

Interpretations on 228:
The 28th February 1947 Incident on Taiwan and the
Taiwan Independence Movement

Stefan Fleischauer
Ph.D. candidate in Sinology
University of Tübingen

Paper presented at the 3rd Annual European Association for Taiwan Studies Conference
Paris, 30. - 31.March 2006

Introduction

The 28th February 1947 Incident (228) on Taiwan, which occurred only 18 months after the island was returned to the governance of China, is undoubtedly one of the major turning points in recent Taiwanese history. After the brutal suppression of what was considered an “insurgency” by government authorities, the KMT regime established an authoritarian rule of unchallenged power based on martial law. This period, which is commonly termed the “White Terror”, arguably lasted until the beginning of political democratization in the late 1980s. Since opposition to KMT rule was rendered impossible on Taiwan, the Taiwan Independence Movement (TIM), which appeared as a direct result of the 228-incident, first took root in Japan and the USA. It was not until gradual democratization occurred in the 1980s that support for Taiwan Independence could be publicly voiced in Taiwan.

Not surprisingly, the memory of 228 was of great significance to the concept of national autonomy – a fact that was reaffirmed on 28th February 2004, when millions of people took to the streets to voice their support for Taiwan’s right for self-determination vis-à-vis the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In the course of the last 60 years, however, the connection between the 228-incident and the TIM was not at all constant. In its struggle for national independence, the TIM frequently found itself in new strategical positions, caused by a changing international environment that necessitated a readjustment of the TIM’s tactical short-term goals. In order to preserve its legitimating power for the movement, the 228-incident had to be reevaluated and reinterpreted accordingly. In this paper, I wish to show how the 228-incident was interpreted at different stages of the TIM, and how the incident was utilized at different times to gain support in the struggle for national independence. This general topic is further divided into the following specific questions:

1. What was the overall importance attributed to 228 by the TIM at different stages of the movement?
2. What strategies for a renewed military uprising did the TIM pursue at different times, and what role – if any – was attached to 228-incident in this context?
3. Which major adversaries (the “mainlanders”; the KMT-regime; the PRC) did the TIM face at different stages of the movement, and how were these shifts reflected in various interpretations on 228?

In the last chapter, I wish to give special consideration to the 228-interpretation prominent on Taiwan today, an interpretation that was most spectacularly expressed in the 2004 Hand-in-hand rally and recently reaffirmed by President Chen Shuibian’s decision to abandon the National Unification Council on this symbolic day.

1. The Taiwan Independence Movement Overseas

1.1. Japan: The “Government-in-Exile of the Republic of Taiwan” and the “Taiwan Youth Society”, 1950-1970

Following the brutal suppression of the 228-incident by the government military, a number of Taiwanese who had evaded detection were escaping to Japan and formed the core of the early TIM. One of the leading figures of that time was Liao Wenyi, who was on the KMT’s “Most Wanted” list of the 228-criminals. On the 28th February 1956, the “Government-in-Exile of the Republic of Taiwan” (台灣共和國臨時政府) was founded in Tokio, with Liao Wenyi as the “Supreme Leader” (大總令). For a period of nearly ten years, the Government-in-Exile remained the most influential TIM organization. In 1965, Liao Wenyi abandoned the movement and secretly returned to Taiwan, where his “surrender” was hailed as a great propaganda success by the regime.¹ The vacuum left by the decline of the “Government-in-Exile” was quickly filled by the “Taiwan Youth Society” (台灣青年社), whose prominent members included Wang Yude, Huang Zhaotang, and after 1965, Gu Kuanming, who also took over the chairmanship of the Youth Society.

For these early TIM activists, the 228-incident was of obvious significance. Many of them had witnessed the uprising themselves, or had suffered from government suppression. The TIM regarded itself as the avenger for and heir to the 228-martyrs, as can be seen in the following “Elegy to the 228-martyrs”:

*Rest in peace,
The day is near when the Taiwanese shall walk on lofty paths
Rest in peace,
For later generations shall build altars in memory of your prowess,
and the sweet fume of incense shall burn for ten thousand generations
Rest in peace, you heroic souls, revered by all Taiwanese.²*

The mainlanders were perceived as a foreign and occupying force who had invaded Taiwan after 1945, and the intention of the TIM was to drive these foreigners away from the island by

¹ Liao Wenyi had been informed by KMT agents that members of his family were under arrest in Taiwan and awaiting execution. As a reward for his surrender, the KMT government promised to release these hostages, and Liao was furthermore offered an “important political position”. After his return, the prisoners were duly released. Liao Wenyi, however, never engaged in politics afterwards and was kept under close observation. He died in Taipei in 1986. On Liao Wenyi see: **Zhang Yanxian**張炎憲, **Hu Huiling** 胡慧玲, **Ceng Qiumei** 曾秋美: *臺灣獨立運動的先聲: 臺灣共和國*. Taipei 2000.

² n.a.: “弔祭因二二八革命而成仁的英靈“. In: *Taiwan Qingnian* Nr. 99, 69/02. p.1f

violent means.³ The aim, therefore, was to stage a “second 228” – with a victorious conclusion. However, in order to picture the 228-incident as a harbinger for their own revolutionary plans, two assumptions concerning the incident had to be made.

The first assumption concerned the feasibility of an armed revolution, that is: it had to be assumed that the 228-Incident actually had had the potential to successfully overthrow the KMT regime. A large part of the 228-literature in this period was devoted to the question of why the uprising had failed, and what mistakes were to be avoided in the future.⁴ The chances for a second uprising were considered quite favorable, an opinion for which two reasons were frequently quoted.

