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### Taiwan's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

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# Taiwan's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

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APS 650: Capstone Project

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### **Abstract**

Taiwan has constructed a response to the COVID-19 pandemic that not only has largely protected its citizens from the rapid community spread that has devastated larger countries around the world, but has also, commanded acclaim from the World Health Organization (WHO). Ironically, the WHO has refused to allow Taiwan entry into the organization because of the island's tenuous relationship with China. The tensions between Taiwan and China are rooted in a post-World War II history that is predicated on Taiwan's self-governing assertions despite China's desire to consider it as part of the mainland. Such geopolitical and economic tensions have continued to the present. Understanding Taiwan's approach to managing the pandemic may provide insights into what has worked in terms of a practical nation-wide response model and how important readiness was for the island after it dealt with the 2003 SARS outbreak. Moreover, despite continued tensions between Taiwan and China, the assistance that Taiwan has provided – and is continuing to offer – to the world community concerning the outbreak has shifted perspectives on the international status of the island as a regional and world power. From possible membership into the WHO to establishing partnerships with various nations to fight the pandemic, Taiwan's response has made it a viable player on the international stage.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, China, international relations, Taiwan, World Health Organization (WHO)

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the world in myriad ways, from global travel to economic impact to social interaction and beyond. The first case reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) was a pneumonia of unknown origin in Wuhan, China on December 31, 2019.<sup>1</sup> On January 30, 2020, “the outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern” by WHO.<sup>2</sup> On February 11, 2020, the WHO announced “a name for the new coronavirus disease: COVID-19.”<sup>3</sup> On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was officially declared by WHO to be a global pandemic.<sup>4</sup> According to the WHO, it is the first coronavirus to trigger a pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Every country around the world has been forced to respond, be it closing entirely like Italy or Spain, or deciding not to shut down at all to build herd immunity, like Sweden. Many Asian nations opted for shutdowns to avoid further spread of the virus. Taiwan (Republic of China) was praised for its COVID-19 approach both because of the speed of its response and its ability to mitigate the spread enough to keep case counts lower than other nations comparable in size and scope. Taiwan is not a member of the WHO because of its contentious relationship with the People’s Republic of China (mainland China). China does not recognize Taiwan’s sovereignty and instead considers it a wayward province of China. The WHO does not recognize the sovereignty of the island either.<sup>6</sup> The United States and many of its allies have petitioned the WHO to invite Taiwan to become part of the collective, especially because it has had successfully controlled the virus in ways that other nations have not. Analysis of the Taiwanese response to COVID-19 requires an

1. World Health Organization, “Rolling Updates on Coronavirus Disease,” *World Health Organization*, last modified May 4, 2020. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Wilfred Chan, “The WHO Ignores Taiwan: The World Pays the Price,” *The Nation*, last modified April 3, 2020. <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/taiwan-who-coronavirus-china/>.

understanding of its social, political and economic structures, and in this paper, I use qualitative data to provide insight on patterns and trends relating to the island's response and quantitative data to underscore factual support for those trends. This paper will also discuss the history of the Taiwan-China relationship, China's influence on the international community's acceptance (or lack thereof) of Taiwan as an independent state, Taiwan's relationship to the WHO, Taiwan's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and why it has been so successful. Additionally, it will include a qualitative analysis of the media coverage regarding Taiwan's successful response and efforts towards diplomacy from Taiwan.

### **History of Taiwan-China Relationship**

Among the reasons that Taiwan has not been invited to join the WHO is due to its very contentious relationship with China. Situated off the coast of mainland China, Taiwan has considered itself separate from China since 1949.<sup>7</sup> The island has always had something of a muddled history. The majority of the island's population were comprised of Han Chinese citizens (who now definitively identify as Taiwanese).<sup>8</sup> The island was taken by force by the Japanese military in 1895 and it was considered a Japanese colony until 1945, when forces surrendered to Chiang Kai-shek and his military.<sup>9</sup> The group, operating under the Republic of China moniker, had come to the island in 1949 after losing a battle with the communist party in China.<sup>10</sup> Chiang Kai-shek was insistent that his governing party represented the interest of all Chinese people, both in Taiwan and mainland China. This is one of the reasons that the world powers initially recognized Taiwan as a viable entity and its government as the official voice of China.<sup>11</sup>

