

Tsunesaburō Makiguchi's Recasting of Competition: Striving for Excellence in a Context of Interdependence

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Abstract

The geographic studies of Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944) offered an understanding of human activities on Earth's surface that differed from the geographic theories and practices of his Euro-American predecessors and Japanese contemporaries. With his rejection of geographic determinism and its imperialist/colonial orientation he sought to configure a decentered world, or a world centered on the lives of people in the unique settings of their local communities. In the second half of the nineteenth century geographic determinism was linked with the newly influential ideas of evolution, in particular with interpretations that directly transposed ideas of biological competition and survival of the fittest to the realm of human society. Under the rubric of Social Darwinism, these ideas of competition and dominance justified existing domestic and international orders as the inevitable outcome of natural processes. Makiguchi sought to redefine the concept of competition using the term jindōteki kyōsō (人道的競争)—humanitarian or humane modes of competition. In doing this he sought to find ways of enabling the realization of the positive outcomes of competition—striving for excellence, inventiveness, innovation—while containing the more negative outcomes. The key to this, for Makiguchi, was to ensure that competition was conducted within an understanding of human interconnection and interdependence.

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Introduction

In the first decades of the twenty-first century we live in a world in which competition—for access to education, jobs, and all the other necessary or desirable things in life—is the order of the day. The benefits of competition are often promoted as a panacea; we are told there is virtually no problem that cannot be solved by unleashing greater, more vigorous competition. In the tech world, this is often framed as disrupting incumbent industries and their sclerotic ways. The negative aspects of competition—the fate of the “losers”—are ignored or treated as a necessary price for the benefits of growth and progress.

The question of competition was, if anything, even more pressing in the time of Japanese educator and geographer Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944) than in our own. The end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries was an era of fierce global competition. The major

imperial powers vied to expand their territorial holdings and to gain (to the degree possible, exclusive) access to resources and markets. The global losers were—then as now—largely silenced.

Likewise, the multiple layers of competition and cooperation that constitute the realm of international relations present aspects that feel at once novel and familiar. While the consensus emerged early in the pandemic that any more effective response would involve unprecedented levels of domestic and even international cooperation, there has also been a return to some of the more blunt and indeed atavistic forms of competition. In the field of education, there was even a brief suspension of competitive exams before these were revived in the effort to return to “normal.”

In keeping with the theme of this special issue, this article considers an example of ideas not from our time and originating outside the Euro-American context. These are the thoughts of Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944) on the conceptualization and practices of competition. Makiguchi was a Japanese geographer, educational theorist and practitioner. His criticism of the spiritual foundations of his country’s military adventurism from a Buddhist perspective resulted in his death while incarcerated as a “thought criminal” in the closing years of World War II. The ideas he set out in his writings on human geography at the start of the twentieth century offer frameworks that can help us formulate modes of competition that will contribute to human welfare in the complex and contested sites of learning and living of the twenty-first century.

Biographical Sketch

Tsunesaburō Makiguchi was born in 1871, in a small port on the west coast of Japan as Chōshichi Watanabe. Three years earlier, in 1868, the military Shogunate that had ruled Japan since the early 1600s was replaced by a new government that made the youthful Emperor Meiji the symbol of a new era. This new government initiated a process of industrial, economic, political and military development that would, in just a few decades, make Japan a major power on the world stage.

In 1878, Makiguchi enrolled in the Kashiwazaki Elementary School, which had been established four years earlier (Origins, 2017, p. 470). Makiguchi was thus a member of the first generation of Japanese nationals to be exposed to the modern educational system and its associated spatio-temporal disciplines (See Editors’ Introduction, this issue).

Makiguchi continued his efforts to study and learn during his years in Otaru, by some accounts gaining the nickname of “the studious errand boy” (Origins, 2017, pp. 30–31), for his habit of making use of every spare moment to read. Makiguchi’s academic interest and potential attracted the attention of his supervisor, the head of the police station, who was also the administrative chief of Otaru City. It was this man who recommended him for entrance to the Hokkaido Normal School, the teachers college for Hokkaido, a recommendation that opened the path for Makiguchi to become a professional educator (Saito, 1989).

The Hokkaido Normal School was established in September 1886 through the merger of two existing teachers colleges in the island’s two largest cities, Sapporo and Hakodate. There were two paths to admission: the first was to sit an examination; the second was through recommendation for provisional matriculation, with full admission granted on the basis of students’ first semester grades. Makiguchi was recommended for provisional matriculation (Saito, 1989).

Although Makiguchi was spared the need to sit a highly competitive test, this does not mean that he was sheltered from the harsh realities of competition.

According to the memoirs of a fellow student who entered the school one year before Makiguchi:

We were sorted [lit. put in a sieve and shaken] three times before we could become full students. And the shaking was fierce: of 23 students who gained provisional entry through the entrance examination, only 12 were granted full matriculation. This number continued to decrease until, by the time of graduation, we were only seven. (Cited in Saitō, 2004, p. 421)

Makiguchi survived these competitive sortings to graduate from Hokkaido Normal School in 1893, at which point he was hired as an instructor in the affiliated elementary school. Makiguchi's interest in geography dated back at least to his days as a student, and it was one of the subjects that he taught there. In 1896, he passed the Ministry of Education examination for the teacher's license for the teaching of geography in secondary schools. This was an extremely competitive examination: nationally, of the 137 candidates sitting for it that year, only 16 passed (Timeline, 2011, p. 23). Makiguchi was the first teacher in Hokkaido to be awarded this license, which had been adopted as part of an effort to make up for the shortage of university-trained instructors; it qualified Makiguchi to teach geography at the Hokkaido Normal School, and he became the school's first instructor to specialize in the subject in November 1897.

Following a series of incidents involving the internal dynamics of the Hokkaido Normal School (see Saito 1989 for details), Makiguchi quit his positions and moved to Tokyo, arriving with his family of five—his wife, three children and adoptive mother—on May 1, 1901. The family is thought to have first settled in Ishikawa Edogawa-cho in central Tokyo, later moving about 2 km to the northeast, to Komagome Oiwake-cho in present-day Bunkyo Ward (Origins, 2017, p. 83). These locations are symbolic of Makiguchi's success in relocating himself to the heart of national life. The first was adjacent to one of Japan's most important military arsenals, producing much of the weaponry used in Japan's modern wars. The second was just a short walk from Tokyo Imperial University, founded with the explicit mission to foster competent bureaucrats and regarded—then, as now—as the pinnacle of the nation's intellectual hierarchy.

Makiguchi also brought from Hokkaido the outlines of a manuscript, derived from his teaching notes and lesson plans from his Hokkaido Normal School days, of what would be his first published work, *Jinsei chirigaku* (*The Geography of Human Life*; Makiguchi, 1981-1996, Vols. 1 & 2). By the fall of 1901, Makiguchi appears to have completed an initial draft of the book.

