Save local languages from the KMT

Written by Taipei Times Editorial Tuesday, 07 October 2014 08:05

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) has again shown its ignorance of and disrespect — if not contempt — for local cultures by making local language studies an elective — rather than mandatory as it promised — course in junior high schools.

Although former minister of education Chiang Wei-ling (□□□) had made the promise during a legislative meeting, a curriculum committee meeting yesterday rejected the idea, listing the classes as optional and to be offered only when students request them.

Minister of Education Wu Se-hwa ([][]]) defended the committee's decision, saying it was in line with the ministry's objective of reducing the number of required courses. Moreover, by making local languages an elective, students have more freedom in course selection, he said.

While what Wu said may sound reasonable, there is so much more at stake, considering that local languages — be it Hoklo (also known as Taiwanese), Hakka, or Aboriginal languages — are rapidly declining, and are in very disadvantaged positions to different degrees.

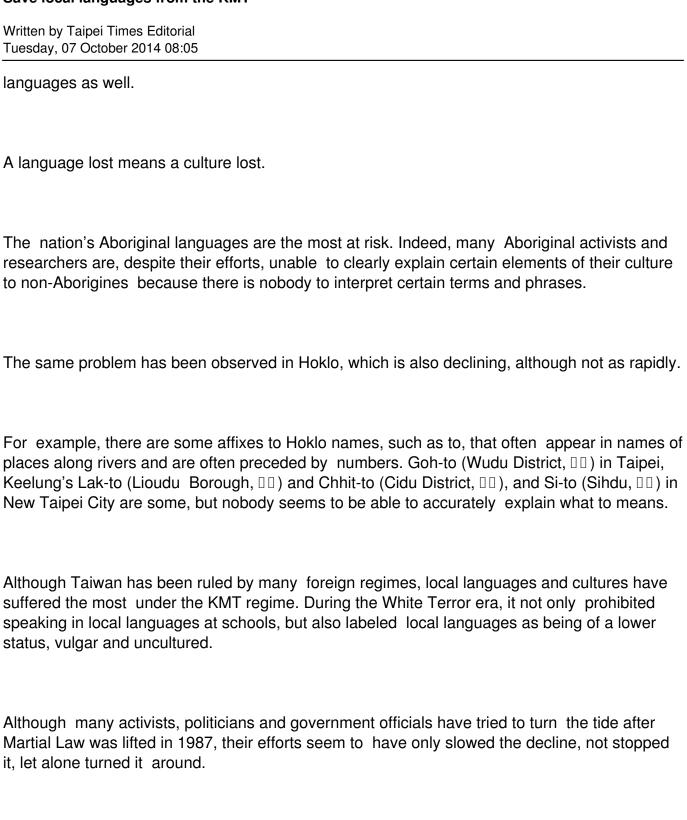
It is cruel but true that when a language is considered "not useful" or "not important," students would be less likely to learn it. The situation is worse if the language is prejudicially viewed as "vulgar" or "uncultured."

This is the challenge facing local language learners.

Most young people cannot speak local languages, which their families might speak fluently, as they are accustomed to speaking Mandarin among their peers. Many of them have also stopped speaking local languages at home, except when talking to their grandparents, who might not have a good command of Mandarin. Examples of young people not being able to communicate well with their grandparents because of the language barrier is not uncommon.

It is worrisome that many parents who speak local languages fluently talk to their children in Mandarin, which means that the next generation might not be able to understand local

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Normally, teaching and preserving the native tongue is a family's job, but since the problem was created by the government, it is the government's responsibility to put extra efforts into

saving local cultures by protecting their languages.

Affirmative action is required on local languages and cultures.

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