

New national anthem needed

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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A national anthem, an indispensable representation of any sovereign nation, plays a crucial role in fostering national unity, instilling national pride and reinforcing a patriotic spirit.

It is therefore understandable that President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has expressed concern over the frequency of the national anthem being sung by students at elementary and junior-high schools.

However, as Taiwan progresses toward a mature democracy, the legitimacy of the Republic of China's (ROC) national anthem has come under increasing challenges, with many people either refusing to sing it or only muttering it under their breath.

The situation is particularly glaring whenever non-Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) officials at public functions gag on the very first line of the anthem — “Three Principles of the People, our party's aim shall be (三民主義是我黨之綱領)” — followed by the usual political wrangling, with members of the pan-blue and pan-green camps trading barbs over the issue of national identity.

It seems that the current national anthem, rather than pulling people together, serves more as a reflection of the divisions in Taiwan's sense of identity.

And there is a valid reason for that.

The lyrics of the anthem are an adaptation of a speech delivered by Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙) at the opening ceremony of the Whampoa Military Academy on June 16, 1924. The KMT adopted Sun's exhortation as its party anthem in 1928 and solicited contributions from the public for a melody to fit the words. In 1930, the Nationalist government passed a resolution to use the KMT anthem as the interim national anthem before deciding in 1937 to adopt it as the official national anthem.

Since the Whampoa Military Academy, headed by Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石), was essentially a party-run school, it is indisputable that the “party” in Sun's “Three Principles of the People, our

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party's aim shall be" refers to the KMT.

In other words, not only are the anthem's lyrics closely associated with the KMT, but they also embodied its party-state rule.

Having a new national anthem would benefit Taiwan in several ways.

First, a new anthem that has wider public acceptance would better serve its purpose of bonding the nation's people and fostering national unity.

Second, it would exorcise the remnants of the party-state consciousness and implement the transitional justice that is long overdue in the nation's democratization.

Third, it would aid the KMT's reputation, because the current lyrics are a constant reminder of the party's authoritarian past.

Most important of all, a new anthem with lyrics that better capture the values and the essence of the nation and its people would ultimately help forge a sense of national identity.

But can the anthem be changed? Of course.

Unlike the national flag, the ROC Constitution does not prevent changes to the lyrics of the national anthem. Since the current national anthem was unilaterally adopted by the former party-state regime, the government, backed by public consensus, can revise the lyrics or replace the current anthem with a new one without having to go through any complex legal or constitutional process.

As times and circumstances have changed, all practices — especially those relating to

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party-state ideology that used to permeate the nation during the KMT's authoritarian rule — ought to be publicly discussed and addressed to keep pace with progress and changes in values.

Taking Canada for example, a parliamentary member recently introduced a bill seeking to remove sexism from the national anthem by changing the phrase “True patriot love in all thy sons’ command” to “all of us command.”

Taiwan's transformation, without bloodshed, from authoritarianism into a democracy has been touted as a success story. Now that the nation has marked its third transfer of power, a step further consolidating its democracy, there is no justification for using a political party's song as the national anthem.

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