In the spring of 1902, Makiguchi made contact with Shiga Shigetaka (1863–1927), at the time Japan's most famous writer on landscapes and geography. Makiguchi would most likely have encountered Shiga's 1889 *Chirigaku kōgi* (*Lectures on Geography*) as a textbook; his 1894 *Nihon fuukeiron* (*On the Japanese Landscape*) was a widely influential literary best-seller. According to the foreword Shiga would later contribute to *The Geography of Human Life*, Makiguchi arrived at his door with no introduction other than his name card, described his background and interests, and presented the older man with an 18cm-thick manuscript. Shiga was impressed by Makiguchi's ambitions and wished him success. One year later, Makiguchi again sought out Shiga, who was at that time campaigning near Nagoya for election to the Diet. Makiguchi asked Shiga's help in editing his manuscript, which by now totaled some two thousand pages. Shiga returned to Tokyo and spent the next six months helping Makiguchi shape his manuscript for publication. It was at Shiga's suggestion that the book was shortened to half its original length (Shiga, 1903, pp. 1-3).

The Geography of Human Life was published on October 20, 1903. By the end of the following year, the book had been reviewed in at least 41 newspapers and journals, receiving a generally warm critical reception (Shiohara, 2003). Although precise sales figures have not been determined, they would appear to have been brisk, as second and third printings of the book followed on October 28 and November 25. An expanded edition was printed in 1908 and it would continue to be reprinted in various editions for the next two decades. In 1911, it was included on the Ministry of Education's list of officially recommended books on geography (Origins, 2017, p. 123).

The book earned Makiguchi considerable recognition in the fields of geography and geographic education, and would later help him gain entry to some of the more elite circles of Tokyo intellectual life. Despite this, he remained hindered throughout by his lack of a university degree, seen as necessary for full acceptance as a member of the thinking class. At this stage and later, even genuinely enthusiastic academic praise for his work would often be couched in such phrases as “for an elementary school teacher...” or with remarks that he only read Western sources in Japanese translation (see Ishibashi, 1930; Takeuchi, 2004; Tanabe; 1930).

The Geographies of “Civilization”

In 1884–85, the Berlin Conference among the great European powers was held, initiating what would be known as the Scramble for Africa—the division and colonization of the continent. By the start of the twentieth century, the nations of Europe and the United States directly controlled huge swathes of the world's surface and much of its population. Other regions, such as Latin America and China, were nominally independent but under the economic and political sway of foreign powers to a degree that rendered that independence largely moot.

While *The Geography of Human Life* in places expresses views—particularly regarding the nature of “civilization”—that may strike present-day readers as anachronistic, there are many aspects of Makiguchi's first work that were both unusual for its time and make it relevant to our world today. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the book is how it forged an independent locus of understanding relative to the geographical studies of the time, most of which were deeply bound up with the objectives of European colonialism and imperialism. These very often sought to explain, using various scientific “laws,” the reasons for the superiority of European civilization and the inevitability of its global domination.

An example of such a “law” of civilizational development was that of the German geographer Carl Ritter (1779–1859) that correlated the degree of civilization with the ratio of continents' landmass to the length of their coastlines. The idea was that the longer the coastline relative to the surface area of the continent, the more complex the coastline, and thus the greater the opportunity for people to interact with the oceans, something widely seen at the time as key to the development of civilization. In his highly influential *Earth and Man: Lectures on Comparative Physical Geography in its Relation to the History of Mankind* (1849), Swiss-American Arnold Guyot (1807–84), cites Ritter's theory and ranks the continents on this basis. In this account Europe is foremost, with 156 square miles of surface area for each mile of coast, with Asia (459:1) and Africa (623:1) rated geographically least hospitable to the development of civilization (Guyot, 1853, p. 47). Guyot reads prevailing European stereotypes about Africa and Africans into the land itself, which “seems to close itself against every influence from without” (1853, p. 45).

In thinking about these theories as they originated in Europe, it is also important to keep in mind deep cultural assumptions concerning the providential origins and purpose of the natural world. With roots in Abrahamic monotheism reaching back to the Book of Genesis, the idea that

the world was formed with the welfare of humans in view was so pervasive as to be easily overlooked; it provides an ontological basis for any form of order or meaning in the world. This worldview was highly compatible with the kind of geographical determinism that lent an air of fated inevitability to Euro-American dominance.

Guyot spells out this providential vision in terms of the respective roles of the continents in nurturing humankind.

Asia is the cradle where man passed his infancy, under the authority of law, and where he learned his dependence upon a sovereign master. Europe is the school where his youth was trained, where he waxed in strength and knowledge, grew to manhood, and learned at once his liberty and his moral responsibility. America is the theatre of his activity during the period of manhood; the land where he applies and practises all he has learned, brings into action all the forces he has acquired.... (1853, p. 327)

Like most nineteenth-century geographers, Guyot dismisses out of hand the continents of the southern hemisphere: “As there is a temperate hemisphere and a tropical hemisphere, we may, in the same manner, say there is a civilized hemisphere, and a savage hemisphere” (1853, p. 263).

In his 1828 *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe*, translated into Japanese in 1877 where it was widely influential, the French historian François Guizot (1787–1874) took the idea of a providential project of civilization even further: “European civilization has, if I may be allowed the expression, at last penetrated the ways of eternal truth—into the scheme of Providence;—it moves in the ways which God has prescribed. This is the rational principle of its superiority” (p. 40).

In practical terms the role of geography here can be understood as the power of definition: the ability of Europe to define the rest of the world according to its perspective and understanding. It came down, in this sense, to a question of who *mapped* and who *got mapped*.

Japanese Geographers Respond

These geographical schemas presented Japan’s intellectual elites with an important dilemma: Should they accept the maps of the world being drawn up in Western capitals and their own resultant marginalization? Or should they try in some way to redraw these maps or develop new ones of their own? Early nineteenth-century nationalist thinkers developed alternate cosmologies that stressed Japan’s unique status as the “land of the gods” (*shinkoku*) and produced geographies that positioned Japan as the “head” of the world at the leading edge of the Eurasian continent, with Europe consigned to the role of “legs” (Kanō, 1999, p. 119).

On the title page of *The Geography of Human Life*, Shigetaka Shiga (1863–1927) is listed as having played the dual roles of “editor and critic,” suggesting a certain distance between Shiga’s views and Makiguchi’s. This is perhaps inevitable given that the task Shiga set for himself, in both his geographical and landscape writing, was considerably simpler than Makiguchi’s. Where Makiguchi sought to provide his readers with a grasp of general principles for understanding the relationship of people and the land, Shiga wrote from a distinctly nationalist perspective, seeking to guide a rising generation of leaders in responding to Japan’s geopolitical challenges and to instill in his readers a sense of love for and pride in the land of Japan. In service of this latter purpose, he enlisted a range of literary sources, along with his own poetic observations, to offer testimony to the superiority of the Japanese landscape to those of other countries.

The geographical thinking of Kanzō Uchimura, a Christian educator whose refusal to bow before the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1891 generated intense controversy, was strongly influenced by his reading of Guyot's works. The first two books he cites in his 1892 work, *On the Earth and People* are Guyot's *The Earth and Man* and his *Physical Geography*. In the preface to the second edition, Uchimura notes that he revised the title (from *Thoughts on Geography*) at the urging of a friend who thought he should more directly acknowledge his debt to Guyot.

