

Museums for peace: Identity of Taiwan's peace museums and human rights parks

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Abstract

Because of the unique historical development of the twentieth century, after World War Two contemporary historical memorial museums focused on human rights, peace, and the commemorating of historic incidents gradually created in the wake of global democratization. As a result, with the establishment of ICOM's International Committee of Memorial Museums in Remembrance of the Victims of Public Crimes (ICMEMO), the relation between the memorial museums which fell within ICMEMO's compass and the subject of peace had a deep and far-reaching significance.

In Taiwan, museums falling within the framework of peace memorial museums came about with the grass-roots democratic movement of the 1980s. The process of their creation has its own historical, political, and social background. The main emphasis of this paper is on the historical and cultural currents of the events during the period of Kuomintang control, such as the 228 Incident (28 February 1947), and following on that the White Terror, which came during the long period of martial law (20 May 1949 to 15 July 1987). The paper will also touch on the process of establishing the 228 Memorial Museum in Taipei (opened 28 February 1997) and the Green Island Memorial Park (opened on International Human Rights Day, 10 December 2002). We will also reflect on the historical process of Taiwan's democratization, dissemination of news concerning the pursuit of multiculturalism and respect for human rights, and investigate how, through the propagation of universal human rights values, the memorial museums pursue the pacific mission, establish self-identity internally as well as professionally, not to mention the self-identity of the community comprising their external environment, and even the regional self-identification of their Asian neighbors. It concludes with an appreciation of how memorial museums create peace culture, and how they promote efforts at international exchange, which constitute the existential significance of the peace museums as important cultural institutions of the new century.

Keywords: Identity, peace museum, Taipei 228 Memorial Museum, Green Island Human Rights Memorial Park, ICMEMO.

Introduction

When we think of museums, it is usually of the storing in magnificent edifices of civilization's treasured representations of humanity's pursuit of truth, excellence and beauty. Inculcating in the masses recollections of pleasure and beauty, museums have become important cultural institutions of the times. Having come in the train of economic development and social demand, museums have been proliferating along different lines-number, type and architectural form-all over the world since the 1970s, like thousands of spring flowers blossoming in profusion in a wild field, so that today the museums' activities and exhibits present the public with a sumptuous banquet. As for those involved in museum work, the wild proliferation of museums requires that even more bountiful knowledge of the various professions be brought to bear in response to the rapid changes induced by social development and the demands of a democratic and socially diverse public.¹

We cannot but take delight when we survey the course of museum development, from the beginning of the last century, with its imposing halls presenting the cultural and artistic accomplishments of the West, to the end of the century, which saw the global proliferation of museums. But at the same time, in that same century we were witness to some of humanity's most heinous and tragic atrocities, not simply because the wars of that century were fought on the largest scale, with shocking loss of life, but all the more because the bitter facts of a humanity engaged in mutual annihilation continued to accumulate. The World Trade Center bombings, "anti-terrorism," the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon-these and other tragic images have been transmitted to the far ends of the earth. These tidings tell us that at the beginning of the new century, such instances of mutual annihilation have yet to abate.² So we are compelled to ask: When is

the world of peace to arrive? Will peace in the real sense be able to develop in the course of civilizing progress? And what can the museums which preserve and bear witness to human civilization do for peace? How do people involved in museums see these questions?

This paper comprises three sections. First, we attempt an understanding of the development of museums and the peace movement internationally. In section two, we turn to social movements in Taiwan, grassroots democratization and the call for the rectification of history, and the drive for the establishment of memorial museums and memorial parks. Section three examines how memorial museums are confronting the topic of identity in the course of social evolution, the guiding principles of memorial museum management, and the proper mission as a response to contemporary society and the public in their pursuit of historical truth, respect for human rights, and the quest for peace.

1. Museums and the peace movement

1.1 UNESCO and ICOM

As everyone knows, under the auspices of the United Nations, UNESCO is charged with inculcating the idea of peace through education, science, culture and the media. Since the establishment of pacifist thought would require a prolonged study of the historical experience, the largest organization in the world related to museums, ICOM, with its long association with UNESCO, in 2001

¹ The connection between political democratization and the museum can be traced back to the French Revolution of 1789 and the establishment of the Louvre.

