

Taiwan Soka Association and Its Social Impact

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ABSTRACT: Taiwan Soka Association is the branch in Taiwan of Soka Gakkai International. Although Soka Gakkai started spreading its teachings in Taiwan in 1962, Taiwan Soka Association was legally incorporated in 1990. The article focuses on three areas of activity of Taiwan Soka Association: education, culture, and peace activities. For each area, the main activities are presented, and their impact on both members and non-members in Taiwan is discussed. The article concludes with a global evaluation of the impact of Soka Gakkai's social activities on its members and on Taiwanese society.

KEYWORDS: Soka Gakkai International, SGI, Taiwan Soka Association, TSA, Daisaku Ikeda.

Introduction

Humankind has experienced 4,100 wars throughout its history. Unlike other religions, Buddhism has never shed blood through the propagation of its teachings in the past 2,600 years. Marietta Stepanyants, director of the Department of Oriental Philosophies at the Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, stated that,

Buddhism is the only world religion that has spread its teachings globally without using violence or military force. It used only two methods: words (the teachings of Buddha) and actions (the behavior of Buddhists) (Stepanyants 2008, 157).

Founded in 1930, Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a global, community-based Buddhist organization grounded on Nichiren Buddhism's philosophy of life, which adheres to a Buddhist humanism and holds the dignity of life as its cornerstone. In just a few decades, SGI has expanded from Japan to 192 countries and regions, establishing a global religious presence. This

achievement, which has few precedents in the history of Buddhism, has been made possible by SGI members who are active in various countries, and in most cases are not full-time members, but active contributors to the well-being and prosperity of their communities.

In August 1962, SGI began promoting its teachings in Taiwan, and officially became a legally incorporated organization in 1990. Taiwan Soka Association (TSA) continues to promote educational, cultural, and peaceful exchange activities, built upon the humanistic philosophy of Buddhism. So far, TSA has received the “Executive Yuan Award,” the “National Award for Public Welfare Contribution by Social Organizations” 21 times, and the “Religious Public Welfare Award” by the Ministry of the Interior 18 times.

At the same time, TSA has also contributed to social harmony by actively promoting educational, cultural, and peaceful activities with the concept of building a society based on education. As a result, since 1994, TSA has been awarded by the Ministry of Education the “Social Education Public Service Award” 8 times, the “Arts Education Contribution Award” in 2017, the “Social Education Contribution Award” in 2019, and the “Arts and Business Award” by the Ministry of Culture 4 times.

This article first discusses the impact of TSA’s educational activities on the educational aspects of character and life education on students, youth, and society in Taiwan. The paper also addresses TSA’s cultural activities and the impacts of its campaigns for “Cultural Literacy.” In addition, the paper examines TSA’s peace movement, and its promotion of a “Peaceful Society.”

SGI’s Views on Education

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), the first President of Soka Gakkai, founded a system of “value-creating pedagogy,” which emphasized that the purpose of education is the happiness of children. For Makiguchi, education must achieve the growth and development of children in a “happy life.” The philosophical concept of “happy life” is the core of education as proposed by American educator, John Dewey (1859–1952). He believed that education should be implemented in real life, so that citizens can grow up and be happy to contribute to peace and development of society, and create value.

James Garrison, former President of the John Dewey Society, observed that SGI's Soka education is consistent with Dewey's philosophy of education, which insists on the fundamental goal of a "student-centered" and holistic development. He emphasized that the dignity of life is the most noble and universal wisdom, and that "reverence for life pervades the mission of Soka Gakkai" (Garrison, Hickman, and Ikeda 2014, 2 and 4).

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda stated that,

Based on unwavering confidence in the limitless power of education and through our passionate commitment to the empowerment of youth, SGI will strive to build a sustainable and peaceful global society where all can manifest their inherent dignity (Ikeda 2019, 30).

SGI's Views on Culture

Ikeda also noted that,

What will serve as a fundamental force for taking humanity from this twentieth century of war and ushering in a 21st century of peace? This is a question of gravest consequence for humankind. The answer is the power of culture which links human hearts together across differences of race, nationality and religion. This unifying power of culture represents a brilliant light of hope for all 6 billion members of the human family (Ikeda 1999).

