

Article

Intercultural Dialogue for Peace: A Conversation Between Martin Wight's *Three Traditions* and Daisaku Ikeda's *Civilization of Dialogue*

Andrew Eungi Kim ¹, Jongman Kim ² and Daniel Phillip Connolly ^{3,*} ¹ Division of International Studies, Korea University, Seoul 02841, Republic of Korea; aekim@korea.ac.kr² Institute for Religion and Civic Culture, Kyung Hee University, Seoul 02447, Republic of Korea; kjmif@khu.ac.kr³ Division of International Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul 02450, Republic of Korea

* Correspondence: danielc@hufs.ac.kr

Abstract

This paper explores the advocacy of Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023) for intercultural dialogue as a means of fostering peace. It does so by bringing his thought into dialogue with Martin Wight (1913–1972), an English international relations theorist whose *three traditions* model explored two forms of dehumanization: a radical solidarist position that dehumanizes by treating all people the same, and an extreme form of pluralism that leads us to a realist position that there is no morality except for a group's own truth. Wight's model is especially helpful for drawing out the tensions in Ikeda's writings between peacebuilding processes centered on solidarism and those centered on pluralism. But, at the same time, this model benefits from a sustained conversation with Ikeda because Wight's conceptualization of a middle path was highly Eurocentric and too state-centric. Ultimately, Wight's model gives us a new vocabulary and the context to understand Ikeda's advocacy, but Ikeda's approach to intercultural dialogue, deeply rooted in Buddhist humanism and prioritizing citizen diplomacy and education, went farther than Wight in theorizing and practicing how to create a healthy middle ground between the two forms of dehumanization. When viewed together, both scholars also address the broader ambivalence in the literature about why, how and when religion(s) contribute to violence and peace by emphasizing the courage and faith needed to navigate a middle path between extremes.

Keywords: English School; pluralism; solidarism; humanism; religious violence; religious peacebuilding



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1. Introduction

Contemporary international relations are widely seen as in a state of crisis—with cultural and discursive polarization becoming a growing problem across the world ([Brügge-mann and Meyer 2023](#)). Alongside this process has been what scholars call the *civilizational turn* in International Relations (IR), which attempts to understand how cultural and religious values interact with or even transcend the state system ([Arnason 2010b, 2010a](#); [Bettiza 2014](#); [Haynes 2014](#)). A pessimistic strain of this research sees foreign cultural values as a unique threat to the current world order ([Coker 2019](#); [Huntington 1996](#)). Tellingly, the most recent US national security strategy also draws upon this civilizational language, warning Europe that it is facing civilizational erasure due to its migration policies ([White House](#)

2025, p. 25). In this era of deepening polarization, facilitating dialogue across cultural boundaries is an urgent agenda for peace activists.

Accordingly, this paper explores intercultural dialogue as a means of fostering peace by examining the advocacy of Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023), a Japanese Buddhist philosopher and educator who led the Soka Gakkai—the largest new religious movement in Japan. It asks what philosophical principles underpin Ikeda’s advocacy of intercultural and interfaith dialogue as a pathway to peace (see [Kim and Kim 2024](#))? What are the key features and challenges of its implementation? To critically evaluate Ikeda’s vision of intercultural dialogue we contextualize it by drawing upon Martin Wight’s *three traditions* model of international life. Martin Wight (1913–1972), one of the founding figures of the English School of International Relations (IR) theory, is especially useful not only because he was more attuned to the role of religions in international relations than many other IR theorists, but also because his model captures the tension between particularist and universalist forms of dehumanization. When viewed from the vantage point of Wight’s model, Ikeda’s approach to intercultural dialogue can be understood as charting a middle ground between these two destructive tendencies.

This paper consciously positions itself as part of a growing effort by international relations scholars to better integrate the study of world politics and religion ([Troy 2013](#); [Sandal and Fox 2013](#); [Omer et al. 2015](#); [Norris and Inglehart 2004](#); [Snyder 2011](#); [Haynes 2021a](#); [Bagge Laustsen and Wæver 2000](#)). This is important because mainstream IR scholarship has often neglected religion, with critics noting how secularizing accounts tend to view it as unimportant or an atavistic leftover ([Sandal and Fox 2013](#); [Haynes 2021c](#), p. 5; [Jackson 2008](#), p. 360). This neglect of religion by IR scholars has even caused them to overlook the constitutive role of religious attitudes in IR theorizing itself—such as the role of faith and religion in classical realism ([Troy 2013](#)) or the work of contemporary scholars ([Fitzgerald 2011](#), p. 4). Compounding this neglect, the contemporary revival of IR scholarship’s interest in religion, which principally dates to the Iranian Revolution and then the September 11th attacks on the US, has tended to be reductionist accounts viewing religion as a source of insecurity ([Huntington 1996](#); [Brown 2021](#); [Haynes 2021b](#); [Juergensmeyer 2026](#)). [Appleby \(2015\)](#) divides these into strong, weak, and pathological accounts of religious violence. This fearful and ambivalent perspective of religion is also seen in peace studies ([Haynes 2014](#), p. 245). Even Appleby’s groundbreaking work on religious peacebuilding was focused on how religious movements could become peaceful by taming their extremist tendencies, noting religion’s unique “ability to sustain cycles of violence beyond the point of rational calculation and enlightened self-interest” ([Appleby 2000](#), p. 4). Despite progress in developing conceptual and theoretical understandings of religion’s role in peacebuilding (see [Omer et al. 2015](#)), an underlying ambivalence about the role of religion in organized violence still casts a long shadow. A major textbook on peace studies exemplifies this, noting how religion as a source of peaceful ideas but also “many of the world’s organized moral and theological preachers historically have been more likely to support militarism than to oppose it” ([Barash and Webel 2018](#), p. 460).

