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Tsai Ing-wen: Examining how the First Female President of Taiwan Managed the COVID-19 Global Health Crisis

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Abstract: At the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, a new virus later recognized as COVID-19 began to spread rapidly worldwide, with the first major outbreak starting in Wuhan, China. Just across the strait sat Taiwan, headed by newly re-elected president Tsai Ing-wen. As the threat of COVID-19 became clearer, Tsai, the first female president of Taiwan, was tasked with deciding how to handle what seemed to be an incoming global pandemic. Throughout the decision process, Tsai was forced to consider a myriad of factors when determining the best course of action for her country, including her reputation as the first female leader of Taiwan, the lack of international support after Taiwan was banned from the WHO, the poorly managed health crisis from SARS in 2003, and the political and economic security of Taiwan as a country. Through her strong and effective leadership, Taiwan emerged from the pandemic as one of the few success stories.

Introduction

On January 21, 2020—nearly a month after the emergence of a mysterious, flu-like illness in Wuhan, China—Taiwan reported its first case of the novel COVID-19 virus. The diagnosis came just days after the start of the Lunar New Year celebrations, the most important holiday in Taiwan and much of East Asia. While citizens hesitantly prepared travel plans for the upcoming festivities amidst rumors of a "pneumonia" outbreak, the Taiwanese government prepared for a far more serious scenario: a global pandemic. At the head of these preparations was Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan's first female president, who had been reelected for the position just nine days prior. Over the next few days, Tsai would be tasked with the unprecedented task of deciding how to lead Taiwan through the largest public health crisis of the twenty-first century.

The Makings of a Leader

Tsai Ing-wen was born on August 31, 1956, in Pingtung County, Taiwan, to a Hakka Chinese father and Aboriginal Taiwanese mother (BBC 2024). As a child, Tsai's family moved to Taipei, where she later attended National Taiwan University and earned her degree from the College of Law before moving abroad to earn her Master of Law from Cornell University in the United States (BBC 2024). Following her time at Cornell, Tsai went on to earn her PhD in Political Science from the London School of Economics in the United Kingdom (BBC 2024).

Upon completing her degrees, Tsai returned to Taiwan and taught law classes at Soochow University and Chengchi University before transitioning into politics in the 1990s. There, she held positions in the Fair Trade Commission, Copyright Commission, Mainland Affairs Council, and National Security Council before the turn of the millennium (Cooper 2012). Yet, it was not until

Commented [CH1]: OVERALL EDITS:

Truly remarkable job, Olivia. This is a fantastic case. You have such a clear protagonist and dilemma, and your writing style fits perfectly into the case study format. Great work! Here are the main things you need to focus on for this round of edits:

1. **COVID-19 NEWS SPREAD:** This is probably my biggest edit, which I've expanded on below, but I think you need to add at least a paragraph about the news of COVID-19 reaching Taiwan and establishing that particular timeline.

2. **MINOR REPETITIVENESS:** One of my main recurring comments to you were small instances of repetitive word choice. You'll see those flagged throughout your case study, but check for it on your own as well.

3. **APSA FORMATTING ERRORS:** There are a few issues with citations not fitting into the APSA guidelines. Again, I've flagged some instances of these, but make sure to carefully look over your case and references and check for yourself.

Overall, excellent work! This was such a great case to read.

Commented [CH2]: Spell out centuries. See APSA Style Guide page 21

Commented [CH3]: Excellent introduction; you do such a good job of swiftly introducing the stakes of the dilemma, the protagonist, and the dilemma itself.

Commented [SS4]: This is a fantastic introduction! Instead of saying "how to lead Taiwan..." I would like for you to briefly lay out the specific options she was deciding between.

Commented [SS5R4]: Or rephrase to say it without the colon, i.e., "...Tsai would be faced with the unprecedented task of deciding how to lead..."

Commented [SS6]: I would love to see you get a little more creative with the header

Commented [CH7]: I don't love where this is now so feel free to play around with it but it felt a bit awkward in its original position.

