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**Reflections: Eighty Years After the War*
**Visit by Mr. Dobrin Keresteliev from Bulgaria*
**In Memory of Professor Xiu Gang*



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Reflections: Eighty Years After the War

July 2024, in our 440th issue of our Japanese organ, we published an article titled "The Lingering Scars of War: The Importance of Human Education" to mark seventy-nine years since the end of the Second World War. It featured a dialogue between our Center's Palestine Branch head Mrs. Amal Abou Emara and her husband Mr. Ali Takkash, who have continued their work based in Gaza, and Director General Yumiko Kaneko, alongside testimonies from war survivors who reflected on their experiences through the lens of Nomura Lifelong Integrated Education. Together, these perspectives raised the question: what does it mean to uphold human dignity?

Director General Kaneko concluded her exchange with Mrs. Emara with these words:

"Even in times of peace without physical conflict, my heart aches to see how human dignity has been lost in Japan. To awaken to the dignity we have lost, and to pay true attention to circumstances where inhumane acts prevail - that, I believe, is what it means to be humanitarian."

This year, 2025, marks eighty years since the end of the World War II. In recent years, some war survivors have remarked that they sense the atmosphere of the prewar era. As the generations with no direct memory of war grow in number, the question remains: how should we Japanese live so that the stories of the "postwar era" continue to be told?

From Japan, and from beyond its borders, we now share voices reflecting on "Eighty Years After the War."

Mrs. Asako Sasaki
Miyagi Branch (Northen prefecture of Japan)

I am now 91 years old and live alone in Sendai. My husband has passed away, but I have two children, four grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

After our marriage, my husband fell ill and was repeatedly hospitalized, unable to work. I threw myself into working as hard as I could to support our family. When our eldest daughter reached adolescence, she began to drift into delinquency. I carried my worries alone, without confiding even in my husband.

At that time, an acquaintance invited me to a lecture at the Nomura Center. Desperate, I decided to attend. There I was struck by the words: a child's problems are, in fact, an issue of the parent's own self-education. This surprised me deeply and awakened in me a strong desire to learn more. From then on, I traveled to Tokyo once a month to attend the National Seminar Course, eager to study these teachings more thoroughly.

After several years of learning at the seminar course, I stepped away from my studies for about ten years. On March 11, 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake struck. A ceramic plaque that I had displayed in my entryway, inscribed with a poem and drawing created by our Founder in her youth near the end of the war, fell to the floor. When I picked it up and re-read the poem, every word pierced my heart.

In the aftermath of the disaster, the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant occurred, and for the first time I became aware of the dangers of nuclear power. Until then, I had simply assumed it was safe, and I regretted that I had never sought to understand its many issues. From that moment, I felt a personal responsibility to study and to know, and I resolved to once again engage seriously with the teachings of Nomura Lifelong Integrated Education. The following month, I began attending the Miyagi regional seminar course.

Through my learning of the Nomura principles, I have come to feel more deeply than ever the preciousness of life. Now, as wars and conflicts unfold around the world, when I see children fleeing in fear on TV news, I cannot help but recall my own experience at age eleven during the air raid on Sendai and feel like I want to cover my eyes.

The air raid on Sendai took place in the early hours of July 10, 1945, when 123 B-29 bombers dropped more than 10,000 incendiary bombs over the city center, reducing it to ashes.

My mother had already evacuated with my younger brother and sister. When the air-raid siren sounded, I tried to flee, holding the hand of my sister, who was three years older than me. She told me to wait while she went back into the house to fetch some belongings. As I waited, the flames began to spread. Terrified, I joined a group of people fleeing through the streets, and walked desperately with them all through the night until we reached the mountains.

When I looked up, the B-29s were flying low overhead. I remember being stunned by the enormous size of the planes and even seeing the soldiers inside. I stood there in shock.

Eventually, I was reunited with my family, but my memories of that time are only fragmentary. My eldest brother returned from the war, but my younger brother still lies beneath the sea off the coast of Taiwan. I vividly recall my mother's grief when she received only an urn with a slip of paper inside, inscribed with the words "the spirit of a fallen soldiers." She wept uncontrollably.

