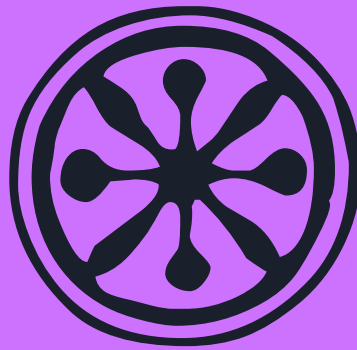

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Soka Gakkai in Italy: Periphery or Center?

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ABSTRACT: Theories of mainstreaming argue that all religious groups are born at the periphery and, if successful, slowly move to center. The article distinguishes between institutional mainstreaming, i.e., the official recognition of a religious movement, and social mainstreaming, i.e., its acceptance as a legitimate religion by the majority of citizens. Soka Gakkai's institutional mainstreaming has been completed in Italy, while its social mainstreaming continues to meet with oppositions.

KEYWORDS: Mainstreaming, Religious Mainstream, Retrenchment, Soka Gakkai, Buddhism in Italy, Anti-Cult Movement.

Two Forms of Mainstreaming: Legal and Social

In their classic 1992 book *The Churching of America*, sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark use as their starting point that no religion is “mainstream” when it is created. All religions start at the periphery of the religious field, and are criticized as “marginal” or “cults” by those who are in the center. Successful religions engage in a journey from periphery to center, called “mainstreaming.” “Winners,” Finke and Stark said, successfully complete the mainstreaming process. “Losers” remain in the periphery, or disappear (Finke and Stark 1992).

There are no exceptions to this rule. Christianity was originally regarded as a marginal “cult” in the Roman Empire, and persecuted as such (Stark 1996). The expression *xie jiao*, often translated as “evil cults” but in fact meaning “heterodox teachings,” still used in China to indicate banned groups such as Falun Gong, was

coined in the early Middle Ages by Tang courtier Fu Yi (554–639) to designate Buddhism in general (Wu 2016, 8–9).

Finke and Stark's theory of mainstreaming inspired another well-known book of religious sociology published in 1994, *The Angel and the Beehive*, by Mormon sociologist Armand Mauss (1928–2020). Mauss noted that, while religious movements in general regard mainstreaming as desirable, there are some that resist it. If the mainstreaming process advances too quickly, Mauss also claimed, "traditionalist" resistances will appear both at the grassroots level, determining schisms, and within the leadership, which may consciously pause the journey toward the mainstream and promote a "retrenchment" (Mauss 1994).

Another factor to consider is that mainstreaming does not occur in a vacuum. Several forces may try to oppose or slow down the mainstreaming process: governments, religions that have already reached the mainline and fear competition, and those who do not like the group that is about to reach the mainstream, for whatever reason. The anti-cult movement is one example of a lobby actively trying to prevent new religious movements from joining the mainstream.

Governments, of course, can also speed up the mainstreaming process by granting to once marginal groups some sort of official recognition. However, the media and the public opinion may be slow in accepting this recognition, evidencing that there is not only one, but two different mainstreaming processes. The first is institutional, the second is social. A religion is institutionally mainstreamed when it achieves the same level of legal recognition enjoyed by older religions that are already considered as part of the mainstream. But, independently of the legal recognition, a religion is socially mainstreamed only when the public opinion, in turn shaped by the media, regards it as mainstream.

That the two processes, legal and social, are independent was recognized in Italy by the Supreme Court of Cassation in a landmark 1997 decision granting legal recognition as a religion to the Church of Scientology. The Supreme Court acknowledged that the majority of both the public opinion and the media in Italy might not regard Scientology as a "genuine" or "legitimate" religion. But it also declared that the public opinion should not guide the courts, which should use different criteria, including regarding as more authoritative than the beliefs of a misinformed majority the opinions of credentialed scholars who have published about a certain religion (Corte Suprema di Cassazione 1997).

Legal Mainstreaming in Italy

Legal mainstreaming may be achieved either by repeatedly obtaining favorable verdicts from courts of law, or by following the procedures for recognition that some national laws offer. The second was the case of Soka Gakkai in Italy.

The Italian post-Fascist Constitution uses the word “Concordat,” with a capital C, only for the agreement with the Holy See, which Italy and the Vatican signed in 1929 and amended in 1984. Sometimes, we hear it called a “Concordat with the Catholic Church,” but this is technically wrong. The Catholic Church in Italy, represented by its bishops (and in 1984 by their Bishops’ Conference), was not a part of the Concordat. The latter is an international treaty between two sovereign states, Italy and the Holy See. This has important legal consequences. As an international treaty, it can only be litigated in international courts, as any other treaty. How relevant this is emerged this year when the Holy See informed Italy that a law that was being discussed in the Parliament limiting the liberty of all Italians, including bishops, priests, and nuns, to produce statements that can be interpreted as inciting discrimination against LGBTQ persons would be against the Concordat and open Italy to international litigation (*Adnkronos* 2021).

As opposite to the only Concordat, the Constitution calls “Intese,” a word also translated into English as “concordats,” but with a small c, the agreements the Italian State may stipulate with other religions. They are negotiated and signed by the government, but come into force only after having been ratified by the Parliament. Unlike the Concordat with the Holy See, they are agreements between the Italian state and associations of Italian citizens, governed by Italian domestic law.

Whether there is a legal right for religions that technically qualify for one to enter into an “Intesa” with Italy is a matter raised in 2016 before the European Court of Human Rights by the largest single religious minority organization in Italy, the Jehovah’s Witnesses (there are more Muslims and Eastern Orthodox, but they do not belong to a single organization). The case is still pending (see questions sent to the parties by the European Court of Human Rights on November 3, 2019: European Court of Human Rights 2019). Two different governments signed “Intese” with the Jehovah’s Witnesses in 2000 and 2007, but the Parliament never scheduled a session to ratify them. The Jehovah’s Witnesses complain that this is because of an attempt by Italy to discriminate

them. Italy counters that there is no “right to the Intesa.” Granting or rejecting an “Intesa” is a political decision on which both the government and the Parliament should concur. The size or the social influence of a religion are not factors guaranteeing that an “Intesa” will be signed and ratified, Italy argues, and political decisions are not justiciable. Islam is the largest religious minority in Italy, and does not have an “Intesa” either.

The case of the Jehovah’s Witnesses shows that size in itself does not lead to institutional mainstreaming. Certainly, members of the Parliament consider how many voters are involved, and Jehovah’s Witnesses are a special case since the answer to this question is “zero.” Jehovah’s Witnesses do not vote in the elections for theological reasons. But tiny groups such as the Lutherans have had their “Intesa” signed and ratified, while larger groups did not.

Not having an “Intesa” in Italy creates a discrimination for taxpayers who are religious believers. In Italy, when filing their tax returns, taxpayers should choose to whom they want that 0.8% of their taxes will be given by the tax office. They may choose the Catholic Church, one of the religions with “Intesa” (except those who have opted out of this system), or a state fund, which will use the money for cultural or social activities. This is often mistaken as a clone of the German system, but it isn’t. In Germany, taxpayers who do not indicate an option for their religious tax keep the money in their pockets. This is not the case in Italy. In fact, most citizens do not indicate an option but they should pay this part of their taxes anyway.

Many Italians believe that, if they fail to indicate an option, 0.8% of their taxes will go to the state fund by default. This is also not the case. 0.8% of their taxes will be divided between the Catholic Church, the state fund, and the religions with the Intesa (except, again, those that opted out either of the 0.8% system in general or of the division of the money of the taxpayers who did not indicate an option). How will it be divided? The answer is, considering how many of those who did choose chose each participant organization. In a simple example, let’s assume that there are twenty taxpayers. Ten indicate an option, five for the Catholic Church, three for the state fund, one for the Lutherans and one for the Jews. Ten leave the form blank. 0.8% of the taxes of those who left the form blank will be levied anyway by the tax office and divided. Fifty percent will go to the Catholic Church, because 50% of those who did make a choice opted for the

Catholic Church, thirty percent to the state fund, ten percent to the Lutherans, and ten percent to the Jews.

An interesting question is why the Italian government and Parliament signed and ratified certain “Intese” but not others. The size of a religion is a factor, but more important is what is perceived as its positive contribution to society. Their “separatism” (rightly or wrongly interpreted) played against the Jehovah’s Witnesses. I was myself a member of one of the governmental commissions that entered into a dialogue with Italian Muslims. One reason why this did not lead to an “Intesa” is that Italian Muslims quarreled between themselves, and never managed to have a single organization or body that might reasonably claim to represent the majority of them. Another was 9/11 and the fact that some political parties, for their own reasons, cultivated the popular hostility to Islam, and claimed that Italian Islam had not been able to marginalize its radical or fundamentalist elements.

The “Intesa” with Soka Gakkai: 2015–2016

This context was necessary to explain the meaning of the “Intesa” between the Italian government and Soka Gakkai, which was signed on June 27, 2015, and ratified unanimously by the Parliament through law no. 130 of June 28, 2016.

An “Intesa,” as mentioned earlier, certifies that a religion has been institutionally mainstreamed in Italy. “Intese” are limited in number (only twelve have been ratified so far) and, in more than one sense, make the religious groups a trusted partner of the state.

Certainly, the size of Soka Gakkai was considered. In 2021, Soka Gakkai has 94,000 members in Italy, almost half of the 208,000 Italian Buddhists. No other Italian Buddhist group approaches the size of Soka Gakkai, including those that are part of the Italian Buddhist Union (UBI). Soka Gakkai is not a part of UBI, which has its separate “Intesa” with the state.

As we have seen, size alone would not be enough. The unanimous approval of the “Intesa” by the Parliament meant that Soka Gakkai was both visible and trusted. Many Parliamentarians had been personally involved in its humanitarian and peace activities, including its campaigns against nuclear weapons. Media emphasized that celebrities are among the members of Soka Gakkai, including

actors, singers, and football players. Personally, I believe that even more important was the fact that several Italian MPs had met Soka Gakkai members engaged in leading roles in humanitarian and charitable activities they were familiar with. This cooperation continued, and in 2020 Soka Gakkai announced during the COVID-19 crisis that it will transfer the 0.8 percent money it will receive to projects supporting the efforts against COVID-19 and its social consequences, including one managed by the Catholic Community of Saint Egidio (*Il Mattino* 2020).

Italian media were overwhelmingly favorable to the “Intesa.” They mentioned the celebrities who had joined Soka Gakkai, but also what one of the main Italian wire agencies, *AGI*, called its “extraordinary message of peace” (*AGI* 2016).

The Social Mainstreaming of Soka Gakkai and Its Opponents

When the “Intesa” was signed and ratified, there were some dissenting voices too. Perhaps the most negative article was published by the Italian version of the *Huffington Post*, and signed by reporters Gianni Del Vecchio and Stefano Pitrelli (Del Vecchio and Pitrelli 2015).

The article, however, had a prehistory. In 2011, the two reporters had published a book, *Occulto Italia* (Occult Italy), where they presented an analysis of the presence of new religious movements in Italy inspired by the usual clichés of the anti-cult ideology. More than other anti-cult books, the volume focused on the fact that some members of what they called “cults,” including Soka Gakkai, were active in politics. Leaders of Roman Catholic lay organizations have also been active in Italian politics, and became cabinet ministers or governors of regions, but for whatever reason Del Vecchio and Pitrelli saw the fact that citizens belonging to Soka Gakkai and other religious minorities were also active in political parties as a sinister “infiltration” of the institutions (Del Vecchio and Pitrelli 2011).

The book was full of innuendo and inaccurate information about religious minorities, and academics reacted. In 2012, veteran sociologist Luigi Berzano edited *Credere è reato?* (Is Believing a Crime?), which collected critical articles about *Occulto Italia*. Rather than a “cultist,” Berzano is a Roman Catholic priest,

and the book was published by one of the oldest and most well-known Italian Catholic publishers (Berzano 2012).

In 2018, the campaign of *Occulto Italia* was revamped by another couple of journalists, Flavia Piccinni and Carmine Gazzanni, with the book *Nella setta* (In the Cult: Piccinni and Gazzanni 2018). Concerning Soka Gakkai it was, if anything, even more aggressive. It repeated old stories on how the leader of Soka Gakkai, the internationally respected Daisaku Ikeda, had allegedly consorted with criminals and Japanese mafia godfathers, ignoring the fact that these tall tales had been debunked in Japan decades ago.

Nella setta is more readable than *Occulto Italia*, but equally full of inaccurate information (Introvigne 2019a). Both books were quickly dismissed by scholars of new religious movements, but their authors appeared often in Italian printed media and television. Sensational claims about “cults” always make for good copy. Soka Gakkai was particularly targeted by these campaigns. Why?

A first answer is that sometimes personal stories do have an unpredictable influence on larger events. A gentleman who was once a Soka Gakkai member, and left in troubled circumstances, became one of the most vocal Italian critics of “cults,” and the president of a tiny association, AIVS (Italian Association of Victims of Cults), which evolved from a group of “victims of Soka Gakkai.” AIVS uses an extreme language, and it is difficult to take seriously its criticism of Soka Gakkai, which is mostly a collection of insults. Nor is it possible to have a polite discussion with its president. After I explained on Facebook how and why in a scholarly conference I co-promoted in 2019 at the University of Turin a session on the book *Nella setta* was organized, I got as an answer from the official account of AIVS that I am a “filthy motherfucker” and a “son of a bitch,” and an invitation to visit AIVS so that we can “manly punch each other.” One of the messages concluded, “Go back, Introvigne: to the Hell from which you came out” (I preserve screenshots of these posts in my archives).

While AIVS language is a matter of study more for psychiatrists than for scholars of religion, a second reason why folk accusations against Soka Gakkai sometimes appear in the media is the disproportionate presence among reporters of the anti-cult ideology. The ideology that “cults” are different from religions as they convert their members through sinister techniques of “brainwashing” and “mind control” has been debunked by scholars as pseudo-scientific already in the

past century (Anthony 1996; Anthony and Introvigne 2006) but, while supported only by a small minority of academics, is still successful among reporters as a quick, if false, explanation of the success of religious movements they regard as “strange.” USCIRF, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a bipartisan federal commission whose members are designated by the congressional leaders of the two major American parties and appointed by the President, has denounced in 2020 the anti-cult ideology as one of the main international threats to religious liberty (USCIRF 2020). Italian scholar Raffaella Di Marzio has studied an almost stereotypical attempt to apply to Soka Gakkai the faulty anti-cult model of the “cult” (Di Marzio 2018).

A third reason anti-Soka-Gakkai propaganda is promoted, and relayed by some media, in Italy is that anti-cultists and those who publish sensational articles on “cults” need to argue that the “danger of the cults” is widespread. For this reason, they cannot only target small groups, which perhaps commit real crimes but have only a handful of members. To come to a significant total of “cultists,” they have to add the members of large movements such as Soka Gakkai (or the Jehovah’s Witnesses), even if they hardly fit even their own definitions of “cults.”

A fourth reason of the obstacles created to Soka Gakkai’s social mainstreaming is connected with Matteo Renzi, who was the Prime Minister who signed the “Intesa” with Soka Gakkai in 2015. Renzi had been Mayor of Florence, a city where the peace and humanitarian activities of Soka Gakkai are well-known, but anti-cult journalists created a close link between the politician and the Buddhist movement (Del Vecchio and Pitrelli 2015) that never existed. Originally, this was a tool to attack Renzi, but later it became mostly a tool to attack Soka Gakkai.