The first purely concerned military aspects. The most obvious reason for the failure of the 228-uprising, it was argued, was the fact that the KMT had been able to dispatch a large military contingent from the mainland, while the Taiwanese had no adequate armed forces to match this challenge. This situation, however, had clearly changed in favor of the Taiwanese: The KMT no longer controlled any “hinterland” from which to suppress an uprising on the island. At the same time, the military on Taiwan, with the exception of the highest ranks, consisted mostly of native Taiwanese, who, in the event of a military uprising against the mainlanders, could be expected to join the insurgency. Furthermore, it was argued that the KMT-regime would be faced with an increasingly grave military challenge from the mainland. Through the declining fortunes of the KMT-regime in the international area, it had become evident that the KMT-regime would not be able to stage a successful recapture of the mainland, and that it would thus be faced with a hostile and ever more powerful PRC. This hostility, however, was not directed at Taiwan, but at the regime of the KMT, which had

³ Concerning the question of how to treat the mainlanders in case of a successful revolution, a certain evolution can be observed. While the early TIM in Japan under the leadership of Liao Wenyi had apparently proposed the physical eviction of all mainlanders, this scheme was later somewhat attenuated. While mainlanders, according to Gu Kuanming, should still be regarded as foreigners, they should be offered a permanent residence permit and be eligible for full Taiwanese citizenship after the standard legal procedures. Special consideration should be given to 2nd generation mainlanders born on the island – at the same time, anybody remotely involved in the 228-massacre was to be exempted. **n.a.:** “時事對話 (4): 台灣獨立運動的背景及其本質“. In: *Taiwan Qingnian* Nr. 97, 68/12. p.4f

⁴ It was also claimed that an important factor contributing to the failure of the 228-uprising was a flawed military strategy. This point was strongly emphasized by Shi Ming, who argued that the Taiwanese should have moved troops and provisions to the mountains, and set up bases for a long drawn-out guerrilla war. According to Shi Ming, the KMT would not have been able to deploy large contingents of military to Taiwan over a long period of time, since it was still occupied by the civil war on the mainland. See **Shi Ming 史明: 台灣人 400 年史**. Tokio 1964 /Taipei 1998. p.823ff

become the common enemy of both the PRC and the TIM. The military threat from the PRC was therefore widely regarded as beneficial for the Independence movement.⁵

The second assumption regarded the motives of the individuals involved in the 228-incident in regard to Taiwan Independence. In order to picture the 228-Incident as a first – if unsuccessful – struggle for Taiwan Independence, it had to be implied that the actors in the 228-incident had actually strived for national independence. This claim was not easy to justify since the “Resolution Committees”, which had been formed by prominent Taiwanese during the incident at the beginning of March, had repeatedly expressed their support for central authority and explicitly rejected any support for Taiwan Independence. This lack of support for national independence was explained by two factors: Firstly, it was claimed that the vast majority of the Taiwanese by that time had come under the influence of the regime’s propaganda, which had described Chinese and Taiwanese as brethren and fellow citizens of one, united China. Due to this largely successful indoctrination, the Taiwanese had not been able to realize their “true interests” and to draw a clear distinction between friend and foe. Despite this lack of national awareness, the actual content of the 228-uprising had all the characteristics of a struggle for independence from the mainland. As Wang Yude wrote:

[The demands] of the Taiwanese were tantamount to factual independence, this is an undisputed fact. If the revolution had been successful, the high degree of self-government would naturally have led to separation [from the mainland] and independence.⁶

The 228-incident in this context was regarded as the turning point in the formation of a Taiwanese national identity: For the first time, the Taiwanese had been forced to understand the true nature of the so-called Chinese “motherland”, and perceive themselves as a separate nation both self-contained and distinct from China. The 228-incident was therefore regarded as the major catalyst for the national awakening.

The interpretation on the 228-incident during the early TIM can thus be summarized as follows:

- The 228-incident was considered an extremely important asset both in the fields of mobilization and legitimacy of the movement. During this early period, the memory of

⁵ Gu Kuanming even went so far as to favour political neutrality for the future Republic of Taiwan, for which he hoped to gain the support of the PRC in the role of a guarantor: “I think it would be ideal if the United States, China and Japan would jointly guarantee the neutrality of Taiwan [...] This shall be the ultimate goal of our foreign policy”. **n.A.:** “時事對話 (4): “台灣獨立運動的背景及其本質“. In: *Taiwan Qingnian* Nr. 97, 68/12. p.11

⁶ **Wang Yude (Ong Ioktek) 王育德:** *Taiwan – kumen de lishi 臺灣 – 苦悶的歷史*. Tokio 1964/Taipei 2000. p.161

the incident was still fresh, and many Taiwanese had personal experience of the atrocities of the KMT's suppression;

- further, the uprising was perceived as a violent struggle for national independence – a failed revolution, which the TIM intended to repeat and bring to a successful conclusion;
- finally, this armed uprising was to be directed against the mainlanders *in toto*. Mainlanders were summarily excluded from the Taiwanese nation, which facilitated the promulgation of a simplistic enemy concept. The PRC, on the other hand, was considered to share the same antagonism towards the regime of Chiang Kai-shek, this made it a potential ally of the TIM.

1.2. USA: “The World United Formosans for Independence” (WUFI), 1970-1990

The roots of the TIM in the USA can be traced back to the 1950s, when the first student organizations in support of Taiwan Independence began to appear. However, it was not until the beginning of the 1970s that the USA began to replace Japan as the new centre of the TIM overseas. On the 1st January 1970, the “World United Formosans for Independence” (WUFI) was founded in New York, establishing the first world-wide organization of the movement.⁷ In contrast to the movement in Japan, the TIM in the USA in the 1970s consisted mainly of younger activists who had come to the USA to study or work. This new generation aimed to bring new life to the independence movement, which had so far had few successes and which, as an article by Tian Diren elaborated, in the past had largely consisted of:

[...] great landowners [whose] enthusiasm for Taiwan Independence was inevitably linked to the selfish wish for revenge [for the 228-incident]. A selfish person will hardly find the support of others, and this is especially true for a revolutionary movement, which is relying on the sacrifice of the individual.⁸

One very important factor in this “new driving force” within the TIM was the reevaluation of the perceived enemy and a more conciliatory stance towards the mainlanders in Taiwan. In contrast to the movement in Japan, which had advocated the expulsion of all mainlanders

⁷ The WUFI originally consisted of five branches which were located in the USA, Canada, Japan, Europe and Taiwan. The Taiwan-branch was purely added for symbolic reasons, since the WUFI could, of course, not openly operate on the island, and the occasional attempts to infiltrate Taiwan with underground operatives were largely unsuccessful. In 1975, a “South-American branch” (南美本部) was added, which was based in Brazil. The US-branch continued to be the most influential of these branches; also, the headquarters of WUFI was located in New York, with many personal overlapping with the US-subbranch of the organization. During the early years, the interaction between these different branches was very limited.