² Video produced by the film and TV industries as well as contemporary news images of massacres have been saturating modern life: the historical viewpoint of dark tourism has become universally known thanks to the dissemination of these images, while memorial museums have come to increasingly make use of oral history in their presentations. All these phenomena are cultural topics deserving further research.

organized the International Committee of Memorial Museums for the Remembrance of Public Crimes (ICMEMO).³

The purpose of the ICMEMO is to encourage responsible historical remembrance, and, through education and the application of the knowledge of peaceful interests, to enhance cultural cooperation. This is also UNESCO's purpose. The goal of these memorial museums is to commemorate the victims of national and social policies, and of the crimes brought on by differences in identity. They are generally situated at the original historical locations or at places chosen for commemoration by the survivors. By preserving a kind of historical view with strong contemporary cognitive associations, they seek to convey information about historical incidents.

For museums, implicit within the above ICMEMO aims lay special significance bearing on: (1) public crimes and their victims, (2) contemporary history, (3) social harmony and solidarity, (4) knowledge relating to peace for all humanity, (5) close relation between modern social, political and democratic development, and (6) the promotion of cultural cooperation across national boundaries. When looked at from the core issue of public education, this kind of memorial museum touches on consciousness regarding contemporary society, politics, economics, culture and history, while also involving itself in such new cultural topics as ethnicity, class and gender, engaging in interchange within international society, and promoting mutual understanding through comparative viewpoints.

1.2 The United Nations

The preamble to the 1945 charter of the United Nations calls on world cooperation “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person,” while the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that “recognition of

the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” As for the important work of human rights education (HRE), that also came after the war, and has been moving right along ever since, so that there is now a wave of world peace museums coming into being internationally. The foreword to the *Human Rights Education for the Twenty-First Century*⁴ explains in simple form why human rights education has gradually become a consensus in every country, why a multifaceted human rights education promotes a peaceful environment, and why peace education, human rights and environmental education have gradually become the main topic of international society for 21st century humanity. Published by the United Nations in 1998, *Peace Museums Worldwide*⁵ introduces 51 museums connected related to peace in sixteen countries, commemorating historical events, massacres, wars of resistance, peace, nuclear bombings, and human rights. The historical artifacts that these museums display lets the museum bear witness to the peace movement, while concrete international exchange is reflected in the international conferences held at the peace museums.⁶

1.3 International Network of Peace Museums

When we look at the formation of peace-

³ For more on the ICMEMO committee see <http://icom.museum/international/icmemo.html>.

⁴ Andreopoulos, George J. and Claude, Richard Pierre, eds, 1997 *Human Rights Education for the Twenty-First Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁵ United Nations Publications on Peace, 1998 *Peace Museums Worldwide*. Geneva in Association with the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford.

⁶ The International Peace Museum Network plays an essential role in international exchange as a platform for promoting peace education. It first met in England in 1992, the second time in Austria in 1995, third in Japan in 1998, fourth in Flanders in May 2003, and fifth in Gemika-Lumo, Spain in May 2005. ICMEMO meetings are held concurrently. See the ICOM website for details.

themed museums in every country, we can see the intimate relation that they bear with twentieth-century history. Each country's memorial museums were established in the process of an historical consciousness whose deepening was brought on by important historical incidents, and serve as constant reminders of history's warnings that the same mistakes must not be repeated. They are the signal towers that send out the message of the pursuit of universal human rights and peace. As bases which put out the word to contemporary society of historical incidents, they are a unique phenomenon of the late twentieth century that continues to the present.

Since 1992, the International Network of Peace Museums has held five international conferences, attended by individuals representing professionals working at government-established institutions, but even more by people's groups representing the peace movement. That the NGOs have established such museums so as to further grassroots movements for peace and human rights is a special feature of the 21st century, and is worth the high regard of the museum world.

According to an investigation by the International Conference of Peace Museums into the connection between museums and the peace movements in all their aspects, although such study currently is centered on the museums within the countries' peace museum system. Nonetheless, this area of investigation is without a doubt an important trend of the museum movement of the new century, and will bring with it consideration by museum people of the relationship between museums and those who serve it, on the one hand, and peace and human rights, on the other. Moreover, it will promote the gradual improvement of the environment in which we are situated, as the relation between humans and the environment is an important topic for the 21st century. Are not the preserving and

exhibiting of natural and human objects by museums the harmonious junction of the manifestations of the creative power of nature and humanity?