Uchimura was both a devoted Christian and an impassioned patriot, something expressed in his formulation that he loved above all the "two J's"—Jesus and Japan. As a Christian, Uchimura was determined to make evident the working of God's providential hand in the shaping of the world; as a Japanese patriot, he could not accept the relegation of Japan to a secondary role in the grand project of civilization. Reconciling these two imperatives is at the heart of Uchimura's geography.

In Chapter 8 of *On the Earth and People*, "On the Orient," Uchimura adopted the view, typical of the Eurocentric geographies of the era, that India and China were fated by their respective geographies to the kind of spiritual and physical unity and uniformity that inevitably produced stagnation. Unlike many Europeans, however, Uchimura was not ready to dismiss Asia as a place of purely past glory:

A truly perfected civilization will only be realized when these three [civilizations of Europe, China and India] intermingle and assimilate one another. Unless one turns to the other two, it will not be able to make up for its own deficiencies. The hope of humankind lies in the harmonious unification of these three. (1897, p. 180)

For Uchimura, the work of bringing the civilizations of East and West together was the special vocation prepared by providence for Japan. It was the natural mission of islands to connect different continents, as Sicily historically linked Europe and Africa and Britain has served as a point of connection between Europe and North America. Using a gendered analogy, Uchimura expressed his hope that Japan would serve as a matchmaker to introduce China, "the bride," to the United States, "the new groom" (1897, p. 206).

Makiguchi's Geography

Perhaps the best way to understand Makiguchi's interest in geography is as a stand-in for his sustained intellectual engagement with material reality, specifically with the dynamic nexus of human and non-human nature. That reality is complex and in *The Geography of Human Life*, Makiguchi carefully avoids attributing to any single factor or cluster of factors an overriding causal or explanatory power. Likewise, his work is free of the kind of teleological inflection that can be seen in the work of Ritter, Guyot, Uchimura and others. The nuanced complexity of Makiguchi's descriptions derives from the fact that he was committed to the view, reflected in the book's title, that humans and their environment exist in relationships of constant and mutual co-influence. It also stems from his belief that the most valuable human–nature interactions are multifaceted; that the richest and most robust human character is developed through, and expresses itself in, a multi-vector engagement with one's surroundings.

Not surprisingly, thus, he cites or acknowledges works and efforts from a wide range of disciplines: geography, of course, and also literature and history (as in Uchimura and Shiga), but, perhaps most strikingly, contemporary works in pedagogy and sociology, including those by Kern

(*Grundriss der Pädagogik* (1873)), Mayo-Smith (*Sociology and Statistics* (1895)), Giddings (*The Principles of Sociology* (1896)), and Fairbanks (*Introduction to Sociology* (1896)) (see also Goulah, 2013). Makiguchi's exposure to sociological theory at this point was principally through American sources; the works of Durkheim, for example, would not be translated into Japanese until after the end of World War I. He also references Friedrich Rätzels (1844-1904), considered the founder of the field of political geography, and a number of Western writers in the political and military fields as well as Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* (1857), Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (1837), and Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (1890), all of which were influential in shaping views of Japan's position in the world. The breadth of this reading suggests that Makiguchi fully availed himself of the resources available to him in Tokyo, including the Imperial Library, a short walk from his home.

In a sense, Makiguchi can be read as responding to the need more recently expressed by David Harvey (2006), to bring the geographic and sociological imaginations into conversation:

I considered the disjunction between these two imaginations unfortunate and counterproductive. The relations between social processes and spatial forms needed to be better understood as a prerequisite to well-grounded critical research on urbanization, modernization, diffusion, migration, international capital flows, regional development, uneven geographical development, geopolitics, and a host of other subjects of considerable importance. (p. 212)

Dayle Bethel (2002) produced a summary translation of Makiguchi's work under the title *A Geography of Human Life*. This title, with its use of the indefinite article, in my view fails to convey the actual scale of Makiguchi's ambition, which was to offer a comprehensive and synthetic account of the varied relationships between natural phenomena and human agency. In doing so, he sought to overcome the disembodied fragmentation of knowledge that characterized the Japanese textbooks used to teach Geography in public schools. These were typically ordered as national or global tours of Earth's surface demarcated by political or administrative boundaries, with descriptions of physical, economic, and occasionally cultural highlights. Makiguchi pursued more universal, more broadly explicative, understandings.

At the same time, Makiguchi's *Geography* was in many ways built upon the paradigm of civilization that prevailed in his times. That is, Makiguchi accepted the idea that the world as it stood could be divided into the categories of civilized, semi-civilized and uncivilized (1981–1996, Vol. 2, pp. 180–185). He did so, however, with a critical distinction: he consistently avoided attributing these differences to any fixed or inherent factors, such as race, “national character,” or geographical conditions.

A literal reading of the Sino-Japanese characters with which the different stages of human development were written gives us “opened,” “partially opened,” and “yet to open.” Drawing implications from the individual characters with which Japanese expressions are written always carries risks of a reductive literalism, but as discussed below, there seem to be cases in which Makiguchi followed the meanings of the characters with which terms were translated more closely than he did the meaning of the translated terms in their original cultural settings. In any event, it is clear that he did not consider civilization to be a static endpoint, but an unfolding process of new possibilities.

For Makiguchi, whatever qualities prevailed within a culture were understood as the product of interactions between a people and their environment—which he understood as comprising

both natural and social dimensions. Humans, in this view, are always able to choose their response to the challenges and possibilities of a given set of circumstances and thus shape their own future. His optimistic faith in human agency realized through education was no doubt related to his own biography—a story of hard work rewarded—and the great changes and material advances he experienced in Japanese society over the course of the first three decades of his life. It is in this sense that *The Geography of Human Life* is educational both in its program of exposition as well as its core message: It is learning and education that enables individuals and societies to fully realize the positive possibilities of their circumstances.

This approach, which has been termed “environmental possibilism” (Saito, supplementary note 10, Makiguchi, 1981–1996, Vol. 1, pp. 407–408), represented a fundamental challenge to the geographic determinism that lay at the heart of much Euro-American geographic research and which was inevitably (if often unconsciously) linked to colonial-imperial projects. It is this focus on the possibilities present in a given set of circumstances that gives Makiguchi’s approach to geography a deeply educational orientation.

Makiguchi’s treatment of oceans is illustrative. Oceans, he asserted, can serve either as isolating barriers or as connecting global routes, depending on the human factors that are brought to bear. For most of history, fear and trepidation of the oceans kept people from venturing onto their vast expanses. But with the deployment of human wisdom in the form of navigational technologies, as well as the courage and vision to travel to unknown regions, these same oceans were transformed into “thoroughfares” (1981–1996, Vol. 1, p. 221) connecting the world’s peoples.

Needless to say, these thoroughfares brought new dangers, in particular to societies that had previously enjoyed the protections afforded by isolation. In *The Geography of Human Life*, Makiguchi expresses his understanding of the transformations of spatio-temporal as well as power relations wrought by the technology of his era.