⁸ **Tian Diren** 天地人: “台灣獨立革命必定成功“. In: *Taiwan Qingnian* Nr. 98, 69/01. p.7

from the island, the TIM in the USA rejected this uncompromising stance on both strategical and humanitarian grounds. The mainlanders on Taiwan, it was claimed, still controlled a huge portion of the national resources, and should not be foolishly alienated from the movement. At the same time, the great majority of mainlanders, whose dream of a “return to the homeland” had been utterly shattered, were also suffering under the totalitarian regime of the KMT. Consequently, they could be won as allies in the common struggle for national independence.

A similar reevaluation can also be observed in the TIM’s perception of the PRC. While the PRC had successfully achieved diplomatic supremacy over the ROC, it repeatedly stated in unequivocal terms that it would not renounce its territorial claim over Taiwan. The TIM thus found itself fighting on two different fronts: while the major objective of the movement - the violent overthrow of the KMT-regime - remained unchanged, it now had to take into account an equally grave threat from the PRC.⁹

For the TIM in the USA, 228 had lost some of its original appeal. While the February-issues of the *Taidu*-magazine, the leading Taiwan Independence magazine in the USA, still ran a title story on the incident each year, the 228-incident did not dominate the pro-Independence magazines as it had in the previous period. This was partly due to the fact that the majority of activists in this period had not experienced the 228-incident themselves, and the strong emotional connection to the incident was slowly fading. Simultaneously, the prevailing image of the incident caused conflict between “native Taiwanese” and “mainlanders” – an image that no longer correlated to the aims of the TIM. Some attempts were made to readjust this image, and to show the 228-incident as an uprising of a suppressed and exploited population against the government and its corrupt officials, which, unfortunately, by this time was mainly represented by mainlanders. Even during the incident, it was claimed, the Taiwanese people had been able to draw the distinction between ethnicity and official function, in fact offering protection to many of the “innocent” mainlanders.¹⁰ These attempts of a reinterpretation were not very successful and failed to influence the mainstream interpretation of 228. Some activists of the TIM therefore argued that an incessant accentuation of the 228-incident might

⁹ The dilemma of the TIM was highlighted in the question of US arms sales to the ROC. On two occasions (following the *Jiang Nan* murder case in 1981 and the *Chen Wancheng* murder case in 1984), the US government threatened to freeze arms sales to the ROC. On both occasions, the WUFI and its “foreign policy department” FAPA lobbied against this decision – for fear of a military superiority of the PRC. See **n.a.**: “FAPA 為台灣人作了什麼?” In: *Minzhu shidai* Nr. 5, 03/03/86. p.58-61. The paradoxical result was that the TIM, which had vowed to overthrow the KMT-regime, lobbied for a further armament of that same regime.

¹⁰ One example which was often quoted in this context was the 228 in Gaoxiong, where, it was claimed, triangular armlets had been issued to all “innocent” mainlanders on the 4th of March to protect them from harm. See **n.a.**: “二二八的意義“. In: *Taidu Yuekan* Nr. 12, 02/28/73. p.2

actually be counterproductive to the goals of the movement. As an article in the *Taidu*-magazine put it:

We should not always overemphasize the martyrs of the 228-incident. In fact, most of these “martyrs” were just innocent victims [...] [the mainlanders] will otherwise get the wrong impression that the only purpose of the revolution is simply to take revenge – or even worse, some young Taiwanese might get this misconception.¹¹

However, the 228-incident could still serve as an important rallying-point for the movement in times of crisis. The most striking example can be found in the *Mailidao*-incident: only three days after this incident, which occurred on the 12th of December 1979, ten groups of the TIM in the USA issued a joint statement, declaring their determination to carry on the fight against the KMT to the bitter end. This remarkable statement ended in the words:

We shall unite all Taiwanese both at home and overseas, and we shall continue to attack the Chiang-regime [...] until it has been wiped from the face of the earth. The beginning of another 228-incident is right now unfolding [on Taiwan], but the end of 228 shall definitely not be repeated.¹²

Although the analogy between the *Meilidao*-incident and the 228-incident remained somewhat unclear, it is evident that the TIM fully understood the potential of 228 to incite mass-mobilization. At the same time, another important change in regard to the interpretation of the 228-incident, which was typical of that period, becomes visible. The incident was no longer hailed as a first uprising which had to be repeated. Rather, it was considered a great calamity and tragedy for the Taiwanese people (including the mainlanders), for which, of course, the KMT government was blamed. The aim of the TIM, however, was no longer to trigger a “Second 228”, but to prevent a second 228 from occurring.

The interpretation of 228 in the US-period of the TIM can thus be summarized as follows:

- While the 228-incident still served as an important rallying point for the movement, the incident had lost some of its legitimizing power and could no longer be easily used to serve the aims of the TIM;
- the 228-incident was regarded as a massacre by the KMT and as a tragedy that had to be avoided in the future, and
- the decreasing importance of the incident can be partially explained by the shifting strategic situation of the TIM. The ultimate purpose of an armed uprising remained unchanged, however, the TIM was faced with a different pattern of friend and foe. The

¹¹ **Ou Yin** 偶陰: “台灣何處去?”. In: *Taidu Yuekan* Nr. 4, 06/28/72. p.10

¹² It should be noted that this statement was issued before the Lin murder cases, which took place on the 28th February 1980 and which were consequently referred to as “the Second 228”.

mainlanders were now regarded as potential allies in the struggle for national independence, while the PRC was perceived as a new, if secondary, adversary to the independence of Taiwan. In dealing with this new pattern, the 228-incident was of limited paradigmatic value.

