

Memorial hall could be transitional justice hub

Written by Tsao Chin-jung 蕭欽君

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Taiwan finds itself in a period of transitional justice. Taiwanese, determined to make social dialogue a reality, are facing challenges with courage and hope.

An article on Monday last week titled “Taiwan’s hopes for transitional justice” by Academia Sinica research fellow Wu Nai-teh (吳乃德) in the Chinese-language Liberty Times (the Taipei Times’ sister newspaper) made a big impact as it pointed out several ways to create social dialogue.

The best place for implementing these ideas is the museum at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall.

During President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) first term in office, the Ministry of Culture ran a memorial hall review and art transformation project, but the project did not generate enough ideas.

The media reported that many programs remained unannounced, stuck in the Executive Yuan. Whether they were not announced following passionate decisions over political name rectification in 2007 and 2008 will never be known.

During the first name rectification campaign in 2007, almost 100 White Terror and 228 Incident victims and family members stepped into the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall for the first time in their lives to express their support for changing the name to National Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall.

It is difficult to imagine what they felt as they did so.

In 2008, then-president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) undid the name change and proposed an exhibition that would show Chiang’s mistakes as well as his achievements, something he never followed through on during his eight years in office.

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Wu's article brought up the complicated issue of whether the memorial hall should be kept.

Before politicians make a decision, he wrote, it would build mutual understanding to use the memorial hall as a museum in which people could talk about the nation's contested history, as was intended by the theme for International Museum Day in 2017: "Museums and Contested Histories: Saying the Unspeakable in Museums."

The theme for this year's International Museum Day is "Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion."

Perhaps this could offer Taiwanese society an opportunity to collectively gain a deeper understanding of difficulties encountered and achievements gained in transitional justice experiences in Germany and South Africa, as well as countries in eastern Europe, South America and Asia.

Using the memorial hall space to host comparative exhibitions, films, symposiums and other activities addressing transitional justice in Taiwan and abroad, while also collecting and publishing visitors' opinions would be a transparent and creative way to gauge public opinion and build mutual trust, while respecting democracy and freedom.

The Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, the National Human Rights Museum, the National 228 Memorial Museum and the Transitional Justice Commission should work together with private museums to gain an understanding of what most members of the public are thinking.

Using the museum in this way would have the lowest social cost, while offering the best opportunity for dialogue and making use of soft power.

It is also a precious and unique opportunity gifted to Taiwanese by their forbears' sacrifice and struggle, which built the freedom that Taiwan enjoys today. It is an opportunity for all of Taiwan to show the world how it implements transitional justice.

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