The civilization of recent centuries has expanded the scale of humankind’s struggle for survival, until it now takes place over the entire world. The two great motive forces of steam power and electricity have reduced distances on the globe; they have shortened and eliminated time, making the entire world one. Thus, the small-scale competition that once took place between different tribes has now grown to become large-scale international competition. In this manner, all nations have been brought into proximity; countries and peoples eye each other with vigilance and envy, looking for the slightest opening or opportunity to seize another’s territory. To this end, they do not hesitate to use violence and cruelty, for this is in keeping with the ideals of what is known as imperialism. If we consider what the legal or moral sanctions for this might be, we live in an age when one is punished as a thief for stealing the possessions of another person, but feared and respected as strong for stealing their country. (1981–1996, Vol. 1, p. 14)

Makiguchi’s clear-eyed understanding of the global power relations of his time, however, was coupled to a response that was unlike that of Shiga—who sought to restore a Japanese sense of pride by extolling the beauties of the landscape—or Uchimura—who accepted the Eurocentric map of the world but tried to find a more honored place within it for Japan. Rather than try to rewrite the “map” of the world as it was predominantly defined, Makiguchi took a different approach, one that suggested a more fundamental reordering.

As noted, Makiguchi’s consistent goal was to identify the universal principles that guide human interactions with their surroundings. What, for example, did it mean for people to live on

an island or a peninsula? What were the limitations and potentialities presented by those geographic facts? He considered an accurate understanding of our individual and collective place in the world as the necessary basis for formulating effective (what he would later term “value-creating”) responses (1981–1996, Vol. 5, pp. 212–216).

At the same time, his analysis is marked by a complexity and multidimensionality that contrasts with, for example, Guyot, whose analysis of plains is limited to commenting on their fecundity (1853, pp. 75–76). For his part, Makiguchi notes the importance of this, but goes on to chart a further series of human-nature interactions that includes the elements of transportation, trade and social organization:

Plains provide the most convenient form of land travel; as a result they are the site of the most frequent movements of people and goods. Ease of travel makes isolated ways of life impossible for the human inhabitants; it also militates against uneven pricing for goods. From this we can see the source of the tendency for mountain peoples to be stout defenders of their particular territory, and for the people of plains to engage more in interdependent and communal ways of living. (1981–1996, Vol. 1, p. 142)

Likewise, in his discussion of coasts, Makiguchi challenged the already-discussed formula that directly correlated a landmass’ relative length of coastline to the level of culture. As a counterexample, he cited the east coast of India which, with the exception of the port of Madras (Chennai), was nearly entirely lacking in the complex curvatures and indentations that Carl Ritter and other Western geographers asserted were essential to cultural development. He also noted that there is little observable difference in the degree of cultural development between the east and west coasts of northern Japan, despite the fact that the former is far more convoluted than the latter (1981–1996, Vol. 1, p. 312).

The Geography of Human Life was published in October, 1903, a little more than two months before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, when jingoistic passions were running high. Against this backdrop, Makiguchi eschewed the kind of nationalism that saw the state as an ultimate value in itself. Instead, he believed that the best way to locate our lives and loyalties is to recognize that we are simultaneously inhabitants and members of: 1) a local community, 2) a national society and 3) the world. Of these different levels, the local community was of particular importance because it is there that we can directly observe the various physical and social phenomena that shape our experience of life and from which larger conceptualizations can be extrapolated. The local community was thus for him “indispensable as a conscious basis for the lives of each individual and for understanding the entire world in a fair and farsighted manner” (1981–1996, Vol. 1, pp. 15–16). Encouraging learners to see their surroundings as the site of learning and the source of valid knowledge further has important implications for breaking down the claims to epistemological monopoly that underlie many formal educational systems and institutions.

One way of putting this is that Makiguchi sought to develop a map of the world without a fixed center; another is that Makiguchi mapped a world with an infinite number of centers. His method of studying geography, based on carefully observing the realities of the local community, meant that each of us stands at the center of the world. Where we are at this moment is the place from which we observe the world, the place where we experience our lives, where we learn and from which we can act in ways that will transform the world. Thus, if Makiguchi embraced a vision

of cosmopolitanism it was not abstract or ideal, but rather one realized through sensing other people's attachments to their lives in their respective local communities via the empathetic transposition of our own connections and commitments.

Evolution and Competition

The ideas of evolution that became influential from the middle of the nineteenth century provided a biological foundation for the racial theories that had already been deployed as part of the effort to explain and justify European pre-eminence in the world. To the spatial aspects of geography, evolution added a temporal element: If the evolution of all lifeforms was driven by competition for survival, some lives represented a past to be overcome or forgotten; others were successfully adapted to the present and competing for the future. The “losers” in evolutionary competition were condemned to a vestigial status of being irrelevant at best, a hindrance at worst.

Although Darwin himself was cautious about applying his theories to human society, this was not always the case among those who followed him. For others—the immensely influential Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) most prominent among them—the biological mechanisms of competition and evolution were then used to explain social realities—domestically, to explain the success of the new industrial aristocracy and the degraded state of the laboring classes; internationally, to justify the subjugation of supposedly weaker peoples by the stronger, more “fit” races of Europe. Spencer's view of evolution is one that is relentlessly, even cosmologically, totalizing:

While we think of Evolution as divided into astronomic, geologic, biologic, psychologic, sociologic, &c., it may seem to some extent a coincidence that the same law of metamorphosis holds throughout all its division. But when we recognized these divisions as mere conventional groupings, made to facilitate the arrangement and acquisition of knowledge—when we remember that the different existences with which they severally deal are component parts of one Cosmos; we see at once that there are not several kinds of Evolution having certain traits in common, but one Evolution going on everywhere in the same manner. (Peel, ed. 1972, p. 72)

When social progress is argued as a continuation or extension of biological evolution, it is often undergirded by an ideological commitment to genetic inheritance. The scope of these supposedly heritable traits will vary and may include not only physical or intellectual capacity, but such qualities as ambition and morality (or their lack). In this context, Spencer weighs the benefits of the “purifying process” of physical war relative to the deleterious impact on the morals of the members of more highly developed societies, and suggests a transition to economic or industrial war as something that accomplishes the same outcome.

Severe and bloody as the process is, the killing-off of inferior races and inferior individuals, leaves a balance of benefit to mankind during phases of progress in which the moral development is low, and there are no quick sympathies to be continually seared by the infliction of pain and death. But as there arise higher societies, implying individual characters fitted for closer co-operation, the destructive activities exercised by such higher societies have injurious re-active effects on the moral natures of their members—injurious effects which outweigh the benefits resulting from extirpation of inferior races. After this stage has been reached, the purifying process, continuing still an important one, remains to be carried on

by industrial war—by a competition of societies during which the best, physically, emotionally and intellectually, spread most, and leave the least capable to disappear gradually, from failing to leave a sufficiently-numerous posterity. (1873, p. 199, cited in Peel, ed. 1972, p. 173)

It was more in its social than its biological or scientific form that the theory of evolution arrived in Japan (Watanabe, 1984, p. 194). The lectures delivered by Edward S. Morse (1838-1925) at Tokyo Imperial University in 1877 are often cited as the formal introduction of evolutionary theory to Japan. Morse's lectures were enthusiastically received and he enjoyed teaching evolution "without running up against theological prejudices as I often did at home..." (cited in Duke, 2009, p. 234).

