Mabuhay

Asahi Ueda

 It’s always fun to tell someone I first met in my school that I had spent 5 and half years abroad. Totally surprised, he/she would say “Wow! That’s cool! What country?” giving me a face of huge expectation and admiration, as if they’d met Brad Pitt! So I would proudly answer, “Republic of the Philippines.” And most of the time their faces of excitement disappear, hitting me hard with the sad reality that I’m no Brad Pitt.

 Obviously when I mention “living abroad,” they have countries like U.S. or U.K. in their mind. Some people around me even think those countries are, in all ways, superior to any other countries in the world. And many know little about the Philippines, resulting in a general impression that the country is poor and still developing. Of course everyone likes the beautiful resorts like Cebu, but sadly nobody has ever considered it as a place to live or study. Not many know that English is also an official language in the Philippines, or that the suicide rate is one of the lowest in the world. And I ask everyone here: do you know any Filipino words? We know a few Chinese words like “Nihao” or “Xiexie”, but not many know even the simplest greeting words from the country as close as China. Although I was warmly welcomed by the Filipino people as a Japanese boy, the acceptance of the Philippines in Japan is not as strong as the sense of welcoming countries like the US.

 I believe these simple ideas thinking “nah, South East Asia” can be also seen in our government policies. To name one: accepting foreign nurses from Indonesia and the Philippines. In our country, they are given three years to work as a trainee, and must get the Japanese nurse license within those years or they have no permission to further stay and work. And take a moment to think: would you choose to go to Japan as a trainee when there are other countries, welcoming you as a professional nurse, with permanent residency, and the only license needed is that of your home country? No, right? A Filipino nurse I met there shocked me that most of them prefer to work in countries like the UAE nowadays. This situation could end up losing great opportunities for Japan.

 I came across the United Nations Millennium Declaration. It states that only through broad and sustained efforts to create a shared future, based upon our common humanity in all its diversity, can globalization be made fully inclusive and equitable.

 In my personal opinion, globalization is not just about the ability to speak English, nor copying western culture, and we high school students must play the central role of making an atmosphere that we truly welcome all countries, including South East Asia with our hearts as much as accepting nations like the U.S. The republic of the Philippines is just an example, just one country in this region of great diversity, and respecting and welcoming one nation is not our ultimate goal. However, it is my first step to tell people around me the slightest piece of information that could lead to changing how you look at the Philippines. To end my speech, I would like you to remember this one Filipino word that you might wish to use someday: “Mabuhay,” which means “Welcome.”