

## Strange secrecy of first-family wedding

March 17, 2013 by Daniel J. Bauer

Some may argue that enough is enough, and it is now more than time to let go of the fuss over last week's revelation that Taiwan's first family has enjoyed a wedding it more or less did not want us to know about.

Now, I don't want to leap too foolishly (a little foolishly, maybe) into the pool of murky ink the first daughter has stirred here in the local media. At the same time, this quick cloudburst of news deserves just a bit more attention. We find here a lesson or two about secrecy, about stereotypes and, finally, about giving people the right to live their own lives.

The veil of secrecy about the marriage of the elder of Taiwan's first daughters seems unwise and unnecessary. A nation of 23 million people has but one president and thus one First Family. The members of that special family, especially the children, do have a right to their own privacy.

At the same time, people in a democracy tend to feel more comfortable about their leaders if they are allowed, at least occasionally, and in reasonable ways, a glimpse into their private lives. I grant that the line between respect for and intrusion into the personal stories of public people may be thin, but in most circumstances there is no need to panic or to tip-toe through the tulips, camouflage the truth, and play games with the public.

What explains this reluctance to celebrate a family wedding? Secrecy surrounding what ought to have been a happy affair resulted in the impression the Ma family was reluctant and was, well, bad-spirited for staying so mum about news the public would have eventually learned of anyway. The cat and mouse caper with the media, the claim the couple's quiet return to Taiwan and the dinner at the Grand Hotel was a class reunion, hey, what was cooking there?

Stereotypes of all kinds surround us, set ideas about groups of people that are guaranteed to be empty and devoid of truth. You know what I mean. All persons of a certain racial background are stars in music or sports, or males of this or that culture are geniuses at science and mathematics, that type of nonsense. Stereotypes are stale cookies. They fall apart the minute we test them.

When folks fly to the moon and back to keep

something hidden, more often than not, the initial effect on others is doubt and suspicion. The first cousins of doubt and suspicion are accusations at the least, and misunderstandings and false notions at the worst.

The ultimate effect of the silence emanating from the presidential palace on our high profile young couple was, I think, unfortunate. What was the public to think, but that the first family was somehow embarrassed?

Now, now, I say to myself, "Why are you imaging the silence was ever so slightly related to the fact that the son-in-law, now a successful banker in Hong Kong, has enjoyed widely publicized success in the past as a fashion model?"

I am quite sure that my imagination is off kilter. Surely I am the only person in all Taiwan to think the reluctance to share the news was actually a reticence to face stereotypes about models, specifically male models.

For those of us who had no idea who Tsai Pei-jan (Alen Tsai) was before all this publicity (and I am one of them, mea culpa), the pictures in the media last week probably were a punch in the chest. But sometimes we need a punch to wake up and see the light.

Models are human beings like all of us. Models are multi-faceted and deep, complex persons. I am but one of thousands of instructors who have taught students who modeled during their college years or are modeling this very minute. Stereotypes about these interesting individuals — and individuals they are — are only stereotypes, which is to say they are riddled with false impressions.

As the week approached its end, the president spoke rightly when he asked for us to respect his daughter and her right to live her own life. She's been an adult for a long time, and is entitled to take responsibility for herself. That means she surely may love whomever she pleases.

It also means she and her husband had a right to the kind of wedding they preferred. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points:

- 1) Critics had a lot to say last week about the secret wedding of President and Mrs. Ma's eldest daughter. What "reports" and "ideas" did you hear in the media or from friends?
- 2) This column argues that secrecy may create new problems and actual misunderstandings about the truth. The column specifically suggests the Ma family may have felt embarrassed its son-in-law was once a (sexy?) fashion model. Do you feel the column is too extreme in this reaction? What stereotypes about models (female and male) may people have?
- 3) President Ma in the end asked the public to respect his daughter's privacy. Why is respect for the privacy of others such an important issue?

\*\*本文章僅供讀書會參考使用，非經原作者同意，請勿任意轉載。

師生互動與社會關懷  
專欄讀書