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ARTICLE

Preventing Catastrophe: The World's First Peace Museum

Peter van den DUNGEN

ARTICLE

Preventing Catastrophe: The World's First Peace Museum

In praise of Ikuro Anzai and Jan Bloch

Peter van den DUNGEN*

Abstract

The advent of the nuclear age has seen the creation of many peace museums, especially in Japan. They are important instruments of public peace education. As director of the Kyoto Museum for World Peace at Ritsumeikan University, Professor Ikuro Anzai has played a central role in their development. The world's first peace museum was established by Jan Bloch in Lucerne in 1902, to warn of the dangers of a new large war. He belongs to a rich tradition of peacemakers and peace educators from the past, whom the world does not remember. Their inspiring lives and ideas should also be told in peace museums. In order to enhance the effectiveness of the atomic bomb museums in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, such museums should also be established outside Japan. The creation of an Atomic Bomb & Peace Museum in Lucerne would provide a great stimulus for the movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons, and of war.

In September 1992, the first conference of what would soon become the International Network of Peace Museums was convened in Bradford by the small British Quaker charity 'Give Peace a Chance', in association with the Department of Peace Studies of the University of Bradford. This was the first global meeting of directors and staff of peace and anti-war museums and related institutions'. Among the participants was also Professor Kimio Yakushiji who represented the Kyoto Museum for World Peace at Ritsumeikan University, which had opened its doors a few months before, in May. For peace researchers and educators, who see peace museums as vital instruments for the promotion of peace education and the creation of a culture of peace, the Kyoto Museum has always been an inspiring example, not least because of its institutional setting. Given the responsibility of universities as the prime centers in every country of the world for the discovery and dissemination of knowledge, it was heartening to know that there was at least one university - and a prominent one, too - whose campus incorporated a peace museum. It can be noted that the European Museum for Peace, which was opened in 2000 in the castle in the small Austrian village of Stadtschlaining, is part of a family of institutions which also comprise the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution and the European Peace University. However, as this is not a university in the ordinary sense, it seems that

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the Kyoto Museum at Ritsumeikan University remains unique on account of its incorporation into a university.

In order to stimulate the plans for a peace museum in Stadtschlaining, and also support the fledgling International Network of Peace Museums (which the Bradford conference had decided to create), Dr. Gerald Mader, president of the Austrian Study Center, hosted the network's second conference, which was held in August 1995. Professor Ikuro Anzai, as its new director, represented the Kyoto Museum. The contrast between the two localities could hardly have been more striking: Kyoto - the former imperial city which continues to be the cultural capital of Japan, with one and a half million inhabitants; Stadtschlaining - a sleepy village of 700 inhabitants in rural Burgenland. However, the village is not without history as is evident, particularly, by the presence of the imposing castle, dating back to the Middle Ages. Now the home of the peace museum, it has become a veritable 'fortress of peace' which provides another contrast with the modern, purpose-built museum in Kyoto.²

Towards the end of the Stadtschlaining conference, participants had the satisfaction to be informed by the Japanese delegation of its endeavours to organise the third international conference in Japan. This promise, and its subsequent realisation, owed much to the vision, determination, and efforts of Professor Anzai. The third - large, and highly successful - international conference was made possible through the cooperation of five important peace museums in Japan. The conference took place in November 1998 in Osaka and Kyoto, and for foreign participants was enriched with optional excursions to the peace museums in either Hiroshima, Nagasaki, or Okinawa. The fact that from the beginning the conference secretariat was based at the Kyoto Museum is indicative of the central role played by its director, ably and enthusiastically assisted by Ritsumeikan University Professor Atsushi Fujioka, the Secretary General of the Conference's Organizing Committee.³ Peace museum experts the world over will always remember with gratitude and fondness this outstanding event.

At the Fifth International Conference of Peace Museums, organised by the Gernika Peace Museum Foundation in the Basque Country (Spain) in May 2005, Professor Anzai presented the renewal project of the Kyoto Museum for World Peace. In order to keep up to date, and continue to attract visitors - both old and new - the need to reconsider at least every ten years the content of a museum and the way it displays its materials and presents its message is a widely accepted principle in the general museum world. How much more is this true for museums dealing with war and peace, incorporating as they do such related themes as human rights, development, environment, and security which are subject to fast-moving developments - both in the conceptual field and in the real world. Because of his great expertise, Professor Anzai has been called upon to assist in the renewal of other peace museums in Japan and beyond. The successful extension and renewal in recent years of such museums as the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum,⁴ the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Museum, and the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) have

benefitted from his creative input.

