

"I sing of arms and of a man," wrote Virgil in the opening lines of the Aeneid. However, as the world celebrates the 70th anniversary of the ending of World War II, complexity fills the air in Taiwan and different questions are asked. The nation finds different songs ringing out; celebrating different arms and different men. Just whose arms and which men is the nation celebrating?

On one side, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), who is set to vacate the presidency in a little over four months, wants to pull the nation into a celebration of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). He is not so much celebrating the end of World War II, but the KMT's participation in and semi-leadership role in the Chinese War of Resistance Against Japan.

On the other side, former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) expresses different thoughts. His words illustrate the national dissonance and the continuing problem of forging national identity. Lee has pointed out that for many Taiwanese, Japan was the motherland of their experience. Contrary to Ma's statements, Lee indicates that the majority of Taiwanese are descendants of those who fought for Japan and not against it. During WWII, more than 8,000 youths left Taiwan to make airplanes in Japan, while an even greater number of conscription-aged Taiwanese participated in the war as Japanese soldiers and military support staff in places like Papua New Guinea and the Philippines.

Ma's push for celebration contains a hollow ring for other reasons as well. First, how can Taiwan's president ask the nation to celebrate the KMT's victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan when four years later, the KMT would suffer defeat and be driven out of China by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the Chinese Civil War came to an end in 1949?

That civil war had been going on for nearly a decade prior to China's War of Resistance Against Japan and it would continue for four more years after (1945 to 1949). One can then ask, where will Ma be in 2019? Will he at that time call on Taiwanese to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the KMT's loss to the CCP in the Chinese Civil War? Will he want to celebrate the KMT's fleeing as diaspora to Taiwan? Will he then also mark the beginning of the KMT's imposition of martial law and White Terror on Taiwan?

When Virgil wrote the Aeneid, he was searching for a myth and legend that would both praise Rome's then-ruler Caesar Augustus and also justify the destined rise of the Roman Empire

after its civil wars. Virgil needed a myth that had some semblance of credibility and appeal; he found it in the legendary Aeneas, a son of Venus and prince of the once great city of Troy.

However, what is Ma trying to do? Is Ma trying to revivify the KMT's past worship of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) in Taiwan? His words might be falling on deaf ears. In case he has not noticed, the statues of that past KMT "emperor" have been hauled down in droves and now collect dust at the Cihu Sculpture Memorial Park (二二八和平公園) in Taoyuan.

Other questions on motivation can be raised as Ma spends millions of New Taiwan dollars to commemorate the KMT's participation in the War of Resistance Against Japan.

One question involves the need for distraction. The nation's economy has not improved during Ma's seven failed years as president, despite his infamous and now laughable "6-3-3" campaign promise: 6 percent annual GDP growth, annual per capita income of US\$30,000 and unemployment below 3 percent. Ma's popularity remains at a low point. His party, the KMT, is still reeling from its disastrous defeat in last year's nine-in-one elections, and its hopes for the presidency next year are looking dismal. So, is this a good time to celebrate the KMT's past resistance against Japan, a neighbor that Taiwan might need to call upon for assistance in future conflicts?

How else can Ma's current efforts to suggest or promote democratic Taiwan's unification with the autocratic CCP that defeated the KMT in China be explained? The Taiwanese had no real part in that past civil war except for those Taiwanese that were forced to fight for the KMT.

As Ma serves out the final year of his unpopular presidency, a different question arises. Is he searching for some sort of convoluted legacy? Ma appears to be desperately trying to find a myth that will not only rescue his image, but will justify his party's ill-fated past. What myth, what narrative is available?

Virgil was writing on the cusp of Rome's transitional rise to power. Ma finds himself in the opposite position; his party is in a transitional state of decline and he is striving to forestall and prevent an even greater debacle and loss. In this situation, what narrative is available for Ma to turn the KMT's loss in the Chinese Civil War into a semblance of victory? What myth will counterbalance the steady rise of the CCP after it won the war? What myth can Ma find to

The KMT's wartime conundrum

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compete with the myth of former Chinese leader Mao Zedong (毛澤東)?

Through Aeneas, Virgil could admit that though Troy was lost, the Romans should concentrate on the future and the new Rome that was being built. Ma unfortunately lacks that vision. He cannot admit that China was lost; instead his identity depends on finding a way to link the KMT back to the myth of "one China."

Throughout the past seven decades, the KMT diaspora have in effect been trapped on Taiwan, but Ma still talks as if the KMT identifies with defending the borders of the past Manchu Empire. This is the conundrum that Ma finds both himself and his party in. How does one preserve the KMT link to its indoctrinated version of the "one China" myth and balance it with the CCP's version?

The bogus "1992 consensus" does allow for the myth of "one China, different interpretations," but it also creates a weak foundation that opens the door for other problems. In this, current KMT presidential candidate Hung Hsiu-chu's (洪秀柱) explanation of "one China, same interpretation" does not help.

Therefore, as Taiwanese watch their tax dollars being spent to celebrate the KMT's past role in the War of Resistance Against Japan, they have a right to ask: Is this the way we want our money to be spent, especially in difficult times?

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