2. The 228-incident and the TIM on Taiwan

2.1. Taiwan under martial law and the Dangwai-movement

After the retreat of the KMT government to Taiwan and the proclamation of martial law, any support for Taiwan Independence was considered high treason punishable by long prison terms or even capital punishment. This policy of suppression was also applied to the 228-incident, which became a strict political taboo. The regime made a determined effort to erase any memory of the incident from Taiwanese society. Thus, in the period from 1950¹³ to 1970, it is almost impossible to detect any public debate about the incident; only on very few occasions did carefully-worded references to the 228-incident appear in publications on Taiwan.¹⁴ Even in the first stage of the *Dangwai*-period after 1970, when a certain degree of criticism towards the regime was reluctantly tolerated, the 228-incident was mentioned only once in an article in *Meilidao* magazine. The careful wording of the article, which referred to 228 as an “exchange of hostilities” between the different ethnic groups on Taiwan, showed how highly sensitive this subject still was at that time. In this seven-page article, which focussed on Taiwanese history, the author referred to the 228-incident in only two short sentences, closing with the remark:

Although 30 years have passed, all those who have witnessed this incident will still have a fresh memory of this wound. I do not wish to dwell upon this subject here.¹⁵

¹³ In June 1950, the former governor of Taiwan, Chen Yi, was executed for his alleged surrender to the communist enemy. This occasion marked the last time that the 228-incident made an appearance in the Taiwanese press, where Chen Yi was given full responsibility for the incident. According to newspaper reports of that time, the public execution of Chen Yi attracted a crowd of 20.000 celebrating spectators. **Xian Zhi** 先知: “清算陳義, 欽佩湯恩伯“. In: *Zili Wanbao* 06/19/50. p.1

¹⁴ For example, in the July 1960 issue of the *Free China* magazine, which was published only a few weeks before the arrest of Lei Zhen and other leading figures of the *Free China*, an article appeared which mentioned 228 as an “unfortunate incident which left deep wounds in the Taiwanese society”. n.a: “台灣人與大陸人“. In: *Ziyou Zhongguo* 23-2. 07/16/60. p.3. The memoirs of the Taiwanese writer Wu Zhuliu, first published in a three-part series in the small magazine *Taiwan Wenxue* in 1967 and 1968, included frequent references to the 228-incident. According to the editor of the 1995 edition of this book, the memoirs probably escaped censorship because of the small circulation of the magazine. A reprint in 1970 was promptly censored. **Wu Zhuoliu** 吳濁流: 無化果. Reprint Taipei 1995, Foreword.

¹⁵ **Liu Fengsong** 劉峯松: “一千八百萬人的台灣史“. In: *Meilidao* Nr. 3, 79/10. p.71

As a result of this partly successful government-enforced policy of secrecy and denial, the memory of 228 was in danger of slowly fading away, and most Taiwanese, especially those of the younger generation, probably had only a very vague idea of the incident.¹⁶ In the second stage of the *Dangwai*-movement after 1980, a multitude of political magazines appeared. Those magazines regarded it as their first and most urgent concern to revive the understanding of the 228-incident among the broader public. The period after 1980 also marked the first attempts to conduct critical historical research on the incident, which despite the scarceness of historical materials, showed some remarkable results.¹⁷

Throughout the democratic movement in Taiwan, the call for a violent uprising, which had characterized the TIM overseas, was completely absent. At the same time, any suggestions of support for Taiwan Independence were not tolerated by the regime, and therefore they rarely, if ever, appeared. Two of the major elements that had dominated the 228-interpretation overseas (“violent uprising” and “struggle for national independence”) were therefore rendered fundamentally impossible under the rule of an authoritarian regime based on martial law. Instead, the interpretation of the 228-incident became focussed on two aspects that were congruent with the aims of the democratic movement.

Firstly, the 228 was seen as part of the “dark history” of the KMT, an evidence of its past atrocities and injustices. This image, which was reinforced in a shocking way by the “second 228”, the Lin murder cases on 28th February 1980, still had a deep impact on the political realities of Taiwan in the 1980s. The condemnation of the KMT, however, did not take the form of an uncompromising call for the eradication of the regime, as was the case in the TIM overseas. Underlying these condemnations, there was always a certain conciliatory tone, formulated in the appeal to the KMT to “face its dark history”, allow for an open discussion of the 228-incident and avoid repeating the same mistakes.

The second aspect, in close connection with the first, was to picture 228 as the root of a political power structure that still shaped the realities at that time, namely the subjugation of the native Taiwanese and the one-party rule of the KMT. It was argued that during the 228-incident, a whole generation of Taiwan’s social and political elite had been disposed of, through either murder or exile, and the Taiwanese had been forced into submission. As a

¹⁶ As late as 1992, long after the 228-incident had become a publicly discussed issue, a survey conducted by the *Zhongguo Shibao* showed that only 2.1% of the respondents claimed to have a “complete understanding” of the incident, while 58.8% of the respondents had “only heard the name before” or had “never heard about this incident”. **n.a.:** “逾六成國人不了解二二八事件始末“. In: *Zhongguo Shibao* 02/14/92, p.5.

¹⁷ One important factor in this attempt to establish a critical 228-research were sources from overseas, which were usually considered “forbidden writings” by the authorities and had to be smuggled into Taiwan. Especially the book “Taiwan Betrayed” by George Kerr, written in 1965 and translated into Chinese in 1974, had an important impact on this early 228-research. In 1986, the *Shen Geng*-magazine published a special edition with an abbreviated version of the book; the issue, however, fell prey to the censoring authorities of the government.

result of the traumatic experience of the 228 massacre, a whole generation of Taiwanese had been scared away from politics, thereby facilitating the KMT's unchallenged domination of the island. Again, it was implied that the KMT still had the opportunity to rectify these past mistakes by relinquishing its grip on absolute power and allowing for a democratic society which provided for equal opportunities. The demands focussed on the abolition of martial law and tolerance of opposition parties.

