



Unwanted statues and busts of Taiwan's longest-serving head of state Chiang Kai-shek have been placed at the Cihu Sculpture Park in Taoyuan city. ST PHOTOS: YIP WAI YEE

DON'T ERASE HISTORY

If you destroy everything, how will people know what happened? People have the right to know their history, to learn lessons from our sufferings.



MR FRED CHIN, a survivor of the White Terror, on why the statues should be saved.

longer “idolise” their former leader, they recognise his contribution to Taiwan’s development.

For its part, the modern KMT has taken steps to atone for its history. While serving as justice minister, former Taiwanese president Ma Ying-jeou helped establish the 228 Memorial Foundation in 1995, which seeks to raise awareness of the White Terror.

But it was only after President Tsai Ing-wen of the ruling DPP took office in 2016 that transitional justice work was made a top priority.

In 2018, her administration set up a committee to review injustices committed during the territory’s authoritarian rule.

Among the committee’s top recommendations was the removal of “authoritarian symbols” such as Chiang’s statues and busts. According to official statistics, there are at least 500 still scattered across the island.

But the proposal has been met with resistance from those who say that doing so amounts to erasing history.

Even Mr Fred Chin, a survivor of the White Terror, believes it is important to keep such symbols.

“If you destroy everything, how will people know what happened? People have the right to know their history, to learn lessons from our sufferings,” the 73-year-old Malaysia-born Taiwanese told The Straits Times.

During the 1970s, Mr Chin was tortured by secret police and imprisoned for 12 years on an offshore island – accused, among other things, of joining what he referred to as “a non-existent Communist Party” in Malaysia. This was after he first arrived in Taiwan to attend university in 1967.

Despite what he went through, he does not harbour hatred towards the Chiang regime. “You can’t deny that this person has done some good things for Taiwan,” Mr Chin said.

Tamkang University’s Prof Ma believes that Chiang’s divisive power will eventually fade in the years to come.

“If you ask most young people today, they might not even be able to tell you who he was or what he has done,” he said.

In Taipei, the National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall continued to see a flurry of international visitors last week.

Other than the main hall where tourists take selfies with the massive Chiang statue, the sprawling grounds are also home to the National Concert Hall, the National Theatre and the Liberty Square plaza.

A group of six middle-aged Taiwanese friends drove an hour from Hsinchu city to spend the day in the area.

“I know people have strong feelings about that man in the hall,” said one of them, who wanted to be known as just Linda.

“But actually, we just came to have a picnic and take photos of the cherry blossoms.”

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Chiang Kai-shek’s complicated and troubling legacy in Taiwan

Some see him as a symbol of leadership, others despise him for brutal purges

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TAOYUAN, Taiwan – Walking through a quiet lakeside park in Taoyuan city, one comes across 200 statues and busts of the same man – Chiang Kai-shek, Taiwan’s longest-serving head of state.

Some of the bronze and plaster figures are placed neatly in a line, while others face each other, resembling old friends having a conversation.

There is something peculiar about seeing the same smiling face on so many sculptures – coloured from teal to burnt orange – while the man is depicted standing, seated on a horse, or with a book in hand.

The Cihu Sculpture Park was not designed to celebrate Chiang, even if it has become a tourist attraction.

It is just where unwanted statues were placed after being gradually removed from schools, commercial buildings and public parks across the island.

The place is a reflection of the man’s complicated legacy.

While some see him as a strong leader who fought against the communists, he is equally despised as a dictator who ruled the island with an iron fist until his death in 1975.

His Kuomintang (KMT) government – which fled from mainland China to Taiwan in 1949 after being toppled by Mao Zedong’s Communist Party of China in the Chinese Civil War – maintained an author-

itarian grip on Taiwan, purportedly to root out communism.

Emotions over his legacy heat up ahead of Peace Memorial Day on Feb 28 every year. It marks the “228 incident” of 1947, when the government suppressed an uprising in Taipei with a bloody crackdown, during which at least 18,000 people were killed.

The incident gave birth to the long White Terror years – a period of martial law covering almost four decades of brutal political purges.

Around Feb 28 each year, civil society groups repeat their calls to have every remaining statue of Chiang in Taiwan taken down, deeming them traumatic reminders of a painful past.

In particular, they demand to see his towering statue removed from Taipei’s National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, where millions of tourists flock to every year to take selfies and watch the changing of the guard.

But emotions are running particularly high this year.

Mr Chiang Wan-an, the Mayor of Taipei, is Chiang Kai-shek’s great-grandson.

A rising star in the KMT, the young and charismatic politician is seen by many as indispensable in helping the opposition party restore its popularity, though his lineage is not viewed favourably by all.

