

Hatta, Chiang statues not connected

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Tuesday, 18 April 2017 08:39

Many in Taiwan were appalled by the news that a statue honoring Japanese engineer Yoichi Hatta in Tainan was found decapitated early on Sunday morning.

China Unification Promotion Party member and former Taipei city councilor Lee Cheng-lung (李程龍) yesterday turned himself in and confessed that he and a female accomplice were responsible for the vandalism.

Some commentators, pointing to previous cases of vandalism to statues of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石), asked whether the Hatta statue was targeted by anti-Japan or pro-unification supporters in a bid to take “a head for a head.”

Any form of vandalism or hateful act ought to be condemned, irrespective of the national or political identity that inspires it.

However, to equate the philosophy behind the erection of the Hatta statue with what led to the proliferation of Chiang statues around the nation is a serious error.

In addition, anyone trying to criticize Taiwan’s honoring of a Japanese as an act of “Japanization” that fawns on the nation’s past colonial rulers has failed to understand history and is interested only in inciting ethnic conflict.

To examine Hatta and Chiang from a purely historical standpoint, the two are worlds apart: Hatta never killed anybody. Chiang, on the other hand, was perceived by many Taiwanese as a murderer responsible for the bloody 228 Incident during which thousands of Taiwanese and Mainlanders perished; Hatta contributed to Taiwan with his planning and overseeing of the construction of Tainan’s Wushantou Reservoir (烏山頭水庫), whose irrigation network benefited the farmers of the Chianan Plain (嘉南平原); Chiang’s Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) took over properties belonging to the former colonial government and private properties as party assets when the Japanese colonial government and settlers left Taiwan in 1945.

Hatta, Chiang statues not connected

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Tuesday, 18 April 2017 08:39

It is also worth noting that Hatta's statue came about as a result of a public initiative; it was built and financed by his subordinates, whereas the countless Chiang statues around Taiwan were erected using taxpayers' money and without the public's consent.

A critic might say that Hatta's construction of the Wushantou Reservoir was motivated by the then-colonial government's concern over a stable rice supply. However, that Hatta's engineering achievements helped lay the keystone of Taiwan's modernization is indisputable.

Hatta, dubbed by Taiwanese as the "Father of the Chianan Irrigation System," is remembered not only because of the reservoir — which dramatically increased the annual production of crops in the 150,000 hectare Chianan Plain which spans from Tainan through Yunlin and Chiayi counties and greatly improved the lives of tens of thousands of households in the region — but also because despite being an official of the colonial government, he showed humility toward the welfare of Taiwanese and did not oppress or exploit them as other colonial officials did.

The values behind the statues of the two are strikingly different: Hatta was apolitical and he earned the respect of Taiwanese via his selfless deeds; Chiang's statues were erected to idolize the leader of a totalitarian regime.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2017/04/18](#)