

Speaking of graduation ceremonies

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It's that time of the year again, and a special time it truly is. I mean, of course, graduation time.

I am not thinking so much these days of how our graduates may be feeling about what may or may not have happened to them in the past few years of their lives. Nor am I thinking of what every graduate in the world (not only here in Taiwan) contemplates at this special rite of passage as he or she takes a deep breath and, with shaky knees and worried look, steps out into a cold and scary world.

In fact, my eye is fixed not so much on students, but on those who speak to them at graduation ceremonies.

Let us not distinguish between high school and university graduation ceremonies. What matters is the content of speeches in a ceremony here or there. What may matter even more, however, is the messenger, the one who delivers a speech at a ceremony.

Kuomintang (KMT) city Councilor Chung Hsiao-ping in Taipei has attracted headlines and angry comments on his Facebook page because of his remarks at a graduation ceremony for a local high school last week (TT 6-13-13, p. 3). One of several politicians appearing at the ceremony, Chung used the occasion to announce his candidacy for the office of mayor in next year's election. He went on to say he'd do his best to sink the 12-year compulsory education plan. Well, he didn't quite use the word "sink."

His critics are saying Mr. Chung took advantage of a student activity to promote himself, and so on and so forth.

It is interesting that students expressing anger at the councilor on Facebook apparently actually listened to his words. Are we to assume the graduates wanted to hear something inspiring or educative on their graduation day? This honestly gives me hope.

I am ashamed to say so, but during most of the university-wide graduation ceremonies I've attended in recent years on my campus (and I never miss) students have generally blatantly ignored the words of officials speaking to them from the stage before them. Graduates have been far more interested in chatting non-stop with friends nearby, talking on cellphones, eating breakfasts wrapped in brown paper or cellophane, running combs through their hair, taking

pictures of themselves and their buddies in cap and gown, or, of all things, applying fresh makeup or touching up their eye-liner or mascara.

Let us at least ask if a speaker at a graduation ceremony may offer a wise word to an audience. Consider local business leader Dai Sheng-yi.

Wowprime Chairman Dai Sheng-yi advised students from the commencement speaker rostrum at National Chung Hsing University last week to go ahead and spend their hard-earned money if their first salaries land in the NT\$22,000-NT\$28,000 area. "Unless you earn more than NT\$50,000 a month, you can forget about saving," he reportedly said (CP 6-12-13, p. 15).

Mama Mia, he even recommended that the graduates borrow money from their parents if their living expenses outrun their income. Wowprime?

I am not so sure. Surely WOW! at least.

To be fair, Mr. Dai also encouraged his listeners to cultivate healthy social relationships and to beware of the dangers of Internet-obsession.

No one invited me this time around to congratulate graduates and then drop a pearl of wisdom into the palm of their hands.

If anyone had given me such a privilege, in a nutshell, this is what I'd have said.

Do scrimp and save your money, if you can, but don't tell yourself your salary is the key to becoming a wealthy person.

People can have empty pockets and still be very rich in happiness. Whenever possible, make others, not yourself, the center of your concerns. Give yourself the space to discover what you do best in the world and, when you find it, don't hold back. The greatest wrong in life is to have talent and opportunity, and let them go to waste. Always be willing to change, and always give others a second chance. Learn to forgive yourself for your mistakes, for you're certain to make a few. Every now and again, give yourself a hug.

Finally, seek the gift of peace in your heart. Develop a moral conscience, and follow its voice.

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