Channeling Facts, Crouching Rumours: 
Taiwan’s Post-Truth Encounter with the Covid Pandemic

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This study examines the confrontation between Taiwan and Covid in the period before the virus finally invaded and spread widely on the island in May 2021. While the general approach to Taiwan’s success in keeping the virus out is historical, stating the policy lessons learned from previous anti-pandemic experience, the study focuses on how these coping strategies were able to be made and conducted with little disruption from misinformation and conspiracy theories. Inspired by Sheila Jasanoff’s notion of how science and technology are received through different political and policy systems, and by Bruno Latour’s semiotic reflections on the actor-network theory, the STS take on post-truth politics here is institutional and discursive: instead of focusing on the scientific and the misleading in individual policies, I provide an ethnography of rumour and scientific discourse on Covid, capturing their interactions and net effects in the context of policy discussions. Following closely the daily press conferences held by the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC), the only official information source for the Covid pandemic, I argue that discursive frames were made upon the limited information given and few confirmed cases found. Through the expert authority and ‘what if?’ scenarios seen at these conferences, Taiwan’s anti-Covid policies came to be presented as a narrative on crises and what the government was doing to get over them, and rumours were either ignored or marginalised. Meanwhile, though disputes and speculations on pandemic control did exist among experts, they only surfaced after the local outbreak, whereupon conspiracy theories flared up, challenging the already exhausted CECC. Together, the excessive information by experts, health professionals, policy analysts and talkshow hosts compiles a ‘post-truth normal’ that has started to place Taiwan’s democracy and its trust in expertise on trial.

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Covid, Taiwan and Post-Truth

As the Editor-in-Chief of *East Asian Science, Technology, and Society: An International Journal* (EASTS), I was approached by scholars last year with various proposals on STS and Covid, from which I picked just one or two to take further. While being urged to stake our claim as an Asia-based STS journal, I had reservations over how we could actually engage in coping with this disease and how any publications put together so precipitately would end up being both sharp and well-aimed (Kuo, 2020a, 2020b). For a moving global target like Covid, we require both fast and slow scholarships to better capture the lessons this pandemic has taught us.

As a Taiwanese academic, however, I am finding that now might be a good time to write down reflections on Taiwan and Covid. Until mid-May, 2021, Taiwan had been almost immune to the pandemic. Confirmed cases numbered only in the hundreds, and a handful of deaths had been reported. For a sizeable economy that has extensive connections with China, the ground zero of Covid, Taiwan seemed nevertheless to live in a virus-free bubble whose situation was too unique to compare with other parts of the world. But this situation has changed. The protective shell has collapsed and, at the time of writing, the number of new cases is still hovering around hundreds every day. Even so, looking at the period from December 2019 to May 2021, when Taiwan was considered exemplary in pandemic governance (a latest account on this can been seen in Fitzpatrick, 2021), I think it worth paying more attention not to what made Taiwan a success case but instead to the ways in which its policies were being discussed alongside fleeting guesswork, or, to put it simply, rumours.

In the light of the misinformation and conspiracy theories that surfaced during the pandemic, in this essay I will review how preventative measures against Covid were being discussed in Taiwan at a time when its economic activities were not being much affected. My problematic is as follows: with the WHO coining the term ‘infodemic’ to indicate the role information plays in determining people’s perceptions of, and actions with regard to, a disease outbreak, how was Taiwan able to win out over false and misleading information and appear to take the right steps? A simple and ideal answer to this might be that the Taiwanese were more resilient in the face of such misinformation, but apparently that is not correct. Like others elsewhere in the world, the Taiwanese are unexceptional in being surrounded by misinformed rumours, particularly ones about science. As Joseph Dumit (1998) would analyse it, scientific findings or explanations are of an exploratory nature and are thus ‘facts’ that travel through different media and reach different audiences. What pulls these expert discourses out of their communicative trajectories to the public are the narrative frames within which scientific facts and speculations are
chopped into fragments, mixed up and stitched back into arguments that favour certain perspectives or standpoints in debates—most of which are political.

