RECOLLECTIONS OF LEADING WORLD FIGURES BY DAISAKU IKEDA
A GREAT LEADER OF THE PEOPLE: ZHOU ENLAI

IWAS in Kansai, Japan, when I received the news of Zhou Enlai's death. That inevitable moment had finally come, I thought. I offered a silent prayer for him: "How tired you must have been, Premier. Please, rest quietly now."

On that day, January 9, 1976, I was on my way from Osaka to a meeting in Kyoto. At that meeting, one thousand members and I prayed with all our hearts for Zhou Enlai's eternal happiness. (Zhou Enlai died on January 8, and his death was announced the following day.)

In his youth, Zhou Enlai had studied in Kyoto. Before leaving Japan, the 21-year-old Zhou visited Kyoto's Arashiyama and Maruyama parks. It was the spring of 1919. Arashiyama Hill was blanketed in a cloud of rain. The banks of the river flowing through the surrounding park were lined with deep green pines, and the rain poured down.

What could he do to save his suffering nation? the young Zhou wondered. He had come to Japan in search of solutions, but he soon discovered that behind Japan's apparent prosperity lay the shadow of an exhausted, depleted people. And a racist scorn for other Asians was strong among the Japanese.

"It's time to return," he decided, "to return to my homeland!"

The young man looked up. The rain had ceased, and there amidst the carpet of deep green a small cluster of blossoming cherry trees glistened in the sun. It was like a torch illuminating the darkness.

Maruyama Park, too, was bustling with people enjoying the cherry blossoms at night. The trees were in full bloom, and the light pink of the flowers glowed with an otherworldly beauty in the lamplight.

The premier's words came back to me: "Fifty years ago, I left Japan when the cherry trees were blooming." Surely the cherry blossoms he spoke of were those in Kyoto.

"Please come to visit Japan again when the cherry trees are in bloom," I invited him.

"I would like that very much," he said, "but it is impossible. My body no longer obeys my wishes."

This exchange took place on December 5, 1974, just a little more than one year before Premier Zhou passed away. He was already gravely ill at that time.

The first thing he said to me when we met was how sorry he was that he couldn't meet me the first time I visited China. He confessed that he had simply been too ill.

MY first visit had occurred six months earlier. On June 1, two days after I arrived in Beijing, Premier Zhou was hospitalized for surgery. He had been diagnosed with cancer two years earlier in the summer of 1972. In 1973, he spent seventy-two days in the hospital, keeping up his grueling work schedule in between. From the beginning of 1974, his condition became unstable. But he could not afford to rest. He continued to work eighteen-hour days and sometimes thirty hours straight without sleeping.

In April, he suffered an acute shortness of breath. In May, it happened on three occasions, each time necessitating that he rest and inhale oxygen. This is what finally led him to consent to surgery, and he entered the hospital on June 1. But even in that condition, he made careful preparations for my first visit to China. He inquired, through his staff, into all the details of my personal habits—what foods I liked and disliked, whether I

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smoked, and so forth—to make my stay as comfortable as possible.

I protested that there was no need to go to any trouble, that the premier's good wishes alone were sufficient, and that I would be happy to follow the customs and directions of my Chinese hosts during my visit. Even so, Premier Zhou had the curtains in the room where I stayed changed to heavier ones so that I might sleep better. Wherever I went, I encountered signs of his thoughtfulness; my entire visit was full of his kindness and consideration.

A few months later, in September, I visited Moscow for the first time and met with Soviet Premier Aleksey N. Kosygin. This was a period of heightened tensions between China and the Soviet Union. Still, Premier Kosygin clearly recognized the outstanding caliber of his Chinese counterpart and expressed the view that as long as Zhou Enlai was alive, China would prevail over any problem.

But the "great tree" that protected and shaded China was ailing. From his first hospitalization in June 1974 until his death some eighteen months later, Premier Zhou was operated on fifteen times—an average of once every forty days. Seven were major operations. He received more than a hundred blood transfusions. In spite of all this, he turned his hospital room into an office and continued to drive himself mercilessly to keep working on behalf of China's one billion people. "I can hear, I can still think," he declared. He refused to take any painkillers because he wanted to remain clearheaded. In a monumental display of iron will and determination, he silently bore the excruciating pain of his affliction.

CHINA was in the throes of the Cultural Revolution, and he was needed. The so-called Gang of Four was seeking to destroy the new China that the premier and the people—united in a joint struggle—had fought for with their lives. The Gang of Four and their followers resorted to every sort of scheme, to violence, treachery, extortion, personal attack—anything to have their way. The cries and pleas of numberless suffering people assailed the premier's ears. Ill as he was, he did everything in his power to help his fellow citizens. The people came to him because they knew he was the only one who could stand up to the Gang of Four.

