

The “White Terror” and the National Human Rights Museum in Taiwan



“Jin Ai” Building which was used as the Detention Center of Taiwan Garrison Command Martial Law Section. (Jing-Mei Human Rights Memorial and Cultural Park)

“Martial Law” was promulgated by the Republic of China (KMT Regime) in May 19 1949 after it’s defeat in the Chinese Civil War. It lasted 38 years and 56 days until it was lifted in July 15 1987. During that period, the KMT Government issued different Statutes as “Punishment of Insurgent Act”, “Purging of communist spies at politically unstable period” especially “Guilt-by-association Act”, “Punishment for concealment of bandits”....etc ,for strict control of thoughts and speeches of the people as well as elimination of political dissidents. This created an uncertain and precarious atmosphere in the society so called the “white terror”.

Under the deterrent reign at “White Terror Era”, many political cases were unfairly treated. Civilians were punished just because they said something that crossed the red line and were deemed as “political victims” under the “Punishment of Insurgent Act”, and were prosecuted under martial law. The bounty encouragement system created many cases that were false, innocent or fabricated.

At the earlier stages (early 1950s’), political defendants were detained at No.3

Qingdao East Road, Taipei City (Taiwan Security Command) on investigation. Once condemned they were sent to military prison or other detention centers in lieu of prisons for incarceration.

In 1950, political victims were sent to Green Island “New Life Correction Center” for ideological and labor reform (so called brain wash). May 1958, Taiwan Garrison Command was set up in replacement of Taiwan Security Command. 1968, The Martial Law Section Detention Center of Taiwan Garrison Command moved from No.3 Qingdao East Road to 20 Chang Road, Xindian and renamed as “Jing-Mei Martial Law Detention Center.”

The currently preserved Green Island Prison and Jing-Mei Detention Center are the two most important sites during the “white terror” period bearing many life stories of the political victims and their families.

The Preparatory Office of Human rights Museum was officially established in December 10 2011. It’s main operations and responsibilities are:

- (1) Showing the Government’s respect and concern for Human Rights.
- (2) Enhancing the quality of Human Rights Education.
- (3) To witness the process of Taiwan Democratization.

Both Green Island and Jing-Mei Human Rights Memorial and Cultural Parks tell and testify the history of White Terror with no end.

Green Island (originally named as Burning Island) lies 18 knots from the south eastern coast of Taiwan Main Island, it was once a place that segregated freedom, life and dreams. In May 17 1951 thousands of political victims were sent to Green Island by sea from Keelung, two victims in a cuff. They suffered moisturized heat and stumbled all their way on board until they were landed on Green Island from Chungliaw fishing port. They walked along the path reaching the New Life Correction Center and began their ideological and labor reform.



Green Island "Oasis Villa" (Green Island Human Rights Memorial and Cultural Park)

The Taiwan Security Command New Life Correction Center's management was by concentration camp system and centralized control. At peak time they were more than 2,000 victims separating into 12 squadrons with about 120 to 160 victims per squadron. From 1963 until 1973, political prisoners were incarcerated at Taitung Taiyuan Prison. Because of the "Taiyuan Incident" in 1960, political victims were then transferred to Green Island "Oasis Villa" in 1972.

Jing-Mei Human Rights Memorial and Cultural Park originally was the Military Academy which moved out in 1967 and later was in dominion of Taiwan Garrison Command. The original school field was converted into "Jin Ai" Building which was used as the Detention Center of Taiwan Garrison Command Martial Law Section. Later the military courts and the "First Court" were built successively. It's the important location in connection with the history of Taiwan Human Rights development. It functioned as the detaining, prosecution and incarceration in lieu of prison at White Terror Period.



The "First Court" (*Jing-Mei Human Rights Memorial and Cultural Park*)

Retracing history is the momentum for us to move on. Through oral history and visual documentary, The Preparatory Office tried its best to retain the stories of the political victims at that time as well to preserve the important memories of the Nation.

Oral history is an intangible record but with proper preservation of documents, only then cultural heritage, be it material or invisible, can be passed down. The collections of articles and documents by the Preparatory Office, as the violin from Chen Men Ho, the school bag from Hsu Kui Piao (both are political victims) , not only brought back the deepest feelings and their touching stories but also transmitted the truth of the history. So as the younger generation learned to esteem the errors of the past and avoiding the tragic to be happened again in any ways.

The core functions and jobs of the Preparatory Office are:

- (1) To preserve the group or personal historical memories during the "white terror" era by inviting political victims to personally write down their life stories and the Preparatory Office will help in editing and publishing them in related books. This has received a good feedback and responses from the public.



To preserve the group or personal historical memories by doing the work of oral history.

(2) Special exhibition is one of the ways that the Preparatory Office is trying to convey to the public the achievement of the preservation of documents and highlight the concepts of Human Rights Education.

Through the exhibition, we hope all visitors can be fully and deeply absorbed into the condition and the atmosphere of that particular situation in which the victims had gone through, so in hoping that an unlimited dialogue within the people, documents and history can sparkle and flourish in some way.

(3) Human Rights Education needs years of hard work to accomplish its target. Just as our Chinese proverb says: "Planting a tree needs ten years but training a man needs hundred years."

To intensify and deep-root of Human Rights Education, Preparatory Office organized seminars or training camps for teachers or the public in hoping that this platform can not only be the key of entrance but also provide a good condition that will finally nurtured the "seeds" which will penetrate into every corners of our society.



One of the political victims Mr. Tsai, Kuan-Yu is a museum volunteer to guide the student group.

Preparatory Office organized symposiums in 2013 inviting Human Rights Scholars from Canada, Chile, Germany ... etc in exchanging ideas how to preserve and record of historical memories. They were total 70 representatives from over 40 countries participated in this symposium and visited the Green Island and Jingmei cultural Park.



Director Ricardo Brodsky Baudet (middle), The Museum of Memory and Human Rights (in Spanish: Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos) and Dr. Stuart Murray(left), President, The Canadian Museum for Human Rights were listening to the guide of the Preparatory Office when they attended the symposium in Jing-Mei Human Rights Memorial and Cultural Parks in 2013.

Every year on May 17, the Preparatory Office have the Green Island Human Rights Art festival and the activity on December 10-the Human Rights Day. We thank you all the supports of the political victims that urged the National Human Rights Museum Preparatory Office to move on firmly and stably.

The donations of different articles at Human Rights Day by the political victims fruitfully mended the empty gap of the history. Adding up the ages of the political victims, it's over thousand years and these seniority sang on the spot the song which at that time supported them to live through the hardship at White Terror Period.



Two political victims were looking at the old photos photographed during the "white terror" period when they attended the workshop called "Health Check of Cultural Documents".

The admonition of history cannot be forgotten. Our Bodies can be incarcerated but our souls will fly over the high walls penetrating the space-time. Political Victims used their lives and bloods mending the gap of the dark side of the history and light up the path of democracy for the next generations.

We learnt the history from the mistakes of the past experiences. We felt the pains and sacrifices of the seniorities. We learned to respect Human Rights and thus avoiding the reoccurrence of the tragic past. This is the highest respect to the political victims for their sacrifices.