



An Organisation for Promoting
Understanding of Society

LISTENING POST

Taiwan at the Dawn of 2019

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part, the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they: in work, unemployed or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, voluntary or leisure organisations; or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives': the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2, the aim collectively was to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

The 2019 New Year Listening Post event was initiated by Group Relations Taiwan, a newly formed organization that promotes the learning of Group Relations in Taiwan.

The sharing started with one member mentioning the recent Kaohsiung City Mayor election and the deification of the elected major, Han, Guo-Yu. The last sharing was the experience that during the election season, friends would express their points of view online but would not have a discussion in person. This pattern resulted in seeing the difference among people more easily, but not what they had in common. It seemed that everyone was searching some kind of identification from those living in their echo chamber.

All the sharing between the first and the last one is described below in the order of time sequence:

- I was not familiar with many of the issues included in the 2018 Taiwan Referenda because I was overseas. I did have a clear opinion on gay marriage issue, but I had no idea about the rest. I feel it is not easy to be a modern citizen that one needs to pay attention to so many things.
- I am semi-retired. Many of my colleagues who retired in recent years decided to stay in Taiwan. I feel Taiwan is very friendly toward the elderly. In addition, I feel grateful for those who are willing to give birth and raise children. Although I do not understand those who do not enter marriage nor do those who do not want

to get pregnant, it does not seem to be a bad thing.

- I was struck by the news that Chi, Po-Lin (director of the film, 'Beyond Beauty - Taiwan from Above') died in a helicopter accident. For me, it made the saying that "those whom the gods love die young" come true. I decided to donate to his foundation, hoping that his good intention can carry on.
- My mind was preoccupied the entire 2018 by the petitioning, confirming, campaigning, and voting for the anti- and pro-gay rights referenda. My emotion was constantly affected by the actions and news of the anti-gay side. Last year was my most politically involved year.
- I felt quite upset with Han, Guo-Yu being elected. I felt that he is not a good person, and he constantly changes his political views.
- I am also considering retiring recently. I am not married. I used to work as a freelancer, but needs to take care of my parents this year, gradually feeling less free. I have been pushed to the position of assuming responsibilities more and more.
- The election made me feel that many logical communication methods do not work. Living in this society, facing public affairs, I can barely take care of myself, let alone taking care of others. Just like an old saying "Under the bright sunshine, everybody takes care of his own life." I feel that I don't stand up to injustice as before.
- What was most memorable for me last year was the passing away of Jing-Yong, a famous Chinese martial art and chivalry novelist. I grew up reading his novels, which contain some philosophy on life. I resonate very much with him and his work; however, many people had different views on him, which confused me.

(There was a 20-second silence. The host broke the silence by saying "maybe we have anxiety about what topics we can share and the uncertainty what stances each of us takes on these issues.")

Different political talk shows make different arguments about the same issue, which makes me feel like we are living in parallel worlds. The reason Han, Guo-Yu won the election was that he turned Kaohsiung around. People in Kaohsiung wanted to have things changed. The climate changed immediately after Han was elected because now everyone saw the importance of economy.

The younger generations are having a hard time. The news that Sun, An-Tso fell into the wrong path was a pity. But he was able to hold on to the life goal he set out for himself and turned into an Internet celebrity. Sun's story reminds me of those of many middle- and small-size businesses in Taiwan, working hard while the environment is difficult.

I have quite complex feelings toward last year. Last year's election made me witness that the society as a whole made a coarse decision and only few people were aware of it. I usually don't discuss politics because people around me seem only interested in convincing other people. But through the Election Bulletin, experimental education, and a middle school classmate running for councilman, I know there are many other choices in facing politics. I wonder if everyone sees it.

I have contact with two LGBT students, but I often wonder whether the phrase “supporting LGBT” when said from a heterosexual position would imply that LGBT are in a weakened position. If we don’t reflect on it, this label can be easily exploited.

2018 was a very busy year for me. Because I was doing an internship, there were many changes and adjustments. The most memorable thing was the popularity of Chinese palace drama, not sure whether this is because everyone was nostalgic. I also recall a sudden popularity of honey lemonade matched with an old song.

As far as people's livelihood, 499NT for an unlimited data plan, I remember me following other people waiting on line for that plan without thinking. I cared about the amount of money I spend, but why? I also browse PChome and Shopee websites for discounts in order to get the best price. I also recall everyone went crazy buying toilet paper when the price was lowered.

When I saw the mobilization of the two opposing groups on same-sex marriage referenda, I was very curious about what people experienced when they were shouting slogans. It made me think of the rising of populism and fake news. I feel the information I receive is not diverse enough. We only know what we are fed.

I feel confused and tired facing different stances and parallel worlds. I don't want to speak up. I feel these people are asserting their identity through emphasizing their positions, and I am not part of their identity. I paid most attention to my Christian friends during the same-sex marriage referenda. I feel that the opposite voices are silenced. I really want to go outside of my echo chamber to see.