War is truly terrifying and cruel. It robs us of our loved ones and leaves deep scars in people's hearts.

Whenever I recalled my wartime experiences, the memories were so painful that I avoided speaking about them. But for the sake of the victims of war and for future generations, about ten years ago I began sharing my story of the Sendai air raid as a storyteller in Sendai city. In doing so, I found that it was not only about recounting my own experiences; also by talking with family and neighbors, I came to better understand

myself, and we came to know one another more deeply. I want to continue to convey how important it is to reflect, and to learn about the period with its historical background of those times.

I believe I was able to come to this way of thinking, and to face myself honestly, thanks to the learning and practice of the Nomura Lifelong Integrated Education with the support of my fellow branch members. Through this, I realized that in working desperately to support my family, I had come to put economic survival first. I was often cold toward my bedridden husband, and recognized that I left my children with many lonely memories.

Now, my daughter is finally able to say what she could not before: "Mother, you were so strong that I couldn't say anything to you." Hearing this, I feel that our relationship as parent and daughter has grown closer. I want to continue my learning earnestly, and with sincerity.

Mrs. Yedla Naoko Simhadri
Head of the India Branch

After marrying the late Professor Yedla C. Simhadri, she began in India in 1984 to operate the Dr. Ambedkar Memorial School based on the principles of Nomura Lifelong Integrated Education together with him, as part of activity of the India Branch.

On August 15 this year, Japan marks the anniversary of the end of the war, while India will celebrate the 79th anniversary of its Independence. In the many decades since, the world has witnessed the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Iran-Iraq War, and the so-called "War on Terror." The shelling has never truly ceased. India, too, continues to face border conflicts with both Pakistan and China. Even when leaders sit at the negotiating table, it is as if they are kicking one another's legs beneath it. As I think of Gaza, Ukraine, Iran, and Russia, I cannot help but feel growing unease about whether true peace will ever come to our world.

In recent years, India has experienced something resembling Japan's "bubble" era—a spirit of unchecked expansion, with the belief that money alone could make anything possible. Now, however, the country's internal contradictions have begun to surface. Economic growth has slowed, and pressing issues such as youth unemployment and the burden of unpaid loans have come starkly to the forefront.

India has reached a point where it must confront these contradictions. Yet at the same time, this confrontation also presents an opportunity for renewal.

Against this backdrop, an emphasis on test scores has been reinforced by a hierarchical social system, the commercialization and business-driven approach to education and schooling proceeded. Family structures, too, have shifted—from extended families to nuclear families, and now increasingly to single-parent households.

Recently, we hosted a workshop inviting teachers from eight neighboring schools along with parents. The discussions were lively, focusing on how schools should respond to the changes in family structures and the resulting impact on students.

Education and the family are the very roots and foundation of a nation. They determine what the future of that nation will be. In Japan, the past thirty years are often described as a time of economic stagnation. Yet from where I stand overseas, I have seen a country that has quietly persevered: steadily developing new technologies, seeking to build a society that is easier to live in, and using this period as a time of transition.

At this stage of life, I find myself recalling with gratitude the words once spoken to me by our Founder, by Director General Kaneko, and by my senior colleagues. I am fortunate to encounter with the Nomura Lifelong Integrated Education in my youth that offered me a view of education, and of humanity itself, that was deeply essential. The practice of the principles in everyday life has become the very foundation of who I am.

Looking back, I remember coming to Tokyo at the age of eighteen and experiencing culture shock. After graduating from university, uncertain about which path to follow, I came across the youth division at Nomura Center. There I met fellow youth, senior members, and the Founder, who encouraged me to open my heart. For me, that period of youth was the beginning of my journey of self-discovery.

Later, I met my husband, Professor Simhadri, when he came to study at the Center. We married, and as I began life in India, I came to see that his aspirations for India were rooted in his upbringing, and in his determination to confront the contradictions of Indian society. Gradually, I came to understand this wish. Today, I realize the profound significance of his encounter with our Founder, through which he was able to restore and reaffirm his own dignity.

In studying "What it means to be human," we found joy in our own growth and self-development. I came to feel that, by sharing these insights with schoolteachers and people in India, we were drawing closer to realizing my husband's wish.

