THE HANSEN REPORT ON AUTOMOTIVE ELECTRONICS

Editorial Notes

Dear Reader,

One of the things I have admired about the automotive electronics industry from its very beginning is the global community of like-minded electrical engineers who often cooperate to advance the state of the art. Our development and supply chains are global and they work admirably because they are based on choosing what provides the best value, regardless of country of origin. But the rise of technological nationalism, where countries in pursuit of national interests look to build technology supply chains that are independent from one and another, has the potential to upend how our industry does business.

Evidence of this trend and the potential for upheaval can be seen as nations respond to the chip shortages that could cost global automakers 60 billion US dollars in sales this year. Those shortages can be blamed in part on the pandemic and on the fire at Renesas' Hitachinaka plant in March. They were exacerbated by Huawei, which gobbled up a good chunk of TSMC's capacity after being shut out when it was added to the US entity list in 2019, barring exports of American products to the company because of its ties to the Chinese government. Though, according to a statement from TSMC, "there is very little (if there's any) overlap between what the automotive industry is using and what Huawei was using."

In response to their own automotive chip shortages, executives from China's major carmakers are calling for legislation to foster domestic chip production.

According to the chairman of Changan Auto, "at least 90 % of China's automotive-grade chip market is dominated by US, European and Japanese companies, while Chinese chip makers make up an almost negligible share." Ironically, calls for more major investments in local chip production are also coming from the US and European Union governments. An expert panel in Japan is studying ways to promote investment in semiconductors for autos. We could end up with a lot of excess chip capacity.

A bigger concern is the growing tensions between China and the West. Any escalation will, at the very least, force the industry to consider the risks of doing further business with the Chinese.

Cordially,

Paul Hansen
Editor

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