

Memorial Tribute to Aileen Baviera¹

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First of all, allow me extend my deepest sympathies to the family of Aileen. I thank the UP Asian Center for this opportunity to say a few words of remembrance about a dear friend and colleague.

Even in her early twenties, she was regarded as the most promising and sought after scholar on Chinese studies after she returned from Beijing Language Institute and Beijing University. Many years later, I always consulted her on Chinese foreign relations when I assumed my position as Ambassador to ASEAN.

I admired her not only for her academic expertise but also for her objectivity and principles. She was unswerving in her commitment to the national interest and the advancement of peace.

I know this firsthand when we attended conferences both here and abroad and worked hard to establish the Asia-Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation Inc. (APPPFI) as the Philippine representative in the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies.

In her 2016 essay published in the New Straits Times, entitled “Can Anyone Really Rule the South China Sea?”, she wrote: “I envy the free creatures of the sea, for we creatures of the land have become captive of our own illusions of conquest and control... It seems that governments have let their primordial territorial instincts rule them. There is folly in

this. They seek control of the of the waters, as if oceans could be tamed, claimed and fenced off like the land. In truth, no one knows exactly what they are claiming....As I look down at the smallness of the land features, and the distances between them in proportion to the vast expanse of ocean, I cannot help but think of how presumptuous and foolish men are to think that this all belongs to certain countries because once upon a time, some person named or mapped or fished or navigated here before anyone else did.”

This is the message of Aileen Baviera that should resonate as we experience the present crisis. It is a message that calls on mankind to set aside the hostilities that divide them. More lethal than the corona plague that we are now suffering are the viruses that are imbedded in our hearts—racial and other forms of discrimination, abuse of nature, Big Power rivalry.

Aileen, although you are in the company of the God of Peace, you have not left us. Your passion for international understanding continues to inspire us to pursue our dreams that have yet to be realized.

Note

¹ *This tribute was first read on 21 April 2020 during an online memorial service in honor of Dr. Aileen Baviera. The editors thank Ambassador Villacorta for giving us permission to publish.*