

Memorial Service and Transitional Justice (17 December 2019)

Summary by Corentin Ludwig, translated by Aurélia Martin



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Wang Huei-min
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Commemoration et souvenir des « Morts pour la patrie » :
quelle place dans la politique de préservation du
patrimoine historique et culturel à Taiwan ?

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Lee Suen-cheng
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La politique de justice transitionnelle et son impact sur
l'évolution de la mémoire historique à Taiwan

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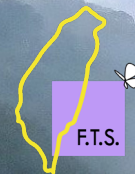
This session received two Taiwanese speakers: Mr Wang Hui-min (王惠民), Ph.D. in political science at Tamkang University (淡江大學) and Mr Lee Suen-cheng, researcher at the National Foundation for Political Studies (國家政策研究基金會).

Mr Wang's presentation was devoted to a specific memory space that commemorates those who died for their country: the National Revolutionary Martyrs' Shrine (Zhonglieci 忠烈祠). This shrine is tied to 20th century history. Built in 1969, it became a national memory space: it holds both a historical and cultural significance specific to the Republic of China's history. It is managed by the Ministry of Defense. Mr Wang's presentation aims to question the role of this place in Taiwan's historical and cultural heritage preservation policies.

The Zhonglieci Shrine was built with the intention of commemorating those who fought and sacrificed their lives for the protection of their country, in the conflicts taking place from the start of the Revolution in 1911 until the period of anti-communist mobilization. The shrine is divided into three areas. The central area is a replica of the biggest room of the Imperial Palace in Beijing. The area on the left is devoted to commemorating civilians who were commended with exceptional acts of bravery for their country. Their names are all engraved on a stone tablet, a total of 2 547. The annual commemoration ceremony is celebrated in the presence of the Minister of the Interior and representatives of the various Yuan. The right side is reserved for soldiers who are remembered for feats of arms and sacrifice in service of their country. There are 398 671 names. In this area, the annual commemoration ceremonies are celebrated in the presence of the Minister of Defense and serving generals. The admission of new "Revolutionary Martyrs" into the shrine is governed by Article 18 of the law concerning the "Measures for the Commendation and Commemoration of Civilians and Soldiers Dead in Combat or for the Good of the People"¹. There are three criteria: to have died for the success of a mission in time of war, to have respected one's military commitments in time of war, or to have died while carrying out a special mission and to have received honours from the President of the Republic.

Wang Hui-min presented another mission related to the shrine's management. He states that the shrine is not just a memorial, but also the starting point for historical research. Indeed, one of the shrine's

1 In Chinese, 國軍作戰或因公亡故官兵安葬紀念表揚實施辦法, accessed on 9 January 2019 at URL: <http://www.rootlaw.com.tw/LawArticle.aspx?LawID=A040060060003000-1020509>



missions is to help find these martyrs for the country and to retrace their lives through the national archives, some of which are still in Nanjing, or thanks to personal documents and archives entrusted by friends and relatives. This task can prove to be especially difficult due to the separation between mainland China and Taiwan from 1949 to the end of the ‘80s. Indeed, many individuals who are commemorated in this shrine were born on the mainland, and often their families still reside there. Wang Hui-min told us some of these life stories, individual and family histories. He insisted on the fact that this memory space’s fundamental purpose is that “the dead may rest in peace; that the bereaved may be comforted; and that the hearts of men may settle.”² He stressed the importance of the shrine and other memorial sites, which, “like compasses on the path of history,” help us understand the past and guide us towards the future.

The second presentation questioned the impact of the transitional justice policy on historical memory in Taiwan. Mr Lee started by giving some context for the debate that took place in the ‘90s on the issue of Taiwanese identity, which emerged in part because of the 1997 textbook reform. The question of Chinese culture and Taiwan alleged roots on the mainland were also discussed in this debate, as well as the figure of Chiang Kai-shek, whose effigy in public spaces is nowadays the subject of numerous disputes within Taiwanese society.

Dealing with the fate awaiting these many statues of Chiang Kai-shek, Lee showed that the debates around transitional justice reveal tensions that exist in the public sphere and in the political sphere especially. Indeed, the committee responsible for transitional justice had asked for the destruction of the statues of Chiang Kai-shek in the buildings belonging to the Ministry of Defense, but this request was refused by the minister in question.

At the same time, there exists an interesting differentiation between two administrative levels: national and local. Lee used the example of a mayor affiliated with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), who, against his own party’s political line at the national level, refused to remove or destroy statues of Chiang Kai-shek in his town, invoking their historical significance.

Ultimately, transitional justice as it is addressed in Taiwan offers an opportunity to consider, because of its *modus operandi*, the importance of certain memory spaces for the Taiwanese and the relationship they have with their history.

2 In Chinese, 使烈士得安息、遺族得安慰、人心得安定