

## Anthem ‘national’ in name only

Written by Lee Hsiao-feng 李孝楓  
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Since President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) inaugural address on May 20 last year, the media have focused on whether she sings the national anthem at public occasions. There is probably no other nation in the world where the question of whether the president sings the national anthem is an issue. In normal democracies, the president will of course sing the national anthem, and if they did not, the news media would soon find out why.

The problem is that in Taiwan, the so-called “national anthem” is not a national anthem at all, it is the anthem of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). The only thing the media care about is whether Tsai sings along — in particular the line “the foundation of our party” — but they do not care whether it is truly a national anthem. If it is not, then what does it matter if one sings it?

It is bizarre to want a president from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to sing the KMT’s anthem.

To put an end to media speculation, Tsai sings the “national anthem,” but she could refuse to do so and be within her rights to tell people that “this is not a national anthem, it is the KMT’s anthem.”

However, that would not be in line with Tsai’s personality.

The “national anthem” was written by Republic of China (ROC) founder Sun Yat-sen (孫中山) in 1924 to be used for instructional purposes at the Whampoa Military Academy.

In 1929, the KMT adopted the piece as its anthem, and on March 13 that year, the party leadership decided to temporarily use it as national anthem until a formal national anthem was written. This temporary state continued as the KMT fled to Taiwan and it continues to this day.

We can leave the obscure lyrics aside, but more frustratingly, while the KMT overstepped the bounds in turning its anthem into a national anthem, Taiwan was then a Japanese colony that was not even part of the ROC. Today, the only use for the KMT’s anthem is to force

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Taiwanese, who were never a part of the founding of the ROC, to sing along and treat it as their national anthem.

The national anthem that Taiwanese sing is the product of a place that Taiwan was not a part of.

This has to be a political joke that makes the whole world laugh. The joke is of international proportions, unable to separate party from nation. Distinguishing fact from falsehood is of no interest to the media — all they care about is whether Tsai sings the “national anthem.” This is a matter of utter confusion and a failure to tell right from wrong.

When A-mei (Chang Hui-mei, 張惠妹) sang the “national anthem” at former president Chen Shui-bian’s (陳水扁) inauguration in 2000, she was added to the list of pro-Taiwanese independence artists by the authorities in Beijing and banned from performing in China. What a joke — labeling someone pro-Taiwanese independence for singing the Whampoa Military Academy anthem.

If we really want to promote transitional justice, the temporary use of the KMT’s anthem as national anthem should have ended long ago.

Since Tsai has made it clear that she respects the ROC, a formal ROC anthem should be created and the whole nation should be invited to submit lyrics and melody.

Doing so would also help build a national consensus.

With an official national anthem, the conflict arising from non-KMT members refusing to sing the party’s anthem could be avoided. This would not be as sensitive an issue as changing the nation’s title, and it could also be used to gauge whether KMT members and pan-blue camp supporters really love the ROC or the KMT.

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