For the Four, Zhou was a bitter enemy. His continuing presence was a thorn in their side. If it were not for him, they could rule the day. They tried every underhanded scheme conceivable to bring about his downfall. Their relentless campaign against Lin Biao[1] and Confucius around this time was actually directed at Zhou, for Confucius was an indirect reference to him.

The Gang of Four even tried to disrupt Premier Zhou's medical treatment. On one occasion, one of them phoned him while he was undergoing a blood transfusion. The caller demanded: "Put me through to the premier right now. It can't wait." Though Premier Zhou had just been sedated and had fallen asleep, the medical staff woke him, stopped the transfusion, and helped him to the phone so that he could take the call. On another occasion, one of the Four came to the hospital demanding to see the premier, even though he was in the middle of treatment. It turned out to be a ruse, for the person had nothing urgent to say and, after some aimless chatter, left. Their motive was to wear down and undermine the ailing premier's mental and physical strength.

WHEN I met Premier Zhou, this tempest was at its height. From December, the attacks on him had intensified. The first National People's Congress in ten years was scheduled to be held the following month, January 1975, and the Gang of Four was doing everything in its

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power to wrest complete control of the nation. If that were to happen, all would be lost. The premier was gravely ill. There was so much he still had to do, but so little time left. The only one who knew of his painstaking efforts and undying dedication was his wife, Madame Deng Yingchao.

Our 1974 meeting was decided upon at the last moment. It may have been that Premier Zhou had been waiting for his condition to take a turn for the better. However, before that happened, the last day of my stay in China arrived.

The banquet that my colleagues and I had arranged at the Beijing Hotel to show our appreciation to our hosts was nearing its end. Liao Chengzhi, president of the China–Japan Friendship Association, leaned over to me and said quietly in my ear, "President Ikeda, I need to talk to you for a moment." I followed him into a separate room, and it was there he told me: "Premier Zhou is waiting to see you."

Knowing how ill the Chinese leader was, I declined, saying: "No, no, I really can't. I don't want to endanger his health. I don't wish to impose. But please tell him I am deeply grateful for his generosity." I didn't know the precise details of his condition, but when I had met with Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping that morning, I had learned that the premier's health was very poor.

Hearing my response, Mr. Liao's face clouded with disappointment; devoted as he was to the premier, it was unthinkable that he should fail to fulfill his request. When he explained that to me, I decided to accept the premier's invitation. "I will go," I said, "but I don't wish to disturb him for more than two or three minutes."

ACCOMPANIED by Mr. Liao, my small party and I drove by car for fifteen or twenty minutes before stopping in front of a surprisingly plain building. This turned out to be Hospital 305, where Premier Zhou was staying.

Later, Madame Deng recalled the evening during a conversation with a Japanese friend: "At that time, Comrade Enlai really wanted to meet President Ikeda. But the entire medical staff who were caring for him at Hospital 305 were against it, fearing what it would do to his already grave condition. They said if he were determined to go ahead with the meeting he must do so at his own risk, bearing full knowledge that it could cost him his life. But Comrade Enlai replied that he must meet President Ikeda, whatever the cost.

"The doctors didn't know what to do, so they came to me. They wanted me to persuade Comrade Enlai to listen to them. But I replied that if Comrade Enlai was so insistent on meeting President Ikeda, they should permit him to do so. And so it was that the meeting took place that night."

Such was the deep understanding that Premier Zhou and Madame Deng shared.

It was cold in Beijing—so cold that even during the day our Chinese interpreter Lin Liyun had insisted on giving my wife her coat to wear. Now after nightfall, the mercury had dropped even lower. But in spite of the frigid weather outside, Premier Zhou was standing there waiting for us, just inside the hospital entrance. I approached him. "Thank you for coming," he said. He extended his arm and shook my hand firmly.

He looked at me long and intently. His gaze was extremely penetrating and at the same time infinitely kind. It was the gaze of a man who misses nothing. He exuded an ineffable aura, a presence. I felt as if we had already met, even before that first face-to-face meeting. Our lives had touched and communed. He was exactly as I had imagined.

"Let's take a photograph," he said. The preparations had already been made and my party and I were arranged on a platform for a photograph with the premier.

