

## Pitfalls of corporate jab donations

Written by Chang Kuo-tsai 張國才  
Thursday, 15 July 2021 04:25

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Hon Hai Precision Industry Co founder Terry Gou (郭台銘) and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC) on July 2 reached initial agreements and signed legal documents with Shanghai Fosun Pharmaceutical Group, the distributor for the BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in Taiwan, China, Hong Kong and Macau, with both firms purchasing 5 million doses each.

On Sunday, China's Xinhua news agency reported that Gou's Yonglin Foundation and TSMC on Friday reached advance arrangements with Shanghai Fosun's subsidiary Fosun Industrial Co to buy vaccines, which would be supplied to Taiwan through normal commercial procedures.

It is of course wonderful that the two private firms, as well as the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, are digging into their own pockets to buy vaccines for Taiwan.

However, the nation should address several issues to ensure that these "vaccines of love" do not degenerate into "united front vaccines."

First, COVID-19 vaccine brands that are in use in advanced democracies also include Moderna, AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and others.

It is economic common sense not to put all of your eggs in one basket, but TSMC, Hon Hai and Tzu Chi all happen to have chosen BioNTech.

Is this coincidence or is something else going on behind the scenes? What is so attractive about the Pfizer-BioNTech jab? Does it offer the best protection? Does it have the fewest and least serious adverse effects? Is it the cheapest? Does it offer the fastest delivery or are there the least worries about supply volume? Is it the easiest to transport? Or does it have the longest shelf life?

Second, after TSMC and Hon Hai signed the preliminary legal documents with Shanghai

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Fosun, China's Taiwan Affairs Office spokeswoman Zhu Fenglian (朱鳳蓮) on Monday last week said that the China-based firm is the only distributor of the BioNTech vaccine for the "Taiwan area."

Her wording was telling. Look at what happened to Chinese firms Alibaba, Tencent and Baidu when they were deemed to have been politically incorrect. Look at the absurd images of Buddhist monks in their robes goose stepping on the square in front of the Shaolin Temple in China's Henan Province, singing the Chinese national anthem and raising China's five-star national flag.

Knowing full well that companies and religion are highly politicized in China, TSMC, Hon Hai and Tzu Chi have nonetheless avoided Moderna, AstraZeneca, and Johnson & Johnson, which would not involve any political interference, and instead insisted on purchasing from BioNTech and its China-based distributor. Again, what is so attractive about it?

Third, the government's earlier attempt to buy the BioNTech vaccine directly from the German manufacturer in the name of "Taiwan" was blocked by Chinese behind-the-scenes interference just as the contract was about to be signed, and has been shelved ever since.

Taiwanese can admire TSMC and Hon Hai for their ability, as private companies, to secure Shanghai Fosun's agreement to provide vaccines "from the original factory, in the original packaging, delivered directly to Taiwan," but the public must also remind the two firms not to forget about one of the main characteristics of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP): its habit of reneging on agreements, both spoken and written.

Look at how, when the CCP negotiated with Taiwan's then-Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government, Beijing broke its promises as soon as the talks were over.

In another example, when the CCP began breaking its promise of 50 years of "one country, two systems," which it made to Britain 20 years earlier when Hong Kong was handed back to China, Beijing even claimed that the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration was a mere historical document that no longer had any practical significance — in other words, just a piece of paper.

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The legal documents “formally signed” by TSMC and Hon Hai must not contain wording such as “the Taiwan area” that belittle Taiwan’s national status as a passport for the deal to go through.

Otherwise, even if the agreements are covered by a “confidentiality clause,” it would be amazing if China, with its “united front” mentality, did not immediately treat the “confidentiality clause” as a scrap of paper and announce the deals’ terms that belittle Taiwan in front of the international community.

If so, TSMC and Hon Hai spending billions of New Taiwan dollars to buy vaccines would be a small price compared with what Taiwan would pay in terms of lost sovereignty.

Fourth, what would happen in case of the following sequence of events: The purchase is authorized by the Chinese distributor, a China Airlines plane is loaded with the vaccines at a German airport and is flying eastward via Chinese airspace. Even the name of the Taiwanese national carrier does not reveal that the vaccine purchase has anything to do with Taiwan, and a mistaken association would likely be created in the minds of the international community.

Of course, it would be best if Taiwan avoids shooting itself in the foot like that. Would it, at least, not be better for the vaccines to be delivered by EVA Airways instead?

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2021/07/15](#)