In the West it was evolution itself—the possibility that the work of divine creation was somehow either incomplete or mutable (permitting or requiring the addition of new species)—that tended to spark resistance. In Japan, it was the idea of competition and its implications for social stability that provoked anxiety within the political culture of the time. The influential translator, educator, and proponent of enlightenment values, Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835–1901), describes, with characteristic drollness, the official resistance that met his initial attempts to translate the word "competition" into Japanese.

I was reading Chamber's book on economics. When I spoke of the book to a certain high official in the treasury bureau one day, he became very much interested and wanted me to show him the translation. He said that if translating the entire book was too much, he would like to see the table of contents. I began translating it...[and] when I came upon the word "competition" for which there was no equivalent in Japanese, I was obliged to use an invention of my own, *kyōsō*, literally "race-fight."

When the official saw my translation, he appeared very much impressed. Then he said suddenly, "Here is a word for 'fight.' What does it mean? It is such an unpeaceful word...I could not take the paper with that word to the chancellor." (Fukuzawa, 1966, p. 190)

Likewise, the geographer Shigetaka Shiga, returning from a ten-month sojourn on the Navy training vessel *Tsukuba* in 1886, during which he had witnessed the incursions of the imperial powers in the South Pacific and the effects on the local population, was filled with dread at the prospects of a Japan exposed to competition. Were Japan to be opened to foreign populations, he wrote in *Conditions of the South Pacific* (1887), the upper classes of Japanese society would find themselves in direct competition with northern Europeans and Americans; the middle strata of Japanese society with Iberians and Irish; and the lower classes with the "East Indians" and Chinese. In such a case, "Ah, men of Japan! Will you then have the courage to boast of the Yamato Spirit?" (as cited in Motoyama, 1977, p. 287).

Another example of the impact of evolutionary ideas as they were introduced to Japan can be seen in the thinking of Hiroyuki Katō (1836–1916), a prominent intellectual who served as president of Tokyo Imperial University during the period 1890–93. In his 1882 work, *A New Theory of Human Rights*, Katō used the theory of evolution as the basis for recanting as "delusion" his earlier support for a natural law theory of human rights. A similar strand of "social Darwinism" runs through his 1893 work *The Competition for Rights Among the Strong*. Katō's understanding of competition was that when the assertion of their rights by the strong is not met with an assertion

of countervailing power, the strong simply prey on the weak in a “violent and cruel” manner. It is only when there is competition between forces of equivalent strength that it takes on a more “elevated and noble” aspect and becomes codified as legally guaranteed rights, thus propelling social progress (Katō, 1889/1943, p. 183).

In reflections written in 1912, near the end of a long life, Katō described the transformation in his thinking toward a position of totalizing “monism” (1915, p. 462) in the following terms.

From that point I started to feel how extremely important it was to apply natural science to the human sciences, and as I read work about evolutionism by such great scholars as Darwin, Spencer and Haeckel, I became ever more aware that there is only nature in the universe, and nothing that is supernatural. Thus I came to have no doubt that we humans are not inherently the highest among all living beings, but have come to be so entirely through the workings of evolution. (Katō, 1915, p. 462)

On a more popular level were the writings of the animal biologist Asajirō Oka (1866–1944), whose *Shikaron kōwa (Lectures on the Theory of Evolution)* (1904) became a best-seller, going through multiple editions and introducing a wide reading public to evolutionary theory. For his part, Oka advocated proactive measures to improve the national genetic stock.

We need to apply the strictest possible sanctions against those who engage in harmful actions, making an example of them for others. Those with heritable illnesses should be prevented from having children, as painful as that may be. And there is a need to remove from society those with a congenital predisposition to do evil with all haste. Further, we must abolish all systems which artificially block the processes of natural selection and permit the weak and foolish to continue their splendid existence. (Oka, 1907, p. 621)

In contrast to Oka and Katō, who affirmed the value of competition, socialists such as Sen Katayama (1859–1933) and Shūsui Kōtoku (1871–1911) discussed evolution in connection with theories of socialist revolution. Katayama’s 1903 work *My Socialism* and Kōtoku’s work of the same year *The Essence of Socialism* both dealt with evolutionary theory in a way that was critical of current modes of competition. Terujirō (Ikki) Kita (1883–1937) is now remembered principally for how his later writings inspired the instigators of a failed coup attempt in February 1936, leading to his execution despite no evidence of his actual involvement. Kita’s first major work was *On the National Essence and Pure Socialism* (1906), which has been described as an effort to “reread biological evolution from the perspective of socialism, and socialism from the perspective of biological evolution” (Kuno, 1975, p. 174). In it, Kita points out the contradiction in Oka’s stance of simultaneously calling for reliance on the unimpeded work of evolutionary competitive forces while urging active eugenic intervention in those processes.

Socialists, perhaps predictably, tended to view competition as an aberration, an historical anomaly peculiar to the current capitalist stage of socio-economic development. Kōtoku and Katayama, for example, both looked to a future in which competition would cease to be a central feature of human society. Kōtoku cited Lewis Morgan’s 1877 book *Ancient Society* to support the contention that communistic social organization had prevailed for all but 5,000 of the past 100,000 years of human history. Katayama, for his part, remembered the world of a more recent past, when labor was viewed as sacred and there were no intense competitive pressures:

This was a society in which our grandfathers went off to cut hay in the mountains, our grandmothers went to the river to wash clothes, in which there was not a single capitalist. This was a world that accorded exactly with the proverb that there is no poverty that will overtake those who truly work. (1969, p. 229)

Makiguchi's Views of Evolutionary Competition

The idea of evolution, that the natural and human worlds are subject to fluctuation and change, was something that seems to have met with little resistance from Makiguchi. Here also it is easy to find sources for this in his biography: His life had from the earliest years been marked by change, and he had learned to accommodate himself to this in creative and productive ways. (Saitō, 1981). For Makiguchi, the idea of evolution was most probably understood as the possibility of change for the better, that is, progress.

Within the range of responses to the idea of evolutionary competition examined above, Makiguchi's should be identified as falling more on the affirmative end of the spectrum. Makiguchi was clearly familiar with evolutionary theory and it can be said to form a leitmotif running through *The Geography of Human Life*. Zensaburō Tachibana's translation of *On the Origins of Species* is among the works referenced, and Makiguchi cites Darwin's ideas (1981–1996, Vol. 1, p. 79). At first glance, it might seem that Makiguchi uncritically embraced the new doctrine of evolutionary competition. We find, in fact, statements such as the following:

Just as the cause for all evolution in the biological realm can be explained in terms of the influence of the competition for survival, all progress in the phenomena of the life activities of humankind can be understood from the perspective of competition for survival. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 401)

This apparently blanket affirmation is, however, followed immediately by an important and characteristic caveat: “But it is of course unreasonable to imagine that all the complex phenomena of human affairs can be entirely explained by the competition for survival” (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 401).

The stance expressed here reflects two acts of restraint, two boundaries that Makiguchi consistently observed throughout his intellectual career and which are key to understanding his thought.

The first is that, while Makiguchi was strongly drawn to large-scale, effectively universal, principles, he consistently resisted the totalizing impulse, the search for a single explanatory scheme such as Spencer or Oka found in evolution.

The second boundary that Makiguchi was reluctant to obscure might be described as the one delineating the biologically and socially human. This distinction can be seen in the structure of *The Geography of Human Life*.

