

Pair surrenders to police over Hatta statue decapitation

Written by Taipei Times

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The vandalized bronze statue of Japanese engineer Yoichi Hatta is covered with a tarpaulin yesterday in Tainan's Yoichi Hatta Memorial Park.

Photo: Yang Chin-cheng, Taipei Times

China Unification Promotion Party member Lee Cheng-lung (李程龍) yesterday admitted being involved in the decapitation of a bronze statue of Japanese engineer Yoichi Hatta in Tainan on Sunday.

Police said video surveillance in the area appeared to place the former Taipei city councilor and a woman identified as Chiu Chin-i (邱金一) at the Yoichi Hatta Memorial Park (許昌興紀念公園).

A Taiwan Chia-Nan Irrigation Association member yesterday said he recalled seeing a man and a woman “playing” with the statue’s head at about 5am on Sunday while he was exercising in the park near Wushantou Reservoir (烏山頭水庫), which Hatta is credited with building.

He said he felt the situation was odd, but continued to exercise before deciding to call park personnel an hour later.

He said he could not positively identify the pair except to say it was a “woman with long hair and a tall, skinny man.”

Police said video surveillance was not very clear given the 50m distance between the statue and the nearest security camera.

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Lee and Chiu yesterday turned themselves in at Taipei's Zhongzheng First Precinct at 1pm, and were later handed over to investigators in Tainan.

Chiu, who goes by the nickname White Jasmine, is a member of the Chinese Unionist Party.

Three Facebook posts by Lee on Sunday appear to implicate him in the crime, police said.

One advertised the auction of an electric saw that was "used only once," while a second said: "I will not conceal it from everyone, it was me who did it ... Lee Cheng-lung!"

He later posted that he had been invited to "take a day trip to Tainan and have coffee" with the police.

Association officials said they are working to have the statue repaired.

Police said Lee and Chiu are known to them for their regular participation in protest activities, noting that they were prosecuted over an arson and vandalism case at the Taoyuan headquarters of the Taiwan Civil Government group in July last year.

Lee was also involved in a dispute with pro-independence supporters at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall on 228 Memorial Day during which he hit a police officer, the police said.

Greeted by reporters when he arrived at the Taiwan High Speed Rail's Tainan Station at 5pm yesterday, Lee was asked how long he had planned the attack on Hatta's statue.

"I planned it for many years," he said. "What should be done must be done."

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Asked where the statue's head was, he said: "It is in Taiwan."

The statue was commissioned by area residents and aides who worked under Hatta on the construction of a series of canals in the Chianan Plain (彰化平原) and the reservoir. It was created by Japanese sculptor Yuma Tsukada and shipped to Taiwan in 1931.

In 1941, local residents decided to hide the statue because they feared the Japanese colonial government would want to melt it down for the bronze. They continued to hide it after the war for fear the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government might destroy it for political reasons.

They did not uncover it until 1981.

Additional reporting by CNA

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