7. Eleanor Albert, "China-Taiwan Relations," *Council on Foreign Relations*, last modified January 20, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-taiwan-relations>.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

Given the world's resistance to working with communist governments and the efforts to which many of most powerful countries in the world were going to stamp out communism in favor of democracy, this aligned with global values at the time. However, as mainland China grew in influence and power, especially economically, it became impossible for the world's superpowers to maintain this stance.<sup>12</sup> The shift in the United States happened during President Nixon's administration, which is also the point at which the shift in the United Nations occurred as well. The official recognition of the People's Republic of China was a turning point for the efforts of Taiwan to establish itself as a formal government for China and the voice of the nation and its people.

China considers it a province of the country, though the current Taiwanese government supports full independence from the mainland.<sup>13</sup> The 24 million people that live on the island of Taiwan, also called The Republic of China, under a democratically-elected government.<sup>14</sup> China asserts that Taiwan remains a part of China under the principle that there is just "one China."<sup>15</sup> Initially, the United States was a strong supporter of China's endeavor to remain as one, including Taiwan in this assertion.<sup>16</sup> In fact in the late 1970s, the U.S. established a commission in which it stated officially that "the United States of America acknowledges the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China."<sup>17</sup> Then-President Jimmy Carter was even unwilling to negotiate or engage in a diplomatic relationship with the ruling party of Taiwan.<sup>18</sup> However, this changed mere months later when Congress passed the Taiwanese Relations Act, meant to at least open up the possibility of diplomatic relations with Taiwan.<sup>19</sup>

12. Ibid.

13. George Wei, *China-Taiwan Relations in a Global Context* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012).

14. Albert, "China-Taiwan Relations."

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

However, while the relationship between Taiwan and China remained contentious, years later, there would be a point at which the Chinese government and the ruling party of Taiwan could find some common ground, at least for the moment. The grey area in this relationship is an agreement established in 1992 by the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang government of Taiwan. This agreement established that there could only be one China; however, there could be different interpretations of what that looked like, thus allowing Taiwan to maintain its independence from Beijing and the mainland in general.<sup>20</sup> What has further complicated this relationship is the diplomatic relationships that Taiwan has subsequently developed with other countries, including the United States.

Under the auspices of the Taiwanese Relations Act, the U.S. has provided Taiwan with an impressive cache of military weapons, which has allowed the island nation to build up its military and strategic defenses.<sup>21</sup> There has also long been the suggestion, though no official assertion, that if the U.S. had to intervene in any conflict, it would do so in an effort to aid Taiwan in fending off the much larger and more powerful Chinese presence. The grey area that provides Taiwan with a modicum of independence creates confusion at times, since Taiwan does operate much like its own country. It has been a member of the World Trade Organization since 2002 and 17 member countries of the United Nations recognized Taiwan as its own nation.<sup>22</sup> Despite its own assertion, Taiwan still grapples with the fact that it is not, in fact, independent and much of its official processes occur in the context of being part of China. In 1971, Taiwan (the Republic of China) was replaced by the People's Republic of China (mainland China) in its United Nations position.<sup>23</sup>