Renzi is a flamboyant politician. He became Prime Minister of Italy at age 39, and his bold, in-your-face statements and unpredictable political about-faces determined the premature end of this experience, and explain why he has a significant number of enemies. Legends about Renzi are not limited to Soka Gakkai. He is a main target of the American conspiracy movement QAnon, who accuses him of having changed the results of the last American presidential elections, in a conspiracy also involving former U.S. President Barack Obama, through a mysterious machine hosted in Pisa that can send from Italy to the United States impulses able to influence the voting machines through Italian military satellites (Gilbert 2021). Why Renzi did not use the machine to improve the poor electoral performances of his own party in Italy is not explained.

Finally, a fifth reason of the resistances to Soka Gakkai's social mainstreaming in Italy comes from within Soka Gakkai itself. The movement went through a process of mainstreaming in Japan, which sped up when it terminated its relationship with the conservative monastic order Nichiren Shoshu in 1991 (McLaughlin 2019). This converted Nichiren Shoshu and its patriarch Nikken Shonin (1922–2019) into mortal enemies of Soka Gakkai. Although they were able to gather only a small minority of Soka Gakkai members (and a *very* small one in Italy), the followers of Nikken became the main source of slanders against the movement and its President Ikeda internationally.

In Italy, the rapid journey towards the mainstream of Italian society determined a predictable “traditionalist” reaction. For a time, Soka Gakkai in Italy was led by advocates of a “retrenchment” promoting conservative moral and political positions not shared by most members. The internal conflict was solved in 2002 through a reform that led to the appointment of Tamotsu Nakajima as the new general director for Italy. Most of the arch-conservatives remained within the fold, but some defected (Introvigne 2019b). Anti-cultists do not have an exact understanding of the reasons of the Italian problems of 2002, nor of the Japanese split with Nichiren Shoshu in 1991. They are, however, happy to use any criticism of Soka Gakkai and its leadership, without pausing to ask from where it comes and what motivations may explain it.

Soka Gakkai has completed its institutional process of mainstreaming with the “Intesa.” Reading attacks on the Internet and in some sensationalist media, one can have the impression that, on the other hand, Soka Gakkai has still not completed its process of social mainstreaming. This would not be surprising, as the two processes do not necessarily coincide. However, Internet and some media create a games of mirrors. By quoting each other *ad infinitum*, they try to give the impression that “the public opinion” is critical of their targets.

It is true that sustained media and Internet campaigns do influence public opinion. However, what Italians really think of Soka Gakkai should be ascertained through further research and different tools. Despite the opponents, who are vocal but not many, the number of devotees makes more and more frequent that Italians may know Soka Gakkai from the direct contact with a member rather than from a TV program against the “cults” or from the Internet. Thousands of Italians also have a direct experience of Soka Gakkai activities such as the anti-nuclear campaign “Senzatomica.”

Also, institutional mainstreaming is independent from social mainstreaming but, in the end, normally influence it. The most reasonable prediction is that Soka Gakkai will become a permanent feature of the Italian religious landscape, and will remain part of it when its opponents will have long been forgotten.

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**La Maison littéraire de Victor Hugo in Bièvres:
A Shrine of Hugo's Teachings to Buttress Daisaku Ikeda's Project
for the Betterment of Our World**

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ABSTRACT: The Maison littéraire de Victor Hugo in Bièvres, France, is a unique example of a museum nationally recognized for its contribution to the study and understanding of the great French writer, yet founded by a Japanese. The article discusses the origins of the popularity of Hugo in Japan, his meaning for Daisaku Ikeda and Soka Gakkai, and how the museum successfully overcame attempts by anti-cultists to dismiss it as propaganda for a “cult,” and gained national acceptance as a legitimate cultural institution.

KEYWORDS: Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai, Victor Hugo, Victor Hugo in Japan, Maison Littéraire de Victor Hugo, Victor Hugo Museums.

The region to the West of Paris exhibits delightful landscapes along deep valleys and dense royal forests, dotted with quaint traditional towns and villages. It is particularly rich in exceptional monumental venues: if the palace of Versailles is clearly the most impressive, there are many more treasures nestled in the wooded hills. A few kilometers southeast of Versailles is the Maison littéraire de Victor Hugo, housed in the château des Roches, in the middle of a superb park on the sloping bank of the Bièvre river, in the hamlet of Vauboyen, in the commune of Bièvres, in the county of Essonne.

This museum is unique in that it miraculously perpetuates the actual presence in the grounds of the great Victor Hugo (1802–1885) through the devotion of one of his admirers from the other end of the world, Daisaku Ikeda, the president

of the famous Japanese Buddhist movement Soka Gakkai and a man of impressive artistic culture. It is this mysterious operation that I will try to unravel here.

Before presenting the Maison itself, it seems appropriate to start with an investigation into the ways in which Daisaku Ikeda came into contact with the work of Hugo, for even if the poet and novelist was an accomplished spiritualist who could communicate with beings distant in time and space, the connection between the two men is based on less elusive grounds, those of the intellectual exchanges between France and Japan in the late nineteenth century. Ikeda was exposed to Hugo's writings from an early age since Japan is well-known for its extremely favorable reception of the novelist's work. What struck a chord with him was the warm humanism, the charitable universalism, and the spirit of resilience most vibrantly at play in *Les Misérables* and *Ninety-three*.

By offering to purchase, protect, and display rare manuscripts and large collections of the works of Hugo and of some of his contemporaries, Daisaku Ikeda shared Hugo's goal to promote peace through knowledge of the past and education. Finally, we will see how this seemingly modest museum does play out also the politics of museums in general: through their engagement as agents of social betterment, they also perform a variety of subtle political missions on the local and global scales.

My personal appreciation of this precious mansion derives from my having been able to visit it just when it was reopening after the long COVID lockdown. Mr. Philippe Moine, the director, arranged for a long private visit with my family on June 19, 2021. Mr. Stéphane Mahuet was our most informative guide. Mr. Jean-Claude Gaubert, President of the Association culturelle Soka France (ACSF) and Mrs. Masako Moine, in charge of the exhibitions, accompanied us and answered more questions. I thank them all here as well as Mrs. Myriam Giroux, Director of ACSF, and Mr. Yoshiyuki Nagaoka of the Office of International Affairs in Tokyo for making my research possible.

1. Hugo as the Master of Resilience: The Raison d'Être of the Museum

The major theorist of resilience, Boris Cyrulnik, built his analysis on this observation of the survivors of various major traumas. Born in 1937 in a Bordeaux Jewish family, he himself had to hide several times, and miraculously

escaped from the round up that sent neighboring Jews to the camps. He has explained that the victims had to be able to form “bonds and meaning” in order to be healed. Before the term resilience existed, the phenomenon itself had been explored at length by various thinkers and artists, in particular by several nineteenth-century novelists, and probably best by Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables* (1862). It so happens that this was Hugo’s novel that most fascinated readers in Japan, as we shall see below.

The novel is a long social saga, which follows the life itineraries of several powerful protagonists in a movement going from poverty, dereliction, darkness, and sin to light, wealth, and redemption. Several now stand on their own as archetypal figures of vices or virtues: the Thénardiens as nasty greedy authoritarian employers; Javert as the police inspector unrelentingly pursuing his prey; Jean Valjean, the prey and ex-convict who finally turns himself in to save an innocent and becomes very rich; Cosette as the miserable child rescued from poverty by generous Jean Valjean; Gavroche, the typical Parisian street boy...

It is not fortuitous that one of Cyrulnik’s major books, *Le Murmure des fantômes* (The Murmurs of Ghosts) (2003), devotes a long section (almost half of the volume) to young children and their relations to, or lack of, family and education. Several chapters focus on street kids, one on their resilience in the streets of Switzerland in the sixteenth century, another on their resistance to cultural aggressions today. The painting on the 2005 book cover shows “An Outraged Young Hebrew,” by Russian painter Ivan Kramskoj (1837–1887), in a pose and in looks immediately evoking Gavroche and Cosette.

Hugo’s saga is intensely didactic in its celebration of the resistance/resilience of the people of Paris. Hugo wanted his novel to be “the poem of human conscience,” and he also said that, “this book is a drama whose major protagonist is the infinite. Man is the second one.” His ambition is summarized by a critic in those terms:

Hugo invents a new object, misery, the infinite from below that unites all the margins of society—gutters, penal colonies and barriers—, of History—lost battles and suicidal barricades—, and of the individual being—interior collapses, riots of the soul—, whereby humans accomplish in the abyss their belonging to humankind (*Robert des grands écrivains* 2000, 608).

The genesis of *Les Misérables*, and of the entire project of Hugo as a man fighting for justice, can be best grasped in a letter that he penned in 1862: “In Paris

around 1818 or 19, one summer towards noon, I was walking across the square of the Palais de Justice.” A crowd was surrounding a post to which a young woman was tied. At her feet there was a brasero containing a red iron with a long handle. The woman was guilty of a “domestic theft.” Then suddenly a man climbed on the scaffolding behind her, opened her shirt to bare her back, took the red iron and pushed it into her flesh.

I can still hear, more than forty years later, and I will always hear in my soul the unbearable scream of the tortured woman. To me she was not a thief, she became a martyr. I came out of this—I was sixteen—determined to fight forever the wrong actions of the law (Letter of 1862 to a correspondent in Geneva, in Gaillard 1984, 7).

From the focus on the unjust and cruel martyrdom of one miserable individual, Hugo expanded his vision to the lower social classes and finally to society at large. In *Les Misérables* and in other works, he demonstrated how the power of resistance of the people, in a movement both psychological and social that we would now call “resilience,” led to their liberation, political, social, and finally intimate. The message was so powerfully expressed that the reputation of the novel transcended the borders of the French-speaking world.

2. The Reception of Hugo in Japan and Daisaku Ikeda’s Own Interpretation of Hugo’s Vision

One of the most fascinating and transformative historical periods that I have ever studied and taught is the so-called “Opening of Japan” by Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794–1858) in 1853, which paved the way for the overall transformation of the country. Perry had been ordered by U.S. President Millard Fillmore (1800–1874) to establish diplomatic relations with Japan, and force it to open its harbors to American vessels. After long months of hesitations because of major infightings, the councilor in charge of the negotiations, Abe Masahiro (1819–1857), accepted the deal. Various treaties were signed, putting an end to the self-imposed centuries-old isolation of the islands.

The irruption of the Americans prompted the demise of the Shogunate that had been running the country, and the end of the Edo era when imperial power was restored with the accession to the throne of Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) in 1867. Those decades witnessed a powerful demonstration of national resilience since, instead of being totally destabilized by such a blatant show of military and

political might, as so many other countries would have been (and as so many were, when confronted with the expansion of the Western powers), Japan saw where its interest lay, and decided to transform itself completely both domestically and externally. Emperor Meiji understood that only by imitating the Western powers could his country stand up to them.

In 1871, he dispatched a delegation to the USA and to several countries in Europe to observe their mores, and to negotiate treaties and trading agreements: led by Foreign Affairs Minister Prince Iwakura Tomomi (1825–1883), this Iwakura Embassy proved most instrumental in modernizing Japan on a par with the West, and in the opening of reciprocal exchanges between Japan and the Western powers. As is most interestingly narrated in the Embassy's report (excerpted and published by Tsuzuki Chushichi [1926–2020] as *Japan Rising: The Iwakura Embassy to the USA and Europe 1871-1873*), if the envoys appreciated the industries and the educational and political institutions of the United States, Britain and Germany and advised that they should be duplicated, in France, it was the culture they most admired. Though far more difficult to appreciate at first sight than architecture, painting, or fashion, literature was soon also sought after, whether produced by the French or by other Westerners as well as by the Russians (Chushichi and Young 2009).

The very first translation of a French novel from the original French text was that of *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* by Jules Verne (1828-1905) done by Kawashima Tadanosuke (1853–1938) in 1878 and 1880 (published by Maruya Zenshichi Press in Tokyo). Several novels by Hugo and by Verne were later translated by Morita Shiken (1861–1897), but from their English translations from French (an enduring method, since mastering English was seen as a priority when French was only accessible to a smaller elite). In his study of those early translations, Minami Asuka wonders why the two translators chose Verne and Hugo first. He suspects it was because they were very popular in France already, and the books were thus easy to obtain. Furthermore, Japanese readers liked to follow their minute descriptions of the way people lived in the West (Minami 2004, 148).

From 1890 on, the Japanese had access to French novels, and Western novels in general, in three ways: firstly, the translators either bought the books directly in the West or had travelers bring them back for them. Then the Maruzen bookshop in Tokyo, founded in 1868, played a major role in distributing

Western books for several decades. Finally, those who could not afford to buy books, could read them in the national library in Ueno that opened in 1885 (Minami 2004, 149). In the lists we have of the published authors during the Meiji era (1868–1912), Hugo was just one out of many Western writers (Minami 2004, 150) but he would soon become the most famous French author. Interestingly, it was from Japanese translations that the first Chinese edition of a Hugo text (probably an essay) in 1903 (Luo 2004, 204) and the first Korean edition of *Les Misérables* in 1923 (Yi 2004, 215) were realized, Japan acting from 1853 to this day as the port of entry of “modernity” in East Asia.

Most of what we know of Hugo’s reception and current status in Japan comes from the numerous works published in French by Nakio Inagaki (Inagaki 2002, 2004; Inagaki and Rebollar 2005). The first notable translation of *Les Misérables* was published in 1919 by Toyoshima Yoshio (1890–1955), a novelist himself. His version was corrected in 1986; it has been retranslated seven times since 1987, again from the 1919 version. So far, at least nine Japanese films have been made following the plot (including six between 1910 and 1935), and four television dramas. Now practically all the works of Hugo have been translated including major studies on him, notably the one by André Maurois (1885–1967). *Les Misérables* is also published in a manga series started in 2013 by mangaka Takahiro Arai (born in 1982), from the translation by Toyoshima Yoshio (Arai 2015–17). It is available in French also, retranslated from the Japanese.

The most popular version of *Les Misérables* is an earlier adaptation of the book as a serial novel in the journal *Yorozu Chōhō* in 1902–1903 under the title *Aa Mujō* (Oh, the Heartless Ones). The translator was Kuro’iwa Ruikō (1862–1920), who condensed and shortened the book to the point of turning it into a sort of pulp novel that met with such astonishing success, and it is considered as the first example of “industrial literature, to use the terminology of [Charles-Augustin] Sainte-Beuve [1804–1869]” (Inagaki 2002, 94). It is easy to understand why a translator would feel the need to abridge the novel: in my 1973 Gallimard Folio edition, the first volume numbers 605 pages in tiny print, the second volume 606 pages, and the third volume 510 pages. The eight books of the 1862 edition were bound in five thick volumes.

When the Japanese version of the French musical *Les Misérables* opened in Tokyo in 1987, it was to be performed 115 times. This enduring success is explained by the fact that the novel had become such a household story that

everyone could easily identify with the plot. As Daisaku Ikeda would remark, in Japan children are often told the story of Cosette and everybody knows Jean Valjean.