I do not want to discuss in this study how arguments are made, or what we can call ‘post-truth’ mechanisms. Neither do I jump into topics on debate, treating them as controversies and analysing them by the principle of symmetry (Lynch, 2020). My focus is an STS one, inspired by Jasanoff’s (2005) work on how science and technology are discussed in different democracies. According to Jasanoff, the reception of a science, in her case biotechnology, is not purely a scientific affair. It has to be considered within political and policy systems which are in transition over time. Following from this, I would like to remind readers of the one basic foundation upon which an infodemic arises—too much information. The less the information released, the less the possibility that rumours will flare up. In addition to its conventional strategies against misleading information (such as fact-checking chatbots and websites; see Hu, 2021), I will argue that a broader understanding of Taiwan’s politics and epidemic control policy is required.

**What Was Behind a Successful Anti-Covid Story? Retrospective Reasoning and Beyond**

First let us review Taiwan’s success in keeping the Covid virus out. As historian of medicine Wayne Soon (2020) put it, this achievement was not just luck; it had to do with not only its evolution as a democratic polity but also its unique status in global health diplomacy. In brief, ruled by the Democratic Progress Party (DPP) that replaced the pro-Beijing Kuomintang government in 2000, Taiwan was wary of epidemics originating from China, especially after its experience fighting SARS in 2003. It was also that SARS epidemic, in which Taiwan’s public health system came into jeopardy when the central government and Taipei’s local government differed over locking down a public hospital where clustered cases had been found, which resulted in the creation of the Central Epidemic Command Center (國家衛生指揮中心中央流行疫情指揮中心, CECC), a mission-oriented entity for centralising anti-pandemic measures. From the perspective of global health history, Soon pointed out that Taiwan, long isolated from the WHO, took its own policymaking path. While in general following WHO guidelines and standards as closely as it could, Taiwan chose to trust its own field investigations and rejected the WHO’s rather weak advisories in January 2020.

While reasoning upon this success story with hindsight, Soon mentions only briefly the culture of gossip. Nonetheless, gossip has been a mainstay of talkshows, magazines and social media for over twenty years and has become a vital source in people’s political understanding (for a general review of this history, see Tang, 2014). Around the same time the DPP took up the presidency, there was a boom in talkshows in Taiwan featuring debate over policy. Usually running every weekday, with weekend reruns, these shows covered not only general policy but also those requiring specialised knowledge and expertise. One or two experts might be invited, but, overall, discussions always led to politically polarised positions, and their
quality was uneven. The demand for information intensified as social media and YouTube streaming overtook traditional broadcasting, and this created a veritable incubating chamber for gossip.

As a political tactic, gossip is widely discussed in post-colonial and Subaltern studies, as it is in the technoscientific field, as seen in Prasad’s (2021) paper in this issue. Even so, in Taiwan’s case, except for a minor debate among experts about the efficacy of NRICM101—a herbal complex claimed to have therapeutic effects in Covid patients2—such debates (e.g., on the origins of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, theories on how it spread, existence of local virus carriers or treatment in intensive-care cases) were either ignored or marginalised. They did not arouse much attention or stimulate official response during the period under discussion. This is exactly the reason why Jiyi,3 a digital archive that aims to collect official and unofficial documents on Taiwan and Covid, deliberately excluded such sources despite the huge volume of information they carried.

With due respect to Jiyi and its decision to exclude, I have other thoughts about gossip in terms of post-truth politics. In spite of their annoying nature, nobody would deny the power of these distorted narratives and misinformation; they exert this power by shaping the public’s perceptions and under-reactions—or using Jasanoff’s term, ‘civic epistemology’, which refers ‘to these culturally specific, historically and politically grounded, public knowledge-ways’ (Jasanoff, 2005, p. 249). Echoing Prasad’s analysis of Covid conspiracy theories in the United States, I consider these narratives to be as productive as those created by policymakers, who, in Taiwan’s case, are aware of the effects of these discourses and produce narratives that favour them (Tang, 2014). What differs in my STS assessment is scale: while Prasad works on individual theories and their reception among ethnic groups, my study concerns the total effect—quantitative and qualitative—on the dynamics of facts and rumours concerning Covid in Taiwan.