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FOR a period of ten years before our meeting, Premier Zhou had been sending kind messages to me, keeping in regular contact through such intermediaries as the noted statesman and Economic Planning Agency Director Tatsunosuke Takasaki and popular author Sawako Ariyoshi—both of whom had long been working to promote friendly ties between Japan and China. Premier Zhou had recognized that the Soka Gakkai was an organization that had arisen from among the people. "Among the people, with the people," was one of Premier Zhou's mottoes. He no doubt appreciated the fact that the Soka Gakkai had resisted Japanese militarism during the war and suffered government oppression as a result. In his dealings with Japan, he paid keen attention to whether the individuals or organizations involved could rise above the narrow framework of nationalism.

He believed that the people at the grass roots were the key ingredient for amicable China–Japan relations. Treaties and paper promises could always be violated or disregarded when national interests shifted. True friendship between China and Japan, he knew, would only be achieved when the people of both countries understood and trusted each other.

This belief was also the basis upon which I urged the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China in 1968. The reality of the situation was in fact not a question of two nations but of two peoples, and no reconciliation could take place until their views were taken into consideration. The reaction to my suggestion was immediate and harsh. One person even wrote, "Why is a religious leader suddenly donning a 'Red' necktie?"

Then, in March 1970, the Japanese political leader Kenzo Matsumura asked me to accompany him on a visit to China. He was insistent. I refused, reminding him that I was a religious leader, and that the Soka Gakkai was a Buddhist lay organization. The restoration of diplomatic relations, I recognized, must be carried out in the political realm. I suggested that he contact members of the Komeito (Clean Government Party), which I had founded, and ask them to accompany him. Mr. Matsumura replied that he would brief Premier Zhou in detail about me and the Komeito. As the party's founder, I will always regard it as a great honor that Premier Zhou trusted the Komeito representatives and assigned them the crucial role of serving as a bridge in the restoration of diplomatic relations.

After the photographs were all taken, Premier Zhou said, "Please, come this way," and he rose and began walking. Beneath his coat I could see as he proceeded ahead of me that he was painfully thin. He was standing on willpower alone. To prevent him from tiring any more than necessary, I decided that only my wife and I would join him in the room to talk. The room he led us to was simple and uncluttered, and the light had been dimmed to keep his eyes from tiring. Out of concern for him, I also tried to keep our conversation to a minimum.

He spoke of many things, but whatever the subject, he remained passionately concerned about the future, about the coming century. He was completely focused on what would happen after his death. "These last twenty-five years of the twentieth century are the most important for the world. All nations will have to cooperate and help one another as equal partners." He was determined to forge a solid path to peace in this final quarter-century for Asia and the world, and he fervently desired peaceful and friendly relations between China and Japan in the coming century. I listened to his words as if they were his will and testament.

In a speech he once gave many years earlier, Premier Zhou said:

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> When that day comes, we shall all treat each other as equals and help fulfill each other's needs. All people, regardless of geographic location or skin color, are brothers and sisters. When that time comes [when all countries gain independence], imperialism will have vanished, and harmony will prevail in the world. But that probably won't come about until the twenty-first century. I will not live to see it.… Yet our younger generation will probably see it.[2]

To me, he said: "You are young, and that is why I value our relationship." At the time, Premier Zhou was 76 and I was 46.

He also said, "China will never become a superpower, I believe.… But if some day in the future it should, and if it seeks to dominate the world, the people of the world should rise up and join hands with the people of China to topple that regime." He also admitted, "China today is still not economically affluent." But behind those words was the solid belief that China would change, that China's future would be different.

A month after our meeting, in January 1975, Premier Zhou announced his program of the Four Modernizations that he believed must take place to prepare China for the twenty-first century. A very important part of his political legacy was his determination to make the lives of his beloved people more prosperous.

PREMIER Zhou had the telescopic vision to grasp the vast panorama of human history on a grand scale, and also the microscopic vision to penetrate the subtle workings of people's hearts. I have often called him a modern-day Chuko K'ung-ming, after the brilliant and heroic prime minister who appears in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Premier Zhou bore a heavy load of responsibility without seeking personal power or position. He was at once an invincible general, a flexible and skilled diplomat and a consummate administrator—all accomplishments arising from his strong sense of duty and commitment.

He was the pivot, the axle, that would carry his nation into a new age. He was determined to change the landscape from a "China in chaos" into a "China of peace and prosperity." And though he suffered under the weight of this enormous burden, he bore it bravely and gladly. He cared nothing for personal glory. Everything he did, he did for the people. For them, he gave his entire heart and being.

