

The *Hiroshima Panels* and Soka Gakkai's Anti-Atomic-Weapon Aesthetics

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ABSTRACT: The tragedy of Hiroshima generated, since its immediate aftermath, works of art that tried to capture its horror and preserve its memory. In Japanese contemporary art, the fifteen giant *Hiroshima Panels*, painted by Iri Maruki and his wife Toshi between 1950 and 1982, epitomize this effort that marked a generation. The article explores the context, meaning, and controversies surrounding the *Panels* and compares them to other international artistic reactions to Hiroshima, including the “Eaist” movement in Italy. It then explores how Daisaku Ikeda, the third president of Soka Gakkai, presented his opposition to nuclear weapons, including through novels for children and *anime* (animated films), and discusses similarities and differences between his discourse and aesthetics and *The Hiroshima Panels*.

KEYWORDS: Hiroshima Panels, Iri Maruki, Toshi Maruki, Eaism, Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai, Soka Gakkai Anti-Nuclear-Weapon Activities, Hiroshima Bombing and the Visual Arts.

Introduction

On July 7, 2023, my wife and I visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, with its director as our personal guide. Significantly, at the very entrance of the museum stands a work of art, a mosaic called *Caravan of Peace*. Its author is Hikuo Hirayama (1930–2009), a Japanese academic and painter famous for his depictions of deserts along the Silk Road. Hirayama was also a *hibakusha*, a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. His *Caravan of Peace* expresses the desire to unite Western and Eastern culture in a common journey towards a world without wars.

Indeed, as we learned in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, the *hibakusha* almost immediately after the bombing of August 6, 1945, understood

the therapeutic function of art, and started drawing the horrific scenes they had seen. Although the purpose of the children and adults who created these drawings was not artistic, some works tell the horrific story of Hiroshima with such a strong power that they do belong to the realm of art. All the most dramatic moments of the tragedy were immediately captured by the drawings. As one *hibakusha*, whose words accompany the exhibition of his works in the museum as a caption, reminisced,

People were crawling towards the river, crying out for water to cool their burns. But many died on the riverbanks or drowned. The river was full of bodies [caption in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum].

Collecting original drawings by the *hibakusha* in the museum serves the same purpose the Japanese Buddhist movement Soka Gakkai has pursued for many years in collecting, publishing, and translating testimonies of the bombing survivors—before it would be too late to preserve them. An important book, *Hiroshima and Nagasaki: That We Never Forget*, contains the testimonies of over fifty *hibakusha* collected and published by the Soka Gakkai Youth Division in Japan in 2017 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda's (1900–1958) “Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons” (Soka Gakkai Youth Division 2017).

This article discusses how the horror of the bombing was presented in the celebrated *Hiroshima Panels* by Iri Maruki (1901–1995) and his wife Toshiko (Toshi, 1912–2000). It will shortly compare their artistic reaction to the atomic bomb to that of Eaism, an Italian movement that developed in the city of Livorno after the bombings. It will then discuss how the language of these artists presents both differences and similarities with respect to the aesthetic of Soka Gakkai's campaigns against nuclear weapons, focusing in particular on the *anime* (animation film) *Journey to Hiroshima*, based on one of the children's stories written by Soka Gakkai's third president Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023).

Iri and Toshi Maruki

Iri Maruki was born on June 20, 1901, in Imuro-mura, Asa-gun, a small village near Hiroshima (the biographies of Iri and Toshi are summarized from Okamura 2019). His mother Suma Maruki (1875–1956) ran the shipping agency family business. Only in her seventies, urged by her daughter-in-law Toshi, she

converted a hobby into a profession and became a professional painter herself, producing more than seven hundred works, some of which won national awards. Although she was also a survivor of the Hiroshima bombing, she depicted mostly animals and flowers, in a dreamy style that showed she had finally found peace.