The concerns in this approach are both empirical and theoretical. As I have written previously, Taiwan did not have the outbreaks that would give rise to conspiracy theories, and rumours were less publicly visible. Therefore, instead of estimating how a piece of misinformation was created and secretly spread, I am more interested in knowing how these ideas—whether intended to make people informed or misled—shaped the way anti-Covid policies were discursively settled. My theoretical reasoning here concerns the idea of frames, inspired by Latour’s (2004, 2017) semiotic reflections on actor-network theory. According to Latour, there are multiple interpretative frames which exist between the objective and relativist. The principle of symmetry evolves into ethnographic networking on how actors and actants are presented and connected; different frames generate concerns as viewers move from one to another.

Using this idea, our STS attempt here is an ethnography of rumour and scientific discourse on Covid, following how they interact in the formation of Taiwan’s coping strategies.4 Just as when chasing the Covid virus, we may not be able to trace the myriad ways in which each text or message transmits from one device to another, but we can capture their net effects in the context of policy discussions.
Starting from this background, we can get a better idea on the role gossip played in Taiwan’s fight against Covid. The overarching interpretive frame for this period of time I would call the ‘what if? ’ scenarios. Thanks to the early locking out of possible virus carriers from China in January 2020, followed by strict epidemic controls at border customs and mandatory personal protection measures (such as face mask wearing), people in Taiwan somehow enjoyed an almost normal life while Covid was attacking Asia and spreading to other continents. The real challenge for Taiwan, then, was how to maintain the status quo theoretically and practically.

Learning from its SARS experience, as early as 27 February 2020, the government launched the CECC as official and only channel for the public to learn about Covid policies. After its inception, the CECC insisted on holding press conferences on a daily basis, most of them hosted by its Commander-in-chief, Shih-chung Chen, the Minister of Health and Welfare. These soon became one of Taiwan’s most popular shows on Covid. Starting at 2 p.m. every day, viewers saw a panel seated in a row, including Minister Chen, his leading science advisor Professor Shan-Chwen Chang (a senior specialist in infectious disease), the Deputy Minister of Internal Affair Tsung-yen Chen, CDC Director General Chih-haw Chou, spokesman Jen-Hsiang Chuang (an expert on biomedical informatics) and sometimes another spokesman, Yi-Chun Lo (a specialist in infectious disease). Unlike most governmental officials, who are generally unknown to the public, these team members became popular figures as the pandemic proceeded. Some viewers even expressed a sense of loss when, in early June 2020, the CECC announced a reduction in the frequency of its conferences to a once-a-week basis.

So, what did these press conferences convey? Since Taiwan’s CDC had established a transparent reporting system and a procedure for case-based epidemiological study, the standard format was a brief opening address followed by a report on the tracing of confirmed cases and the people under investigation after contact with these cases. Such reports were conveyed professionally and plainly, and so what aroused viewers’ attention was the Q&A session, the contact zone where official record and speculation met.

As Taiwan did not have many confirmed cases, the preventative measures being adopted in other countries were therefore less real, and Q&A sessions were predominantly occupied by hypothetical questions starting with ‘what if?’—questions such as ‘what if we fail to keep Covid out?’, ‘what if Taiwan were to see community spread?’, ‘what if we don’t have enough masks for our people?’, ‘what if we are short of negative pressure isolation rooms for confirmed cases’ or ‘what if we find people who receive vaccines and develop adverse effect?’—and the CECC’s comments in response. Some viewers may have considered these conversations ‘controversies’, but from a retrospective viewpoint it was the tensions between questioner and questioned that mattered, not their inconsistent views. Wittingly or unwittingly, they created the theatrical effects for Taiwanese viewers to live in the pandemic era.
It was also through these ‘what if’ Q&As that rumours were confined, if not neutralised. On the one hand, the CECC was open to all kinds of questions but provided only information immediate to the questions asked: even if there were disagreements, this proffered too little material to allow them to grow into controversies that might arouse public attention. On the other hand, despite there being conspiracy theories that the government had acted to cover up Taiwan’s pandemic situation, given that the public was not faced with Covid outbreaks these theories spread only between individuals and not more widely.

