

Taiwan needs Furies of its own

Written by Jerome Keating
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In Greek drama, the concept of justice was never lacking. The goddesses most prominent in serving justice were the Erinyes, or the Furies by their Roman name; their task was to pursue those guilty of crimes, especially the murder of kin.

Yet while the Furies were relentless and horrifying in this pursuit, their primary task remained to serve justice no matter how far back the crimes went.

The play *Oedipus Rex*, for example, begins with Oedipus still proudly basking in how he saved Thebes from the riddle of the Sphinx, but the city now suffers from a new plague.

This plague is the result of an unsolved murder, that of the city's former king, Laius. Justice must be served and Oedipus to his chagrin eventually discovers his guilt.

His peace with the Furies comes in the subsequent play *Oedipus at Colonus*.

In the *Oresteia* trilogy, the protagonist, Orestes, also finds himself pursued by the Furies. He had faced an irreconcilable dilemma where he had to either kill the person who murdered his father, Agamemnon (his mother, Clytemnestra), or let his father's murder go unavenged.

What has this to do with Taiwan?

Ghost Month is past, but Taiwan continues to be haunted by the ghosts of its own past. Justice has not yet been served. Taiwan remains in need of its own Furies.

The two chief areas where Taiwan has yet to achieve justice are the unsolved crimes found in transitional justice and the restoration of stolen state assets.

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These crimes date back to the end of World War II and the 228 Incident in 1947. They continue through the subsequent decades till the disbanding of the Garrison Command in 1992, along with the forced retirement of those that had been “permanently” elected to the legislature in 1947.

Those were the years of the White Terror, martial law and the one-party state rule of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT).

Taiwan suffered greatly in those decades and many families were destroyed. True, there are some monuments; and there have been apologies along with some few claims that have been recognized, but without full disclosure of all records and accountability, justice cannot be served.

Countless family lives had been disrupted and ruined, and untold property was seized and acquired.

One has to only look back at all those who were executed as well as the countless people who spent years on Green Island serving time for trivial or assumed offenses against the state, to see the problem.

Two blatant questions stand out: How can there have been so many crimes with so few criminals? And how could there be so much theft with so few thieves?

The nation begrudgingly admits that there were crimes, but many still resist admitting that there were criminals involved and it avoids exposing them.

Similarly, in the matter of stolen state assets, untold theft is acknowledged, but few references spell out the names of the thieves and the families that profited.

It has been a quarter of a century since the lifting of martial law in 1987 and the first free

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elections in 1992 in this multi-party state. Yet so little justice has been achieved.

One could try to brush some of this off by saying that some of the guilty and complicit perpetrators of the White Terror crimes are dead. That may be true, but their profiteering families are alive and they enjoy the wealth and positions gleaned from that past.

In addition, many of the perpetrators and accomplices are still at large.

Today, the public applauds the remarkably quick action of the police in capturing the suspects in the murder of a Canadian, Ramgahan Ryan, and how they quickly found and apprehended a US citizen wanted by Texas, Cody Wilson.

However, in contrast to that speed, the high-profile murders of the 1980s, a time when many current KMT politicians were cutting their teeth, remain unsolved.

Prime examples are the high noon murder of three members of the Lin I-hsiung (林義雄) family while their home was under 24-hour police surveillance, and the death of Chen Wen-chen (陳文成), an assistant professor at Carnegie Mellon University, after he was taken in for questioning by the Garrison Command. Who are the criminals?

Vice Admiral Wang Hsi-ling (王希齡) served six years of house arrest for the murder of California-based writer Henry Liu (劉曉環), but that was only because the murder took place on US soil and not in Taiwan.

These are only the tip of the iceberg of all the crimes committed in past years in Taiwan.

The blood-soaked ground of Taiwan calls for justice, as well as the waves of the harbors that engulfed the many bodies of those whose pierced hands were strung together with wire before they were shot.

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A database of deaths, murders and crimes is finally being developed from files from the Garrison Command, the Government Information Office and other sources; this is good, but the government must not hesitate to point the finger at those who are the criminals.

The question remains: How can there have been decades of so many crimes with so few criminals and facilitators?

Next Monday's final deadline for gathering the files pales in comparison with the way that the East Germans responded to securing the Stasi files once they realized files were being destroyed.

The Berlin Wall "fell" metaphorically on Nov. 9, 1989, and less than a month later, on Dec. 4, when the residents of Erfurt realized that the Stasi were beginning to destroy police files, they acted. This set off a chain reaction of citizens all over East Germany storming the Stasi offices to sit on the files until they could be codified.

Now even files that were shredded are being pieced together.

Taiwanese never did that and have reason to worry that many of the files here have already been sanitized.

As for the money and stolen state assets, where are the paper trails? What about organizations like the National Women's League? How did it gain wealth that is close to US\$1 billion? How was this acquired and should it now be nationalized?

Founded in 1950, the league would have gained the majority of its assets during the KMT's one-party state rule. Who now controls this wealth?

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Questions like these must also be directed at the KMT itself: How did it become and how does it remain one of the richest political parties in the world?

These questions must be asked and answered.

As the Transitional Justice Commission proceeds, it also must find a way to move quickly, but carefully. Proper laws of lustration must be developed and controversy must be expected.

Former National Police Agency director-general Hou You-yi (侯友宜), the KMT candidate for New Taipei City mayor, is an example. Is he being targeted or has he been properly vetted for his past?

What responsibility does he have in the death of Deng Nan-jung (鄧南雄)? Can he say that he was just carrying out orders?

That his wife's name appears in the housing scandal of Chinese Culture University students also raises related family issues. All this does not happen in a vacuum.

In Taiwan, there are so many ways that justice still cries for recognition. If this were a Greek play, the unrelenting Furies would have far to go before justice is served and they can be at rest.

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