Not surprisingly, the regime did not react favourably to this kind of criticism, and all the magazines which included any reference to the 228-incident were summarily confiscated or censored. For the democratic opposition, however, this continuation of the policy of denial offered an excellent opportunity to use 228 for a well-directed provocation of the authorities¹⁸. In the years after 1980, the February-issues of virtually all *Dangwai*-publications were dominated by reports on the 228-incident, usually running the title story, and 228 came to be regarded as the symbol and most visible manifestation of the *Dangwai*'s struggle for freedom of speech. The unceasing suppression only led to an even more daring approach, with different magazines competing in a determined and sometimes self-destructive "trial of courage" to present the boldest challenge to the regime.¹⁹

In summary, the dominating interpretations on the 228-incident are as follows:

- Beginning in the early 1980's, the 228-incident became an important factor for the democratic movement in Taiwan. However, far from being an "obvious" issue to rally support, as it had been the case in the TIM overseas, the democratic movement had to face the difficulty of rekindling the memory of the incident and raise awareness among the broader and especially younger public. Due to the uncompromising stance of the authorities, 228 furthermore gained prominence as a provocative topic in the *Dangwai*'s struggle for freedom of speech;

¹⁸ Despite the fact that the 228-reports met with confiscation orders from government authorities, the respective issues could sometimes still reach the market. This odd phenomenon was due to the strange and often unwritten "rules" which had been established between the *Dangwai* and the regime authorities. A political magazine could only be censored and confiscated after publication. On the morning of the publication date, when the confiscation orders reached the editorial staff of a *Dangwai*-magazine, a true "race" would ensue, with the magazine desperately trying to put the issue on the market before the order for confiscation could be enforced. Li Xiaofeng, then working for the *The Eighties* magazine, told me that forbidden issues of the magazine that could be brought into circulation would sell especially well, thus ensuring a high profit. On the other hand, the confiscation of a whole issue of one magazine could mean a grave financial loss for the editors, sometimes leading to bankruptcy.

¹⁹ This could occasionally lead to a cycle of confiscation and defiance: a *Dangwai*-magazine who had been faced with confiscation because of a report on the 228-incident would voice a public protest against this unreasonable censorship in the next edition of the magazine – which then was promptly confiscated again, triggering a renewed protest. This cycle was sometimes repeated four or five times.

- both the subjects of a “violent uprising” against the KMT and the connection of 228 to Taiwan Independence were lacking – which is not surprising, since these demands were not possible under martial law;
- while the democratic movement was aimed against the mainlander-dominated political leadership, the majority of the *Dangwai*-activists did not seek to create a division between native Taiwanese and mainlanders. Rather, they strived for an equal-opportunity society. The 228-incident was regarded in this context as the beginning of the authoritarian rule of the mainlander-dominated KMT regime and the exclusion of the native Taiwanese from the political sphere.

2.2. Taiwan after 1987

In the process of Taiwan’s political liberalization, the 228-incident gained enormous momentum. Beginning in early 1987, in preparation of the 40th commemoration day of the incident, a true “228-movement” emerged on Taiwan for the first time. In contrast to the previous period, this “movement” was no longer limited to the print-media, but sought other channels to convey the memory of 228 to the broader society, including street demonstrations and public debates. This movement, which originated in the “228 Peace Day Association”²⁰ founded by Zheng Nanrong, Chen Yongxin and Li Shengxiong, proved to be enormously successful from its very inception. In the first year 1987, more than twenty 228-activities were held all over the island.²¹ The central 228-memorial activity in Taipei alone, which was co-sponsored by the DPP, reportedly attracted more than 30.000 participants.²² Throughout the following years, these activities were repeated every year, meeting with ever greater response and turning the 228-movement, as Chen Yongxin wrote, into the “most successful movement of the opposition”.²³

²⁰ *Er-er-ba heping ri cujin hui* 二二八和平日促進會

²¹ This was even more remarkable since these activities were carried out in defiance of martial law, which was still in existence at that time. As Chen Yongxin told me in an interview, all of these activities initially met with resistance from riot-police, but on each occasion, the demonstrators successfully broke through the police cordon. Still, the early 228-activists were very much aware of the dangers involved: “[...] we were beaten [by the police], but every time, we managed to break through. What could the police do in the face of a peaceful demonstration? I kept wondering: would they shoot again, like they did 40 years before? I didn’t think that they would dare to do this. But one might get arrested, and maybe put in jail for a few years. I was prepared for this possibility.” Interview with Chen Yongxin, 03/17/05.

²² The DPP turned this first major 228-activity into a great „welcome-party“ for Yao Jiawen, later chairman of the DPP, who had just served an 11-year prison term in connection with the *Meilidao*-incident and who had been released from jail only days before. Yao Jiawen publicly joined the DPP on that very day. **n.a.:** “不讓人間有冤魂“. In: *Ziyou Shidai* (III), 03/09/87. p.7ff

²³ Weng Shuhua 翁束華: “二二八, 最成功的反對運動“. In: *Zili Zaobao* 02/23/91.

One reason for this success was the fact that the 228-movement could unite all different facets of the social and political forces critical to the KMT-regime²⁴, most importantly the DPP, which had been founded only months before. Through its representatives in the legislature, the DPP could highlight the demands of the 228-activists and enforce a parliamentary debate – which, in return, ensured a high degree of media coverage.²⁵ One further advantage of the 228-movement was its ambiguity towards the question of Taiwan Independence. With the abolition of the infamous “Paragraph 100” of the penal code in 1992, the call for Taiwan Independence could now be publicly promoted. While the majority of the newly arisen, outspoken TIM merged with the radical *Xin Chaoli* fraction of the DPP, which particularly in the early years dominated the agenda of the party, the DPP as a whole remained deeply divided on the question of an outright support for Taiwan Independence for both ideological and strategical reasons – a state of affairs which continues to this day.²⁶ For the 228-movement, however, these questions were of no direct consequence. Although the 228-movement had always included a certain predisposition towards national independence, and therefore held a great appeal for TIM activists from the beginning, the primary aim of the 228-movement was a condemnation the KMT – an aim that all the different fractions of the DPP could easily agree upon.