Through the ‘what if?’ scenarios, Taiwan’s anti-pandemic policies turned to be presented as crises and what the government was doing to get over them (過關, gueguan, in the Taiwanese idiom). One after another there arose situations which threatened to drag Taiwan into the pandemic, beginning as early as the return of people from China during the 2020 lunar new year holidays, the docking in January of a cruise ship whose passengers were later found to be infected with Covid (Everington, 2020a), and a group of military personals diagnosed of Covid from a returning Navy fleet in April (Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, 2020). Because Taiwan was still allowing foreign travel, minor crises followed in which confirmed cases entered Taiwan and had contact with local people.

While vaccines were still far from being available, how to secure enough medical masks and distribute them to those who needed them created crises for the government. This was where the military trope of ‘fighting a pandemic like fighting a war’ (防疫視同作戰) was called upon. As early as January 2020, the government forbade the exportation of masks and created new production lines with machine tool companies—the so-called ‘national team of masks’ (Taiwan External Trade Development Council, 2020). It also utilised its health insurance system to monitor and ensure anti-pandemic resources were fairly distributed (Leonard, 2020). From 12 April 2020 to 22 December 2020, Taiwan set a record of 253 consecutive days with no new confirmed cases (Ellis et al., 2020). Minister Chen was portrayed by the mass media as an anti-Covid hero; Shun Shih-chung! (順時中‘Obey Minister Chen!’) became the slogan that summarised all the good anti-Covid measures suggested by the government.

With no outbreak coming to pass, Q&A sessions turned to how long we could maintain that virus-free streak. Taiwan’s success in preventing Covid became a national(ist) phenomenon that we were reminded of at CECC press conferences and heard chanted repeatedly in the media.

**Incubating Post-Truth Discourses: Turning Expert Debates into Public Controversies**

But this did not mean that rumours had been totally swept away. There were political motivations to keep doubts to the government alive, especially for non-DPP politicians who would need visibility in upcoming election campaigns. The measures to separate Taiwan from China could be justified on the grounds of public health...
concerns, but there were still experts (epidemiologists, policy makers, drug and medical device developers and physicians from different specialties) who had different ideas on how to prepare for possible outbreaks. It was where the post-truth discourses came into being.

Among these professional debates, one constantly discussed in early 2020 was the necessity for large-scale testing. Concerns originated in Taiwan’s SARS experience, where there had been a sudden outbreak after a complete lull in cases. In order to know whether Taiwan had fallen into a situation of community transmission, there was always an urge to push the government to conduct such testing. The CECC clearly rejected this idea on grounds of cost-effectiveness, but rumours arose that it had attempted to cover up the fact that there had been asymptomatic cases or virus carriers in the community. The rumours intensified when a speculative study of a high-risk population in central Taiwan identified four positive cases who carried the Covid antigen among 4,841 serum samples (Everington, 2020b). While denouncing the design of this study and its procedures as possibly violating research ethics, the CECC cited it to show that the possibility of an outbreak was extremely low. Meanwhile, seizing upon the fact that it contained hard data, critics interpreted it as confirmation that the virus had already been circulating in the community and that costly, island-wide screening was necessary.

The other issue in debate was the development of vaccines and their supply. Following its experience in the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, Taiwan had decided to develop its own vaccines as early as in February 2020 to fill an anticipated supply shortage (Ko, 2020). But unlike masks, which required only low-end technology, vaccines are a rather complicated product that needs time, expertise and financial tactics to develop. At the beginning of the Covid pandemic, notably four potential candidates were considered to join the global race to develop a vaccine. As Taiwan proved to be Covid-free, some lost impetus and silently pulled out after Phase-I trials, while Medigen Vaccine Biologics Corp and United Biomedical insisted on moving on to Phase-II clinical trials (Huang, 2021a).