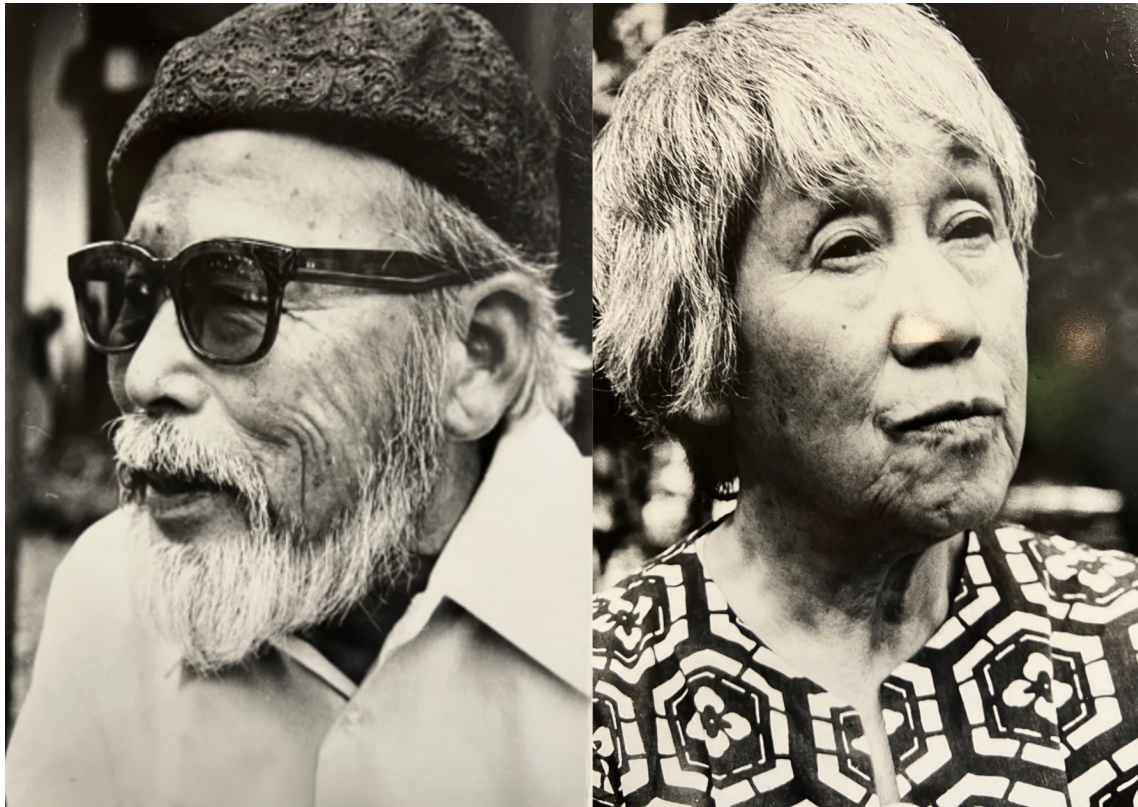


Image 1. Iri and Toshi Maruki (all pictures except the last one were taken by or on behalf of Massimo Introvigne at Higashi-Matsuyama's Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels in July 2023).

At age 18, Iri moved to Osaka to study design at the Seika Institute of Art, from where he transferred in 1923 to the Tennen School of Painting in Tokyo. He studied under Raisho Tanaka (1868–1940), at that time one of the most celebrated Japanese landscape painters. In 1928, he exhibited in Hiroshima for the first time while continuing his studies in Tokyo, from 1934 at the Metro School of Art led by another well-known artist, Rofu Ochiai (1896–1937).

Iri broadened his interests and explored Western Surrealism and abstract art. In the late 1930s, his works were increasingly featured in national exhibitions. He became a member of the Bijutsu Bunka Kyokai (Association for Art and Culture), whose members wanted to create an art in dialogue with the Western

avant-gardes yet distinctly Japanese. This dialogue is apparent in Iri's *suibokuga* (ink wash paintings) of the decade.

In 1940, Iri met fellow painter Toshiko (Toshi) Akamatsu. She was born on February 11, 1912, in Chippubetsu, Hokkaido, in a deeply religious family. One of her relatives was the head priest of a large Zen temple. In 1929, Toshi moved to Tokyo to enroll at the Women's Academy of Fine Arts, which still exists under the name Joshibi University of Art and Design. She graduated in 1933 but was not able to support herself as a full-time artist. She became a teacher at an elementary school located in Ichikawa, in the Prefecture of Chiba.

In 1937, she moved to Moscow with the better-paid job of private tutor of the children of a Japanese embassy interpreter. She returned to Tokyo in 1938 and joined the artist colony called Atelier Village. She exhibited in several galleries and, before Iri did, had her first solo exhibition in 1939 at the fashionable Kinokuniya Gallery in Tokyo's Ginza. In the same year, Iri participated in an exhibition in the same gallery, but did not meet Toshi, who was busy preparing for a five-month trip to Micronesia.

It was upon her return in September 1940 that she met Iri for the first time. They started dating, but Toshi decided to return to Moscow in January 1941, this time as tutor of the children of Japan's Ambassador to the Soviet Union. She returned to Japan and married Iri in July 1941, persuading him to join her and live in the Atelier Village. However, the war soon broke and the Marukis moved to the safest area of Urawa (a city now incorporated into Saitama), in the Prefecture of Saitama, some thirty kilometers from Tokyo.

After their traumatic stay in Hiroshima for a month in the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombing, they returned to Tokyo and joined several avant-garde artistic associations, as well as the Japanese Communist Party. However, partisan politics was neither their vocation nor their main interest. With time, they became critical of Marxism and in 1964 were expelled from the Communist Party. In 1948, they moved to Katase, in the Prefecture of Kanagawa, and decided to devote themselves to preserve the experience of the victims and survivors of the Hiroshima bombings through art. In 1950, they exhibited what will become the first of the *Hiroshima Panels* in Tokyo. What was originally conceived as a three-panel project kept growing for the next twenty-two years, until the Hiroshima paintings reached the number of fourteen in 1972. A fifteenth panel, on Nagasaki, was added in 1982. This is the only panel that is not

exhibited in the museum established in the house in the city of Higashi-Matsuyama, in the Prefecture of Saitama, where the Marukis, after having lived in Tokyo and in Matsudo, in the Prefecture of Chiba, settled in 1966 and remained until their deaths.

Panel XV is thus at the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, while Panels I to XIV remain in the Maruki's house, renamed after their deaths the Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels. It also hosts large paintings in the same style of the *Panels*, which the Marukis produced in the last period of their lives about other horrors and disasters, including Auschwitz and the Nanjing Massacre. By then, they were among the most internationally well-known and celebrated Japanese artists and spent much of their time promoting domestically and internationally the *Hiroshima Panels*.

In 1986 a documentary on the *Hiroshima Panels* directed by American filmmaker John Junkerman called *Hellfire: A Journey from Hiroshima*, was nominated for an Academy Award. In 1988, the Marukis received honorary doctorates from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. In 1995, an international movement to award them the Nobel Peace Prize gained some momentum but did not ultimately succeed. That the Marukis, even after their break with the Japanese Communist Party, had still participated during the Cold War in regime-sponsored exhibitions in the Soviet Union, Hungary, Bulgaria, and China was still held against them.

Iri died in October 19, 1995 at age 94. Toshi died on January 13, 2000, at age 87. Although it was difficult to keep their work separated from politics in the Cold War climate, the Marukis always maintained that the message of the *Hiroshima Panels* was political only in the broader sense of the word. They were against nuclear weapons rather than against any particular country or bloc.

The Hiroshima Panels

The Marukis were both *nyusi hibakusha*, i.e., they were among those who were not in Hiroshima on August 6 but went there immediately after the bombing to help (thus exposing themselves to the radiation: Kozawa 2019, 11). Iri was from Hiroshima and had family there. Some survived the tragedy; others did not.

Both Iri and Toshi worked as volunteers (and depicted themselves as such in the eighth *Hiroshima Panel*) but also interviewed survivors and collected journals.

