

## Statue vandals accomplish nothing

March 6, 2014 by Daniel J. Bauer

The recent toppling and desecration of a 3m-tall statue of Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Republic of China, may have occurred deep in the south, far from bustling, sophisticated Taipei, and in a relatively tiny, tucked-away niche of the country at that, but the crudity and symbolism of the act were enough to provoke concern for thoughtful citizens everywhere.

The statue was pulled face down to the ground and defaced with red paint in Tang Te-chang Memorial Park in Greater Tainan on February 22. The locus of the event is important.

Tang Te-chang died at age 40 at the hands of soldiers under the command of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) during the February 28th 1947 Incident.

Pro-independence activists were behind the attack on the bronze likeness. Police arrested Tsay Ting-kuei, a leader of the Alliance of Referendum for Taiwan, later released him, and then pushed paperwork up the ladder for prosecution.

Predictably, the KMT condemned the vandalism. The party's Culture and Committee head Fan Chiang Tai-chi pinned at least partial responsibility on the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The DPP was in charge of city government administration in Greater Tainan, he said, and should have fulfilled its duties "to maintain a historic monument and protect cultural assets" (TT 2-24-14 p. 3).

Media coverage a day after Fan Chiang's remarks included a photograph with the touch of the bizarre that was, for me, at least, disturbing, if not actually scary. I studied that picture and shook my head. Only in Taiwan, I thought, can you find oddball politics like this.

The photo showed an acknowledged former leader of the Bamboo Union, a noted Taiwan crime syndicate, speaking before what appeared to be a well-organized crowd. He looked like Taiwan's answer to Robert De Niro in the classic tragic-comedy, "GoodFellas."

Attired in a floor-length dapper coat not unlike the haberdashery we see mob bosses wear in Hollywood films, this good fella (may I?) was clean-shaven and striking in appearance. Impeccably groomed, with oiled hair slicked back on his scalp, he wore wire-

rimmed glasses that conveyed the image and posture of a bookish intellectual hectoring an admiring audience of college freshmen. The former gangster reportedly "threatened to wage a long term protest" if the statue is not restored as he "requested" (CP 2-25-14 p. 15). Media identified the gentleman as the President of the Taiwan Unionist Party.

If we stay cool, we may yet get something good from this situation.

The KMT needs to remember that despite its efforts over several decades to acknowledge guilt and regret over February 28, real reconciliation and healing remain an on-going and painful process for a large segment of our population. The party should also understand that recent efforts up and down the KMT line to swap kisses and cotton candy with friends in Beijing have caused many to be anxious and distrustful. People who identify particularly strongly with Taiwan and not China per se get a bad case of the jitters at the mere mention of the names "Ma" and "Lien." This is only to state the obvious, but this is a time to state the obvious.

And then there is the DPP challenge. Now and again, the party has its hands full reining in diehard loyalists who apparently long for the days when the DPP could dominate the headlines by sheer force of demonstrations, rhetoric, and forceful, symbolic behavior which people of a reasonable mind are now likely to find over-bearing and off-putting. The DPP should have condemned the violence in Tang Te-Chang Memorial Park, for example, and condemned it swiftly. If DPP officials in Greater Tainan were pussyfooting in the face of their duties, they were wrong and should be held accountable.

Shouting slogans and pulling and shoving, whether it occurs in the national legislature or in parks dedicated to authentic political heroes, accomplishes nothing.

Wrecking an over-sized statue of a famous, even controversial political figure may have won some attention and drawn the public eye. The violence did nothing however to serve the country or help anyone. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

### **Talking points :**

1. Protestors recently tore down and desecrated a large statue of Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Republic of China, in the Tainan area. This column discusses the situation. Do college students in Taiwan follow current political news in the media? If "yes," how do they feel about politics? If "no," why not?
2. In your schools when you were younger, were you aware of political "indoctrination" regarding Taiwan history or historical events associated with the KMT, DPP, Chiang Kai-shek, Chen Hsui-bian and so on?
3. Some people criticize Taiwan college students for being apathetic about social problem and politics. Do you feel such criticism is fair or unfair?

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