Commented [SO8R7]: how awkward does it feel where it is? i'm happy to keep it where it is since i can't think of a much better alternative, but if it reads very awkward i'll keep brainstorming on how to move it

Commented [SS9]: Make sure you cite all of the information in this paragraph

Commented [SS10]: Split this into two sentences because there's a lot of information - this is where I would make the split, but do what feels right to you!

Commented [SS11]: I want you to put in this clarification because she does continue in politics after these positions

the year 2000 that Tsai's political career began to take off after President Chen Shui-bian appointed her the high-ranking position of chairwoman of the Mainland Affairs Council (Cooper 2012). Four years later, Tsai formally joined the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), —a left-leaning Taiwanese nationalist party, and became the legislator-at-large for the party (BBC 2024). Tsai continued to climb the ranks when, in 2006, she served as chairwoman of the Consumer Protection Commission and Vice President of the Executive Yuan, Taiwan's executive branch of government (Cooper 2012). Due to her rapid ascension in politics, by 2008, Tsai was allegedly considered as a vice-presidential candidate for presidential nominee Ma Ying-jeou. However, this rumor never came to fruition. Instead, Tsai was elected as the chairwoman of the DPP and became the first woman in Taiwan's history to hold a major political party's chair position (Cooper 2012).

As chairwoman of the DPP, Tsai became increasingly outspoken for her support of the Taiwan localization movement—a movement centered on Taiwanese nationalism, culture, and unity as a nation. She and President Ma were known to clash on this topic, causing the former president to label Tsai a "Taiwan independence extremist." In 2010, Tsai controversially identified Taiwan's government as a "government in exile," implying that Taiwan's Kuomintang (KMT)[1]-led government was still ruling with a Chinese authoritarian government model (Mo and Chao 2010). In other words, Tsai was indirectly saying that the Taiwanese government was ruling as they had decades ago in China instead of adopting a Taiwan-centered approach to leading the country, undermining their legitimacy and leading constituents to question the government's commitment to Taiwan as a nation separate from China. Although she later retracted the statement, the incident marked her as a polarizing figure in Taiwan's political scene. In 2012, Tsai decided to run for president, but lost to President Ma and subsequently resigned as the DPP's chair. Two years after her resignation, Tsai re-ran for chairwoman of the DPP and won. She helped the DPP win leadership positions in 13 of the 22 districts in Taiwan, once again strengthening her position in the party and political field (BBC 2024). Her growing support, alongside increased dissatisfaction with the KMT's economic and diplomatic policies, culminated in the 2016 Presidential Elections, which she won in an overwhelming victory, becoming the first female president of Taiwan. Notably, Tsai's victory solidified her as the first female head of state in Asia not born into a political family (Friedrich Naumann Foundation 2019).

During her first term, Tsai implemented a host of progressive reforms, raising the minimum wage, improving social services, and developing better public housing. Tsai also had a hand in legalizing same-sex marriage in 2019, making Taiwan the first country in Asia to do so (Human Rights Campaign 2025). This decision once again marked a controversial time in Tsai's career. A poll of Taiwanese citizens, taken just a few months later in 2020, revealed that 56.9% of respondents opposed the same-sex marriage legislation (Rich and Eliassen 2020).

On January 11, 2020, Tsai was reelected as the president of Taiwan, just days before the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Taiwan. Despite her 20 years in politics, Tsai was about to experience a once-in-a-lifetime test of leadership and resilience.

Taiwan 101: Understanding Cross-Strait Relations

First, to grasp Tsai's predicament in handling the COVID-19 pandemic in a country scarcely recognized internationally, it is important to understand the history of the relationship

[1] The Kuomintang was the ruling party of China before and during the Chinese Civil War, after which the party fled to Taiwan. The Kuomintang traditionally advocated for reunification with China, and today serves as the major opposition party to the DPP

Commented [SS12]: Get more specific by what you mean here - if she had already held so many positions, what made this different? Did she have more reach? More connections?

