

KMT 1949 Massacre: 228 Anniversary Reminds of Continued Struggle for Transitional Justice in Taiwan

Saturday 4 March 2023, by [HIOE Brian](#) (Date first published: 28 February 2023).

ON THE 76TH anniversary of the 228 Massacre, commemorations were held to memorialize the event, traditionally viewed as the start of the decades-long White Terror that followed. This includes many events held annually, such as the Gongsheng Music Festival-the indie rock festival held on Ketagalan Boulevard organized by civil society groups-as well as commemorations by the government. Nevertheless, the anniversary of the 228 Massacre should point to how the pan-Blue camp in Taiwan has generally sought to avoid reckoning with its authoritarian past.

It may not be surprising to note that [statements by the DPP](#) touted the efforts of the party to push for transitional justice through the framework of the Transitional Justice Commission (TJC), which was dissolved last year. This occurs even as the TJC did not manage to carry out the removal of Chiang Kai-shek statues nationwide, such as at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial, or [the 1,533 locations with statues of Chiang Kai-shek or Chiang Ching-kuo that it identified](#).

The TJC called for the removal of [the 6.3-meter statue of Chiang Kai-shek in the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial](#) and [the Cihu Mausoleum](#), where Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo's graves still have an honor guard maintained at the national expense. Civil society organizations commemorating 228 have called for the removal of these statues, as fulfilling the tasks of transitional justice in Taiwan, with the view of Chiang Kai-shek as the primary perpetrator of the killings.



THE CHIANG KAI-SHEK MEMORIAL. PHOTO CREDIT: ANGMOKIO/WIKICOMMONS/CC BY-SA 3.0

Indeed, major historical crimes of the White Terror still have not seen official clarity, [such as the 1980 murder of democracy activist Lin Yi-hsiung's daughters and mother](#). The murder occurred despite the fact that the Lin family was under 24-hour surveillance, suggesting that the murders were committed by state security forces themselves. The KMT sought to pin the blame for the murders on other activists of the democracy movement, so as to suggest that activists tended to internally purge each other. Nevertheless, the records from the incident have not been declassified-despite that some who were caught up in the incident, such as Bruce Jacobs, the Australian academic that the KMT tried to pin the killings on, have since passed away.

Prominent pan-Blue politicians such as Taipei mayor Chiang Wan-an and New Taipei mayor Hou You-yi have been accused of failing to confront the authoritarian past. Chiang claims to be the descendent of Chiang Kai-shek, [with him and his father John Chiang having changed their last name from “Chiang” to “Chang” in order to claim the Chiang legacy](#) when they decided to seek political office. On the other hand, [Hou was the responsible police officer that oversaw the series of events that led to free speech martyr Deng Nan-jung’s self-immolation](#).

Indeed, with Chiang Wan-an and former president Ma Ying-jeou both giving speeches today about 228, [Chiang was heckled during his speech by demonstrators](#). It seems probable, however, that some pan-Blue outlets will frame the incident as Chiang sincerely trying to make amends but being disrupted by rowdy, uncouth demonstrators, perhaps with an ethnic, class slant to such depictions.

For its part, [the KMT](#) and [its chair Eric Chu](#) did issue a statement of condolence for 228. However, the statement generally avoids discussing the causes of the 228 Massacre, instead depicting 228 as though it were some kind of tragedy along the lines of a natural disaster. Instead, the KMT statement on 228 instead tries to pivot the historical memory of the incident to call for “cross-strait peace”.

THE JINGMEI HUMAN RIGHTS MEMORIAL PARK, FORMERLY THE SITE OF A JAIL USED BY THE KMT DURING THE WHITE TERROR. PHOTO CREDIT: REKE/WIKICOMMONS/CC BY-SA 3.0

In past decades, of course, the KMT has become the pro-unification party in Taiwanese politics. [Yet recent meetings in China held between the KMT and the CCP by vice chair Andrew Hsia](#) go to show the KMT’s willingness to circumvent Taiwan’s contemporary democratic institutions, to hold talks with the CCP. The KMT frames its actions as in the pursuit of “cross-strait peace” while framing the DPP as unnecessarily provoking China, but clearly does not see any need to be accountable to public institutions.

Nevertheless, to this extent, one can observe how the KMT still sees Taiwan as its rightful dominion, without needing to bother with what the view of Taiwanese society as a whole is. Indeed, [the KMT recently even put out an image on its Facebook page suggesting that Tsai Ing-wen and other DPP leaders that criticized the KMT over Hsia’s trip to China should be arrested](#)—rather astonishing for a party that was until not too long ago arresting political dissidents including the founding members of the DPP.

In the meantime, there continues to be much to be worked on in terms of efforts to realize transitional justice in Taiwan. Past years have seen calls to be more conscious of Indigenous justice not only for Han victims of 228 and the White Terror, but regarding Indigenous perspectives, and to take into account Taiwan’s broader history of colonialism as it pertains to transitional justice for Indigenous, both during the White Terror and during preceding periods. As such, the Gongsheng Music Festival and other youth-oriented 228 commemorations have sought to platform Indigenous activists as part of the proceedings. Yet with there being a refusal to confront even relatively recent historical trauma, making redress for these and other wrongs in Taiwan will be an uphill struggle.