The underlying problem is that mainstream theoretical approaches to international peace and security are poorly equipped to deal with the role of religion. Realist theories, rooted in thinkers like Hobbes and Machiavelli, assume that humans (and states) are inherently self-interested and power-seeking ([Richmond 2024](#), pp. 29–30, 86, 251). The realist theory of peace is rooted in the belief that peace is not achieved through ideals or cooperation, but through power, deterrence, and the strategic behavior of states in an anarchic international system (see [Doyle 1997](#)). This is a very narrow understanding of peace as an absence of violence, called *negative peace*, and does not include ethical considerations of justice.¹ Moreover, drawing on Machiavelli’s classical distinction between

private morality and reasons of state, realists argue that the inclusion of religious values in state decision-making will produce suboptimal outcomes by causing actors to behave in ways contrary to the balance of power. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, has a more expansive vision of *positive peace*, which goes beyond the mere absence of violence and “denotes the simultaneous presence of many desirable states of mind and society, such as harmony, justice, equity, etc.” (Webel 2007, p. 6). Positive peace is fostered through the establishment of supportive attitudes, institutions, and systems that uphold stability in society. It seeks to eliminate structural violence, encompassing social injustices and inequalities that negatively impact individuals. Nevertheless, neoliberalism’s treatment of religion is limited by the assumption that secularization is part of human progress (Fukuyama 1992), so the persistence of religious attitudes and practices is a *problem* to be explained. This attitude is evident in Norris and Inglehart’s Existential Security Theory, which views religion as a byproduct of a lack of peace: “We believe that the importance of religiosity persists most strongly among vulnerable populations” (Norris and Inglehart 2004, p. 4).

This paper consciously draws on Martin Wight’s *three traditions* model as an alternative to neorealist or neoliberal understandings of peace. We select this model because it is a centerpiece of the English School, also known as the International Society approach, a school of thought that has been identified as one of the IR theories best suited to examining the role of religion in world politics (Sandal and Fox 2013; Haynes 2021c; also see Troy 2013). Moreover, Wight himself stands out from his fellow English School scholars for being exceptionally attuned to religious issues and themes (Bull 1992; Bain 2025), which makes his writings a useful guide for exploring the theoretical connection between war, peace, and religion. As we show below, Wight’s model highlights two distinct forms of dehumanization that threaten human flourishing. The first is excessive diffidence to cultural uniqueness, i.e., pluralism turning into exclusivism, which produces an international system built on differentiation and results in violent power-maximization. The second is an aggressive sense of human moral unity, i.e., solidarism blending into universalism, which corrodes the boundaries between cultures and fuels messianic behavior. A key implication of this model is that both processes are forms of peace and order-making in moderation but when taken to extremes they become forms of violent dehumanization.

This theoretical discussion sets the stage for revisiting the peace advocacy of Daisaku Ikeda. Ikeda is a useful figure to bring into dialogue with Wight because even though they were contemporaries and examining the same themes of religion, violence and peace-making, they never met in person and have never been compared before.² Bringing them together for the first time and comparatively analyzing their perspectives of religion’s linkage to dehumanization and its solutions is intended as a form of triangulation that can illuminate the issue in richer detail than would be possible by approaching their works individually. Arguably, Wight provides a richer theoretical model of the problem, but Ikeda exemplifies a practitioner’s perspective of peace advocacy that is more solution-oriented. Additionally, this comparison is deliberately intended to bridge Western and non-Western religious and intellectual traditions. This is necessary because there are persistent critiques of the English School, and IR theories more generally, that they are Eurocentric depictions of the world that downplay non-Western agency and beliefs (Geeta and Nair 2004; Hobson 2014; Peterson 2021). Ikeda, for instance, is never mentioned in mainstream IR textbooks and even Buddhism rarely appears. Therefore, bringing Ikeda into conversation with Wight, one of the foundational thinkers of the field, is congruent with Acharya’s (2017, p. 76) call for a new global IR incorporating the “voices and experiences of the non-Western world.”

We argue that Ikeda’s vision of a *civilization of dialogue* creates a middle ground between the dangers identified by Wight’s *three traditions* model. This argument is supported by

zooming in on several aspects of Ikeda's advocacy. First, Ikeda regarded intercultural dialogue itself as the most reliable pathway to positive peace, maintaining that open and sincere communication can break down the walls of mistrust, hatred, and division (Ikeda 2000).³ This approach also drew significant influence from leading advocates of nonviolence, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. Even though Ikeda and Wight used very different vocabularies, there is a strong congruence between some of their ideas, especially their frank discussion of the challenges and benefits of navigating the liminal spaces between pluralism and solidarism. Second, even though Ikeda's approach resonates with a variety of existing peacebuilding and conflict resolution theories, it is distinguished by its uniquely spiritual and humanistic orientation. His vision of peace produced through intercultural dialogue was firmly grounded in Buddhist humanism, which affirms the inherent dignity, interconnectedness, and boundless potential of every individual. Third, he viewed education as a vital force in cultivating a culture of peace, underscoring how peace is not a state but a process of becoming.

As we will demonstrate below, this ability to navigate between universalism and particularism—in theory and in practice—has been a key feature of Ikeda's contribution to peacebuilding. By carefully acknowledging group boundaries as well as the moral unity of all individuals, this pursuit of a *civilization of dialogue* remains the best path forward in contemporary politics.

2. Martin Wight's *Three Traditions*

The English School, also known as the International Society approach,⁴ dates to the post-war period when scholars such as Hedley Bull, Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight reacted to what they perceived as contemporary liberal and realist simplifications of key processes of world politics. Marked by a synthesis of realist assumptions and proto-constructivist insights into the role of culture and identity, the English School argues that international life potentially oscillates between realist behavior, which produces international systems where competitive and fear-based logics predominate, to international societies, where common culture and identity can create predictability and cooperation, and potentially even to cosmopolitan world societies centered on human rather than state identities. Particularly, these scholars saw the emergence of a common diplomatic culture as a key factor in creating the potential for international societies (Wight 1977, p. 141; Bull [1977] 2002).

As originally formulated, the English school was Eurocentric because it saw the creation of the Westphalian system after the Thirty Years War, and its diplomatic norms of sovereign equality, as an exemplary international society and focused on mapping the spread of this society from Europe to the rest of the world (Suzuki 2005).⁵ Subsequent waves of scholarship have pushed this theorizing away from a narrow focus on European diplomatic culture as a source of order to include the examples of non-Western cultural and religious practices as creating the possibility of international societies (Zhang and Buzan 2012; Ruacan 2018). Although a detailed analysis of this theoretical school is beyond the scope of our paper, it is important to note that its assumption that culture plays a constitutive role in shaping world order makes it one of the best theories for exploring the role of religion in international life. As noted by one study on the topic, it is "one of the most suitable frameworks for the analysis of religion, international legal frameworks, and world orders. ... [and] is also an ideal framework to compare visions and theories of human behavior and moral precepts" (Sandal and Fox 2013, pp. 119, 122; also see Haynes 2021c).

