

The symbols of Taiwan's national sovereignty — the national flag, emblem and anthem — have long since disappeared from international sport contests, academic conferences and international organizations under pressure from China. The country's name is often left off the list of options for online registration. The Diaoyutai Islands (釣台) belong to Toucheng Township (觸城) in Yilan County, yet the nation is incapable of protecting them. Now even the air defense identification zone and the Taipei Flight Information Region are being intruded upon by those of China and Japan.

What is the national identity, and what is the nature of the relationship with the other side of the Taiwan Strait? Under President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) administration, these questions have become mired in confusion.

The whole world calls the other side "China," and it also calls itself "China," but the Ma government says we cannot call it "China." The whole world calls this nation "Taiwan," and the other side of the Taiwan Strait does as well, but the Ma government says Taiwanese cannot call it "Taiwan." According to the Ma administration, the two sides are not exactly one country, but they are not two countries either. There is no such definition in any dictionary of political science, so perhaps the whole thing should be called the KMT's "sovereignty identification zone."

Experts on nationalism agree that the way countries are portrayed on maps, and the terms that the media use to differentiate between their country and other countries are essential elements by which a modern state can mark its national identity and pass it on to the next generation. However, with the KMT in charge, it has become difficult to find a map that shows the Republic of China (ROC) as an independent country. Rarely these days do the KMT-supporting pan-blue media stress the ROC's independent nationhood, as distinct from the People's Republic of China.

The level of protocol applied when welcoming foreign guests is part and parcel of a nation's foreign policy and a symbolic expression of national sovereignty. When Ma's government first welcomed then-Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) chairman Chen Yunlin (陳雲林) to Taiwan in 2008, the level of security he was accorded was even higher than that given to the president. All that was missing was the nets that have recently been erected to protect Ma from flying shoes.

KMT serves to obscure national sovereignty

Written by Wei Hung-wu 許雪姬

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During ARATS Chairman Chen Deming's (陳德明) visit over the past few days, senior KMT figures have once again turned out in force to welcome the Chinese envoy. Their eagerness to flatter Chen Deming makes them look like imperial subjects kowtowing and paying tribute to an imperial envoy.

One cannot help but ask where it will all end. Perhaps aerial combat might one day break out over the Diaoyutai Islands, with hostilities extending into the Taipei Flight Information Region, yet news reports on CNN and the BBC will tell us that the ROC Air Force took no part in the action and that the ROC government merely expressed "regret" over the incident.

It would be reminiscent of 1905, when various battles of the Russo-Japanese War were waged on Chinese territory in Port Arthur and Dalian and in the Bohai Gulf. Apparently the Zongli Yamen — the Qing Empire's equivalent of a foreign affairs ministry — sent telegrams to the great powers expressing strong "regret" over these circumstances.

As the saying goes, history often repeats itself, first as tragedy and then as farce.

Wei Hung-wu is an adjunct associate professor in National Chengchi University's political science department.

Translated by Julian Clegg

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