American historian of Japan John Dower has called the *Hiroshima Panels* “one of the most ambitious artistic undertakings of this [the 20th] century” (Dower 2019, 103). As mentioned earlier, the production of fifteen giant panels occupied the Marukis for thirty-two years, from 1950 to 1982.



Image 2. Massimo Introvigne in front of Panel VIII, where the Marukis depicted themselves as volunteers in Hiroshima.

Panel I: Ghosts

I will now shortly present the fifteen panels. Each is accompanied by a short poem written by the artists. Panel I, *Ghosts*, depicts what the Marukis encountered when they arrived in Hiroshima, shortly after the bombing. They reported that,

We lost our uncle to the Atomic Bomb and our two young nieces were killed; our younger sister suffered burns and our father died after six months; many friends perished. Iri left Tokyo for Hiroshima on the first train from Tokyo, three days after the Bomb was dropped. Toshi followed a few days later. Two kilometers from the center of

the explosion, the family house was still standing. But the roof and roof tiles were mostly gone, windows had been blown out, and even the pans, dishes, and chopsticks had been blasted out of their places in the kitchen. In what was left of the burned structure, rescued bomb victims were gathered together and lay on the floor from wall to wall until it was full (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 8).

They started working as volunteers:

We carried the injured, cremated the dead, searched for food, and found scorched sheets of tin to patch the roof. With the stench of death and the flies and the maggots all around us, we wandered about in the same manner as those who had experienced the Bomb (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 8).

A “procession of ghosts” was still going on:

A human shadow was etched on stone steps.

Did that person’s body vaporize?

Was it blown away?

No one remains to tell us what it was like near the hypocenter.

There was no way to distinguish one charred, blistered face from another.

Voices became parched and hoarse.

Friends would say their names, but still not recognize each other.

One lone baby slept innocently, with beautiful skin.

Perhaps it survived, sheltered by its mother’s breast.

We hope that at least this one child will awaken to live on (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 2).

This panel was the first to be painted. It was in 1950, and the Marukis were afraid its exhibition might be prevented from post-war censorship. It was exhibited at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. At the opening, some visitors loudly criticized the work as both unrealistic and propagandistic: did really citizens of Hiroshima walk around the city naked and disfigured? Then an old man rebuked them. He was there, he said, and had lost a daughter and a grandson in the bombing: and the painting told the story exactly as it happened (Dower 2019, 103).

Panel II: Fire

In the perverse alchemy of Hiroshima, all elements were mobilized against humanity. “Never on earth or in heaven had humankind experienced such a blast”

(Maruki and Maruki 1983, 2). Fire was everywhere. A mother refused to hand her child to the rescuers, telling them she would only be left to wander the streets, and burned with her little girl. “Mother and child were devoured by swift flames of vermillion” (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 2).



Image 3. Detail of Panel II.

These horrific scenes were based both on sketches and on an extensive collection of photographs the Maruki had gathered. According to historian Setsuko Kozawa,

The war paintings of Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita [1886–1968] and others share this methodology. Foujita’s “final battle” paintings (*gyokusai-zu*) were the product of the painter’s imagination, working in a studio, while the Marukis based their work more closely on the original scene, but they share the compositional techniques of depicting, one by one, members of a group caught in the throes of war (Kozawa 2019, 11).

The realism derived from their personal experience and familiarity with direct sources did not prevent the Marukis from mobilizing the resources of Japanese traditional art and religious traditions to build their modern-day apocalyptic icons. Dower notes that *Fire*,

intimating hell, gave a hint of the unanticipated resources that the two artists had to draw upon; for not only did their seemingly divergent styles merge effectively, but it also became apparent that many of the painterly idioms of traditional Japanese art could be applied with stunning effects to stark contemporary subjects. Thus, the brilliantly stylized flames that consume the victims of Hiroshima in *Fire* can also be seen in ancient Buddhist paintings and medieval Japanese scrolls, including classic depictions of the torments of *jigoku*, or hell (Dower 2019, 103).

Panel III: Water

The second element, water, offered a false solace. All the victims screamed for water, without knowing that drinking water would actually kill them. When they understood it, survivors were put in the cruel alternative of giving water to those who desperately asked for it and kill them instantly, or refusing and increase the pain of their loved ones who would die anyway. Jumping into the crowded river involved the risk of drowning there. Yet, many were fatally attracted by the water as if it were their way of salvation. For many, it wasn't.



Image 4. The “Hiroshima Madonna” in Panel III.

In the water, the artists depicted their twentieth-century image of Madonna and child. She gives the breast to her child; then, she realizes he is not alive.

Wounded mother and dead infant.

The statue of despair.

Let the mother and child be

a symbol of hope as it has always been.

It must be! (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 3).

The Hiroshima Madonna has become the most famous and iconic detail of the *Hiroshima Panels*. Its power derives from the inversion of symbols. Breastfeeding and water are both symbols of life. But the bomb corrupted whatever it touched, and both water and breastfeeding became symbols of death.

So powerful was this panel that, when it was finished in 1950, Iri Maruki believed that it completed their trilogy, and no further paintings were needed. However, his wife prevailed upon him, and in 1951 they decided to go on with the series (Dower 2019, 103).

Panel IV: Rainbow

A rainbow was really seen shortly after the bombing, but Panel IV remains hopelessly dark. Looking carefully, one sees American uniforms. American prisoners of war were in Hiroshima. “The Atomic Bomb kills foes and friends” (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 3).

The prisoners of war are the only Americans in the *Hiroshima Panels*. Depicting the Americans as aggressors was legally forbidden by Occupation policy. However, for the Marukis not to depict the American plane dropping the bomb was a conscious choice, not governed by legal reasons only, and one they came to after long deliberations. Kozawa reports that,

even after the Occupation ended, the Marukis did not directly depict the aggressor. In various episodes and recollections, the artists described the internal struggles they experienced over depicting the aggressor. Over time, this led to the depiction of people at war in a manner that could not be contained by the simple dichotomies of aggressor/victim or enemy/ally (Kozawa 2019, 11).

