

**Daisaku Ikeda's Recollections of World Figures
Vice Chancellor Wang Gungwu of the University of Hong Kong —
Internationally Renowned Scholar and Academic**

THERE are things we must not forget, painful as they may be to remember. "A historical view is important," I remarked to Vice Chancellor Wang as we sat in his official residence at the University of Hong Kong in February 1992. The afternoon sun shone gently on the greenery outside the window.

Dr. Wang, who is a renowned historian, agreed and observed with keen perception that when leaders have a mistaken understanding of history, it can adversely affect the decisions they make, thus causing society to move in the wrong direction.

Our discussion that day focused on the issue of war. Whenever I visit Hong Kong, I can't help but recall the Japanese military occupation of Hong Kong that lasted for three years and eight months. I remarked how Japanese militarism, backed by an emperor-centered view of history, had trampled on Hong Kong and China. And as I did so, I was struck again by the terrifying results of leaders' mistaken views of history.

A Barbaric Occupation

ON December 8, 1941, the Japanese military simultaneously attacked Pearl Harbor in the United States and invaded Hong Kong's Kowloon Peninsula. On December 14, guns began firing on the island of Hong Kong itself. Needless to say, many innocent civilians were killed. Students of the University of Hong Kong were among those who fought alongside the British forces stationed in the territory, but on December 25, the garrison surrendered unconditionally and the Japanese army and navy entered Hong Kong.

Those who experienced the Japanese military occupation will never forget the atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers. They say that complete lawlessness prevailed.

At the time of the Japanese invasion, the population of Hong Kong had swollen to about two million people, owing to a large influx of Chinese immigrants prompted specifically by the Japanese occupation of China. One of the first things the Japanese military did when they took control of Hong Kong was to seal off all the warehouses containing food that had been set aside for the civilian population. Anyone who voiced opposition to this move was beheaded. As food shortages began to be felt, the Japanese army initiated forced evacuations of the population. Hundreds of thousands were driven out of Hong Kong, often by cruel and violent means. In at least one instance, the Japanese military packed people onto boats and then threw them into the sea or abandoned them on uninhabited islands. Still the food shortages worsened. People starved to death and it was not uncommon to find their corpses littering the roadside. Some people even sold their children because they could not feed them.

Food was not all the soldiers devoured; they robbed people of their possessions as well. Anyone who showed even a hint of resistance was simply disposed of. Torture was commonplace and even used on children. As if they were a law unto themselves, the soldiers behaved with appalling arrogance and insolence. They broke into homes and pillaged them at will; they raped women. The people of Hong Kong spent their days and nights in fear.

There are many tragic stories of the occupation that tell of this fear. I've heard of one instance where a mother, hiding along with many others in long grass, was tragically

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forced to suffocate her own baby in order to stop it crying out and giving them all away to the enemy soldiers.

The Japanese soldiers were truly brutal. And in fact, the Chinese called them “the Eastern Devils” or “the Japanese Devils.” The deep wounds the Japanese inflicted on the Chinese have not healed even today, and the scars perhaps will never completely disappear.

Given this history, many who suffered at the hands of the Japanese during the occupation find it unforgivable that even now, a half-century after these events took place, the Japanese authorities are unwilling to offer them a sincere apology or to redress past wrongs. They are also left with the distinct impression that Japan does not teach the true history of this period to its younger generation and that, on the contrary, it actually tries to cover up its unsavory past.

Today, more than a million Japanese tourists visit Hong Kong each year. Yet how many of them, I wonder, are aware of Japan’s wartime activities in Hong Kong, China and other Asian countries, or understand the magnitude of the suffering that was inflicted on the people of these places? Because of this lack of awareness on the part of the Japanese, it is not unnatural perhaps that some people in Asia fear a repetition of the nightmare that they experienced during World War II.

“It is far too dangerous,” I said to Vice Chancellor Wang at our meeting, “to leave the world’s future in the hands of politicians. The people must become wise and responsible for their own future. When people of one country communicate with those of other countries, when they join hands to work together, they will create a current toward peace. The people can forcefully direct history, so that a small handful of corrupt leaders cannot turn that current astray. That is the reason I continue to promote activities for peace, culture and education, based on the philosophy of Buddhism.”

