

Developing young minds

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A Taoyuan city councilor sent the room into peals of laughter, mostly scornful, when she asked officials at a council meeting who Chung Chao-cheng (鍾朝成) is and “whether he is still alive and so famous” that there have to be awards and local buildings named after him.

Widely considered one of the most important advocates of Hakka culture, Chung, now 90 years old, is a literary figure who was born in Taoyuan and has lived there most of his life. He has won national arts awards and medals.

Taoyuan City Councilor Lu Shu-chen (盧樹成) of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) did not stop there.

When told that Chung is indeed famous, she asked: “Former [KMT] chairman Wu Poh-hsiung (吳伯雄) is pretty famous too, why are there no awards named after him?”

This episode revealed a deplorable lack of cultural appreciation and knowledge of the nation’s history — or history in general — that is prevalent in the nation. What makes it worse is where this ridiculous conversation took place: the city council. Coupled with its handling of the city’s budget, the council needs to be held accountable for how regrettable local politics could influence young minds.

On Tuesday last week, the council passed next year’s budget for the city — now headed by a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) mayor — totaling NT\$95 billion (US\$2.88 billion), after making a small cut of 0.33 percent, or NT\$318 million.

However, what is worth noting is that the city’s Department of Youth Affairs was subjected to a disproportionate setback in terms of budget loss — NT\$136 million of the total NT\$318 million cut. Its funding next year will be almost half of this year’s budget of NT\$280 million.

At the end of last month, the council’s KMT caucus slammed a department-sponsored activity aimed at developing university and high-school student self-governance groups’ abilities. The

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KMT threatened to boycott the budget review, accusing the department of using a “biased article by a current candidate that calls the KMT a squanderer” as a teaching material.

The article was an interview conducted by the National Taiwan University Student Association in 2013 with Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌), who is now a New Power Party legislative candidate, but was interviewed as a former president of the association.

In the interview, Huang talked about the historical backdrop against which he served and planned changes as association president.

The campus was striving to democratize and “the intervention of the party-state apparatus was still grave,” Huang said in the article.

In other words, he was talking about the ghost of the KMT on campus only a few years after the end of the Martial Law era, with “KMT-supported clubs going buddy-buddy with the administration and getting subsidies, only to waste them.”

The day after Lu’s ridiculous line of questioning, another KMT councilor continued the attack, but bungled by falsely accusing a lecturer of teaching absurd ideas, quoting a teaching segment that the lecturer later explained was deliberately made fallacious to test students in a critical-thinking class.

No one should underestimate the power and the potential of young people, but the KMT, which still controls many local councils despite the DPP’s performance in last year’s mayoral elections, chooses to stymie rather than promote activities that aim to develop self-understanding and independent thinking among young people. One can only infer that the party has misgivings about the possibility of an enlightened younger generation. Why would it do this? The reason is not difficult to guess.

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