As Ikeda reminisced, Josei Toda (1900–1958), the second President of Soka Gakkai,

often said to young people that everything starts from sincere, heart-to-heart communication. To this end, he believed, it was important to discuss the tales and literatures of one another's countries and promote peaceful, cultural dialogue (Wahid and Ikeda 2015, 34–5).

Ikeda emphasized that,

There are three essential qualities that I think every global citizen should possess: (1) the wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living [beings]; (2) the courage not to fear or deny the difference, but to respect and strive to understand people from different cultures, and to grow from encounters with them; (3) the compassion to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one's immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places (Harding and Ikeda 2013, 221).

SGI's Views on Peace

In his recommendation for the book *The Wisdom of Tolerance: A Philosophy of Generosity and Peace* by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda and the former President of Indonesia Abdurrahman Wahid (1940–2009), Gumilar Rusliwa Somantri, President of the University of Indonesia, wrote that,

Peace is not something we can easily enjoy; it should be the hope of victory and struggle. The war here is not a war with weapons, but a war of ideas. [...] Peace cannot be achieved if we keep emphasizing our differences without opening the windows of our hearts (Somantri 2015, 7 [the recommendation does not appear in the English edition, Wahid and Ikeda 2015]).

Ikeda queried,

How to bring “Civilizational Differences” to “Civilizational Symbiosis” and “Civilizational Dialogue”? How to discover the highest value of “Life”? How to create a universal “Culture of Peace” for humanity? The people of the world should cooperate to create a “New Spiritual Silk Road” (Ikeda and Chang 2010, 171).

In his 2011 Peace Proposal, Ikeda stated,

Each of the world’s seemingly ordinary individuals can be a protagonist in the creation of this new era. Members of SGI are determined to continue working in solidarity and partnership with those who share our aspirations toward the goal of a new global society of peace and co-existence (Ikeda 2011, 17).

Soka Gakkai believes that religion should not be kept at a distance from society, but should be rooted in people’s real life, and adapted to various countries and societies, to produce good citizens who may contribute to social prosperity and world peace.

TSA's Educational Activities

Taiwan Soka Association (TSA) operates in accordance with SGI’s peculiar humanism, and promotion of educational, cultural and peaceful movements. TSA promotes peace, culture, and education activities with the stated aim to accelerate mutual understanding between members of different religions, cultures, and traditions. TSA believes that this is the foundation for the construction of a peaceful and symbiotic society. It states that the purpose of these activities is not proselytization but contributing to the creation of a society based on the consciousness that human beings are inherently religious.

TSA has organized education-related activities for students, youth, and the general public, which have been generally well-received. It has devoted substantial energies to activities for students and teachers. Some examples follow.

TSA's Summer Camp

In January 2000, the year after Taiwan's 921 earthquake, TSA formed the "921 Disaster Service Team" to serve throughout the disaster area. For the next twenty years, TSA has expanded its care to indigenous tribes, rural areas, outlying islands, and fishing villages. Soka youth have designed lively programs that teach and entertain children, inciting them to care for the people and things around them. In addition, TSA holds its "Fun Summer Vacation" family activity every summer at Soka Cultural Centers throughout Taiwan. In July 2016, for the first time, TSA sent university students to Tainan, Taichung, and Taitung as service teams to hold the "Future Division Members Fun Summer Camp."

Seminars for Middle- and High-School Students

To nurture young people to become a new force for peace, TSA regularly holds the "Junior High School Leaders Seminar" and the "Phoenix Seminar," which try to be both informative and fun, as well as the "Junior High School Fun Growth Camp" and the "High School Young Learners Camp," which are held throughout Taiwan in the summer. This activity attracts tens of thousands of junior high and high school students every year. In particular, the Soka teachers' department has designed the "Happy Learning" lessons on natural sciences, English, and mathematics, whose aim is to lead students to experience "the joy of learning."

Seminars for College Students

To nurture leaders for the 21st century, TSA holds annual events such as the university division's "Eagle Conference," the "Graduate Division Seminar," and the "Academic Division Seminar." After more than four months of preparation, members of more than 100 universities and graduate student associations across the country plan performances and informative exhibitions on topics such as nature, education, human rights, economy, sustainable development, and international exchanges. The "Rock for Peace Contest" was held in May 2016 at

various Soka Cultural Centers to demonstrate Soka youth's determination to contribute to world peace.