The world already acknowledges the human rights accords of the United Nations, so does the work of museum professionals exist for the purpose of showing the more perfect future for mankind that the UN instruments have been declaring? And a more perfect future depends on ever more individuals and groups striving for the respect for human rights and peace, so museums should be among the most important constituents. In Europe, a relatively broad network organization has been established for the system of peace museums there, while in East Asia, Japan, Korea and Taiwan see their private organizations advancing the peace movement through ever-increasing awareness of the history of their neighboring countries.⁷

2. Taiwan: Memorial museums and democratization

If we want to understand the development of Taiwan's modern history memorial museums and the peace movement, we must first take a look at Taiwan's postwar history, the 228 Incident, the White Terror, the historical revision movement, and how they are related to memorial museums.

2.1 Rewriting the history of 228

Focused on the incident of 28 February 1947, the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum is the

⁷ The author attended ICOM's 20th congress in Seoul in October 2004, where one of the main topics discussed in the ICMEMO forum was whether or not the 4-kilometer-wide demilitarized zone between North and South Korea at the 38th parallel might, as legacy of the cold war, might be used as an eco-park or a true outdoor peace park. The author also took part in the International Conference of Peace Museums held in Gernika-Lumo from May 1 to May 6, 2005. Not only were there many European NGOs in attendance, but NGOs from Japan, Korea and Central Asia were also well represented.

first museum in Taiwan history dedicated to explaining Taiwan's history. Long desired by the Taiwanese people, the museum opened fifty years after the event. It was initially managed under guiding principles calling for collection of historical materials, promotion of the public's understanding of the incident, and promotion of ethnic harmony. Another important item incorporated into the agenda was pacifism.

In 1986, the year before the end of martial law, many groups calling for the rectification of the 228 Incident history were organized privately. While still under martial law and facing the armed might of the military, street demonstrations and commemorative activities took place all over Taiwan with the slogan of "love and peace." The hope was that with regards to the 228 Incident, the government would (1) investigate the true facts of the incident, (2) apologize, (3) establish an annual day of commemoration, (4) erect a monument and a memorial hall, and (5) compensate the victims. Afterwards, the government concluded a documentary report by historical scholars, which did not touch on government responsibility, thereby failing to win the trust of the people. But the government promised to establish a monument. After an international design competition, on 28 February 1995, the National 228 Monument was completed, with then-president Lee Teng-hui doing the honors at the opening ceremony.⁸ On behalf of the government, he apologized to the victims as well as to society. Also in 1995, the Legislative Yuan (the national legislature) passed a law mandating compensation for the victims, and funds started to be issued for this purpose. On 25 February 1997, the Legislative Yuan passed a law making 28 February the National Peace Memorial Day, while on 28 February of that year, on the fiftieth anniversary of the incident, Taipei City, with Chen Shui-bian as mayor, established the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum, located at

one of the sites that figured in the incident, a radio station. The museum was operated by an NGO, the Taiwan Peace Foundation.⁹ For the moment we will leave for later discussion the current state of management of the museum by the Taipei city government, how the historical memorial museums are regarded by the public, and how the families of the 228 Incident victims are calling for a 228 memorial museum at the national level.¹⁰

2.2 Rectification of the White Terror history¹¹

In the 228 Incident of 1947, the people of Taiwan suffered an indiscriminate slaughter perpetrated by those whom they had greeted at the end of the war as coming from "the mother country" -the Nationalist government, whereupon there was a sudden increase in the number of young people who participated in underground anti-government organizations, or else went into exile abroad, where they took up the movement for Taiwan independence. In 1949, having lost the civil war on the mainland, the Kuomintang fled to Taiwan and declared martial law. Thus began

⁸ Situated in the heart of the city at the Taipei 228 Peace Park, the National 228 Monument came about through an international design competition in which various views from society contended, with interpretations deriving from everything from design ideas to historical annotations.

