

Cheer for team Taiwan

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Wednesday, 09 August 2017 07:00

The line needs to be drawn somewhere.

The English media guide for the Taipei Summer Universiade caused quite a stir on the Internet yesterday due to its use of phrases such as “Introducing our island — Chinese Taipei” and “Chinese Taipei is long and narrow.”

It is not just “very strange,” as Sports Administration Director-General Lin Te-fu (林德福) said in a Central News Agency article.

This is insane.

The name is not the issue — those who understand China’s political clout and bullying tendencies know that “Chinese Taipei” is a hated, but likely necessary, compromise for Taiwan to participate in international events.

It would be ideal for the nation to be able to participate in the Olympics one day as “Taiwan” — as it did in 1964 and 1968 — but as China becomes increasingly volatile and hostile to whatever is left of Taiwan’s international stature, while the rest of the world bows to its whims, this seems unlikely.

Most informed people know that “Chinese Taipei” is not the nation’s name and that nobody uses the term to refer to their own nation.

While reporting on last year’s Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Western media outlets such as CNN simply used Taiwan instead of the nonexistent “Chinese Taipei” when referring to the nation’s athletes.

CNN reported on Aug. 6 last year that weightlifter “Hsu Shu-ching [許淑淨] became the first athlete

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from Taiwan to win gold at the Rio Olympics on Sunday.”

It makes sense: Hsu’s team might have been “Chinese Taipei,” but she is from Taiwan, not “Chinese Taipei.”

That name is a formality to get Taiwan into the Olympics and should be left at that — regardless of how fervently Beijing would disagree.

However, as the host country, Taiwan is referring to itself as “Chinese Taipei” in its own media guide.

Even those who do not agree that Taiwan is a sovereign state should agree that from a geographical standpoint, that “long and narrow” island is called Taiwan, or its former name of Formosa.

Nothing else.

Whoever wrote that passage was probably under considerable time pressure. The guide requires final approval from the International University Sports Federation, so the writer probably should not be blamed — it is just that this is a sorry situation to be in.

It is already unfortunate enough that we have to compete on our own turf using a name other than Taiwan.

This brings up more questions:

Will Universiade volunteers and staff have to tell visiting athletes: “I hope you enjoy your stay in Chinese Taipei”?

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Is the city where the games are to take place called Taipei, Chinese Taipei?

When visitors leave Taipei and perhaps visit Taroko Gorge, would they still be in “Taipei”?

The situation is absurd.

This would have been a great opportunity for Taiwan, which would benefit from international exposure, to introduce itself and assert its uniqueness, as well as its distinction from China, to people who have only ever heard Beijing’s rhetoric — which often drowns out all other voices.

If the naming standards are the Universiade’s stance, there is nothing that can be done — on an official level, that is.

However, the public is not obliged to use the name “Chinese Taipei.”

With the influx of foreigners during the Universiade, let us do our part to welcome them to “Taiwan” while remembering to cheer for team Taiwan, no matter what the official name might be.

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