Japan has its own character, and India has its own as well. Each nation's qualities are unique and irreplaceable. Within that diversity, the role Japan can play that our Founder elaborated in the Nomura Lifelong Integrated Education, and its contribution to the world, is a vast challenge. Yet, as our Founder taught, it ultimately comes down to how each of us chooses to live our own life.

Although I may never reach the depth of devotion that my husband, Simhadri, held for his homeland, I wish to keep striving toward it here in India.

Reflections: Eighty Years After the War

From Gaza, Palestine

In 2001, founding Director General Mrs. Yoshiko Nomura published her statement 'Copernican revolution in the thinking needed to end the vicious cycle of terrorism and war' as a full-page advertisement in the International Herald Tribune. She said the following at the end of this statement.

As long as each side in any matter of contention holds the other responsible for the original cause, they will not be able to arrest the chain of effects.

It is up to each of us to overcome the curse of our history of war and murder by seeking out and eradicating its cause within us....

Only when human beings are awakened and liberated from ignorance, greed and arrogance and experience a true restoration of the humanity within us will we be able to create a new civilization free from terror and war. This is the task of creating our future together to which each of us is called. I believe that only when all people are united under this universal value will we at last be enabled to eradicate the terror that threatens us and pay true tribute to the innocent victims of the terrible crime we have seen.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Palestine, which began in October 2023, has now entered its twenty first month (as of July, 2025). Even today, the situation remains severe, with countless precious lives being killed. From her base in Cairo, Mrs. Amal Abou Emara, head of our Palestine Branch, has done her utmost to remain in contact with local staff in Gaza. At the same time, she has continued to search for her own path, both as a Palestinian and as a fellow human being.

Since last year, Mrs. Emara and Director General Kaneko have maintained an ongoing exchange through emails and video calls. What follows is a chronological report drawn from their correspondence.

In November 2024, a report reached Mrs. Emara that Ms. Aisha, a local staff member who had taken refuge in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza and was living in a tent, had begun new initiatives for children and families there. Along with the report came a brief message: "I received encouraging photos and videos from Aisha. The activities she has started with a new team and the children have filled us with hope for the future."

The video showed a place near the seashore in Deir al-Balah, where rows of tents stood among date palms. In the center, about one hundred children, ranging in age from toddlers of two or three to elementary school students, stood in a large circle, smiling as they danced together to the rhythm of a song.



Then in December, after hearing the children, who had been surviving for months on canned beans long past their expiration date, express their longing for fresh food, Ms. Aisha was miraculously able to obtain fresh vegetables. Together with the children, she prepared Gaza salad and baked bread.



A report and video followed, showing the children sharing their stories of the journey that had brought them to Deir al-Balah, and opening their hearts with others who had endured similar hardships.

At the start of the new year 2025, after the ceasefire took effect on January 19, Mrs. Emara wrote the following to Director General Kaneko in an email dated February 7.

"Our obligation at this time is to intervene and find a way to make them feel better. Their homes have been destroyed; they have no water or way of life. But what they all agree on is that they want to stay, no matter what even if it's on top of the rubble.

We put down a new strategy for rebuilding hope and rebuilding families and unity but first we need to find out who lived and who died and finding out their stories. The children are traumatized right now but we will work on helping them see that they still have a future."

Subsequently, on March 18, the ceasefire was broken and Israeli forces resumed their attacks. Immediately afterward, Mrs. Emara sent an email expressing her urgent hope for a swift return to a ceasefire.

In April, Mrs. Emara wrote in an email:

"I am writing to you with heart breaking for each day we are losing our loved one in Gaza; relatives, neighbors, teachers, doctors, health workers, children and families scattered around the beaches looking for something to eat. Nonstop killing makes the life impossible. We pray too to open the borders for at least humanitarian aid."

In response, Director General Kaneko sent her message: "Feeling the depth of your grief in my heart, we too are pained in sorrow. Faced with this wartime atrocity, there are no words that can solace a heart so torn apart. Yet we share with you an unwavering faith in the Founder's teachings, and we will continue to walk with you, always by your side."