Although the government had prepared NT$1.87 billion (US$635m) to support these companies, there were regulatory problems as well as political ones. Taiwan did not have enough subjects for regular trials, and required flexible trial designs. As this was a matter of public health the government could exercise its authority to grant emergency-use authorisation (EUA) to facilitate the availability and use of unapproved medical products—in this case vaccines. There were discussions among experts after the US FDA first issued its guidance for industry on the development of vaccines to prevent COVID-19,8 in June 2020, and an expert meeting was held in July 2020 on EUA and alternative trial designs (Wu, 2020). Meanwhile, conspiracies sneaked in, stating that the government would sacrifice its people’s health in favour of domestically developed vaccines. These rumours did not gain attention outside of expert circle as Taiwan was generally safe thus mass vaccination seemed to be out of its vision. Despite some doubts over the safety of AstraZeneca (A-Z), the first available vaccine that arrived in Taiwan in March 2021, there was no serious debate till the outbreak of Covid two months later.
It was the collapse of the ‘Covid-free’ bubble that changed the direction of the ‘what if?’ scenarios, and rumours found their places in public discussions. With hindsight, those first local cases were infected by a pilot in places he had visited in early May and in the airport transit hotel where they worked. The number of cases quickly increased through interactions of those patients with family and the people they came into contact with. Several districts in greater Taipei were identified as ‘hot zones’ as they had clusters of confirmed cases (Zennie & Tsai, 2021). Yet the approach of following targeted case tracing gradually lost its winning advantage as it failed to pin down people for quarantine, to say nothing of the countless events and gatherings that took place over the Mother’s Day weekend. By 10 June 2021, confirmed cases could be found in every county in Taiwan except Kinmen (Quemoy), an outlying island 187 km away from the shoreline of the island of Taiwan.

At the same time, the CECC started losing its discursive authority. The daily press conferences continued, but what had previously made Taiwan a success story of epidemic control now seemed to lose its interpretative power. In the name of a ‘right to know’, hard questioning based on an assumption of political manipulation took up most of the Q&A sessions. The CECC stuck to the old strategy of providing only succinct information to avoid misinterpretation, but this no longer satisfied the journalists present nor viewers who needed vicarious excitement. Critics began to call the CECC conferences ‘the empty words of five men’ (五漢廢言 wuhan feiyan).

The central/municipal relationship was also in the spotlight. Soon (2020) was right that Taiwan had learned a lesson not to make Covid a local affair but instead one where the central government should take the lead. However, as the situation was about to become out of control, cracks appeared. Taipei City began its own press conferences on May 11, held daily at 3 p.m., followed by the other big cities of New Taipei City, Taichung and Kaohsiung. These press conferences were informative and promotional. They were arranged similarly to the CECC’s and were hosted by the leadership of the city, usually its Mayor. Even so, instead of simply repeating what the CECC had announced, these conferences set their own agendas and the Mayors sometimes expressed different opinions on anti-Covid measures. In order to streamline anti-pandemic resources, from 20 May 2020, the CECC decided to hold daily national working meetings on the fight against Covid and to make the post-meeting press conferences a forum for clarifying misinformation (see, e.g., Huang, 2021b; Liu, 2021). It also announced on May 24, 2021 a fine up to NT three million dollars (about 107,00 USD) for those who spread fake news on Covid.

