

A failed attempt by Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) to attack the central government has drawn renewed attention to the many streets in Taiwan that are named after places in China.

Describing the legislature in Taipei as surrounded by a “Chinatown,” Ko in a Facebook video on Thursday highlighted that many streets in the city are named after places across the Taiwan Strait, including Qingdao, Hangzhou, Tianjin, Nanjing and Guangzhou.

A certain political party has been presenting itself as the “local” party, sporting phrases such as “Taiwan consciousness,” but its headquarters are on Beiping E Road, Ko said, referring to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) without directly mentioning it.

“Don’t you think it’s weird?” he asked.

Ko, chairman of the Taiwan People’s Party, urged the central government to rename the streets to better reflect a “Taiwan spirit.”

However, he became the laughing stock of DPP members, who pointed out that the right to rename streets in Taipei lies with the city government alone. Ko’s video was removed just a few hours later.

The incident again exposes how Ko often uses clumsy tricks to grab headlines by poking at the DPP, even though they often backfire.

Yet the issue of street names, and the names’ political and cultural connotations, is indeed thought-provoking.

The street names singled out by Ko highlight that Taiwan has accommodated many immigrants from China. Whatever their initial motives for moving to Taiwan, they often sought to rebuild

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their hometowns on this side of the Strait.

Places that are hundreds of kilometers apart in China, such as Jinan and Xuzhou, are only a block away from each other in Taipei — an area that is famous for its variety of beef noodle dishes and Chinese traditional pastry stores.

Many streets in Taiwan are also named after the eight traditional virtues highlighted by Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙), including *Zhongxiao* (忠孝, “loyalty and piety”), *Renai* (仁愛, “mercy and love”), *Xinyi* (信義, “faith and loyalty to friends”) and *Heping* (和平, “harmony and peace”), although they are not necessarily the most important virtues for today’s Taiwanese.

Likewise, there are many streets nationwide referring to Sun himself and Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石), including those with *Zhongshan* (中山), *Zhongzheng* (中正) and *Jieshou* (介壽) in their names.

The streets, many of them a city’s or town’s arterial, symbolize the omnipresence of the authoritarian figures.

On March 21, 1996, Jieshou Road leading to the Presidential Office Building was renamed Ketagalan Boulevard by then-Taipei mayor Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) of the DPP, marking the city government’s respect for Aboriginal history.

The renaming ceremony was just two days before Taiwan’s first direct presidential election, and the boulevard became a venue for many social movements and protests.

While many roads have been renamed to reflect residents’ heritage, some street names still reflect the Japanese colonial period of the nation.

Despite the tense relations between Taiwan and China, the intricate relations between people

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across the Strait can hardly be severed with a clean cut. Changing the name of a street might not be difficult, but more efforts are required to prompt people to reflect on the teachings of history.

After a country eliminates the name of an autocrat from its map, has it moved away from autocracy, or is the act part of building a new one?

When some streets are named after minority groups, are their cultures more respected or sooner forgotten? These are some questions that are more worth thinking about than Ko's shallow show.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2021/04/25](#)