

## Remembering Chen Wen-chen

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
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It was 1981 when a young associate professor at Carnegie Mellon University, named Chen Wen-chen (陳文成), died — allegedly murdered by members of Taiwan Garrison Command — but the effect his death has had on Taiwan has not diminished with the passing of time.

To commemorate the incident, National Taiwan University is to dedicate a plaza on its campus to Chen, for which it held a design competition.

Blank Space, the winning design, features an opaque cube made of dark glass that allows people to see out from inside the cube, is a fitting monument for the incident due to its ghastly aesthetics, which according to its designers are to highlight the unanswered questions surrounding Chen's death, giving it an almost "unreal" feel.

However, Chen's death was very real and the facts about the incident are worth reviewing, lest people living in the free world forget for how long the pioneers of democracy fought to earn the freedom they enjoy today.

Chen, who had returned to Taiwan for a vacation, had allegedly been followed by the command for more than a month. He was detained on the grounds that he financially supported the pro-democracy Formosa Magazine and questioned the night before he was found dead outside the university's library.

While the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) might think that it has come clean, as there was no "official" proof that Chen was murdered, it should not forget that society is capable of putting two and two together, making it almost evident who murdered Chen.

The then-KMT government said that Chen committed suicide in remorse for a criminal activity, only to backtrack when pressed by the media to explain what Chen's supposed crime was.

The assumption that Chen was murdered was consolidated after US forensic pathologist Cyril Wecht performed an autopsy on his body, finding lacerations to his kidneys and signs of

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hemorrhaging in his lungs, indicating that he had been bludgeoned. There were no signs of defensive wounds, Wecht said.

Before leaving Taiwan, Wecht told reporters that Chen could have been knocked out or drugged and thrown off the roof of the library.

He also suggested that the Ministry of Justice run a toxicology test on Chen's blood to ascertain whether he had been under the influence of drugs. However, the ministry turned down Wecht's request, which painted the then-KMT administration in a bad light, and left Taiwanese at home and overseas perplexed and angry.

The Chen Wen-chen Incident left its mark in Taiwanese history, but it was not the last heartbreaking example of oppression.

Earlier this year, 28 years after the government lifted martial law, military police illegally raided the home of a civilian, surnamed Wei (魏), and seized documents he purchased online regarding the 228 Incident, which had allegedly been leaked by government officials.

In a sense, Wei had become another Chen, as both men were targets of atrocities perpetrated by those in power.

There have been many "Chen Wen-chens" throughout the nation's history, such as painter Chen Cheng-po (陳成波) and Massachusetts Institute of Technology-trained aerospace engineer Kuo Ching-chiang (郭景昌), to name but a few.

The story of Chen Wen-chen's death is more than a cautionary tale about the White Terror era. It is a story that should be told to the generations to come, to warn people of the danger they face when they are watched by the Big Brother and educate them about Taiwan's hard-earned democracy.

It is a lesson every free person should take to heart.

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