Working within this tradition, our article goes back to one of the foundational thinkers of the English School, Martin Wight (1913–1972). Wight's key contribution was the *three traditions* model, which postulated that understandings of international life are split between

Realists (Machiavellians) who believe the world is conflictual and progress is impossible, Rationalists (Grotians) who believe that rationality can offset humans' base instincts, and Revolutionists (Kantians) who seek transformation and human perfectibility. Wight explored how these traditions encapsulated starkly different philosophical positions, such as their perceptions of state interest, definitions of power, the nature of world order, as well as the utility and practice of war (Wight 1992). Though he noted that there was "overlapping and indistinctiveness" at the borders and each tradition had "an infinite series of gradations" (Wight 1992, pp. 125, 158) he conceptually positioned them on a wheel with Realism and Revolutionism on either side of Rationalism. This mapping does not exactly correspond to the contemporary understanding of IR theories. As discussed by Buzan (2004), the Machiavellian category is the most straightforwardly aligned to what we call Realist theory because it envisions world politics as largely conflictual and state-centric. But the Rationalist and Revolutionist categories are more complex because they cut across standard definitions of Liberal, Constructivist and Critical schools of thought. Essentially, the Rationalist category is congruent with some forms of liberalism because it seeks to create an international society whereas the Revolutionist category, which seeks to create a universalist world society, is closer to various strands of cosmopolitanism, neoliberalism, and Marxism (also see Jackson et al. 2022, pp. 144–45).

For our current purposes, though, we are less interested in how Wight's three traditions map to IR theories but rather how they implicitly identify two divergent understandings of religion, violent conflict and peacebuilding. Especially, the model is embedded with a keen appreciation of the religious foundations of international life. Perhaps this stems from the fact that Wight was a devote Anglican and a Christian Pacifist who was a member of Dick Sheppard's Peace Pledge Union in the 1930s. One of Wight's junior colleagues and prominent English School theorist, Hedley Bull, even admitted: "I have often felt uneasy about the extent to which Wight's view of International Relations derives from his religious beliefs" (Bull 1992, p. xxiii). Yet, Wight's religious convictions did not manifest as parochialism, but rather as an awareness that religious values, faith, and experiences were integral and even inseparable from international politics. As a result, it is possible to read his three traditions as a critical model of religiosity, especially how he mapped the three models to a wide range of religious movements, concepts, and traditions, ranging from the Quakers, *Respublica Christiana*, Protestant Reformation, Counter-Reformation, Papacy, Orthodoxy, Islamic Jihad, Calvinism, and Catholicism. As one modern commentator notes, "the language of sin, antichrist, and apostasy is jarring to contemporary scholars" (Bain 2025, p. viii).

Seen in isolation, Wight's use of religious imagery appears to evoke the ambivalent or even negative perspectives of religious violence that we discussed in the introduction. But this is not the case when they are viewed in the context of his model. Wight did not embrace a simple perspective of religion as exotic, good, or theatrical—a problem that arguably hampers contemporary scholarship (Omer 2015).⁶ Rather, he viewed religion as an integral part of world politics and one which possessed a complex relationship with two distinct forms of dehumanization. These forms of dehumanization blurred into one another in practice, and the genocide-like violence they produce tends to look similar (e.g., Wight 1992, pp. 64, 228), but disentangling them was important for Wight because they come from what he described as very different philosophical and theological positions (see Figure 1).

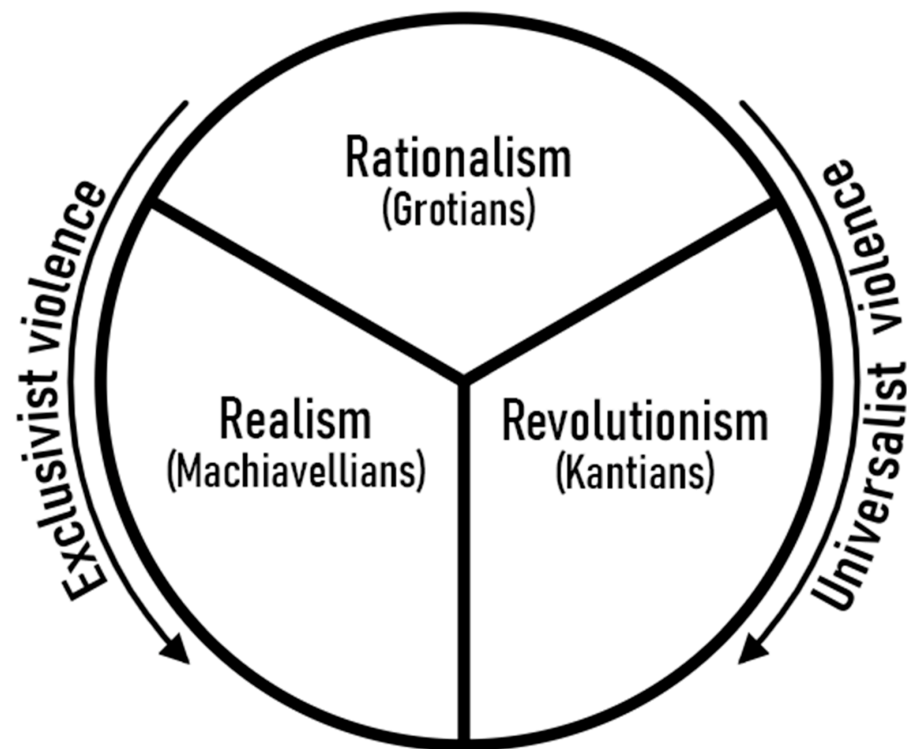


Figure 1. The Three Traditions Model and Dehumanization.

The first form of dehumanization stems from the Realist tradition, which is anchored in a bleak view of human nature as sinful and flawed, and which views our own political community as the “chosen people” and foreigners as untrustworthy and dangerous (Wight 1992, p. 63).⁷ Thus, if goodness only exists within a people’s community, then everything outside that community exists in a state of war and the pursuit of power is the only security. This exclusivist or particularistic perspective suggests that outsiders, i.e., barbarians, have no rights, are not even human, and may be exploited if useful or exterminated if not (Wight 1992, pp. 50–62). Historically, cultural and religious differences have been an important contributing factor to the process: “The first reaction to people of markedly different culture from ourselves, [is] that they are sinister or crazy” (Wight 1992, p. 62). Put simply, this is dehumanization centered on fear, which prioritizes one’s own community and its values over the rest of humankind.