One further group who exercised a great influence on the 228-movement after 1988 were the victims of the 228-incident and their relatives²⁷. The demands of the 228-movement were formulated with respect for and consideration of these victims. These demands can be grouped in the following three categories:

²⁴ At the first public appearance of the “228 Peace Day Association”, a press conference held on the 2nd of February 1987, the Association issued a “Declaration on the 228 Peace Day” in order to mobilize support for their movement. Within days, more than 50 organizations in Taiwan and overseas had declared their support, amongst them the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan and several human rights groups. **Chen Yongxin**: “公佈真相, 平反冤屈. 二二八和平日宣言”. In: **Taiwan Peace Association (ed.): 走出二二八的陰影. 二二八事件四十週年紀念專輯**. Tokio 1988. p.59f.

²⁵ Through an interpellation on 27th February 1988, more than 20 DPP-delegates in the Legislative-Yuan for the first time forced the KMT to respond to the demands of the 228-movement, causing a sensation in the Taiwanese press. **n.a.**: “二十三位民進黨立委提出聯合質詢, 要求公佈 228 真相, 公開道歉”. In: *Taiwan Shibao*, 02/27/88.

²⁶ As early as 1988, the DPP was faced with an internal struggle regarding the party’s stance towards Taiwan Independences, with some members arguing that the party program should include the aim of national independence. See **Lin Zhengyi林正義**: “贊成 „台獨“ 列入黨綱, 一萬比零也沒有用?”. In: *Ziyou Shibao* Nr.216, 04/02/88. p.55f. A first solution was found in a revised party program in June 1991, where the DPP declared that it would strive for a national referendum on the question of Taiwan Independence. This position, however, was again revised in 1999, when the new policy of a “defensive referendum” was formulated that remains in force today. The DPP claims that any change of the status quo can only be accepted after a national referendum.

²⁷ Already in the late 80s, very few people who had physically suffered from the 228-incident were still alive. Today, the members of the different organizations of the 228-victims are mostly relatives of the 2nd or 3rd generation. One of the most influential representatives of the 228-victims is Lin Zongyi, the son of the prominent scholar Lin Maosheng, who was probably murdered by KMT soldiers in March 1947.

- a) Historical justice and commemoration of 228. This included demands to establish the 28th February as a national remembrance day, the inclusion of the 228-incident in the official school books and the construction of 228-memorials.
- b) Political demands. This was exclusively directed at the KMT and its unresolved historical guilt. The demands included an official apology and open access to all official documents concerning the incident
- c) Legal demands. This included financial compensation for the 228-victims, their full rehabilitation and the criminal prosecution of the individuals responsible for the 228 massacre.²⁸

For the government, it soon became obvious that the former policy of denial could no longer be upheld. In an unprecedented move, President Li Denghui in 1988 held a press conference after his inauguration, in which he also touched upon the question of 228. For the first time, President Li called the 228-incident a “great tragedy” for Taiwan, whilst simultaneously urging people to “look forward”, and not to dwell upon the past.²⁹ However, beginning in the early 90s, the government gradually gave in to the demands of the 228-movement. While this yielding by the KMT was mainly due to relentless pressure from 228-activists and public opinion, it is also interesting to observe that the more liberal wing of the KMT, the so-called “mainstream” under Li Denghui, apparently regarded the clarification of the 228-incident as an opportunity to distance itself from its authoritarian past and picture the KMT as a new, democratic party, fit for competition in an open and democratic society. At this time, the regime gave up its resistance to the 228-movement and began to take an active part in the 228-commemoration – a development that was symbolized by the government-sponsored 228-commemoration in 1995, when President Li Denghui offered an official apology and a full rehabilitation to all 228-victims. The KMT also began to woo the support of the 228-victims, which were generally held in great esteem as the living memory and reminder of past injustices.³⁰ The climax of this process was reached in 1994 when Li Denghui declared that he himself was also a “victim” of the 228-incident.³¹

²⁸ One person responsible for the government suppression of the 228-incident who was still alive by that time was General Peng Mengqi, who had earned himself a reputation as “the butcher of Gaoxing”. In 1992 and 1993, several attempts were made to file a lawsuit against Peng Mengqi. These attempts were rejected at court on the grounds that the legal time limit for such a lawsuit had already expired. n.a.: “彭孟緝拒絕公開道歉”. In: *Minzhong Ribao* 12/02/93. After his death in 1997, Peng was buried in the “section for special merit” of the national cemetery of the armed forces, his grave bearing a personal inscription by President Li Denghui.

²⁹ See n.a.: “李總統責無旁貸”. In: *Ziyou Ribao* 02/28/88.

³⁰ The influence of different political interests was one reason for a split amongst the 228-victims. The most influential organization, the “Alliance for the Care of 228” (二二八關懷聯合會) chaired by Lin Zongyi, was often criticised for its policies, and a number of other rivaling organizations were formed. The discord amongst the 228-victims was highlighted in the induction of the 228 memorial in Taipei in 1995: Only 100

By 1997, the year that marked the opening of the 228-museum in Taipei and the introduction of the 28th February as a national day of remembrance, all of the above demands (with the sole exception of the legal prosecution of the culprits) had basically been fulfilled. Although in the eyes of many critics, the historical role of the KMT is still far from clear, and the KMT is still blamed for not taking full responsibility for its past³², the focus of the interpretation of 228 favoured by the TIM gradually moved away from the sole condemnation of the KMT towards an interpretation that allowed for a pose of defiance against the PRC. This interpretation of 228, which was most visible in the “228 Hand-in-hand rally” in 2004, is still dominant today.

2.3. The 228-incident and Taiwan independence today: The 228-incident as a weapon against the PRC in the struggle for independence.

