

There can be no justice without truth

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The Executive Yuan on Saturday announced its final nominees for the transitional justice promotion committee, proposing that prominent Taiwanese literature academic Yang Tsui (楊素), Academia Sinica ethnologist Peng Jen-yu (彭仁宇) and former Taiwan Association for Truth and Reconciliation chief executive Yeh Hung-ling (葉宏凌) fill the remaining three spots on the nine-member committee, which would implement the measures set forth by the Act on Promoting Transitional Justice (促進轉型正義法).

Among the nominees subject to legislative review and confirmation, committee chairman Huang Huang-hsiung (黃煌煬) has raised eyebrows among political observers.

Although President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on March 31 said that Huang was an appropriate candidate chosen after rounds of inquiries, and several Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) politicians said he has “public credibility,” Huang is not free of controversy.

Pan Hsin-hsing (潘心馨), the director-general of the Taiwan 228 Incident Care Association, has expressed concerns over Huang’s qualifications and called for the establishment of a privately run transitional justice promotion committee to monitor the state-run committee.

New Power Party Executive Chairman Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌) has engaged in heated online exchanges with Presidential Office Deputy Secretary-General Yao Jen-to (姚建人) over the nomination.

Saying that Huang Huang-hsiung during his term as a Control Yuan member opposed the recall of then-prosecutor-general Huang Shih-ming (黃世明) in January 2014 after the latter was convicted of leaking information to then-president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), Huang Kuo-chang raised doubts over Huang Huang-hsiung’s definition of justice.

Yao said that reconciliation is the ultimate goal of carrying out transitional justice, adding: “Huang Huang-hsiung is a good choice if the goal of transitional justice is to achieve reconciliation.”

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Yao's remarks suggest that the government chose Huang Huang-hsiung because he is acceptable to both the pan-green and pan-blue camps, and therefore fits the perception of reconciliation. If this really is the government's mindset regarding transitional justice, it is disappointing.

Former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) has said that the Tsai administration "lacks courage and decisiveness," and the nomination of Huang Huang-hsiung appears to be an illustration of that.

Implementation of transitional justice cannot be reduced solely to the end result of achieving reconciliation: Without truth and justice, there cannot be true reconciliation.

On Saturday, at an event commemorating the 29th anniversary of the death of democracy activist Deng Nan-jung (鄧南仲), Tsai said that it is important for the nation to get transitional justice right, adding that transitional justice is rooted in uncovering the truth.

Even Yao acknowledged that the implementation of transitional justice should follow the order of truth-seeking, criminal prosecution, redress and reconciliation.

How will Huang Huang-hsiung convince the public that he is capable of leading the committee when there are allegations that he ingratiated himself with both sides of the political divide?

It is little wonder that 228 Incident expert Chen Tsui-lien (陳水扁) reportedly declined a seat on the committee because she believed that Huang Huang-hsiung is not knowledgeable enough about transitional justice to head the committee.

If reconciliation is prioritized ahead of finding the truth, what is the point of setting up the committee in the first place?

Implementing reforms is not easy, but by nominating Huang Huang-hsiung, the government is risking its credibility, as it seems that it has forgotten its pledge to implement transitional justice.

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