20. Ibid.

21. Wei, *China-Taiwan Relations in a Global Context*, 2.

22. Ibid., 3.

23. Ibid., 2.

## Taiwanese Political Structure

The challenges of Taiwan's relationships with the international community and with the WHO is predicated on political upheavals on the island. In the context of issues faced in establishing a national identity for Taiwan is the vast differences in ideologies for the governments that have had power to date. The Kuomintang party governed Taiwan from 1949 through 1987 "under martial law."<sup>24</sup> The ruling party reigned under harsh conditions and political dissent meant punishment. Indigenous populations faced discriminatory conditions and its first free elections were not held until 1996.<sup>25</sup> The Kuomintang ruling party has not supported large-scale efforts towards independence and were more than willing to ascribe to the idea that Taiwan was considered part of China.<sup>26</sup> At the turn of the millennium, however, more progressive voices began to rise on the island. Even after its loss of political majority in 2016, the party is close with many of the business leaders in Taiwan and continues to work towards efforts to reconcile with mainland China.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, since the DPP was elected in Taiwan, tensions between mainland China and the island nation have once again flared up. The party was fiercely critical of previous agreements between the Taiwanese government and Beijing.<sup>28</sup> The DPP accused the former government of "selling Taiwan to China" with its agreements governing how Taiwan could conduct itself on the international stage.<sup>29</sup> Taiwan's current president, Tsai Ing-wen, is an advocate of a two-state approach.<sup>30</sup> She stated during her campaign that most residents of Taiwan do not consider themselves a part of China and many younger demographics advocate heavily for independence from Beijing.<sup>31</sup>

24. Albert, "China-Taiwan Relations."

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Lowell Dittmer, *Taiwan and China: Fitful Embrace* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 19.

29. Ibid., 19.

30. Albert, "China-Taiwan Relations."

31. Ibid.



The DPP, now the political majority in Taiwan after the 2016 elections, is a much more progressive voice in Taiwan. It was the party founded in 1989 once political dissent was no longer punished harshly on the island. This party advocates heavily for the independence of Taiwan and has established a voice for a specific Taiwanese identity.<sup>32</sup> While the DPP has had to deal with some issues of internal corruption with its first president, it has since established its popularity on the island. When current President Tsai won the election in 2016, Beijing began a concerted effort to limit relations between mainland China and Taiwan, even going so far as to suspend “a cross-strait communication mechanism with the main Taiwan liaison office” after the election.<sup>33</sup> Tourism from mainland China to Taiwan has been restricted since the election and the island has been largely excluded from “international entities addressing civil aviation and global health issues.”<sup>34</sup> China has also exerted pressure on corporations with global reach to “list Taiwan as a Chinese province.”<sup>35</sup>

#### *International Relationships with Taiwan in the Shadow of China’s Significant Influence*

Taiwan has largely been shunned by the international community because of China’s influence. For example, Taiwan is not a member of the WHO is because China refuses to allow this to happen.<sup>36</sup> Given the power that China has managed to amass in recent years, along with its lucrative trade partnerships and economic interactions with many of the world powers, the influence and political pressure exerted by Beijing is enough to ensure that even if recognized in some areas, Taiwan will continue to exist on the fringes of many of the world’s governing entities. The United States, which may be one of the only countries willing to contend with an angry China on this issue, has repeatedly found ways in which to attempt to push the issue of Taiwan’s participation on the world stage. For example, in March 2020,

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Chan, “The WHO Ignores Taiwan: The World Pays the Price.”

U.S. President Donald Trump and his administration created the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act. The purpose of this act is to support “Taiwan’s international presence.”<sup>37</sup> Part of the push behind this act was to allow Taiwan to participate in the WHO.

### **Taiwan’s Limited WHO Presence**

In the past, China has been willing to accept limited participation from Taiwan in global organizations, often under the name of “Chinese Taipei.” For instance, during the last agreement between the Chinese and Taiwanese governments, Beijing allowed Taiwan to observe at the World Health Assembly, which “is the WHO’s highest decision-making body.”<sup>38</sup> Taiwan could only participate in this assembly, though, under the name “Chinese Taipei.”<sup>39</sup> Even still, Taiwan had to petition Beijing annually to observe and was not allowed to establish a presence at any WHO meetings, which is where the most “important health information and decisions were discussed.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, when the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected as the ruling government of Taiwan in 2016, relations broke down once again and Taiwan has not been invited back to observe or participate in any activities relating to WHA or WHO.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, where the world could have benefitted from Taiwan’s knowledge of the disease and its processes to address it, the WHO prevented this from happening in the initial stage of the pandemic..<sup>42</sup>

37. Albert, “China-Taiwan Relations.”

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Chan, “The WHO Ignores Taiwan: The World Pays the Price.”