Soka SDGs × Seeds of Hope and Action Exhibition

The world is now facing global challenges such as climate change, wealth inequality, and trade conflicts. In 2015, the United Nations released the “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs), hoping to improve human life with 17 specific targets and actions. For this purpose, TSA has organized the “Soka SDGs × Seeds of Hope and Action” exhibition from April to September 2021. TSA thus promotes SDGs with the aim of inspiring Taiwanese to share their concern for a sustainable future through a diverse and interactive content.

Educational Seminars

To build an educated society and create what it calls an era of “universal wisdom,” TSA also holds “Smart Life Seminars” at Soka Cultural Centers around the country. The topics cover medicine, laws, environmental protection, arts and culture, parent-child education, higher education, fire safety, and others. In addition, TSA regularly organizes activities to educate members and expand knowledge by inviting speakers from different areas, mainly medicine and education. For example, Doctor Shih-Jen Chen, Director of VitreoRetina, Department of Ophthalmology, Taipei Veterans General Hospital, and the Chairperson of Taiwan Retina Society, lectured on “macular degeneration.” On July 21, 2018. Doctor Bo-Li Wei, Deputy Dean of Medical Affairs, Taipei Municipal Wan Fang Hospital, gave a medical lecture on “New Opportunities for Gastrointestinal Health Through New Innovation in Medicine” on September 9, 2017.

Academic Exchange Activities

Hoping that the entire society will devote more effort to the good cause of education, and to create platform for education involving academic institutions and the public, TSA, in addition to organizing and participating in academic seminars, following suggestions by Ikeda has donated various educational books published by SGI to schools at all levels and to libraries around the country. At the same time, various academic exchanges have been held as follows.

(a) TSA representatives participated in the “9th International Symposium on Daisaku Ikeda’s Thoughts on Civil Diplomacy and the Integration of Civilizations,” co-organized by Soka University and Nankai University in Tianjin, Mainland China, on October 22–23, 2016.

(b) Chienkuo Technology University and TSA co-organized the “2017 International Symposium on Holistic Education” on May 19, 2017. Scholars from 10 colleges including Soka University and Maejo University presented 20 papers to discuss the meaning and practice of “holistic education.”

(c) The “Daisaku Ikeda Research Center” of Chinese Culture University held the “12th International Forum for the Study of Daisaku Ikeda’s Peaceful Thought” on March 2, 2018. More than 30 scholars and experts from Soka University and Konan University presented their research papers on the topic of “Starting the Popular Trend Toward the Age of Human Rights.”

(d) The Daisaku Ikeda Research Center’s “6th International Youth Forum” was held in the Chinese Culture University “XiaoFeng Memorial Hall” on December 1, 2018. Students from 12 universities presented 15 research papers, and more than 200 young students discussed Ikeda’s philosophy and his ideas about peace.

Soka Educational Consultation Office

Applying the Soka education philosophy aiming at the “happiness of children,” TSA has organized various initiatives on education. In 1995, TSA gathered educators from all over Taiwan who teach below the high school level, and established the “Teachers’ Division.” In 2010, under the initiative of Professor Kuen-Huei Liu, a leading psychological counselor in Taiwan, TSA set up “Educational Consultation Offices” in Soka Cultural Centers around the island. The offices provide educational consultation services for Soka members and their children. Since 2012, the Teachers’ Division has been promoting a campaign to encourage Soka teachers to keep a daily record of their educational practices, to share their experiences of growing up and encouraging their students, and to realize the Soka philosophy of “education for the happiness of children.”

Impact of TSA's Educational Activities

What has been the impact of TSA's activities in the field of education? We can distinguish between the impact on students and on society at large. TSA provides "Summer Camps" to motivate young students to discover their potential and to nurture every child to become a "one in a thousand" talented person and create a happy life. TSA holds "Young Geniuses of the 21st Century" to help students in different universities to become conscious about their mission, and to grow into outstanding individuals who can contribute to the society. Based on different platforms for education between academic institutions and the public, universities' students also deepened their knowledge of educational philosophy and holistic education through the "International Youth Forum," the "International Forum for the study of Daisaku Ikeda's Peaceful Thought," and the "International Symposium on Holistic Education."