As for the rainbow, its apparition in Hiroshima is both historically accurate and seems to offer a way to the artists to escape their own desperation. However, the

dark mood still prevailing in the panel demonstrates that the way to a possible escape remained long and painful.

Panel V: Boys and Girls

School pupils, boys and girls, had been mobilized for military drills and civil work and defense. The great majority of those caught in the Hiroshima bombing did not survive. Many of those who did were physically or mentally handicapped for the rest of their lives.

The panel is an obvious critic of militarism, which promised glory and victory to young boys and girls and delivered only death:

The boys and girls had been mobilized
to do adult work that day
to tear down buildings

Whole classes died together (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 3).

However, the *Hiroshima Panels* always tell their stories both through hyper-realistic images and through symbols. Not unimportant in the panel are dead trees. Just as water in Panel III, trees are a symbol of life and beauty in traditional Japanese art. Here, the meaning of the symbol, once again, is reversed. The trees have been disfigured and killed just as the militarized boys and girls were.



Image 5. Details of Panel V.

Panel VI: Atomic Desert

The apocalyptic scenario of a post-atomic Planet Earth, featured in several movies, was a reality in Hiroshima.

There was no food, nor medicine.

Houses were all burned,

the rain came in.

No electricity, no newspaper to read, no radio.

No doctor (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 3).

—and corpses and bones everywhere. The Marukis, who completed Panel VI in 1952, noted that,

Even now

human bones are found in the soil

in Hiroshima (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 4).

Cattle had been a favorite subject of Iri's pre-war works, and here animals share in the general sadness, as cow skulls accompany the desperate wandering of survivors. In another iconic image, a mother looks for her lost little girl with a rag doll in her hand. We understand that the girl will never be found. The rag doll is all what remains of her—in a way, the rag doll *is* the girl.

Panel VII: Bamboo Grove

When the artists arrived in Hiroshima, they discovered that many had sought shelter in a bamboo grove. But nobody helped them there, and many died.

There was no one to take away the corpses—

A typhoon and flood in early September

carried them all away

out to sea (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 4).

Here, a Japanese audience's attention would be no doubt attracted by the bamboo. Traditionally, the bamboo is a symbol of harmony. It has a number of metaphorical, spiritual, and even esoteric meanings. It is said that painting a bamboo in a perfect way was the test of greatness for classic Japanese artists.

Here, what the Marukis want to show us is that even the resilient bamboo can be humiliated and killed. Those who sought refuge in it might have counted on the traditions and legends about the sacred bamboo but were deceived and disappointed.

Panel VIII: Relief

Panel VIII introduces an element of hope. Although it acknowledges that “rescue came later” (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 4), it celebrates the volunteers, including the two artists, who went to Hiroshima and did whatever possible to help, even after they were told they were exposing themselves to the radiation.

We understand that this unforgettable experience generated the *Hiroshima Panels*. The Marukis saw dead people and people dying in their arms. They tried to help others, unsure of what their fate will be, yet trying to do something for them nonetheless. They included the parents of the husband of Iri’s sister:

Sister’s mother- and father-in-law
had hundreds of glass fragments
piercing their whole bodies.
Their ankles were swollen
as thick as thighs.
From our house we put them on a cart
and pulled it to their oldest son’s home in Kaita
walking by the center of the blast (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 4).

Having told the story of their personal involvement in the tragedy, the Marukis believed they had concluded the *Hiroshima Panels*. However, something happened. Panel VIII was painted in 1954 and first exhibited in February 1955. In March 1954, the *Daigo Fukuryu Maru* incident (depicted in Panel IX) happened. By reflecting on it, the artists concluded their work should continue.

Panel IX: Yaizu

Panel IX is the first of the *Hiroshima Panels* dealing with an incident that did not happen in Hiroshima. However, the artists insisted that, unlike later

depictions of Auschwitz and other horrors, it should be regarded as part of the *Hiroshima Panels*.

After World War II, nuclear weapon tests continued. Paradoxically, the long series of American tests in the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands—which Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) denounced in his famous painting *The Three Sphinxes of Bikini* (1947: see Introvigne 2023)—caused again Japanese victims. In 1954, the Japanese fishing boat *Daigo Fukuryu Maru*, from the port of Yaizu, was showered with ashes from a Bikini test explosion. Its chief radio officer, Aikichi Kuboyama (1914–1954), died after six months. Others from the crew developed various diseases, as did islanders living near Bikini.