The second form of dehumanization is the Revolutionist tradition, which involves a “messianic” desire to emancipate all of humanity and in doing so propel human progress. Unlike Realism, this tradition does not privilege one’s own community but rather opens membership to the entire human race, like a universal church (Wight 1992, p. 97). Thus, Wight celebrates how the Revolutionary tradition is different from Realist tradition’s denial of basic rights to outsiders but also warns about dark consequences: “from the Revolutionist assertion that barbarians have equal rights there follows the question whether they have a right not to be assimilated. Theoretically, no” (Wight 1992, p. 91). Even if beginning as peaceful movements focused on moral suasion, Wight (1992, pp. 28, 250) notes that the solidarist approaches linked with Revolutionism frequently evolve into the universalist drive “to coerce the remainder of the human race into goodness; to force them to be free.” This dehumanization, then, is paradoxically centered on a vision of human moral unity but prioritizes the doctrinally correct happiness of a *future* humankind over the lives of *present* humans.

Lastly, Wight’s third tradition, Rationalism, appears to exemplify the middle path. Rationalists held a complex view of humans as flawed and sinful but still rational and their

approach to international relations was based on cooperation, consensus, and international law (Wight 1992, pp. 13, 39–40). This humanist approach is fraught with tension because it involves the preservation of distinct cultural identities but also an acceptance that a wider human society exists. This tension is especially evident in the practice of international diplomacy and dialogue. Wight argued that Realist approaches treat dialogue as a simple interactive communication of interests, such as exchanging threats or warnings, while Revolutionists view it as a unidirectional or mandatory process, akin to doctrinal conversion by missionaries: “No heretical state has the right to prevent the establishment of the doctrinal norm in other states” (Wight 1992, pp. 133, 157–58). On the other hand, the Rationalist approach to dialogue assumes that goodwill will be reciprocated and cooperation stems from common interests, and this produces a syncretic diplomacy centered on reconciling states’ common interests through negotiations involving mutual recognition and compromises (Wight 1992, pp. 126, 141–53, 181).⁸ As Wight (1992, p. 188) explains,

[Rationalist diplomacy is] a theory constructed in terms of tension, balanced opposites, political factors interpenetrated by moral ones, and power harnessed by purpose. And the easiest way to understand the other traditions concerning diplomacy is by seeing them tearing the arch apart, relaxing the intellectual tension; the Kantian going off with the moral element, disentangling it from objective conditions of negotiation, and the Machiavellian going off with the power element and releasing it from moral controls.

This Rationalist view of diplomacy as a liminal space where actors seek to discover mutual interests between extreme universalism or solidarism (i.e., we should all be the same) and particularism or pluralism (i.e., we should all be different) connects to contemporary optimism about intercultural dialogue, even though the terminology was not used in Wight’s time. The Council of Europe (2008; see Näss 2010) proposed a definition in 2008, for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, as follows: “Intercultural dialogue is an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other’s global perception.” Intercultural dialogue thus refers to the exchange of ideas, values, and perspectives between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds (Ganesh and Holmes 2011). It plays a crucial role in conflict resolution by fostering mutual understanding and empathy, reducing prejudice, and promoting peaceful coexistence.

Intercultural dialogue is often championed by diplomats as an aspirational vision rather than a reflection of present-day realities (Leeds-Hurwitz 2014). Although intercultural dialogue is significant for diplomats and practitioners, further studies are necessary to determine whether intercultural dialogue genuinely produces the positive outcomes it is often credited with achieving (Leeds-Hurwitz 2014). Indeed, even though intercultural dialogue remains a popular concept, scholars are still searching for ways to implement it in equitable ways without creating dominance (Miike 2026). Similarly, Wight (1992, pp. 75–79, 260) warned that the moderate middle position was always a dynamic process of becoming and there was a continuous risk of it being pulled towards the Realist or the Revolutionist edges of the spectrum.

So, how can this middle road be maintained in practice? For the answer to this question, we turn to the peace advocacy of Daisaku Ikeda.

3. Daisaku Ikeda’s Vision for a Culture of Peace

Daisaku Ikeda’s approach to intercultural dialogue emerges as a powerful framework for peacebuilding that corresponds with the dynamics identified in Wight’s *three traditions* model but also extends it by emphasizing the role of civil society and non-Western religious ideas. In the subsections that follow, we are unable to give an extensive overview of Ikeda’s

entire philosophy due to space constraints, but we will zoom in on several key features of his peace advocacy to illustrate how it both complements and challenges Wight's model. First, Ikeda's Buddhist humanism reveals a sharp understanding of both the universalist, and the exclusivist forms of dehumanization and, even though using different terminology than Wight, contributes to the idea that peace is a liminal space. Second, Ikeda's writings on intercultural dialogue offer a valuable demonstration of how this liminal space of peace can be created in practice, especially the role of interfaith dialogue and education.

3.1. Philosophical Foundations—Peace as a Liminal Space

At first glance, the philosophical foundations of Ikeda's peace advocacy resemble what Wight described as the Revolutionist category because of its focus on human transformation, moral unity, and cosmopolitanism. For example, Ikeda echoes universalist themes by envisioning peace as a transformative process rooted in dialogue, empathy, and inner change. What he calls the "human revolution" is described as "the process of self-development and self-realization accomplished through compassionate Buddhist activities" (Rotblat and Ikeda 2006, p. 140; see Urbain 2010, pp. 30–31, 98–99). Ikeda's vision for peace is founded on the principles of Buddhist humanism,⁹ which is centered in the belief that all people possess inherent dignity and limitless potential (Ikeda 2010a, pp. 144–54, 165–85). In other words, Ikeda's human revolution concept makes peacebuilding personal, arguing that self-transformation leads to societal change (Ikeda 2004b).