More broadly, based on its "Smart Life Seminars," TSA creates a new environment where many Taiwanese may acquire new knowledge and different perspectives in fields such as medicine, law, environmental protection, children education, and so on. Not only SGI members but also the persons they invite attend TSA's different seminars and acquire new knowledge and professional skills. Students from universities benefit from TSA's academic exchange activities, which helps the cultural growth of Taiwanese society in general.

TSA's Cultural Activities

SGI believes that culture is a manifestation of humanity, and that to create a culture of excellence people must first cultivate the human spirit and life, and cultivate a rich soil of humanity. TSA regards cultural exchanges as religious missions, and has set up arts centers throughout the country, inviting world-renowned cultural or music groups to perform in Taiwan. TSA brings arts into the lives of ordinary people, and tries to create an ideal land not only of "rich and polite" but also of "rich and beautiful." It has organized a number of cultural activities for students, youth, and the general public.

TSA's Art Series Exhibitions

The development of art in Taiwan over the past hundred years has been diversified and enriched by its special historical background and regional communities. With the stated aims to explore the historical traces of this period, to let art penetrate into the community, and to raise the importance of culture in Taiwanese society, TSA has used “Finding the Cultural Roots: Constructing the Centennial History of Taiwan Art” as a curatorial axis since 2003. TSA researches and promotes artists who have contributed to Taiwan's art history. It operates nine art centers in northern, central, and southern Taiwan to hold different exhibitions.

Soka International Performance

Ikeda founded Min-On to socialize the enjoyment of music, which he believed should not be limited to some upper classes only. In the footsteps of Ikeda, in March 1988, TSA established the “Soka Cultural and Educational Foundation.” In March 1989, with the help of Japan's “Min-On Concert Association,” TSA held its first classical concert at the National Concert Hall and invited the renowned Japanese conductor Tezuka Yukinori (1940–2020) and soprano Chiu Yu-Lan, with the well-known musician Qin Zhao as the host. Over the past 30 years, TSA has invited world class performing arts groups from Japan, Mexico, Canada, Peru, Argentina, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Panama, Russia, Brazil, Spain, South Korea, India, and other countries to perform in Taiwan. The variety of performances include concerts, recitals, and dances. They became a major feature of TSA's cultural exchanges. In addition to the performances by professional groups from abroad, the well-known domestic Taiwanese opera group, Ming Hwa Yuan Arts & Cultural Group, was invited to perform in Japan in November 1995, and received enthusiastic response from Japanese audiences. Since 2001, TSA has extended those international performances to western towns of Taiwan and the eastern regions of Yilan and Hualien.

Concert Mobile

In addition to stage performances, to expose students to the arts and inspire their minds through music, TSA has cooperated with international groups that performed in Taiwan to hold Concert Mobile on school campuses. They bring

different cultures from around the world to campuses, and allow students to get close to first-class performing artists, to enrich their minds and expand their international perspective.

International Special Exhibitions

In addition to a series of art exhibitions, TSA has presented many international and large-scale exhibitions rarely seen in Taiwan.

(a) “Gandhi, King, Ikeda: The Legacy of Building Peace.” To build a mutually respectful and harmonious society, with the support of Dr. Martin Luther King’s (1929–1968) alma mater, Morehouse College, and TSA, the exhibition was presented successively at Taichung City Council, Yilan County Council, Changhua County Government, and 15 universities, including National Chengchi University, Chung Hsing University, Sun Yat-Sen University, and others, from 2004 to 2010.

(b) “The Building Culture of Peace for the Children of the World Exhibition.” In 2007, TSA held Community Friendship Culture Festivals across the country while showing “The Building Culture of Peace for the Children of the World Exhibition.” The exhibition was aimed at raising public awareness of the importance of children’s happiness, and to spread it to all corners of society. The exhibition had four themes: “Origin,” “Children’s Dreams for Peace,” “What Is Peace?” and “What Can We Do to Create a Culture of Peace?” It was displayed in elementary and high schools and government agencies all over the country, and was received with great acclaim.

(c) The “Transforming the Human Spirit” Exhibition. Persuaded that the only way to realize world peace is through transforming the human spirit, SGI planned exhibitions on themes such as “Human Security,” “Transforming the Human Spirit,” and “Abolition of Nuclear Weapons,” also highlighting problems of domestic violence, child abuse, crime, and harsh verbal abuse that surround our lives. The exhibition “Transforming the Human Spirit” has been exhibited in New York, at the United Nations in Geneva, at Stanford University, and elsewhere. Since May 2008, with the direct support of Ikeda, the exhibition has been exhibited in Taiwan at more than 50 universities, including National Taiwan University, National Chengchi University, National Taiwan Normal University, and National Tsing Hua University. Since February 2009, the “Transforming the

Human Spirit” exhibition reached more than 1,000 schools at all levels throughout Taiwan.

