

Last month's 228 Memorial Day marked the 69th anniversary of the 228 Incident in 1947. However, the historical significance of the event was outshone by the bright lights of this year's lantern festivals, which took place across Taiwan during the three-day 228 holiday weekend.

It has been almost 70 years since the troops dispatched by Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) landed in Keelung in early March 1947 and initiated a crackdown and massacre following the events of Feb. 28 that year.

Seven decades later, the Political Warfare Bureau's and the military police's recent harassment of a collector of historical documents during a search for missing classified government documents brought the White Terror era back to life. At a time when Taiwanese society is involved in a debate about transitional justice, this incident shocked the nation.

These so-called "missing classified government documents" are letters of accusation from informers active during the 1960s and 1970s. Is the bureau investigating the alleged online sale of such documents to protect the parties involved, or is the military still conducting surveillance of the civil sector today?

The Taiwan Garrison Command was abolished many years ago when the Martial Law era finally came to an end, but this incident raises the question of whether Taiwanese are still being monitored through a complex surveillance network.

Although Taiwan is moving further along the road to democracy, with the nation's third transition of power about to take place, this incident also raises the question of whether the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) party-state system remains unchanged.

As the government has failed to address the issue of transitional justice, the political terrorism that accumulated during the Martial Law era has blocked Taiwan from shining a light on its history. The accomplices to this structure continue to share the spoils inside the system while eroding Taiwan's vitality.

Lingering shadow of political terrorism

Written by Lee Min-yung 李敏勇

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The biggest historical irony of all is that even President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has repeatedly been accused of having been an informer and a secret agent.

In 2008, Academia Sinica's Institute of Taiwan History purchased a set of letters containing details about people connected to the 228 Incident and the White Terror era. The documents were part of the private collection of Lin Ting-li (林庭利), who had headed the now-defunct Secrets Bureau. The documents were later sold by members of Lin's family to collectors of historical materials.

According to those who browsed the documents, which were signed by Lin, an evil mind was revealed between his neat calligraphy. On the documents, the names of people who were overcome and suffocated by the events of the time were all recorded, highlighting the political terrorism of the KMT's party-state. These documents are but one small part of the recorded history of the White Terror era, and a lot more remain hidden.

Since the collapse of the communist states in eastern Europe in the late 1980s, they have undergone political reconstruction through transitional justice.

In comparison, despite the lifting of martial law in 1987 and the following quiet revolution that led to the nation's democratization, Taiwan still suffers from the intangible darkness that remains following the long period of martial law. It is because this shadow continues to hang over Taiwan and its democratic development that Taiwan cannot be thoroughly localized and reborn.

Entangled in the web between victims tolerating this situation and unexposed offenders, the shadow of political terrorism continues to eat away at people's minds and close the door to their hearts. What must be done to expel this demon? This is precisely what transitional justice is all about.

Lee Min-yung is a poet.

Translated by Eddy Chang

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