

Ministry denies passport claim

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Department of North American Affairs Deputy Director-General Yao Chin-hsiang, right, speaks during a question-and-answer session at the legislature in Taipei yesterday as Minister of Foreign Affairs David Lin, second left, looks on.

Photo: Chien Jung-fong, Taipei

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday refuted a Taiwanese woman's claims that her passport was temporarily confiscated by the Taipei Representative Office in the UK on Wednesday for covering the national emblem on her passport with a sticker.

The woman, surnamed Pang, posted an article on Wednesday night on a Facebook page called "Taiwanese in Europe," saying that an official at the representative office threatened to seize her passport if she refused to remove a sticker on the cover of her passport.

"I just went to the Taipei Representative Office in the UK to apply for the authentication of my marriage certificate. I was asked to tear the sticker covering the 'party emblem' [of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT)] — which the official said is our national emblem — off my passport, or my application would be denied," Pang said.

Both the emblems of the Republic of China (ROC) and the KMT feature a white sun on a blue background. The difference is that the rays of the sun on the KMT party emblem are longer than those on the ROC emblem.

Refusing to comply, Pang said she told the official that it did not matter if her marriage was also recognized in Taiwan and that she wanted to revoke her application.

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“Then the official dangled my passport in front of me, saying he could not give back my passport if I did not remove the sticker,” Pang said.

Pang’s message quickly galvanized a heated debate on the Internet. Some netizens questioned the legitimacy of the official’s alleged actions, while others said the incident served as proof that the White Terror era was far from over.

The designer of the “Republic of Taiwan” sticker, who identified himself as Lao Tan (勞潭), urged the ministry to explain why a public servant has the mandate to confiscate a passport.

“Even if the official returned the passport to the woman in the end, such a douche bag public servant deserves to be disciplined,” Lao Tan said.

The ministry issued a statement yesterday saying the representative office only explained to Pang Taiwan’s ban on alterations or stickers on passports and asked her to remove the sticker to safeguard the nation’s dignity and official state name.

“The citizen contended that what the sticker covered was the [KMT’s] party emblem,” the ministry said.

“The official later returned the passport to the woman, but asked her to tear off the sticker. He also witnessed her signing a Chinese-language translation of her marriage certificate before issuing her a receipt,” it said.

The ministry said the woman’s account of what happened was untrue, adding that according to the law, representative offices can only advise people to remove stickers on their passports and do not have the authority to confiscate travel documents.

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The ministry proposed an addendum to the Enforcement Rules of the Passport Act (入國管理條例) in November last year, which took effect in January, banning any modifications of the nation's passport design.

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