Commented [SS13]: Either clarify in the previous sentences what party President Chen Shui-bian was or what parti Tsai was before this (or if this was just that she was formally joining the party she was already operating within)

Commented [CH14]: Passive voice — reformat (see how I reformatted the sentence about President Chen Shui-bian appointed her as chairwoman)

Commented [CH15]: Use another word since you say "labeled" right above.

Commented [SS16]: Expand on what this means exactly for an unfamiliar reader

Commented [SS17R16]: And consider splitting this paragraph into two after you expand here

Commented [CH18]: Again, choose a different word.

Commented [SS19]: Say the specific number

Commented [CH20]: Can you take another sentence and expand upon this huge turn in sentiment around her? It's a pretty impressive shift in public opinion that she made, so I'd love to better understand how that happened.

Commented [CH21]: Wow, interesting tidbit!

Commented [SS22]: I want to take a chance to say that I'm really liking your writing style! It's engaging, concise, and well-tailored to the case study format. Great work!

Commented [SS23]: I see what you're getting at here and I like it, but your whole heading shouldn't be in quotes

Commented [CH24]: Can you pick another word for one of the "understand"s

between Taiwan and China. Their history of conflict and China's emergence as a global superpower would eventually lead to Taiwan's isolation on the global stage, adding an additional layer of complexity to Tsai Ing-wen's decision-making process.

In 1895, upon the loss of the Sino-Japanese War, China ceded Taiwan to Japanese control. The territory remained under Japan's rule until the end of World War II in 1945, when Japan returned control of Taiwan to China (BBC 2024). Meanwhile, the Chinese Civil War raged.

The Chinese Civil War began in 1927 but paused upon Japan's invasion of China in 1937 until resuming for the war's most impactful phase from 1945-1949 (Bultrini 2021). The two sides were headed by Mao Zedong, who led the Communist Party, and Chiang Kai-shek, who led the Nationalists. During World II, the Nationalist party acted as the governing body in China under the name the "Republic of China" (ROC). After years of fighting, the Communist Party emerged victorious, forcing Chiang and his Nationalist supporters to flee to Taiwan, where they established the ROC in Taiwan. In response, Mao and his supporters officially renamed China to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Despite this split, both governments claimed to be the "true China," a disagreement that serves as the basis of the modern-day conflict between Taiwan and China. Also at this time, China, under the PRC, attempted to join the burgeoning United Nations (UN). The UN was formed in 1945 following World War II with China under the ROC acting as one of the five permanent members, meaning that the ROC still represented China internationally, and at the time was recognized as the "true China" (Bultrini 2021).

As time went on, the PRC and ROC's ideologies increasingly diverged, and the PRC began to develop its "one-China" principle, an ideology that emphasized a unified China and necessitated the return of Taiwan to the PRC's control. Additionally, the PRC's international influence grew significantly, eclipsing that of the ROC, and more nations began to switch their allegiance from the ROC to the PRC. The advocacy for a unified China demanded that other nations in the UN rescind their recognition of the ROC as China if they wanted to build or preserve diplomatic relationships with the PRC, the party that was ruling mainland China in practice (Portada, Bem, and Paudel 2020). Both the ROC and PRC governments continued to claim to be the only legitimate Chinese government, further complicating matters. In October of 1971, due to mounting pressure from the PRC and its expanding diplomatic relationships, the UN passed Resolution 2758, recognizing the PRC as the only legitimate government of China, and effectively removing the ROC from the UN (United Nations General Assembly 1971). From then on, to avoid confusion, people began to refer to the PRC-led nation as China, and the ROC-led nation as Taiwan. This removal isolated Taiwan from international affairs and made other countries hesitant to establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan out of fear of retaliation from China.

