



FOREWORD

I came to know the person honored by this special supplement, Mr. Leonardo Co, when he first became my student at the Caloocan City branch of the Philippine Cultural High School many years ago. He was then a young and active student who loved science. Following me, he went to the University of the Philippines in Diliman to take up the Bachelor Science in Botany degree program in early 1970s. We had become close field companions for decades in our joint searching of interesting plant species and new plant species as well in many collecting trips until I left the country for my overseas job in late 1980s.

Being a rather patriotic Filipino botanist, Leonardo did not want to become an immigrant in the USA when his parents migrated in the 90s. Instead, he chose to stay behind and continue his study of Philippine plant diversity at work and after working hours, with or without financial support from institutions, until he was shot death on Leyte Island while doing his routine field collecting of plant specimens in the noon hour of 15th November, 2010.

The Department of Justice of the Philippine Government had finally released on 28th February of 2013 its finding dated 20th December of 2012, which reported that the death of Mr. Leonardo Co and his field companions on Leyte in 2010 was due to the probable cause of “reckless and imprudent multiple homicide and attempted homicide action” committed by nine named members of the 19th Infantry “Commando” Battalion of the 81D of the Philippine Army (see <http://www.doj.gov.ph/news.html?title=Charges%20Filed%20in%20Connection%20with%20the%20Death%20of%20Botanist%20Leonardo%20Co&newsid=161>).

Whatever the meaning of the “reckless and imprudent multiple homicide and attempted homicide action” is, the country has lost a very knowledgeable and outstanding botanist. Through his many years of field investigations, Leonardo knew the correct scientific names of the many plant species of small trees, shrubs and herbs found in the Philippine rain forests. His accumulated botanical knowledge is very important because outside of the commercial timber yielding tree species, these non-commercial components of the rain forests are little known. His death is a big loss for a country with mega-plant diversity but has only a few resident botanists who specialize in the basic field of plant taxonomy.

Leonardo loves playing harmonica at night while camping out in the wilderness. He loves to sing a song that extols the death for the cause of people is heavier than the Sierra Madre Mountain Range in Luzon. Unfortunately, this fate has come to him. Allow me to say, “Ang kanyang kamatayan ay simbigat ng Sierra Madre na ginalugad niya sa pagkilala ng mga halamang nabubuhay dito”.

Three years have quickly passed after the tragic death of Leonardo in 2010. It seems like only yesterday when I first met this young man who asked me, as his high school teacher in biology class, a lot of questions about the plants that he saw on school campus and from the vicinity of Metro-Manila. When he died in 2010, he knew more than I do about the identification and distribution of seed plants in the

country. It is no wonder that his students at the Institute of Biology at UP Diliman give him the nickname, “The Walking Philippine Botanical Encyclopedia”.

This special issue with many foreign contributors of manuscripts from USA, UK, The Netherlands, Germany, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand, not to mention the local contributors, is a testimony and an attestation of the national and international recognitions earned by the deceased botanist. There are a few more colleagues and research collaborators of Leonardo who work in the USA, Australia and Thailand, whom I have failed to contact for a contribution of manuscript for this special issue. My apology to them.

Many touching reminiscences, compliments, praises and reports of the significant botanical contributions of Leonardo have been written and published in newspapers, magazines, TV shows and internet medium since his sad and permanent departure from the scenes of Philippine rain forests. One can see in his biography in this issue the list of botanical books and scientific articles that he had published. However, I think that this printed supplement of the Philippine Journal of Science authored by many of his colleagues and associates that focuses on the recent findings of the plant diversity in a broad sense ranging from algae, fungi, bryophytes, pteridophytes, and groups of angiosperms in the country, is the most appropriate and meaningful act of celebration of the life and death of this man. Hopefully, this special issue, which showcases indirectly also the still missing information of several plant groups in the archipelagic country, will attract and inspire young people to step into the challenging field of studying the plant diversity and taxonomy in the decades to come.

Leonardo had found the many pre-war issues of the Philippine Journal of Science to be his best sources of taxonomic information on various plant groups in the Philippines. It is therefore very fitting for the Philippine Journal of Science to produce a special supplement on the current state of the country’s plant diversity to honor a distinguished Filipino botanist who died in action investigating the plant diversity.

I thank all the members of the Editorial Board of the Philippine Journal of Science under the incumbent chair person of UP Diliman Chancellor and Prof. Caesar Saloma for their support in publishing this special issue. I also thank the valuable help that I obtained from members of the ad hoc committee who helped to organize this special issue, namely, Dr. Ang Put Jr., Prof. Elena Rragragio, and Dr. Virginia Cuevas. Dr. Julie Barcelona kindly provided the photo of Mr. Leonardo Co for use in the frontispiece of this commemorative publication. My sincerest thanks also go to all the contributors of manuscripts printed in this issue who serve, additionally, as reviewers of the manuscripts to assure the high quality of the publications. Needless to say, I owe Ms. Ma. Judith Lagarde Sablan, my deep gratitude for her tireless effort exerted in coordinating with me on the publication of this special issue of the Philippine Journal of Science.

To the parents and the bereaved family members of Mr. Leonardo Co, I offer, with salutation, this special publication in behalf of all the friends and colleagues of Leonardo as a token of our lasting memory for the man in honour. May this special issue of the Philippine Journal of Science become a tall monument in the post-war history of Philippine Botany.

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