Part 2 of *The Geography of Human Life*, Nature as the Medium for Mutual Interactions between Human Beings and the Land, concludes with Chapter 22 “Humankind” and Part 3, The Phenomena of Humankind's Life Activities with Earth as their Stage, opens with an exposition of the nature of human society (Chapter 23). The term translated here as “humankind” as the title for Chapter 22 is *jinrui* (人類), which at the time had quite strong biological overtones and could almost be translated as “the human species.”

Thus, within the overall structure of Makiguchi's *The Geography of Human Life*, biological and social humanity are neighboring phenomena, and the transition from one to the other is the pivot and fulcrum of his system. This suggests how much importance Makiguchi assigned to the social nature of humans, to the idea that what is genuinely human is inseparable from our interactions as social beings. This would appear to be the reason why Makiguchi was, unlike some of the Western and Japanese thinkers noted above, highly resistant to any attempt to directly transfer the principles of biological competition and evolution to the human realm. For Makiguchi, the key paths of human heritage were extrasomatic—in lessons learned through experience and passed on as cultural systems of knowledge and wisdom. Together, these factors meant that his preferred model of competition-driven social progress was articulated through ideas of human agency and motivation rather than biological mechanisms of survival and extinction.

The phrase that translated “struggle for survival” into Japanese, *seizon kyōsō* 生存競, appears repeatedly throughout *The Geography of Human Life* and can be said to constitute one of its underlying themes. This Japanese expression, however, creates space for both the kind of biological interpretation practiced by Oka and others, and Makiguchi's more socially oriented understanding of competition. *Seizon* can also be rendered “existence” which has a less binary sense than “survival” and can indicate a full range of experience from just barely living to living well. Further, the lack of clearly defined relationships between the component elements of multiple-character expressions such as this opens it to such readings as “the struggles of existence,” or “the competition inherent in existence,” which seem more consonant with Makiguchi's use.

In his later writings, such as his major work on education, the four-volume *Sōka kyōikugaku taikei* (*The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*) (1930–34; Makiguchi, 1981–1996, Vols. 5 & 6), we find evidence that Makiguchi's awareness of the negative aspects of competition had heightened over the intervening years. He writes, for example:

Human beings, from early in their social life can be seen to engage in a life of vicious competition, producing scenes of carnage; at the same time, they carry out a welcome and desirable shared life, manifesting the realm of the compassionate bodhisattva. (1981–1996, Vol. 5, p. 180)

He continues in this passage to term a competitive way of life execrable (lit. worthy of being spit on) and a cooperative, collective one “beautiful and worthy of respect” (1981–1996, Vol. 5, p. 180).

Even in this later period, however, Makiguchi continued to see competition as potentially productive of advancement and improvement. In Volume 3 (1932) of *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*, for example, Makiguchi calls for elementary school principals to be selected through competitive tests rather than, as was the common practice of the time, personal connections and favoritism (Makiguchi, 1981–1996, Vol. 6, pp. 88–97). Even when competition was not to be deployed to forestall such clearly negative outcomes, Makiguchi seems to have viewed it as one element in a constellation that included ideas of economy, efficiency, rationality, purposefulness and innovation.

Makiguchi's focus on social rather than biological realms of competition supports the interpretation that he believed that it was ideas and practices, rather than people, that should be subjected to the winnowing effects of competition.

Humane Modes of Competition

Chapter 30 of *The Geography of Human Life*, “Competition for Survival and the Land,” is where Makiguchi sets out one of his most expansive ideas—the possibilities of what has been translated as “humanitarian competition” (including by this writer) and which, as described below, might better be translated as a “humane modes of competition.”

With the idea of evolutionary competition having served as a kind of leitmotif for the entire book, in the final chapters of *The Geography of Human Life* Makiguchi considered how the manner in which competition is conducted might also change; that competition, in addition to being a driver of evolution, might itself also be subject to evolutionary forces. In a sweeping survey of human history, Makiguchi suggested that competition within and between human societies had developed and changed along the following lines: The earliest, primitive form of competition was military, followed by political and then economic competition. Economic competition, he asserted, was the predominant mode employed in the world of his time—a world in which states as well as large industrial and financial concerns vied for domination of the world’s markets and resources.

Finally, and looking to the future, he offered this vision: As the historical possibilities of military, political, and economic competition exhausted themselves, a new kind of competition would come to occupy an increasingly central place in human affairs. He saw this shift as not merely representing a change in the methods or site of competition, but as a qualitative transformation—from a zero-sum style of competition overhung by the threat of physical elimination to one conducted within a social framework of mutual recognition, what today might be called a “win-win” mode of competition.

Before examining the content of this concept, it is worthwhile to reconsider the aptness of “humanitarian competition” as a translation. Written in Sino-Japanese characters, the expression consists of two parts: the first *jindōteki* 人道的 comprises three characters, “person/human,” “path/way,” and “type/kind”; the second is the two-character expression coined by Fukuzawa for “competition” referenced above: *kyōsō* 競争 “strive/compete” and “fight/engage in conflict.” While *jindōteki* did become the standard translation for “humanitarian” particularly in the context of the International Red Cross movement and international humanitarian law that developed starting in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the term has older, broader meanings rooted in the East Asian worldview that posits an inherent human morality. These meanings can be accessed through a direct rendering of the characters: the path of humanity; the way of being that people should follow or pursue.

“Humanitarian competition” suggests certain positive imperatives: striving, for example, to make the greatest contribution to human welfare, and a review of Makiguchi’s different uses of the term would indicate that this sense is certainly not absent. On the other hand, the older use of *jindō* carries implications of negative restraints and bounds within which any competitive striving should be conducted. In his later writings, Makiguchi indicates his consonance with such negative restraints, referencing what he called a “maxim of the Orient” and which has sometimes been described as the “negative Golden Rule”—Not to do unto others what one would not have done unto oneself (1981–1996, Vol. 5, p. 339). To capture this second sense, while still retaining the meaning conveyed in earlier translations, in this paper I use “humane modes of competition” or “humane competition” as translations for *jindōteki kyōsō*.

Given the many negative aspects of competition apparent in the world around us—the freezing of winner and loser status into conditions of entrenched inequality—it may be difficult for readers to see the idea of humane modes of competition as a valid, workable concept. The

elements that comprise it—humane, competition—seem to represent an irreconcilable contradiction.

Over the years, different readers of Makiguchi have in fact suggested that he was principally calling for a shift from a competitive to a collaborative mode of social organization (Miyata, 1995; Matsuoka, 2005). This thread is certainly not absent from Makiguchi's thinking. But he was extremely deliberate in his use of language and, had he wanted to propose simply supplanting cooperation for competition, he would almost certainly have said so in as many words.

How, then, did Makiguchi see these seemingly contradictory ideas coming together as a coherent whole? First it is important to note that, for him, the different modes of competition outlined above were not stages in a simple, linear progression. Rather, they overlapped and coexisted, shifting back and forth as a new and different mode of competition came to occupy a more central place in human affairs (1981–1996, Vol. 2, pp. 393–401). Thus, while Makiguchi firmly and consistently believed in the possibility of progress, he never considered such progress to be automatic or inevitable. In line with this, Makiguchi assumed that transitions from one mode of competition to the next arise from within the internal logic of that competition. In other words, people would start to adopt a new mode of competition when the previous one had reached its limits and no longer functioned as a means for the achievement of desired ends.

