

University autonomy is not total indulgence

Written by Chang Kuo-tsai 張國才

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Media have reported that a number of private Taiwanese universities signed “one China” agreements with Chinese educational institutions, pledging not to engage in activities that promote “one China, one Taiwan,” “two Chinas” or Taiwanese independence during academic exchanges.

With the Ministry of Education citing “university autonomy” and the schools citing “freedom of expression,” the ministry has failed to take action and these institutions have escaped punishment.

University autonomy seems to have become a shield that allows these reckless schools to flout the law, while freedom of expression has been twisted to allow people to voice support for Taiwan being an inseparable part of China’s sacred territory, but not for “one China, one Taiwan,” “two Chinas” or Taiwanese independence.

The low birthrate and the excessive number of local universities directly challenge private universities’ survival, but for them to survive, Taiwan must survive.

Should the government allow them to sell out Taiwan and sign such agreements on behalf of Taiwanese without thinking twice?

To be blunt, the ministry has adopted an “ostrich policy” by emphasizing the separation between education and politics, respect for academic freedom and university autonomy.

For the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), political correctness is the only means of survival and political correctness is to do whatever the party says.

In such an environment, private Taiwanese universities are prone to surrender to the Chinese, swapping freedom for survival — but, naturally, this only leads down a dead-end street.

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The Chinese media must publish whatever the CCP says, and entertainers must curry the favor of the CCP and Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) by expressing the party's political stance as their own.

How can universities survive if they do not follow the party's every whim or curry its favor?

For example, Huadong Taiwan Businessman's School is operated in China by retired army general Chen Ting-chung (陳廷雄), a former commander-in-chief of the Republic of China Army who recently said that he is Chinese, calling it a symbol of pride.

Could his school for Taiwanese students allow them to build an awareness of their Taiwanese identity? Does it teach a Chinese or Taiwanese identity? Does it shape students into Chinese or Taiwanese? The answers to these questions are obvious.

The ministry pays Chen's school an annual NT\$60 million (US\$2.07 million) subsidy.

In response to his praise of China and insult to Taiwan, the ministry simply said that his remarks were inappropriate, but drew no correlation between the remarks and the subsidy — the ministry keeps paying the school, kidding itself and refusing to stop.

Regardless of the purpose of the subsidy, the ministry should stop daydreaming and deceiving itself.

China's Confucius Institutes have used education as an excuse to do political work around the world — or as the Chinese saying goes: "Hanging a sheep's head while selling dog meat."

After Beijing's political trick was finally exposed, many Confucius Institutes were forced to close in the US, Germany and Sweden.

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Ironically, the ministry continues to pay a school operated in China for Taiwanese students.

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Translated by Eddy Chang

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