

Ma's misplaced stream of tears

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Tears can be a potent tool in a politician's toolkit. They can be especially effective when caused by an event or an issue that deeply resonates with the public. A perfect example was demonstrated by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao (温家宝), when, in the wake of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, he cried as he visited the ravaged areas.

His watery eyes captivated the hearts of the Chinese and further fortified his image in China as "Grandpa Wen."

President Ma Ying-jeou (马英九) also has a reputation as a man who is driven to tears. Ma appeared to choke back tears when he watched *Lust, Caution* (色戒), an espionage thriller that explores an intricate, tangled web of love, hatred and lust.

The corner of his eyes glistened during an inspection visit to Tainan County in the wake of Typhoon Morakot, not because of the typhoon victims' plight, but because of old pictures on a wall showing his long-time idol, the late president Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國). Ma also often becomes emotionally wrought whenever the stage is set for him to commemorate Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙).

The latest appearance of the president's tears came on Saturday, when he addressed the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) convention. Lambasting the former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration for missing many opportunities — ones he felt were critical to Taiwan's continued development — Ma, emotionally stirred, said: "I feel like shedding tears whenever I think of how it undermined the country."

While it is nice to see a politician welling up and showing a softer side, the events that have prompted Ma to shed a tear are somewhat bewildering. His tears appeared out of place and ill-timed in the case of the movie and the discovery of Chiang's photos.

To also show such emotion for Sun — granted he was the founder of the Republic of China (ROC) — is a bit of an overkill considering he has been dead for almost 90 years.

The tears streaming down Ma's face during his speech at the KMT convention were not becoming of a man who is the head of state, but rather they resembled a grizzled politico who only knows how to point fingers at others and to divert attention from the real issues at hand.

Indeed, Ma's tears would find more resonance with the public and enable him to come closer to being a man of the people if they were shed over more substantial events or issues, such as the plight of the Morakot victims, the farmers in Dapu (大埔), Miaoli County's Jhunan Township (竹南), who stood helplessly by as the Miaoli County Government's excavators demolished their rice paddies, or the potential health risks posed to residents of Yunlin County's Mailiao Township (麻寮) as the result of a naphtha cracker complex nearby.

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A genuine display of tears from the president demonstrates to the public that he is not apathetic to their suffering, but when his tears are shed out of place they only engender the public's disgust. It's time for Ma to dry his eyes and provide some concrete accomplishments before he has everybody in the nation crying over his administration's pathetic showing.

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