Cross-Strait Artistic and Cultural Exchanges

(a) “Zhaoqing’s Treasure: The Exhibition of Duan Inkstone in Contemporary China.” TSA, Zhaoqing Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, Film, TV, Press and Publication, Zhaoqing Duan Inkstone Association, and Zhaoqing Municipal Museum co-organized “Zhaoqing’s Treasure: The Exhibition of Duan Inkstone in Contemporary China,” which was inaugurated on July 3, 2013. Duan inkstone produced in Zhaoqing, the capital of inkstone in China located in the province of Guangdong, is famous for its long history, excellent stone quality, and exquisite carving. It has been revered as the first of the four famous inkstones since the Song Dynasty. The exhibition had a record attendance.

(b) The “Children’s Drawing Exhibition After the Disasters.” To commemorate the 15th anniversary of the 921 earthquake, TSA, the government of Taiwan, and China National Children’s Center co-organized the “Children’s Drawing Exhibition After the Disasters” and the “Seeds of Hope” exhibition on September 20, 2014. The exhibition featured 94 drawings by children from the Wenchuan, Sichuan, earthquake disaster areas.

Youth Cultural Teams

For half a century, TSA has devoted substantial efforts to build several youth cultural teams, mostly in the field of music.

(a) Tianshi Fifes and Drums Corps. Founded on July 22, 1977, Tianshi Fifes and Drums Corps was given the motto “As bright as the sun and as clear as the moon” by Ikeda. It is dedicated to foster young women who love music and dance. Since 2006, the Corps has been invited to participate in the Chiayi City International Band Festival street parade for ten consecutive years. In 2009, the corps participated in the team marching drill for the first time.

(b) Tiangu Wind Orchestra / Tiangu Hope Wind Orchestra. The wind orchestra was founded on August 24, 1986. The members are devoted to the mission of “boosting the morale of the Bodhisattvas of the earth and expanding *kosen-rufu* [i.e., world peace through individual happiness, or through spreading the peaceful teachings of the Buddha] playing the fanfare of victory and bringing

courage and hope to people.” Tiangu Hope Wind Orchestra was founded in July 2017.

(c) Pacific Ocean Chorus. The chorus was founded on May 3, 2001, and has been invited to Singapore, Malaysia, and Peking University through exchange programs. It performed Ludwig van Beethoven’s (1770–1827) ninth symphony *Ode to Joy* at the Renaissance Concert of the 15th Anniversary of the 921 Earthquake in Nantou in 2014, hoping that the joyful voice of youth might comfort the hearts of the victims and contribute to reconstruction.

(d) Soka Victory Orchestra. To celebrate the opening of TSA’s Taoyuan Culture Center, Soka Victory Orchestra (SVO) was formed on July 3, 2011.

Impact of TSA’s Cultural Activities

TSA has invited international performing art groups from 15 countries to present over 200 performances in 15 cities throughout Taiwan, literally bringing culture to every corner of Taiwan’s cities and countryside. Based on the campaign “Finding the Cultural Roots,” TSA motivates and encourages famous artists to exhibit in TSA’s art centers. These exhibitions are aimed at creating “arts in the community” and “cultural literacy.” The number of visitors has exceeded 100,000 within the short “international special exhibition period.” The exhibitions became major events in the art world in Taiwan.

TSA brings international performance groups to hold “Concert Mobile” on different campuses and locations, including elementary and high schools. The students have the opportunity to enrich their understanding of art and extend their international culture and vision to different countries. From “The Children’s Drawing Exhibition After the Disasters,” many children learned how to react with optimism and determination when facing disasters, depict their dreams and hopes for the future, and send positive energy to adults to overcome adversity and difficulties. TSA created different “Youth Cultural Teams” in different musical areas. Training and performances helped the young people involved to develop leadership abilities and confidence in the future.

TSA's Peace Activities

As a member of SGI, TSA holds the humanistic belief that peace is not far away, and should be built in our communities and our hearts. Several activities have developed this theme.

