

The world knows of Taiwan, not the ROC

Written by Chang Kuo-tsai 張國燾
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As the World Health Assembly (WHA) once again shut its doors on Taiwan, Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-chung (陳時中) filed an official complaint with the WHO expressing the nation's outrage and dissatisfaction, signing the letter as "Republic of China Minister of Health and Welfare."

Only by using the false title of "Taiwan, Province of China" would Taiwan obtain Beijing's approval to attend the assembly as an observer. Other titles, such as "the Republic of China," "the Republic of China (Taiwan)" or simply "Taiwan," will only meet with strong opposition from China.

The issue at stake is that, in the face of Beijing's obstruction, the title Taiwan uses will send different signals to other nations.

First, the title "Republic of China" is confused with "China" to the extent that an ally once played the Chinese national anthem at a ceremony to welcome Taiwan's president.

The consensus shared by the world is that "China" is the abbreviation of "the People's Republic of China," so there is very little room left for "the Republic of China."

Second, the title "Republic of China (Taiwan)" is even more confounding and hardly understandable even for Taiwanese, let alone to other nations.

Thus, it would be much clearer for Taiwan to speak to the WHO — and to the world — using the name "Taiwan." Calling oneself by one's own name should be nothing to be afraid of, and it will not inflict any additional damage.

The health ministers of the nation's allies emphasized the importance of the "Taiwanese government's and people's" participation at the WHA. How would Chen translate that into Chinese: "the Taiwanese government and people," "the government and people of the Republic of China" or "the government and people of the Republic of China (Taiwan)"?

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Non-diplomatic allies, such as the US, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, Germany and Australia, also expressed their support, and mentioned “Taiwan” rather than using one of the other two titles.

On Dec. 2 last year, then-US president-elect Donald Trump tweeted that “The President of Taiwan CALLED ME today to wish me congratulations on winning the Presidency. Thank you!” He did not mention Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) as “the President of the Republic of China” or “the President of the Republic of China (Taiwan).”

On Jan. 1, 1979, the US established diplomatic relations with China, and on April 10 that year, the Taiwan Relations Act — which aims to secure the safety of Taiwan and to maintain regional stability — was signed into law by then-US president Jimmy Carter.

In March, Trump signed the Taiwan Travel Act to facilitate mutual visits by high-ranking officials between the US and Taiwan.

In other words, two acts with the name “Taiwan” in their title can be found in the US, but there are none with the name “the Republic of China” or “the Republic of China (Taiwan).”

Evidently, no one in the international community speaks of “the Republic of China.” By contrast, there are still a few people in Taiwan who constantly force others to pay the utmost respect to that title. Curiously, these are the same people who dare not say “the Republic of China” when they visit China.

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Translated by Chang Ho-ming.

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