

In remembrance of Huang Tien-lin

Written by Lu Shih-Hsiang 盧士香

Tuesday, 08 June 2021 05:07

Twenty-one years ago, I telephoned former Presidential Office adviser Huang Tien-lin (黃天麟) to invite him to write an opinion piece for the Chinese-language Economic Daily News.

At the time, Huang had just retired as chairman of First Commercial Bank and I had just been hired by the newspaper. Huang later told me that the invitation marked the beginning of a new chapter in his life as a writer.

I met Huang in 1979, when he was a manager in the bank's overseas department and I was a journalist at the Chinese-language United Daily News.

In February that year, a fraud case at the bank's Zhongshan branch had sent shockwaves through society and I conscientiously went about interviewing Huang for the paper. He later told me that he was deeply impressed with my fair and impartial report.

Huang graduated from National Taiwan University's Department of Economics and drew on the copious experience he had gained at the bank as the basis for his writing. He possessed an extraordinary amount of knowledge and insight, and understood economics and finance from both a theoretical and practical standpoint.

During the 1990s, Huang greatly contributed to the debate over Taiwan's economic and trade policy toward China, providing concrete research and analysis. He vehemently opposed then-Democratic Progressive Party chairman Hsu Hsin-liang's (許信良) "boldly go west" (大膽向西) initiative and stressed the importance of Taiwan maintaining its autonomy and continuing development. From the moment he began writing for the paper, I felt a tingle of excitement to be in the privileged position as the first person to set eyes on his exquisitely worded missives.

After my retirement from the Economic Daily News, I did not completely lose this privilege. Before he sadly passed away last month at the age of 93, I still enjoyed an advance reading of Huang's regular articles for the Liberty Times (the Taipei Times' sister paper).

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Born in 1929 during the Japanese colonial era, Huang belonged to the generation of Taiwanese who were schooled under the Japanese education system — also known as the “Doosan” generation (道生代). Huang’s entire life represented the unique qualities of Taiwan’s “greatest generation.”

Influenced by the environment of the era he grew up in, Huang was proficient in his mother tongue of Hoklo, commonly known as Taiwanese, as well as Japanese, Mandarin and English. Languages are much more than a means of expression and tools for communication; they are a key to unlock one’s horizons and gain a broader understanding of the world and its myriad cultures.

In addition to Huang’s economic and financial expertise, his English skills were sufficient enough to be made manager of First Commercial Bank’s overseas branch in Guam, before going on to establish and run the bank’s London branch. Huang also served as chairman of the bank’s operations in California.

Later on in his career, Huang used his mastery of the Japanese language to promote cultural and economic exchanges between Taiwan and Japan, and received decorations from the Japanese government, including the Order of the Rising Sun, (third class, gold rays with neck ribbon) for his contributions toward enhancing Taiwan-Japan relations.

In addition to his regular opinion articles, Huang also published no fewer than 12 books.

Even more importantly, as a member of the Doosan generation, Huang’s multilingual, multicultural upbringing broadened his horizons and allowed him to continually absorb a wide variety of new skills, knowledge and information from abroad.

During his lifetime, Huang also experienced the end of one colonial government and the imposition of another. All throughout, he maintained a belief in Taiwan’s right to autonomy and actively worked to achieve this aim. He helped formulate former president Lee Teng-hui’s (李登輝) “no haste, be patient” (不疾不徐) policy, opposed the integration of Taiwan’s economy with China’s, and worked hard to ensure that Taiwanese semiconductor manufacturers maintained roots in Taiwan.

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Huang was also an advocate for the rejuvenation of Taiwan-centric values and culture. More than a quarter-century since the implementation of Lee's policy, over two-thirds of the electorate today view it positively — a testament to the two men's incredible foresight.

Huang is a shining example of the Doosan generation, whose education was steeped in the twin ideals of public duty and selflessness. During the administration of former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), Huang served as a Presidential Office adviser for seven years.

Huang donated his entire salary during this time to charitable causes, including establishing a scholarship foundation at his alma mater, Magong Elementary School, in Penghu County, and another at the National Tainan Girls' Senior High School, where his mother used to teach.

In more recent years, Huang continued to give back to society, serving as president of the Taiwan-Japan Cultural Economic Association and director-general of the Taiwan Nation Alliance. Throughout his 93 years of life, Huang consistently put his country and its people first and continued to write until his death.

My friend will be sorely missed. His extraordinary achievements and prodigious contributions serve as a model for all Taiwanese, now and for generations to come.

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Translated by EDWARD JONES

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