

Depending on the setting, the nation could be referred to by scores of different names.

Taiwan's formal title is the Republic of China (ROC), but it is called "Chinese Taipei" at the Olympic Games, the "Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu" in the WTO and the "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office" in Washington.

Pressure from Beijing requires Taiwan to go under many guises in international settings and organizations, but local government officials are just as inconsistent.

To avoid confusion with the People's Republic of China (PRC), the administration of former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) opted for the use of "Taiwan" as the first choice internationally and "China" for references to Beijing.

In 2008, when former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) came to power, his administration demanded that all government agencies stop referring to the other side of the Taiwan Strait as "China" or "the PRC."

It stipulated that the official name for China on any government document should be "the mainland" or "mainland China," and all foreign delegations to Taiwan should be referred to as "Fang Hua" (訪華) — meaning "visitors to Zhonghua Minguo" (中華民國, ROC) — rather than "Fang Tai" (訪台), which means "visiting Taiwan."

Since President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) of the Democratic Progressive Party took office in May last year, official releases from government agencies have mostly maintained the custom of the former KMT administration.

As such, Premier William Lai (賴清德), who was sworn into office on Sept. 8, has surprised many with his exclusive use of the word "China" to refer to the other side of the Strait.

Nation's name manifests sovereignty

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This has rekindled calls from pan-green lawmakers for government agencies to follow Lai's example and use "China" in all official language.

Of all people, Taiwanese officials should take the lead in manifesting the nation's sovereignty, instead of displaying ambivalence that only ends up ensnaring Taiwan further into Beijing's "one China" framework.

Ever since the UN recognized the PRC, Taiwan's official title has been increasingly met with confusion among foreigners who mistake the ROC for the PRC.

If even Taiwanese officials cannot make the proper distinction, but instead keep using "self-censored" names, they are essentially playing into Beijing's plan of stoking the misconception among members of the international community that Taiwan is a part of China.

As National Chengchi University Graduate Institute of Taiwanese Literature professor Chen Fang-ming (陳芳明) said, it was understandable that the former Ma government referred to China as "the mainland," as Ma followed the so-called "1992 consensus."

Since the Tsai administration does not recognize the "1992 consensus," her government should change its name for China in official documents to avoid the misinterpretation that Taiwan is a part of China.

People who are quick to argue that Beijing could deem such an act provocative need to understand that upholding national dignity should come naturally to any government.

If cross-strait relations are not established on equal footing and with mutual respect, what they consider to be non-provocative would simply mean forever letting Taiwan be subjected to Beijing's bullying, and allowing the ROC's sovereignty to be constantly undermined.

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