During our meeting, he clearly stated that he wished to see the early conclusion of a China–Japan peace and friendship treaty. I promised that I would make his opinion known to the appropriate people in Japan. I find it significant that he didn't simply use the term peace treaty but rather peace and friendship treaty. It was five years from the time I had proposed such a treaty in my novel *The Human Revolution*, and it was to be another four years before the treaty was actually signed.

Through our encounter, I felt firsthand the incredible energy and vibrant spirit of Premier Zhou. Such were his inner resources that he might easily continue speaking for another hour, or even two. But I kept looking at my watch and nodding to Mr. Liao, signaling my concern that we were tiring the premier and should now be on our way. Each time, Mr. Liao would signal that we should stay a little longer. We ended up meeting for nearly thirty minutes. I will never forget how the premier, ill as he was and after having spent so much time with us, arose and accompanied us to the entrance of the building when we left.

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As the famous saying goes, "Treasure every meeting, for it will never recur." Our first meeting was also our last opportunity to speak to each other.

DURING our meeting, I presented Premier Zhou with a painting. I was later told that he hung it in his hospital room, replacing the one that had been there. He spent the last year of his life gazing at that Japanese painting.

A few short months later, in the spring of 1975, we welcomed the first exchange students from the People's Republic of China to Soka University. When Premier Zhou came to Japan in his youth, he had a difficult time and was unable to study at a Japanese university. I wanted to make that up to him somehow.

There were six Chinese students. I made a proposal to them and the other Soka University students: "Premier Zhou told me that he would like to visit Japan again when the cherry trees bloom, but that he is unable. Why don't we plant a cherry tree in his honor on campus? With this as a first step, let's foster a lasting friendship between Japan and China throughout our lives—a friendship that will endure through the generations."

And in November of that year, the Zhou Cherry Tree was planted.

Two months later, the news of Premier Zhou's death raced around the world.

Pinned on his chest as he lay in state was a badge inscribed with the words: "In the service of the people."

Even on the operating table, Premier Zhou had managed, while gasping for breath, to give instructions concerning the health and welfare of coal miners in a certain region in China. The great are selfless. The only thing in Premier Zhou's mind, in his heart, was his concern for the people. In the final days of his life, he said to his doctors: "There's nothing more you can do here. Don't waste your time on me. Please go and see to the other patients who need you more."

MEN and women alike wept at the news of his passing. He had been like a parent to the people. Who would ever care for them as deeply and as well? The grief of the Chinese people shook the mountains and rivers; the cold winter wind wailed over the earth. No matter how hard the Gang of Four tried to suppress it, the people's mourning filled the land.

When the Qingming Festival (a festival to honor the deceased) came in April, huge numbers of people gathered in Tiananmen Square to leave floral wreaths for Premier Zhou. The Gang of Four ordered the flowers cleared away, but the people just made new wreaths and gathered together in even greater numbers in an outpouring of grief. "We have made wreaths for you, dear Premier, in our hearts, wreaths of love and gratitude that no one can carry away!" That was their spirit.

The more the Gang of Four attacked Premier Zhou, the more they roused the people's anger. The people would not allow his reputation to be sullied. A cry went up around the nation to topple the Gang of Four, and no one could hold back the wrath of the people once it was awakened. The premier, in death, finally defeated his living enemies. Love for the people was all that mattered to him. His entire life, every fiber of his being, was devoted to this, and this alone.

BACK in 1962, representatives of Buraku Liberation League[3] —an alliance of one of Japan's most oppressed minorities—visited China. When the head of the delegation expressed gratitude to Premier Zhou for taking time out of his busy schedule to meet them, the Chinese leader responded: "What are you saying? Any premier who did not

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meet with the most oppressed and suffering of all the Japanese people when they've come all the way to China would not deserve to be China's premier!"[4]

To Premier Zhou, "the people" were not only the Chinese people. This was evident in his attitude toward the issue of Japanese war reparations to China. The Japanese invasion of China resulted in 35 million Chinese casualties and direct and indirect economic losses totaling an estimated $600 billion. If a certain amount of that tremendous loss had been paid by Japan to China as reparations, how much it could have helped the devastated Chinese nation! After the war, many in China urged that Japan should not be allowed to rebuild its heavy industry freely, but that seventy percent of its industrial plants be dismantled and shipped to China to revive its industrial base.

But Premier Zhou disagreed: "China does not seek reparations. The Japanese and Chinese people alike were victims of Japanese militarism. If we seek reparations, we will be inflicting pain and suffering on our fellow victims."

As a matter of fact, the best estimates suggest that paying even a modest $50 billion reparation would have taken Japan fifty years. In so doing, Japan would not have become the economic power it is today. No Japanese should ever forget this. And given this truth, it is utterly unspeakable for Japan to pride itself on its economic might and fail to pay proper respect to China, to which it owes its prosperity!

