



## Taiwan at the dawn of 2021

### Report of a Listening Post held on Zoom Jan. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Convener:** Ming-Hui Hsu

**Note Taker:** Yin-Jen Lu

There were 19 participants (including the convener and note taker), of which 11 were male, 5 were female, and 1 was agender. Mandarin was used in the meeting.

#### **PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

Due to our translation limitation, this part is omitted.

#### **PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

Participants were divided into two groups, with one group facilitated by Ming-Hui Hsu and the other by Yin-Jen Lu.

##### **Theme 1: Pandemic-induced survival threats and resulting survival anxiety and other emotions.**

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the public was concerned about the pandemic and the lack of medical masks, resulting in aggressively shopping for medical masks and some daily supplies, and illegal manufacturers selling masks without virus protection. Although there were only a handful of pandemic-induced deaths in Taiwan, seeing a large number of deaths in China and later in other countries in the early stages of the pandemic has deepened survival anxiety. In addition to survival anxiety, voluntary quarantine or social distancing in fighting the pandemic deepened the feeling of loneliness, and it was easier to feel sad and powerless in the face of the death of celebrities or family members.

##### **Theme 2: Existential threats caused by tensions between the United States, China and Taiwan and the resulting survival anxiety.**

As China grew more powerful, the threat of Taiwan being annexed by China had

increased, and Taiwan's need for the United States' assistance in resisting China has also increased. However, due to the lack of the United States' commitment to help defend Taiwan, Taiwanese people increasingly worried about their survival. During the US Presidential election, many people were very worried about the future of Taiwan (individuals, families, and the sustainable existence of the country) because they were worried that the results of the election would change US support for Taiwan's sovereignty. In the face of the two major powers of the United States and China, although United States and Taiwan are both democratic countries and have trusting relationship, what Taiwan has to sacrifice in exchange for the support of the United States? What does Taiwan want? What request from the United States can Taiwan refuse? Lifting the ban on the import of American pork from pigs fed with feeds containing Ractopamine is one example.

Because Taiwan's pandemic was well controlled, compared with the threat of the pandemic, the threat of China's annexation raised deeper concerns about survival and was harder to detect. This hypothesis is based on the fact that in the first stage, most people recalled the impact of the pandemic, but overtime during the listening post, in the third stage, the topic was about the threat of China's annexation and the tension between the United States, China and Taiwan.

### **Theme 3: Coping and Adjustment under Existential Threats and Survival Anxiety.**

Faced with the existential threats and anxiety caused by COVID-19 pandemic and the tension between the United States, China and Taiwan, members mentioned several ways to cope with and adjust, including avoiding memories and emotions related to these threats, looking for small happiness in bitter life, using Internet to shorten interpersonal distance, rethinking the meaning of life (improving self-awareness), reconnecting with Taiwan, increasing domestic tourism, planning the future for the next generation, and cooperating with the government's pandemic prevention policy. It can be seen that the Taiwanese sacrificed individual comfort in exchanging for the common good. But this compliance seems to be easier to happen when it is easy to be seen. When not seen (for example: driving), individuals less likely to yield.

### **Theme 4: Taiwan's status and Taiwan's identity under the pandemic and the international situation between US, China and Taiwan.**

In 2020, due to the excellent performance in pandemic prevention and the importance of Taiwan's semiconductor industry under the Sino-US confrontation, Taiwan's international status and international visibility were greatly improved. Employment opportunities in Taiwan's technology industry and public health industry

increased, foreign technical talents migrated to Taiwan, and the public's sense of identification with Taiwan increased. However, seeing the severity of the pandemic in various countries, it also felt that Taiwan's situation is surreal.

### **PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

**Analysis:** In 2020, Taiwan experienced two existential threats: COVID-19 pandemic and China's annexation. In the face of the pandemic, although there was some chaos in the beginning, such as insufficient production of masks, under the scientific and humane management of the Central Pandemic Command Center and the efforts of the national mask manufacture team, Taiwan performed well in pandemic prevention, with 800 cases confirmed throughout the year. Most of them imported from abroad, with only 7 deaths and no local cases in the second half of the year. Although the damage caused by the pandemic to Taiwan is relatively small compared to other countries, individuals still paid a lot of price in the process of fighting the pandemic, including survival anxiety, loneliness, and easy sadness and powerlessness for loss.

China's intention to annex Taiwan has become more apparent in recent years. For example, China's anti-secession law passed in 2016 and Chinese President Xi Jinping's speech on the unification of Taiwan under One Country, Two Systems in 2019. The One Country, Two Systems policy has proven to be unworkable after Hong Kong's One Country, Two Systems policy was destroyed by China. Despite the impact of the pandemic and the Sino-US trade war in 2020, China continued to launch military and diplomatic provocations against Taiwan. In the face of the increasingly treat of the powerful communist totalitarian China, Taiwan, not able to stand alone against it, becomes increasingly dependent on the United States. Because of this dependence, Taiwan is very sensitive to the strength of the United States and its foreign policies toward Taiwan. The U.S. Republican Party has traditionally been more friendly to Taiwan than the Democratic Party. The U.S. election at the end of 2020 has caused many Taiwanese to have deep survival anxiety about who would be the new U.S. president. At the end of last year, Taiwanese government decided to lift the ban on American pork from pigs fed with feeds containing Ractopamine to show its favor to the US government. This decision caused Taiwanese to reflect on the cost of relying on the United States.

In the face of the two existential threats mentioned above, Taiwanese people used different methods to cope and adjust. Among these methods, apart from avoiding negative emotions and thoughts related to threats, the others are more positive, including looking for small happiness in bitter life, using the Internet to shorten the

distance between people, and reflecting on the meaning of life (improving self-awareness), reconnect with Taiwan, increase domestic tourism, plan for the future of the next generation, and cooperate with the government's pandemic prevention policy.

Thanks to the successful prevention of the pandemic in a democratic way and its leading position in the semiconductor industry, Taiwan has become the focus of attention of the world from a small island that was previously little known. Compared to the confusion in the past, identification with Taiwan can finally be developed through pandemic prevention and democratic mechanisms. Because of the current international tensions and the fact that Taiwan has been seen by the international community, Taiwan needs to think about its international position and role in addition to pandemic prevention.

**Hypothesis:** In 2020, Taiwanese people paid price for pandemic prevention, but successful pandemic prevention enabled Taiwanese to have a relatively stable environment to think about what is important to them and gradually adapt to life changed by the virus. Compared with the impact of the pandemic, the survival anxiety caused by the threat of China's annexation seemed deeper and more difficult to deal with, and people can only focus on the possible impact of the US election result on Taiwan. In the face of these existential threats and anxiety, in addition to the use of defense mechanisms such as dissociation, Taiwanese also used many positive adjustment methods. Successfully fighting the pandemic in a democratic manner and the increasing importance of Taiwan's semiconductor industry under the confrontation between China and the United States have brought Taiwan an increase in international status and an increase in national identity. Because of this, in addition to the anxiety of survival, the people of Taiwan seem to be facing the question of what Taiwan is.

[ Taiwan, 02/04/2021, Ming-Hui Hsu & Yin-Jen Lu]