⁹ When the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum first opened, it was put under private management, creating a fine example in Taiwan of a privately operated public institution from 1997 to 2000. Whereupon, when Ma Ying-jeou came into office as mayor in 2000 (he served his second term through 2007), his director of the Culture Affairs Bureau, Lung Ying-tai, took a different view towards the Taiwan Peace Foundation, and replaced it with another management team. Hindsight shows that this began a gradual decline for the peace museum, foremost because it became subject to all sorts of political pressure.

¹⁰ Since Taiwan's first peaceful transition of political power in 2000, the public's call for the government to establish a national-level 228 memorial museum continued unabated, but not until February 28, 2007 will the central government succeed in establishing the National 228 Memorial Museum.

¹¹ Taiwan's White Terror generally indicates the period from about 1949 to the end of martial law in 1987. Until the 1992 revision of laws restricting freedom of speech, the Kuomintang ruled Taiwan through martial law and terror.

the arrest of dissidents on a mass scale and the implementation of a reign of terror lasting 38 years. The movement opposing authoritarianism continued nonetheless, with generation succeeding generation, until matters came to a head in the 1980s. With a social force that had fermented all that time, consolidating the domestic and overseas push for democratization, the people finally managed to force the government to end martial law on 15 July 1987.

The generation of the victims of the 228 Incident and White Terror had experienced the Japanese occupation of Taiwan (1895-1945) and the Pacific War of that era, while the victims themselves had either participated in or been witness to the 228 Incident and/or the reign of terror that followed. Many of the survivors were later to participate in the 228/White Terror historical redress movements. In response to both the victims and society at large, the government passed a law in 1998 offering compensation to victims of the martial law period. On 10 December 1999, at the ribbon-cutting for the Green Island Monument, then-president Lee Teng-hui apologized to the victims, while the government opened a part of the Green Island Memorial Park, the whole of which is still now in the final planning stages, as it addresses history, human rights, Micronesian culture, harmony with the environment, and peace, on the road to establishing a multicultural memorial park.¹² And, in 2007, a human rights park is to be opened in Jingmei, on the outskirts of Taipei.¹³

2.3 The true face of history: transitional justice¹⁴

Although the Taiwan government has passed into law compensation for the victims of the 228 Incident and the White Terror, the historical facts have not been investigated according to principles of justice, nor has it acknowledged its responsibility for injustices of the past. Compare this to many countries

which have gone through the “third wave” of democratization, where in the democratic transition they have set up truth and reconciliation commissions.¹⁵ So as to sort out instances of government-perpetrated public violence, the method currently adopted in Taiwan is that of compensating the victims with money, but this obviously is not enough. The two foundations charged with financial dispensations are mainly releasing funds without issuing an official annual report providing information on (1) the basis for such compensation, (2) reason for the fates suffered by the victims, (3) whether the government should be held responsible for the past injustices, and (4) whether legal and mental/physical recompense is still owed the victims - as well as other requirements called for in the UN human rights instruments. In other words, the government has not approached legal and mental/physical restitution with a positive attitude, nor has the confidence or values to reestablish legal protections for the people, or human rights guarantees.

The topic of justice during the period of democratic transition encompasses historical justice, which in turn gets into such categories as investigation of the true historical facts, historical responsibility, rectification of history, establishing the case

¹² The area encompassing the park once boasted a detention center incarcerating drifters from 1911 to 1919, while after the Second World War, from 1951 to 1965, it hosted the New Life Detention Center, followed by the Defense Ministry's Green Island Prison, from 1972 to 1987. In all, some 3000 prisoners, made up largely of a small number of February 28 Incident victims and victims of the White Terror, did time there.

¹³ From 1968 to 1987, the park facilities originally served as White Terror-period detention center and political prison. It is soon to open as a memorial park for research on human rights in Taiwan and Asia.