During Taiwan’s local elections in November 2022, his main opponent, Dr Chen Shih-chung of the ruling Democratic Progressive Par-



The towering statue of Chiang Kai-shek in Taipei’s National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, where millions of tourists flock to every year.

ty (DPP), said that he would not hold Mr Chiang Wan-an responsible for what the Chiang family did, but noted that, as a descendant, he should do what he can to help “heal wounds” in Taiwan.

Now, several civil society groups, mostly comprising survivors or victims’ families, have said that

they will boycott the city’s upcoming Peace Memorial Day event at the 228 Peace park on Tuesday, which the mayor is set to attend.

They also said they would not allow the mayor to join them at their own private commemoration events.

“Countless Taiwanese were

killed, imprisoned and tortured under Chiang’s authoritarian regime, and now Chiang Wan-an continues to claim that bloodline,” Mr Wang Wen-hung, the head of the Taiwan 228 Care Association, said at an event recently.

“We should turn him away from commemoration events,” added the 76-year-old, whose father was shot dead by KMT forces in 1947.

In response, the 44-year-old mayor told reporters he would face the issue “calmly” and that he respected “different opinions”. Local media also reported that he has met various victims’ family members in recent weeks to hear their stories.

COMPLICATED LEGACY

Taiwan transitioned to a democracy in the 1990s and ranks among Asia’s freest societies today, but it continues to wrestle with its authoritarian past.

“Some view Chiang Kai-shek as a symbol of, and responsible for, the authoritarian violence enacted upon Taiwanese society during the martial-law era,” said Assistant Professor James Lin, a Taiwan history expert at the University of Washington.

“On the other hand, others see Chiang as a symbol of paternalistic leadership and the nationalistic qualities of the Republic of China,” he said, using Taiwan’s official name.

The distinct views roughly follow political party lines, experts said.

Assistant Professor Ma Chun-wei, a political scientist from Taiwan’s Tamkang University, said that while KMT supporters no

Japan to buy 400 US Tomahawk missiles

TOKYO – Japan will purchase 400 Tomahawk missiles from the United States, said Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday, as his government beefs up the country’s defences with eyes on threats, including China.

“Our country’s plan is (to acquire) 400 units” of the cruise missile, he told the Lower House budget committee without elaborating, citing the military sensitivity of the purchase.

Earlier in February, Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada said Japan has set aside 211.3 billion yen (\$2.09 billion) to buy the missiles in the coming fiscal year, rather than dividing the procurement over several years.

Mr Kishida’s government wants

to dramatically expand Japan’s defence capacity in the face of China’s growing military clout and nuclear-armed North Korea’s unpredictable missile tests.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has also stoked fears that China may move to take over Taiwan, a self-governing democracy claimed by Beijing.

Japan’s pacifist post-war Constitution limits its military capacity to ostensibly defensive moves. But in 2022, it updated key security and defence policies, outlining the challenge posed by China and setting a goal of doubling defence spending to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation standard of 2 per cent of gross domestic product by 2027. AFP

Beijing criticises Taiwan Strait fly-through by US

BEIJING/TAIPEI – China accused the United States of “endangering” peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait after a US P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance military plane flew through the sensitive waterway on Monday.

Beijing has been incensed by US military missions through the narrow strait, most frequently of warships but occasionally of aircraft, saying China “has sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction” over the waterway. Taiwan and the US dispute that, saying it is an international waterway.

The Eastern Theatre Command of China’s People’s Liberation Army said its forces closely monitored the aircraft, which is also used for anti-submarine missions,

as it flew through the strait which separates China from Taiwan.

The Pentagon did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The US previously said such missions show its commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Taiwan’s Defence Ministry, in its own brief statement, said the aircraft flew in a southerly direction through the strait. Taiwan’s forces tracked the aircraft as it flew through the strait, the ministry said, noting the situation was “as normal”. It did not elaborate.

China regards Taiwan as a renegade province to be reunified, by force if necessary, and has stepped up its military activity near the island in the past three years.

REUTERS

Philippines files 10 protests against China in 2 months

MANILA – The Philippines has filed 10 diplomatic protests against China over alleged “violations” in the South China Sea barely two months into 2023, underscoring renewed tensions between the two nations over the disputed waters.

These form part of the 77 diplomatic protests filed against China under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, according to a statement from the Philippines’ Department of Foreign Affairs on Monday.

The number is almost a fifth of the 388 protests filed over the six-year term of Mr Marcos’ predecessor, Mr Rodrigo Duterte.

“The Philippines continues to

protest China’s persistent and illegal presence in Philippine waters, including those near Ayungin Shoal,” the agency said.

Beijing has been asserting its claims to a wide swathe of the South China Sea, including islands and reefs that Manila sees as its own.

Earlier in February, the Philippines protested against China’s actions in aiming a military-grade laser at a Philippine ship in the contested territorial waters.

The United States has described China’s move as “provocative”, while Beijing has said the laser was not military grade. BLOOMBERG