

Members of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) legislative caucus on Friday last week held a news conference to question the authenticity of President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) doctoral diploma and dissertation from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

Armed with their own diplomas and dissertations from overseas institutions were legislators Lin Yi-hua (林錫山), Arthur Chen (陳其南) and Yosi Takun, in an academic show-and-tell that only added to the sense of political theater surrounding this latest attempt to smear Tsai.

The conspiracy theory over Tsai's apparently missing — although they are not — academic credentials did not originate with the KMT. That accolade goes to US-based political commentator Cao Changqing (曹長青) and former TV political talk show host Dennis Peng (彭望明), who began circulating the allegations in June, but the KMT decided to run with it.

Even though the allegations are baseless, a survey released on Tuesday by the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation showed that 24.6 percent of respondents said that they believe Tsai's dissertation is problematic, suggesting that the smear campaign is working.

The KMT is demonstrating that it is quite happy to fall back on its old tricks.

That the news conference was held at the Legislative Yuan is significant, as legislators are immune from legal liability for claims made within its walls. Had they made their allegations outside, they would have left themselves open to a defamation suit.

A report last week said that during a Sept. 11 meeting of the KMT's Central Standing Committee, suggestions for a smear campaign against Tsai were raised and the LSE credentials allegations were suggested.

According to the leaked minutes of that meeting, KMT Vice Chairman Hau Lung-bin (郝龍斌) cautioned against taking such a route, as he knows from experience that confirmation of academic documents, especially for the high-level positions Tsai has held, are extremely

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stringent.

It was, then, a ridiculous assertion to suggest she could have come this far on a fake diploma.

Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Kuan Bi-ling (關碧玲) on Monday said that Tsai's LSE doctoral certificate had been accepted by the Central Election Commission when she ran for New Taipei City mayor in 2010, and that this would have been validated by the Taipei Representative Office in the UK.

Still, the veracity of the smear is not the point.

KMT Culture and Communications Committee deputy director-general Cheng Mei-hua (鄭美華) later denied that there had been any formal planning of a smear campaign. Make of that denial what you will, but the KMT has form, against Tsai and as well as in the run-up to previous presidential elections.

In late 2011, just before the 2012 election, the now-defunct Special Investigation Division (SID) opened an investigation into allegations Tsai had received improper benefits from biotech start-up Yu Chang Biologics in 2007. Not only had that case been looked into years before, with Tsai being exonerated of any wrongdoing, but one had to question the timing.

Weeks after the election, the SID found that there was nothing illegal about the Yu Chang case, but by then the damage had been done, and Tsai had lost to then-president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九).

The KMT took some losses — the Taipei District Court ordered Christina Liu (劉曉蓮), who headed the Council for Economic Planning and Development under Ma, to pay Tsai NT\$2 million (US\$64,445 at the current exchange rate) in compensation over the case, but the KMT got what it wanted, a second term for Ma.

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The nation would be better served if the KMT could focus on the issues, instead of distracting the public with spurious allegations that it knows full well to be false.

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