



English

Flowers of Freedom

Blooming in the hands of those in protest, in streets awash in civil unrest;
from the tip of the dissident's pen, from the bow of the prisoner's violin;
in the chest of the martyr, in the eyes of children looking to the future;
flowers of freedom, herald the advent of a democratic spring.

Freedom is neither a gift bestowed from above nor a right that remains forever.

Throughout the world, flowers appear as symbols of freedom in popular movements and cultural works advancing the cause of liberty. A few examples from Taiwan include the poem *Flowers of Freedom* by Lai He, the novel *The Indomitable Rose* by Yang Kui, and the Wild Lily and Sunflower student protest movements in 1990 and 2014, respectively.

Like any plant with prized blooms, freedom must be watched over and nurtured. Freedom is treasured in Taiwan as well as other countries that have fought for and won democratic governance. This exhibition spotlights humanity's call for democracy and freedom across different countries and periods of time. The theme *Flowers of Freedom* goes beyond sharing disparate experiences to encourage international solidarity in continuing to uphold and expand freedom's vital spirit. The flower of freedom may wilt and wither; only democracy can ensure it continues to flourish.

Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, completed in 1980 as a symbol of autocracy, quickly became an epicenter of the popular struggle against authoritarianism and of Taiwan's march toward democracy. While its monumental architecture continues to make it one of Taipei's most-visited sites for international tourists, we hope that, in addition to photos and social media check-ins, your visit here is a starting point to a better understanding of Taiwan's democratization experience. Discover Taiwan's rocky road to freedom and prosperity, and see how Taiwan's people planted, cultivated, and now tend their flower garden of freedom.

Exhibition Sections

This exhibition is divided into five sections centered on three themes: the global wave of democratization, the journey toward democracy and freedom in Taiwan, and visions for the future.

Section One | Waves of Change

This section revisits major global movements for democracy and human rights that emerged after World War II. These are positioned alongside milestones in the development of democracy in Taiwan. This section also highlights the lifelong pursuits of Nylon Cheng, a key advocate of free speech in Taiwan whose beliefs and actions became the nation's turning point toward freedom.

Section Two | The Era of Imposed Silence

When Taiwan was placed under martial law, authorities imposed sweeping measures of social control, banning songs and restricting freedom of thought, speech, and movement. This section also includes a reconstruction of an interrogation room typical of the time.

Section Three | The Road to Freedom of Speech in Taiwan

Tracing the development of freedom of expression from 1945 to modern times, this section presents how authoritarian rule was transformed into a vibrant democracy within 47 years.

Section Four | Trauma

Through personal stories, letters, and final testaments from victims of the White Terror era, this section reveals the lasting wounds inflicted by the state on individuals, families, and society at large.

Section Five | Brilliant Blossoms

Contemporary books, picture books, comics, films, and music in Taiwan reflect on the nation's past. Visitors are invited to reflect on their own experiences and share what freedom and democracy means to them.

Flowers of Freedom

Permanent Exhibition Hall, 1F, Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall

Advisor | The Ministry of Culture

Organizer | National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall

No. 21, Zhongshan S. Rd., Zhongzheng Dist., Taipei City 100012 <https://www.cksmh.gov.tw/>

Hours | Open Daily 9:00-18:00

Closed on Lunar New Year's Eve, Lunar New Year's Day, February 28th, and annual maintenance days

Exhibition Floor Plan and Overview

Waves of Change

Totalitarianism starts with surveillance; resistance starts with speaking the truth. History bears witness not to high, solid walls, but rather to the eggs that break against them. Today, let us honor not guns or bullets, but the flowers that have been placed gently into their barrels.

The last forty years of the 20th century was an era of rising human rights advocacy and activism. In the 1980s, free speech advocate Nylon Cheng proclaimed: *Live in Taiwan as a citizen of the world. Although a small nation with a small population, we are a good nation with good people.* Similar to others pursuing liberty around the world, the people of Taiwan confronted the guns of their rulers with both flowers and spilt blood.