It is a further measure of Professor Anzai's great commitment to the peace museum idea, and firm conviction of the importance of such institutions in promoting a better world, that he regards the Kyoto Museum for World Peace at the Kyoto Campus of Ritsumeikan University as only the first in an ambitious and imaginative peace museum complex, comprising three further components. These other components consist of a Science & Technology Museum for Peace at the University's Biwako Lake Campus, an International Understanding Museum for Peace at Ritsumeikan Asia-Pacific University in Oita Prefecture, and a Digital Resource Museum for Peace Education related to the complex of primary, junior and senior high schools of Ritsumeikan University.⁵

It can be said with little fear of contradiction that in today's world Professor Anzai is the leading figure as regards the conceptualisation and creation of museums for peace. It is not surprising that his country is Japan, and his institutional home Ritsumeikan University. The annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the continuing threat represented by the arsenals of what has worryingly become a growing club of nuclear weapons states, inevitably continue to make nuclear abolition a high profile issue for the country. The two cities, in particular, regard it as their grave responsibility to preserve for all humanity the reality of nuclear war, and to prevent its repetition by striving for the abolition of nuclear weapons and the promotion of world peace. The age-old cry of suffering humanity, 'No more war!', has never been uttered with as much agony, desperation, and passion as by the Hibakushas. Their voices are heard, and their testimonies recorded, for all posterity in the peace museums in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the first such museums to be established anywhere in the wake of World War II. Education for a broad public about these and related issues - the dangers inherent in current defence and security policies of the nuclear powers, the urgent necessity of new thinking and its translation into more constructive policies, the physical, social and psychological damage caused by violent conflict, the potential for peaceful conflict resolution, the power of nonviolence - remains a prime function of peace museums everywhere. As a nuclear physicist by training, Professor Anzai is more aware than most of what is at stake.

As exemplified at the Kyoto Museum, an important factor in establishing trust between countries is an honest appraisal of the past. Together with Osaka Peace, the Museum was the first in Japan to draw attention to the fact that the country was not only a victim in World War II, but also an aggressor. To the extent that this aspect of recent Japanese history has been unsatisfactorily dealt with in school textbooks, the role of the few museums which are brave enough to squarely address this issue (which remains highly sensitive, both in Japan and in the region) assumes great significance. Japan is of course not the only country whose destiny in the first half of the 20th century was tragically shaped by an aggressive imperialism driven by a strong military. Together with the rest of the educational sector, universities were both victims and instruments of the new, brutal order which suppressed the most fundamental human rights and values, at

home and abroad. Following World War II, Ritsumeikan University recognised its responsibility for the country's debacle, and committed itself to an educational policy based on an absolute respect for human dignity, and which also aimed to infuse the values of international peace and cooperation in all its endeavours. This philosophy readily explains the prominent presence of the Kyoto Museum for World Peace at Ritsumeikan University, as well as the plans for the complementary museums mentioned earlier.

Taking a wider view of history and of peace museums, the latter institutions are also ideal vehicles for bringing before a large public an aspect of history which has traditionally been ignored in textbooks the world over, namely the struggles and campaigns against war and militarism and for peace and nonviolence. They can be found in all cultures and at all times but their documentation, as well as positive appreciation, is largely confined to the modern period. Indeed, whereas military history and the history of war have a long tradition (and are also well represented in universities, next to national military or war academies), peace history only emerged in the 1960s as a distinct, deliberate approach.⁶ There is a rich tradition and legacy of ideas concerning peace, nonviolence, anti-militarism, internationalism and cosmopolitanism - with its philosophers and practitioners, as well as campaigns and movements, instruments and institutions - and with a complex record of achievements as well as failures. A greater awareness of this aspect of history - which has frequently been deliberately ignored, distorted, and suppressed (because of fears of subversion of established authority, or alleged treachery, or anti-patriotism, or similar reasons) - is a necessary corrective to the one-sided image of history as an inevitable succession of wars and violent confrontations. At the same time, peace history is able to provide intellectual and moral sustenance, and even practical support, for those who believe that a world without war is possible.

Peace museums should therefore also see it as part of their mission to showcase peacemakers, war-resisters, heroes of nonviolence of all kinds, of the past and present, and the causes for which they stood, as a popular and effective means to inform and inspire their visitors. It is of course already the case that many peace museums highlight the ideas and achievements of leading figures from the peace and nonviolence movements, such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi. Indeed, museums fully dedicated to a single peacemaker are among the most moving of peace museums. They show that preventing war and violence, and building a world of freedom and justice by nonviolent means, is no less challenging than war. It was the intention of Alfred Nobel, when he instituted in his last will and testament the annual peace prize which bears his name, that 'champions of peace' should be honoured, and be given the means to be able to dedicate the rest of their lives to the wholehearted pursuit of peacemaking. The prehistory of this prize reminds us of the rich ferment of peace ideas and efforts to prevent and abolish war at the time when Nobel drafted his will (1895). It was precisely because he became convinced that the peace movement of his day was not a utopian enterprise, but represented a promise which deserved support, that he - a brilliant scientist, fertile inventor, and hard-nosed businessman - established a prize for peace. It was first awarded