Moreover, Ikeda's philosophy is particularly inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., both of whom championed nonviolence and ethical leadership. Wight, who had also been a Christian pacifist in his youth, saw these figures as exemplifying a tendency towards what he called Inverted Revolutionism, a softer form of the tradition that eschewed violence but which he criticized for tending towards isolationism or escapism (Wight 1992, pp. 65, 108–10, 115, 154, 256–57). But for Ikeda these figures provided ethical, philosophical, and strategic foundations for his belief in dialogue as the most effective tool for peacebuilding. For example, Ikeda deeply admired Mahatma Gandhi, whose philosophy of Satyagraha (truth-force) emphasized peaceful resistance and dialogue as tools for social change (see Ikeda 2010a, pp. 144–54; Radhakrishnan and Ikeda 2009, pp. 79–92). Ikeda embraced this idea, arguing that truth and justice emerge through conversation, not conflict. Gandhi's unwavering commitment to nonviolence, even in the face of oppression, resonated with Ikeda's belief that peace must be built through ethical leadership and mutual understanding. He also embraced Gandhi's idea that violence only perpetuates cycles of hatred, while dialogue fosters reconciliation. He often referenced Gandhi's struggles against colonial rule, highlighting how moral courage and conversation can dismantle systemic injustice. Ikeda was similarly inspired by Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of nonviolent resistance, particularly the latter's belief that love and understanding can overcome prejudice and discrimination. Martin Luther King Jr. promoted dialogue as the means to dismantle racial and social injustice. Ikeda echoed this belief, stating that open conversations can challenge prejudice and foster reconciliation.

Despite these differences, though, Ikeda's philosophy also substantially overlaps key parts of the Rationalist tradition in Wight's model. First, Ikeda's philosophy is congruent with Rationalism's embrace of diversity rather than uniformity. As we noted earlier, Wight frequently criticized Revolutionism, which sought to converge or compress all interests together and create peace through uniformity, contrasting it with the Rationalist approach that sought a harmony of interests without extinguishing their individuality (Wight 1992, pp. 115, 212, 252). Similarly, Ikeda's interpretation of Buddhist humanism is based on the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism, which rejects hierarchical or exclusionary views of

humanity and promotes the idea that all people, regardless of background, are equally deserving of respect and dignity (Ikeda 2010a; see Urbain 2010, pp. 74–89).

Another key aspect of Buddhist humanism which informs Ikeda's philosophy is the interdependence of all life. Central to such philosophy is the doctrine of "dependent origination," which "holds that every phenomenon, be it social or natural, is the result of its connection with something else. Nothing can exist in total isolation; everything is interrelated" (Ikeda 2010a, p. 7). He thus argues that human beings, states, and even entire civilizations, are not isolated entities but exist within a vast web of relationships. This interconnectedness means that peace cannot be achieved through domination or exclusion but only through mutual respect and understanding.¹⁰ From the perspective of Wight's model, Ikeda's emphasis on interdependence puts him between Realists, who habitually seek to deny the existence of interdependence and seek autonomy, and Revolutionists, who want to collapse the differences between different groups by fusing them together (Wight 1992, pp. 144–46, 154).

Of course, to accept the difference between individuals and groups while simultaneously seeing them holistically is not easy. As we saw in the previous section, this liminal space must be continuously maintained against countervailing pressures. Wight (1992, pp. 120, 128, 146) describes this tension as a sort of "enlightened selfishness" which requires policymakers to realize that the satisfaction of their vital interests requires other actors' vital interests to also be satisfied. This process led to the "compromises and make-shifts inherent in Rationalism" (Wight 1992, p. 116). Unlike Wight, who viewed interdependence from the perspective of foreign policy, Ikeda had a more holistic perspective, anchored in his Buddhist faith, that "lives are intimately linked with one another. . . [like] two bundles of reeds" (Ikeda 2005, p. ix). Ikeda also had a more optimistic perspective of the ability of peace activism to harmonize the interests of different groups. As noted by Urbain (2010, p. 197), Ikeda's writings do not assume that conflict or competition between interests is inevitable and instead argue that genuine transformation through humanism is possible. Ikeda (2002, p. 10) argues "since the ultimate enemy is dehumanization, the ultimate solution must be a revitalization and restoration of humanity. The wellspring for this must be a philosophy of humanism." He continues by articulating the ideal mode of living through the lens of Buddhist humanism: "The world of enlightenment, or Buddhahood, is regarded as the ideal way of life, one characterized by great compassion, courage and wisdom" (Ikeda 2002, p. 10).

But in Ikeda's writings, the tension between solidarism and pluralism nevertheless comes out. Indeed, a key contribution of a dialogue between Wight's and Ikeda's writings is how it helps us disentangle some of these tensions and contradictions. If Ikeda did a better job of theorizing peace and dialogue than Wight, he was perhaps less coherent when it came to theorizing dehumanization and at various times described it in very different ways. For example, Ikeda blamed dehumanization on nationalism and exclusivist ideologies: "It is the function of evil to divide; to alienate people from each other and divide one country from another" (Ikeda as quoted in Urbain 2010, p. 157) and criticized religions that enclosed humans instead of linking them together, noting that "any religion that sacrifices human life in the name of its own authority is wicked (Pauling and Ikeda 1992, p. 96).¹¹ But if extreme group solidarity was a problem, Ikeda was also skeptical of individualistic liberalism which was "dominating the entire world" and erasing local societal and cultural diversity (Ikeda and Esquivel 2021, p. 66). In this way, Ikeda's idea of peace was more diverse and pluralistic than the peace thesis promoted by liberal thinkers (Urbain 2010, pp. 182–83). Especially, neoliberal values of efficiency were criticized for possessing an "insidious tendency to reduce human beings to mere things" (Ikeda 2001, p. 6).

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to see Ikeda as a straightforward pluralist. He argues that “while remaining aware of cultural relativism, we must pursue the universal elements in human nature. Understanding values that are universal throughout human history is helpful in encouraging respect for the dignity of the individual” (Galtung and Ikeda 1995, p. 129). But his universalism was also not absolute. In his discussion of the abstract spirit, he argues that some ideologies have “beautiful ideas that have an abstract kind of logical consistency” but are then implemented in rushed and arbitrary fashion (Ikeda 2001, p. 22). In this way, he explained, religious-like “ideologies contemptuous of humanity” (Unger and Ikeda 2016, p. 54) were filling a spiritual vacuum with disastrous consequences. Especially, he worried that “any worldview that bases itself on ‘historical inevitability’ fundamentally denies the human capacity to create our own destiny through our own efforts” (Ikeda 2010a, p. 202). In this way, he circled back and forth between universalist and cultural relativist conceptions of a “genuinely inclusive global civilization” (Ikeda 2001, p. 108; also Urbain 2010, p. 168).