## Taiwan's Response to COVID-19

However, part of what has further underscored the differences between Taiwan and mainland China has been its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While Taiwan has been more than transparent and helpful in providing information to WHO during the pandemic, China has been notoriously secretive regarding the impact the virus has had on the nation and the extent to which it spread. The timeline of the virus spread has also been called into question as the data from China has been largely sporadic and even inaccurate in some instances.

It is important to note that China's monetary contributions to the WHO have increased by 52% since 2014.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, contributions from WHO member states has decreased to a mere 20% of the organization's overall budget.<sup>44</sup> This has led observers to wonder if China's influence over the WHO will continue to increase because it is donating such large sums, more so than other member states.<sup>45</sup> In fact, it has been stated that the election of WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was largely successful because of China's lobbying efforts.<sup>46</sup> Taiwan has attempted to participate in the collection of information on COVID-19 in conjunctions with WHO efforts, but has reported being shunned when doing so.<sup>47</sup> When a journalist interviewed a WHO advisor and asked about the exclusion of Taiwan from the global conversation during the pandemic, the individual in question hung up the phone without warning.<sup>48</sup> The WHO then stated that it was working closely with the Taiwanese government, which Taiwan has since disputed.<sup>49</sup> Despite the issues with

43. Srinivas Mazumdaru, "What Influence Does China Have Over The WHO?" *DW*, last modified April 17, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/what-influence-does-china-have-over-the-who/a-53161220>.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

46. Jerome Cohen and Yu-Jie Chen, "Why Does the WHO Exclude Taiwan?," *Council on Foreign Relations*, last modified April 9, 2020 <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/why-does-who-exclude-taiwan>.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

communication, Taiwan has continued to share valuable information with WHO, even though the organization has not shared with its membership body or the general public.<sup>50</sup>

The Taiwanese government has maintained transparency from its end with its own Centers for Disease Control. The Taiwanese CDC has published a wealth of data on its website, updating it daily for all to see. By comparison, mainland China has not been as transparent regarding the timeline of the virus, number of people impacted and economic effects on its society. In fact, the transparency in response to the virus is one of the defining differences between Beijing and Taiwan. The online portal of this extension of the Taiwanese government has been instrumental in releasing data relating to the spread of the virus on the island. It has included the number of new cases each day, the numbers of deaths relating to the virus and the protocol for testing.<sup>51</sup> The government has also used the agency as one of its primary forms of communication regarding the virus, listing out preventative measures that can be taken from a public health perspective and using the Taiwan CDC to communicate with the public on expectations during the crisis. The Taiwanese government has been purposefully open about its data so that the information found on the Taiwan CDC website could be instrumental to other countries. The Chinese government has been markedly less transparent, which underscores some of the differences in governing ideologies between the two entities.

### **Reasons for Taiwan's Successful Response to COVID-19**

At the outset of the COVID-19 outbreak, there was a great deal of concern about any states and nations close to China. Since the outbreak was centered in China, there was a consensus in the international community that it was highly likely that China's neighboring

50. Ibid.

51. Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), last modified May 19, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov.tw/en/Disease/SubIndex/>.

regions would be adversely impacted. This was especially so in Taiwan because so many Taiwanese citizens live on the island, but often work in mainland China. Moreover, with the start of the lunar New Year, the possibility of so many people going back and forth between Taiwan and mainland China meant that the disease was more likely to spread on the island faster than just about anywhere else in the world. However, what many also did not consider was that Taiwan had learned a very costly lesson because of the 2003 SARS outbreak. Because of the required quarantine of 150,000 people on the island and the death of 81, Taiwan stood ready to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>52</sup>

One of the interesting components of the way that COVID-19 has impacted Taiwan is the fact that the island nation did not have as many confirmed cases as mainland China despite its close proximity to what is now considered the ground zero of the outbreak. It is important to note that in January, even as the rest of the world was still trying to recognize if there even was a danger to monitor, two countries began reporting in earnest: Australia and Taiwan.<sup>53</sup> Both countries have a similar profile in terms of population and the fact that they are both islands.<sup>54</sup> Both also have strict border controls in place and have close ties with mainland China.<sup>55</sup> However, after 10 weeks, Taiwan had less than 400 cases while Australia had almost 5,000.<sup>56</sup> This is the quantitative approach to the data, which underscores the fact that Taiwan had one of the most efficient responses in the world. The cases in Taiwan have continued to be well lower than many other areas of the world and the stringent and measured containment approaches that Taiwan has implemented seem to be holding. In fact, those countries that