Old issues such as large-scale testing and vaccine development resurfaced, but this time they were not confined to experts but exploded in the public sphere in a welter of misinformation and conspiracy theories. Some critics cited their previous pleas, blaming the government for not having heeded their suggestions for avoiding this outbreak and pushing the CECC to conduct ‘universal testing’ (普篩 pushai) of residents in Taipei City or to enact a city-wide lockdown. The supply and distribution of vaccines also caused a panic. Some Taiwanese who had returned the previous year to escape the pandemic were reported to be rushing back to the United States to get vaccinated (Everington, 2021), and many of the news...
media chose terms meaning ‘exodus’ or ‘fleeing danger’ to describe the move. In addition to spreading doubts raised by adverse reports and sudden deaths after receiving the A-Z vaccine, critics linked the government’s reluctance to accept foreign vaccines to its protection of domestically developed products, which, as discussed above, had seen questions raised concerning the qualification of trials for approval under the EUA.

Political conspiracy theories eventually bedded in. Unlike Prasad’s (2021) analysis of domestic politics on race, Taiwan’s conspiracy theories were international and geopolitical. Just a few days after Foxconn founder Terry Gou proposed procuring five million doses of COVID-19 vaccine from abroad on 1 June 2020, rumours arose pointing to Gou’s connection with China via his newly acquired biotechnology company EirGenix (Chiang, 2021). When a donation of 1.24 million doses of the A-Z vaccine arrived from Japan on 4 June 2021, rumours claimed it was a diplomatic move to disgrace China over the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre. It was no surprise that, when the American Institute in Taiwan (the de facto US embassy) formally confirmed on 19 June 2020, that 2.5 million doses of the Moderna vaccine would be delivered to Taiwan, rumours quickly linked the move to Terry Gou’s offer of BNT vaccine, portraying it a part of a US political ploy to compete with China in Asia by supporting the DPP government (Huang, 2021c).

As I write this essay towards the end of June, Taiwan has started learning to live the ‘new normal’ like its neighbouring states did in 2020—thousands of confirmed cases, some of whom are in a critical condition; a sufficient supply of vaccines still uncertain; the fear of sudden lockdown persisting. Meanwhile, the ‘post-truth normal’ has sneaked back. Along with the latest pandemic information (in particular Coronavirus variants found in India), the distracting messages of Covid conspiracy theories—the sudden deaths from silent hypoxia, retrospective fixing of the number of confirmed cases, vaccine supply for universal vaccination and protective power of these vaccines—are all resurfacing on social and traditional media on the screens of our computers, laptops, tablets and phones.

So, what STS lessons can we learn from Taiwan’s encounter with Covid? Just as Prasad (2021) reflects in his Covid paper, I agree that STS scholars are compelled to offer insights to cope with the pandemic, and there is still room for participation by treating seriously misinformation and conspiracy theories. But we should be careful of the scholarship created in such circumstances. Anderson (2020), for instance, has reservations in his criticism of some unsuccessful attempts: ‘it is all too easy to make mistakes, to mass produce instead fatuity, guesswork, and irrelevance’. By echoing the motto of the strong programme in sociology of scientific knowledge, I believe that the key to approaching this tough task lies in our reflexivity as scholars—only with which reliable scholarship is made possible.

Let us take Wayne Soon as an example. Back in 2020, Soon contributed to EASTS, a timely essay that summarised what Taiwan had learned from its previous
experiences in terms of epidemic governance (Soon, 2020). However, by taking a serious look at rumour and gossip I have showed in this paper that the Taiwanese people might not yet have learned how to work with their government in fighting disease. In fact, shortly after the community outbreak of Covid in Taiwan, Soon wrote an editorial for The Diplomat with Honghong Tinn, titled Saving Taiwan’s COVID-19 Success Story (Soon & Tin, 2021). The authors looked back honestly at how, for all its success in keeping the virus out of its national borders, Taiwan had not followed the policies adopted in other Asian states. Therefore, as they pointed out, the tough challenge Taiwan faces is ‘unlearning some of its successful strategies at the beginning of the pandemic—including widespread fumigation and reluctance to evacuate indoor spaces of people—and keeping those that have worked, including a strong quarantine system as well as universal masking’.

