

Terry Gou record raises questions

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Terry Gou (郭台銘), Taiwan's wealthiest man and chairman of Hon Hai Precision Industry Co, on Wednesday threw his hat into the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) presidential primary.

There are many reasons that Gou's bid should raise questions and red flags. Here are four:

First, Gou's record as chairman of Hon Hai — known internationally as Foxconn Technology Group and famous for assembling Apple Inc iPhones — is questionable.

Hon Hai was one of the first Taiwanese firms in the 1980s to begin manufacturing in China to take advantage of its cheaper labor market. Over the years, there have been frequent media reports of poor working conditions at Foxconn's Chinese facilities, including low pay, no sick leave for junior employees and forced overtime, with some assembly-line workers reportedly putting in 60-hour weeks and only being given one day off in 13.

From January to May 2010, 14 Foxconn workers at plants in Shenzhen committed suicide by jumping off roofs.

In 2012, CNN interviewed an 18-year-old Foxconn worker, identified only as Ms Chen to protect her identity.

"Foxconn employees have a saying: Use women as men and men as machines," she said.

"It is so boring, I can't bear it anymore. Every day I finish work and go to bed. I get up in the morning and I go to work. It is my daily routine. I almost feel like an animal," Chen said.

The animal analogy is apt.

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Gou once told senior managers at an end-of-year party: “Hon Hai has a workforce of more than 1 million worldwide and, as human beings are also animals, to manage 1 million animals gives me a headache.”

Gou also invited former Taipei Zoo director Chuang Hsuan-chih (莊煥池) to share his management experience with Foxconn managers, according to a report by the Chinese-language *China Times*.

At a time when Taiwan is seeking to diversify its economy away from China and tackle a chronic low-wage problem, his lukewarm commitment to Taiwan and the continued allegations of poor working conditions at Foxconn raise questions about how he would handle these issues.

Second, given that Gou’s business is inextricably wedded to China, many have questioned whether he would have Taiwan’s best interests at heart if he were president. Even supposing that Gou has undergone a Damascus road conversion and is now filled with patriotic fervor for his native land, given his core business interests in China, a perception of him as Chinese President Xi Jinping’s (習近平) puppet are likely to dog him.

Third, Gou’s behavior at two high-profile forums in Taipei this week raises questions about his temperament. On Monday, at a forum to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the US’ Taiwan Relations Act, he asked American Institute in Taiwan Chairman James Moriarty whether the US would support a specific presidential candidate or would allow Taiwan to elect its own leader.

On Tuesday, Gou stormed out of the Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue after complaining that fellow panelists — a group of Taiwanese and US lawmakers — failed to answer a question he asked.

Fourth, on Wednesday, he said the sea goddess Matsu had appeared to him in a dream three days earlier and told him to “come out” — in what some cynics saw as an attempt to appropriate local religious beliefs to set himself up as a messiah figure.

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KMT members and other voters should demand answers from Gou about these issues and incidents ahead of the KMT primary.

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