52. James Griffiths, "Taiwan's Coronavirus Response Is Among The Best Globally," *CNN*, last modified April 5, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/04/asia/taiwan-coronavirus-response-who-intl-hnk/index.html>.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

initiated full-scale lockdowns of their citizens have not realized the effects that Taiwan has even when the island has not had to take such stringent measures.

It is important to note that part of the reason that Taiwan has not had to initiate such harsh measures, to the degree that many of its counterparts have, is because there is a high degree of trust between the island's citizens and its government. There is also a collective idea of shared responsibility among Taiwanese citizens that kicked in at the outset of the pandemic. The government did not have to move to a sanctioned lockdown process since it not only already had the cooperation of its citizens, but also, it had measures in place to provide for citizens who were opting to stay home. Citizens had access to everything from money to food to medicine delivered to them as needed so that they could cooperate with the government's insistence that it was much safer to stay in the house. This prevented the kind of community spread that created so many problems in places like the U.S., Italy and Spain.

### **Qualitative Analysis of Taiwan's Well-Publicized Results**

A qualitative approach to understanding the response that Taiwan had to the virus can be seen in the response seen in news reports, many of which consist of praise for the island's efforts. The qualitative data used was centered on the themes in the various media reports about Taiwan's efforts and trends seen in some of the international outlets. Analysis was conducted based on the consistency of these themes and the positive references to the island's COVID-19 response. Taiwan has long been something of an outlier in the international community. Even those countries that may have quietly supported Taiwan often did not do so publicly to risk the ire of a mighty and powerful China. The spread of this pandemic and the degree to which so many countries have been impacted, however, has brought about a new perspective on Taiwan especially because of how well the island has done in the throes of this pandemic. Among the ways Taiwan has been recognized is because of the accuracy of its

understanding of the virus, even when China and the WHO came out with conflicting information. On January 14, 2020, the WHO tweeted that based on the information it was receiving from China, the virus did not appear to be spread from human to human.<sup>57</sup> This was indeed a grave error, especially since Taiwan had declared two weeks before that people were, in fact, passing the disease among one another.<sup>58</sup> They shared this data with the WHO and the UN's International Health Regulations reporting platform, which is where such information is meant to be reported to the world's governing bodies.<sup>59</sup> Taiwan has since furnished copies of its correspondence with WHO at the outset of the pandemic to show that it did attempt to raise alarms about the transmission of the virus and how quickly it was manifesting in China.

Taiwan did not wait for guidance from the WHO or any other body to determine what was right for its citizens. Since it already had a strong universal healthcare system in place, Taiwan established its own way of contending with the virus. Well before any other countries were issuing widespread travel bans from China, Taiwan implemented such a step.<sup>60</sup> Even when the WHO and other governing agencies said that face masks were not necessary nor effective in stopping the spread of the virus, Taiwan went into production of face masks anyway and distributed them to citizens on a massive scale.<sup>61</sup> In a conversation about future WHO participation from Taiwan, the agency has even had to acknowledge that the Taiwanese government has been significantly successful in managing the virus and has provided invaluable contribution to collecting data and learning more about the virus as events unfolded.<sup>62</sup>

57. Tim Culpan, "Taiwan's Viral Success Makes It Harder to Ignore," *Bloomberg*, last modified April 5, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-04-05/taiwan-s-advance-on-who-in-covid-19-shows-its-place-in-world>.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*

62. Taiwan News, "Upcoming WHO Key Assembly to Discuss Taiwan's Participation," *Taiwan News*, last modified May 5, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3928438>.

