

## Living the Coronavirus Experiences in Taiwan

Taiwan is the first country to warn the World Health Organization (WHO) as early as late December 2019 about the possible infectivity among human beings, but Taiwan's email was completely ignored (Kerr, 2020). John Hopkins University once predicted that Taiwan would be likely to have 400,000 of its 24 million citizens infected by this pandemic because its close geographical proximity to China, the epicenter of the Coronavirus Pandemic (Stokes, 2020) and intensive cross-strait commerce and human exchange (Government Portal of Republic of China, Taiwan, 2019). But, fortunately, as of June 5, 2020, Taiwan only 443 confirmed COVID-19 cases, 7 deaths, among 73,225 tested in the country (Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, 2020). As a result, most Taiwanese people have lived their lives as normal as possible. Classes and business activities continue to be held without any disruption.

What are my daily experiences living in the time of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) in Taiwan?  
How has COVID-19 (Coronavirus) affected my personal and professional life?  
This is what this short multi-modal essay attempts to explore.

The Coronavirus is a highly contagious disease that easily spreads among people (McFall-Johnsen & Bendix, 2020). In the public health community, R0 (pronounced as R-naught) is the major metric to measure how many people without immunity could be infected by one sick individual; the number is about 2 to 2.5 according to The World Health Organization (McFall-Johnsen & Bendix, 2020). Because close personal contacts have been attributed to the spread of the Coronavirus, government agency (such as Taiwan Centers for Disease Control) has emphasized the importance of surgical masks as seen on its website below:



As a rhetorical scholar, I was particularly attracted by how visual rhetorical artefacts have been widely employed to persuade people to modify their behaviours to adjust to the new normal. For example, in the Taiwan CDC website above, the visual banner instructs people to “[w]ear surgical masks when coughing or sneezing”, “[w]ash hands thoroughly with soap”, “[a]void crowded places including hospital” (Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, n.d.).

Human ingenuity as shown in these two advertisements is particularly noteworthy to demonstrate how we should adapt our behaviours to protect us from being infected. The following two ads by Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine are meant to be public service announcements (PSA) to educate people about the needs to change their pre-COVID behaviours. These two ads have shown two artistic figures wearing masks for their daily activities to prevent the infection of the Coronavirus. The ad on the left-hand side has the slogan, “Pay with Card”, because using “card payments instead of cash, may significantly reduce the spread of the infection. On the

right-hand size, another ad, it advises people should use delivery services to reduce “the number of contacts and minimize the risks of infection”.



As shown in these two Ukrainian ads above, masks have become part of daily human experiences in the COVID-19 Era. I remembered that, when I studied at The University of Texas at El Paso, I observed my Hispanic friends kiss each other on the cheek when they greet each other. With the new normal of mask-wearing and social distancing, it is less likely for people to be close to each other, particularly if they are required to wear masks in public.

In Taiwan, the Coronavirus has also dramatically changed people’s daily experiences like what have happened in many other countries around the world. I recalled when I commuted from my home in Taoyuan by train to Keelung at the northern tip of Taiwan’s northern coast, I used to enjoy a relaxing train ride of 2 ½ hours. When I transfer at a train station, the platform is usually packed with people, but most of them are relaxed and chatting with each other without wearing any mask, as seen in the photo below

(<https://news.housefun.com.tw/news/article/36534857597.html>).



However, that is before the time of the Coronavirus Pandemic. As seen in the photo below (Central News Agency, 2020/4/5), train passengers at the platform have now been required to wear masks as a mandatory measure to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. The platform is packed, but now people are wearing masks and are more intense.



Surgical masks have become the first line of defense to protect humans from being infected with this dreadful diseases. At this stage, surgical masks are purely functional and have not caught any cultural meanings. However, as a researcher trained in rhetoric, I have increasingly observed that human creativity again has caught on to use masks to express their own individuality. For example, a San Francisco start-up, Resting Risk Face, has printed the lower part of human face on the surgical mask (Liberatore, 2020) to make the mask less intrusive. This innovative mask design has received over 30,000 visitors and generated 1,200 pre-orders of the product (Liberatore, 2020). The following three photos show unique designed to fit different target market's preferences (Liberatore, 2020). As rhetorical researcher, I am thrilled to observe how a surgical mask could become a human artefact that shows human beings' desire to be unique, while maintaining the functionality of the surgical masks.





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