In 1978, a little more than two years after Premier Zhou's death, I met again with Madame Deng in Beijing. It was as if I were talking to the late premier's other self, so similar was her spirit. With a smile, she said to me, "I would like to visit Japan next year when the cherry trees are in full bloom." She meant to tell me that she would finally fulfill her husband's wish.

And she came just as she had promised. She was an official guest of Japan in the spring of 1979—exactly sixty years after her husband had bid farewell to the cherry blossoms of Kyoto.

Unfortunately, the cherries had bloomed early that year in Tokyo, and a spring storm had blown most of the blossoms away by the time of Madame Deng's visit. Wishing to share with her the beauty of that year's cherry blossoms, I brought her some branches of blossoms from the later-blooming double-flowered cherries when I called upon her at the State Guest House. In addition, I presented her with an album of photographs of the Zhou Cherry Tree and also of the Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao Cherry Trees—a pair of trees I had planted on the Soka University campus for her and her late husband—along with some snapshots of the happy Chinese exchange students studying at the university.

When she saw the pictures of the cherry trees at Soka University, Madame Deng beamed and declared that they were beautiful symbols of our friendship.

THE Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao Cherry Trees stand side by side. In the past, Premier Zhou and Madame Deng had a similar pair of cherry trees growing in their garden, but one withered and died. Madame Deng confided her regret that she and her husband never had their picture taken together beneath those cherry trees. In the wish that it might bring some small joy, I planted a pair of trees for the two of them on the Soka University campus.

I met Madame Deng again on several occasions after that visit to Japan, the last being at her home in Beijing in May 1990. A painting of her and Premier Zhou that I had presented to them hung on the wall. "Whenever I receive foreign friends here in this room," she explained, "I show them this picture and talk about my memories of Premier Zhou as well as the friendship between you and the premier. I have never received a more wonderful gift

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in my entire life. I am sure that the premier is just as pleased with it as I."

When I showed her new photographs of the Zhou Cherry Tree and of the Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao Cherry Trees, she expressed surprise at how they'd grown. And then, when I was about to leave, she presented me with an ivory paper knife that had belonged to the premier. I made to decline this all too precious gift, but she said: "I know the strong feelings of friendship the premier had for you, and that is why I have decided to present this personal item of his to you. Please accept it as a keepsake of your friendship. When you look at it, please remember him." And she also presented me with a jade pen stand of her own. She knew that this was the last time we would meet.

There is an old Chinese saying: "When you communicate with a person, communicate with his heart; when you want to water a tree, water its roots." Premier Zhou knew the secret to true government: Cherish the people's hearts and gain their trust.

To this very day I remember with great vividness Premier Zhou's voice, his gaze, his spirit. He was a "Giant of Asia" who pressed forward despite storms of opposition. When he died, he was surrounded by enemies. But he is the one who triumphed in the end. He made superhuman efforts to prepare his country internally for reform and liberation, and at the same time he carved out a space for China in the world, readying it for friendly relations with Japan and the United States. Only after achieving these great deeds did he leave us.

Today, at last, China is shaking off 100 years of oppression and suffering and taking giant steps forward toward a prosperous twenty-first century—following the path that Premier Zhou devoted his life to creating. He has triumphed. His selfless dedication, weathering all trials and tribulations, prevailed.

The stone monument that designates the Zhou Enlai Cherry Tree at Soka University faces the direction of China. When I look up at the western sky toward that vast land, I see there the bright smiles of Premier Zhou and Madame Deng. ❑

1. Lin Biao (1907–71) A hero of the Communist struggle for power under Mao Tse-tung, he was one of modern China's outstanding military leaders who made substantial contributions to the Communists' eventual triumph in 1949. Before his death in 1971, Lin Biao was considered most likely to be Mao's successor.
2. Zhou Enlai, *Selected Works of Zhou Enlai* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1989), vol. 2, p. 324.
3. The Buraku Liberation League is a grass-roots organization formed by descendants of members of the old Japanese "untouchable" caste, which was comprised of those who were engaged in so-called unclean occupations such as butchers and tanners and who were known as *burakumin*. For centuries, contact with *burakumin* was shunned, and they were forced to live in segregated ghettos (Jpn. *buraku*).
4. Saichiro Uesugi, *Jinken wa sekai o ugokasu* (Human Rights Move the World) (Osaka: Kaiho Shuppansha, 1991), pp. 127–28.

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