## WHO's Response to Taiwan's Efforts

In fact, WHO Executive Director for the Health Emergencies Programme Michael Ryan outright said that Taiwan deserves “praise” for the way that it has handled the crisis.<sup>63</sup> Ryan stated that Taiwan ran a “very good public health response” that was reflected in the island’s case numbers.<sup>64</sup> There exists a general feeling that with the WHO’s acknowledgement of Taiwan’s level of response and role in providing data that it would not be quite as easy to continue to leave Taiwan out of WHO activities moving forward after the pandemic has been resolved. Taiwan’s approach to successfully navigating the crisis has been, in part, due to experience.

Also chief among the reasons that Taiwan has had such a successful approach to dealing with COVID-19 is because it was hit so hard in the 2003 SARS outbreak as well as the 2005 H1N1 avian flu pandemic in 2005.<sup>65</sup> The Taiwanese government communicated that such close proximity to China meant that it constantly had to monitor for infectious diseases and that past experience led to a level of preparedness that guided such an effective response. The Taiwanese government said that one of the lessons from the SARS outbreak that it applied to that of the COVID-19 pandemic was the prevalence of the virus as a hospital-acquired infection.<sup>66</sup> The government said that it spent time and money upgrading its healthcare systems even before this most recent outbreak to ensure that isolation rooms were available and that there were a national infrastructure in place to deal with infectious disease outbreaks.<sup>67</sup> Taiwan has been praised in academic journals for its level of response, with

63. Kinling Lo, “Taiwan’s Coronavirus Response Wins Rare Praise from World Health Organisation,” *South China Morning Post*, last modified April 18, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3080547/taiwans-coronavirus-response-wins-rare-praise-world-health>.

64. Ibid.

65. Nicola Smith, “Taiwan’s Vice President Chen Chien-jen On His Country’s Fight With COVID-19,” *The UK Telegraph*, last modified April 18, 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/taiwans-vice-president-chen-chien-jen-countrys-fight-covid-19/>.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.



some articles detailing specifically what Taiwan did that served as a model for other countries in terms of virus response and preparedness. For instance, in a paper published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the Taiwanese government was praised for “taking 124 actions to identify potential cases of the then-emerging respiratory virus.”<sup>68</sup>

### **Taiwan Engages in International Diplomacy**

Taiwan also engaged in diplomacy, even though it was shunned on the international stage over the years and even at times in this crisis. The government announced a donation of 10 million surgical masks to allies around the world as they continued to fight the pandemic.<sup>69</sup> The island can afford to be this generous as it is producing upwards of 15 million masks per day to keep up with demand both domestically and regarding the needs around the world.<sup>70</sup> Taiwan has also increased production on those medications that have been shown to be effective in fighting the virus, with hopes of sharing those resources as well.<sup>71</sup> This has underscored a level of diplomacy among the Taiwanese government that does not necessarily mirror back the same degree of diplomatic relations that it has had since its inception. The European Union president, Ursula von der Leyen sent a tweet thanking Taiwan for its mask donation.<sup>72</sup> It was one of the first times that the EU had ever shown such a prominent display of support and gratitude towards Taiwan.<sup>73</sup> The Czech Republic went so far as to forge a medical partnership with Taiwan to battle COVID-19, citing its “strengths in the health and

68. Bill Chappell, “Taiwan Reports No New Coronavirus Cases, Adding to Success In Fighting Pandemic,” *NPR*, last modified April 14, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/14/834431383/taiwan-reports-no-new-coronavirus-cases-adding-to-success-in-fighting-pandemic>.

69. “Tsai praises Taiwan Model for managing COVID-19,” *Taiwan Today*, last modified April 7, 2020, <https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=2,6,10,15,18&post=174952>.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*

72. Jo Kim, “Taiwan’s Success Is the Bane of Beijing’s Global Coronavirus Propaganda,” *The Diplomat*, last modified April 8, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/taiwans-success-is-the-bane-of-beijings-global-coronavirus-propaganda/>.

