

## Removal of Chiang statue prioritized

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Honor guards march in front of a bronze statue of former president Chiang Kai-shek at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taipei yesterday.

**Photo: CNA**

The Transitional Justice Commission yesterday announced its plan for transforming Taipei's Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, which would prioritize removing the main hall's large bronze statue of the former leader.

In today's democratized society, all authoritarian character should be eradicated from the complex, which is itself a product of Taiwan's authoritarian past, the commission said.

The most important task would be removing the hall's "axis of worship," or the 6.3m-tall bronze of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣中正) in its main chamber, it said.

Removing the statue — Taiwan's largest remaining symbol of its authoritarian past — would indicate the "establishment of a liberal democratic constitutional order, denial of the legitimacy of authoritarian rule and remembrance of the historical lessons of human rights violations," the commission said.

In its place, the proposal seeks to create a park for "reflection on Taiwan's authoritarian history" by changing its function and appearance.

After the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) retreat to Taiwan, it invested significant resources into building the huge "memorial park" in the center of the nation's capital.

Although ostensibly created to commemorate Chiang, the design and layout of the compound encourages visitors to worship rather than simply memorialize, the commission said.

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For example, its flat, directional plaza leading up to the main hall with boundary walls surrounding the compound create lines of sight and pathways that suggest reverence of the central “temple,” it said.

The so-called “park” also has a huge amount of paved space which, despite being used by the public, retains its authoritarian character, since its spatial design and symbols have remained largely unchanged, it added.

The axis of worship should therefore be removed to reverse the spatial structure of the park, in addition to all of its accompanying authoritarian symbols, it said.

Yeh Hung-ling (葉 Hung-ling), the commission’s acting minister, confirmed that the statue can legally be removed after consultation with the Ministry of Culture’s Bureau of Cultural Heritage.

While the hall is protected as a historical structure, the statue was not included in the registry, Yeh said, adding that any removal plan would require a review involving authorities in charge of heritage preservation.

As for what to do with the statue, Yeh said that a decision would be made after consulting with civil groups and victims of political persecution, although the common consensus is that retaining such a symbol in the center of the nation’s capital is problematic.

On the other hand, the reclaimed space offers endless possibilities, she said.

Some have proposed changing the main hall into an arts space, a memorial for past presidents or even a new location for the Legislative Yuan, she said, adding that the public could continue proposing ideas, although the two side halls would remain performance spaces.

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Asked whether the Republic of China Honor Guard would be asked to leave the compound, Yeh said that a decision would need to be made by the Ministry of Culture, as it has jurisdiction over the hall.

Yeh also vowed to speed up the process, with plans to submit a full proposal to the Cabinet by next year.

Speaking to a party event, KMT Chairman Johnny Chiang (蔣經國) said yesterday that the person who should “reflect on authoritarianism” is the nation’s leader, referring to President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) of the Democratic Progressive Party.

“She is not only an authoritarian leader over a one-party state, but also an admitted publicly elected dictator,” he said. “Does she not need to reflect on herself? Stepping down is better than tearing down statues.”

Additional reporting by Shih Hsiao-kuang

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