

Exploiting the name of Taiwan

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been at the center of attention and criticism for the creation of 20,000 stickers with the slogan: “I am Taiwanese. I am from Taiwan” in Vietnamese and English, which it sent to Vietnam, hoping it would help anti-China protesters distinguish Taiwanese from Chinese.

The property of hundreds of Taiwanese businesses and the lives of thousands of Taiwanese were at risk after the protests broke out in southern Vietnam last week which later devolved into riots against foreign companies and factories, in particular those from Taiwan because, according to the ministry, Vietnamese had trouble differentiating Taiwanese from Chinese.

Deputy Foreign Minister Vanessa Shih (謝長廷) was seen posing with the stickers and smiling.

While analysts said the emergency measure was “simply stupid” and came too late, it would be hard to fault the slogan itself.

However, it showed that the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has repeatedly exploited the name of Taiwan when it is convenient without considering the implication of the name of Taiwan.

The slogan made one wonder why it was not “I am not Chinese,” but only “I am from Taiwan,” since the protest was targeted at the Chinese.

A message circulating on social media suggested it must have been difficult and confusing for the Vietnamese to tell Taiwanese from Chinese because the flights sending the businesspeople back to Taiwan belonged to “China Airlines” and the destination was “Chinese Taipei.”

The Vietnam incident was not the first case of Ma exploiting the name of Taiwan for his own reasons.

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During the presidential campaign in 2008, Ma famously told supporters on the eve of election day that he would be Taiwanese until the day he dies. Only months after his inauguration in May 2008, Ma said he was not only Taiwanese, but also Chinese.

In June 2008, the Ma administration demanded all government agencies stop referring to China as China or the People's Republic of China (PRC), saying the official name of China on any government document should be the "Mainland" or "Mainland China" and that all foreign delegation visits would be referred as "Fan Hua (訪華)" — meaning visiting Zhonghua Minguo (中華民國) — rather than "Fan Tai (訪台)," which means visiting Taiwan.

On June 1, 2009, Ma briefly met with then-US secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton at a banquet hosted by former Salvadoran president Elias Antonio Saca in the Central American country and introduced himself as "the President of Taiwan."

Ma then took time to explain his conversation with Clinton to Taiwanese reporters the next day, saying that Taiwan was a "common term to refer to ourselves" and that by using "Taiwan," he was referring to the Republic of China (ROC), not the Republic of Taiwan.

During Ma's re-election campaign in 2011, his office created a slogan, which read: "I'm a Taiwanese and also a ROCer," referring to a ROC national.

In the past year, Taiwan has been embroiled in a controversy surrounding the Ma administration's effort to "de-Taiwanize" high-school history textbooks with curriculum guidelines spearheaded by pro-unification politicians and academics. The revised guidelines also tried to highlight that Taiwan and China both share the same Zhonghua culture (中華文化).

Ma may have good reason for using the name of Taiwan, because the Constitution, as crazy as it is, still lists China and Mongolia as the territory of the ROC.

However, it will be difficult for him to evade public scrutiny on his opportunistic, flip-flopping

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position on the name of this nation and his exploitation of it to advance his own agenda.

For Taiwanese, who maybe for the first time faced losing their lives when they called themselves — or were mistaken as — Chinese in the Vietnam incident, it is time to develop a practical and comprehensive idea of the difference between Taiwan and China.

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