

NTU must rethink juvenile Kuan

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Despite former minister of education Pan Wen-chung's (潘文忠) resignation last week over the controversy surrounding National Taiwan University (NTU) president-elect Kuan Chung-ming (管中閔), some people still cannot seem to fathom the severity of the issue.

It is startling how some critics have written off Pan's resignation as the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration "letting itself off the hook" over its botched attempts to block Kuan's appointment.

Throughout his resignation statement, Pan stressed that the ministry was doing the right thing in investigating the allegations against Kuan, which include plagiarism in a journal paper, being involved in a conflict of interest in his election and teaching in China, which is illegal for a government-contracted professor.

Pan also expressed the hope that the political manipulations and attacks targeting the ministry would cease following his resignation, so that public attention could be focused on the controversy and Kuan's qualifications.

If anything, Pan's resignation illustrated that there are real concerns over Kuan's legitimacy to serve as NTU president, and an ongoing investigation into allegations that Kuan illegally worked in China shows that the ministry would press on with or without Pan.

Since the controversy about Kuan allegedly plagiarizing a master's thesis by a student of one of his coauthors erupted, he has adopted a condescending attitude and has refused to engage in any communication outside some Facebook posts.

Kuan's stance that "nobody said that [the identity of] an independent director must be revealed" also smacked of hubris and raised many eyebrows, considering he is an independent director at Taiwan Mobile, whose vice chairman Richard Tsai (蔡其昌) was an NTU election committee member.

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Despite the university's statement that the conflict of interest does not breach any of its regulations, the election might establish a bad precedent, as it could encourage corporations to exert undue influence on universities and use them for their own gains.

Any sensible person would be hard-pressed to deny that the conflict of interest runs counter to public expectations of NTU. Had there not been such a glaring loophole in the election rules, the result would likely have been annulled.

Faced with 31 allegations that he breached the Act Governing the Appointment of Educators (師資職專法) over his dabbling in Chinese higher education institutions since 2005, Kuan chose to stonewall the government, while posting on Facebook esoteric lines from poems he took from wuxia (martial arts) novelist Jin Yong's (金庸) work in an apparent attempt to claim innocence.

"Master Kuan" — as Kuan calls himself — might think that by shying away from the public eye and only taking to Facebook to make hipsteresque remarks is cool, but it is juvenile and about the most uncool thing a potential NTU president could do.

If Master Kuan has any respect and vision for the post, he should act like he wants the job and clear up any doubts.

Hiding behind Facebook while refusing to give any explanations shows that he is an egoist who puts his pride before anything else, even the top office at the nation's leading university, which is insulting to the school.

NTU is first and foremost a public university run on taxpayers' money, so for someone who thinks that it is cool to stonewall the government and the public to actually become its president, the university's greatest disaster might still be ahead.

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