



Taiwan at the dawn of 2022

Report of a Listening Post held online (Zoom) Jan. 12th, 2022

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This New Year Listening Post activity was initiated by the Taiwan Group Relations Working Group, including the host –Yin-Jen Lu and the record –Zih-Ruei Wu. A total of 13 participants (4 women and 9 men; the age range from 30 to 50 years old).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

Theme 1: The epidemic has changed interpersonal connections and lifestyles and brought emotional shocks

After the outbreak of the epidemic in May, the way of life has been greatly affected. For example, work and courses have been transformed into online formats, which has brought great challenges and impacted many major decisions such as marriage and childbirth, relocation, and job change.

Theme 2: Existential threat responses to epidemics, social disasters or violent incidents, and cross-strait tensions.

In the first few months of the outbreak, the lack of vaccine doses caused great panic among the population. Some of the participants, as counseling psychologists, felt reassured and grateful that they were given priority, and were saddened by the need for the general public to scramble for places. In addition to the epidemic, there have also been many social incidents that have attracted attention, such as the Puyuma train accident and the fatal beating of the other party after the second-generation rich car accident, all of which have caused people's emotional

fluctuations and instability. The tension between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait also brings the imagination like a typhoon. These situations trigger existential anxiety and even a sense of hopelessness.

Theme 3: Different ideologies are polarized by anxiety, tend to blame and evolve into political conflict or avoidance.

Participants have different national identities and political inclinations, so that everyone has different interpretations of social phenomena and events (for example: interpretation of the increase in calls for help, interpretation of the government's strategy for purchasing vaccines, and the progress of the government's handling of social events).

Opposition and tension are also felt in the social environment. Many social events, such as the recall case, the blue-green party confrontation, cross-strait relations, and the case of a collision that turned into a case of beating to death, have shown more opposition and attacks.

In the discussion of social atmosphere and social events, on the one hand, many people seem to feel that if their survival is threatened, the government should take full responsibility no matter what. But on the other hand, We also feel that criticism cannot be made, for example, dramas that promote local values and the government cannot be criticized, criticism will lead to extreme attacks.

We feel that criticism represents the contempt and abandonment of the country and the land, making the individual quiet and silent. In a society full of high-profile and antagonistic emotions, the news or gossip of artists seems to be a collective outlet. For example, Qiu Ze and Xu Weining's marriage, Wang Leehom's divorce and follow-up events, etc., are a topic that everyone can focus on at the same time and is safe.

Theme 4: Ethnic differences within Taiwan have been highlighted due to the epidemic.

In response to the impact of the epidemic and epidemic prevention policies, many industries have also suffered a huge impact. As a result, the catering industry has been hit hard and forced to transform. The livelihood of many practitioners is being greatly affected by the epidemic, but on the other hand, it can be seen that the Taiwan stock market has reached a new high, and the electronic technology industry and investors have ushered in huge gains.

Theme 5: Exploration and promotion of Taiwanese identity.

Taiwanese began to gradually develop and expose Taiwanese local culture

through media such as film and television, drama, symphony orchestra, ballet company, etc., and let Taiwanese culture be seen in different ways, which may be regarded as a development of Taiwanese cultural subjectivity. In the trend of international relations, we can see that Taiwan's position has changed from only talking about cross-strait relations and US-China relations in the past to now discussing Indo-Pacific relations, European relations, etc. With the increase and expansion of related regions and international organizations, Taiwan gradually has a different status. But from another point of view, Taiwan may be like an orphan in terms of identity. Some people want to be American, and some people think it should be closer to Japan. It seems that this orphan recognizes his parents everywhere, but there is no way to really determine who he is.

Some participants also shared that they would watch life videos on YouTube made by international students from mainland China, Hong Kong, the United States and other countries studying in Taiwan. Through these foreign students sharing their life in Taiwan, they could gain another perspective on Taiwan from outsiders, trying to understand oneself from the other.

Part III: Analysis and hypothesis formation

Taiwan in 2021 still faces various challenges, from the epidemic, social disasters and violence, and threats from China. Taiwan is an international gifted student for epidemic prevention, a member of the Alliance of Democracies, and is at the forefront of facing the expansion of the Chinese Communist Party. This has made Taiwan constantly valued by other countries in recent years, and its relationship with the world has gradually changed. Taiwan also has more opportunities to develop and explore its own identity and positioning. For Taiwan and Taiwanese, "identity" has always been an inescapable issue. Both geographical location and historical context make Taiwanese's identity in a relatively unstable state, so it is important to establish one's own identity.

However, this year (2021), Taiwan's first major outbreak and home isolation are challenging the positioning of gifted students for epidemic prevention, and it also challenges the original identification of epidemic prevention. Various industries have been impacted by the epidemic, and the public has become particularly anxious and powerless because they are facing the virus at close range for the first time. In the process of fighting the epidemic, people have different views and opinions on the government's anti-epidemic actions and negligence due to different ideologies and identities. In the early stage of epidemic prevention, the scarcity of vaccines brought anxiety and powerlessness to the whole society. With the implementation of the third level alert, the differences between different ethnic groups have also been

highlighted at a practical level. For example, the catering and blue-collar ethnic groups, and technology upstarts are unequally interested in the economy; medical staff can give priority to vaccination. It also includes the way people ease themselves when there is no epidemic crisis, such as connecting with people, traveling, etc., which are blocked to relieve anxiety. When the identity of epidemic prevention is challenged, the sense of powerlessness and anxiety cannot be relieved, and differences emerge, the contradiction between different nationality and ethnic groups with political identities has deepened, and the tension of confrontation has gradually heated up and turned into a political conflict. However, they also choose to avoid conflicts because they are uncomfortable. In this process, it can also be seen that the Taiwanese people show a fight or flight response in the basic survival assumption when dealing with high anxiety situations such as the existence of issues related to life and personal identity.

Hypothesis:

On the whole, because of its epidemic prevention performance and the improvement of its international status, Taiwan can identify with itself, and has also carried out different country-to-country relations and explorations. However, the outbreak of the epidemic in the past few months not only challenged such a identity of epidemic prevention, the various differences highlighted by the vigilance measures, but also injected into the whole system a sense of anxiety and powerlessness that cannot be relieved by the usual way of life. The way of blaming others in order to ease emotions increases the existing tension in the system about pro-China or anti-China, and too much tension evolves into political confrontation or direct avoidance.

[Taiwan, 01/28/2022, Yin-Jen Lu, Zih-Ruei Wu , Ming-Hui Hsu]