

Activists back embattled former student

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Activist Lin Fei-fan, right, speaks in support of former National Chung Kung University student Lee Ying-jui, left, at a news conference in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Liu Hsin-de, Taipei Times

Civic groups and Sunflower movement leader Lin Fei-fan (林飛帆) yesterday voiced support for former National Cheng Kung University student Lee Ying-jui (李英儒), who was charged with and acquitted of vandalism for damaging a campus sign, but faces more legal action.

They held a Taipei news conference to condemn the Greater Tainan school's suit and a prosecutor's decision to appeal Lee's acquittal.

The case stems from a 2013 university request that the student association choose the name of a new campus plaza. Although an overwhelming number of students voted to name the square after democracy and human rights activist Deng Nan-jung (鄧南仲) officials rejected the students' decision.

University president Huang Huang-hui (黃煌煇) said a university should not get involved in

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political activities or embrace a specific political ideology.

Students protested that stance, saying that the names of the school's two campuses should then be changed, since the Chung-cheng (中正) campus was named for Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and the Kuang-fu (光復) campus referred to the "return of Taiwan to China after Japanese colonial rule."

Lee, then a political science graduate student, removed the characters for kuang-fu from a sign at an entrance to the school.

He was indicted by prosecutors, but acquitted by the Tainan District Court. However, prosecutors have appealed the verdict.

"After he removed the characters, he did not run away. He stayed there to be arrested, because he wanted to call the school administration's attention to the issue. It was an act of freedom of expression," Lin, a Cheng Kung alumnus, told reporters. "University campuses are places where we should have 100 percent freedom of speech. However, we regrettably have not achieved democracy on campus, and it is just ridiculous that National Cheng Kung University even filed a lawsuit against one of its students."

Attorney and human rights activist Huang Di-ying (黃帝英) said that judging by Council of Grand Justices' constitutional interpretations, Lee's act was a symbolic expression of protest.

"I am glad the Tainan District Court values the freedom of expression over National Cheng Kung University's property, but I am worried that there may be many authoritarian-era judges in the Taiwan High Court who lack true understanding of democracy, and could overturn the district court's verdict," Huang said.

Representatives from the Taiwan Association of University Professors and the Deng Liberty Foundation also attended the news conference to support Lee.

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