In the following decades, China and Taiwan struggled to find a diplomatic balance between their conflicting beliefs. At the same time, Taiwan was beginning to develop its own distinct identity, and younger generations were beginning to view themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese (Jiang 2017). Then came the 1992 Consensus, a meeting between the ROC and PRC that established "One China, different interpretations" and now serves as the basis for cross-strait relations (Cooper 2012). This consensus upheld Taiwan's independence until 1997, when Britain returned control of Hong Kong to China. The expansion reignited China's desire to repossess control of Taiwan. This goal contrasted with Taiwan's 2000 election of Chen Shui-bian, the first member of the DPP to be elected president. The DPP was an avid proponent for an independent Taiwan, thus, the election angered China, worsening cross-strait relations once again. The uneasy

Commented [SS25]: Add an introduction paragraph to this section that talks about Tsai and why the history is important. I do think that this background is critical to the case, and you do a good job of writing it, but make sure you don't lose your protagonist and you ease your transitions

Commented [SO26R25]: i put in the sentence above; does this help?

Commented [CH27R25]: Yes, I think this is a good initial sentence! I think like 1-2 more sentences setting up this section would be great. Maybe some that are related to Tsai more specifically? But it's not too necessary. If you can't think of anything, it's not too urgent of an issue.

Commented [SO28R25]: added the second sentence to try to connect it back to tsai. lmk if that works?

Commented [SS29]: Check if there's an actual author listed for your BBC sources

Commented [SO30R29]: there's no author listed on the article, is it okay to just leave as "BBC"?

Commented [CH31R29]: Yes, that's okay!

Commented [SS32]: You introduce a lot of acronyms in this section but don't use all of them again. Read through and don't put acronyms in parentheses if you don't repeat them later

Commented [SS33]: Clarify what this meant for the relative independence of Taiwan from China at the time

Commented [SO34]: okay, i realized i misinterpreted a bit of the conflict, so i revised and restructured some of this paragraph, the next, and the previous line to this sentence for clarity. please let me know if this makes sense since the situation is a bit complicated so i want to make sure that it doesn't get too lost in the writing

Commented [CH35]: What was the reasoning behind passing Resolution 2758?

Commented [SS36]: Never use the word this without a clarifying word after. This what

Commented [SS37]: Who was involved? Did both Taiwanese and Chinese leadership agree? Clarify

Commented [CH38]: Bro Britain just loves to be in everyone's business don't they.

relationship was further strained in 2003, when Zhang Qiyue, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, referred to the ROC as "Taiwan, a Chinese province" (Lam 2003). However, in 2008, Chen was succeeded by Kuomintang President Ma Ying-jeou, who revitalized cross-strait relations with a more collaborative approach. Ma's diplomacy allowed Taiwan to be invited as an observer at the UN's World Health Assembly (WHA) from 2008 to 2016 under the stipulation that they join as "Chinese Taipei" (Chen and Cohen 2020). However, since Taiwan was classified as a part of China and not an independent participant, they were barred from participating in new projects, sharing information or ideas at meetings, freely attending meetings, and receiving access to the newest information on novel topics.

Upon the election of Tsai, a DPP member, tensions again rose due to Tsai's well-known stance as a staunch supporter of Taiwan's independence. Taiwan was uninvited from the WHA, effectively blocking the nation from one of the most important international forums on public health and medicine. This exclusion became especially problematic for Taiwan in December 2019, when reports emerged of a mysterious illness resembling pneumonia in Wuhan, China—an illness now identified as COVID-19. On December 31, 2019, Taiwanese health officials reported their concerns about human-to-human transmission of the virus to the World Health Organization (WHO) but were ignored (Financial Times 2020). Since Taiwan was classified as a province of China, the WHO determined that it was China's responsibility to transmit and report information coming in and out of Taiwan. Yet, due to strained cross-strait relations upon the reelection of independence-minded Tsai, China was not likely to help the nation it viewed as a rebellious province. The WHO's actions in the matter sent a strong message to Tsai concerning the new virus: help was not coming.

