

## **Name change would foster identity**

Written by Chu Meng-hsiang  
Sunday, 12 August 2018 05:10

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On July 24, an extraordinary meeting of the East Asian Olympic Committee, acting at China's behest, revoked Taichung's right to host next year's East Asian Youth Games.

Current and past members of Taiwan's national sports teams have been blaming the Team Taiwan Campaign for 2020 Tokyo Olympics for this setback.

They say that as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has already written a letter in which it clearly stated that Taiwan will not be allowed to change the title of its team from "Chinese Taipei" to "Taiwan," the campaign is flogging a dead horse while expecting innocent sportspeople and coaches to bear the consequences.

They are angry about this and say it is very unfair.

However, there are other national-level sportspeople who say that Taiwan is our country's proper name and only that title can bolster our sportspeople's fighting spirit.

In Taiwan, different people have different dreams about our national identity, and this has always been the case. When the Croatian team, with their checkered shirts and flags, reached the final of soccer's FIFA World Cup, we saw how sport acts like a religion in bringing a nation together.

What is China so afraid of? Why has it taken such heavy-handed action, even though the referendum proposal has not even been officially established?

It must be because if "Chinese Taipei" really becomes "Team Taiwan," that would gradually foster a strong identity in the nation and Taiwanese would naturally want to cut the umbilical cord with China.

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It is sad to say, but some people in Taiwan are still taking China's side and blaming the Team Taiwan campaign for China's domineering behavior. Yet the referendum does not demand that the government should tear up the 1981 Lausanne Agreement by going straight out and unilaterally changing the team's title.

Rather, the hope is, through the process of proposing the referendum and applying to rename the team, to review and re-examine the agreement, which Taiwan signed with the IOC back in the days of martial law.

In 1979, when Taiwan was still under one-party rule by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), the IOC recognized the People's Republic of China's Olympic committee as representing China and told the Taiwan-based Republic of China Olympic Committee that its title would be changed to the "Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee." That was playing hardball.

In contrast, the main text of the referendum proposal contains a very important word, namely that we should "apply" to take part in the Olympic Games under the title of "Taiwan." Without the word "apply," to call for the government to take part under the name of "Taiwan" would be playing hardball.

It is unlikely that such an application would be turned down by the IOC's executive board straight after being proposed, because the 2020 Games' host country is Japan. There would therefore be a strong chance of the proposal going to a vote in a plenary session of the IOC, where 206 countries have one vote each, so China would not have a strong chance of winning. That is why China is so afraid of the Team Taiwan campaign.

Some people think that Taiwan could end up losing the right to compete, but that is even more unlikely to happen, because every member nation of the IOC has the right to use its proper name. Why on Earth would we be punished for asking for our own rights?

Even though Russia was disqualified from competing at the Winter Olympics in South Korea in February, some Russian sportspeople were still able to compete under the title "Olympic athlete from Russia."

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Besides, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Election Commission cannot approve a referendum proposal that the government would have no chance of implementing. In that case, the aim of correcting the team's title would obviously be out of reach.

It is even more unreasonable to blame the Team Taiwan campaign for hurting Taiwan's young athletes and dragging young athletes from all over East Asia down with them. Do people imagine that our respected national sportspeople do not care about the name of their team, about whom they represent or about their country's dignity?

If they really only care about playing in competitions and matches, totting up points, and getting subsidies and prize money, then it does not matter what flag they play under.

Let us take a broader view and unite as one. Who is being unreasonable and domineering here? Can sportspeople who have been nurtured by Taiwan be so heartless as to turn around and blame Taiwanese for longing to be their own masters?

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Translated by Julian Clegg

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2018/08/12](#)