On May 15, Nakba Day, in response to an email sent by Director Hideyo Kimura, in charge of international relations, Mrs. Emara shared the following reflections:

"All of these conditions happening again and especially in the memory of the Nakba it feels like Palestinians have been in survival mode this whole time. It might take 100 years, but I hope there will still be people left to accomplish this aim.

We are also heartbroken when we think of so many small babies and their families all facing starvation and war. Thank you for reminding us that the Founder, Mrs. Nomura, and Mrs. Kaneko keep us educated, facing reality, and looking within. It is us human beings like us after all who create this grim reality of living hell."

On June 4, after a long interval, Mrs. Kaneko was able to hold a video call. According to Mrs. Emara, the northern, southern, and western areas of Gaza have been invaded and brought under control, and some two million people are now forced to flee along the eastern coastline.

Most have no choice but to live on the streets. Three of our branch staff remain in contact while themselves living in such conditions, continuing their support activities wherever they are. One of them, Ms. Aisha, has returned to Gaza City, where she was able to reunite with five former students from the Young Journalist Program. Even while mourning the loss of their own family members and struggling simply to survive, the staff continue to carry out their work of support.

On July 8, we received the sad news of the passing of Amar Zakzouk, a recipient of the Nomura Tetsuo Scholarship Fund in both 2022 and 2023, who had been studying business management at Al-Aqsa University. Mrs. Emara wrote: "He was a smart, giving, kind young man. His death came right before they announced the ceasefire. He was on his way to obtain flour to assist his mother in making food when he was killed. He will be missed by so many of his family and friends, and our heart mourns for him as we mourn for the thousands who have been killed by this senseless war on the people of Gaza."

Upon receiving this sad news, Director General Kaneko remarked: "This is by no means a distant tragedy. It is not merely a story of a war in the past, but something that could happen anywhere in the world. Eighty years after the end of the World War II, we Japanese must reflect on how we ought to live, rediscover our spiritual foundations, and seek out the role that Japan should fulfill in the world today."

Visit by Mr. Dobrin Keresteliev from Bulgaria

On Tuesday, May 20, Director General Yumiko Kaneko welcomed the visit of Mr. Dobrin Keresteliev from Bulgaria. Mr. Keresteliev, now 80 years old, worked for many years at Bulgarian National Television as a director and producer, creating numerous programs throughout his career. He has also contributed to the production of three videos for our Bulgarian Branch.

Head of branch Mrs. Maria Tzonkova informed us that, during his private trip to Japan, Mr. Keresteliev wished to meet with Mrs. Kaneko and to film scenes at the Center's head office and members' activities for a new video project being planned by the Branch. This became the occasion for his visit.

On the day, Mr. Keresteliev arrived accompanied by three friends he had met during his tour. When asked by Mrs. Kaneko for his first impressions of Japan, he replied: "What struck me most at first was that Japanese people are always smiling. I felt they must truly be happy." As part of Mrs. Tzonkova's greetings to Mrs. Kaneko, he played a video showing a preschool, that the Branch has been cooperating with, where the principal and children warmly interacted, before enjoying a time of conversation together.

Filming then took place in the tatami room on the third floor of the Second Seminar House, with the blooming Enkianthus azaleas in the garden as a backdrop. The session followed an interview format, addressing three questions submitted in advance. Mrs. Tzonkova explained that these questions reflected the challenges facing families with young children in Bulgaria: most parents work full time and expect preschools and schools to take responsibility for everything—from their children's health to their personal appearance. Teachers, themselves also working parents, become overburdened and exhausted. It was her hope that this new video could help convey the importance of family life and child-rearing inspired by Nomura Lifelong Integrated Education.



Mr. Keresteliev preparing his camera to shoot the interview

The first question—"How do you communicate with children's parents? What do you do when parents are uncooperative?"—was answered by Mrs. Nami Ishifune, former head of the Division of Infant Education.

The second question—"How do you introduce Nomura Lifelong Integrated Education to adults who are not members of the Center?"—was answered by Assistant Director Mrs. Asuka Tomoda, who is directly involved in activities at the Shizuoka Branch.

