

Creativity does not trump security

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Artistic vision can often cloud common sense. That would appear to be the case with film director Doze Niu (倪子), who could face prosecution for helping Chinese cinematographer Cao Yu (曹宇) enter Taiwan's Zuoying naval base on a location scouting trip for his next film project. Cao could also face charges if he returns to Taiwan.

Though the visit took place on June 1, reports of Cao accessing the base, apparently using the national ID card of a Taiwanese man, only made the news this week after a photograph was published of the two men aboard a naval vessel at the base.

Cao is to be the cinematographer for Niu's planned film *Military Paradise*, which is about a group of Republic of China (ROC) soldiers stationed on Kinmen during the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1958.

Niu offered something of an apology via his Facebook page on Wednesday, writing: "I might have gone overboard in order to make a better film." He also apologized for his "negligence" in not paying attention to the law barring Chinese from entering sensitive military establishments, according to a statement from Atom Cinema, the producer of *Military Paradise*.

His explanations do not count for much, given that the Ministry of National Defense said it twice warned Niu against violating regulations governing the protection of military secrets before his visit, and it also rejected a request in May that Cao be allowed to join the scouting trip. Until the photograph surfaced, Niu's production team reportedly consistently denied bringing a Chinese national onto the base.

How much clearer did the ministry need to be for Niu and his production team to pay attention?

Perhaps they think creative license trumps national law. Or, perhaps they think national security no longer matters, given the frequency with which retired ROC generals and other former flag officers, including intelligence officers, visit China, sometimes meeting with their People's Liberation Army (PLA) counterparts. One former officer reportedly said in 2011 that there should be no distinction between the ROC Army and the PLA because both were "China's army."

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Plus, perhaps since President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) rhapsodizes about “Zhonghua culture” (中華文化), “Zhonghua minzu” (中華民族) and the growing ties between China and Taiwan under his administration, while ignoring counterintelligence and military defense needs, an artist might think that distinctions between Chinese and Taiwanese do not count for much when it comes to accessing military bases.

Yet regardless of the current lovefest between the Presidential Office and Zhongnanhai, Taiwan remains under threat from China with Beijing’s avowed goal of “unification.” Security requirements for entry to military bases in Taiwan — just as for similar establishments around the world — exist for very good reasons, to keep unauthorized persons out, be they Taiwanese, Chinese or other nationals.

While funding for the new film came from a Chinese company, Huayi Brothers Media, no one is accusing Niu and Cao of being spies, just of being stupid. Given that the navy on Thursday withdrew its offer of bases and sailors for the production, the future of *Military Paradise* may be in doubt. For many, that might seem punishment enough for Niu.

However, if Kaohsiung prosecutors decide to charge Niu and Cao for violating the Vital Area Regulations (重要地區管理條例), they could face up to five years in prison. Cao might also be charged under the National Security Act (國家安全法) for photographing naval facilities.

While artistic freedom should be upheld, thoughtless stupidity or cupidity cannot be and should not be ignored. Jail terms would be overkill, but both men deserve to be roundly condemned — and fined — for their actions. National security must remain a priority, regardless of warming cross-strait ties.

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