

Lien Chan reveals hatred, ignorance

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Tuesday, 18 November 2014 06:52

Former vice president Lien Chan (連戰) — father of Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Taipei mayoral candidate Sean Lien (連戰) — showed his lack of understanding of Taiwan's history and lack of sympathy for the Taiwanese who lived through the Japanese colonial period by calling independent mayoral candidate Ko Wen-je's (柯文哲) father and grandfather “traitors” because they were educated under the Japanese educational system and once adopted a Japanese surname.

Lien Chan made the remarks during a campaign rally for his son on Sunday. He said that Ko has been raised in a family that received a Japanese colonial education, with his grandfather even adopting the Japanese surname Aoyama, and therefore Ko's loyalty to the Republic of China was in question. A person from a family of “traitors” should not be elected as mayor of the capital, he said.

The remarks are astonishing not only because they express so much hatred, but also because they show so much ignorance of Taiwan's history.

First, as the island was under Japanese colonial rule from 1895 to 1945, it is inevitable that the vast majority of Taiwanese — about 90 percent — would have fathers, grandfathers or great-grandfathers who went to school under the colonial education system. These include many of the leading figures in the movement against Japanese colonial rule that are praised by the KMT government as “national heroes.” So was Lien Chan implying that the majority of Taiwanese are unfit to be elected officials?

Moreover, many Taiwanese took Japanese surnames because the colonial government introduced a policy in 1940 to “encourage” them to adopt a Japanese name and lifestyle.

Incentives for adopting Japanese names included better education and job opportunities, and more food rations and other necessities during wartime, when resources were scarce. The colonial government also had many ways other than incentives to pressure or force Taiwanese to take Japanese names.

Certainly, those who resisted the pressure and the temptation should be lauded, but is it fair to

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blame those who changed their surnames under pressure or to ensure the survival of their families during wartime?

If Lien Chan truly believes that it was a sin to adopt a Japanese name, why did he not protest or resign when serving under former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), since Lee adopted a Japanese name, Masao Iwasato, during the Japanese colonial period?

If Lien Chan sincerely believes it is wrong to adopt foreign names under pressure, does he feel the slightest bit guilty about or would he apologize for the KMT policy that forced all Aborigines in Taiwan to adopt Chinese names?

While Sean Lien repeatedly said that it was unethical to criticize the family of a rival during an election, Lien Chan does not appear to share the same compunction.

If Lien Chan insists that it is important to consider the actions of a candidate's grandfather, maybe he would care to explain why his grandfather, Lien Heng (連橫), once penned a poem in praise of then-Japanese governor Gentaro Kodama's visit to Tainan in 1899, and then an article promoting the benefits of smoking opium in a pro-Japanese newspaper in 1930 at a time when the Japanese colonial government was pushing for a policy to issue special permits for opium smokers?

No, we did not think so.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2014/11/18](#)