

KMT still in denial over 228 killings

Written by Chen Yi-shen 陳逸申

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Considering the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) past position that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) initiated the Civil War and that advocating Taiwanese independence was tantamount to insurgency, President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) statement that the 228 Incident was the result of a public reaction to official oppression, thus placing the fault with the government, would seem to be a step forward. Is there any reason to oppose this development?

Given the complex history of the 228 Incident, there are many aspects that cannot be explained simply by saying that it was a public reaction to official oppression. The misgovernment more than a year after the end of World War II ignited the violence that took place at the outset of the Incident, which is more in line with Ma's position, but one also has to consider the intermediate and later stages of the incident.

The most tragic part of the incident is the deaths and miscarriages of justice that resulted from the disorganized counterattacks by the party, the government and the army, the random shooting — in particular from March 8, 1947, by the military police that arrived from China's Fujian Province and the 21st division of the Nationalist army — and the two or three months of appeasement, mop-up actions and score-settling that began on March 21.

That is why describing the incident as a matter of a public reaction to official oppression is tantamount to an excuse and saying that the suppression was the result of rioting. It also completely avoids the issue of whether the KMT regime engaged in revenge-driven slaughter.

The 228 Incident was both a clash between ethnic groups and a clash between the government and the public. Although the opposition between Mainlanders and ethnic Taiwanese was the result of a set of very specific historic conditions, it must not be ignored just because we do not want to deal with it. This is yet another reason why saying it was a public reaction to official oppression does not suffice as an explanation.

More than five years ago, the Taiwan 228 Care Association filed a lawsuit against the KMT and its legal representative, President Ma Ying-jeou, demanding that the party offer a public apology in specific media outlets, donate NT\$2 billion (US\$63.79 million) to finance the establishment and operation of a memorial hall, and hand over all the party's relevant files and documents to the National Development Council's National Archives Administration for safekeeping and publication.

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The KMT and Ma's appointed legal representatives were then-Taipei City councilor Lai Su-ju (賴素珠) and Hung Wen-jun (洪文俊). The main point of their defense was that "if the Republic of China (ROC) government indeed is guilty of the infringements that the plaintiffs claim it is [note: the defendant denies that there is any truth to the plaintiffs' accusation of infringements], it would at most be a question of whether the ROC regime infringed on the rights of the plaintiffs, which cannot be used to claim that the defendant has carried out."

Incredibly, in its ruling confirming the not guilty verdict in the two previous instances, the Supreme Court perpetuated the preposterous idea that "the 228 suppression was a matter of the government carrying out its public duties, and said it had nothing to do with the KMT."

The Constitution took effect on Dec. 25, 1947, and the 228 Incident occurred during the party-state period. Do the judges not have even the most basic knowledge of history? I cannot help but think that by saying that the 228 Incident was a matter of a public reaction to official oppression, Ma has succeeded in absolving the KMT of responsibility.

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Translated by Perry Svensson

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