

Aborigines continue to be oppressed as in past

Written by Lin Yu-lun 林育倫
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During Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, which is observed by China's Uighurs, the Chinese government used the promotion of Chinese culture as an excuse to force students to eat zongzi, glutinous rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves that are traditionally eaten during the Dragon Boat Festival.

Threatening students who did not eat zongzi, local officials told them that their families would be punished.

In terms of Beijing's use of state violence to persecute people for their religious beliefs and culture, this is just the tip of the iceberg.

On Monday, when questioning Council of Indigenous Peoples Minister Icyang Parod in the legislature in Taipei, Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Chen Chao-ming (陳朝明) used an extremely disparaging tone of voice as he mentioned the minister's name and said that it implied chucao (草) — the Chinese interpretation of a phrase in many Aboriginal languages that describes a head-hunting tradition.

To openly adopt an attitude dripping of Han chauvinism in the halls of the legislature to ridicule Aborigines is no different from the way the Chinese government treats ethnic minorities in China.

The Republic of China (ROC) government has been in exile in Taiwan for almost 70 years. In addition to the past language policy prohibiting the use of the Hoklo language [commonly known as Taiwanese] and culture — which covers a majority of Taiwanese — the ROC rulers of that period also persecuted Aboriginal culture.

Last year, a three-and-a-half-year prison sentence handed down to Bunun hunter Tama Talum — for possession of a rifle and for killing a wild boar and a Formosan serow in 2013 — was upheld by the Supreme Court, but fortunately, an extraordinary appeal against the sentence is to be filed.

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However, for a long time, the dominating values of the Han people and the zhonghua minzu — Chinese nation — have controlled all ethnic groups in Taiwan. Aborigines have been forced to learn Mandarin and take Chinese names, as well as give up their traditional ways of life. This longstanding persecution continues to this day.

As the government is preparing to initiate a procedure of transitional justice for Aborigines, they are being ridiculed by a lawmaker from the opposition KMT in the legislature. The fact that the party that had been in power for many years is oblivious to the past and even tries to block such legislation makes it clear that deep-rooted bad habits continue among ethnic Chinese in Taiwan.

The KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have long promoted Han chauvinism, ignored the ethnic identity of non-Han ethnic groups, grabbed the land of ethnic minorities and even attempted to wipe out cultures and beliefs to boost the impression of fundamental ethnic unity. The actions of the KMT and the CCP are so similar that they almost seem to be agreed upon.

Hopefully, President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) administration will promote Taiwan-centered education and avoid being trapped in Chinese ethnic thinking. If it does not, Aborigines will face yet another great calamity.

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Translated by Perry Svensson

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