Cross-Strait Exchanges

Cross-Strait exchanges with Mainland China are “non-governmental exchanges” and “peace movement exchanges.”

(a) Cross-Strait University Student Exchange. Face-to-face communication is a bridge to break down prejudices and remove cultural barriers. In 1998, TSA began to participate in cross-strait university student exchange visits. Taiwan's Soka Youths have travelled to Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, Hangzhou, and Harbin. They have also hosted in Taiwan students from Peking University, Tsinghua University, Xi'an Jiaotong University, and Shihezi University. Since 1999, there have been more than 10 exchange visits between Peking University, the leading academic institution in China, and TSA. On July 16, 2005, at the invitation of Peking University, TSA's Pacific Chorus performed with Peking University Art Ensemble at Peking University's Centennial Lecture Hall under the theme of “Listening to Voices from Taiwan.” In December of the same year, the President of Peking University, Xu Zhi-Hong, led the Peking University Art Ensemble to visit Taiwan. Under the arrangement of TSA, President Xu visited National Taiwan University, National Tsing Hua University, National Sun Yat-Sen University, National Chung Hsing University, and Chinese Culture University. President Xu, who is internationally renowned in the field of plant biology, also gave a lecture at National Taiwan University. Since then, Peking University and TSA's undergraduate and graduate students have visited each other several times.

(b) Cross-Strait Peace Angels Exchange Activities. In 1994, on the recommendation of Ministry of the Interior, TSA began to actively participate in Cross-Strait Peace Angels Exchange Activities. On December 18 of that year, TSA held a Cross-Strait Peace Angels Hand-printing event at Daan Park, made a “Declaration of Cross-Strait Peace for the New Century,” formed host families, held a welcome party, and had a joyful exchange with the little angels from various ethnic groups in Mainland China. The Cross-Strait Peace Angels Exchange Event

continued until 2012, and is known as the longest-running, youngest, and most far-reaching youth and children exchange activity across the Taiwan Strait.

(c) Cross-Strait-Care for the Next Generation Growth Forum. In 2010, the Work Committee of Care for the Next Generations held Cross-Strait-Care for the Next Generation Growth Forum, and invited TSA to participate. For the last six years, the forum has invited Cross-Strait education experts and schoolteachers to participate with the themes of “Caring for the Healthy Growth of Cross-Strait Youth,” “Family Education and Social Co-Education,” and “Cross-Strait Pre-School Education Exchange.” TSA sends more than 10 members of the Teachers’ Division every year to attend exchanges, hold seminars, give presentations, and publish papers. TSA has provided to exchange participants from Mainland China a detailed introduction to Taiwan’s family education, school education, social education, and educational counseling.

International Peaceful Exchanges

In keeping with the belief of SGI’s first President, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who saw the 21st century as the century of peaceful humane exchanges, TSA has actively engaged in international exchanges with SGI members from other countries. Since 1988, the Youth Division has participated in the World Youth Seminar. In 1995, TSA’s members went to Europe to participate in the 35th Anniversary Seminar of Kosen-Rufu. Since then, TSA has regularly sent training groups to Tokyo for exchanges. TSA has also conducted exchange visits with SGI members in Japan, Okinawa, Singapore, and Malaysia. On September 27, 2020, in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of World Peace Day on October 2, SGI held an online World Youth Division Conference for SGI’s youth members from 192 countries and regions around the world, including TSA, with more than 15,000 young people participating.

Social Peace Activities

Community Friendship Culture Festival. Community is a microcosm of society, and world peace begins with the community that is closest to people’s lives. Since 2003, TSA has organized the Community Friendship Culture Festival in various regions of Taiwan, in which various exhibitions have taught the benefits of living in harmony with nature and valuing the dignity of life. In

addition to the static exhibitions, community organizations are invited to participate in performances, spreading the message through music and dance (Taiwan Soka Association 2016).

Disaster Relief

TSA is committed to caring humanism, and has actively engaged in social care initiatives, not only to provide warmth to the underprivileged, but also to assist in major disasters, both domestically and internationally, in the spirit of “love others as you love yourself.” Typhoon Herb in 1996, the 921 Earthquake in 1999, Typhoon Toraji and Typhoon Nari in 2001, Typhoon Mindulle in 2004, the 612 flood in 2005, the Meinong Flood in 2007, Typhoon Megi in 2010, and Typhoon Saola in 2012 all caused major disasters. TSA members immediately set up Disaster Relief Command Centers in the disaster areas to work on the ground and carry out various disaster relief and reconstruction work. TSA also donated disaster relief funds, and carried out disaster relief work.

