

Culprits behind 228 must be named

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Today is a solemn day marking the beginning of a tragic chapter in the nation's history. Seventy years ago, the 228 Massacre began; it was a violent crackdown spearheaded by the then-Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) authoritarian regime that led to the White Terror era, during which thousands of Taiwanese were arrested, imprisoned and executed.

Many relatives of the massacre victims still do not know the reason for their loved ones' deaths or the whereabouts of their remains.

While there is no known count of the total number of people killed during the massacre, historians estimate the casualties as being between 20,000 and 30,000.

Given that only about 2,200 compensation claims have been filed under the Act for Handling and Compensation for the 228 Incident (二二八事件處理及賠償法), the vast disparity in numbers suggests that the truth concerning that dark page in Taiwan's history has not been entirely uncovered and that the shadow of the massacre and the White Terror era still haunts many Taiwanese.

A more comprehensive understanding of what happened needs to be pursued. While it is painful to recall the injustices, the nation must continue to dig for answers so the whole truth about the bloody crackdown can be unearthed.

Those who argue that people should let bygones be bygones, all the while claiming that those who chase after the matter are motivated by revenge, ought to be reminded that to this day, no culprits — primary or secondary — have been officially held accountable.

For every crime, there are victims and perpetrators; yet in the case of the massacre, they seem to be missing.

Despite efforts by the government to heal the wounds by acknowledging mistakes, apologizing, offering compensation and erecting commemorative monuments, Taiwanese have

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only heard mention of victims, never who was responsible for this traumatic event.

While people will not forget, they should forgive and move on.

However, it is difficult for friends and relatives of victims to forgive when they do not even know who should be forgiven, as the killers and accomplices were never named.

A report published by a group of academics in 2006 said Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) should be held accountable for the Incident, along with then-Taiwan governor Chen Yi (陳儀) and Kaohsiung Fortress commander Peng Meng-chi (彭孟緝), who were directly responsible for the troops.

In a book released yesterday, Academia Sinica researcher Chen Yi-shen (陳宜生) cited declassified documents which said that Chiang approved Chen Yi's request for military intervention in the nationwide protests following the Incident and showed support for Chen Yi and Peng in the aftermath.

Even former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) yesterday said that Chiang has responsibility to bear for the Incident and the ensuing White Terror era. While Ma did add that more deliberation is needed "to determine what exactly that responsibility was" and warned against jumping to conclusions, his remarks nonetheless show that there is now a consensus among the pan-green and pan-blue camps that those who bear responsibility need to be uncovered.

As there is no truth, including official identification of the persons primarily responsible for this abominable crime, talk of implementing transitional justice is disingenuous.

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