¹⁴ Teitel, Ruti G. 2000 *Transitional Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ Situations vary from country to country, so there are some countries - Taiwan being one of them - which have not established truth and reconciliation commissions.

histories of the oppressed, and legal and moral responsibility of the oppressors. Other broad areas for consideration include public ceremonial apologies, creation of laws to prevent recurrence of human rights infringements, compensation of the victims, restoration of their reputations, opening the files to public view, historical exegesis, inclusion of the victims' histories in textual materials, and so on. Another subject matter is that of the establishing of memorial museums for the victims. Such institutions are not only for remembering the victims and preserving memories, but also for annotating and narrating history. Memorial museums must also reflect the situation then prevailing in light of the foregoing topics. The evolutionary transition brought on by liberalization and democratization touches on the subject of justice at all levels, with constitutional justice ranking at the top. It follows that when setting up a memorial museum, one must contend with all of the past issues left still unresolved, new issues of the present, as well as future problems - in short everything now confronting the country in transitional mid-course needs to be sorted out.

This is why so many of the victims are calling for the Executive Yuan and the Legislative Yuan to establish something along the lines of a "Commission to Investigate Post-war Human Rights Infringements." Their generation, born in the 1920s, personally experienced the Japanese occupation, some of them even having fought for the Japanese empire.¹⁶ After World War II, one's national identification changed; and then there was the Chinese Civil War between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party, such that some Taiwanese could find themselves in the military uniform of the Japanese Imperial Army one year, that of the Kuomintang army (to fight the communists) the next, and the People's Liberation Army (drafted by the communists)

the next. During the historical transition, the Taiwanese have not developed a sense of their own identity, being first Japanese and then Chinese, so right up to the present in the midst of this democratic transition, self-identity continues to be a hot topic for historical, political, social and ethnic debate among the people, often argued in terms of era of arrival in Taiwan of the speaker's family.

The victims hope, as does society in general, that all of the people will be informed as to the real historical record concerning postwar events. As can be seen from both the process and outcomes of the elections during the last twenty years of democratic process, strong differences regarding the true facts of history have been caused by political stances and questions of national identity. This sometimes goes to extremes, with diametrically opposed views, such as before the end of 2004, when all of society had its attention riveted on the debate over history textbook content. As a result, in the course of forming memorial museums, plenty of attitudinal differences of identity have arisen in Taiwan when it comes to the relationship between historical discourse and political power. These disputes have an impact on the interaction between the public and the memorial museum. Once the memorial museum has opened, policies of communication between the memorial museum, on the one hand, and its audience and the larger society, on the other, what kind of methods, and whether they really achieve the educational mission of communicating

¹⁶ According to private research, 207,183 Taiwanese served as Japanese soldiers in the Second World War. 30,304 were killed. Former president Lee Teng-hui's elder brother, Lee Teng-chin, was one of them. He died in Manila, and today his name is listed among the Japanese soldiers who died for their country, at the Yasukuni Shrine, the museum of which features his photo likeness whereas in Taiwan, there has yet to be any official investigation or recognition of those who died either in the Second World War or the Civil War with the communists.

and elucidating - all these are topics which have yet to be investigated in detail. Just how should memorial museums face the thorny issues of "identity?"

3. Memorial museums and "Identity"

The question of "identity" for the museum in general possibly hinges on the character of the museum and how it interacts with its audience. Everything that the museum does is in the service of the audience, as it strives to gain the self-identification loyalty of the audience. This is especially true of historical museums. Memorial museums presenting contemporary history are replete with challenges in the form of the self-identity question introduced by both the internal and external environments, and this is especially the case in countries like Taiwan, where historical consciousness runs so thin, and is all the more complicated. Add to this the memorial museum's close connection with contemporary society, the intrusion of political power, and interference from "identity consciousness," and the memorial museum must squarely face questions of self-identification. With the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum about to complete the first ten years of its operation, when we regard three changes of management over the decades, we see the aforementioned elements hidden within: the operational principles gradually bring to the memorial museum an amorphous set of difficulties, and demonstrate that the basis of civil society in Taiwan is in a weak position vis-a-vis its own "not-too-distant history." When we cast our gaze a bit further, and precisely for the same reasons, the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum has even greater potential to act as a museum for civil society, which now awaits bringing out. Its operator, the Taipei City Government, cannot escape its responsibility.