This oscillation in Ikeda’s thought suggests that he was exploring, using different terminology, the same two processes of dehumanization identified by Wight. First was the exclusivist violence stemming from an international system populated by incompatible communities driven by fear and suspicion and parochial beliefs. Second was universalist violence stemming from ideological beliefs that all the people of the world should conform to a single type of behavior or belief system. Even if less holistically presented than Wight, Ikeda appears to be describing these dehumanizing processes working in parallel—including “cold-hearted national and economic interests” as well as “arrogance not to regard others as equally human” (Clements and Ikeda 2019, p. 161) due to “stereotypical characterization of culture” (Yalman and Ikeda 2008, pp. 63–64).

3.2. *Liminal Spaces in Practice—Intercultural Dialogue*

If Wight’s three models help contextualize Ikeda’s conceptualization of peace as a liminal space between different types of dehumanization, Ikeda’s conceptual and practical work on using dialogue as a path to peace goes far beyond Wight’s understanding of diplomacy as interaction between state officials. Ikeda sees intercultural dialogue not as a luxury, but as a necessity in a world fractured by prejudice, nationalism, and fear. He argued that “Dialogue has the power to break down the walls of mistrust, hatred, and division in the hearts of people everywhere” (Ikeda 2004a). For Ikeda, dialogue itself is seen as the foundation of peace and as a tool for resolving conflicts (Toynbee and Ikeda 1976a; Peccei and Ikeda 1984; Pauling and Ikeda 1992; Wilson and Ikeda 2008). In fact, he emphasized the importance of dialogue for peacebuilding in many of his writings. For example, in his editorial written for the Japan Times, Ikeda (2008, p. 78) writes:

... dialogue is a choice requiring genuine courage and strength. Dialogue starts by clearly recognizing the positions and interests of the respective parties and then carefully identifying the obstacles to progress, patiently working to remove and resolve each of these. It is the ultimate constructive undertaking of the human spirit. And it is for just this reason that conflict resolution through dialogue—unlike military force whose essence is destruction—holds the promise of a genuine and lasting solution.

Ikeda (Ikeda and Tehranian 2003, p. 9) also maintains that “If one drop of the water of dialogue is allowed to fall upon the wasteland of intolerance, where attitudes of hatred and exclusionism have so long prevailed, there will be a possibility for trust and friendship to spring up.” Moreover, in his foreword to *Peacebuilding Through Dialogue*, Ikeda (2018, p. ix) viewed dialogue as both the starting and end point of overcoming “the divisions within our own hearts that make us unconsciously categorize people and rank their value on that

basis.” In his 2009 commemorative message to the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue on the occasion of the publication of *Creating Waldens: An East-West Conversation on the American Renaissance* (Bosco et al. 2009), Ikeda unequivocally affirmed the importance of dialogue:

Our objective must be the realization of peace for all people and to support the harmony and progress of global civil society. The way to achieve this, I believe, is, again, through the dialogue of spiritual openness. The key to such dialogue is devoting our very lives to listening and learning from those different from us. This humble willingness to learn is profoundly meaningful, invariably fostering deep, empathetic connections. Not only does this resonance enable us to understand others on a deeper level, it acts as a mighty impetus for our true self—our greater self—to flower within us (Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue 2020).

Ikeda thus firmly believed that dialogue is the surest path to peace, arguing that open and sincere communication can dismantle barriers of mistrust, hatred, and division. Ikeda viewed “equitable dialogue” (Ikeda 1981, p. 258), which echoes Wight’s emphasis on mutual recognition between diplomatic actors, as the most effective tool for resolving conflicts, emphasizing that listening and mutual respect are essential for overcoming divisions. He argued that violence and coercion cannot create lasting peace, whereas conversation fosters trust and solidarity. His philosophy of intercultural dialogue is rooted in the conviction that human connection transcends political, cultural, and ideological differences. Throughout his lifetime, Ikeda demonstrated how dialogue can transform conflict into understanding and foster lasting harmony. He also believed that all conflicts—whether personal, national, or global—are caused by human beings, meaning they must also have human solutions. He emphasized that no matter how complex a dispute may seem, dialogue can always uncover a path forward.

This conviction led Ikeda to engage in dialogues with world leaders, scholars, and activists to promote peace. Many of these conversations have been published as books and are part of a broader effort to promote what Ikeda called a *civilization of dialogue*. While it is impossible to convey the scope and depth of these interactions in the limited space here, some notable examples include his dialogue with the Chinese premier Zhou Enlai in 1974 which helped lay the groundwork for decades of cultural and educational exchange, and is frequently recognized as a pivotal moment in restoring and strengthening ties between China and Japan. Ikeda also met with the former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990 to discuss disarmament and the role of dialogue in easing Cold War tensions (Gorbachev and Ikeda 2005). One of Ikeda’s most influential discussions was a two-year dialogue with the renowned Arnold Toynbee in the early 1970s, resulting in the book *Choose Life* (see Toynbee and Ikeda 1976a, 1976b). Their conversations explored critical global issues confronting humanity, including war, environmental challenges, technological progress, as well as the role of culture, ethics, and education in shaping a peaceful world. Other prominent dialogues include his conversation with Linus Pauling, American chemist, peace activist, and one of the most influential scientists of the 20th century who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1962 for his efforts to ban nuclear weapons testing (see Pauling and Ikeda 1992); and Johan Galtung, the principal founder of the academic field of peace and conflict studies (see Galtung and Ikeda 1995). In this way, Ikeda’s real-world advocacy of citizen diplomacy pushed dialogue beyond Wight’s more formal conception of diplomacy.

