

# Scoffing at Tsai's marital status disrespects Taiwan

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“Tsai is ‘extreme’ because she is single: China.”

Headlines can sometimes nail us right between the eyes. That is what the one above (“Tsai is ‘extreme’—“) did recently to me on page 16 of this very newspaper (5-26). But, wait just a moment.

Are we absolutely sure that this report is accurate? It isn't some practical joker's notion of a good laugh, is it?

A member of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait by the name of Wang Weixing (which sounds similar, but not identical to the Mandarin word for “danger”) attacked Taiwan's new president on the grounds of her marital status?

I'll run with this piece of criticism of Tsai Ing-wen, but down deep I am filled with doubt about its veracity. Something smells fishy here to me. I've been burned before by believing reports that were so absurd that they seemed phony. Having made a fool of myself in the past, I don't want to do it again.

But for the moment, let's assume the publication is accurate. This means then that an official for the government of the Peoples Republic of China has shot verbal arrows at our Madame President for a very large defect in her character, for goodness sake. (Oh, “satire.” Such a beautiful word.)

Reporters are attributing to Mr. Wang the view that President Tsai is “extreme” in her politics because she is “an unmarried woman lacking the emotional balance provided by romantic and family life.” Our poor president! How miserable she must be. She lacks, goes the article posted on the Internet this past week, “the emotional encumbrance of love, the constraints of family, or [I fear this ought to be “and”] the worries of children.” Ah, excuse me. This probably means “. . . the worries of those who raise children.”

The words I've quoted, and the original report as well, appeared in “The International Herald Leader” under the auspices of China's official Xinhua News Agency.

There is indeed a pile of bones to pick about these efforts of Mr. Wang and the interestingly named “International Leader,” not to mention China's official Xinhua blah blah blah, to denigrate our new president.

Let us begin with the question of fairness to humanity here. If a woman is open to the attack of a political machine because she is unmarried, so too should unmarried men be similarly open to attack. Not that I have any desire to run for president of Taiwan (or any other country), but I suppose I am illegible from the get

go because, like President Tsai, I too have chosen not to marry.

The sheer quantity of people this rules out for roles of public service on the highest levels of government in the world - - another great cliché — just boggles the mind. There are just millions of unmarried folks around, and just think of it, not a one of us is up to the job of being president anywhere. Oh my gosh. Not until now did I realize how bad off I am.

Next up is the question that perhaps should have preceded the one we just viewed. Going after someone in such a dastardly personal way should stop us in our tracks, at least momentarily. This is really cheap stuff. This is, no apology for the analogy, a low blow. Not that it hasn't been done before, because we know of prominent Taiwanese politicians who stooped in the past to poking their fingers into questions of love and affection, of sexuality and privacy and so on in terms of Ms. Tsai. This new attempt to humiliate the woman rankles perhaps in a special way. Like it or not, she does happen to be the victor in a landslide clobbering of the opposition in a national democratic election, the likes of which is only a prayer in the hearts of our friends over there in the Peoples Republic.

All right. Mr. Wang and the propaganda apparatus of Beijing chose to go low in their desire to discredit the president. In so doing, they went low too on the 23 million people who call Taiwan their home. It is the people of Taiwan, of course, who selected this (unmarried) woman to be their leader. Taiwan's electorate must have been wooden-headed indeed to have made such a lousy choice.

At the same time, this casting of aspersions against unmarried persons gets under the skin of people like me, who are also unmarried, and who believe this ‘un’ is no lack and, in fact, at times is actually an advantage in our efforts to live lives of public service.

It would be wrong of me to end today without mention of reports (to my knowledge unconfirmed) that former first lady Chow Mei-ching (wife of our former President Ma, of course) skipped Tsai's inauguration as a sign of discomfort that Tsai Ing-wen is not married (“Former first lady” CP, 5-21-16, p. 16).

I've no notion whatever of Ms. Chow's reasons for dodging a personal word of congratulations for Madame President. I hope they had nothing to do with feelings about Ms. Tsai's personal life.

I am hoping the media got it all wrong. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

## Talking points

- 1) A spokesperson for the Chinese government in Beijing criticized Taiwan's new President last week because she is an unmarried woman. This incident has received a lot of attention in English language media. The New York Times even ran a large article to report on the criticism. Are you aware of this news event? Did local Chinese language media bring this situation to the Taiwan public?
- 2) Some say public opinion about 'to get married' or 'not to marry' in life has changed in recent years. Do you at your age at this time consider the possibility of marriage in your life? Is getting married or not getting married an active question on your mind? Why "yes," or why "no"?
- 3) This column relies to a slight degree on literary satire to advance its argument. The author in other words combines some humor with words of criticism of the Beijing-based critic of President Tsai Ing-wen. Are you aware of the humor in the column? Do local readers perhaps miss the humor because they are of a different culture than the culture of the author?

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