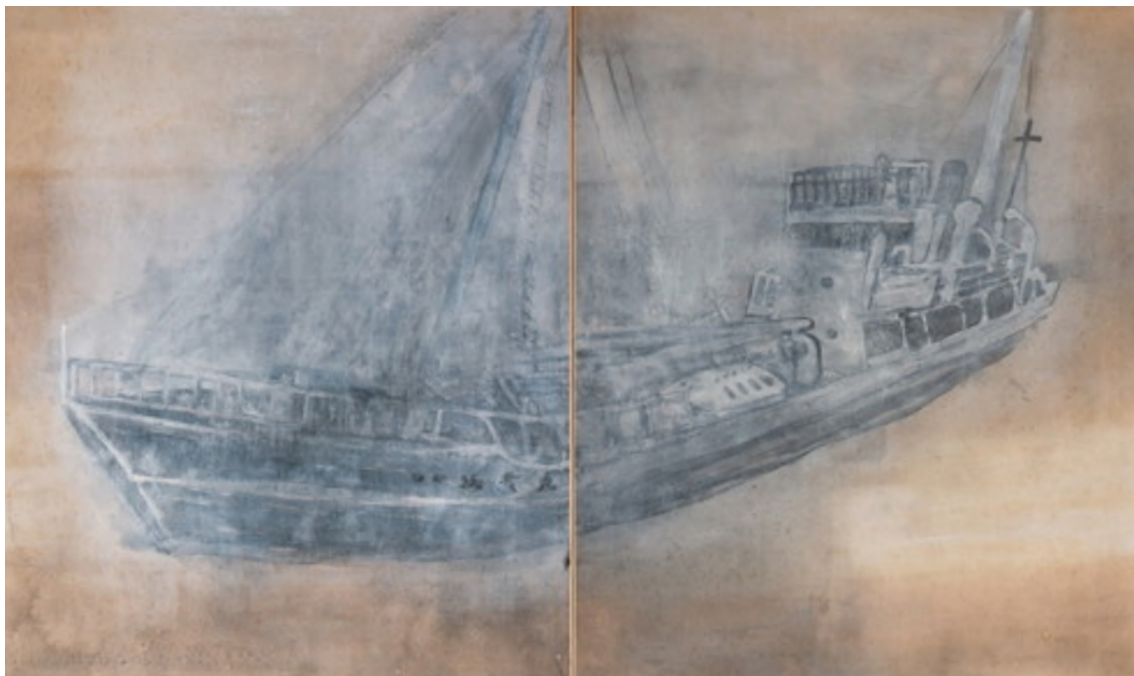


Image 6. The *Daigo Fukuryu Maru* depicted in a way reminiscent of the mythical *Flying Dutchman* in Panel IX.

The Marukis cannot be accused of ignoring the suffering of the islanders, who occupy more than half of the panel, yet their attention was caught by the paradox that, after so many discussions and apologies for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, again in 1954 a nuclear explosion had Japanese among its victims, this time outside of a war context:

Once, twice, three times

Japanese fell victim

to the Nuclear Age (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 5).

To the Marukis, just as to the members of Soka Gakkai who developed similar reflections in these years, it was now clear that the battle for preserving the memory of Hiroshima could not be separated from a battle to ban all nuclear weapons and tests altogether.

Panel X: Petition

The Bikini explosions fueled the anti-nuclear-weapon movement, which had started in Japan almost immediately after Hiroshima, and in which Soka Gakkai played a leading role. Petitions to ban atomic weapons started being signed in Tokyo and all over Japan.

On the left of the panel, signs of hope appear. Cherries and plums blossom again. The horror of the atomic bombings cannot be forgotten, but the birth of a powerful anti-nuclear-weapon movement, which was started in Japan, offered some hope.

The Marukis, however, were still hesitating between hope and despair. They were still collecting stories from the *hibakusha*. Panel X was completed in 1955. After four years, they returned to where it all started, in Hiroshima, with the very different Panel XI of 1959.

Panel XI: Mother and Child

Dower argues that with Panel XI the artists “returned to the hell fire and images of despair” (Dower 2019, 103). Indeed, at first sight, the panel is another depiction of the mother-child relationship turned into tragedy and death, in the spirit of the earlier panels III and VI.

Parent left child, child left parent,
husband left wife, wife left husband.
Nowhere to escape to.
Figures fleeing in all directions.
This was the Atomic Bomb.
In the midst of this, how eerie—
Mothers’ loving arms shielding their babies

from death, dying themselves.

There were oh! so many (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 5).

However, this was not the whole story. The Marukis were also interested in narratives of miracles. They acknowledged that legends follow all disasters but did not rule out the possibility that some stories might be true. They reported that “many witnessed the miraculous sights of children who survived, held tightly in their dead mothers’ arms” (Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels 2023). This supernatural reference makes Panel XI, of 1959, somewhat different from the panels of the early 1950s.

Panel XII: Floating Lanterns

After completing Panel XI in 1959, the Marukis did not continue the series for almost ten years. The decade was spent by organizing traveling exhibitions of the *Hiroshima Panels*. The Maruki’s ambition was to bring an anti-nuclear-weapon message “to both sides of the Cold War” (Dower 2019, 104). They took the panels to the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea, as well as to Western Europe, Australia, and the United States. While they realized how difficult it was to avoid being manipulated by different countries for propaganda purposes, they also visited museums throughout the world and were exposed to the progress of Western modern art, which they had somewhat lost touch with during the war and the long years in which they had focused on the *Panels*.

Panel XII was completed in 1968, when Hiroshima had been reconstructed and August 6 was becoming an institutional memory. It also shows how the artists had been more influenced by non-figurative art. It depicts, with reminiscences of Cubism, the sad yet poetic tradition of putting each year, in the anniversary of the bombing, floating lanterns in the Hiroshima rivers with the names of the victims. On August 6, 1945, the rivers had been full of corpses. Now, only their names remained.



Image 7. “Cubist” reminiscences in Panel XII.

In 1968, the Maruki’s world tours with the *Panels* still missed the most challenging experience: showing Hiroshima to the Americans. This happened in 1970, when the artists accompanied the *Hiroshima Panels* to the United States. It was a deep, life-changing experience.

Panel XIII: Death of the American Prisoners of War

As the Marukis later reported, there were several intense moments in their American tour. Art critics generally acclaimed the *Panels*, yet non-specialized audiences had mixed reactions. Some asked the Marukis whether they hated the Americans, thus perpetuating a current of hatred that could only generate new horrors and wars. A mother who had a son killed in Pearl Harbor asked whether they had considered that Japanese militarism had killed many too. And a Chinese American inquired about how Japanese audiences would react if Chinese artists would go to Japan to exhibit panels about the atrocities of the Japanese Army in China, including the Nanjing Massacre of 1937 (Dower 2019, 104).

The Maruki did not react defensively, but asked themselves whether the *Hiroshima Panels* may inadvertently perpetuate a form of nationalistic chauvinism, while their purpose had always been to depict the atomic weapons as a form of universal evil. They were particularly disturbed by the objection that American prisoners of war who were in Hiroshima in 1945, including women,

had not been killed by the bomb as depicted in their Panel IV but had been lynched by Japanese survivors.

They didn't know for sure, and upon their return back home from the United States they decided to go to Hiroshima to investigate. They interviewed survivors and concluded that some of the 23 American prisoners of war who died in Hiroshima were killed by the bombing, but others were beaten to death by survivors who were not stopped but rather encouraged to kill them by the military police. The Marukis believed some of the Americans killed were women, although this detail is now regarded as probably false (Dower 2019, 104–5).