Yet, Inagaki laments the twisted image the Japanese have painted of Hugo, and their lack of an authentic profound appreciation of his work. He expresses this issue most forcefully in his chapter on “Victor Hugo and the rebellious modernizers in Meiji Japan,” in which he examines the political use of the image of Hugo by the Liberal movement for civil rights (*Jiyūminken undō*) and then the influence he exerted on the program of social reforms by the group called “Friends of the Nation” (*Kokumin no tomo*).

Inagaki narrates how the first major encounter between Japan and Hugo can be traced to a visit that Taïsuke Itagaki (1837–1919), the leader of the Liberal movement, said he paid to Hugo during his stay in Paris from December 1882 to April 1883. It was only in 1884 that the episode became really known, and in 1885 the party’s newspapers testified that Hugo was aware of “the liberalism and of the political activities of his Asian visitor... and welcomed him with such friendliness that all the other visitors were very surprised.” Hugo is supposed to have told him “to move forward without ever going back,” and to “publish all sorts of political treatises and European liberal novels in Japanese newspapers in order to initiate and encourage the Japanese people.” Then, Hugo is supposed to have recommended that he read his latest novels (Inagaki 2004, 186).

Inagaki points out that this narration was made public one year after its actual occurrence to serve Itagaki who was embroiled in a corruption affair then and needed the “protection” of Hugo and the reference to *Quatre-vingt-treize* (Ninety-three: Hugo 1874) for his own sake. In Japan, in 1884, several rebellions against the Meiji government were taking place, and this is when it was decided to translate this novel which, appropriately for the Japanese situation, describes the counter-revolution of royalist peasants in Vendée, under the leadership of rebel aristocrats, victims of the Revolution. Their plight was seen to resemble those of the samurai, the members of Itagaki’s movement, rebelling against the Meiji government. The translation of the novel was then interrupted.

Another use of Hugo was made by the same party: this time, it emphasized the exile of Hugo for having fought against Napoleon III (1808–1873). Inagaki gives other examples of the recourse to a somewhat invented Hugo to serve the national

interests of those rebellious politicians. He finally explains how they in fact never understood the ambiguity of Hugo.

Inagaki goes below the surface of the seemingly easy to grasp humanism of the writer. While he was fighting for the common good, Hugo was also obsessed with and fearful of the popular masses and of their potentially irrepressible violence, which is why he discarded the idea of a republican government for many years. “It was only in the 1850s that he recognized the French Revolution as a historical necessity, inevitable for the progress of mankind.” The Hugolian specialist goes on:

The fright of Hugo facing the dark energy of the people and his craving for social reforms in favor of this same people collided constantly within him, and a kind of dialectics of those two antithetical forces finally engendered his humanitarian philosophy. It is natural that the Meiji Japanese could not understand this ambiguous attitude because they had never had the experience of a true revolution (Inagaki 2004, 200).

Inagaki further comments upon the success of the Kuro'iwa Ruikô's translation of *Les Misérables* as a serial novel. He concludes that when the Japanese government was copying the German empire (following as we saw above the recommendation of the Iwakura Embassy), those who disapproved of the government invoked France and French thinkers to buttress their point (the same phenomenon was seen in China, where Hugo and Verne fascinated the reformers of the early twentieth century [Luo 2004, 203] as well as in Korea [Yi 2004, 209]).

But when Japan became sufficiently proud of itself, Inagaki feels that it distanced itself from Western cultures, and saw them as a matter of individual knowledge only. The same happened to the popularity of Hugo, who is now simply known as the author of one single novel (Inagaki 2004, 202). It is thus fairly reassuring in such a context to see that someone like President Ikeda has retained a profound and genuine regard for Hugo.

Daisaku Ikeda (born in 1928) expresses his admiration for the man of letters in the “Founder's Message,” a moving text published as the introduction to the catalogue of the Maison. Ikeda explains that Hugo and the characters of *Les Misérables* in particular have accompanied him from his very childhood. When his mentor Josei Toda (1900–1958) told him about the novel *Quatre-vingt-treize*, which, as we saw just above, stages the darkest hours of the French Revolution (the war in 1793 in Vendée between the Catholic Royalists and the Republican forces, both sides being extremely violent), Ikeda saw a parallel with his own

experience of the Second World War. Like Hugo, Ikeda envisioned “the ideal revolution for humanity” that he then strove to define and make accessible through the Buddhism of Soka Gakkai (Ikeda 1991).

It is important to remember here that Josei Toda is one of the founding figures of Soka Gakkai. He was the favorite disciple of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) who founded in 1930 Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (The Value-Creating Educational Society). When the government imposed Shinto as state religion, Makiguchi refused to receive a Shinto talisman of the sun goddess Tensho Daijin that he saw as countering Buddhism, and he did not want to offer religious support to the Japanese war effort. He was taken to prison with some twenty followers, including Toda, in 1943, and he died there from malnutrition one year later (Dobbelaere 2001, 5).

This unjust and cruel punishment, which powerfully echoed that suffered by the branded young woman Hugo beheld in his youth, oriented forever the path devised by Toda (who came out of prison in 1945) when he became the second President in 1946, and by Daisaku Ikeda, the third President of Soka Gakkai from 1960 to 1979 and then of Soka Gakkai International since 1975. Such a traumatic genesis fueled their passion for human rights and justice that is the hallmark of Soka Gakkai, registered in 1952 as a religious organization whose full name translates as “Society for the Creation of Values, movement for peace, culture and education.”

In his “Founder’s Address,” Ikeda voices his admiration for “the warrior of words” that Hugo was. In all trials and sufferings, in prison, “No chains could imprison his soul.” He fought back with words and used them to rescue other people as well:

No threat was great enough to silence this voice which cried out for justice. No wrong escaped him, be it poverty, injustice, lack of freedom of the press, inequality of political rights or the death penalty.

Hugo is a model for Ikeda in all his undertakings:

The force of will that exists in *Les Misérables*, solid as a rock, a force that the writer always directed towards good, shakes my soul still today. For this strong will that never gave in to attack encouraged me so many times, as did his determination and love for the people...

Ikeda concludes:

Hugo is my eternal companion. Hugo, with his spirit to fight until the end, and his eyes set on a far-off ideal, should be an eternal companion and source of encouragement for all people throughout the ages (Ikeda 1991, 23–5).

In the footsteps of Hugo, Ikeda intends to bring people to the Light of a better world, and the Maison littéraire has to be envisioned as one stage toward achieving this noble goal: world peace and the union of free citizens through education, culture and deep spirituality. In *A New Humanism* Ikeda quotes a Western poet and an Eastern one who voiced the very goal he pursued in founding the Maison littéraire:

East is East and West is West,
but when the two giants meet
boundaries and nationalities will disappear.

To which the Eastern poet replied:

East and West must marry
on the altar of humanity.

Ikeda concludes his own poem on a celebration of Art that leads imagination:

to the noble stage of wisdom
and leading it toward the far-off horizon
of universal civilization (Ikeda 2010, 11).

The early history of the Maison now has to be detailed for us to grasp the intimate connection between its current collections and Hugo himself and its founder's project.

3. The History and Complex Mission of the Maison Littéraire de Victor Hugo

One may indeed wonder why set up a Hugo museum in the château des Roches since it is not generally known to be connected to the writer, unlike the other five museums devoted to him in which he did live for more or less long periods: the most famous one being his own house, place des Vosges in Paris, where he lived from 1832 to 1848; his house in Guernsey, where he lived in exile from 1856 to 1870; one house in Villequier (Seine-Maritime); the Maison Hugo in Vianden, Luxembourg, and his birth place, Maison Hugo in Besançon. Yet, the connection

to Victor Hugo becomes obvious when one studies the history of the château, a point my guides at the Maison emphasized in great detail.

Les Roches belonged to Bertin l'Aîné, Louis-François Bertin (1776–1841), a very famous patron of the arts in the first half of the nineteenth century. Bertin was most well-known as the director of the *Journal des Débats* (founded in 1789, it ran until 1944) that he and his brothers bought in 1799. The most important daily paper of the century, it published the minutes of the French National Assembly as well as political editorials and literary pieces. Suspected of being a royalist, Bertin was imprisoned and then exiled in 1800 by Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) on the island of Elba (famous now as the place where Napoleon himself was exiled later). Thanks to François-René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848) who then worked as “secrétaire d’ambassade” in Rome and shared Bertin’s dislike of Napoleon (crowned emperor in December 1804), Bertin obtained a fake passport that allowed him to go back to France under the promise that he would only dedicate himself to literature and real estate.

On his return, he bought the mansion in 1804, which, because it was outside Paris, allowed him to remain at a certain distance from his aggressive political opponents. From 1815 to 1841, he invited there the most prestigious thinkers and artists of the time, several of them being intensely involved in politics, notably Hugo and Chateaubriand.

Between 1831 and 1845, Hugo spent time in the chateau as often as he could, first with his wife and children, later with his mistress. There he wrote a great number of texts, novel or theater chapters, letters, and poems, dedicating many to Bertin’s daughter, Louise (1805–1877), who had become his trusted confidante. Born in the château, Louise was handicapped from having suffered poliomyelitis as a child, but she was extremely prolific as an artist, a talented poetess and composer.

Not too well known, though a most fascinating piece because its realization combined the skills of the major French artists of the century, the opera *La Esmeralda* was composed in the château. Inspired by Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Louise composed the music and Hugo the libretto. The famous painter and illustrator of several novels by Hugo and Alexandre Dumas Louis Boulanger (1806–1867) designed the costumes. Hector Berlioz (1803–1869) directed the rehearsals (Berlioz had been hired by Bertin to run the musical columns of *Le*

Journal des Débats). The opera was performed in 1836 in Paris but only six times as the opponents of Bertin had it withdrawn from the Opéra.

When Daisaku Ikeda came to France in 1981, he was invited to meet Alain Poher (1909–1996), the President of the Senate. In the Luxembourg palace that houses the Senate, he beheld a bust of Hugo. He immediately experienced a form of revelation: there and then he decided to patronize a museum to celebrate and perpetuate the ideal of Hugo with the goal of creating a truly humanistic culture and society, and of serving as a bridge between Japan and France.

Without being aware of his wish, the members of the Soka Gakkai Cultural Association had heard that the château des Roches was for sale and that it had been one of Hugo's favorite hideaway places, so much so that he had evoked it in his poems. They thus informed Daisaku Ikeda who suggested to turn it into a museum dedicated to him. Long negotiations were then to be held as the whole estate as it is now was then in three lots, and the three landlords had to be convinced to sell together in order to form only one property. The sale was concluded in 1989.

The Maison and the estate are owned and maintained by the Association Culturelle Soka de France, Mr. Ikeda being the founder but not the landlord. The Maison was inaugurated on June 21, 1991. The Association Culturelle Soka de France (ACSF), registered under the terms of the 1901 law on "associations," is different from the Association culturelle Soka du Bouddhisme de Nichiren, which is the spiritual branch, registered under the terms of the 1905 law on the relations between the French state and religions.

The mansion is painted in a charming pink. The entrance hall, the four exhibition rooms and different lounges extend over 400 m². Apart from a few transformations, notably in the large entrance hall that was expanded, the property was minutely restored to its nineteenth century state, each room decorated with epoch furniture and the hues then fashionable: one lounge is blue, the color Hugo favored, another is bright red to evoke Hugo's house in Guernsey, another room is celadon green. The library bookcases are in mahogany. The surrounding park harbors some of the trees Hugo admired and wrote about.

The lounges exhibit troves of manuscripts and first editions of Hugo's books in glass cabinets, in perfect preservation conditions. One also sees precious editions

of other writers' works, from François Rabelais (1490?–1553) to André Malraux (1901–1976), and in particular of nineteenth century authors: Chateaubriand, Alphonse Dumas père (1802–1870), George Sand (1804–1876), Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), and others, numerous nineteenth-century pamphlets, political cartoons, several by the most famous illustrator and caricaturist of the nineteenth century Honoré Daumier (1808–1879), and so on. The library is exceptionally rich, and keeps expanding.

Several extremely valuable items are registered each as “Trésor national au titre des monuments historiques” (“National treasure in the register of Historical Monuments”): the printed proofs corrected by the hand of Hugo of *Les Misérables*, *Les Contemplations*, *La Légende des Siècles*. Most precious also is the actual slip of paper on which Hugo penned his very last words on his death bed: “Aimer, c’est agir” (“To love is to act”). The paper was registered as a Historical Monument in 2000 (the most prestigious and difficult ranking to obtain from the Ministère de la Culture). The other unique manuscript contains the blueprint of the decree for the amnesty of the Communards (Diebolt 2001, 1).

The Maison is however far more than a mere conservatory of manuscripts. Its organization follows the wish of Daisaku Ikeda to promote education of all people and all age groups, since according to him, it is only through education that our ailing societies will transcend themselves and reach an ideal of brotherly love. Like Hugo, Ikeda is sincerely convinced that one can save the world through work and love, and that the inhuman and the savage brute can become human.

To advance this project, that Ikeda refuses to consider as utopian, the Maison is geared to all age groups: in fact, it is opened on weekdays only to groups, most of them being retirees associations and school groups, and to individual visitors solely on the week-end. Visitors are given tours with detailed explanations on the life of Hugo, on his work and on his humanist values. The Maison also promotes research on Hugo in partnership with academics and is held in high regard by Hugolians in France and abroad. It publishes a journal for each new exhibition to make sure visitors leave with the printed texts of Hugo and of the different writers highlighted on the occasion. The journal also publishes analyses of the collection and recapitulates various important events.

To sustain the interest of visitors, regular temporary exhibitions are organized on the works of various authors but also on works of art. The Maison has held some twenty exhibitions so far and has participated in six international projects. It

also organizes displays within larger topics: for example, two around the figure of Napoleon, plus one international collaborative exhibition. Several were held in Japan in 2001, 2004, 2005. Three in Germany, notably “Victor Hugo and the 21st century,” presented in 2001 in Bingen, Germany. As Director Philippe Moine wrote in his presentation, Germany is linked to Hugo since it was in his book *Le Rhin* (1842), from the name of the river along which he enjoyed staying, that for the first time he elaborated the concept of the United States of Europe, built “on the alliance of France and Germany, seen as the constitution of Europe” (if this can be seen as a herald of the actual construction of the European Union in our times, Hugo could never have imagined the global bloodshed that was to precede it).

The message Daisaku Ikeda sent for the occasion of this exhibit once more summarized his intent in setting up the Maison and its various educational activities:

Hugo actively worked towards creating the future. Unrelentingly, he drew in the sky of the future, the immense rainbow of his dream of all-encompassing social reforms.

He went on:

Protecting the magnificent cultural heritage created by mankind is a duty for all. Contributing to the culture of mankind is also the natural duty of all religion (Moine 2001).

The Maison is therefore the concrete realization of what Daisaku Ikeda expounded in his speeches and texts, in particular in those gathered in *A New Humanism* (2010), the first part of which is devoted to “Art, Literature and Education.” In the chapter on “Creative Life,” a most talented poet himself, the author defines art as the creative power of mankind:

Can we not see it,
the pulsing rhythm that springs
from the depths of the spirit,
this profoundly deep, this unfathomable
fountain of creation?

