

COVID-19 Taiwan International Listening Post Report

Convener: Ming-Hui Hsu

Recorder: Ian Lu

Date of event: May 22nd, 2020

The COVID-19 Taiwan international Listening Post consisted with 14 participants (4 males, 10 females, including the convener and recorder). One member did not show up until Part 3 due to mistaking the meeting time). There was a brief silence after the introduction and members' sharing in Part 1. The atmosphere was harmonic.

Part 2: Identification of major themes

Theme 1: Connecting with one's homeland (country) and oneself

Two members indicated that their career paths changed due to the COVID-19. They used to work and live in another country before the pandemic; yet, due to the COVID-19, they were forced to move back to their home town, which allowed them to re-experience and to re-learn the country where they were born into.

Theme 2: Adjusting to lifestyle changes

Many members mentioned experiencing a variety of adjustments based on the progression of the pandemic, for example, shopping methods, workplace policy and procedure, and the use of auxiliary equipment (video conferencing). This kind of adjustment also came with a varying degree of uncertainty. Encountering this pandemic, it seemed that every country was actively searching for solutions. People felt fatigued and sad as the result of these ongoing life changes.

Theme 3: Avoiding conflict re: national identity differences between Taiwan and China and struggling with getting close to each other

The atmosphere among Taiwanese and Chinese members was harmonic and restrictive, intentionally avoiding issues that would lead to tension, including cross-strait relations and the worldwide support for Taiwan's joining WHO. In Part 2 discussion, Chinese members showed the desire to get close to Taiwanese members; yet, Taiwanese members appeared to be reluctant about getting close to Chinese members.

Part 3: Analysis and hypothesis formation

Analysis:

Unknown and rapidly spreading pandemic has changed a lot of things, as little as personal life and work adjustment, as big as nations taking a conservative and nationalist path in responding to the impact of the pandemic, and the increasing strained international relations. The sudden change is a stress to everyone. Although the anxiety about contracting the COVID-19 virus has reduced, and our governments and the world have taken various actions in dealing with the pandemic, there seemed to still be a lot of uncertainties ahead, as the lifestyle we were used to has been changed completely by the COVID-19, and we did not have time to grieve the loss of our familiar lifestyles due to the anxiety to the ongoing

pandemic. Facing the sense of uncertainty, it is important to find something familiar and stable. Thus, to reconnect with one's homeland and country seems a feasible way.

Regarding the connection between Taiwanese people and their land, partly because of the success of handling the COVID-19 crisis and partly because of the international situation, Taiwan has been put under the spotlight, which made many Taiwanese people proud; yet, Taiwan has also become the focus of the global competition. Additionally, China has been oppressing Taiwan in many international functions and influencing international relations based on the "One China" policy. Interactions between Taiwanese and Chinese people would be filled with all kinds of complicated feelings. For example, China's shame about having to cede Taiwan due to the invasion of other nations in the past was compounded with the shame of feeling rejected by Taiwanese people, leading to China's nationalist sentiment about taking back Taiwan at whatever cost. Although Taiwanese people have democracy and election, they also hold a lot of sadness and anger being an long-term international orphan because of China's oppression. All these factors contributed to a lot of ambivalent and complex feelings among Taiwanese and Chinese people when both of them come close to each other. Being unable to understand each other and feeling discontent and hostile towards each other seem to be the most apparent feelings. Yet, other than the fact that it is not comfortable for Asians to express hostility and having direct conflict, Taiwan has been used as a bargaining chip, put on the frontline of the China-U.S. conflict by the U.S. As a result, people from Taiwan and China were very careful and cautious in interacting with each other, avoiding sensitive topics. They seemed to worry about the potential cross-strait conflict that could occur at any moment.

Hypothesis:

The pandemic has forced nations and individuals to react and respond. The sudden loss of one's familiar lifestyle has been exhausting and saddening. Facing the constant-changing and uncertain future (the pandemic, the lifestyle, the international relations), identifying with one's motherland culture is a coping strategy. Yet, the complex cross-strait relation, feelings, and apparent aggression are triggered by the increasingly heated international relations. Various kinds of conflicts and a war that can occur at any moment have triggered people's anxiety across the strait. As a result, in a face-to-face situation, trying hard to avoid any potential conflicts, it is very difficult to express one's deep and complicated feelings.

[Taiwan, 06/01/2020, Reporter: Ming Hui Hsu & Ian Lu, Translation (from Chinese to English): Yu-An Wang & Ming-Hui Hsu]