Brian Hioe

- New Bloom Magazine. 02/28/2023:
<https://newbloommag.net/2023/02/28/228-76th-anniversary/>

Chiang Wan-an Comes Under Fire Over Heritage Claims Ahead of 228

TAIPEI MAYOR Chiang Wan-an has come under fire ahead of the anniversary of the 228 Massacre from groups commemorating the incident, such as the Taiwan 228 Care Association.

In particular, Chiang is the self-proclaimed descendant of Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo, who ruled Taiwan as father and son dictators during the authoritarian period. Chiang Kai-shek was the leader of the ROC and KMT during the period that the 228 Massacre took place and, as a result, he is often seen as directly responsible for the events that took place.

Chiang has been called on by individuals such as [Taiwan 228 Care Association head Wang Wen-hong to apologize for the incident](#) and to take action to remove the statue of Chiang Kai-shek in the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial, also known as Liberty Plaza.



THE STATUE OF CHIANG KAI-SHEK IN THE CHIANG KAI-SHEK MEMORIAL. BALON GREYJOY/WIKICOMMONS/CC0

Removing the 6.3-meter statue of Chiang Kai-shek from the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial and turning the site of the memorial into a park was [one of the last recommendations of the Transitional Justice Commission \(TJC\) before its dissolution last May](#). The commission pointed out that the design of the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial is [clearly that of a temple and so called for structural changes to the layout of the outdoor spaces](#) surrounding it so that it is no longer a temple.

The TJC likely issued its recommendation because of the fact that the statue of Chiang Kai-shek in the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial is the most prominent statue of Chiang Kai-shek in the nation. More broadly, the TJC stated that [it had identified 1,533 locations with statues of Chiang Kai-shek or Chiang Ching-kuo](#), or otherwise commemorating the two dictators. However, 55% of those locations have refused to discuss plans for removing such commemorations. Yet taking aim at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial could draw a line in the sand for the nation as a whole, when it comes to advancing beyond symbols of the authoritarian past.

Chiang, along with former president Ma Ying-jeou in recent comments, has been criticized for failing to acknowledge the KMT's authoritarian past. Although both have made token gestures towards truth and reconciliation, this is often framed as the KMT as having inadvertently committed some accidental imprisonments or killings, as part of broader actions still justified as necessary to preserve social order in Taiwan after its withdrawal from China or to crack down on Communist infiltrators. As such, groups that usually hold 228 commemoration events in collaboration with the Taipei city government [have refused to do so this year](#).

Some, such as media commentator Huang Wei-han, [have criticized the notion of calling on Chiang to apologize for crimes committed by his ancestors](#). But that being said, Chiang and his father, former KMT legislator John Chiang, were originally surnamed Chang due to being illegitimate. The two changed their last name to “Chiang” in order to capitalize off of Taiwan’s authoritarian past as part of their political ambitions when they decided to pursue public office.

To this extent, at one point while campaigning during election season, when asked about his recommended tourist attraction in Taipei for foreign visitors to Taiwan, [Chiang Wan-an responded that he recommended the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial](#). This response was lambasted not only for Chiang’s praise of a monument to his apparent ancestor, but because of its unoriginality as an answer.



TAIPEI MAYOR CHIANG WAN-AN. PHOTO CREDIT: CHIANG WAN-AN/FACEBOOK

Although Chiang has come under fire because of his claimed heritage, one notes that elected officials with checkered histories during the martial law period, in fact, continue to have no issue being elected to office. New Taipei mayor Hou You-yi [was the police officer that oversaw the series of events leading to free speech martyr “Nylon” Deng Nan-jung’s self-immolation](#), yet that has not prevented his being elected mayor of New Taipei. In fact, Hou is currently one of the most popular politicians in Taiwan, and is raised as a prospective frontrunner for the KMT’s 2024 presidential candidate—though his past [did not prevent the DPP from trying to recruit him in the past, during the Chen Shui-bian administration](#).

It is not only KMT politicians such as Chiang Wan-an, Ma Ying-jeou, or Hou You-yi that have come under fire. Tainan mayor Huang Wei-che [was criticized at the launch event for a book](#) on 228 by members of the Remove Zhongzheng Road Action Alliance over failing to take action over 38 roads named Zhongzheng Road in Tainan. Zhongzheng is the courtesy name of Chiang Kai-shek and the many roads named Zhongzheng Road across Taiwan have been criticized as another legacy of Taiwan’s authoritarian past.

Nevertheless, it is not surprising that it is more often pan-Blue politicians that have refused to reckon with the past of the KMT. It continues to be the case that there is a lack of official clarity about crimes committed by the KMT during the period, such as the killing of Lin Yi-hsiung’s family. [The Control Yuan recently asserted that records](#) show sections of government colluding to cover up the murder, calling for the declassification of records about the murder.

Brian Hioe

- New Bloom Magazine. 2023/02/26:
<https://newbloommag.net/2023/02/26/chiang-wan-an-228/>
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P.S.

- Brian Hioe is one of the founding editors of New Bloom. He is a freelance journalist, as well as a translator. A New York native and Taiwanese-American, he has an MA in East Asian Languages and Cultures from Columbia University and graduated from New York University with majors in History, East Asian Studies, and English Literature. He was Democracy and Human Rights Service Fellow at the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy from 2017 to 2018.

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