As has been discussed, Makiguchi viewed competition as a universal, unavoidable reality of life. It had certainly been so for him. He witnessed it in the decline of the port city of his birth as steam won out over sail; in the process by which he gained entry to and was able to graduate from a teachers college; in the national examination that qualified him to teach geography. And as has been noted repeatedly, the entire Japanese national project was shaped by its competitive placement within the global system.

Implicit in his analysis of competition is that in order to produce valuable outcomes it must be conducted within the context of social frameworks and an underlying presumption of interdependence. Makiguchi appears to have seen competition and cooperation as paired, interrelated concepts. Thus, when he describes the process by which “we interact and compete, harmonize and clash” (1981–1996, Vol. 1, pp. 15–16), he is describing what was for him the inevitable phases of cooperation and conflict within human life.

It is interesting to speculate about the sources of Makiguchi's sense of interdependence, which is a consistent theme of his work, underlying many of his key ideas. Interdependence is, of course, central to the worldview of Buddhism, but *The Geography of Human Life* was written decades before Makiguchi formally associated himself with Nichiren Buddhism. This would therefore seem to be an instance in which Makiguchi remained faithful to non-modern values and outlooks because he felt they offered a more accurate and useful mapping of the world in which we live. In this case, Makiguchi refused to jettison the ethos of human interdependence long prevalent in East Asian cultures—where society has tended to be viewed as a positive good—for the Western post-Enlightenment view of society as a contractual arrangement that keeps atomistic individuals from engaging in unlimited violence against one another—Hobbes' famous formulation of “the war of all against all.”

In this view, meaningful competition—that which spurs and encourages excellence—should not be for the necessities of life. Rather, the most effective incentives are social. As social beings, we are driven by the desire for the approval and recognition of our peers.

Makiguchi discusses even military competition in these terms, with a specific reference to the samurai classes of past eras when they were seen as “the most highly respected members of

society and it was considered the highest honor to be a samurai; it was this that made them the ultimate winners” (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 393).

Following the logic that modes of competition shift when the one currently prevailing has exhausted its possibilities, Makiguchi describes how, over time, the military competition that had long been the dominant factor in human affairs gave way to political competition.

With the progress and advancement of society, military force alone was no longer enough to determine the functioning of authority. As people became aware that they could gain respect within society through the power of knowledge and wisdom, these became the means by which they sought to grasp political authority. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, pp. 393–94)

Internationally, Makiguchi saw the shift from primarily military to political (diplomatic) competition as propelled by realistic evaluations of the ultimate ineffectiveness of military competition. He illustrated this by noting that the states that had emerged victorious from military conflicts were now typically prevented by the other Great Powers from fully enforcing the demands they placed on the defeated. The result was that the economic benefits gained by the victors were now almost never adequate to compensate for the losses endured. This view was borne out two years later when Japan, despite winning its war with Russia, was unable to extract meaningful reparations and found itself victorious but deeply in debt.

Within the grand scope of history, Makiguchi saw political competition—both domestically and internationally—steadily yielding to the forces of economic competition:

As the idea of freedom becomes more pronounced among individuals, it becomes impossible for those wielding political authority to make the masses submit to their will. As a result, there is a shift from the quest to seize political power to a greater stress on gaining economic power. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 394)

He was also clearly conscious of the potentially destructiveness of economic competition among nations, what Johan Galtung (1969) identified as “structural violence.”

Military competition occurs suddenly, creating terrible suffering and tragedy, and we are thus clearly conscious that it is taking place. In contrast, economic competition takes place slowly and insidiously, and thus we are largely unconscious that it is occurring. But the suffering and misery that is ultimately produced by economic competition far exceeds that of military competition. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 397)

Just as other shifts in competition had been driven by practical considerations—the ineffectiveness of a given form of competition to obtain the desired ends—Makiguchi assumed that the transition to humanitarian or humane modes of competition would be realized by a similar process: “Those who emerge victorious economically are not necessarily the final victors in the struggle for survival. This is something that is already recognized among those whose thinking has developed beyond a certain level” (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 398).

Although Makiguchi positioned humane modes of competition as the final stage in a series of historical transitions, he did not assume a static condition free from the disruptive energies of

competition, much less the “end of history” as envisaged in either the socialist or neoliberal imagination. Makiguchi clearly expected that some form of competition would continue to be an integral aspect of the human condition. He used the phrase *mukeni no seiryoku* —“intangible force”—to describe the means by which humane modes of competition could function, including in the international arena.

This means deploying an intangible force that—naturally exerts a positive influence on others. Rather than seeking compliance through the exercise of authority, we seek the willing and heartfelt compliance of others. Instead of conquering other lands in the selfish pursuit of territorial expansion, countries attract and draw others to them by gaining respect and admiration for their virtues. These are the methods of humanity. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 399)

Makiguchi did not explain what exactly he intended by the phrase “intangible force.” The idea that respect and admiration for character or virtue can be an effective motive force even in the realm of politics is another concept of enduring pedigree in East Asian thinking (Angle, 2017), and there is reason to believe the idea had a personal and cultural resonance for Makiguchi.

While it may be tempting to dismiss this approach as idealistic, the fact is that states—like individual humans—respond not only to concrete threats of loss or promises of gain, but to the more subtle forces of recognition, reputation, and prestige. In recent decades there has been serious discussion regarding the efficacy of the “soft power” of cultural attractiveness (Nye, 1990). What has been termed the “power of legitimacy” in international law literature has been demonstrated to shape the behavior of states in ways that strictly realist models would not predict; analyses have shown that the majority of states uphold the majority of their obligations under international law, including in a significant proportion of cases when doing so runs against their national interest as defined by rational actor models of behavior (Franck, 1990). In the international realm, Makiguchi’s vision of humane modes of competition might be understood as an attempt to give full substance to the idea of international society or an international community; that is, relations among states that recapitulate the kinds of mutuality and reciprocity that pertain among individuals and groups in a sustainably functioning society.

The goal [of humane modes of competition] lies not solely in self-profit, but in protecting and advancing the experience of life for oneself as well as for others. It is, in other words, to choose those means by which we benefit ourselves while also bringing benefit to others. It means to consciously engage in a shared or common life. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 399)

Here the idea of *consciously* engaging in collective life is of particular importance. For Makiguchi, to speak of our social, cooperative nature was not to give voice to an ideal, but to make a statement of fact: As social beings, humans cooperate, communicate, and compete. And the greatest, most lasting good will be realized when our striving relative to others is conducted with a conscious awareness of our interdependence on and need for those others.

Within the total body of Makiguchi’s writings, this exposition on the idea of humane modes of competition stands out as a rare example of a sweeping vision that gestures to a more ideal future. In point of fact, Makiguchi did not return to or elaborate on this idea in any of his subsequent writings. It may be that he experienced some degree of hesitancy or even embarrassment looking back on the ideals he had voiced in his early 30s. Makiguchi principally viewed writing

and publishing as means of expressing ideas that can be implemented by the reader, something which does not necessarily pertain in the case of a fundamental transformation in the vectors of human history. Conversely, however, nowhere in his writings does Makiguchi explicitly renounce or recant these ideas. It is thus equally possible that the remainder of his life was in some sense devoted to the realization of these early ideals in some modified or sublimated form.

