

## It's OK to be proud of your country

Nov 10, 2013 by Daniel J. Bauer

Nothing turns a person's stomach quite like nationalism, especially the in-your-face, plain ugly variety. At the moment I've got a bad feeling in my stomach.

Netizens in China who have over-reacted to the Deserts Chang incident on a stage at the University of Manchester on November 2 ought to look in a mirror and see what fools they've made of themselves. Their charges in blogs that the Taiwanese singer is "a whore trying to dredge for money in China" should cause these critics to feel deeply ashamed. Lashing out at performers for introducing their country's flag to a foreign audience is a form of bullying. A government official here said as much, and I agree.

Until a few days ago, to tell you the truth, I was only vaguely acquainted with the name of Deserts Chang. I knew she was a popular entertainer and had a following. All I knew in detail about her though was that she totes a rather unusual English name. I wondered, you know, if our local press was guilty of an innocent typing error with the "s" issue there.

I've asked myself in the past, months before The Manchester Incident occurred, "Does she want to advance an image of sweetness, is that the idea? If so, why not transfer that 's' at the end of 'Deserts' to the middle there? Park it beside the other 's' to hint at something positive and cool like chocolate cake, ice cream or fresh fruit. You know, something sweet at the end of a festive meal."

Now, however, Deserts Chang has troubles greater than quibbles about her interesting English name.

During her concert at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom last week, Ms. Chang spotted what appeared to be Taiwanese students sitting near the front, waving flags for the Republic of China and placards with her name on them. An impromptu act then got her into trouble. She leaned over and lifted a flag onto the stage. In English, she then introduced that flag to her audience. "No politics tonight," voices rang out in the crowd, words reportedly from Chinese students. The nasty name-calling on the Internet to which I referred above then followed.

Ms. Chang is due to perform in Beijing on December 30. I write these words, not knowing what the full aftermath may be. Will authorities in Beijing withdraw their approval for Ms. Chang's concert because of her pride in her country? Will the audience show its "patriotism" by boycotting the show? Time will tell.

A Hong Kong media source is saying the concert was already canceled, a report denied by others. If the powers that be do scotch performance rights, Deserts Chang will of course take a hit financially. She will have the satisfaction, however, of helping us to see just how small some people can be, and how silly.

Chou Yu-hsiu of the Department of Youth Development for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) responded to the blog behavior by saying people in China need to feel more empathy for Taiwanese, who in many parts of the world are denied the right to refer to Taiwan in public as their country. He also said critics should be more rational.

What more may we say about this sad situation?

I rarely hear my students speak with pride about their flag or country. I hear a disproportionate amount of praise for pop culture in Korea or Japan, or American basketball stars, or for sites enjoyed while traveling abroad. I find Deserts Chang's gentle use of the Republic of China flag in a public forum refreshing and supportive.

The man from the DPP was right to speak of empathy. Empathy is like a river. Empathy flows very visibly, and it flows back and forth upon both shores. I've met a number of students from China in my courses. I've admired their courage, their industry, and their friendliness. I hope they feel that many of us in Taiwan feel empathy for them and their ups and downs in life.

Finally, are folks in Taiwan's entertainment industry allowed a political opinion? I'd like to think they are. We know though that bullies will be bullies whenever they please. That makes for a delicate, not to say dangerous balancing act for Taiwan entertainers who, by the way, could also do with a dose of our empathy as well. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

### **Talking points :**

1. Taiwan singer Deserts Chang got herself in trouble by welcoming a flag for the Republic of China Taiwan onto the stage recently in a performance in England. Do you feel her actions were wrong or right or ???
2. In some countries actors and actresses, singers and artists in general take public stands on political issues. This rarely happens in Taiwan. Do you feel entertainers should be silent about their personal views? When should any of us be silent, and when should we speak up about what we believe?
3. One political leader in Taiwan said the people of China should have more "empathy" for the people of Taiwan. "Empathy" calls for people to meet the emotions of others and to try to feel the feelings of other people. Are you a person of empathy for others?

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