The thing that touched me most last year was the speech by a movie director in her receiving a Golden Horse Award, “I hope someday our country can be treated as an independent entity.” This kind of speech makes me feel proud. Although different voices may cause conflict, this is democracy, it feels safe and struggling at the same time.

What I faced last year had to do with life and death. The death of some friends and celebrities made me think of the change of generation. When I traveled to India, I was very worried about my uterine fibroids condition, but I was fine there. It was after I got back to Taiwan I fell ill. Though my body was relieved after the surgery, my thyroid started to inflame. These are the things I wanted to run away from, but they kept coming back. I feel my body is not as healthy as before. Now I am very sensitized toward my body condition and those of my families.

Three themes have been identified:

Theme 1: Identification of Political Ideology

This theme has to do with the identification of various political ideologies related to the election and referenda held in Taiwan last year, especially the identification of political parties (the blue camp as represented by the Chinese Nationalist Party vs. the green camp as represented by the Democratic Progressive Party), Gay Right (proposing vs. opposing same-sex marriage), and National Identity (Taiwan vs. China-based).

Theme 2: Diverse Voices and Societal Split

Theme 2 has to do with the opposition, indifference, and lack of communication between the opposing political-ideological groups mentioned in Theme 1. Political ideology can be

mainstream or alternative. For example, opposing of gay marriage was the mainstream. Generational difference was a main factor in societal split. Compare with the younger generation, the older generation had more conservation value (e.g., opposing gay marriage). Through the election and referenda, this kind of split and opposition was highlighted and the society was unable to integrate, falling into adolescent-like identity confusion. Furthermore, with fake news abound and too much information to digest, the confusion exacerbated.

Theme 3: System-Level Existential Anxiety and Coping Methods

Theme 3 has to do with system-level existential anxiety and hopelessness resulted from being in a society with a confused identity mentioned in theme 2. System-level existential anxiety exhibits itself in anxiety toward sickness and death, not entering marriage, not having children, decreased birth rate in the population, and feeling anxious and hopeless about future. Faced with such anxiety, many people cope by pursuing small bliss and bargains in consumptions, taking part in election/referenda, and seeking cultural and spiritual solace.

PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In Part 3, the participants were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here, participants were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world: their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

Analysis: Political oppositions in Taiwan originated primarily from the opposition between two political ideologies represented by the KMT (seeing China as the homeland and Taiwan as a temporary base before returning) and the DPP (seeing Taiwan as the homeland). The 228 Incident in 1947 followed by the 40-something years of "White Terror" caused huge trauma in Taiwan which led to hatred between people from these two distinct backgrounds. Although the actual incidents have been slowly forgotten over time after the democratization of the society, the psychological trauma and societal oppositions have continued until this day. It is because of this opposition and not knowing others' political identification background, the participants at the Listening Post experienced a period of awkward silence during the Part 1 sharing.

The long-term identity split and opposition in the Taiwanese society puts its people in a long-term identity confusion, just like a teenager stuck in an identity state full of confusion and conflict, not being able to complete the task of internal integration and feeling extremely anxious. The huge amount of fake news and information in the mass media that is hard to absorb has amplified such anxiety.

In addition to the split and conflict of the national identity, dividing opinions on whether same-sex marriage should be legalized is also a factor contributing to the split of the Taiwanese society. Generally speaking, the older generation is

more conservative and less in favor of same-sex marriage than the younger generation.

Besides the internal factors in Taiwan, international situation, particularly the China factor, contributes a great deal to the spit and conflict in the Taiwanese society. As a result of its rapid economic growth, China has become a powerful nation in the world in recent years and is aggressively expanding its influence on the world order. Although the Chinese government does not have jurisdiction over Taiwan, it sees Taiwan as part of China, and has been increasingly using its economic and diplomatic power to suppress Taiwan's sovereignty globally and within Taiwan, with the ultimate goal of taking over Taiwan. For examples, threatening airline companies around the world to change Taiwan from a nation to a province of china, feeding Taiwan with fake news to manipulate the election, fostering pro-Communist China forces inside Taiwan using monetary incentives, and threatening Taiwan through missile deployment and sending military aircraft to circle Taiwan. Despite the profound influence China factor has on Taiwan, the general public in Taiwan, including the participants at the Listening Post, can be easily oblivious of it.

Hypothesis: The opposing ideology related to national identity, China's high pressure and conciliatory strategies towards Taiwan, and the influence of social media and fake news have caused identity split, disorganization and helplessness, and system-level existential anxiety in the Taiwanese society. Faced with such anxiety and helplessness, many people cope by pursuing small bliss and bargains in consumptions, taking part in election/referenda, and seeking cultural and spiritual solace.

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