The final question—"What can we do to reconcile the contradictions posed by the wars in today's world and those that may arise in the near future?"—was addressed by Director General Kaneko.

After the garden filming, Mr. Keresteliev continued recording in the second-floor study room, joining a group of peers in lively discussion as they prepared for the following day's monthly seminar course for Senior Citizens.



He then visited the Yoshiko Nomura Memorial Museum, a former private residence of our founder and her husband that has been renovated to preserve their legacy. He carefully filmed each room, including displays of the founder's handwritten manuscripts, postcards sent to her husband Tetsuo from overseas, and her traditional Kihachijō silk kimono. At the conclusion, he remarked: "It is wonderful that all this has been preserved. I am very glad I could experience it."

After returning to Bulgaria, we received a message from Mrs. Tzonkova reporting that Mr. Keresteliev had been deeply touched by the warm welcome he received at the Center. He commented: "I was enchanted by Japan and the Japanese people—they completely captured my heart."

In Memory of Professor Xiu Gang

On April 26, 2025, Professor Xiu Gang, former President of Tianjin Foreign Studies University and a long-time friend of our Center, passed away at the age of 68.

Professor Xiu served in many distinguished positions, including Professor at the Graduate School of Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Chairman of the Japanese Language Education Steering Committee of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, and Honorary Chairman of the China Education Association for International Education. He devoted himself to advancing Japanese language education in China and played an instrumental role in nurturing countless outstanding students.

Our connection with Professor Xiu began in 1991, when our Founding Director General, Mrs. Yoshiko Nomura, was invited by the China Education Association for International Exchange to deliver lectures in Tianjin and Beijing. Professor Xiu served as interpreter for her lecture in Tianjin. During the preparatory meeting, Mrs. Nomura surprised him by not going through mere confirmation of the text, but rather asking for his impressions of it. He later recalled how deeply that moment affected him, never imagining at the time that this encounter would go on to shape the course of his own life.

In 1994, Professor Xiu translated Mrs. Nomura's book "Housewife and International Conference" into Chinese, which he was committed to the publication by Nankai University Press in June of that year.

He also took part in many of our Center's activities, including the National Conference on Lifelong Integrated Education, the International Forum, and Intensive Seminars. At the 24th National Conference, held in 1992 to mark the 30th anniversary of our founding, he served as a panelist at the International Symposium. At the 6th International Forum in 1994, he was a speaker of the workshop on education, further deepening his understanding of Nomura Lifelong Integrated Education.

In February of 2005 he participated in the Remembrance Day for the Founding Director General, and he visited our head office in November. Professor Xiu described his busy days recently and said, "When I come here, I feel quite relieved because we meet as humans without any title." Referring the Japanese-Chinese relations at that time, he said "It seems that only political and economic aspects are reported and cultural exchanges of citizens, which sustain them are left perfunctory.... To go beyond nationality and race standing on a common ground as human beings and try to understand the other party and each other, this is what I learnt from the founder Mrs. Nomura. Therefore, I tell my students no matter where one may come from, we ought to think that we are all fellow human beings. If I had not met Mrs. Nomura, I would not be thinking or acting as I do now."



Professor Xiu Gang giving a presentation at the intensive seminar of the 12th International Forum, 2018.

In 2014, at the 11th International Forum held in Tokyo, Professor Xiu took to the stage as a panelist for symposium.

Recalling Mrs. Nomura's lecture made at Tianjin in 1991 for 140 education researchers he talked "The founder started her talk by apologizing to them for unhappy wartime events that took place as a Japanese citizen. Her words changed the atmosphere of the meeting place. She had communicated to her audience she wished to understand their feelings and they in turn responded to her. I was full of admiration for her."

Then, Professor Xiu closed his remarks by saying "It is essential to achieve trans-cultural communication by seeing each other objectively, understand each other, and accept diversity if we are to build peaceful relations between the Chinese and Japanese people."

While serving in prominent positions in China, Professor Xiu remained dedicated to fostering friendship between Japan and China, as well as to cultivating the next generation. His passing amid these efforts is a loss felt with profound sorrow.

We are deeply grateful for the kindness and support that Professor Xiu extended to us, and we offer our heartfelt prayers for the repose of his soul.