

An affront to victims of terror

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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It is difficult to decide which aspect of the Chiang Kai-shek (蔣經國) design competition, announced earlier this week by the National Chiang Kai-shek (CKS) Memorial Hall and the Ministry of Culture, is most infuriating: Minister of Culture Lung Ying-tai's (龍應台) continued refusal to point to those responsible for the murder of thousands of Taiwanese under the Generalissimo's watch, or that public funds are being spent on this ridiculous project at a time when society's most vulnerable are seeing their homes destroyed by the government.

Launched to coincide with the 10th anniversary of former first lady Soong Mayling's (宋美齡) death and to honor the "deep love" that the dictator and his spouse had for each other, the design competition, which comes with a NT\$100,000 (US\$3,347) prize for the winner, purportedly seeks to promote marital love, family values and the uniqueness of the nation's Chinese "heritage."

No sooner had the contest been announced than its organizers, along with Lung, came under fire from victims of the White Terror and were ridiculed online.

Just across from the CKS Memorial Hall last week, residents of the Huaguang (華光) community looked on as bulldozers sent in by the Ministry of the Interior demolished their homes to make way for a glitzy new leisure area for the rich and powerful. Since the government cold-heartedly refused to listen to the residents' pleas, let alone provide financial assistance to help those who are not too old to rebuild their lives, the Ministry of Culture is spending untold amounts of money promoting a design competition to honor a very flawed man who brought nothing but terror and desolation to Taiwan.

For many Huaguang residents, some of whom make as little as NT\$4,000 a month, NT\$100,000 would go a long way. Yet the government does not support them, but is willing to spend money honoring two dead individuals who this nation is better off without.

Feeling the backlash, Lung, whose ministry oversees the CKS Memorial Hall, had little choice but to adopt a critical tone when discussing the competition yesterday, calling it "frivolous." However, she still could not bring herself to admit that Chiang and his Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) were the perpetrators of the 228 Massacre. Despite all the evidence, the testimonials and apologies by previous KMT administrations, Lung said the incident was "too complex" to attribute responsibility to the perpetrators.

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All of this is occurring under an administration that, in defiance of public opinion, continues to promote the Sinicization of Taiwanese society. It also coincides with a move by China to restore the image of Chiang, who for decades was depicted by the communist regime in Beijing as the devil incarnate.

Apparently, it is not enough that in recent months people in Taiwan have had to stare at the face of the 20th century's greatest mass murderer, Mao Zedong (毛澤東), on television ads and in the windows of financial institutions across the nation; Taiwanese must also endure their own executioner being depicted as a man who stood for virtue, love and family values.

Chiang was not the devil incarnate, but he was a ruthless leader who retarded the nation's development and caused untold suffering to its people. The Generalissimo lived through extraordinarily difficult times and had to make difficult decisions. That being said, he made far too many bad decisions — decisions that resulted in deaths, disappearances and broken families — to deserve being honored in such a way.

He is undeniably, for better or worse, a part of the history of this nation, and as such he deserves to be studied and understood. However, ultimately he is not a cultural icon to be cherished, but belongs in history books and museums; and the countless statues erected to honor him should remain in the dark, dusty corners where they have been banished.

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