

NTU professors' language rule draws groups' ire

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Taiwan Association of University Professors deputy chairman Chen Li-fu, third left, speaks at a news conference in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Wang Yi-sung, Taipei Times

Language rights advocates and academics yesterday stood up for students at National Taiwan University (NTU) who wish to speak their mother tongues, after two professors instituted a rule that school meetings must be conducted in Mandarin only.

The incident was an example of “cultural bullying,” as it prevented students from speaking in their mother tongue and had contravened the National Languages Development Act (國家語言發展法), Taiwan Association of University Professors deputy chairman Chen Li-fu (陳立夫) said.

“It is a basic right of citizens... Yet these two professors at a leading university deprived the students of their language rights and continued the cultural oppression of Taiwanese,” Chen said.

At a NTU Cooperative Shop board meeting on July 30, student representative Sun Phok-ju spoke in Hoklo (commonly known as Taiwanese), but was ordered to stop by chairwoman Shih Hsiu-hui (謝淑惠), a biology professor, who said that agricultural economics professor Jerome Geaun (謝國興) had proposed a motion for the meeting to be conducted in Mandarin only.

Geaun was at the June 30 meeting and justified his motion by comparing speaking Hoklo to smoking cigarettes.

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"You have the liberty to smoke, but you cannot infringe on other people's liberty," which is why there are non-smoking areas, he said.

Sun said that at an earlier meeting, Shih had demanded that people only use the "official language" and said that people using any other language would not be allowed to speak and would not be recorded in the meeting's minutes.

"I talked about our rights to speak our mother tongue, and mentioned the National Languages Development Act, but it was no use. Shih would not allow us, even though we had people at the meeting who were willing to act as translators," she said.

"Then Geaun compared people speaking Hoklo to people smoking cigarettes... He was equating speaking Hoklo to damaging other people's health, like secondhand smoke," Sun said. "It was a grave insult to many of us."

Alliance to Promote Common Use of Hoklo director Khoo Hui-ing (許惠英) said that Shih and Geaun were imposing their idea that Mandarin is a superior language to the exclusion of other languages, which would cause other languages to die out.

Attorney Huang Di-ying (黃帝英) said that the Ministry of Education and Control Yuan should investigate the matter, as the two professors' words and actions were discriminatory and contravened the language law.

In related news, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Taiwanese are now allowed to use the romanized spellings of their names in Hoklo, Hakka and Aboriginal languages for their passports.

It is now possible to have romanized names transliterated from one of the national languages, Bureau of Consular Affairs Director Antonio Chen (陳安邦) told a regular news conference in Taipei.

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The change comes after an amendment to Article 14 of the Enforcement Rules of the Passport Act (入國管理條例) was passed on Friday last week, Chen said.

Previously, only Mandarin Chinese names could be romanized.

Additional reporting by CNA

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