

Months of effort to blur the lines between Taiwan and the Republic of China (ROC) by President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration finally resulted in top-level confusion on Sunday, when Presidential Office Spokesman Lo Chih-chiang (羅智強) accused the leader of the opposition of not loving "our country."

At the heart of the war of words between the Presidential Office and Democratic Progressive Party Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) is her criticism of the expensive plans for the 100th anniversary of the founding of the ROC next year.

Lo's accusation, however, contained one fatal flaw: It confused Taiwan for the ROC.

Given Ma's unclear messages and shifting rhetoric regarding the country's name and territory, one could be forgiven for sounding confused — and that's exactly how Lo came across when he accused Tsai of being sarcastic about "the country's" centennial celebrations, while also saying she loves Taiwan.

Of course Tsai had reason to be sarcastic. Not only is next year not Taiwan's 100th anniversary, but the ROC was imposed on Taiwanese after the defeat of Japan in 1945, a situation compounded when the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) lost the Chinese civil war in 1949.

Lo's accusation sounds a little like a British lord berating Canadians or Kenyans for not being true patriots because they aren't celebrating Queen Elizabeth's birthday. An official making such a remark in Ottawa or Nairobi would be laughed out of town, but in Taiwan — and especially in Ma's Kafkaesque world of overlapping boundaries — such rhetoric is treated as respectable.

Tsai has every right to criticize the cost of the centennial project, since it is yet another instance of Taiwanese taxpayers' funding a project that has little relevance to them. In light of people's growing identification as Taiwanese rather than Chinese, a fact expressed in numerous polls over the last decade, it is also disingenuous of Lo to allege that there is "a big gap" between Tsai's feelings and those of the general public. The gap actually lies with Ma and his followers.

Furthermore, loving Taiwan and loving the ROC are two different things. Regardless of how much Ma and Lo would like to see them become one, they are in fact tangential. Someone like Tsai can criticize the ROC's 100th birthday and still love her country, since the two are separate entities.

The question that every Taiwanese should ask of Ma and his followers is whether they love Taiwan or the ROC. This would be a far more relevant line of inquiry, since it would force them to declare their emotions toward an existing entity — Taiwan — not an abstract idea that has

For the love of Taiwan, get it right

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been kept on life support for far too long.

In the end, whether NT\$3.2 billion (US\$100 million) is too much to spend on such celebrations is beside the point. If Taiwanese increasingly see the ROC as an illegitimate template forced on them by individuals who had no right to make such choices on their behalf, then even one NT dollar of taxpayers' money is too much.

If all this high-level publicity surrounding the ROC's centennial is more a political stunt to resurrect an umbilical cord across the Taiwan Strait than a heartfelt celebration of something meaningful to Taiwanese, then Lo has no right to defend the budget by contrasting it with the more expensive World Games in Kaohsiung or Deaflympics in Taipei.

Only when large projects funded by taxpayers are for the benefit of Taiwanese, and only when this is done in a spirit of respect for Taiwanese identity, can such endeavors can be treated without sarcasm.

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