Recollections of Leading World Figures By Daisaku Ikeda
José Abueva — Former President of the University of the Philippines

WHY is it that the Japa-nese do not have respect for their fellow Asians? Why don't they realize that their very arrogance has made them the objects of scorn?

Fifty years ago, a young boy was rowing a sailboat in search of his parents. He was 16 years old. His parents had been taken prisoner by the Japanese armed forces occupying the Philippines. The boy's father, Teodoro Abueva, refused to cooperate with the invaders of his homeland and became a member of the Bohol Guerrillas, the anti-Japanese resistance govern-ment. He worked together with Senator Carlos P. Garcia, who would become president of the Philippines in 1957. The boy's mother, Nena Veloso Abueva, was head of the Bohol Women's Auxiliary Service in the resistance. Together Teodoro and Nena had three daughters and four sons. The boy in the boat was their second son, José.

The Japanese military had been hunting the Abuevas for a long time. In the meantime, they had captured Teodoro's mo-ther, Lola Cadia. José and his younger brother Billy were also taken captive. But they let José go and told him to tell his father, Teodoro, that if he wanted his mother and son back, he had better surrender to the Japanese.

Several days later, Billy came staggering back home, groaning in pain. He was almost unrecognizable. His face was swollen, his front teeth had been knocked out, and his body was bruised and battered. This was the message of the Japanese military to Teodoro Abueva, with the implied threat: "If you continue to resist, we will also torture and kill your mother." But Billy carried a message from his grandmother for his father: "Do not surrender, no matter what happens to me. I am old. You have a wife and seven children to live for."

Hiding in the mountains with the rest of the guerrilla forces, the Abueva family—except for José and Billy who were living apart from the family—were eventually captured a year later. The Japanese military separated the husband and wife and tortured them. The children could hear their parents' agonizing screams as they were tortured by the Japanese. Then the soldiers took the parents away somewhere and let the children free. Billy looked after his siblings while José, together with a cousin, set out in a sailboat in search of his parents.

It was to be a sad journey. They landed on the island where the family had been taken. News of the American recapture of the Philippines was spreading, and there was not a Japanese soldier to be seen. Praying that by a miracle his parents were still alive, José searched for a clue to their whereabouts. Someone told him there had been rumors of people being killed and hurled down a cliff, and suggested he start looking there. When Jose reached that area, he heard several people had been killed on a nearby hillside.

He climbed the hill. There was not a cloud in the sky. The sun shone down fiercely. He walked into a clearing with some bushes lying beyond it. Suddenly, an acrid smell assaulted his nostrils. He looked around. He saw a soiled white shirt with blue stripes and immediately recognized it as his father's. Then he saw a piece of

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brown dress. It was his mother's. He also found fragments of rosaries and belts he recognized as being theirs. Still, he couldn't believe they were dead. Human bones were scattered about. He gathered them together. He found a skull. And then another. From their teeth, he knew they be-longed to his parents.

What a horrible experience! But José didn't cry. He was so drained and depressed that tears would not come. When he gazed around him, the shining sea stretched out toward Min-danao. Thoughts of what had happened to his parents flooded his mind. His parents fought for their love of freedom and country, and for that they had been tortured and killed. They were martyrs, and this was the hill where they had ended their lives in such cruel sacrifice. Someone told him the corpses had been left there for a week or longer, exposed to the elements and the wild beasts.

No Hatred

JOSÉ gathered his parents' remains and got back on the boat. The sea of his homeland was almost blindingly beautiful. This was in the autumn of 1944, and the liberation forces of General Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964), commander of the Allied forces in the Southwest Pacific, had already landed on the island of Leyte on October 20.

José's parents had been killed on October 23. For them, the liberation of the Philippines had literally come just moments too late.

These are some of the recollections that Dr. Abueva, former president of the University of the Philippines, kindly put down in writing for me under the title "Our Family Story of War and Peace, Love and Rem-embrance."

"Although this story happened half a century ago," he writes, "much of it is indelibly etched in my mind. I cannot forget."[1] What abominable cruelty he and many others have experienced, all due to the insanity of war, the demonic nature of power, the savagery of human beings, the march of inhumanity.

But when Dr. Abueva spoke at Soka University [in April 1990], though expressing concern about any moves that might be made toward Japan's rearmament, he said: "My parents were killed by Japanese soldiers. But none of us seven children bears any hatred toward Japan. I like the Japanese. And it is my belief that the people of both Japan and the Philippines share the same love for peace."

What a greathearted person is Dr. Abueva, and how noble is his belief! And what a contrast he presents as a human being to those who murdered innocent, decent people. When judged from this perspective, how poor and ignoble Japan is today!

In sharing his recollections of the past, Dr. Abueva also made the observation:

> Japanese leaders still stubbornly refused to admit, and apologize for, the grievous wrongs they committed in the countries they had invaded in World War II. Japanese his-tory textbooks purposely concealed the truth or justified the wrongs. Fellow Asians were outraged by the insensitivity and dishonesty of the Jap-anese.
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> How could they gloss over the sordid truth that so many had witnessed

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and endured, recorded and remembered?[2]

And this didn't happen only in the past. Dr. Abueva testifies that the depredation, violence and exploitation inflicted by the Japanese on the people of the Philippines continue to this day, though in a different form.

