Taiyuan Prison martyrs commemorated

Academics and government officials joined former political prisoner Kao Chin-lang (高金郎) to commemorate five martyrs of the Taiwanese independence movement who were executed in the 1970 Taiyuan Prison Insurrection at a book launch event in Taipei yesterday.

There have been more files and government internal documents being declassified and made available to researchers and to the families of victims, Kao said, much due to the good work done by the Transitional Justice Commission, which was established by the government in May last year.

With the new material, Kao has added new chapters to his book on the Taiyuan Prison Insurrection, which was sponsored and published by the National Human Rights Museum.

Kao was a witness to the Taiyuan Prison Insurrection and knew the people who were executed in the aftermath of the incident as he was serving a 15-year prison sentence after being accused of taking part in a mutiny aboard a navy warship offshore of Keelung Harbor in 1963.

In May 1964, Kao said he was transferred to Taiyuan Prison in Taitung County, which at the time was used by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government to incarcerate many dissidents and political prisoners.

At the start of yesterday’s event, Kao and other speakers led the audience in a minute’s silence to commemorate all of the victims of the White Terror era from 1949 to 1987.

Taiwanese must remember the sacrifices of those who had participated in that 1970 incident, when political prisoners attempted to seize weapons and battle their way out of the prison with the hope of leading an uprising against the military dictatorship and they had prepared an announcement to proclaim Taiwan an independent nation, Kao said.

Kao, academics and Taiwanese independence advocates have held commemoration services for many years for the “Five Martyrs of Taiyuan Prison Insurrection” — Cheng Chin-ho (鄭金河), Chiang Ping-hsing (江炳興), Chen Liang (陳良), Chan Tien-tseng (詹天增) and Hsieh Tung-jung (謝東榮) — who were executed on May 30, 1970, after a short military trial.

“These five men are heroes to us. They lost their lives for the cause of Taiwanese independence by fighting the corrupt KMT military dictatorship at the time. Their courage, persistent determination and indomitable spirit in facing death are models for Taiwanese to establish a new nation,” Kao said. “I have written books on what took place at Taiyuan Prison, because our society did not know that history and most of the younger generation have never heard of this event. It is not mentioned in school textbooks, as the KMT tried to erase everything and all people associated with the incident, to cover up that chapter of Taiwan’s history,” he said.

Peng Jen-yu (彭仁郁), a Transitional Justice Commission member and a researcher at Academia Sinica, had good news for Kao and the others attending the event, as she said more files and documents held by the Taiwan Garrison Command, as well as other judiciary and intelligence-gathering apparatus, had been declassified in the recent months and more would be made available soon.

“Since May last year, the commission has overturned the convictions of about 3,000 victims of the 228 Massacre and the KMT’s White Terror era atrocities, including the Taiyuan Prison Insurrection... The work is ongoing and we plan in July to overturn the convictions of more than 1,000 more political prisoners and dissidents, and many others who were rounded up and imprisoned on wrongful accusations of discussion about other political ideologies,” Peng said.