Perhaps the form in which the idea of “humane modes of competition” continued to shape his thinking was in his commitment to the view that ideas, systems of thought and belief—even those that touched the core of personal or national ideology—needed to compete; to be discussed and debated openly, their validity tried and tested amidst the pressing realities of daily living. Makiguchi could be said to have engaged in such competition—however lopsided in terms of material force—in his critique not only of the ideas of ultra-nationalist education, but of their underlying structures of thinking of belief (see Gebert, 2022; Ito, 2009). It was this undertaken competition of ideas that led to his arrest in July 1943 for violation of the notorious Peace Preservation Act and to his death while still imprisoned as a thought criminal some five hundred days later (Origins, 2017, pp. 444–458).

Contemporary Educational Implications

What are the implications of Makiguchi’s ideas of humane modes of competition? While Makiguchi’s call for the adoption of humane modes of competition was set forth in the geopolitical context of international relations, the Geography itself manifested an educational philosophy (Saito, 2004) and lines can be drawn from this approach to Makiguchi’s educational thinking and practice.

As discussed, Makiguchi recognized and focused on the motivational effects of competition: That humans as social beings find motivation in their relations with, and in comparison to, their peers; that there is a deeply rooted psychological drive not only to be *better*, but to be *better than*. Directing the energy that is unleashed by this motivational impulse toward positive, humane outcomes is the core challenge Makiguchi addresses in envisaging a qualitative transformation of competition. For Makiguchi, competition fails to fulfill this potential when it is waged in zero-sum terms cognate to biological competition for finite resources with the binary outcome of survival or extinction. In the educational setting this corresponds to high-stakes testing regimes based on uniform measures of success or failure.

My experience teaching in-person and online to an internationalized student body has brought into sharp focus the degree to which such testing has become a pressurizing reality for young people globally. Having gained entry to an institution of higher learning, the students I work with are, in that sense, winners. In my interactions with them, I make it a practice to ask if they can remember learning to hate a given subject. This has typically been met with the raising of many physical or virtual hands. I then ask if this includes subjects at which they were proficient and, again, hands go up. To develop a distaste for an entire field of knowledge represents forms of loss that—even if they can only be estimated counterfactually—must be counted as profound. These losses are incurred in intangible dimensions of human fulfillment essentially different from the kinds of institutional and career advancement made available by successful test-taking. But that does not reduce their significance.

The different modes of competition that Makiguchi reviews in the Geography suggest diverse, evolving, and contextual standards for success. This would imply similarly complex and nuanced standards for evaluating learning, an idea that finds support in Makiguchi’s later ideas

about value-creation, which insist that value is something that is experienced relationally and subjectively (Makiguchi 1981–1996, Vol. 2). Although Makiguchi was widely recognized as a highly effective principal (Origins, 2017, pp. 207–216), the centralized educational system of pre-1945 Japan placed severe constraints on the scope for systemic innovation in methods of evaluation that could be employed in the public school system.

In the 1920s and 30s Makiguchi and his protege and successor, Toda Josei (1900–58), both achieved success in meeting rigid curricular demands and preparing students for the highly competitive middle-school entrance exams. Toda, in particular, ran a school dedicated to such test preparation—a cram school, in other words, the kind of place where love of learning goes to die. Outside the pressure of official observation/surveillance that prevailed in public elementary education, yet under the looming pressure of the tests, Toda was able to implement Makiguchi’s educational ideas in a manner that, as former students have testified, enabled students to realize a high rate of acceptance to secondary schools while retaining interest in and even love for the respective subjects, something testified to by graduates (Makiguchi, 1981–1996, Vol. 5, p. 8–9; Yamashita, 2006). As Goulah and Inukai (2018) have described, Toda’s approach focused on deductive reasoning—discerning “similarities and differences” (p. 311)—in a way that enabled learners to gain real understanding and problem-solving fluency in different subjects.

This suggests that, in his educational approach—which has deep connections to his thinking on geography (see Gebert, 2009)—Makiguchi was able to effect a qualitative transformation in the way that competition was conceived of and experienced. This is an important field for future study because, if Makiguchi was right and competition is an ever-present thread running through the order of things, it is vital that we give further focus to the nature of that competition and how it can be practiced so that its benefits may be realized and its harms contained.

Makiguchi’s call for the adoption of humane modes of competition was set forth in the geopolitical context of the international relations of his time, an earlier era of globalization. Today, factors such as COVID-19 and climate change have brought the intertwined realities of global interdependence and competition into a new and different focus. The supply chains that run through global sites of comparative advantage have been revealed to include numerous chokepoints and vulnerabilities. Likewise, the development of highly infectious variants—and their subsequent global spread—has brought to the surface aspects of the bio-global order in which humans have always lived, but which has been obscured by the techno-medical prowess of certain societies.

Among the questions unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its related time-space disruptions has been the role of competition in the processes of human and non-human life. In one sense, the pandemic may be seen as ushering in the end of the brief interlude, made possible by the invention of vaccines and antibiotics, when humans—at least those in the wealthier societies—lived largely outside our millennial competition with infectious diseases. As the hosts, victims, and vectors of viral infection, we are again compelled to an acute consciousness of the complex competitive-symbiotic contours of our relationship with these forms of life.

The scale and complexity of assessing and learning from the responses to the pandemic will make this a protracted and laborious process. Profound ethical questions regarding the use of coercive state powers and limitations on individual freedom in the interest of public health and safety demand earnest inquiry and debate. And this work, whether on the national or global scale, will be undertaken on a contested field littered with counterfactuals and in the teeth of political forces determined to have the justness of their respective decisions affirmed. Even given this, we can already discern in the various national and international responses elements of cooperation, of

zero-sum competition, and of forms of competition conducted within a framework of interdependence of a type Makiguchi would have recognized as “humane.”

Perhaps most significant from a long-term perspective was the popular response, particularly salient in the initial phase of the pandemic, as billions of people took steps to avoid infection at least in part to keep from infecting others, actions consonant with Makiguchi’s call to “choose those means by which we benefit ourselves while also bringing benefit to others” (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 399). There was also a renewed appreciation for all those who endure hardship and danger to maintain the functioning of society, an awareness of human equality that helped feed a wave of world-scale activism for the security and dignity of Black Lives. Finally, for all its ethical complexities—including the profit-driven nature of the enterprise—the global race to develop vaccines might also be identified as an instance of a humane mode of competition, especially if the focus is on the round-the-clock efforts of researchers.

Looking back, it is not surprising that other forces—including fatigue and a hunger for a return to “normal”—should have generated reaction and retrenchment. But through the pandemic and its response—things experienced globally and synchronously, if unevenly—the range of imaginable social arrangements has undergone a dramatic expansion that will remain as a memory, benchmark, and guide. How this experience is referenced—what is learned from it—will play a crucial role in our species’ response to the challenges of survival and thriving on the planet we call home.

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