

White Terror cases still haunt nation

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Two high-profile cases of mysterious deaths from the Martial Law era remain unsolved to this day. Many suspect they were the work of the Taiwan Garrison Command, although this has never been proved.

Despite Taiwan's gradual democratization in the decades that followed, these unsolved cases demonstrate that transitional justice is still very much a work in progress and that, even today, the chances of unearthing the truth behind the deaths appear as remote as ever.

As Taiwan entered the 1980s, the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) iron grip on power was on the wane following the loss of the Republic of China's (ROC) seat at the UN, the death of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and Washington's severing of diplomatic ties with the ROC. The then-KMT government had also just made a last-ditch attempt to stem the flow of calls for democracy.

On Dec. 10, 1979, the government dispatched troops to a Human Rights Day rally in Kaohsiung organized by the pro-democracy Formosa Magazine. The clashes between troops and protesters became known as the Kaohsiung Incident. In the days and weeks that followed, organizers of the rally and democracy activists, including Lin I-hsiung (林義雄), were systematically rounded up and jailed pending trial in military courts.

On Feb. 28, 1980, Fang Su-min (方素敏), Lin's wife, was visiting him in prison when an unknown person broke into the family's house in Taipei and attacked Lin's mother, and the couple's nine-year-old daughter and seven-year-old twin girls.

The eldest daughter, Lin Ting-chun (林亭君), was the only survivor, although she sustained serious injuries after being stabbed six times.

Even though the house was under close surveillance by police and intelligence agents, the assailant has never been identified.

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A little more than a year later, on July 3, 1981, Chen Wen-chen (陳文成), an assistant professor at Carnegie Mellon University, was found dead outside National Taiwan University's library.

Chen, who was visiting his parents in Taipei, had been questioned several times during his visit about his activities in the US. On July 2, he was questioned again over his financial contribution to Formosa Magazine. While the authorities claimed Chen had committed suicide, an autopsy by US forensic pathologist Cyril Wecht found wounds and bruises on his body, indicating that he had been bludgeoned to death.

The identity of Chen's assailant(s) is still unknown.

Friday next week marks the 40th anniversary of the Lin family murders. On Monday, the Transitional Justice Commission released a report of its investigation into the case.

The report uncovers a hereto unknown detail: National Security Bureau files showed that a suspect in the murders made a call from a telephone in Lin's home to a restaurant about the time of the attack. However, the bureau says that telephone surveillance recordings from Feb. 28 were "flushed."

The report also states that a prior investigation into the murders was "severely obstructed," and that the possibility of the then-KMT government's involvement could not be ruled out.

As for the commission's ongoing investigation into the Chen case, the bureau last month moved to block the declassification of files relating to it for a further 50 years, citing national security concerns.

Sadly, the nation is no closer to knowing the truth in either case — just two of numerous brutal acts of alleged state-sponsored terror that occurred during the period. The permanent bureaucracy within Taiwan's intelligence agencies appears to have closed ranks yet again to protect their own. The truth might only come out after the perpetrators are long dead.

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