



Making a Difference: Pioneers in Interchange Between East and West

Welcome Remarks by

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*The East-West Center
provides a forum for
extended discussion of major
issues affecting Asia, the
Pacific and the United States
by prominent researchers,
analysts and policymakers.
This publication series
extends these presentations to
a wider audience.*

As 1960s alumni, you are the East-West Center's first participants — “pioneers in interchange.” You are also the best measure of the East-West Center's value over the longer-term and our greatest asset. We are proud of you. You — you collectively — have led new countries to independence, you have created businesses and NGOs, you have invented new crops and pesticides, and you brought international verification of credit cards to the world. You have served as mayors, governors, legislators, and Cabinet ministers. As journalists and educators, you have written thousands of books and articles and you have educated tens of millions of others. As public servants you have developed and maintained the modern infrastructure of government services, providing statistics, social services, financial services, and policy analysis. As diplomats you represented your nations and negotiated agreements. In national governments and even in international organizations, such as the Asian Development Bank, you have sometimes been called “the Hawaii mafia.” You have created great and enduring works of arts — buildings, sculptures and paintings, and literature. And you have had families — children and grandchildren. Some — actually quite a few — of you married each other, and some of you have sent a second generation of participants to the EWC.

This is what you have done in forty years. Forty years — I hate to say it — but it is quite a long time. One generation. It was a very different world one generation ago when you first encountered the East-West Center. It was the world of Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, and of Sukarno, Nehru, and Mao. Long-distance telephone calls were beyond the budgets of most students, and modern computers and e-mails would be long into the future.

It was also the world of the Beach Boys and the Beatles. There was the civil rights movement in the United States, and the Cultural Revolution in China. Men first went to the moon, and the United States and Russia nearly went to nuclear war over Cuba. There were wars — in Vietnam and between India and Pakistan — and there were internal upheavals — a huge one in Indonesia.

You were pioneers in a new State. Your fondest memories of Hawaii are in the program brochure. They are of close friends, caring program officers, wise teachers, and kind host families. Of distinguished visitors like the young Thai royal couple. Of those meaningful experiences then that helped you cope with homesickness and learn to appreciate other cultures. Of Don Ho and “Tiny Bubbles,” the Kuhio Grill, Charlie's Tavern and Queens Surf. Of parties and weddings. One woman's fondest memories included living in the men's dorm. And despite many complaints in our archives about food, some of you fondly remember Saga Food Service.

You thought then that the older generation had it all wrong (although now you know better). You thought you could change the world. And how the world did change! Pacific island nations became independent. Women now hold the highest national office in Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Tens of millions of Asians have moved from poverty to middle and upper income livelihoods. Overall, people throughout the region are better educated and healthier. They live longer lives and enjoy more material goods. Many more of the region's citizens live in democracies and enjoy rights of political participation and cultural expression unprecedented in their countries' histories. There was a growth of civil society and regional organization. You and the East-West Center were a part of the change.

For years it seemed that the only way the Asia Pacific region could go was up. Ten years ago in an era of almost continual double-digit growth rates, people talked confidently of the coming Pacific Century. In reality the change was more fragile than it seemed. The Asia financial crisis hit this region hard. South and Southeast Asia have both witnessed a rise in serious terrorist incidents since September 11. North Korea's nuclear program and reprocessing activities are a dangerous threat to regional and global stability. In some countries, economic growth has been accompanied by growing income gaps. There is still much poverty. Modernization and urbanization have been accompanied by increased environmental pollution. The new political and

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cultural values are empowering for most people. But some see these same values as menaces to traditions and morality. In some countries, social tensions are rising, and prejudice, communalism, and separatism are serious and growing problems.

In this challenging world, the work of the East-West Center is as important as ever — I would say even more important. Over the years, you have carried out the mission of the Center in your hearts and in your work. The mission is one of building understanding, relations, and a sense of community — that is, of building the human bonds that unite people of different countries, different religions and different walks of life into a shared sense of civilization. I don't mean a Western civilization or an Eastern civilization, but a shared civilization based on respect for those universal aspirations, perhaps best articulated as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” by Thomas Jefferson, after whom this building is named.

The Asia Pacific community has still a long way to go before it looks something more like the Atlantic community — that is a group of free, prosperous societies among which military conflict has become unthinkable. Asia and the Pacific continue to need in larger numbers women and men who have broad knowledge of the region as a whole as well as their own specialties. It needs future national leaders with regional and global awareness. And the Center student degree and leadership programs are almost alone in responding to these needs.

As you return to the East-West Center, you notice changes — this building has become an international conference center, the cafeteria is gone, and on the Diamond Head side of Hale Manoa lies a new hub of student life — an activity building, a garden of native Hawaiian plants, and a friendship circle. The students are a little older. The carp no longer mysteriously disappear from the Japanese garden. But the garden, the Thai pavilion, and Hale Manoa and Hale Kuahine — you called them “the high rise” and “the low rise” — remain virtually the same.

Most importantly, the spirit of the Center remains the same. It is a unique regional educational

institution in a unique state where peoples have come together from the Pacific, from Asia, from America and live in a harmonious society. It is a place for culture learning, where education and research are pursued not just for their own sake but as vehicles to mutual understanding and relations. Where people feel a sense of stewardship toward each other and toward humanity. Where no one feels foreign. Where people do care about and respect other cultures and countries, no matter how small. For you, as for me, it is a special place.

And this is why we must continue to carry forward its work. I close by thanking you for your contributions to the endowment for East-West Center scholarships. You have been pioneers in interchange, and now you are pioneers in building the foundation of an endowment for future East-West Center scholarships. We are just at the beginning of this effort. Your model of giving will be inspirational for our later alumni. The Center was once almost entirely a government-supported program. Today it is a public-private partnership, with about half of its funding coming from an appropriation from the U.S. government. We must continue to seek funding for needy students and our other activities. Your own contributions and your many indirect contributions are deeply appreciated. Mahalo.

At the East-West Center for 23 years, Charles Morrison assumed the position of president on August 1, 1998. He has had extensive involvement in the conceptualization, organization and funding of policy-oriented educational research and dialogue projects in both Japan and the United States, and has long been involved in promoting the concept of Asia Pacific Community. He is the author of a wide range of books, papers and analyses and is widely quoted by major news media in the region on issues of regional cooperation, U.S. Asia policy and trade policies, U.S.-Japan relations, and Asian economic issues.

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The East-West Center is an education and research organization established by the U.S. Congress in 1960 to strengthen relations and understanding among the nations of Asia, the Pacific, and the United States. The Center promotes the development of a stable, prosperous, and peaceful Asia Pacific community through cooperative study, training, and research. Funding for the Center comes from the U.S. government, with additional support provided by private agencies, individuals, corporations, and Asian and Pacific governments.