he rejected a number of core elements constituting the modern concept of “religion”, such as the division existence into natural/secular and supernatural/religions spheres, and marking of qualitative distinctions between faith or trust among humans and faith directed at ideas and objects considered “religious”. Makiguchi eschewed the use, prevalent among intellectuals, of the term *kami*, as something that could indicate the Yahweh/God of Abrahamic monotheism, or more ambiguously, gesture at unseen, possibly indigenous, forces.

Crucially, he did not accept the confinement of “religion” to the unseen workings of the inner life, by which engagement with socio-political realities could only be legitimately undertaken, when mediated through the inner working of conscience, translated into putatively neutral, “secular” language. This feature was found to be of particular utility to Japanese national authorities; combined with the workings of the “Shintō secular”, it could be, and was used, to justify the silencing of voices in a wide range of registers. Makiguchi rejected the positioning of Shintō as non-religion; in doing this, he denied the cultural authority of the “Shintō secular” and the state’s definitional rights in this regard.¹² Makiguchi’s criticism of Shintō practices coercively promoted in the name of the emperor, expressed first in public statements and then to his interrogators, was made in language—especially in the latter case—that explicitly referenced Nichiren’s Buddhist teachings. As such, his actions were transgressive on multiple levels—relative to the state, its authority, and religious–secular binaries in their domestic and international instantiations.

In his most direct challenge to the “global” version of this binary, Makiguchi rejected the division of labor that assigned the analysis and management of the natural world to science, and rather, strove to find redefinitions of science that would accommodate fields of human experience, typically considered “religious”. From early in life, Makiguchi’s interest was focused on universal principles. This can be seen in his writings on geography, where he sought to clarify the principles or causal laws that guide and enable human interactions with their environments. This pursuit of universal laws or principles led, eventually, to Makiguchi’s embrace of the Buddha’s Dharma, as expounded by Nichiren. I have tried to describe some aspects of Makiguchi’s understanding of this law or Dharma, but perhaps most pertinent here is that, while Makiguchi understood this as a law of universal causality, he did not see this as something objectively “other”, in the sense that the laws of nature have come to be understood by modernity. Rather, this law was something intrinsically “self”, open to communicative interaction with humans, finding its expression in human culture and creativity.

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Notes

- ¹ Finding the most appropriate language to describe Makiguchi's relationship with Buddhism presents a number of problems. In the 1943 record of his interrogation by the Special Higher Police, Makiguchi explains that he and his fellow members of the Value-Creating Education Society embrace the teachings "transmitted within" the Nichiren Shōshū sect. He clarifies that he rejected the idea of becoming a priest and having a temple, as he would then only be able to act within the limits of the sect's doctrines, and stressing the significance of incorporating, as a lay believer, his philosophy of value into those doctrines (Makiguchi 1981–1988, 10:185–88). The post-war Sōka Gakkai, more unambiguously self-identified as a body of lay believers of Nichiren Shōshū, even as it incorporated as a separate religious corporation (1951) and consistently stressed its own heritage of teaching and leadership, starting with Makiguchi. To say that Makiguchi "converted" to Nichiren Shōshū would be consistent with this post-war self-definitional language, but would not necessarily be an accurate representation of the historical reality (and Makiguchi's own self-definition). "Makiguchi's reception and adaptation of the interpretation of Nichiren's interpretation of Buddhism as understood by him to have been transmitted within Nichiren Shōshū" is probably the most accurate formulation, but is obviously unwieldy. When "reception" or "conversion" are used to describe Makiguchi's Buddhist practice, it is as shorthand for this more nuanced understanding. In a similar way, in places the term, "Nichiren Buddhism", will be used to indicate Makiguchi's reception of Nichiren's teachings, initially mediated by the Nichiren Shōshū exegetical tradition, but not limited to this.
- ² These two slogans appeared side-by-side on the cover of Value-Creating Education Society publications in the mid-1930s. As with many expressions consisting of four Sino-Japanese characters, the relationship between the parts is open to interpretation. In this case, the phrase is composed of two distinct parts: "religion" and "revolution". While a reading such as "[political/social] revolution through religion" is grammatically feasible and such a sense cannot be entirely excluded, the pairing with "education" makes this unlikely. This is because Makiguchi's mature writings on education (starting with the 1930–34 *Pedagogy*) are clearly aimed at revolutionizing educational theory and practice, with further societal reforms located as a kind of organic knock-on effect of that change.
- ³ Translations of Makiguchi's *Pedagogy* used in this paper have been produced as part of an ongoing translation project, with Jason Goulah and Nozomi Inukai, under the auspices of the DePaul University Institute for Daisaku Ikeda Studies in Education.
- ⁴ When William James offered the criteria of being "living, forced, and momentous" (James 1912, p. 3) for choices in religious faith, he was giving succinct expression to core assumptions of Protestant Christianity.
- ⁵ In interesting ways, these stances correspond to the nearly contemporaneous distinction made by John Dewey (1934) between what he termed "intellectual" and "moral" faith, in which the former indicates assent to certain propositions about how the world (in its perhaps hidden dimensions) is and the latter indicates committed action to bring about a more ideal world, based on conviction about how the world should be.
- ⁶ Or, "the science of application".
- ⁷ In this paper, the term *hō 法* is translated in a number of ways, depending on context. It is rendered as "Dharma" when it appears in clearly Buddhist contexts. The original Sino-Japanese character is included parenthetically, where it will clarify the polysemy and related communicative strategies present in Makiguchi's usage.
- ⁸ These readings of *hō 法* are all plausible in this context, and this multivalence is quite likely intended in Makiguchi's original, so they are included here.
- ⁹ The term *kami* is translated here as God, to indicate my reading of Ishiwara's usage of the term, its proximity to the Christian deity and distance from Shintō *kami*.
- ¹⁰ Ito Takao (Ito et al. 2022) is of the view that, alongside *seikatsu* "daily life", the term *gijutsu* 技術 represents a keyword of singular importance for Makiguchi, and indeed, it appears at many crucial points in Makiguchi's writings. While translated almost exclusively as "technology" or "technique" today, in Makiguchi's and earlier usages it points to skills developed through actual practice. It often appears as a translation of "art", as this term was used in nineteenth century Western languages and today has echoes in phrases, such as the medical or healing arts.
- ¹¹ This term, written with characters that might be rendered "body" and "test/sign", appears to have entered the Japanese language, at least partially, as a translation of the German philosophical term of the era, *Erleben*. As such, it contrasts with the previously established term *keiken* 経験 ("passage" and "test/sign") for *Erfahrung*, which Makiguchi used to indicate humans' more objective and disinterested interaction with their surroundings.
- ¹² The "Shintō secular" can be understood as Japan's implementation of the modern national ideal of "civic religion" and, several centuries after the fact, of the *cuius regio, eius religio* template of Westphalian sovereignty as the right of princes to determine the official faith within their territory.

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