He continues:

Art is the irrepressible expression of human spirituality... Into each one of the myriad concrete forms of art is impressed the symbol of ultimate reality. The creation of a work

of art takes place within spatial boundaries, but through the process of creating, the soul of the artist seeks union with that ultimate reality, what might be called cosmic life.

Further:

through art we find oneness with a transcendental entity, breathe its rhythm, and absorb the energy we need for spiritual renewal. Art also functions to purify the inner being, to bring the spiritual uplift that Aristotle called catharsis. What is this quality in art that has ordained it to play such an elemental and enduring role in human life? I believe it is the power to integrate, to reveal the wholeness of things.

Ikeda quotes *Faust* as a “statement of the interconnection of all living things” and continues his definition:

then art becomes the elemental modality through which humans discover their bonds with humans, humanity with nature, and humanity with the universe.

To him Notre-Dame and Chartres cathedrals,

a summation in architecture of the worldview of medieval Christianity, embodied the awesome power of art to integrate the world’s reality and ultimate reality (Ikeda 2010, 4–5).

He then continued by reasserting his belief in the advantages of following Nichiren Buddhism: the powerful spirituality expressed in Christian cathedrals has now been erased, for with modernization those forces of integration have waned, and “people are isolated and alone.” Now Buddhism can offer “a connection, a causal relationship or a function that joins life and its environment...” as is explained in the Lotus Sutra (Ikeda 2010, 6–7). The following subchapters define the subtleties of art connected to Buddhism: “Connected with Totality,” “Sutra of this World,” the “Metaphor of Dance”: “The unfolding of creative life according to the Lotus Sutra, then, encompasses all the dimensions of human life” (Ikeda 2010, 9).

These passages allow us never to lose sight of the ultimate intent of Ikeda. He always places the work of Hugo or of any Western or universal artist or philosopher within the scope of Buddhism. They cannot be appreciated for themselves alone but must be somewhat “capped” by this spiritual system seen as the only authentic and valid one to reach universal peace.

Likewise, if President Ikeda constantly refers to authors, artists, philosophers from around the world, in the spiritual field he does not bow to any form of ecumenism unlike several founders or leaders of contemporary religions

movements who promote a form of universal combination of spiritual traditions (the Bahá'í Faith being one famous example but not the only one).

The affirmation of the superiority of Buddhism, testifying obviously to the personal conviction of Ikeda, may be viewed also as the logical reaction to what we have explained above: the aggressive opening of Japan to Westernization first in the 1850s and then of course even more forcefully after World War II, with the occupation of Japan by the USA that sought to impose a massive overhaul of its social and political organization to beget a regenerated (along Western ideals) national identity. Though the movement refuses to be trapped in any form of nationalism because such ideology can only lead to war and is anathema to universal humanism, Soka Gakkai does emphasize a specifically Japanese religious identity, that of Nichiren Buddhism. In his analysis of the structural ambivalence of the movement—both lay and religious, both traditionalist and anti-traditionalist—, Raphaël Lioger writes that Ikeda's "strategy was built in reaction to the cultural and then political Western penetration of Japan in the 1940s" (Lioger 2002, 37).

A somewhat similar appropriation of Western figures to *in fine* reassert the superiority of the national culture now subdued by colonization or occupation was operated by Caodaism (founded in 1926 in Indochina). Victor Hugo ranks as one of its major figureheads as well as Joan of Arc (ca. 1412–1431), the archetypal French national heroine and many other famous French characters (the Indochinese learnt about them directly in the French schools). Such inclusions could be meant to please and assuage the French colonial authorities but they are swallowed and subsumed in the eventually triumphant Vietnamese traditional spiritual narrative.

4. The Multifaceted Functions of the Maison Littéraire de Victor Hugo

I will address two major points here: first, as a literary museum the Maison performs a specific social and cultural function perfectly in the "air du temps." Then, though definitely not a Soka Gakkai museum *per se*, it has been accused of being a cover up for suspicious activities, so that no efforts were spared to counteract such negative vision and broaden the scope of its finality as a museum.

The Paradoxical Functions of Literary Museums

As one of the six literary museums dedicated to Hugo (listed above), all belonging to the extended European network of “Houses of Hugo,” probably the largest such grouping around one single author, the château des Roches fully participates in the musealization of literature that started in the nineteenth century, continued in the twentieth century, and seems to have accelerated since 2000 at the international level. As Marie-Clémence Régnier (2015) and others analyzed by studying “what the museum does to literature: musealization and exhibition of the literary,” these venues have carried literature to a domain different from the one it was produced for (plain reading and/or listening), thereby transforming its status radically. The power of mediation of literature in the public space is here emphasized, the author so “museified” turning more than ever into a heroic figure essential to the construction of a national heritage, of nationalist pride. Consequently, before being understood as cultural tools, literary museums like other types of museums can be seen as political tools perhaps first and foremost, as Régnier and critics such as Peggy Levitt (2015) have shown.

However, château des Roches is a case apart: the Hugo it promotes is definitely not the French heroic figure but the universalist humanist and, as has been explained above, it is definitely not a French project, not even a local project, but a Japanese project! One to promote the opposite of parochialism: the preservation of a universal heritage to abolish nationalist borders and barriers: “I hope this house of literature...will help the immortal soul of this great poet to bring all people closer to universality” (Ikeda 1991, 25).

Another point is explored by Régnier and her colleagues: far from criticizing the literary museum, the scholars wonder whether instead of despising this diversion of the original goal of literature as further proof of the demise of high culture, we should not see this new mode of consumption of the literary work as a positive adjuvant, when literature on its own has become less and less attractive to an increasing part of the population that finds reading boring:

Now that literary culture is profoundly questioned, in its mode of transmission and of valorization..., does musealization not constitute a fountain of youth at the spring of which literary culture can drink, to continue radiating in our societies?... A means to conquer new audiences? (Régnier 2015, 20)

The Maison brings a clear answer to their interrogation. The schoolchildren who are taken to the Maison by their teachers, the retirees, or the individual visitors who may have come simply to stroll around the park but have ventured into the mansion, will have their schooldays memories of Hugo and of the other writers present there revived and given flesh, and, as our guides testified, many exclaim that they are now more interested in the books themselves so that they do buy quite a few of them in the small bookshop on their way out. After the fire of Notre-Dame, Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* sold out: those buyers may not have walked into a regular bookshop in town to purchase the novel. Therefore, the Maison performs a powerful memorial function: seeing the manuscripts and pamphlets of the period entices people to view the actual novel or poems as cogs of a rich cultural chain that they now feel ready to explore for themselves.

Another level of explanation can be observed, that of the “acculturation” of marginalized citizens to high French culture. Because of its historical inscription in the French landscape (in all the senses of the term, cultural and geographical), the Maison demonstrates what Logier concluded on Soka Gakkai in France regarding its relatively important inclusion of otherwise marginalized characters (immigrants, sexual minorities...). Instead of looking for a more permissive social and/or religious group, what these members appreciate in the movement is on the contrary its imposition of specific

rules that take their existence into account and assigns to them a place in the social order. Soka Gakkai provides them with such a place in a communal order that presents itself as much as possible in line with the global order: modern, westernized, without any visible sign of Asian or exotic culture.... Asian specificities are erased. Heroes such as Victor Hugo and Marie Curie [1867–1934] and the founding myths of French identity, such as the 1789 Revolution, are reappropriated through celebrations, feasts and exhibitions (Lioger 2002, 9).

The author mentions the Maison as the proper example of the obedience of members to President Ikeda's injunction to cultivate an international dimension and to promote the work of Hugo in correspondence with the values of orthodox Buddhism (Lioger 2002, 25).

The Maison as the Honorable Daughter of a Minority Religion in France

Most religions interact in a more or less intense manner with their surroundings. When they are not on a separatist path, they will often attempt to

present themselves as useful to society in a variety of ways. Soka Gakkai has opted for the promotion of education and of art, the two domains being intrinsically bound, through the foundations of various institutions for the general public: schools from kindergartens to colleges and Soka University (with various international branches), all operating according to Makiguchi's pedagogical philosophical methods—and museums.

Within this frame, the perfect restoration of château des Roches must be viewed as a most generous gift on the part of Daisaku Ikeda and the Association Culturelle Soka de France, since they protected and embellished a domain that is most important in the literary and political life of the nineteenth century at no cost to the French taxpayer.

The religious group that has systematically applied and perfected this strategy is the Church of Scientology: it does not plan new buildings (of if it does, it is extremely rare) but has specialized in the purchase of historical urban landmarks left in a derelict state that it will restore to their pristine grandeur, in which it installs its churches and various centers (for the urban renewal thus realized in Los Angeles, see Rigal-Cellard 2019). The Church is therefore considered as a major benefactor of many inner cities, and in exchange it benefits from a positive image.

The Maison in Bièvres is not an isolated realization of Daisaku Ikeda: he had displayed a similar aspiration when he founded the Fuji Art Museums, right by his Soka University, and the Min'On Concerts Association in Tokyo. Already then, he expressed his fascination for French culture since he opened the museum in November 1983 with a landmark exhibition of “Masterpieces of French Art” that had been lent by eight major French museums, including the Louvre and the Versailles Museum of the History of France. The presentation of the exhibition reads:

That a private museum without any previous achievement or contribution could organize the showing of such an impressive array of works defied convention.

We then learn that the man who negotiated such a tour-de-force was René Huyghe (1906–1997), “the acclaimed French art historian who is credited with saving the *Mona Lisa* and other national treasures from Nazi looters in World War II.” The two men had met in 1974 when Huyghe had accompanied *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre to Tokyo.

Huyghe came away impressed by Ikeda's belief that the finest works of art should be shared and appreciated by as many people as possible, and the two developed a strong friendship that would culminate in numerous collaborations that included the publishing of their dialogue, *Dawn After Dark* (Tokyo Fuji Art Museum 2021).

The friendship with René Huyghe must have opened a lot of doors to Daisaku Ikeda when he returned the art historian's visit to Japan and landed in Paris in 1981: the Maison is placed under the tutelary protection of notable political actors of the French nation, and major figures of the art and literary world. The foreword was penned by Alain Poher, whom Ikeda met in 1981 as we saw above. Poher was President of the Senate (from 1968 until 1992, the longest serving time ever), and as such was the second ranking political figure in France; he uniquely served several times as President of the nation *pro tempore*.

Visiting him was part of the well-known policy of Daisaku Ikeda, who has always insisted on organizing diplomatic encounters with international political leaders, and has judged them to be among the most instrumental in the development of education and in the positive reception of the religion in their respective countries, in a top-down strategy of efficient missions (a method perfected by the Jesuits as well as today by Scientologists).

Alain Poher sat on the Honorary Committee of the Maison along with René Huyghe, who was a member of the French Academy, fellow academician Alain Decaux (1925–2016) and famous novelist Hervé Bazin (1911–1996), the former president of the Goncourt Academy. Jack Lang the then Minister of Culture granted Daisaku Ikeda the title of “Officier du mérite des Arts et des Lettres” (Officer in the Order of Merit for Arts and Literature) in 1990, and later joined the Honorary Committee.

Baptized with such prestigious godfathers, the Maison should have been held in high esteem from the start, yet since quite a few French people are prone to view suspiciously the real estate operations of religious groups in general and of foreign groups in particular, always perceived as contriving “cults,” in a couple of cases the Maison was demeaned as the proof of the deceptive maneuvers of Daisaku Ikeda.

The 1996 Report of the French parliamentary commission on cults referred to Soka Gakkai in those terms:

The financial power of Soka Gakkai can be deduced... from the recent real estate investments of the cult (des Forges domain in Trets, château des Roches in Bièvres)... Soka Gakkai claims to teach...the doctrine of Nichiren (Assemblée nationale 1996, 57).

Belgian sociologist Karel Dobbelaere pointed out that Soka Gakkai did not “claim” to teach the doctrine of Nichiren but was a major Buddhist group teaching the doctrine most seriously; that the group should be thanked for its preservation of Hugo’s heritage; and he ironically noted that the Maison had been praised by major French governmental authorities, Alain Poher and Jack Lang in particular, so that the authors of the Report were totally ignorant of the facts. He also placed the Trets domain within the range of all the seminaries run by various religions that are always authorized (Dobbelaere 1996, 300).

Ten years later, on October 12, 2006, the French Consistoire Soka du bouddhisme de Nichiren published a report entitled *For a Fair Evaluation of the Religion of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin in France* (translation of the French title: Consistoire Soka du bouddhisme de Nichiren 2006). It sets the record straight by first summarizing all the methods used in France to discredit the group, and lists the criticisms leveled against it by various public authorities since the 1980s. The third chapter answers all these accusations and in particular those contained in the 2005 French governmental anti-cult mission MIVILUDES report, published in 2006 (Consistoire Soka du bouddhisme de Nichiren 2006, 6). I only mention the passages dealing with the Maison. The Consistoire directly denounces the accusation according to which the real estate investments of the movement, and in particular the Maison littéraire in Bièvres, would merely be a “window display,” a front hiding some dark reality. The Consistoire details the collection of some 3,400 pieces for all to see and admire in the museum, in honor of the genius of Hugo, and his humanism, a value shared by Soka Gakkai (Consistoire Soka du bouddhisme de Nichiren 2006 14–5). The authors rightfully ask why the vast patrimony of the Catholic Church or of other Buddhist groups in France is not questioned.

Today, to the best of my knowledge, the Maison is no longer suspected of concealing some devious scheme. On the contrary, the château des Roches has been accepted as a valuable player that participates in the “commercial branding” of Bièvres (like literary museums in general: Régnier 2015, 14) and of the area. It is just a few kilometers away from another small but famous museum, that of Toile de Jouy developed by Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf (1738–1815) in the

eighteenth century in the adjacent city of Jouy-en-Josas. Moreover, since the Maison receives some 7,000 visitors in a regular year, the county was recently planning to include it in its touristic circuit, thus boosting its visibility and that of the region (Chevallier 2019). The park is listed as a must-see for garden lovers because of its numerous rich and exotic trees and magnificent landscaping along the river, with a lake and an island planted with cedars from the Atlas and from Lebanon. An article promoting the park first gives a short history of the museum (*Jardinez.com* 2021). The Maison itself can therefore be considered as a testimony to resilience, this time over the systematic inquisition of some members of Parliament obsessed with “cults.” The Maison has won over its critics, and is now fully at “home” in Bièvres (see the 30th anniversary edition of its richly illustrated catalog: Moine 2021).

Conclusion

The creation of this literary museum in the château des Roches, a place intimately connected to the eventful life of Hugo, though this history had been forgotten in our times, was both the product of chance or the Providence (the château was fittingly for sale when Daisaku Ikeda was contemplating honoring Hugo in a didactic way), and the concretization in space and time of his spiritual quest for the breaking down of all barriers, that he sees as the one and only step to achieving the survival of mankind, what can be termed the resilient life force of man. Yet, one must go beyond this noble goal. The identity of the Maison littéraire can indeed be apprehended on two levels.

Outside of the religious movement, and obviously in France, it is a generous tribute to Victor Hugo’s visionary legacy and a tool for the redemption of humans from trauma, suffering and loneliness. It is a shrine to his talent, and consequently to the French cultural genius, fittingly encased in a lovely mansion and a superb park, the epitome of culture and class *à la française*.