Now in the planning, the Green Island Memorial Park (33 km off Taiwan's southeast coast) and the Taipei Human Rights Culture

Park (in Jingmei, in southwest suburban Taipei) are to exhibit the postwar history of the infringement of human rights during the White Terror in the comparative context of Asian and global human rights. These two parks work under a very clearly defined mission: "With history as our mirror, to vigorously research and explicate Taiwan's postwar history; using the history of the people's pursuit of democracy and freedom as evidence, to pass on through exhibitions and other activities that history to each and every visitor; to let the visitor know that democracy was not easily come by, and that in order to protect the democratic lifestyle, every citizen must realize that anyone can become a human rights worker concerned about our living environment and willing to strive for the creation of a more perfect future." A complete historical narrative of human rights in Taiwan would wield the persuasive power of the rendering of the long-term social and historical background to the gradual deepening of democracy as Taiwan marched through the twentieth century and leaped into the 21st. So as to achieve one of the parks' most important missions - human rights education - they must incorporate the whole of Taiwan's human rights history while weaving in the tide of human rights development globally, thereby making the most of the many functions available to institutions having the educational mission of a museum.

However, as the narrative of the parks' exhibitions touch on the "ebb and flow of self-identity," which, when viewed in terms of the victims' historical experience, shows the oppositional fluidity of self-identification, on the other hand when seen from the vantage of human rights, the individual-autonomous character of human rights thought takes precedence, demolishing the pitfall of "collective identity." With the main object to be commemorated by the memorial museum being the victims - those who

suffered the state-perpetrated public violence - the survivors of the White Terror adopted actions on their own in the 1950s in opposition to the unjust political power, and for this they suffered, while some participated in the democratization of the 1980s. Today they see a plethora of views on Taiwan's political status and all sorts of political tendencies, ranging from those favoring Taiwan's reunification with China to those advocating Taiwan independence, expressed in an environment of full freedom of speech. Therefore, the two parks should manage to: (1) establish a true narrative description; (2) respond to the demands of the victims; and (3) promote such principles as harmony domestically, advance the memorial museum's collections, research, displays, educational activities, international interchange, and the display of the contemporary historical museum's broad vision. By so doing they will help raise the citizen's human rights awareness, his/her participation in international society, and the promotion of interchange within the international peace culture.

Conclusion

Taiwan's earliest inhabitants were the descendants of the Micronesian peoples. Taiwan residents should also acknowledge the peoples who have immigrated here over the last several hundred years. Starting with recognition of the indigenous peoples' history, one can study the ways of harmonious contact between peoples, study the unique environment presented to these islands by mother nature and the ocean, and get to know the ways of harmonious coexistence between the land and the people. The self-identification of the

Taiwanese, after having been through the hundred years of Japanese rule (1895-1945), the postwar martial law of the Kuomintang, and the democratization of the 1980s, saw the peaceful transfer of power of 2000, and is now in the 21st century transition where a sense of collective identification is taking form. Political strife is a constant, but this is not the place to attempt to sort out the complications arising from the topic of identification. Rather, the paper presents the special identity questions confronted by the memorial museum in formation. In acknowledging its mission as a museum, the memorial museum, aside from assuming its duty to dig out historical truth, and aside from having to face history, must also interact with contemporary society, and must respond to its audience with a fully contemporary viewpoint, if it is to win the audience's allegiance and create a harmonious environment for the future. So adopting a position of universal human rights and a stance of peace, we strive for freedom and human rights, while the legacy of those who went before - the victims - carry lessons for us. In this way it becomes a balanced historical discipline, and therein lies the significance of the memorial museum's struggle to establish organizational identity within, professional identity, as well as identification with the communities in the outer environment, and even regional identity with neighboring countries in Asia. All this will be shared with the culture of peace created by the memorial museum as efforts are made to achieve international interchange. This is the existential significance of what they, as important institutions, can do in the new century. (Translated by Lynn Miles)

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Mr. Tsao attended the 2004 ICOM conference in Seoul and the 2005 Fifth International Peace Museum Conference in Gernick-Lumo.

With this he wishes to place Taiwan's most serious cases of governmental violence-the 228 Incident and the White Terror-in their historical and cultural contexts, while contemplating Taiwan's achievements in peace, multiculturalism, and respect for human rights. He also elaborates on Taiwan's experience and achievements as part of the common effort to create a global culture of peace.

¹⁷ 曹欽榮