But the artists were now decided to include in the *Hiroshima Panels* also the less honorable moments of the aftermath of the bombing. Panel XIII shows how the American prisoners of war, including women, who were held near the epicenter of the blast and would have died anywhere, were lynched on August 6 by furious Japanese survivors.

Panel XIV: Crowds

While they were at it, the Marukis explored another dark moment in the Japanese reaction to Hiroshima. Korea was at that time a Japanese colony, from where during the war laborers were “conscripted” to work in Japan. Some 40,000 Koreans worked in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and thousands died. The Marukis discovered that the military authorities ordered to bury the Japanese first, with the result that crows ate parts of the Koreans' corpses.

After the Bomb, the bodies of the Koreans

were left on the streets to the very last.

Some were alive but few.

Nothing to be done.

Crows descending from the sky.

Hordes of crows,

coming down to eat the eyes of the Koreans.

Eat the eyes!

Even in death, Koreans were discriminated against (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 6).

The artist did not want to give the impression of ignoring the shortcomings of the Japanese survivors and authorities. But the Marukis also criticized the government of South Korea, where some 15,000 *hibakusha* returned but, unlike in Japan, their special status and needs were not acknowledged (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 6).

Panel XV: Nagasaki

The Marukis did not have the same experience of Nagasaki as they had of Hiroshima. However, ten years after completing Panel XIV, they decided that the series should be completed by a Panel XV, both about Nagasaki and to be exhibited in that city, separated from the other paintings.

Completed in 1982, Panel XV shows how the epicenter of the Nagasaki bombing was the Catholic cathedral in Urakami (also spelled Uragami), where a Mass was being celebrated and the priest and the devotees were immediately killed:

Just above Urakami Cathedral
it exploded.

Instantaneously annihilating
the priests and believers
and all.

The cathedral at the center.

Endless concentric halo-like circles
of dead human beings (Maruki and Maruki 1983, 6).

In the last of the *Hiroshima Panels*, the theme of the inversion of the symbols is completed. Churches and temples should be arks of salvation. In Nagasaki, however, a church becomes the very center from which the deadly radiation irradiates.

The relationship between the Marukis and religion remains ambiguous. Sometimes, there seems to be hope in the miraculous. In other cases, the implicit statement is that the horror of the Bomb is so absolute that not even religion can offer salvation from it.

Beyond Panel XV

The Marukis wanted that the same museum in Higashi-Matsuyama would also host some of their other works. Their purpose was to show that Hiroshima was not the only manifestation of 20th-century evil. The museum includes their giant panels about Auschwitz and post-war ecological disasters in Japan that they attributed to corruption and greed.

Explicitly, they wanted to include a large, violent mural about the Nanjing Massacre, thus answering the challenge of the Chinese American lady who had confronted them during their American tour. Their answer was that being guilty of the atrocities of the 20th century is not a question of nationality. In the documentary *Hellfire: A Journey from Hiroshima*, Toshi acknowledged that

her own relatives, who were fighting in China at that time, might have been involved in the Nanking atrocities... There was no way of knowing (Dower 2019, 105).

The Marukis insisted that the *Hiroshima Panels* were not a Japanese “us versus them” indictment of the U.S., they were an indictment of the evil of 20th-century militarism, of ideologies, and more in general, of the corrupt human heart.

Eaism: A Comparison

After Hiroshima, several artistic movements that focused on the atomic energy and the danger of the atomic bomb were born in different countries. More than one appeared in Italy (Introvigne 2022). One was Eaism (Eaismo: Era-atomica-ismo, Atomic-era-ism), founded in 1948 in Livorno by painter Voltolino Fontani (1920–1976), who like many other artists before the war had been close to Theosophy (Fontani 2005–6, 37).

Eaists organized their first exhibition in Florence in 1949. Fontani's 1948 work *Grafodinamica (Dinamica di Assestamento o Frattura e Coesione)* [Graphodynamics (Dynamics of Settlement or Fracture and Cohesion)] was a manifesto of Eaism in itself, and a statement of its persuasion that the new science of the atom also required a new way of painting (Introvigne 2022, 26).

Fontani's *Composizione* (1949) was painted a few months after the birth of Eaism. According to a leading scholar of Fontani, Francesca Cagianelli, it depicts the anguish and bewilderment of post-Hiroshima humanity while the colors and

technique reflect the influence of Futurism (Cagianelli 2002, 20). Fontani continued to focus on atomic themes throughout the 1950s.

Fontani and his friends, just like Dalí in the 1950s, were both afraid of the atomic bomb and fascinated by the beauty of the physicists' representations of the atom and the possibilities it opened to artists. They were always against nuclear bombs and tests. However, their enthusiasm for the atom, in the predominantly leftist cultural milieu of post-war Tuscany, compelled them to react against accusations that they were not anti-nuclear-weapons enough (Fontani and Battisti 2020, 15).

That this accusation could be raised shows how audiences looking at the Eaist paintings immediately understood that the atomic theme was regarded by the artists as the possible source of a new beauty. Atomic energy could be used for peaceful purposes too, and the new prodigies of the atom could be represented, effectively creating a new form of art. As mentioned earlier, Fontani and the Eaists also denounced the perverse use of the atomic energy for weapons of mass destruction.

In the “Manifesto of Eaism,” published in 1948, the artists wrote

It should be clarified, however, that the movement does not extol the atomic age, tremendous and evil, nor is it inspired by the phenomenon of that tragic human progress that generated it in its external and mechanical aspects. EAISM will express the tragedy of the 20th century by being inspired by the sense of that tragedy, that is, the sense of humans plunged to live in it, seeking to restore again in humans, and translate into works, the shattered balance of the equation humanity-world (Favati et al. 1948, 11).

Yet, it was not immediately easy for audiences to understand.

The fascination for the atom, on the other hand, was totally absent in the Marukis. Unlike the Eaists or Dalí, they had been in Hiroshima immediately after the bombing and everything “atomic” remained for them an object of repulsion.

