



Session Summary: 18 February 2019

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This session allowed us to question the narrative elaborated around the events of 28 February 1947 and the White Terror. This objective required a preliminary examination of the issue of transitional justice that was introduced in Taiwan in the 1990s.

Transitional justice consists of a set of measures and actions that can enable a society to revisit traumatic events of the past linked to large-scale political violence. The goal is to shed light on the facts, determine responsibility, ensure justice and help reconciliation.

Transitional justice – as the name suggests – is anchored in a particular timeframe. It is an intermediate, temporary period that determines the transition from a violent and discriminatory political system to a democratic system. For this transition to work, it must be fundamentally *ad hoc*, meaning outside both the old and new systems.

It was during this process of transitional justice that debates about the events of 2.28 emerged, often presenting opposing interpretations of this past event. On the one hand, there are the scholarly interpretations and official narratives, provided mainly by historians. One of these, dubbed “pro-independent,” offers a reading that focuses on the victims of the events. It is based on investigations into oral history and states that victims were largely Han Taiwanese, thus contributing to the construction of an ethnic interpretation of these events. Since the 2000s, however, 2.28 has been considered the trigger event of the White Terror.

On the other hand, in opposition to this interpretation is “pro-reunification,” which refutes an ethnic explanation, instead linking the events to an attempted communist insurrection. For proponents of this reading, it was not a question of resistance against a foreign power, but a revolt against the arbitrary actions of civil servants and officials recently arrived from the mainland. Furthermore, an economic explanation is integrated into this narrative: this insurrection was also triggered by a food crisis caused by Japan.

Very recently, an allayed interpretation of these events has been proposed by President Tsai Ing-wen. She suggested commemorating the events of 28 February in the name of universal and democratic values. In addition, the authorities in Beijing also proposed their own, mainly Party-driven, interpretation of these events. They argue that the events of 2.28 were a legitimate struggle of the Taiwanese people against the dictatorial power of the Kuomintang. This interpretation can be seen as an expression of Beijing’s desire to include Taiwan in the mainland’s historic continuity.

The session ended with an educational video called *The 228 Incident*, which was produced by Taiwan Bar, followed by a group analysis.

¹ See the following link to watch the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxSq7tDEAYw>