On the 28th February 2004, the eve of the presidential elections to be held on March 20th, an estimated two million people took part in the biggest-ever mass demonstration³³ held in Taiwan, forming a human chain of more than 300km that stretched the whole length of the island. This mass-rally, which was organized by the Taiwan Solidarity Union and the DPP (the “pan-green camp”), was announced as a defensive move against China, which was accused of constantly developing military capabilities for an eventual invasion of the island. The dominant 228-interpretation thereby experienced yet another shift of emphasis³⁴: The

representatives of the 228-victims were invited to the ceremony as “guests of honour”, while more than 1000 family members of 228-victims were prevented from entering the premises. See: **Lin Xiantang 林獻堂**: “新公園, 台上台下兩樣情”. In: *Minzhong Ribao* 03/01/1995.

³¹ This claim of being a “228-victim” himself, which President Li repeated in the following years, met with a lot of criticism, since it was far from clear what the President actually meant. In 1996, Lin Yixiong staged a public protest in front of the Presidential Palace, basically asking Li Denghui to provide some proof for his claim or to remain silent. **Du Zhenglong 杜政隆**: “李登輝是受害人? 林義雄率員抗議, 要求說明”. In: *Taiwan Shibao* 02/29/1996.

³² At the centre of this criticism is the ambiguous role that Chiang Kai-shek took in the 228. Only recently, a new report on the 228-incident published by the 228 Memorial Foundation came to the conclusion that Chiang Kai-shek personally ordered the suppression of the “insurgency”, with the full understanding that thousands of innocent would perish. Other scholars, however, refute this claim on the grounds that no sufficient proof has been provided to support this accusation. **228 Memorial Foundation 財團法人二二八事件紀念基金會**: *二二八事件責任歸屬研究報告*. Taipei 2006.

³³ On 13th March 2004, the KMT countered this move with its own mass-rally aimed against Chen Shuibian, allegedly attracting over two million participants. The organization of mass-rallies of this proportion can be regarded as a new element in the political contest on Taiwan.

³⁴ This interpretation of 228 as a warning against a future unification with China was not a completely new phenomenon. In Taiwan, this interpretation gained certain relevance in 1989. Following the *Tiananmen*-massacre in Beijing, the pro-independence camp described this incident as “China’s 228” and warned against unification with the mainland. See for example **Zheng Zhaoji 鄭肇基**: “北京大屠殺, 台灣二二八”. In: *Ziyou Shidai* Nr.280, 06/10/1989. p.1ff. However, as long as the KMT remained in power and continued to offer resistance to the 228-movement, this 228-interpretation hostile to the PRC was of secondary importance.

228-incident was now turned into a weapon against the PRC's military threat and served as a symbol of Taiwan's right for self-determination. This shift, which was initiated by the pan-green camp, was based on two propositions:

Firstly, it was claimed that the wounds caused by the 228-incident, which had for a long time caused a deep hostility and suspicion between the different ethnic groups on Taiwan, could actually lead to a new level of mutual understanding and solidarity. Through the process of forgiving and reconciliation, the memory of 228 could become the source of renewed strength and unity to safeguard Taiwan's interests against the mainland.

Secondly: aimed at the PRC and its demands for unification, the 228-incident was perceived as a warning of the consequences that such an enforced unification would necessarily imply. One of the main reasons for the uprising and its brutal suppression was the fact that Taiwan and the mainland in 1947 were divided by deep cultural and political rifts, which inevitably caused friction after the KMT took over the island, finally culminating in the 228-incident. The rifts that are separating the mainland and Taiwan nowadays were immeasurably deeper. If Taiwan was forced to agree to a renewed unification with the mainland, or if the Taiwanese were to repeat the mistakes of their forefathers and foolishly trust the PRC's propaganda of "united Chinese brethren", a "second 228" would follow with the same inevitability. This, it was argued, was even more likely as the PRC, in contrast to democratic Taiwan, was still governed by an autocratic regime, not much different of the past KMT.

The political opponents of Chen Shuibian, however, claimed that the President was merely staging the "228 Hand-in-hand rally" to mobilize his core of Taiwan Independence supporters, and was thus trying to capitalize on the symbolic 228 commemoration for his own political ends in face of a predictably close ballot.³⁵ Although the DPP had asked "all Taiwanese" to join in the activity and to voice their support for Taiwan, specifically inviting the participation of the pan-blue camp, it was evident that the 228 Hand-in-hand rally was completely dominated by pan-green supporters, with Li Denghui and Chen Shuibian holding the major speeches at the main rally in Miaoli.³⁶

³⁵ According to some political analysts, the 228-rally indeed led to a marked rise in the President's approval rate and probably was an important factor in the split-hair narrow re-election of Chen Shuibian. See **Li Xinfang** 李欣芳: "手護台灣圓滿, 扁支持度上升". In: *Ziyou Shibao* 02/29/04. p.8. Some analysts also did not fail to point out the puzzling fact that Chen Shuibian was reelected with a margin of 0.228%. See **Tang Shi** 唐詩: „天意? 贏 0.228% 扁呂驚險連任“. In: *Taiwan Ribao* 03/21/04. p.1

³⁶ The pan-blue camp decided to boycott the "228 Hand-in-hand rally", instead holding their own 228 memorial activity. Under the motto of "Your blood is in mine", supporters were asked for blood-donations.