Brilliant Blossoms

Czechia-born and exiled in France, writer Milan Kundera once wrote: "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting." We too can resist forgetfulness by writing, singing, creating, and retelling stories of the past. We invite you to leave a few words sharing the story of your country. We welcome you also to share memorable stories from your stay in Taiwan. As long as we remember together, freedom will continue to blossom with brilliance.

Nylon Cheng | The Turning Point for Taiwan Become a Free Nation

In 1984, Nylon Cheng (Chen Nan-jung) founded *Freedom Era Weekly* magazine series with the goal of fighting for “100% freedom of speech” in society. Through the magazine, he promoted his ideals and sought to challenge the system of censorship in Taiwan. In December 1988, *Freedom Era Weekly* published the “Draft Constitution of the Republic of Taiwan,” authored by Koh Se-kai. As a result, Cheng was subpoenaed by the Taiwan High Court Prosecutors’ Office on charges of sedition. On April, 1989, when police attempted to forcibly detain him, Nylon Cheng set himself on fire. He died defending both the dream of an independent Taiwan and the principle of absolute freedom of expression.

Vanishing Family

In this series of diptychs by Chen Wu-jen, the left panels include family members with at least one figure deliberately “erased,” painted only as a faint gray silhouette. These blank spaces symbolize victims of the White Terror era who became forever missing from their families. The right panels depict scenes of the missing persons’ deaths. The absence of facial features conveys how these figures are not meant to represent specific individuals or incidents, but the anguish shared by the countless families of this period.

Letters From White Terror Victims to Their Families

Those imprisoned under martial law authoritarianism had their lives forcibly halted. To society and their own families, their fate was often unexplained and unknown. They had simply been “disappeared”. Letters and wills, which their authors well knew might not even make it to their intended recipients, were often the only and final outlet for pent-up regrets, frustrations, and hopes. This area exhibits letters written by imprisoned White Terror victims, including Sung Sheng-miao, 'Uongu Yata' uyungana, Chen Chung-tung, Huang Wen-gong, Tsai Kun-lin, and Ye Sing-ji , to their families. Each carefully penned word and sentence conveys the love and regrets of fathers, husbands, and sons. Reading them today is gut-wrenching. They stand as a permanent reminder that the suffering inflicted upon the people under White Terror can never be forgotten.

The Era of Imposed Silence

The Nationalist government assumed control over Taiwan after the World War II from Japan in October 1945. When then-Provincial Governor and Taiwan Garrison Commander Chen Cheng put Taiwan under "temporary" martial law four years later on May 20, 1949, few could have guessed it would remain in full effect for the next 38 years and 56 days. It wasn't until July 15, 1987 that President Chiang Ching-kuo formally ended Taiwan's nearly four-decade martial law period. Under martial law, the government imposed extensive controls over society. Detailed prohibitions were issued; freedom of thought, speech, and movement were restricted; and, in severe cases, extralegal trials, imprisonment, and executions were conducted, inflicting grave harm on human rights.

The area is further organized into three sections:

- Section I. The Corridor of Music Censorship
- Section II. Banned Materials Archive
- Section III. Interrogation Room

Interrogation Room

During the White Terror period, Taiwan had numerous secret interrogation spaces used by the authorities to detain, imprison, interrogate, and torture political prisoners. Carpets, observation holes / windows, listening devices, curtains, sound-absorbing panels, and bright lights kept on 24/7 were all essential equipment in interrogation rooms.

The Road to Freedom of Speech in Taiwan

Fighters for democracy from disparate origins and backgrounds, undeterred by the mortal dangers they faced, dealt blow after blow against authoritarian rule until the "everyday life" we enjoy today had, at long last, been realized. In this section, we trace the course of free expression in Taiwan from 1945 to today, presenting original records and documents that shed light on our journey from the shadows of oppression to the light of freedom and democracy.

Trauma

During Taiwan's four decades under martial law, political violence ravaged the bodies and minds of not only its direct victims but also their families and descendants. All lived as prisoners under the shadow of violence and stigma. Despite martial law's dismantling in 1987, its wounds linger across Taiwanese society even today.

Although trauma can never truly be undone, empathetic listening and understanding can promote healing and give the power to move forward together.