A Loss of Empathy for the Sufferings of Others

THERE are many Filipinos who don't have enough to eat. Supported by the subsistence wages of such people, foreign companies, many of them Jap-anese, and a class of selfish local exploiters are flourishing. Most of the large amounts of aid directed to the Philippines never reach the needy; because of the way the aid is structured, much of it ends up being recirculated back to the Japanese companies. The people of the Philippines find themselves in a situation in which, in spite of working as hard as they can, they cannot escape poverty, while at the same time they are losing their valuable forests and natural resources to the industrialized nations.

It is difficult for oppressors to see the suffering they are causing others, but it is very apparent to the oppressed. Japan's economic success is built on the sacrifice of the people of the Third World, but this fact is cleverly concealed.

Given this situation, how can we expect the people of Asia to trust us? Alienated from Asia and estranged from the West— where in human society does Japan expect to find a friend? The mindless pursuit of a high standard of living, even at the sacrifice of others, has a price: in addition to alienation from others, Japanese society itself will be dehumanized. The problem is the "big people" who have lost all sense of empathy for the sufferings of their fellow human beings, whether they be the citizens of developing nations or the less fortunate in Japanese society. A tendency to attack the less fortunate and the powerless is deeply ingrained in Japan's leaders and Japanese society.

Children are a mirror of society. The source of the bullying that plagues our schools can be traced right back to the way adults live their lives in our society.

Nurturing Leaders of Peace

THE orphaned Abueva children pulled together to take care of one another, growing into fine people. Dr. Abueva studied at the University of the Philippines and then the University of Michigan in the United States, before eventually becoming a professor at his alma mater in the Philippines. During his distinguished career, he has served in posts around the world, including Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia and Lebanon. Wherever he has gone, his fond memories of his loving parents have protected him. Whatever he has achieved in his life, it started with his climb up that hill on that fateful day. He has been utterly devoted to peace, so that no one else might experience the kind of tragedy that he did.

"The great irony of my life," he remarks, "was my recruitment to serve as university secretary of the United Nations University at its headquarters in Tokyo."[3] He lived for a total of some eight years (from 1977 to 1984 and from 1986 to 1987)

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with his wife and family in the country that had murdered his parents. All that while, he was an ambassador of friendship, with a heart as boundless as the sea. After the 1986 "People Power" explosion in the Phil-ippines that led to the end of the Marcos dictatorship, he supported President Corazon Aquino, and in 1987, he was elected president of the University of the Philippines.

When I first met Dr. Abueva [in April 1990], he declared with great passion that though throughout history there have been many leaders of war, there have been few leaders of peace. For that reason, he said, he wanted to nurture leaders of peace. The graduates of the University of the Philippines are destined to become leaders in all fields of Philippine society. The school is the equivalent of the University of Tokyo, Japan's top university, Dr. Abueva told me. But he was concerned that the university's graduates should be aware of their duty to society, and have the willingness and enthusiasm to lead the way in finding solutions to the problems that confront the Philippines. It is his firm belief that a university must above all deepen students' quality as leaders.

Dr. Abueva himself is a warm and loving man of peace. He has invited exchange students from Soka University to his home, and been very kind to them. When I visited his home [in May 1993], he told me that on becoming university president, what saddened him most was the decline in enrollment of students from poorer families. To rectify the situation, he instituted a policy by which students of wealthy families paid higher tuition to subsidize that of poor students.

As president, he put special emphasis on a "House of Peace" for international exchange, a crystallization, no doubt, of his youthful vow to work for peace. He believes that building deeper and broader relations between peoples is more important than relations between governments. In particular, youth and cultural exchanges are important for creating a great flowing river of peace, he says, and he is determined to achieve this.

DR. Abueva invited me to the official opening of the House of Peace, called Balay Kalinaw in Filipino, on the University of the Philippines' Diliman campus in May 1993. In my honor, he also named the building the Dr. Daisaku Ikeda Hall. He hopes it will be a symbol of friendship between the Philippines and Japan. In my remarks on that occasion, I said: "President Toda, who fought against Japanese militarism, was particularly determined to see that the light of peace, the light of hope and happiness, would shine on the people of Asia. For he was deeply convinced that Japan could only be considered a nation of peace to the extent that it is truly trusted by its Asian neighbors."

I also declared my determination to devote my life, as an individual Japanese citizen, to the people of Asia. Without mutual understanding, we cannot achieve anything.

The great Filipino poet and freedom fighter José Rizal (1861–96) was executed before he saw his dream of independence for his homeland realized. He composed the following lines of poetry:

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I die without seeing the dawn
Brighten over my native land!
You, who have it to see, welcome it —
And forget not those
Who have fallen during the night!

Dr. Abueva's parents were among those who fell in the night, without seeing the dawn of peace.

I quoted these lines from Rizal in a poem that I had written for Dr. Abueva, followed by these words, which I directed to all those present:

I can only believe that,
In a different time,
This must have been the cry that issued
From your parents' lives,
Entrusting you with your mission!

I saw Dr. Abueva remove his glasses. As he dabbed at the tears he could not stop from filling his eyes, I caught a glimpse of a half century of his family's life.

Searching for his parents— Dr. Abueva is still on that fateful journey. It is a search for peace.

President Abueva rose from his seat and declared:

We want an end to killing and maiming
Because of greed or creed, class or tribe
Because the poor are weak and the strong aren't just.

His voice rang through the House of Peace, seeming to reach all the way to that hill he climbed so many years ago. ❑

1. José Abueva, "Our Family Story of War and Peace, Love and Remembrance."
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

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