

Taiwan won a crucial victory this week when Johns Hopkins University reverted to using “Taiwan” on the Web-based dashboard it created to track COVID-19 outbreaks around the world.

The nation’s appellation on the map had been changed on Monday to “Taipei and environs” to align with the WHO’s naming conventions “to achieve consistency in reporting,” the university said, but after a protest from Taipei, it decided to follow the US Department of State’s naming conventions.

Names matter, and the need for such clarity has been made painfully obvious in recent weeks as country after country lumped Taiwan in with China as they imposed travel restrictions on people and flights coming from outbreak-afflicted areas.

It is not just an issue of sovereignty, it is about disease prevention and accurate reporting.

Taiwan’s success so far in combating COVID-19, despite its lack of WHO membership, has been making headlines worldwide, as the virus takes hold in more places. From wire agency reports to British dailies the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, the *Wall Street Journal*, Japanese newspapers, al-Jazeera, *Der Spiegel* and *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*, to name a few, the stories have focused on what an NBC News headline on Tuesday summed up as: “What Taiwan can teach the world on fighting the coronavirus.”

This kind of coverage is invaluable, giving Taiwan a brand-name image for pro-active management, government transparency, harnessing of big data and technology, and a quality health insurance system — as well as its separateness from China. It has done more for Taiwan’s national identity than years of — and millions of New Taiwan dollars spent on — public relations campaigns by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Tourism Bureau and other agencies.

Such coverage is important for another reason, as the *Guardian* quoted National Taiwan University College of Public Health dean Chan Chang-chuan (陳昌川) as saying: “What we learned from SARS was that we need to be very skeptical with data from China. We learned very harsh lessons then and that experience is something other countries don’t have.”

Unfortunately, with the exception of Singapore and Hong Kong, too many nations and the leadership of the WHO forgot something that has been clear for decades: Numbers and statistics from China, be they on agricultural harvests, manufacturing activity, bank loans and financials, or public health issues, cannot be taken at face value.

Even more crucially, the WHO’s obsequious acceptance of China’s statements about what and when it knew about the emergence of the novel coronavirus, and its unctuous praise of Beijing’s response to the Wuhan outbreak now appear to verge on professional malpractice, as stories emerge that Beijing withheld the COVID-19 genome sequence from the WHO for 14 days and that the first person to have contracted the virus did so on Nov. 17 in Hubei Province.

Ensuring a factual timeline about the emergence of a new virus is crucial for epidemiologists trying to track its spread and for scientists trying to develop treatments and vaccines. It is also important because the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other officials are promoting the idea that the virus did not originate in Wuhan or even China, and that it might, as ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian (趙立堅) tweeted on Thursday, have been brought to Wuhan by the US Army, or as his colleague Geng Shuang (耿爽) told a press briefing the same day, have been bioengineered by the US.

The world cannot pretend that such garbage is intended for domestic consumption to ameliorate growing Chinese public outrage at their leaders’ handling of the outbreak. Zhao and Geng are propagandists trying to distort and hide the truth — just as the Chinese government has done so many times before, be it the Tiananmen Massacre, SARS or earthquake casualties, and Beijing cannot be allowed to get away with it.

There is a very good reason Taiwanese government officials continue to refer to COVID-19 as the “Wuhan virus”: It is the truth.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2020/03/14](#)