



## **Taiwan at the dawn of 2020**

### **Report of a Listening Post held online (Zoom) Jan. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Convener:** Ming Hui, Hsu    **Recorder :** Ian Lu

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

8 people (6 males, 2 females, including the convener and recorder) attended the gathering via Zoom. At the first 7 minutes, the whole group was silent. During the sharing process that followed, some had great difficulty expressing themselves, which suggests anxiety about differing from others' political views and offending others. Key content of the sharing is as follow:

- When reading internet news last year, it was not possible to receive complete information, whether it was due to the limitation of personal ability or the control of government; this reminds me of the decoding of historical files by the Transitional Justice Commission (TJC). Due to different confidentiality levels, some files were not released immediately and some have disappeared entirely.
- Many traffic accidents happened to food delivery motorbike drivers. Thinking of the earthquake that happened in Hualien at the beginning of the year and the upcoming election, it feels that there were many forms of earthquakes in 2019, a year full of surprises and tragedies.
- When it comes to the term, differences, I thought of the passing of same-sex marriage law on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019. When the minority group wish to integrate with the majority, should we break the social frame or should the majority design a special law for the minority group? The communication between the two groups did not seem to bring understanding, but it felt like a small step forward and some space was made to hold different voices. I think Taiwan is great!
- I didn't attend the Pride last year but I heard from my friends that they had great time. It reminds me of the pride of minority groups. I really think Taiwan has the space for diversity. I remember in the sex rights parade last year, many disabled people attended, too; It is truly inspiring and it is a proof of Taiwan's democracy.

- Taiwan faced the threat of the Fall armyworm and African swine fever last year, it made me realize that Taiwan is connected to the world at all times; I used to have this illusion of Taiwan being an isolated island.
- I felt geographically close to China when I went to Kinmen. I'm glad we still have braised pork rice to eat. I appreciate the government's effort in guarding a place that is so close to the infected area of swine flu; the feeling is much stronger than what I experienced in Taiwan.
- The protest for anti-extradition law in Hong Kong attracted the majority of attention last year, I felt that this event impacted Taiwan on many levels, including national security, economic growth; it also aroused the difference in opinions by different generations; it was like the protest was happening in Taiwan. The protest has been going on for half a year already and no one knows how it's going to end; similar to Taiwan's next presidential election.
- The protest of Hong Kong did not just happen in Hong Kong. I am from Macau and I studied in a high school that implements patriotic education. When I posted articles to support the protestors in Hong Kong, I lost many friends and experienced conflicts with my family. I am very confused about whether the conflict roots in information gap or other reasons. I experienced a lot of internal struggle and conflict cause many things cannot be spoken publicly.
- I work in higher education and have practiced counseling for about 30 years. I observed that the tension between opposing sides intensified half a year before the presidential election, which had an impact on students; counseling center's intake cases doubled. I noticed the impact of the protest in Hong Kong on the students and me; I also witnessed the conflict between the young and the old. It is possible that the older generation seeks security and the younger one seek freedom and democracy. 2019 is an important year for China, there is something different in the air compared to previous years.
- The U.S.-China trade war last year stimulated nationalism and it reached the peak at China's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of founding. Soon after their 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, President Xi Jinping announced the one-country-two-systems policy for dealing with Taiwan.
- There was a saying in Transitional Justice Commission (TJC) events that everyone has a little 'garrison command' inside of us; how does one calculate the merits and faults of a government in the history? There was a news in November regarding President Tsai, Ying-wen offering compensation of 200 million dollars for the Lanyu residents; the residents rejected the compensation and proposed that this money to be used on the transfer of nuclear waste. When the government deals with the breakdown of relationship between itself and

specific groups, the historical context of every event has to be taken into account; this is why the implementation of transitional justice can be very challenging.

- It reminds me of a movie called 'Detention' which was adapted from a Taiwan-made video game. The screening of Detention aroused a lot of discussion about past history and transitional justice.
- Initially I was not able to attend this event because I had to take my pet to the veterinary. I truly feel that female is a minority group in this meeting; it could be due to that for women with a family, evening time is usually devoted to family and the responsibility of dealing with various situations; I feel a sense of loss to see all females leaving the meeting early today. I find it very interesting to reflect on the process of me being a female who tries to find the balance between work and family. I can feel that 2019 is a turning point for Taiwan's political situation. Females have to take care of family as well as work and is a minority group in the society.
- I would like to respond to an earlier topic on how I felt about certain media manipulating the electorates. I am wondering the possibility of electorates in this democratic era being manipulated unconsciously into opposing standpoints. Some political figures express their personal style in a very intense/violent way. It would require a lot of effort and hard work to resolve the damage caused by opposition.
- The anti-infiltration bill was passed on the last day of 2019.