When we move to the anagogical level of interpretation, the Maison littéraire de Victor Hugo has never been what for some other philanthropists could have been a mere fad, a “folie” as one says in French, to honor a man however great he might be.

It is forcefully connected to the life goal of its founder, a man with a rare command of universal artistic culture who will summon and quote an impressive roster of French and international writers, artist, or philosophers, with one clear purpose: to demonstrate the supreme power of art upon the human imagination and how art can lead to spirituality. However, Daisaku Ikeda does not contemplate any vague expression of spirituality. In the end, within his larger project, the Maison is one of the many cultural steppingstones on the path to the acceptance of the transcendent value of Nichiren Buddhist spirituality to realize *hic et nunc* the betterment of mankind.

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The Political Globalization of Soka Gakkai: Center or Periphery?

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ABSTRACT: Daisaku Ikeda's yearly Peace Proposal for the year 2021 focuses on the COVID-19 crisis. Its themes may be divided in three parts, examined in this article by showing both their Buddhist roots and their practical implications. The first deals with appropriate and inappropriate personal reactions to the COVID-19 crisis, interpreted through the lenses of Buddha's poisonous arrow parable as told in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, and Nichiren's letter to a woman who lost her husband in a time of epidemic. The second is about the need for international cooperation in times of crisis, and Ikeda finds hope in the story of the cooperation between the Soviet Union and the U.S. in testing new anti-polio vaccines in the 1950s. The third is about the interaction between the COVID-19 crisis and human rights, examined by Ikeda through several Buddhist and Western precedents.

KEYWORDS: Soka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda, COVID-19 and Religion, Ikeda Peace Proposal 2021, COVID-19 and Human Rights.

Introduction

The concepts of global and local, center and periphery, were studied with respect to religion long before the COVID-19 pandemic. These terms do not have the same meaning now. Since quarantine prevented most of the world's citizens to leave their homes or at least their cities and villages for long months, everything became local. But at the same time, we all experienced that conferences, seminars, and meetings did not diminish, and in fact, by moving to Zoom or other online platforms, we had more rather than less of them. Everything also became global, or perhaps we became part of a planetary experience blurring the boundaries between global and local.

Not surprisingly, this also involved Soka Gakkai and its political and social activities on behalf of world peace. As others have noted, Soka Gakkai answered COVID-19 by moving its activities online, and spreading among its members information about the best practices to contain the pandemic (Fisker-Nielsen 2020). This was not unique, as other religious movements did the same, although they rarely received credit for it (Šorytė 2020a, 2020b).

At the same time, Soka Gakkai proposed a theoretical reflection on what President Daisaku Ikeda called an unprecedented crisis in the history of humanity (Ikeda 2021, 1). Significantly, Ikeda saw the COVID-19 crisis as unprecedented and unique not only because of the exceptional number of those affected and those who died, but because it was both local and global. Everybody experienced it as local, but at the same time its global character made it initially impossible for other countries to rally in support of the most affected regions, since all countries had their own domestic COVID-19 problems. As Ikeda wrote, for example,

Following the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2011, numerous countries extended various forms of support to people in the afflicted areas, which was a source of untold encouragement. When disaster strikes, such expressions of international solidarity provide vital spiritual support to those who have been impacted and who are unable to see what lies ahead. The COVID-19 crisis has struck almost all nations simultaneously, and this creates conditions of even greater complexity, chaos and confusion (Ikeda 2021, 7).

I will examine here three main points of President Ikeda's analysis of the COVID-19 crisis in his yearly Peace Proposal for the year 2021. While, as it happened in previous documents, Soka Gakkai shows a noteworthy professionalism in dealing with United Nations bodies and activities (see Šorytė 2019), I will particularly focus on the spiritual side of President Ikeda's analysis.

1. Personal Reactions to COVID-19

President Ikeda notes that a large part of the population in developed countries became addicted to look for COVID-19 statistics every day, checking out in the media how many died in their countries and others. The risk is that, by watching for signs of concern or hope, we forget that behind each number there is the unique story of a human being. Ikeda quotes Angela Merkel, who in her famous COVID-19 speech to the German nation told her fellow citizens that,

These are not just abstract numbers in statistics, but this is about a father or grandfather, a mother or grandmother, a partner—this is about people (Merkel 2020).

Another risk is that, by cultivating “social distancing” for valid health reasons, we learn to become more insular and individualistic. Ikeda agrees with those who prefer to call it “physical distancing” (including World Health Organization officers: van Kerkhove 2020), to emphasize that we should put some meters between us and our friends and neighbors, but should not feel less socially engaged with them.

Finally, there is the risk that living as we did in the quarantine will become the “new normal.” We should aim to go back to what was good and valuable in our pre-COVID-19 lives, but at the same time, Ikeda writes, should consider that our old life at a global scale was not totally “normal.” There was too much injustice, too much looking to the other side when tragedies happened by which we believe we were not affected (Ikeda 2021, 4). This played a role in spreading the epidemics, as evidenced by the case of crowded and unsanitary refugee camps, and medical aid sent to developing countries wasted because of ineffective global practices or corrupted local governments. And, although scientists are still discussing this aspect, it is also possible, Ikeda says, that our disregard for Mother Nature’s needs was also a factor in the spread of the pandemic. Symbolically, but believing this will also have an effect, Soka Gakkai is honoring those who died of COVID-19 in Brazil in tragic numbers by planting one tree in the Amazon in memory of each Brazilian victim, as part of the activities of the Soka Institute of the Amazon that Ikeda worked to establish (Ikeda 2021, 3).

Soka Gakkai is a Buddhist movement, and Ikeda also offers two keys to reflect on the situation each of us experienced because of COVID-19. The first key is Buddha’s parable of the poisonous arrow. A man is shot by a poisonous arrow, and doctors suggest that the arrow’s point, which is still in his body, should be immediately removed. The man, however, insists that he wants to know first who wounded him with the arrow, from what tribe or clan he was, who ordered the archer to attack him, what kind of arrow it was, and who supplied it. Until answers to these questions are delivered to him, the man does not want the surgeon to operate. The result, the Buddha said, is that time is wasted, and when the surgeon is finally allowed to intervene, it is too late, and the man dies (Ikeda 2021, 4–5).

Ikeda is concerned with the practical value of the parable, and does not offer us in the Peace Proposal any information on its context. The story is told in the *Sutta*

Piṭaka, a sacred Buddhist text which is part of the Pali Canon. The poisonous arrow parable follows Buddha's refusal to answer a set of "unanswerable questions" (ten or fourteen, depending on different versions of the Canon), despite the fact that the Indian monk Malunkya tells Buddha that he will renounce Buddhism if he fails to respond. The questions include philosophical subjects such as, "Is the world eternal?" and "Is the world finite?" (Williams and Tribe 2000, 34–8).

Rather than answering, Buddha tells the story of the poisonous arrow, which has been commented and interpreted by hundreds of Buddhist masters, and by Western scholars as well. President Ikeda believes that the Buddha

uses this parable to encourage his disciples, who have a tendency toward intellectualizing and theorizing, to focus instead on matters that actually affect human life (Ikeda 2021, 5).

He quotes the interpretation by Romanian scholar of religions Mircea Eliade (1982, 50–1), who wrote that the Buddha's teachings "were not aimed at providing a systematic philosophical theory," but functioned as "a kind of medical treatment to heal human suffering." Ikeda comments that Buddha

was wholly committed to removing the poisonous arrow; in other words, removing the underlying causes of people's suffering (Ikeda 2021, 5).

This is a teaching Ikeda applies to the pandemic. Rather than quarreling and discussing about different theories about the virus, vaccines, and governments, we should first remove the arrow and do what is needed to protect ourselves.

However, Buddhist masters throughout the centuries have also observed that it would be a mistake to argue from the story that Buddha was anti-intellectual or against reflecting on the great questions of the universe, although on Buddha's ultimate attitude to these questions opinion differ (Williams and Tribe 2020, 37–8). An obvious comment is that there is a time for considering the origin of the universe, and a time for acting immediately during a crisis and postponing the philosophical discussions. If you are about to be hit by a car, jumping to avoid the collision is more useful, and certainly more urgent, than stopping to theorize on the government's policies about the cars' maximum speed.

But there will be a time for theorizing—later. And the poisonous arrow story will still be useful. Buddha refused to consider the monk's questions because they were formulated in a way implying that the mind alone would be able to answer

them. In fact, Buddha was suggesting that questions of such relevance for our life should be answered through the heart, not through the mind only, and that a purely mental answer would just inflate our ego and be of no use to us.

The second Buddhist story President Ikeda (2021, 5–6) mentions is about the 13th-century Japanese monk Nichiren (1222–1282), the originator of the tradition of which Soka Gakkai is part. Nichiren lived in a time of wars, famines, and epidemics, and both he and his disciples went through intense periods of suffering. Once, one of his devotees lost her husband. She described her life as “frozen in winter.” She was old and weak, and had an ailing son and a daughter. She doubted she would be able to take care of them for long. Nichiren’s answer can be divided in three parts.

First, he told the woman that he felt her pain as if it was his own. To our modern, cynical mindset this may seem irrelevant, but it isn’t. We all recognize sincerity, and the attitude of a true master. In a world faced with the risk of separation and insularity because of COVID-19 and its consequences, such deep communion with a friend or a genuine spiritual master may change our lives.

Second, Nichiren told the widow that “winter always turns to spring.” This is another needed lesson in a time of pandemic. We should believe in hope. If we believe that there will be no spring, we will create a reality of desperation and will perish in despair.

Giving hope is not less urgent than offering material help, but Nichiren did not forget material help either. He concluded his letter to the widow by assuring her that, whatever will happen, he will personally take care of her children. This was a delicate way of saying that, should she die, Nichiren and his community will make sure that her children will be taken care of.

Ikeda comments that we have all met people that, because of COVID-19, have been reduced to desperation. They have lost their relatives, their jobs, their security, everything.

If a person in this state is forced to shoulder the burden of their suffering alone without the support of a social safety net or personal connections, their world will remain bleak. As soon as someone takes notice of their situation and reaches out to them, however, and they feel the warm and attentive light of others illuminating their circumstances, I believe it becomes possible for them to bring forth the strength needed to rebuild their lives and regain a sense of dignity (Ikeda 2021, 6).

2. *International Cooperation and Vaccines*

The second aspect Ikeda emphasizes in his 2021 Peace Proposal is the need of international cooperation to fight the pandemic. In developed countries, even if not all problems have been solved, we are now busy congratulating ourselves as we did more or less well in vaccinating important percentages of our populations. But this is not the case in less developed parts of the world, particularly in Africa. Soka Gakkai is an enthusiastic supporter of the COVID-19 COVAX, a global vaccine access facility that has put together private foundations and institutional actors to provide two billion vaccine doses worldwide, with 1.3 billion going to the 92 world countries with the lowest income. Although it has also encountered problems due to the difficulty of purchasing such an immense number of vaccines, COVAX has mobilized an impressive amount of resources, and Soka Gakkai is proud to have contributed to generate a widespread public support of COVAX among both politicians and the general population in Japan.

However, the world superpowers today seem more concerned to advance their international image than to cooperate with others in bringing together vaccines and support to the poorer countries.

Ikeda does not mention a Buddhist parable to illustrate what can be done but a real-life tale, and one that personally affected him. Polio has just been declared eradicated in Africa, where it was once a deadly plague, after four years without cases (World Health Organization 2020), one of the few good news of 2020. But in the 1950, when Ikeda was a young man, it was still a very serious problem in several countries, including Japan, something the population was very much afraid of.

There was a vaccine based on a small quantity of inactive (“dead”) polio virus cells, which should be injected. This vaccine was very expensive, and many in the world cannot afford it. American scientists created a vaccine based on weakened, but still active (“live”) polio virus cells, which had also the advantage that it could administered orally, and was much less expensive. There was only one problem, that it could not be tested on a large scale in the United States, because most of the population there had already been vaccinated with the injected vaccine. Then, something many considered a miracle happened. Doctors in the Soviet Union persuaded their government to test the American vaccine in their country, which was large enough to allow for the needed large-scale testing, as the only way of

stopping a global polio epidemic that might have unpredictable consequences. Against all predictions, in the heydays of the Cold War, the Soviet authorities agreed. The new anti-polio live-virus vaccine was tested in the Soviet Union, proved safe and effective, and used globally (Horstmann 1991), averting a health catastrophe in Japan and many other countries.

I myself, remembers Ikeda, have vivid memories of the way that many children in Japan were saved from polio infection through this live-virus vaccine (Ikeda 2021, 8).

We need a similar miracle now. At the time of Ikeda's Peace Proposal, the United States had not joined COVAX, but they have done it since. Russia is not part of COVAX at the time of this writing.

Ikeda also believes that a way to address the vaccine crisis is to advance international cooperation in other areas. Soka Gakkai is famous for its anti-nuclear initiatives, rooted in the dramatic Japanese experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Japan remains the only country so far that has been attacked with nuclear weapons). It is a matter of great pride for President Ikeda that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), of which he was one of the staunchest supporters (see Šorytė 2019), entered into force on 22 January 2021, after it reached the fiftieth ratification. Ikeda believes that,

Following the precedents set by the Biological Weapons Convention and Chemical Weapons Convention, which ban those weapons of mass destruction, the entry into force of the TPNW marks the start of an era in which the continued existence of nuclear weapons on Earth has been stipulated as unacceptable by a legally binding instrument (Ikeda 2021, 20).

It is certainly a symbolic achievement. However, the United States, Russia, China, Israel, Iran, and North Korea have not signed the treaty, and within the European Union only Ireland, Austria, and Malta are currently part of it.

To illustrate why in his opinion the TPNW and COVID-19 are connected, President Ikeda (2021, 22) mentions the story of the mythical King Midas of Phrygia, told in Greek mythology and whose political significance was already noted by Greek and Roman authors (Hadjittofi 2018). Midas, a greedy king, asked god Dionysus (called Bacchus by the Romans) to give him the gift of the "golden touch." The god agreed, and everything Midas touched was converted into gold. Soon, however, Midas discovered that even the food he was about to eat, when touched by his hands or mouth, changed into gold. When he was about to die of starvation, Midas begged the god to take away the gift from him. The god

complied, telling Midas that he will lose the golden touch by washing his hands in the river Pactolus (which still exists in Turkey, and gold was found for centuries there, allegedly because of this action by Midas). The greedy king had learned his lesson.

Ikeda says supporters of nuclear weapons are in the same situation as Midas. They may believe that being in possession of nuclear weapons is a gift, but in fact all what they touch risks becoming metaphorically radioactive. According to Ikeda, this became evident during the COVID-19 crisis, not only because maintaining nuclear arsenals froze resources that might have been used in combating the pandemic, but because nuclear weapons create a climate of distrust that makes the needed global cooperation impossible (Ikeda 2021, 22).

3. COVID-19 and Human Rights

The third main reflection Ikeda proposes is about COVID-19 and human rights. Soka Gakkai, which has experienced persecution and violation of its members' human rights, has always been active in promoting global human rights education.