In July 2014, TSA held nearly 1,000 blessing ceremonies throughout Taiwan to pray for the victims of the Penghu air disaster. When the petrochemical gas explosion occurred in Kaohsiung in August of the same year, TSA immediately set up a Disaster Relief Command Center and launched a humanitarian care and material donation campaign to fully support the recovery efforts in the disaster areas.

The then Minister of the Interior, Jiang Yi-Huah, gave TSA high praise, stating “After 88 flood devastated Taiwan, the humanitarian power of TSA inspires hope and peace for the community. In the society of confused and troubled values, this is what we need most, the power of positive community groups (Taiwan Soka Association 2018a).”

Charity Performances

Based on the spirit of “Expand the respect of the elderly in one’s family to these in other families, and expand the love of the young ones in one’s family to these in other families,” TSA’s cultural teams, such as Bainiao Chorus, the Voice of Rainbow Chorus, Young Phoenix Chorus, Xiongshi Chorus, New Century Chorus, Ziyanghua Dance Company, and Chen-fong String Orchestra, perform charity performances every holiday at the Senior Citizens’ Homes and Children’s Homes set up by the Ministry of the Interior. TSA’s cultural teams have also

performed in Ren-ai Senior Citizens' Homes set up by county governments since 2004. Team members use their voice to celebrate the holidays with the elderly and seniors.

In addition to charity performances, Daisaku Ikeda's books were presented to the Southern Region Senior Citizens Home by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. On September 28, 2012, after Xiongfeng Chorus held a charity performance, the Southern Region Senior Citizens' Home Director Xiao Ming-Hui acknowledged that "TSA not only brings beautiful music, but also spiritual encouragement to senior persons. Thank you and thank you again for your selfless contributions," he said (Taiwan Soka Association 2018b).

Impact of TSA's Peace Activities

Cross-Strait Exchanges have created pioneering young people who are committed to Cross-Strait peace, and strong friendships based on respect and willingness to learn from each other. Through the international peaceful exchanges, TSA's youth members learn the importance of world peace and how to create a peaceful environment. Seeds of peace are thus planted in the heart of every TSA's youth members.

Through the "Community Friendship Culture Festival," citizens learn about community features in culture, education, environmental protection, and social peace. In addition, based on those festivals, different communities create platforms for peace communication between the government and the public. With the work of TSA's "Disaster Relief," people in disaster areas are encouraged and motivated to face psychological stress and trauma with courage, and to move towards a peaceful life in the long-run. From TSA's "Charity Performances," senior citizens and children experienced love and spiritual protection.

Conclusion

TSA holds its educational activities to realize the Soka philosophy of "education for the happiness" and "quality of humanism." TSA organizes a number of cultural activities to create "cultural literacy" and "beautiful life" for

the Taiwanese. In addition, TSA devotes great efforts to peace activities to realize in Taiwan a “peaceful society” and “peaceful humanity.”

On the eve of bidding farewell to a 20th Century of wars and revolutions, Viktor Antonovich Sadovnichiy, the rector of Moscow State University, and Daisaku Ikeda agreed that the 21st century should move from competition to co-creation and that the premise of global civilization is multi-ethnic co-existence and peace. For that reason, the first and foremost meaning of religion must be peacemaking (Ikeda and Sadovnichiy 2002).

SGI’s movement for education, culture, and peace follows the humanistic philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism, and engages in down-to-earth dialogue. These projects have been carried out in Taiwan for nearly 60 years.

In the past, the image of Buddhism in Taiwan mostly referred to the inner spiritual world of personal faith. TSA contributed to change this image through lively education, culture, and peace movements, proving the social relevance of Buddhism. The contributions of TSA have also been constantly recognized by the Taiwan government in the form of awards and commendations.

TSA communicates with other religious groups in Taiwan, and invites them to cooperate in its projects, which thus are also tools for the interreligious dialogue.

More fieldwork would be needed to assess how these activities change the life of TSA members and those who cooperate with them. This may be the theme of additional research to be carried out in the future.

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