Ikeda at “Toda University”

Soka Gakkai is well-known internationally for its campaigns against nuclear weapons (Pellecchia 2022; Šorytė 2019, 2022, 2023). The experience of his third president, Daisaku Ikeda, was powerfully shaped by the horror of Hiroshima and the teachings of his mentor, Soka Gakkai's second President Josei Toda.

President Toda formulated some of the earlier and most radical proposals for the total ban of nuclear weapons (Šorytė 2019), including the strong-worded 1957 “Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons” (Toda 1957),

In the difficult post-war years in Japan, Ikeda received precious daily training from Toda. In subsequent years, Ikeda will affectionately refer to this training as “Toda University.” According to Japanese scholar Masayuki Shiohara, “Toda University” included:

1) all the education and training Ikeda received since he joined the Sōka Gakkai in August 1947; 2) all the education and training Ikeda received since he started working for Nihon Shōgakkai, Toda’s publishing company, in January 1949; and 3) the private one-on-one instruction Ikeda received from Toda since January 1950 (Shiohara 2021, 42).

Ikeda later reported that the term “Toda University” was first used by Toda himself:

According to Ikeda, Toda was the first to use it: “Once Mr. Toda spoke to me as follows: ‘I want very badly to send you to college. Unless you go, you may be at a disadvantage in society. However, you will be fine if you go to ‘a university of humanity,’ ‘a university of faith,’ that is, this ‘Toda University.’ Consider it a college for polishing all aspects of your character and acquiring your greatest power as a human being.’”

On another occasion, Ikeda further stated: “[Jean-Jacques] Rousseau [1712–1778] concluded, ‘true education consists less in precept than in practice.’ These are deep and important words. I fully received training from Mr. Toda. As a foremost representative [of his disciples], I was at his side from morning to night. It was a strict training and education. Mr. Toda called it ‘Toda University.’ It was a university of just the two of us. Receiving such education is the pride and happiness of my youth” (Shiohara 2021, 38–9).

In the private training Toda offered to Ikeda, the older leader insisted that at the core of both Nichiren Buddhism and an effective fight against nuclear weapons was being confident that we can always change our present and our future, no matter how dramatic our circumstances are. Toda taught that,

If people live their lives thinking only of what’s happening to them now, focusing solely on the present effects of past causes, humankind would never grow or develop. Practicing the Buddhism of true cause means bearing in mind that every instant of our lives is a cause for the future; it means having the firm resolve to make every instant a cause for the future (quoted in Ikeda 2021b).

Toda felt a special connection with Hiroshima, as evidenced by this episode of the last year of his life:

On the morning of November 20, two months after the “Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons,” Toda collapsed as he was about to head to Hiroshima, where the atomic bomb was dropped twelve years earlier. Thereafter, Toda had to rest and recuperate at home. The day before, on the 19th, Ikeda, worried about Toda’s extremely frail health, had tried to persuade Toda to cancel his trip to Hiroshima.

However, at that time Toda stubbornly rejected, saying, “I can’t turn my back on something once I’ve decided to do it. I will go even if it kills me!” (Shiohara 2021, 56).

When Ikeda worked for Toda as editor of his publishing company’s magazine for boys *Shonen Nihon*, efforts were made to tell the story of Hiroshima notwithstanding the American censorship that was then strictly enforced:

Among the articles published in the boys’ magazines during the time Ikeda served as the chief editor, one that warrants particular attention is the special series on the nuclear energy and the atomic bomb in the October and November 1949 issues of *Shōnen Nihon*. The November issue included a short story called *Genshino no hana* (Flower in the Atomic Wasteland), written by Akinaga Yoshirō [1904–1993] that depicted the aftermath of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima. At that time, Japan was under the GHQ [General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers] occupation, and all publications were subject to censorship. In particular, anything related to the atomic bomb was strictly censored. Under such conditions, Toda published a novel that illustrated the atrocity of the atomic bomb. Depending on the results of censorship, the publication of the magazine could have been banned. The fact that this series was planned even with such high risk shows Toda’s strong will to actualize a peaceful society; Ikeda also learned from this experience (Shiohara 2021, 58–9).

As Ikeda himself summarized it,

as a practicing Buddhist, my mentor [Toda] acutely understood from the depths of his soul that nuclear weapons would become the greatest threat hanging over humankind (Rotblat and Ikeda 2007, 5).

Nuclear weapons threaten our right to exist and are an absolute evil. Unless we rid the world of them, peace will remain an illusion. Forty-five years ago [Ikeda wrote these words in 2002], in his declaration against them, Toda clearly identified the true nature of nuclear weapons not from the standpoint of ideology but from that of all human life (Krieger and Ikeda 2002, 129).

Ikeda's "Hiroshima Notebook"

Ikeda wrote extensively about Hiroshima. I will, however, compare the Marukis' reactions to the bombing with a story for children Ikeda wrote in 1987, *A Journey to Hiroshima*, who became a successful *anime* (Ikeda 2016). In Italy, where the Soka Gakkai campaign Senzatmica has involved thousands of schoolchildren (Pellecchia 2022), this story has become popular with the title *Il quaderno di Hiroshima* (The Hiroshima Notebook).

The book and *anime* tell the story of two young boys, Kazu and Hide. When his father goes bankrupt, Hide, a popular student and tennis table champion, is crushed by shame and tries to commit suicide. While he is in the hospital, saved from death but with serious wounds, his friend Kazu, very much concerned about Hide, travels to Hiroshima to meet his aunt Yaeko.

In Hiroshima, Aunt Yaeko reveals to Kazu that she is a *hibakusha*. She saw all the horrors of the bombing and her father and mother died, leaving her alone to care for her younger brother (Kazu's father). She contemplated committing suicide.