Lessons from SARS: a Double-edged Sword

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic resurfaced bleak memories of the SARS outbreak of 2002-2004. Taiwan's handling of the outbreak under President Chen was, as one critic put it, a "disaster" (Lin 2019). In late April 2003, Taiwan had 29 probable cases of SARS and had not suffered any mortalities. Just three weeks later, Taiwan had 264 cases of SARS and 34 recorded deaths from the disease (Hsieh, Chen, and Hsu 2004). By June 1, more than a month after SARS had passed through neighboring countries like Hong Kong and Singapore, 680 cases and 81 SARS-related deaths had been reported in Taiwan (Hsieh, Chen, and Hsu 2004). Yet, one incident in particular stayed with people after the last SARS case had recovered: Heping Hospital.

On April 24, 2003, the Taiwanese government ordered Heping Hospital to undergo a two-week quarantine after SARS cases among staff in the hospital began to rise (Cheung 2020). Under the threat of legal punishment, all of the hospital's staff and medical personnel were instructed to report for work that day to comply with the quarantine (Cheung 2020). The quarantine trapped over one thousand SARS-free patients and staff in the building with infected patients. In the ensuing days, cases in the hospital climbed, causing panic among the trapped patients and staff. It was not long before evidence of the quarantined citizens' desperation began to emerge through the news. One photo taken of the event depicted a group of medical personnel restraining their colleague at an open window on the eighth floor to prevent her from jumping out (Appendix A). Next to that window are signs written by people inside the hospital begging for help. Another photograph depicted trapped patients dangling a banner outside of their window (Appendix B). The banner read, "We are healthy people, we want separation from SARS patients. We want to

Commented [SS39]: Who is this?

Commented [SS40]: A little bit of clarification about the chain of events and causation here would be useful

Commented [SO41R40]: I edited the sentence a bit does this make more sense?

Commented [CH42R40]: I'm not sure what exactly you had before but these sentences make total sense to me!

Commented [SS43]: Excellent job tying it all together here

Commented [CH44]: Woah, I just got chills at this connection. EXCELLENT job building up and bringing it back to your protagonist and dilemma.

Commented [CH45]: Love this ending; I'm wondering, can you add Tsai in there to keep her at the forefront of the case? Maybe something like "sent a strong message to Taiwan—and to Tsai—concerning the new…"

Commented [SS46]: I really like your end of section transitions

Commented [SS47]: I like this heading. Make sure in this one and the other ones, when you edit them, that you capitalize all appropriate words

Commented [SS48]: How many weeks

Commented [CH49]: Choose a different phrase - you just used this a couple sentences earlier. Maybe "skyrocketed" or something like that?

Commented [CH50]: Gosh, this is terrifying.

Commented [CH51]: Can you say more about where these photos were published? Were they circulated via social media, or were they on the news? How did these visuals get into the public.

get out of Heping Hospital and we don't want to wait for death" (Cheung 2020). The photos terrified Taiwanese citizens and painted the picture of people trapped waiting for inevitable death.The hospital soon became a nightmare. One doctor described the hospital as "anarchy" in the first few days, as staff were given no instruction on quarantining or how to enforce it (Cheung 2020). Additionally, cases in the hospital began to rapidly rise. At one point, half of one of the ward's nurses had fallen ill with SARS, leaving the other half to tend to their colleagues in addition to the original patients (Cheung 2020). Infamously, the first nurse and first doctor to die of SARS in Taiwan worked at Heping Hospital (Liao 2020). As the two-week quarantine neared its end, the government began allocating people to different sites to quarantine, with the last group evacuating the hospital on May 8, 2003 (Chen and Fang 2024). Still, Heping Hospital served as a symbol of the government's mismanagement and strict enforcement. Although the consensus varies, one source estimated a death toll of 31 people over just a two-week period (Lin 2019).