It is also pertinent to discuss Ikeda’s commitment to interreligious dialogue, which included conversations with religious scholars and leaders such as Bryan Wilson and Harvey Cox (see Wilson and Ikeda 2008; Cox and Ikeda 2009). For Ikeda, interreligious dialogue, where the values of true peace are realized, is understood as recognizing and

appreciating differences as well as recognizing, respecting, and cooperating with common beliefs and practices: “By listening to the opinions of others, we can discover others more deeply. Wouldn’t such an act allow us to rediscover ourselves and deepen and expand the foundations of the ideas and philosophies on which we are based? Only then can we draw out new horizons of cooperation” (Ikeda and Cox 2019, p. 197). Ikeda held a religious view that implies open-minded pluralism that embraces all religions, in that he emphasizes dialogue, respect, cooperation, understanding, and trust with monotheistic Christianity and Islam, and with multi-layered religions of India and China. In addition, Ikeda’s attitude toward other religions shares the viewpoint of the “common essence” school in religion, which refers to the idea that all religions, despite their outward differences, share a fundamental core or universal truth (see Unger and Ikeda 2016, p. 9).¹² This perspective suggests that beneath the diverse rituals, doctrines, and symbols lies a shared spiritual essence—often described in terms of values like compassion, interconnectedness, or the pursuit of ultimate truth. Ikeda emphasized that while religions may differ in form, they can converge in their ethical aims and humanistic values. Ikeda’s attitude toward other religions can also be said to have the characteristics of religious liberation or salvation-centered pluralism, in that it believes that religion and God should be thoroughly for the sake of humans and that they should focus on “liberation” of humans. When we consider that liberation in religion is a transition from the impure land where inequality, injustice, discrimination, and violation of human rights occur to the pure land where nonviolence, peace, justice, and equality are realized, Ikeda’s religious pluralistic attitude can be said to have a very strong religious liberationist character.

Ikeda also firmly believed that education is the foundation of peace, arguing that knowledge should serve humanity, not just economic or political interests. Ikeda maintains that “education is an integrating force for world peace” (Ikeda and Swaminathan 2005, p. 75) and is essential for keeping religions from becoming insular and exclusivist (Rotblat and Ikeda 2006, p. 94). Education replaces our “tribal awareness” with “an awareness of the human race as a whole” (Galtung and Ikeda 1995, p. 125). Experiences such as living or studying abroad help students develop empathy and diminish hostile perceptions of others. He views peace not merely as the absence of conflict, but as an active and ongoing collaboration among individuals in all areas of life (Krieger and Ikeda 2002). Also, students who engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds and genuinely listen to their perspectives help foster an inclusive atmosphere—one that has the power to dissolve the man-made divisions that separate us (Harding and Ikeda 2013). Ikeda agrees with Harding in the belief that fostering students’ understanding of peace enables them to connect more deeply with others and strengthens their inner resolve to stand against violence and conflict. Moreover, participation in international exchange programs cultivates a sense of global responsibility and nurtures the humanitarian values of future generations (Athayde and Ikeda 2009; Krieger and Ikeda 2002). Beyond student exchanges, educators themselves can promote peace by designing assignments that allow students to practice resolving real-world conflicts peacefully, both in school and at home (Boulding and Ikeda 2010). As such, Ikeda believed, it is vital for educators to recognize their own significance and ground their teaching in a guiding philosophy.

Wight was also an educator. His *three traditions* model was even posthumously published from his class lecture notes. But he departed significantly from Ikeda’s strong activist orientation by carefully distancing his teaching from contemporary policy debates, even to the point where his support for the Rationalist position was implied rather than explicit (see Bull 1992). Yet, contemporary accounts of his interactive teaching style seem to describe an experience intensely dialogic and transformative: “Martin Wight was a teacher whose greatest and most seminal influence was in large measures exercised in tutorials, seminars

and discussion groups. Exercised that is by means of the spoken, the living, word transmitted directly person to person, mind to mind” (Kedourie 1979, p. 6). But it is undeniable that Ikeda’s approach to education was more activist and systematic than Wight’s. What Wight did in a classroom, Ikeda wanted to do across society. His faith in education as the catalyst for building lasting peace was influenced by Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944),¹³ a pioneering Japanese educator and philosopher best known as the founder of Soka Education and the first president of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, the precursor to today’s Soka Gakkai. Soka Education, often referred to as *value-creating education*, is a student-centered, humanistic approach to learning (Ikeda 2010b). Ikeda expanded on the ideas of Makiguchi, arguing that learning should not be passive but actively contribute to human happiness and social harmony and that schools should nurture individuals who see themselves as global citizens, committed to dialogue, cooperation, and ethical responsibility (Goulah 2020). Ikeda warned against education systems that prioritize nationalism, economic utility, or political control over human development. He believed that true education should empower individuals to think critically and act ethically. His advocacy for intercultural dialogue thus stems from Makiguchi’s idea that education should cultivate wisdom, compassion, and a commitment to social justice—qualities essential for peacebuilding. Through Soka Education, Ikeda emphasizes that education is the foundation for a peaceful world, cultivating global citizens who can engage in meaningful intercultural conversations (Goulah and Ito 2012).

Lastly, Ikeda’s optimism about the importance of multilateral diplomacy, the International Criminal Court, and the United Nations, all mark him as deeply sympathetic with the English School’s approach to IR that conflict could be mitigated through culture and that a world society was possible (see Ikeda and Esquivel 2021, p. xvi). But here too Ikeda was much more ambitious than Wight and closer to the cosmopolitan side of the Rationalist tradition. Ikeda’s philosophy of global citizenship, which is a prominent theme appearing in many of his works, was a key component of his vision for intercultural peace. Ikeda’s seminal speech entitled “Thoughts on Education for Global Citizenship”—delivered in 1996 at Columbia University’s Teachers College—presents his most often referenced reflections on the essential qualities and conditions required for global citizenship (Ikeda 2021). Ikeda (2021, p. 6) identifies three essential qualities of a global citizen:

1. the *wisdom* to perceive the interconnectedness of all life
2. the *courage* not to fear or deny difference, but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures and to grow from encounters with them
3. the *compassion* to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one’s immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places [*Italics added by the author*].

Ikeda emphasizes that true global citizenship is not defined by nationality, political identity or international travel. Instead, he sees it as a moral and ethical commitment to peace and coexistence. He also stresses that global citizenship requires the courage to engage with different perspectives and learn from cultural differences rather than fearing or rejecting them. Ikeda warns against divisive ideologies that prioritize national interests over global well-being. He believes that true peace comes from recognizing our shared humanity rather than focusing on borders and differences (see Sherman and Boukydis 2023). In this way, Ikeda’s approach to global citizenship offers a recipe for keeping humanity within the middle path between exclusivist and universalist forms of violence.

