

Ma Ying-jeou, When Images Are Not Enough!

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.
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What world does Ma Ying-jeou live in? A clear and painful result of Typhoon Morakot has been that it is a world of images, a world of images past and images present. It is a world of imaginary images, imaginary images that have been built on, fostered and fashioned by years and years of faulty Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) paradigms and reinforced by their propaganda. True in the mind of Ma Ying-jeou, his party and his spin-masters, image has always trumped performance and/or reality. But Taiwanese are finally realizing this. They are not only realizing this but they are also realizing that regardless of and contrary to his words, Ma has no idea of what it is to be Taiwanese.

Ma grew up on images of imagined outside Chinese grandeur. In his early years, as the only son, the family hopes were pinned on him; his four doting sisters would tell him he could do no wrong; he was cast in the image of family hero. Further, his family ranked high in the KMT party; it was the party of colonial outsiders whose image was that it was their destiny to save the second class Taiwanese. The KMT party also could do no wrong. Disregarding the reality of why they lost the war and were thrown out of China, the KMT taught and educated Ma to fit in with the image of their glorious one-party state, an image where they as heroes would return triumphant and reunite China. But images are only images and sooner or later, they must face reality. For Ma and the people of Taiwan, Typhoon Morakot hastened the final coming of that.

The foreign media had always been kind to Ma, fostering and repeating the image of Ma as the Harvard educated lawyer, a pity that he never passed the bar exam either in the United States or in Taiwan. On the other hand, Ma's rivals, Chen Shui-bian and Frank Hsieh did pass the difficult bar exam in Taiwan, but the foreign media never touted the image or reality of their solid legal backgrounds. Ma could clearly feel he was one up.

Likewise, countries like the United States and others also touted the image of Ma as a great statesman, leader and peacemaker in the Taiwan Strait. Again this was an image with little substance for Ma did little to earn it except acquiesce to China's demands and downplay Taiwan's identity and sovereignty. This image suited the agendas of those countries and their economies and so they supported it. Ma, too, came to believe them and feel that he was a great statesman, leader, and peacemaker as well. It fit with his own image of himself; he could do no wrong.

Then came Typhoon Morakot. The typhoon wreaked havoc on the country. This was no image; this was reality. In turn it would be a test of real and not imagined leadership.

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As Taiwan struggled to recover and the ravages of the typhoon, the Taiwanese began to see a different type of leader. When action was called for, all they got was hesitant preoccupation. What seemed to be foremost in Ma's mind was not curing the devastation in Taiwan, but protecting his image with China and the world. What image would he give to China as the great re-uniting peacemaker if he accepted outside help from other countries? What image would he give as a leader if he was at fault?

Ma struggled then as to how he would save this image of an all-knowing leader. It was a tough struggle when everything pointed to a faulty, ill-prepared and ill-carried out rescue effort. As commander in chief Ma bore the final responsibility for what happened after the typhoon. So Ma knew inevitably he would have to shoulder that responsibility. Yet, from his words, it soon became evident that his image of shouldering the responsibility was to find someone to blame, someone that could take the fall and protect his image.

This strategy had worked when Ma was accused of corruption and mishandling of funds. His secretary had served time in jail for depositing nearly a half-million US\$ dollars into Ma's bank account. Further the local and foreign media still preserved his image as a squeaky clean administrator.

But there were other deeper struggles. Ma struggled to identify with and empathize with the people of Taiwan. He spoke of them in terms of "they" and not "we." They should have gotten out of the way. They should have had foresight, not the government. It was ultimately their fault. They were the uneducated Taiwanese; it fit their image.

But this time, the people were not buying into the image that was put on them. They had lost too much and suffered too much. They were in no mood to accept the image of fools in addition to that. They had lived through the reality of Morakot. They knew who helped them and who didn't. They knew how long it took. They had finally come face to face with the reality and not the image of the man they had chosen for President.

Source: [Jerome F. Keating's writings](#)