Two decades later, when COVID-19 began to emerge in 2020, the fear and distrust of the government from the Heping Hospital incident began to reappear (Chen and Fang 2024). The lessons learned from the SARS tragedy acted as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the hospital's story was used as a cautionary tale of what could happen if the government did not act swiftly and efficiently. Therefore, some argued that Taiwan needed to shut down and implement strict mandates to prevent the new virus from becoming as uncontrolled as SARS. On the other hand, some viewed the Heping Hospital incident as the result of government authoritarianism and argued that harsh quarantines and mandates would do more harm than good to the country. No matter which side people fell on, as the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Taiwan, Heping Hospital's story weighed heavily on everyone's mind, most of all that of newly elected President Tsai Ing-Wen.

Taiwan's Iron Cat Lady

As Taiwan's first female president, Tsai's gender was a constant topic of interest in discussions of her leadership. Although more progressive than many of its neighbors, Taiwan still adheres to the traditional Confucian values that most East Asian countries follow (Larm 2012). These values create a strict hierarchy based on many compounding factors such as age, occupation, and gender (Ziliotti 2022). As a woman, Tsai ranked low on the hierarchy. According to traditional Confucian values, women are the property of their male relatives and are expected to obey their fathers, brothers, and husbands (Wang 2023). Although these traditions have been modernized to give women back much of their autonomy, the patriarchal hierarchy persists. So, while Tsai may not have been expected to follow every command her father or brother gave her, there were still many people who doubted Tsai's ability or right to hold the highest position of power in the country because of her status as a woman.

As news spread of the first COVID-19 case in Taiwan, Tsai received heavier scrutiny than ever before. At the beginning of her term, the media labeled Tsai a "cat lady," a demeaning reference to her being single, childless, and a cat owner. A Chinese news station doubled down on this gendered perception, condemning Tsai's leadership in an infamous article stating, "As a single female politician, she had no emotional encumbrances of love, no family restraint, no children to worry about. Her political style and tactics are often emotional, personalized, and extreme" (Lu and Jiang 2016, n.p.). The article's blatant prejudice received backlash from both supporters and critics of Tsai; however, it also exposed some of the public's lingering doubts about Tsai's ability to lead Taiwan as a woman. These concerns also translated to concerns of how Tsai would handle such an important public health crisis as COVID-19.

Commented [CH52]: These are haunting visuals. Can you take one more sentence to sort of describe the public's reaction to the photos? Something like "Taiwan was horrified by the images coming out of Heping Hospital" or something like that?

Commented [SO53R52]: I added a sentence, not sure if it sounds too dramatic?

Commented [CH54]: Repetitive. Rephrase or merge with next sentence

Commented [SO55R54]: i deleted some of the sentence so that it's now more of an intro/transition to the next sentence. does that sound better?

Commented [SS56]: Are there any statistics on exactly how many people (if any) from that quarantine died? I feel like that would be in impactful addition if you have it

Commented [SO57R56]: the reports of deaths all differ by a few people so they are not very accurate so I think I will exclude

Commented [CH58R56]: I think giving a ballpark range could be helpful for understanding. When I (very briefly) looked into it, I saw 25-35 as the estimated number of deaths. Even the fact that there isn't a clear number tells a story, and that many deaths is horrifying for such a localized environment and short period of time. You can definitely make it clear that there isn't a consensus on the exact number.

Commented [SS59]: Same note as earlier about quotations in headers

Commented [SS60]: As you go through this section about gender roles, make sure that you keep connecting it back to the COVID pandemic - don't lose your dilemma!

Commented [CH61]: This is almost the exact same beginning as your "Taiwan 101" section's first sentence. Rephrase.

Commented [CH62]: I don't think this word makes much sense here. Do you mean "compounding factors"?

Commented [SO63R62]: oops yes!

Commented [CH64]: Excellent.

Commented [SS65]: Heavier than who

Commented [CH66]: It's crazy that cat lady is a global insult

Commented [CH67]: For direct quotes, you need to include page numbers. If there isn't a page number, include "n.p." instead. Ex: (Lu and Jiang 2026, n.p.)

Make sure to check for this throughout your case.

Commented [CH68]: Say more—from whom? Was it a lot of backlash or just a few voices?