Because of this commitment, I have worked to pave the way for active exchange programs between Soka University, of which I am founder, and the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Discarding Nationalism

HUMANKIND can no longer allow itself to become involved in nationalist rivalries. This is the lesson we should learn from the catastrophic history of nationalism. The nationalist agenda, which sees the world as “my country” versus “all other countries” must be abandoned, and people must be awakened to a new vision of the world—a vision of human solidarity in which “the people of all nations” stand against “the authoritarian forces of all nations.” It is vital to create a network of common people that transcends national borders and use it as a force to monitor and direct the authorities in all nations. Such efforts will certainly lead to the creation of a peaceful home for all peoples, a global federation.

Dr. Wang made a similar remark in December 1992. He noted that true leaders offer people a vision, and that this can only be done if they direct their gaze to history. That is why, he said, truly great historians are at such pains to write accurate histories so that they may be read and studied by great leaders.

“Accurate histories” — these words are rich in implication. A view of history is ultimately a view of humanity: it includes a view of human society and life itself.

Vice Chancellor Wang was inspired in his youth by the monumental work of the

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British historian Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975), *A Study of History*. He remarked that he was deeply impressed with Toynbee's theory of challenge and response and his gift for grasping history not just in its parts, but as a whole. Dr. Wang was also familiar with the details of my own exchange of views with Dr. Toynbee [between 1971 and 1974, and published in book form under the title *Choose Life*].

From his youth, Vice Chancellor Wang was recognized for his intellectual brilliance. He completed his undergraduate studies in history, economics and English literature at the University of Malaya (today the National University of Singapore) when he was only nineteen. After that, he obtained a Ph.D. at the University of London, returning to work as a lecturer at his alma mater. At the age of thirty-three, he became dean of the faculty of arts at the University of Malaya. He then taught Far Eastern history for many years at the Australian National University in Canberra. In 1986, he assumed the post of vice chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, one of the most respected universities of Asia. He is indeed an internationally renowned scholar and academic.

Flexibility and Compassion: The Makings of a Good Teacher

I ASKED Dr. Wang: "How does one become as brilliant as you are? Several Japanese mothers have earnestly requested that I ask you the secret of developing one's intellectual powers."

"That's the hardest question of all," he said with a smile. He then offered an indirect response to this question by discussing the qualities of a good teacher.

Dr. Wang asserted that flexibility is an essential requirement of teachers because every student, every human being, is unique. What children learn at home, he stressed, is also important, adding that it is desirable to foster a family environment that stimulates and encourages children in a positive way. But since these conditions are not present in every home, he said, it is vital that teachers give special attention to children who are deprived of such educational opportunities, because it is their job to ensure that such children do not feel neglected or suffer any disadvantages. The vice chancellor is warmhearted and compassionate. In spite of his many public duties, he always makes time to interact with students.

Dr. Wang's father was also an educator. An important thing he learned from him, the vice chancellor said, was that education means broadening people's minds. In that respect, he noted, there are no national boundaries in education; it is completely open. And he stated with firm conviction that education can and should contribute equally to all of humanity. The vision cherished by this renowned historian was clearly a future without borders or boundaries.

The more we look to the future, the more we are compelled to devote our energies to human education as a farsighted undertaking.

One Cannot Stem the Flow of History

I HAVE met Dr. Wang on six occasions, and during our conversations, the name of Dr. Sun Yat-sen (Sun Wen; 1866–1925), the father of modern China, has come up several times.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen was a graduate of the College of Medicine for Chinese in Hong Kong, the precursor of the Medical Department of the University of Hong Kong. According to his autobiography, he had already resolved before going to college that China's Qing dynasty

must be overthrown and democracy established, and as a student he began to expand his circle of comrades who shared his revolutionary ideals.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen, too, looked to the future with a unique eye to history. "This world tendency [toward democracy, despite disappointments and defeats,]" he wrote, "has flowed from theocracy on to autocracy and from autocracy now on to democracy, and there is no way to stem the current."¹

The great Chinese leader advanced boldly toward his vision. He titled his autobiography, which ends with the establishment of the Republic of China, *Where There's a Will, There's a Way*.

Expanding the Sphere of Humanism

IT is my belief that the tide of the times is flowing toward ever-expanding humanism. There may be twists and turns on the way, but no one can stop this tide. And we must ensure that it continues flowing forever. Those who work actively to expand the sphere of humanism will be history's victors, whereas history will judge harshly those who seek, for their own petty, temporary gain, to turn back the flow of that mighty current.

Hong Kong—a crossroads where East meets West—is a metropolis alive with the spirit of world citizenship, a bustling port pulsing with human energy. With their respective lofty missions, I feel sure that as long as Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong continue to flourish, history's tide will never be turned back. □

1. *Sun Yat-sen, San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People*, trans. Frank W. Price (Taipei: China Cultural Service, 1985), p. 63.