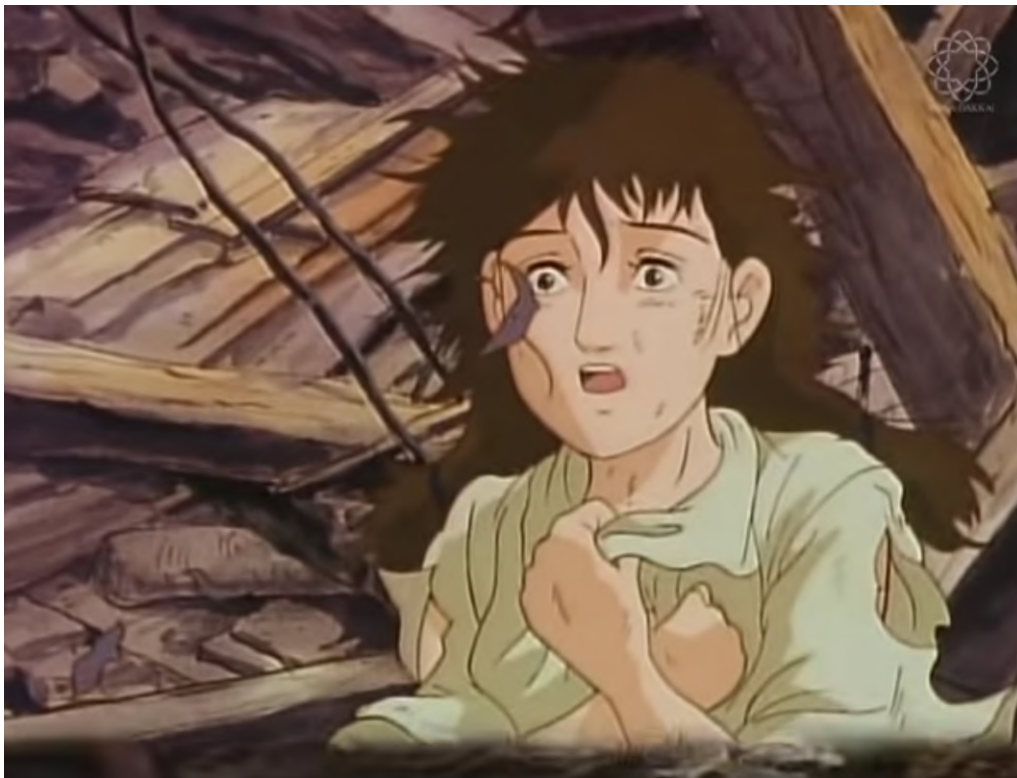


Image 8. A desperate Yaeko after the bombing in the *anime* version of Ikeda's *A Journey to Hiroshima*.

However, when she was ready to jump from a bridge, she met her primary school teacher (a figure of Ikeda himself). He told her he lost his wife and children and had also been close to suicide. But that would be spiritual defeat, he said. When he decided to live, he understood that “our spirits have not been defeated. We have more power than a single bomb!”

In trademark Ikeda style, the schoolteacher wrote down from memory on his notebook a passage from French philosopher Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) and gave the page to Kaeko. “Fate does not determine our happiness or unhappiness. It only provides the means... It is up to our own hearts to use these means to change what is around us.” These are the same teachings of Nichiren’s “Buddhism of True Cause” as taught by Toda to Ikeda.

Aunt Kaeko gives Kazu her most precious treasure, the page where her old teacher wrote down the quote from Montaigne, which gave her the strength to live and overcome the horror of the bombing. Kazu gives it to Hide and tells him the story of how his aunt survived the bombing and its aftermath. Meditating on the story and the words, Hide recovers his joy of living and moral strength, and despite his physical problems even manages to perform and win as a tennis table player. Hide has now internalized the lesson and can give back to Aunt Kaeko the Montaigne note.

The story of Aunt Kaeko resonates with the fifth Hiroshima Panel, *Boys and Girls*. Like the boys and girls in the panel, the young Kaeko was also mobilized for civil defense, and the bomb caught her while she was working in that capacity. Although the *anime* based on Ikeda’s story is intended for children, and the images are less terrific than those depicted by the Marukis, all the horror is there. One can even speculate that those who worked to convert Ikeda’s story into an *anime* might have seen the *Hiroshima Panels*, although pictures and early drawings from 1945 may be a common source.

Conclusion

The *Hiroshima Panels* are not devoid of hope, which is represented by the heroic work of the volunteers and ultimately by the power of art himself. However, the Marukis’ meditation on evil remains fundamentally pessimistic. Ikeda sees more clearly a way out.

Faith in Nichiren Buddhism illuminates the path to happiness extending from the past to the present, and from the present to the future. To be bound by the causes of the past and lament their effects in the present makes for an unhappy life. While it is true in a certain respect that the present is the result of past causes, by elevating our life state in the present, our negative past causes are transformed into positive ones. There is no need for us to be prisoners of the past; in fact, we can even change the past (Ikeda 2021a).

“Changing the past” means modifying our mindset, and is the key for changing the future:

The moment our mindset changes, we create a cause in the present that can definitely transform the effect manifested in the future. Nichiren Buddhism is the Buddhism of the Sun. It is a philosophy of hope that enables us to transform the present and realize a bright future. Those who embrace this philosophy need never feel despondent or hopeless. They need never give in to complaint. What matters is our inner resolve right now. That is the key to building a deep and solid path to an eternally triumphant life, to putting an end to the sufferings of the cycle of life and death and to creating the causes for victory and honor (Ikeda 2021a).

While the Marukis were looking for miracles in Hiroshima, for Ikeda “changing the past” is the real miracle, and it can happen in the lives of all of us.

Toda explained:

Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the way to transform our karma for the better. Through chanting, we are able to clean our slate of past causes and effects and reveal our true selves as ordinary people enlightened since time without beginning (quoted in Ikeda 2021b).

As a true former pupil of “Toda University,” Ikeda concluded that,

No matter what happened in the past or what has taken place up to now, we can make a new cause in the present—a true cause based on the Mystic Law, which is the strongest of all causes—and redirect the current of our lives. Our faith empowers us to continue moving forward victoriously into a bright future (Ikeda 2021b).

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