But what impressed me most in this editorial is not the policy advice the authors provide, but the ultimate goal of introducing these measures—to defend Taiwan’s democracy. It is not just a far-reaching political call, instead, it is the essence of how to situate science in knowledge societies, as Jasanoff (2005) nicely articulates in her comparative study on EU, UK, and the United States. In his editorial ‘Post-truth?’ editor Sergio Sismondo pointed out that the STS way to claim the post-truth era requires a crucial yet necessary understanding of how accountable knowledge is produced, in particular by experts (Sismondo, 2017). He writes: ‘It seems that optimism about the coexistence of democracy and expertise may be misplaced …. If so, we might want to see this phenomenon in terms of post-truth’ (p. 4).

This is exactly the STS lesson this paper is offering: remapping the symmetry between experts and lay people in terms of the infodemic on Covid. The ‘Covid-free’ bubble facilitated in defending Taiwan’s democracy in term of science and expertise, but the real challenge had only just begun. The Taiwanese government and society are trying their best to make coexistence of democracy and expertise happen by skirmishing with fleeting quasi-scientific claims and free-floating information that lacks evidence. Can Taiwan make itself an STS exemplar in the post-truth era? Let us wait and see.11

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NOTES

1. See, for example, https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1
2. NRICM101 (清冠一號) is a herbal formula revised from a classical medical book of the sixteenth century, developed by the National Research Institute of Chinese Medicine and allowed to be

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exported for sale. Interestingly, this government-sponsored medicine was seldom mentioned by the Ministry of Health and Welfare and was not granted permission for sale domestically until recently. A good case of the dynamic between scientific and cultural, NRICM101 deserves a serious study of its own. For a basic introduction, see Tsai et al. (2021).

3. 記疫, https://covid19.nctu.edu.tw/

4. In Latour’s theory, our frame is one among the others in capturing the social.

5. For this essay, I consulted two chronologies concerning Taiwan and Covid: one by Taiwan’s Center for Disease Control (Taiwan CDC), ‘Crucial Policies for Combating Covid-19’ (https://covid19.mohw.gov.tw/ch/sp-timeline0-205.html) and the other compiled by online media ‘The Reporter’ (https://www.twreporter.org/a/2019-n cov-epidemic). In addition to Jiyi, other sources consulted include Taiwan CDC’s Covid section (https://www.cdc.gov.tw/Category/List/AuFztf_j5e4MaYz-sjteNQ), Wikipedia’s ‘Covid-19 pandemic and Taiwan’ entry (last accessed May 30, 2021), and the ‘Humanity and Social Sciences Reflections on Covid pandemic’ website (https://covid19.ascdc.tw/), among other blogs and websites dedicated to observing the pandemic. Although these sources are overwhelmingly in Chinese, in order to make the events mentioned in this paper more accessible to English speaking readers, I cite as much as I can journalistic accounts in English.

6. Minister Chen’s given name Shih-chung sounds like the word for ‘clock’, and ‘Obey Minister Chen!’ is a play on words urging people to follow him just as the hands of a clock naturally move around the clock face.

7. Such as a promotional documentary made by the Executive Yuan on Taiwan’s campaign against COVID-19 premiered in September 2020. See this document at YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Obth6e_d0

8. The tile of this guidance was ‘Development and Licensing of Vaccines to Prevent COVID-19’.

9. Notably the major of Taipei City, who is a senior surgeon and the major of Kaohsiung, who has medical background and holds a master’s degree in public health.

10. In specific, Jasanoff argues that ‘domestic theory cannot be articulated in satisfactory terms today without looking in detail at the politics of science and technology…It is no longer possible to deal with such staple concepts of democratic theory as citizenship or deliberation or accountability without delving into their interaction with the dynamics of knowledge creation and use’ (p. 6).

11. As a postscript, at the end of of July Taiwan seems to have gotten over this crisis. In spite of 15662 confirmed cases accumulated among whom 787 died, the number of daily new confirmed cases has dropped to dozens and mass vaccination programs have begun. Rumors and conspiracy theories on Covid are still flourishing, but their public influence wanes quickly as Taiwanese people’s attention is being drawn by the news on Tokyo Olympics Games starting on July 23.

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