73. *Ibid.*

medical fields” which the Czech Republic said are now being “recognized by the international community.”<sup>74</sup> The American Institute in Taiwan issued a statement in March stating much of the same regarding Taiwan’s response and the institute’s desire to partner with Taiwan to fight the pandemic.<sup>75</sup> Israel and New Zealand (which has subsequently received praise for its COVID-19 efforts and successes) both said they were modeling their response on that of Taiwan’s approach.<sup>76</sup>

Taiwan even received an endorsement of its response from a celebrity. Pop singer and Puerto Rican icon Ricky Martin praised the island’s approach to dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>77</sup> In a social media post, Martin not only congratulated Taiwan for its response, but also encouraged the rest of the world to follow suit in the way the island responded to the crisis.<sup>78</sup> He also shared an article published in the German newspaper, *Deutsche Welle*, which also praised Taiwan’s response as one of the more effective in the world.<sup>79</sup> The newspaper pointed to Taiwan’s early measures to restrict access to its borders as well as early containment of those arriving from mainland China as instrumental in stopping the virus from infiltrating communities enough to cause community spread. Also, as is the case in many other instances of praise for Taiwan, the newspaper pointed to the fact that Taiwan was already so prepared for an outbreak prior to it happening and pointed to prevention as key.<sup>80</sup>

Among the areas of policy that was cited by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control in Taiwan’s efforts was a centralized system of response that made tracking information more

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Nick Aspinwall, “Taiwan is Exporting Its Coronavirus Successes to the World,” *Foreign Policy*, last modified April 9, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/09/taiwan-is-exporting-its-coronavirus-successes-to-the-world/>.

77. Lyla Liu, “Ricky Martin Praises Taiwan's Coronavirus Prevention Efforts,” *Taiwan News*, last modified March 17, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3898543>.

78. Ibid.

79. *Deutsche Welle*, “This is How Taiwan Managed to Contain the Coronavirus Outbreak,” *DW*, last modified 2020, <https://www.dw.com/es/as%C3%AD-es-como-taiw%C3%A1n-logr%C3%B3-contener-el-brote-de-coronavirus/a-52737879>.

80. Ibid.

effective. Taiwan had in place a National Health Insurance database that allowed it to track critical virus information in real-time.<sup>81</sup> Additional critical decision-making cited by the CDC also includes a “robust nationwide public health network, comprehensive universal healthcare for all citizens, vibrant medical research and pharmaceutical industries and improved infection control practices.”<sup>82</sup> Timing was also a factor, as the government responded effectively and decisively in the first 50 days to allow such a response to permeate throughout the entire island. The systems in place also allowed it to “support disease surveillance and case detection.”<sup>83</sup> It was able to accomplish this even as case rates were rising in areas around it, including around mainland China.

### **Citizen Response to Taiwan’s Governmental Efforts on the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Moreover, Taiwanese citizens have displayed a sense of pride in their government’s response to the pandemic. According to a survey of 1,079 random Taiwanese citizens conducted by the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation, 80% of respondents approved of the job being done by the minister of health and welfare and 70% approved of the job being done by the president and the premier.<sup>84</sup> Given the fact that there are 5,700 monthly flights on average between Taiwan and mainland China, the pandemic should have had a far more significant impact on Taiwan than it ultimately has to date.<sup>85</sup> One Taiwanese citizen, Alice Chen, detailed her entire experience of coming home amid the pandemic. Studying in Italy,

81. Pikeui Tu, Ju-Hsiu Teng, Jewel Mullen, Cheryl Lin, Jih-Haw Chou, Wendy Braund, and John Auerbach, “Policy Decisions and Use of Information Technology to Fight 2019 Novel Coronavirus Disease, Taiwan,” *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, vol. 26, no. 7. 2020, [https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/7/20-0574\\_article](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/7/20-0574_article).

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. C. Wang, Chun Ng, and Robert Brook. “Response to COVID-19 in Taiwan: Big Data Analytics, New Technology and Proactive Testing,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, last modified March 3, 2020. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2762689>.