4. Conclusions

Martin Wight and Daisaku Ikeda together offer a powerful advocacy of peace as a liminal space between particularist and universalist forms of dehumanization. Despite differences in terminology and professional settings, the two scholars have important

similarities. Ikeda believed that we need an international society that creates “stability and peace without infringing on the freedom and creative potential of the individual” but also “equal footing” between states (Toynbee and Ikeda 1976b, p. 233). This tension—how exactly can stability and peace for individuals be reconciled with state or community rights—is also at the heart of Wight’s writings and the English School’s approach to IR in general. Of course, we must not overstate the similarity between these two scholars. Wight was a traditional Christian, with a pessimistic view of human nature and perfectibility (Jackson 2008, pp. 361–62; also Bull 1992, p. xvi), and he firmly believed that his three traditions were products of Western civilization (Wight 1992, pp. 14, 260). Ikeda’s Buddhist humanism, on the other hand, is far more optimistic about human nature, and has a greater belief in the role of global civil society and solidarity among peoples. Specifically, Ikeda’s vision for peace goes deeper than the traditional English School by inspiring a wide range of institutional efforts that blend education, dialogue, interfaith relationships, and grassroots activism while infusing a valuable non-Western perspective into debates about religiosity and peace.

But this article is not arguing that these scholars were making the exact same argument about peace; rather, we are claiming that they were exploring some of the same dilemmas and reaching similar conclusions that overlapped rather than fit together neatly. The differences are as important as the similarities. In fact, as Ikeda reminds us, dialogue should not start from a position of uniformity:

Dialogue is not simply two people asserting their opinions, nor is it just a simple exchange of words. Through conversing, we can gain a shared insight into each other’s point of view and intent. It is also a process of creating something of new and positive value (as quoted in Urbain 2010, p. 116).

In this spirit, our article has sought to draw out something new and positive from these two scholars by bringing them into a conversation with each other. Juxtaposing their thoughts on violence and peace has allowed us to showcase not only their common appreciation of peace as a moderate path between different forms of dehumanization but also their underlying belief that faith continues to matter in international relations. Specifically, Martin Wight’s *three traditions* model of international relations illustrates not only the importance of religiosity but also identifies two forms of dehumanization—one fueled by fearful reinforcement of group boundaries and power politics and the other by a singular drive to create human perfectibility at any cost. The middle path between them, Wight warned, was often treacherous and required “skill, judgement, and moral insight” (Wight 1992, p. 128).

In turn, Daisaku Ikeda’s peace advocacy and his concept of intercultural dialogue demonstrates that Buddhism, far from being a form of Introverted Revolutionism as Wight assumed, can play an important role in maintaining this middle ground and shows how dialogue, education and global citizenship are practical tools for accomplishing this. Ikeda also identified tribalism and universalism as dangerous threats but was ultimately more optimistic than Wight that his broader conception of dialogue centered on Buddhist humanism—embracing formal diplomacy and interfaith, cultural, and personal dialogue—could create peace between civilizations (Tu and Ikeda 2011) and would become the “Magna Carta of Civilization” (Yalman and Ikeda 2008, p. 117). It would accomplish this, Ikeda believed, by propagating a set of “universal spiritual values that bind together all individual, local, and cultural traditions while allowing each to shine on its own” (Ikeda 1981, p. 153).

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Notes

- ¹ For more on this distinction see [Galtung \(1969, 1996\)](#).
- ² Interestingly, there was only one degree of separation between them. Early in his career, Wight worked with the historian Arnold Toynbee, and they formed a last friendship ([Hall 2003](#)). Toynbee also later became an important collaborator with Ikeda (see [Toynbee and Ikeda 1976a, 1976b](#)).
- ³ Intercultural dialogue (ICD) builds upon the concepts of *intercultural*—which refers to communication among people of different nationalities, races, ethnicities or religions—and *dialogue*—which refers to an exchange of ideas or opinions, especially among those who disagree ([Stewart 2014](#)). The latter often refers to “a quality of communication characterized by the participants’ willingness and ability simultaneously to be radically open to the other(s) and to articulate their own views” and the primary goal of dialogue is “understanding rather than agreement” ([Stewart 2014](#)).
- ⁴ This group of scholars never named their own school of thought, and the English school label was coined by a critic. Today most standard IR textbooks use English School or International Society to describe this approach, so we will use English School and International Society interchangeably.
- ⁵ Martin Wight was generally guilty of this Eurocentric accusation, though he did acknowledge culturally based international societies in Chinese history ([Wight 1977](#)).
- ⁶ Nothing exemplifies this nuance more than Wight’s treatment of Revolutionism, which he deplores as violent and corrosive but also celebrates for exemplifying “moral dynamism and energy” ([Wight 1992](#), p. 9).
- ⁷ In this sense, nationalism, which treats the state itself as an object of worship and veneration, exemplifies the extreme realist position.
- ⁸ This celebration of diplomacy is also raised in the writings of other English School scholars, such as Butterfield ([Butterfield and Wight 1966](#)).
- ⁹ Buddhist humanism is a modern interpretation of Buddhism that emphasizes the dignity, potential, and responsibility of human beings. Rather than focusing solely on transcendence or the afterlife, it brings Buddhist principles into the heart of everyday life. One major expression of this is humanistic Buddhism, which originated in Chinese Buddhism and was popularized by thinkers like Taixu and his disciple Yin Shun. It encourages integrating spiritual practice into daily living—how we eat, work, relate to others, and contribute to society. The idea is that enlightenment is not something distant or mystical, but something we cultivate through compassion, mindfulness, and ethical action in the here and now.
- ¹⁰ One cannot help but see the parallel between this and [Wight’s \(1992, p. 14\)](#) own description of the Rationalist position as involving a belief “in a cosmic, moral constitution, appropriate to all created things including mankind; a system of eternal and immutable principles radiating from a source that transcends earthly power (either God or nature).”
- ¹¹ Ikeda later argues that the sole role of religion is to foster individuals capable of sustaining a culture of peace (see [Clements and Ikeda 2019](#), p. 38).
- ¹² This school is often contrasted with exclusivist or relativist approaches and plays a key role in discussions of religious pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and global ethics.
- ¹³ Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944) was a pioneering Japanese educator, philosopher, and the founding president of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, the precursor to today’s Soka Gakkai movement.

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