

## Military needs Taiwanese identity

Written by Tsai Sen-jan 蔡善堅

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In her inaugural address in May, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) announced three major areas of reform for the military: asymmetric warfare capabilities, the reservist mobilization system and the management structures.

However, the most pressing area of reform is to engender a sense of Taiwanese consciousness in soldiers, sailors and pilots. The concept of “ethnically Chinese Taiwanese” needs to be gradually built up during recruits’ education and training.

The Chinese Communist Party constantly pushes the idea that “Chinese do not fight Chinese,” while retired officers largely identify themselves as “Chinese on Taiwan.”

Tsai has been in office for almost five years, and during this time she has frequently advocated, and herself put into practice, “the Taiwanese point of view.”

However, the question remains: Given the decades of Sinicization under Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石), is the military capable of loyally serving its commander-in-chief in the event of a war with China?

The People’s Republic of China is a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the legal representative of China. This means that the Republic of China can only represent Taiwan, but calling the nation Republic of China (Taiwan) will not cut the mustard.

What is needed is to change the way military personnel think about their identity and make them “upright and dignified Taiwanese” rather than the “upright and dignified Chinese” that Taiwanese were taught they needed to be during the Chiang era.

Whether our ancestors came from China, Japan, the Netherlands or Spain or were Austronesian, we are all Taiwanese. Fostering a Taiwanese consciousness must start with military training and education.

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The Tsai administration continues to plot a course for the nation as a sovereign and independent state under the banner of Republic of China (Taiwan), which has converged with a growing anti-China force in the US and pro-independence forces in Taiwan.

These elements are moving closer and closer toward what China calls its red line for military action.

As foreign forces are increasingly becoming involved and Taiwanese sovereignty increasingly becomes *de facto* separated from China, the military's Taiwanese consciousness must be fortified, and they must declare that they are upright and dignified Taiwanese.

Given the still prevalent mindset in the military of being "Chinese in Taiwan," in a conflict with China, the nation could lose both the psychological and the physical battle.

*Tsai Sen-jan is a political writer.*

Translated by Edward Jones

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