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

### **Theme 1: Taiwan identity, progress and reflection on human rights in Taiwan**

Many attendees expressed their identification with Taiwan as a nation and expressed that they were proud of the human rights progress in Taiwan last year with the passing of the same-sex marriage law (the first in Asia). At the same time, they expressed that more could be done on transitional justice, female equal rights and aboriginal rights. Apart from the legal reforms regarding human rights, some attendees mentioned the self-censorship on personal thoughts rooted in the long history of authoritarian governing in Taiwan.

### **Theme 2: Presidential election, societal divide, and crisis of democracy**

As it was before the presidential election, the conflict between the pro-China (security seeking, older generation) and anti-China (freedom and democracy seeking, younger generation) continued to intensify. People were constantly bombarded by overloading, emotional, extreme or even false information through social media

websites and apps, making it much harder to think rationally; people can easily accept or reject information without thinking. With the availability of social media platforms, everyone can express their views and receive support, resulting in the intensification of oppositions between people with different standpoints. The bombing of information and populism during the election process makes people worry about the crisis of democracy, even losing democracy.

### **Theme 3: The impact of China, Hong Kong, and international situation**

The anti-extradition law protest in Hong Kong helped Taiwan see clearly the reality of China's one-country-two-systems policy; most Taiwanese believed that Taiwan should keep a good distance from China. The trade war initiated by the U.S. against China and the international community being aware of China's dominating ambition provided support for Taiwan. Taiwan faces enormous pressure from China. The bombing of information and populism mentioned in Theme 2 is partly due to the infiltration and information war launched by China; it is fortunate that Taiwanese government is devoted to fighting the attack and infiltration (including African swine flu) by China and has gained support from the majority of Taiwanese people.

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

**Analysis:** Last year was the year before presidential election, people in Taiwan were experiencing a lot of anxiety due to the possibility that the ruling party may change; supporters of DPP worried that Taiwan may be annexed by China if KMT came into power thus lost freedom and democracy; supporters of KMT worried about the exacerbation of the relationship between Taiwan and China and its impact on Taiwan's economy if DPP stays in power. These survival anxieties are the basis of the opposition between the supporters of the two camps; part of this opposition can be traced to a series of historical conflicts, execution of martial law, white terror and other events between the Chinese who retreated with KMT and local Taiwanese after the WWII; the other part is contributed by the rise of China's power in recent years and its attempt to take over Taiwan.

The history of Taiwan after WWII can be seen as a process of transformation from dictatorship to democracy. It has only been 32 years since the lifting of martial law; the first presidential election took place 23 years ago; the first rotation of political party happened 19 years ago; and only 4 years ago did the process of transitional justice officially began. From the perspective of the history of democracy, Taiwan is still very young, burdened with the shadow from the period of dictatorship in the past, such as self-censorship, but it is also a country that is passionate in pursuing freedom and democracy and was proud of its achievements (e.g. becoming the first Asian country to pass the same-sex marriage law).

China has expanded its international influence through rapid economic growth (e.g. the belt and road initiative). However, as a totalitarian country, the value it tries to export contradicts with the value of democratic countries. As the leader of the democratic countries, the U.S. became alert to China's unfair trade practices and threat to global democracy, and initiated the trade war two years ago against China. The Chinese leader proposed a one-country-two-systems policy as a method for taking over Taiwan and indicated that China would not give up military force in achieving this goal. The anti-extradition law movement in Hong Kong last year made it clear to Taiwanese people that if accepting this policy, the existing democracy would be chipped away gradually by China like what happened to Hong Kong.

Two additional events last year made Taiwanese people wary of China. The first was that during the election process, in addition to the domestic opposition between pro-China and anti-China camps, China has made attempts to influence Taiwan's election results through infiltration and information war. With more knowledge on China's infiltration and information war tactics, Taiwan started to reflect on the limitation of existing democratic system and on ways to prevent China from infiltrating and attack. The second event was the loss of control of the African swine fever epidemic in China and the outbreak of African swine flu into nearby countries. As pork is the main source of meat in Taiwan, Taiwan was very worried about being affected by this epidemic and has tried very hard to prevent this from happening.

**Hypothesis:** 2019 is the year before the presidential election, in the face of possible rotation of political party, both pro-China and anti-China camps have developed intense survival anxiety due to such uncertainty. The division of pro-China and anti-China camps can be traced back to the history of Taiwan after WWII, as well as the rise of China's power and its intention to expand its global influence and to take over Taiwan. The anti-extradition law movement in Hong Kong, U.S.-China trade war, information war launched by China targeting Taiwan's election, and the African swine fever incident all together, through the presidential election, forced Taiwan to face its deep internal conflict re: national identity and democracy, and survival anxiety as a result. Although confronting these issues is very painful, it provided an opportunity for Taiwan to examine and try to integrate these conflicts.

[ **Taiwan, 02/02/2020, Reporter: Ming Hui Hsu & Ian Lu, Translation (from Chinese to English): Vincent Hsu**]