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Taiwan is Helping – The Taiwanese Community in Ireland Rises to COVID-19 Challenge

Posted by **Gary Kavanagh** | May 17, 2020 | **Irish News**



Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak we've been hearing more and more in the news about Taiwan, a small island nation about 200 km off the south-eastern coast of mainland China. Mostly we've been hearing about the geopolitical significance of Taiwan, its history with the Communist Party of China, and the failure of the WHO to recognize Taiwan and the damage that may have done to the world's ability to respond effectively to COVID-19.

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What we haven't heard much about is the fact that Ireland, like many other countries, has a long-established, albeit small, Taiwanese community of its own. And that community, which numbers about 1,000 people, has, under the banner of the Taiwan Ireland Association [TIA], been very quietly working to help the Irish people over the past months.

Since March the Taiwanese community in Ireland has privately fundraised the purchase of nearly 20,000 pieces of PPE which they have donated both to isolated elderly people living on their own, and Irish nursing homes and other long-term care facilities all across the country. The donations have mostly come from Taiwanese people living in Ireland and their families, but donations have also come in from the wider Taiwanese community and from Irish people currently living in Taiwan.

Julien Thibault, who moved to Ireland nearly 20 years ago, is, along with his wife Dr Angel Cheng, one of the main organizers of the community's donations. He was keen to stress that the donations aren't due to any one person, but rather the Taiwanese community in Ireland as a whole, saying, "This is happening due to the Taiwanese community, not me. I helped organize it but we wouldn't have been able to do this without the community. We found people to help through the community; we found people in need through the community; and we found people to distribute masks and PPE through the community."

And that is a point that everyone we talked to was keen to stress. TIA coordinates with the Taiwanese Representative Office in Ireland, but the money they're raising is coming from private individuals and not the Taiwanese government. Even Pierre Yang, the Taiwanese Representative to Ireland, and his family donated in a private, not professional, capacity. Talking to people on the ground one very quickly gets the sense that this is a community



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effort to support the Irish people based on the Taiwanese community's regard for the Irish people.

Tony Liu, a Taiwanese exchange student who came to Sligo in January of this year, has been working with TIA to distribute the donated PPE. He told us that he was proud of the help he could provide, and that, despite only being in Ireland since January, "the people of Sligo have welcomed me into their community. They've greeted me and they've helped me. The people of Sligo remind me of the people in my hometown in Taiwan" and that, "when I got the chance, I wanted to help them and show them my appreciation for the welcome they gave me."

Tony's comments were a common theme amongst the members of the Taiwanese community that we talked to. All expressed an admiration for the Irish people, a humility at what they saw as the small ways in which they could help, and a quiet pride at having helped in some way. According to Tony the community wants to show people that, "we are not just saying Taiwan can help, we are really helping."



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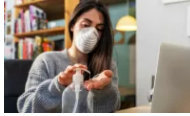
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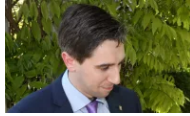
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