Ikeda (2021, 12) reports that, faced with the COVID-19 crisis, one of the literary works he was led to read again was *A Journal of the Plague Year*, written in 1722 by English novelist Daniel Defoe (the author of *Robinson Crusoe*), and, although a work of fiction (Bastian 1965), based on the experience of the author's uncle during the London plague of 1665 (Defoe 1722). Proving that nothing new happens in human history, the book reports how the most fantastic rumors and conspiracy theories circulated in London in the plague year, and unpopular social and religious minorities were accused of being responsible for the epidemic and persecuted. We witnessed exactly the same during the last two years in several countries, and the COVID-19 health crisis also became a human rights crisis.

Another book Ikeda (2021, 13–4) read again during the quarantine was *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, published in 2004 by American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, which explores the role of disgust in the history of discrimination (Nussbaum 2004). When a group is labeled as evil, it elicits feelings of disgust, and it becomes easy to blame incidents the society is

concerned about to them. This happened to the Jews and other groups several times in history and, Ikeda observes, also happened with COVID-19.

However, Ikeda deepens his reflection on COVID-19 and human rights beyond the most usual comments. It is often argued, writes Ikeda (2021, 14), that we do not protect the others' human rights because we focus our love on ourselves and the group we belong to. This criticism, Ikeda observes, may be misleading. Buddhism teaches that loving ourselves first is not only normal, it is necessary. He tells the story of the king and queen of Kosala, an ancient state in India, who asked the Buddha whether they should be concerned that both of them did not love any other being more than they loved themselves. Buddha answered by reciting a poem:

Having traversed all quarters with the mind,
One finds none anywhere dearer than oneself.
Likewise, each person holds himself most dear.

Hence one who loves himself should not harm others (Bodhi 2000, 171).

This poem includes two teachings. The first is that it is a basic law of the universe that we love ourselves more than we love anybody else. For Buddhism, this is natural, and trying to correct it is futile and may even have very negative consequences. The second teaching is included in the verse "one who loves himself should not harm others." In fact, not harming others and helping them when in need is part of loving ourselves. Harming others will come back to us, and damage ourselves at the same time. In a broader perspective, protecting the human rights of others is the only way of guaranteeing our own human rights.

Conclusion

Even in times of COVID-19, Soka Gakkai's political and social action brings the local into the global and the global into the local. Soka Gakkai members described (in private conversations with the undersigned in 2020) how much they missed their usual and exciting in-person activities and gatherings. Yet, from their own rooms and even during the strictest day of quarantine, they believed they could really do something to create a better world.

Soka Gakkai means "Society for the Creation of Values." The term *soka* as the name of the new society, Ikeda recalls, came out of a dialogue between the

founder of Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), and his disciple and successor Josei Toda (1900–1958) in 1930 (Ikeda 2021, 29). “Creating values” means that, while pursuing happiness for ourselves, we can also create a society where others may find easier to create happiness for themselves.

Makiguchi likened the creation of values to the image of “the lotus flower in muddy water,” which is found in the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddhist scripture that is at the center of the experience of Soka Gakkai (Ikeda 2021, 29). The image shows the lotus flower that blossoms and is not sullied by the muddy water; instead, it takes sustenance from it. According to Ikeda, the lotus in the muddy water means that

however deep the chaos and confusion of the times, we can refuse to let this overwhelm us, staying always true to ourselves. The limitless power of value creation, which is intrinsic to life, enables each of us to transform our circumstances into an arena where we can live out our unique mission, imparting hope and a sense of security to all those around us (Ikeda 2021, 29).

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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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Uncompleted Transitional Justice in Taiwan: Repression of Religious and Spiritual Minorities and the Tai Ji Men Case

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ABSTRACT: “Transitional justice” indicates legal and administrative provisions a newly established democratic country adopts to rectify the injustices of the past non-democratic regime, and punish those responsible for them. Taiwan was an authoritarian regime under the Martial Law until 1987, and did not really guarantee freedom of religion or belief, as evidenced by the repression of the New Testament Church and Yiguandao. After 1987, a post-authoritarian regime followed, which proclaimed religious liberty but still persecuted religious movements perceived as hostile to the ruling party. In 1996, a crackdown hit several of the largest religious movements active in Taiwan, including Fo Guang Shan, Chung Tai Shan, Tai Ji Men, the Taiwan Zen Buddhist Association, the Sung Chi-Li Miracle Association, and later Guanyin Famen. Its aftermath particularly affected Tai Ji Men, which continued to be falsely accused of tax evasion, and whose tax case was derived from the criminal case and is still unresolved today. The article reviews attempts by various democratic governments to implement transitional justice in Taiwan, and concludes that more should be done to complete the democratic process in the island.

KEYWORDS: Transitional Justice in Taiwan, Freedom of Religion in Taiwan, Tai Ji Men, Yiguandao, New Testament Church, Fo Guang Shan, Chung Tai Shan, Taiwan Zen Buddhist Association, Sung Chi-Li Miracle Association, Guanyin Famen.

Introduction

This article first reviews the relationship between transitional justice and human rights, explaining that transitional justice not only assists post-conflict societies to move from authoritarian regimes to political democratization, but also deepens the political governance of a country ruled by the law.

In the second paragraph, the article follows the evolution of Taiwan from an authoritarian non-democratic regime under the Martial Law to a post-authoritarian regime, and finally to a full-blown democracy, although one where residual effects of the past non-democratic systems are still at work. Freedom of religion or belief (FORB) was not guaranteed in the Martial Law era, as evidenced by the cases of the New Testament Church and Yiguandao, discussed in the third paragraph.

FORB was also limited in the post-authoritarian era, and the fourth paragraph examines the politically motivated crackdown on several religious movements that happened in 1996. This crackdown had an aftermath with the 25-year-long and still unresolved Tai Ji Men case, discussed in the fifth paragraph. The sixth and seventh paragraphs examine the problems of Taiwanese democracy and the attempts by various governments, including the current one under President Tsai Ing-Wen, to effectively implement transitional justice, and lead to a conclusion arguing that more should be done.

1. Transitional Justice and Human Rights

Transitional justice is a concept that emphasizes the need to confront historical errors and pursue the realization of social justice. The idea has existed as early as the classical Athens period (Elster 2004), but the corresponding theory was formulated only in the 20th century (Lundy and McGovern 2008). According to legal scholar Ruti G. Teitel (2003, 2005), the sources of modern transitional justice were the trial and punishment of war criminals after World War II. Therefore, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide in 1948. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Nuremberg Trials, and the Tokyo Trials are all connected with transitional justice (Lundy and McGovern 2008; Leebaw 2008; Lincoln 2011).

Later, the development of transitional justice was closely related to the democratization movement of the international community in the post-Cold-War period, especially the political transformations in Latin America and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. During these transitions, answering the question how to effectively solve the problem of systematic abuse by the former regimes was a requirement for the promotion of justice (Anders and Zenker 2014). At the end of the 20th century, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, many regimes

underwent competing processes of political transformation. Transitional justice at this stage reflected the uniqueness of the world political pattern in the post-Cold-War period, and was closely linked to the development of global international politics. As a result of such developments, transitional justice gradually became a new model for the governance principles of democratic and law-based countries, by providing a conflict resolution mechanism (Teitel 2005).

The need for “transitional” justice arises when a specific regime has committed major human rights crimes during its ruling period. After the regime is replaced, citizens hope that the state will rectify and compensate for these crimes, to overcome the past and create an entirely new situation (Teitel 2003). Transitional justice is part of a society’s transition from authoritarian to democratic (Arthur 2009). It is generally believed that the leaders of the succeeding regime have the responsibility to correct the mistakes and crimes committed by the old regime, vindicate historical injustice, and pursue social transformation. This is both a legal obligation and a moral responsibility a democratic society should not evade (Bohl 2006). Transitional justice ultimately emphasizes the protection of personal safety, the improvement of the quality of life, and the democratic development of political power to realize the universal values of human dignity and human rights protection (Hellsten 2012).

Transitional justice is based on the theory of social contract justice, emphasizing the dignity of humanity and the protection of human rights, and the realization of the ideal of the rule of law. It is the ultimate goal pursued by the transitional society to realize the ideal of democracy and the rule of law (Hellsten 2012). The goal pursued is political democratization. Without the operation of a democratic government, the concept of transitional justice will be difficult to implement. The two are closely interdependent (De Greiff 2012). Rehabilitation of historical injustice alone does not guarantee democracy. A democracy also includes elements such as regular elections, a sound civil society, and an independent judicial system. Conversely, democracy alone does not correct, rehabilitate, and make up for the harm caused by historical injustice (Barkan 2006).

Not only can transitional justice promote the democratic transformation of the society in transition, it is also an important tool for the implementation of human rights protection. Transitional justice does not mean passively bidding farewell to the authoritarian rule of the past only, it has also an active character that

implements democratic governance, and optimistically faces the future (Lundy and McGovern 2008, 273; Arthur 2009). Transitional justice investigates the illegal past of the old regime, and exposes the truth about human rights violations. Its ultimate goal is to establish a new social order that cherishes and protects human rights (Lundy and McGovern 2008).

Transitional justice, together with the promotion of human rights, is closely related to the development of international law. Through the formulation of the United Nations Charter, and the norms of other international conventions, individuals are endowed by international law with the legal foundation to request the redress of human rights violations from their own countries (Pété and Plessis 2007). The development of international human rights law has given to those who had been victims of state atrocities a basis for claiming compensation or redress from the state. Conversely, according to the relevant norms of international law, the state also has the obligation to protect the human rights of its citizens (McAuliffe 2013).

On the one hand, the state is obliged to prevent violations of human rights. On the other hand, once human rights are violated, the state should investigate what happened, take appropriate actions against the perpetrators, and provide compensation to the victims. Since the international law includes such a provision, the state is under an obligation to comply with it. Once the citizens' rights protected by international law are violated, the state has the responsibility and obligation to take a series of corrective measures and compensate for the violation. Specific actions must effectively respond to the actual needs of the victims (Pété and Plessis 2007).

Transitional justice is needed because, when certain countries try to overcome their past, they must use appropriate methods to solve the problems left by the old regimes. Otherwise, historical injustices will not be rehabilitated, and the society will not be able to complete a successful transformation. The common transitional justice mechanisms approved by the international community include judicial trials, the establishment of truth inquiry committees, public apologies, amnesties, restoration and compensation measures, and so on (Barkan 2006; Olsen, Payne, and Reiter 2010; Mihai 2010).

As an international organization that protects basic human rights, the United Nations have spared no efforts to promote transitional justice over the years (they

are summarized in Chen and Chung 2016, 15–7). Not everywhere, however, have they been followed.

2. Taiwan's Authoritarian Regime and Democratic Transformation

Taiwan's democratic development has been divided into three stages: the authoritarian rule before the lifting of martial law in 1987, the post-authoritarian rule from 1988 to 2016, and the period inaugurated by the third party rotation in 2016. International scholars generally believe that democracy is a learning process, and a country can only be called democratic after it has experienced for three times a comprehensive rotation of the political parties in power (Caldwell 2018).

During the authoritarian regime from 1945 to 1987, there was no concept of human rights. Judicial control and legal delegation served the administrative power and the regime, allowing for complete administrative discrimination. Under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) and his son Chiang Ching-kuo (1910–1988), their party, the Kuomintang (KMT), ruled under the Martial Law of the Republic of China (Taiwan). This authoritarian government controlled the people and all groups through the Martial Law and the “Special Regulations on Mobilization and Rebellion.” Authoritarian governments rely on their powerful political parties, governments, military police, secret services, judiciary, tax bureaucrats, used as one whip force against any group, including religions, deemed to harm the “national security.” They are ruthlessly suppressed and persecuted.

A martial law gives the government enormous powers to eliminate any form of social dissent. In February 1947, a year before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was issued, the KMT government repressed protests across Taiwan, in what was known as the “228 Incident.” The government issued the “Report on the Rebellious People,” searched the country, and wiped out the rebels. Tens of thousands died. This ushered in another period of national terror. The peak of the period of national terror came in 1955, and was known as the “White Terror.” The KMT government imprisoned, tortured, and executed thousands of people over a period of decades (Shattuck 2019).

3. Suppression of Religious Movements Under the Martial Law: The New Testament Church and Yiguandao

Before Martial Law ended in 1987, the political atmosphere of the country obviously limited human rights, and extended the oppression to the social, cultural, and religious fields by suppressing independent movements. The state indoctrinated the citizens and manipulated the mass media ideologically. All media in Taiwan were under the shackles of a series of strict legal norms and policy control (Tien 1989). The Kuomintang government during this period allowed only limited space for freedom of thought, and forbade all promotion of Marxism-Leninism or socialism that might destabilize the legitimacy of its regime (Chao and Myers 2003; Chen and Chung 2016).

During the period of Martial Law, the ruling party and government forces went deeply into religion, and imposed strict restrictions on religious freedom. The freedom of religious belief theoretically guaranteed by the Constitution was denied in practice. If religious groups were perceived as having different political positions from the government, they were repressed. For example, Yiguandao, the New Testament Church (Mount Zion), and even the large Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, all suffered political persecution.

The New Testament Church is a Pentecostal movement founded by Christian Hong Kong movie star Mui Yee (1923–1966). After her death, Elijah Hong became the new leader, and established new headquarters at Mount Zion, near Kaohsiung, in Taiwan. What was called the “Mount Zion Incident” began in March 1974, when the authoritarian government of Taiwan arbitrarily declared the legal household registration certificates of New Testament Church members who lived communally there invalid, and set up checkpoints at the entrance of the area. The military and the police jointly raided the community, and arrested several members.

On April 1, 1980, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled that the household registration certificates were valid. In the meantime, however, members who lived in Mount Zion had been dispersed, including women and children, the church sanctuary and all the houses of the devotees had been demolished, and the property the members had left there looted or confiscated. In 1985, the military and police again raided the communities of the New Testament Church that had been reorganized across Taiwan. In several cases, devotees were beaten, leading

to cases of kidney bleeding, deafness, and even death from severe injuries. In the following years, the authoritarian government continued to display unprecedented violence against the believers. Only in 1987 was the New Testament Church allowed to return to Mount Zion, after the U.S. government had expressed its concern to Taiwan's authorities.

Yiguandao is a non-Christian salvationist new religion, which was banned in Mainland China in the 1950s. As a result, many members came to Taiwan hoping they would be allowed to freely practice their religion there. However, nationalist politicians were also suspicious of the fiercely independent salvationist new religion. In Taiwan, Yiguandao was labeled a *xie jiao* ("heterodox teaching," sometimes translated as "evil cult") and banned from missionary practice for thirty years, with several leaders arrested. A Western scholar of Yiguandao, Edward Irons, reports how during the Martial Law period leaders of Yiguandao were invited by the police to "drink a tea," after which they "disappeared" (Irons 2017). Yiguandao was legalized in Taiwan only in 1987, just before the lifting of the Martial Law.

Taiwan's authoritarian government lifted Martial Law on July 15, 1987, and Taiwan's gradual transition to democracy began. The indispensable elements of a democratic system are: (1) a political order aimed at protecting human rights; (2) the principles of separation of powers and checks and balances, which constitute the system designed to prevent state power from persecuting its own citizens; (3) the independence of the judiciary (as opposite to judicial control by the executive power), which is needed both to gain the citizens' trust and to protect human rights. The period from 1987 to 2016 was defined by scholars as the post-authoritarian regime. At the beginning of this period, the administrative power was still dominant, the judiciary was still under the control of the executive, and the legislative independence was still insufficient. The protection of human rights did not form the core value of governance, and the culture of purging dissent of the authoritarian system was still prevalent. Taiwan, on the other hand, held its first presidential elections in 1996. The president was directly elected by the citizens, which was a key indicator that the country was entering the democratic system.