85. NPR Staff. “With Odds Against It, Taiwan Keeps Coronavirus Corralled.” National Public Radio. Last modified March 13, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/03/13/814709530/with-odds-against-it-taiwan-keeps-coronavirus-corralled>.

she was unsure of what to expect when she arrived in her native Taiwan and discussed the experience in detail starting with being approached by a nurse in protective gear ready to help Chen begin the process of navigating this new way of life in Taiwan.<sup>86</sup> The entire process includes safeguards along the way, including a mandatory 14-day quarantine, filling out a few simple forms about her health (she had a fever about 10 days prior to coming back to Taiwan and disclosed this information immediately), a hospital visit to be tested and checked thoroughly complete with government-provided meals and a \$3 USD hospital bill for the experience.<sup>87</sup>

The government continued to check on Chen as she adjusted to life in quarantine even after leaving the hospital. Citizens were more than willing to adhere to the government restrictions for their safety, especially since they could rely on the government to provide them with funding, necessities and anything else they needed while sheltering in place. What was interesting about this response and the degree to which the citizens displayed trust in their government was that Taiwan never officially shut down.<sup>88</sup> Most sheltered in place because the government told them it was the best thing to do and they did not question the response. Citizens were provided with a daily monetary stipend as well as complimentary Wi-Fi access and food and supply packages.<sup>89</sup> Since they vital supplies, food and money, citizens had no reason to challenge the government's assertions and clearly what the government was doing already was working. Citizens likely wanted to keep numbers low and realized that their cooperation was instrumental in accomplishing that endeavor.

86. Elissa Lee, "A Student's Return to Taiwan Shows What a Serious Government Response Looks Like," *Center for Health Journalism*, last modified April 20, 2020. <https://www.centerforhealthjournalism.org/2020/04/11/student-s-return-home-taiwan-shows-us-what-serious-government-response-looks>.

87. Lee, "A Student's Return to Taiwan Shows What a Serious Government Response Looks Like."

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*

## **Conclusion**

The worldwide praise for Taiwan has been well-documented through various websites, blogs, newspapers and more as the pandemic has continued to unfold. Taiwan has not only been transparent in its efforts to contain the disease, but also, it has shared data as necessary to other nations attempting to bring the spread of the virus under control. It has embarked on official partnerships and has shared nuances of its approach on its own CDC's website.

Despite the political challenges of determining the island nation's identity, Taiwan has clearly proven itself to be a global partner given its rapid and transparency COVID-19 response efforts. Even as it was shunned by the WHO because of pressure from China, the Taiwanese government continued to share vital information with the agency to help in the global fight against the spread of the pandemic. Even with the politics of the situation between international organizations, like the WHO, and its relationships with China, Taiwan should be re-considered in a much different light after its participation in sharing information about COVID-19. Taiwan has managed to stem the spread of the virus in ways that other countries have not been able to do successfully, which underscores the efficacy of its approach and model of government. Moreover, the Taiwanese population is emboldened and buoyed by the support of the international community after the praise it has received in its virus response. Even when organizations like WHO allowed the political implications of the Taiwan-China relationship to get in the way of addressing the virus, the Taiwanese government elected not to engage in politics. It continued to share data, contribute ideas to addressing the pandemic and showed global partnership at a time when it was not given the same consideration. It has not only donated resources to the international community, but officials have spent time with other countries helping them to brainstorm more effective responses based on the treasure trove of experience that Taiwan has had with infectious disease epidemics.

As to whether the WHO sticks with this idea after the pandemic remains to be seen since China is very influential in the organization. However, acknowledgement of Taiwan's important contributions is essential to appreciating their role in helping other countries in such an unprecedented situation. Taiwan did not let the WHO's dereliction of duty stop in terms of fairness and accessibility for all stop it from being a good global health partner to WHO and the rest of the world. It even launched a full-scale campaign on social media called "Taiwan Can Help," in a bid to provide assistance from doctors and research from its COVID-19 experiences to the international community. It sent masks to the U.S. when it was facing a shortage of personal protective equipment. It has shared data to help with every aspect of the pandemic from testing to immunity to community spread and beyond. It is appropriate, if not compelling, to call for the WHO and other international bodies to question why Taiwan continues to be excluded on the global stage when it continuously proves its dedication as a reliable partner.

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