

Tuesday marked the 27th anniversary of the lifting of martial law, which ended the era of authoritarian rule in Taiwan and put the nation on the path of democratic reform. However, as a result of the nation's failure to institute transitional justice over the course of its democratization, a poisonous residue of authoritarianism lingers on.

The absurdity of this was highlighted this week in a campaign by a group of high-school students from prestigious schools such as Taipei Chenggong High School, Taipei Municipal Jianguo High School, Taipei First Girls' High School and National Tainan Girls' Senior High School, who co-produced and released a video calling for the removal of Chiang Kai-shek's (蔣介石) statues from all campuses nationwide.

"Although Chiang made contributions to the Republic of China, he imposed martial law and the 'White Terror,' severely violated human rights and repressed democracy and freedom," the students said in the video. "Why does Chiang's statue still stand at schools? The man denied the people democracy, freedom and human rights. Why should people pay respect to him?"

Indeed, with rhetoric from politicians often touting democracy as the nation's greatest achievement and preaching the importance of democratic values, too few push for the discarding of authoritarian ideas and values to consolidate a national conscience on democracy.

As such, nearly three decades have passed since Taiwan became a democracy, yet statues honoring a dictator who was also the main culprit behind the 228 Massacre continue to stand tall and proud in all corners of the country, with many campus buildings, public spaces, streets and local districts named after him.

This ridiculous ubiquitous presence suggests the nation's sense of transitional justice remains lacking. The statues of the main instigator of the White Terror era stand as an insult to the sacrifices made by Taiwan's democracy pioneers; these statues also serve as a striking irony to the very democratic achievements hyped by the nation's political leaders.

President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), for one, has often trumpeted his administration's achievements

## Transitional justice still lacking

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in advancing the nation's democratic development and has expressed hopes that all educators in Taiwan would help the public better understand the lessons of history and to cherish human rights.

If Ma is at all serious with his words, he should take the students' campaign as an opportunity to acknowledge them for understanding the importance of transitional justice, echo their call to eradicate totalitarian worship and encourage remembrance of those who resisted dictatorship, rather than remembering the dictators.

Unfortunately, not only has Ma kept mum, the increasing crackdowns and violence by the state apparatus against civilians under his presidency these past years have bred concerns from human rights groups over what they perceive as regression of human rights in the country.

Taiwan's democracy has often been touted as a success story, and it is indeed a major asset to the nation that all Taiwanese should be proud of.

However, in light of the Ma government paying mere lip service to democracy, the students' video campaign comes as a timely reminder to all Taiwanese that a lack of action for transitional justice is preventing Taiwan from becoming a healthy and mature democracy.

Members of the public collectively must therefore not sit in complacency, but need to be very wary and watchful to consolidate our fragile democracy.

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