4. The 1996 Presidential Elections and the Post-Election Crackdown on Xie Jiao

In the first presidential elections in Taiwan, held in March 1996, politicians were eager to enlist the support of religious groups, given the significant mobilization power they possessed. Some religions supported certain candidates during the process, which sparked a heated debate in Taiwan. The election was heavily contested but KMT's Lee Teng-Hui (1923–2020), who had already been the president from 1988 on, was reelected with 54% of the popular vote. Those who supported the candidates who lost were repressed after the elections, and paid a heavy price for their political choices.

Post-electoral punishment has been a constant of Taiwan's post-authoritarian rule. Until 2016, almost every presidential election has seen the legal prosecution of defeated presidential candidates under various pretexts, from James Soong (b. 1942) in 2000 to Ma Ying-Jeou (b. 1950) in 2008, and the current President Tsai Ing-Wen (b. 1956). After she lost the 2012 election, she was investigated for her role in the public investments in the company Yu Chang Biologics. Wong Chi-Huey, a world-famous scientist and former President of the Academia Sinica, Taiwan's main cultural institution, was also accused of corruption for political reasons in 2016.

Following the 1996 elections, Taiwan witnessed a series of heinous major murder cases, including the murder of a girl at the Air Force Command Headquarters of the Ministry of National Defense, and the assassinations of politician Liu Bang-You (1942–1996), feminist activist and politician Peng Wan-Ru (1949–1996), and others. These major incidents have not been resolved to this date, and in 1996 they put enormous pressure on the ruling authorities. To divert public attention, the ruling party government carried out a political purge at the end of 1996. Liao Zheng-Hao (b. 1946), the Executive Yuan's Minister of Justice, actively carried out a "religious crackdown" to purge dissidents. The crackdown was supported by the media, most of which were not independent from the ruling politicians.

Liao launched a comprehensive attack against dissident religious groups labeled as *xie jiao*, including investigations, tax inspections by the National Taxation Bureau (NTB), assets seizure, demolitions of "illegal" structures, and exorbitant fines. This elaborate campaign required the mobilization of a large number of media, judicial organs, national tax authorities, and so on. Angry ex-

members were encouraged to make vague accusations, each of which guaranteed a good three weeks of media headlines. The groups targeted in 1996 included the Buddhist orders Fo Guang Shan and Chung Tai Shan (led by Venerable Master Wei Jue, 1928–2016), the Taiwan Zen Buddhist Association (later the Shakyamuni Buddhist Foundation), founded by Zen Master Wu Jue Miao-Tian (b. 1934), the *menpai* (similar to a “school”) of qigong, self-cultivation, and martial arts Tai Ji Men, rooted in esoteric Taoism, and the Sung Chi-Li Miracle Association, a Taiwanese new religion whose founder is Master Sung Chi-Li (b. 1948).

Fo Guang Shan

Master Hsing Yun (b. 1927) of Fo Guang Shan had publicly supported Chen Lu-An (b. 1937), one of the candidates who lost the 1996 presidential elections. In February 1996, the *Taiwan Times*, a media outlet controlled by the ruling party, accused Fo Guang Shan of four violations of law: illegal constructions, excessive reclamation of land, pollution through garbage, and tax evasion. The *Taiwan Times* published titles such as “Fo Guang Shan Bullying and Many Evil Deeds,” “Fo Guang Shan Happy Dances and Lawlessness,” “Fo Guang Shan Tax Evasion Is an Open Secret,” and others that made shocking allegations. Protests from nearby residents were orchestrated, and the Fo Guang Shan monastery was closed for three years. It reopened in 2000.

Chung Tai Shan

Venerable Master Wei Jue of Chung Tai Shan had also supported Chen Lu-An, and his followers actively participated in collecting signatures for the candidate. Following the elections, Master Wei Jue was accused of fraud and tax evasion by the Taichung District Prosecutor’s Office. In 1990, the Shilin District Court pronounced Master Wei Jue not guilty.

Taiwan Zen Buddhist Association

In December 1995, Zen Master Wu Jue Miao Tian gathered 60,000 persons in Taoyuan. It was one of the largest gatherings in Taiwan’s history, and it drew the suspicious attention of the ruling authorities. Some politicians attended the

event, including Chen Lu-An and Hsieh Chang-Ting (b. 1946), the vice-presidential candidate for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which also eventually lost the elections to the KMT.

In the eyes of the KMT, Master Miao Tian was considered a supporter of Hsieh Chang-Ting. After the elections, he was indicted for fraud and tax evasion connected with the Columbarium Pagoda, the ossuary of the Tian Fo Temple. NTB officials announced to the media that they were assessing the value of the ossuary, and that the net profit Master Miao Tian had derived from it was 1.2 billion yuan. “Only for the profit-making business income tax, and personal comprehensive tax, together with supplementary taxes and fines, we may recover more than 2 billion yuan, plus business tax, housing tax, and land value tax, they announced. It will be something out of this world.”

These statements by government bureaucrats incensed the public opinion, and the original case of fraud was transformed into one of alleged massive tax evasion. When the Zen Master asked a professional accountant to file administrative relief procedures with the NTB, and obtain his organization’s tax file in accordance with the law, he discovered that the file contained only one newspaper clipping. Nonetheless, the campaign had placed the Zen Master under a significant financial and spiritual burden. Eventually, Master Miao Tian was exonerated from the main fraud charges connected with the ossuary, but found guilty of illegal acquisition of property and tax evasion, and finally sentenced to a jail term of eight months with probation. He decided to settle the tax case, and pay a part of what had been requested to be free from the NTB’s long-term entanglement.

Sung Chi-Li Miracle Association

Master Sung Chi-Li of the Sung Chi-Li Miracle Association had also been at odd with local KMT Taipei politicians, and had supported the defeated DPP vice-presidential candidate Hsieh Chang-Ting. After the elections, Sung was arrested for fraud in October 1996. He was convicted in 1997 and sentenced to seven years in jail, and the main temple of his Association was demolished by the police. The media depicted him as the quintessential “cult” leader defrauding his “victims.” In 2003, however, after a long legal battle, the Supreme Court overturned Sung’s conviction and stated that the Association’s activities were protected by the legal guarantees of religious liberty.

Guanyin Famen

Emboldened by the initial success of their campaigns, politicians and prosecutors moved against another popular leader of a new religion, the Vietnam-born Supreme Master Ching Hai (b. 1950), the founder of Guanyin Famen. She was accused of amassing wealth through fraud and tax evasion, and decided to leave Taiwan and establish her residence abroad.

5. The Tai Ji Men Case

Tai Ji Men was caught in the crossfire of the 1996 campaign against religious groups that did not support the KMT in the presidential elections, although it had not taken any political position. As later court decisions established, the Tai Ji Men case was built from the ground up on illegal and false premises. It emphasized the typical violations and injustices committed by a government that was not free from the toxic legacy of the authoritarian system.

Tai Ji Men is an ancient *menpai* of qigong, martial arts, and self-cultivation. According to the traditional etiquette and customs, disciples (*dizi*) show respect to their master through gifting. Dr. Hong Tao-Tze legally established Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy in 1966. Over the past 55 years, he and his disciples tirelessly worked to carry forward the essence of traditional Chinese culture, and promote love, peace, and a “culture of conscience” internationally. Since inception, they have never been accused of tax evasion, except for the six years from 1991 to 1996, for which the NTB issued illegal tax bills.

During the 1996 political purge against religious groups, Prosecutor Hou Kuan-Jen sent hundreds of police forces and investigators with guns and ammunition, together with several media, to search nineteen Tai Ji Men premises and the private homes of some *dizi*, arrested Dr. Hong, his wife, and two disciples, and prosecuted them the next year. Hou fabricated two unfounded accusations against Dr. Hong and his co-defendants—fraud and tax evasion. He alleged that the amounts of money given by *dizi* to Dr. Hong were not gifts but criminal proceedings of frauds, while he contradictorily alleged the same money as taxable tuition fees of a so-called cram school. Accordingly, he had all the properties of Dr. Hong and Tai Ji Men frozen and confiscated, and instigated the

NTB to issue tax bills for an alleged tax evasion. He also conducted a virulent media campaign against Tai Ji Men.

On July 13, 2007, the Supreme Court of Taiwan confirmed that Dr. Hong and Tai Ji Men were not guilty of fraud, tax evasion, or violation of the Tax and Tax Collection Acts. It also affirmed that “a gift made by a disciple to a master is a gift. It is exempt income under section 4 (17) of the Income Tax Act.”

American scholar Kenneth Jacobsen summarized the subsequent developments as follows, noting that what happened was a serious blow to Taiwan’s image as a Constitutional democracy:

On March 24, 2015, the Taipei High Administrative Court ruled in favor of Tai Ji Men regarding the 1996 income tax assessment, setting aside the assessment on the ground that the tax dispositions violated evidentiary rules and logical principles, and that the NTB of Taipei had never properly explored the [*menpai*] nature and characteristics of Tai Ji Men and the monetary gifts given by its members. On July 9, 2015, the Supreme Administrative Court rejected the appeal of the NTB of Taipei. The Administrative Court remanded the case to the NTB of Taipei for a legally appropriate disposition, while Hong’s assets remained in jeopardy. [...] In 2018, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled against the NTB in yet another case, finding that Tai Ji Men is an academy of Qigong, martial arts, and self-cultivation, not a cram school—the entire basis of the NTB’s illegal tax assessments.

Based on decisions of the Criminal Division of the Supreme Court in 2007, the Taipei High Administrative Court in 2015, and the Supreme Administrative Court in 2018 [...], and under pressure from other sources, both the National Taxation Bureau of Taipei and the National Taxation Bureau of the Central Area finally, after more than two decades, corrected the tax amounts for the honorariums for years 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1996 to zero. But in an apparent vendetta against Tai Ji Men and Hong, and in likely retaliation for their vindication in those other cases, these agencies continued to pursue taxes and fines for 1992, until in 2020, despite street protests with thousands of participants in Taiwan and statements by international scholars and human rights activists, properties belonging to Hong were seized and auctioned (Jacobsen 2020, 117–18).

On August 22, 2021, a shocking and distressing video was uncovered and released to the media. Tax collector Shih Yue-Sheng revealed in the video that Prosecutor Hou accused Tai Ji Men of tax evasion without evidence, and directly contacted Shih, who had never investigated Tai Ji Men, to provide false testimony, then used his testimony as the key evidence to prosecute Tai Ji Men for tax evasion.

Nearly 20 years after the incident, Shih confessed to the media that he had been pressured by Prosecutor Hou to falsely testify that he had found evidence of the tax evasion. Shih recalled that,

back then when people came to me about the case, I would tell them there's a problem with this case. But no one listened. We deal with taxes, therefore when you submit the case to us, we must analyze it before commenting on the case. Regarding the Tai Ji Men case, I suggested that we wait for the evidence. "How did you compute this amount?" I inquired. He showed it to me, and I asked him where did the amount come from. Because his answer was vague, I responded, "That's not correct." "This will not be discussed," he said. "Won't be discussed?" I inquired, "So, what are your plans?" "We're simply going to use it," he answered. "Have you ever considered that this was a loophole?" I said (Action Alliance to Redress 1219 2021).

Taxation is based on evidence, and Shih believed that the Tai Ji Men case should be postponed until such evidence would become available. If the calculation of the amount cannot be explained, the money should not be counted. However, the City Field Office of the Investigation Bureau insisted on doing so. This entire case was initiated and directed by Prosecutor Hou Kuan-Jen. This revelation proved that Prosecutor Hou's accusation of tax evasion against Tai Ji Men was wholly fabricated and deliberately constructed. It also exposed Taiwan's use of illegal taxation to carry out religious crackdowns during the democratic transition period. This further confirmed the validity of the 2007 criminal court decision, the 2015 Taipei High Administrative Court ruling, and the 2018 Supreme Administrative Court decision.

6. *A Failure of Democracy?*

What happened in 1996 was a clear violation of democratic principles and FORB, as religious and spiritual movements were targeted for political reasons. Even after 1996, the political party in power still mobilized many media, judicial organs, and national tax authorities with their powerful overall power putting together party and government, judicial system and tax administration.

"Religion" is usually associated with one or more specific beliefs and worship systems, either theistic or non-theistic. However, in human rights law, "religious freedom" also includes the right to support unconventional beliefs and non-religious beliefs, such as atheism or agnosticism. In 1993 *General Comment no.*

22 by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, interpreting article 18 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, explained that

article 18 protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. The terms ‘belief’ and ‘religion’ are to be broadly construed (UN Human Rights Committee 1993, no. 2).

Beliefs about religion offer hope and comfort to billions around the world, and have an enormous potential for peace and reconciliation. However, they may also be a source of great tension and conflict. This complexity, and the difficulty of an inclusive definition of “religion” and “belief,” are reflected in the ongoing struggle to protect freedom of religion or belief in the context of international human rights.

The United Nations recognized the importance of freedom of religion or belief in article 18 of its 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18. Similar provisions followed in other well-known United Nations documents (Marshall 2021).

The Constitution of the Republic of China (Taiwan) also includes the principle of freedom of religion in article 7 (“The people of the Republic of China are equal in law, regardless of gender, religion, race, class, or political party”) and article 13 (“The people shall have freedom of religious belief”). According to Judicial Interpretation no. 593, “The State shall observe the principle of neutrality and tolerance towards religion.” Interpretation no. 490 has a similar statement about freedom of religion: “its scope of protection includes the freedom of inner belief, the freedom of religious conduct, and the freedom of religious association.” Accordingly, Taiwan’s Constitution does guarantee the citizen’s freedom of religion or belief (FORB). But in fact, do people in Taiwan really enjoy FORB?

According to a study conducted by the Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Liberty, FORB in various countries is statistically correlated with the existence of fundamental human rights and the success of democracy (Grim 2008, 42–7). The Pew Research Center (2012) noted that data collected between 2012 and 2013 showed that religious minorities were still the target of government restrictions and hostile acts in 61% of the countries around the world. FORB and democracy are so inextricably linked that democracy can only last where FORB is guaranteed (Grim 2009). Thus, it is important to understand the relationship between the development of democracy in Taiwan and FORB.

Under the Martial Law regime, i.e., before 1987, the authoritarian government in Taiwan did not fully guarantee FORB. The Martial Law allowed “restricting or prohibiting religious activities that interfere with public security,” established the authoritarian government’s control over religion, and offered a legal justification for multiple FORB violations, despite the wording of Taiwan’s Constitution. Although the KMT government claimed to give all religions freedom to develop, this was conditional. If religious groups agreed with the government, or were not suspected of not supporting it, most of them could enjoy religious freedom. However, if religious groups had different political views from the government, or if the KMT party felt it was not supported by certain groups, repression followed. We have seen how Yiguandao and the New Testament Church were persecuted, but others such as Soka Gakkai, the Unification Church, the True Jesus Church, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Presbyterian Church (Laliberté 2009) also saw their activities limited by the KMT governments.