In summary, the interpretations of the 228-incident after 1987 were characterized by the following points:

- Following the emergence of a 228-movement in 1987, the 228 gained enormous importance for the political opponents of the KMT. This movement could serve as a focal point for confronting the KMT with its unresolved historical injustices. While this process is still not completely concluded, the yielding of the regime since the early 90s gradually took the pressure from the KMT³⁷, and the 228-incident since the mid-90s lost some of its political relevance. This tendency was reversed in the spectacular staging of the “228 Hand-in-hand rally” in 2004, which raised the prominence of the 228-commemoration to an unprecedented height.
- The option of a violent uprising against the regime was never seriously considered by the opposition. On the contrary: in the course of the political liberalization of Taiwan in the late 80s and early 90s, most of the revolutionary TIM activists overseas chose to abandon their violent stance against the regime and to participate in the democratic competition on Taiwan instead.³⁸
- While the problem of conflict between different ethnic groups continues to play a certain role in the 228-research today³⁹, the element of ethnicity-based hostility is no longer relevant to the political struggle of the TIM. In the years after 1987, the 228-movement was exclusively directed against the KMT, which was urged to face its historical guilt. Through the yielding of the regime, 228 gradually lost its meaning as a weapon in the political struggle in Taiwan, and was consequently redirected towards the PRC.

³⁷ As early as 1991, Yin Zhangyi came to the conclusion that 228 was no longer suitable as a political weapon, as the KMT had shown its honest willingness to rectify its past mistakes. **Yin Zhangyi** 尹章義: “以二二八事件作為鬥爭工具的時代已過去. In: *Lianhe Bao* 02/28/91.

³⁸ In the late 80s and early 90s, the majority of the TIM activists overseas were on the regime’s “black list” of unwanted persons, and could not legally return to Taiwan. Still, many dissidents successfully eluded the regime’s control mechanisms, often travelling into Taiwan under false identities. The WUFI, the most influential TIM organization overseas, returned to Taiwan in 1991, and still has an office in Taipei today. See: **Shi Zhengfeng** 施正鋒 (ed.): *台灣獨立建國聯盟的故事*. Taipei 2000. p.84ff.

³⁹ One of the most heatedly debated topics in the 228-research to this day is the question of how many people perished in the 228-incident, with numbers ranging from just over 800 to a staggering 100.000. At the same time, some scholars claim that the perception of victims has been exclusively reduced to the victims amongst the native Taiwanese, while the victims amongst the mainlanders, that were mistreated and often killed in the first days of the incident, tend to be ignored.

Concluding remarks: The TIM, the 228 and the “opponents” of the TIM

If we look at the history of the TIM, it becomes apparent that the major “enemy” of the movement, that is the force that was perceived to offer the greatest resistance to the founding of an independent Taiwan, shifted several times. At the beginning of this process were “the mainlanders”, who were perceived as a foreign and occupying “Chinese” element. This perceived enemy later shifted to the KMT – during the later part of the TIM overseas – and, finally, the PRC. All of these shifts were also reflected in the TIM’s perception of the 228-incident, that is the interpretation of the 228-incident, as well as the overall importance of 228 to the movement.

For a long time in Taiwan, the 228-incident could not be openly discussed, and it was not until the beginning of the 1980s that the 228 gained importance as a weapon in the political struggle against the KMT. This connection was at the same time very successful and quite obvious: the 228-incident – just like the following period of the White Terror – were indeed part of a historical guilt for which the KMT had to take full responsibility. In contrast to the TIM overseas, the movement on Taiwan never seriously proposed the annihilation of the regime. With regard to the 228-incident, the KMT was blamed for its unresolved history, but at the same time, this condemnation was linked to specific demands, thereby offering the KMT an opportunity to come to terms with its past – an implication that the regime certainly understood and used to its advantage.

With the largely successful settlement of the 228-incident in the years from 1987-1997, it may be expected that some kind of reconciliation and pacification in regard to this topic should have ensued. However, it was during this period that a new aspect of the 228-incident became the centre of the discussion: The 228-incident as a weapon against the PRC and its military threat to Taiwan. At a first glance, this new perception of the 228-incident might not seem very convincing – considering the fact that the PRC was not even founded until more than two years after the incident occurred. At the same time, the staging of the 228 hand-in-hand rally in 2004 came quite unexpectedly. In the preceding years, there was no indication that the 228 commemoration, which had taken on the form of a dignified, if unspectacular ceremony, would be amplified in this stunning way, and it was not until September 2003 that the project of this daunting rally was disclosed to an astonished public. While it seems reasonable to assume that the 228 Hand-in-hand-rally must be understood in light of the Presidential elections of 2004, it is also evident that the DPP has since moved to strengthen this new

interpretation of 228, as can be seen in the President's decision to abandon the National Unification Council on this symbolic date.

It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss Taiwan's right to self-determination vis-à-vis the mainland, or the wisdom to reaffirm this right through explicit gestures. One might wonder, however, why the pan-green camp would choose 228 as a symbol for the affirmation of Taiwan's autonomy versus the PRC. Two points seem worthy of discussion:

1. By turning the 228-incident into a weapon to be used against the PRC, the DPP is, from a certain perspective, reverting to an old pattern of interpretation that was prominent in the first stage of the TIM. Again, the 228-incident is regarded as a symbol of an autonomous Taiwanese nation and statehood, and the incident, is consequently predominantly explained by cultural and political distinctions between Taiwan and "China". The marked difference is that "China", during the earlier period, was identified with the KMT, whereas the PRC, quite interestingly, was regarded as a potential ally in the struggle for Taiwan Independence.

The assumption that future unification would lead to a "second 228", i.e. to renewed unrest and bloodshed, may or may not be true, but it seems questionable that this anxiety for the future of Taiwan, which is in itself quite understandable, should be linked to the memory of the 228-incident. It should be stressed that the PRC was in no way responsible for the incident⁴⁰, and there is a certain danger that this new interpretation of 228 can only be constructed with disregard for historical facts.

2. In the past, 228 had always been regarded as symbol for a deep rift between the ethnic groups on Taiwan, a division which, through a long process of political liberalization and social reconciliation, has been vastly overcome. It may therefore seem inappropriate for any political party to drag the 228-incident into the sphere of political contest, since this might lead to a new rift in regard to the 228 memory, a rift delineated by political rather than ethnical affiliation.

⁴⁰ Directly after the 228-incident in 1947, the KMT authorities described the incident as an uprising both planned and spearheaded by underground communist agents. This theory of a "communist element" in the 228-incident could not be sustained by recent research, and has by now been utterly refuted.