At the end of the Martial Law period, the KMT and government institutions gradually began to adopt relatively relaxed policies. At the same time, some oppressed religious groups became important forces that promoted the lifting of the Martial Law.

During the post-authoritarian period from 1988 to 2016, the relationship between political and religious conflicts gradually changed. Many social groups, and experts and scholars, demanded that the ruling government should not persecute religious groups without legal basis, and insisted that human rights should no longer be violated for political reasons as it had happened under the non-democratic authoritarian system. However, in the early stage of the post-authoritarian system, the protection of human rights was not a core value of the governance. The purge culture of the authoritarian system was still prevalent. The political purge and crackdown on religious movements after the 1996 presidential elections tried to eradicate several religious groups, showing that contradictions still existed.

A case in point was the relationship between the government and the Presbyterian Church, which criticized the authoritarian rule and several aspects of the KMT’s cross-Strait policies (Laliberté 2009, 55). Even in the year 2000, when the first non-KMT president, Chen Shui-Bian (b. 1950), was elected, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan was still anxious about both the governmental

approach to religion and cross-Strait policies. When in 2008 the KMT recaptured the presidency with Ma Ying-Jeou, this anxiety became more intense as the Presbyterian Church, like others, perceived Ma as favorable to a reunification with Mainland China.

Why was Taiwan's implementation of FORB delayed? Italian scholar Massimo Introvigne (2021) compared Taiwan to South Korea, noting that the two countries were born under the threat of China and North Korea respectively, which explains why they were ruled by authoritarian regimes for many years and their democratic allies did not object. Due to this external threat, it was more difficult for Taiwan and South Korea to walk towards democracy than it was, for example, for Italy after Fascism. In Taiwan and South Korea, the transition from the autocratic regime to a democratic system was realized gradually. During the transition period, the old habits, ideas, and behaviors of the old bureaucrats still remained. One of the great tests for the new democracies was to accommodate religious minorities. Both South Korea and Taiwan restricted the activities of religious and spiritual movements during their transition to democracy, with consequences still at work today, as evidenced by the Tai Ji Men case.

7. Is There Transitional Justice in Taiwan?

In many ways, Taiwan's post-Martial-Law political trajectory mirrored that experienced by Latin American and Eastern European countries in the post-Cold-War era. Taiwan was ruled by an authoritarian regime that maintained a firm grip on power by repressing and stifling dissent through complete control of society. In the 1990s, with the passage of time and the strengthening of democratic institutions, the international community, with the help of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), promoted a democratic trajectory in the countries that were once ruled by one-party systems or dictators. Both in Latin America and Eastern Europe the problem of transitional justice was addressed by the former non-democratic countries.

Compared with these international developments, Taiwan's post-Martial-Law approach to transitional justice was somewhat different. In 2008, Taiwan achieved its second rotation of ruling political parties, as the presidency had gone first from the KMT to the DPP in 2000, and now went back from the DPP to the

KTM. Yet, there was no dedicated body to deal with transitional justice, and the achievements of the government and the private sector in this area remained quite limited. Taiwan would have needed compensation for the victims of the authoritarian regime, a comprehensive serious investigation of historical truth, and of the legal and moral responsibility of those guilty of human rights violations. All this would have been needed to restore the citizens' trust in the institutions. However, no positive and clear action was taken.

Both the DPP and KMT administrations still limited accountability or the possibility of prosecution to abuses committed during the Martial Law period, excluding those perpetrated after 1987. This happened because a KMT-led coalition was still in control of the Legislative Yuan (Taiwan's Parliament) from 1987 to 2016, and was reluctant to promote transitional justice targeting wrongdoings the same party had committed in the past. With this historical burden, the KMT government's first post-transition legislation specifically addressing past abuses was the 1995 bill to restore the rights of individuals damaged during the Martial Law era. In its scope of application, as summarized by historian of Chinese law Ernest Caldwell, the Act was limited to

individual cases occurring during the period between May 20, 1949, and July 14, 1987, in which the defendants were either charged but found not guilty in courts-martial or were found guilty but can subsequently prove their confessions were coerced (Caldwell 2018, 463).

The second major part of the transitional justice judicial legislation passed by the KMT-dominated legislatures was the Incident Handling and Compensation Act of 28 February 1995. This bill specifically targeted the victims of the "228 incident," the violent repression of anti-government protests that started on February 28, 1947, and left tens of thousands dead. This was reflected in the first article of the Act, which provided the basic principle of "making citizens understand the truth of the [228] event, healing historical wounds, promoting national unity and harmony," and also established a timetable for compensation. The Act created a system

to provide the restitution of honor for victims or the descendants of those killed, wounded, tortured, detained, or imprisoned, and compensation for individuals or their families who had property damaged or confiscated during the period of state-sanctioned violence (Caldwell 2018, 464).

The last important piece of transitional justice legislation passed by the KMT-dominated legislature was a 1998 Act on compensation for improper trials based on trumped up sedition and espionage charges during the period of Martial Law. According to Caldwell,

This Act was the direct result of public dissatisfaction with the KMT government and legislature's lack of efforts to properly address the abuses occurring during the White Terror period. However, despite the public pressure for more comprehensive transitional justice legislation, the 1998 Compensation Act follows the KMT's trend of legislating compensatory acts while precluding any inquiries over the legitimacy of KMT rule or assigning any liability to specific individuals (Caldwell 2018, 466).

The DPP won two presidential elections, in 2000 and 2004, but a KMT-dominated coalition kept its majority in the Legislative Yuan. As a result,

Chen Shui-bian's two terms in office were fraught with persistent policy gridlock between the DPP-held executive and KMT-held legislature, with the latter opposing nearly all government proposals requiring legislative approval (Caldwell 2018, 467–68).

With President Ma Ying-Jeou, who was elected twice in 2008 and 2012, the KMT came to control again the presidency, the government, and the legislature at the same time. No formal transitional justice legislation was completed during Ma's two terms in office. In 2009, however, under President Ma, the Legislative Yuan ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and passed the Law on the Implementation of the Two Conventions. In 2013, ten international human rights experts were invited to Taiwan to conduct a review of human rights there. In the 81 “concluding opinions and suggestions” published, nos. 24 and 25 specifically pointed out the issue of promoting transitional justice in Taiwan, and put forward specific suggestions. After the meeting, President Ma held an international press conference and promised to implement the expert recommendations, and the ideal of “governing the country by human rights.” However, this commitment was not followed by effective action.

In 2009, Taiwan had adopted the two conventions as its domestic law, with the ultimate goal of strengthening its comprehensive human rights protection mechanism. This should have provided an opportunity for Taiwan to be more responsible for human rights issues, and further strengthen the protection of

human rights enjoyed by Taiwanese citizens (Shope 2012). In particular, the ICCR in paragraph 3 of article 2 asks the states

- (a) To ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity;
- (b) To ensure that any person claiming such a remedy shall have his right thereto determined by competent judicial, administrative or legislative authorities, or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, and to develop the possibilities of judicial remedy;
- (c) To ensure that the competent authorities shall enforce such remedies when granted.

Therefore, Taiwan's adoption of the ICCPR raised the question how to properly correct and remedy human rights abuses related to the authoritarian rule of the KMT (Roth 2019).

During her 2016 presidential campaign, DPP candidate Tsai Ing-Wen included issues of transitional justice in her platform. She had long promised to apologize to Taiwan's aboriginal people on behalf of the government and, more generally, to "face the past and do everything possible to restore the historical truth." Tsai won the presidency with 56.1% of the vote, and the DPP won a legislative majority for the first time in Taiwan's democratic history. As Caldwell (2018, 474) reports,

In her inaugural speech, President Tsai reiterated the importance of transitional justice for Taiwan as a society to move forward. She stated that "the goal of transitional justice is to pursue true social reconciliation, so that all Taiwanese can take to heart the mistakes of that era." Throughout the speech, the scope of transitional justice was clearly expanded to reflect society's palpable discontent with the limited scope and time frame of the KMT legislation.

Tsai's inaugural address, which set out the goal of making investigations and pursuing the truth as a key mechanism for social reconciliation, also marked a departure from past practices, with special emphasis on Taiwan's democratic transition and historical justice (Shattuck 2019).

In July 2016, Tsai and the DPP government introduced the "Act Governing the Handling of Ill-Gotten Properties by Political Parties and Their Affiliate Organizations," and set up the CIPAS (Committee on Ill-Gotten Party Assets Settlement) to investigate and deal with property illegally acquired by the KMT and its affiliated organizations from August 15, 1945, to July 15, 1987. The Act

was only passed on 5 December 2017, and on May 31, 2018, a Transitional Justice Commission (TJC) with a larger mandate than CIPAS was established, to deal with all issues relating to legal files, despotic decisions, and wrongful convictions during the period between August 15, 1945, and November 6, 1992.

Article 6 introduced a so-called overlord clause, which allowed to go beyond the existing legal framework of criminal law and administrative law to revisit unjust decisions, and establish an effective relief mechanism to deal with the injustice and violation of human rights left over by the previous authoritarian governments. According to this article, by March 26, 2021, the TJC had cancelled a total of 5,837 criminal decisions of the Martial Law period, and started the corresponding proceedings for reparation, realizing the most important spirit of the transitional justice, “rehabilitating the reputations.”

CIPAS completed part of its mission in June 2019 with the establishment of an online database of property related to Taiwan’s political parties, which included 30 “significant cases” and 1,896 other cases. The TJC has an even more difficult task, to investigate issues related to Taiwan’s authoritarian past. The TJC is responsible for three main issues: (1) providing public access to political archive records; (2) removing signs of authority and preserving places where injustices occur; (3) correct judicial errors, restore historical truth, and promote social reconciliation (Shattuck 2019).

Comparing the scope of the transitional justice legislation in the KMT era and the DPP era, the difference is obvious. As long as the KMT retained an elected majority in the legislature, it could directly control the official position on transitional justice. Thus, the transitional justice legislation of the KMT emphasized reparation and limited recognition, while excluding any consideration of criminal responsibility, personal responsibility, or the need for amnesty. Since the DPP first opened up the scope of transitional justice legislation when it won a legislative majority after two decades of KMT rule, the DPP legislation now seeks to fill gaps in accountability, knowledge, and financial issues with specific legislative language.

However, not everyone is happy with the DPP’s transitional justice legislative agenda. Like the KMT’s legislation, the DPP’s bill also contains measures to limit the applicability of transitional justice. Both the 2016 Improper Property Act (The Act Governing the Settlement of Ill-gotten Properties by Political Parties

and Their Affiliate Organization) and the 2017 Act on Promoting Transitional Justice are limited in time to the period from 1945 to 1992, excluding any consideration of the need for transitional justice for victims of human rights abuses that occurred after 1992. In short, although President Tsai has won international recognition for her efforts to promote transitional justice, it is my conclusion that Taiwan still has work to do in this respect.

8. Conclusion

Transitional justice emphasizes the concept of facing up to historical mistakes and pursuing the realization of social justice. It is the responsibility of leaders of successive regimes to correct the mistakes made by the old regimes in the past, and rectify the historical injustices. This is an obligation and responsibility that a democratic society should not avoid (Bohl 2006). Transitional justice must transcend the limitations of the past legal framework and use appropriate means to solve the problems left over by the old regime. Otherwise, historical injustice will not be righted, and the society will not be able to complete a successful transformation (Mihai 2010).

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) offers a full program of transitional justice. Based on its criteria, the Tsai administration should also confront the human rights cases of persecution of religious beliefs initiated by the KMT government in 1996, during Taiwan's post-authoritarian period. These cases are typical of the illegal and unjust acts perpetrated under the KMT government, although they occurred after 1992.

In particular, the Tai Ji Men case is a typical example of human rights violations by the post-authoritarian regime during Taiwan's slow transition to a democratic regime. It also shows that the tax system at work from 1992 to 2020 was still not a modern system respecting the principles of separation of powers and checks and balances for the purpose of protecting human rights, and still maintained residual effects of the authoritarian period, which continued to harm basic human rights and hinder social progress. The Tai Ji Men case also highlights that in Taiwan's post-authoritarian regime, administrative courts do not fully protect human rights and continue to serve as a tool to shield the mistakes of the administrative power.

The evidence is as follows: (1) More than 9,500 explanatory letters and orders of the Ministry of Finance govern the tax administration. The explanatory letters and orders go beyond the law, and make the executive power hegemonic over the legislative power, which seriously violates the principle of legal control of the tax system. The Legislative Yuan has no room to comment on the explanatory letters and orders. (2) The administrative courts do not understand the intricacies of the tax law, which means that they rely on the NTB's reports, with the result that more than 94% of tax cases are decided against the taxpayers, who have no effective remedy against unjust taxation. (3) The Ministry of Finance and its subordinate tax authorities, in addition to quoting laws and decrees, also use letters of explanation to offer frequent interpretations that are unfavorable to the citizens' rights and interests, and favorable to the NTB. (4) The Legislative Yuan itself cooperated with the administrative organs to give tax officials bonuses and promotion incentives, with the result that imposing excessive taxes has invisibly become the collective subconscious of tax collectors, and the original sin leading to violation of human rights. (5) If the citizens refuse to accept the administrative decisions of the tax collectors, they have to pay half of the tax to avoid enforcement before they could act for administrative relief, which discourages action. (6) Tax bureaucrats are afraid of admitting their mistakes, and for this reasons would never give up or admit defeat in a tax lawsuit. Nonetheless, in the infrequent event that they lose a court case, they are not punished for their past mistakes.

President Tsai deserves credit for the judicial reform she promoted after her second election in 2016. However, her reform is focused on criminal law, and does not extend to the authoritarian administration of tax law, which also violates human rights to a great extent.

As we have seen, Taiwan has incorporated two international conventions into domestic law in 2009. The two conventions require that effective remedies to protect human rights and rectify past injustices should be implemented. The judiciary may apply several different methods to effectively ensure the enjoyment of the rights recognized by the conventions, including direct application of the conventions, invocation of Constitutional or other legal provisions including similar concepts, or interpretation from the perspective of human rights under the conventions when applying domestic law. An independent and impartial administrative body, such as the Commission on Human Rights, could also be

entrusted to investigate cases of human rights violations promptly, thoroughly, and effectively so as to prevent the recurrence of such violations.

However, although Taiwan has become a democratic country under the rule of law, as of 2021 it has not yet fully dealt with the problem of transitional justice with respect to the past legal and tax authoritarian system. The current remedy system is still limited to the old framework, and there is no effective relief channel for the illegal administrative punishments after the decisions of the administrative courts. As a result, the way of redress for well-known and obvious miscarriages of justice is still blocked, obviously violating the obligations of the state stipulated in the two conventions.

President Tsai must face up to the various cases of human rights violations caused by the post-authoritarian regime after 1992. Taiwan should apply effective transitional justice to acts of tax authorities as well, transcend the limitations of the existing administrative procedural law and tax law, conform to the international conventions, ask the TJC to investigate all kinds of cases, cancel unjust court decisions that violated human rights, rectify all false cases, and realize the essence of transitional justice, “rehabilitate the reputations.” This is the real transitional justice that will make Taiwan a country of real democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

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