Alongside the critics, Tsai's supporters were also outspoken. To take away the stigma, supporters named Tsai the "Iron Cat Lady," an endearing twist meant to make light of the demeaning nickname and represent Tsai's strong stance on political issues like Taiwanese independence (Wingfield-Hayes 2024). Yet, Tsai struggled with how to best lead Taiwan as she battled the stigma she faced as the first female president of the country. Tsai's opponents were quick to frame any of her traditionally feminine characteristics as a negative aspect of her leadership to further push the narrative that Tsai was unfit to lead the country through such tumultuous times. Further, any failure could damage not only her own reputation, but also that of future female presidential candidates if the media attributed her shortcomings to her gender. Nonetheless, the predicament tasked Tsai with making a decision on how she should approach the management of COVID-19.

Trial by Fire

As Tsai debated the best course of action to take, she had many factors to consider. Being the first female leader of Taiwan and the first female president in Asia not born into a political dynasty, she had to overcome stereotypes and the burden of setting the tone for future female leaders of the country. Tsai stated in an interview that she felt she had the pressure and the power to "promote women's empowerment, both at home and abroad," vowing that she "[would] not stop until the term 'female president' is a thing of the past" (Brouwer 2020, n.p.). Further, when asked about female leadership during times of crisis, Tsai responded that traits traditionally associated with female leaders such as compassion, humility, and collaboration—all of which she deployed while deciding how to handle the public health crisis—were important qualities for any leader to have (Brouwer 2020). Tsai added that she believed successful qualities in leadership did not need to depend on the leader's gender, and she hoped that this belief would spread and become the norm while striving for equity in leadership (Brouwer 2020).

This meant that there were many ways that Tsai could display her leadership and message through action in the COVID-19 health crisis. Was it better to take a firm stance and implement strict regulations to demonstrate her strength as a leader? Would it be better to take a softer approach? Was that playing too much into the "gentle woman" stereotype? Was it a disservice to her country if she purposely *did not* take this approach because it played into stereotypes? However, these many uncertainties only addressed Tsai's message and image as a leader, just one part of a much larger problem.

Tsai also had to consider the lingering memory of the SARS epidemic and the growing fear that the government would subject citizens to another quarantine like that at Heping Hospital. The public's uneasiness made Tsai hesitant to implement such extreme measures to prevent the distrust in the government that came from the harsh, unyielding rules of the hospital's quarantine. Still, if the Taiwanese government had learned anything from SARS, it was that they could not allow the same situation to happen again. This meant that they needed to make a decision on how to handle COVID-19, and they needed to make it quickly.

Tsai also had to consider the feasibility of any lockdown or quarantine measures she took. As an island nation, a lockdown preventing travel out of or into the country was a uniquely plausible isolation method. However, considering Taiwan had a population of nearly 24 million and it took less than six hours to drive across the country, domestic spread still posed a major threat to the nation's security. Tsai also had to consider the economic impact on the country. Taiwan was a major trade hub, handling about $568 billion of goods each year (Center for Strategic and

Commented [SS69]: Reword

Commented [CH70]: Passive voice

Commented [SS71]: Split into another section here

Commented [SS72R71]: 1 section about gender roles, next one really focusing in on your dilemma

Commented [CH73]: Excellent use of quotes here!

Commented [CH74]: Make sure to add page number or n.p.

Commented [CH75]: Not quite sure what you're referring to when you say "these possibilities"

Commented [CH76]: Excellent job laying out these questions and establishing everything Tsai must weigh in this decision. You understand the case study format so well!

Commented [CH77]: This part is quite repetitive, you said almost the exact same thing earlier. Can you maybe rephrase this through the lens of what Tsai had to weigh? Or just cut this down, since you've articulated a lot of it already? I like the sentence about Tsai being hesitant to implement extreme measures, I think that's really good.

International Studies 2024). Additionally, Taiwan produced—and still, today, produces—approximately 90% of all advanced technology chips, meaning its shutdown could cost trillions of dollars to the world's gross domestic product (GDP) (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2024). Yet, most importantly, Taiwan imported an abundance of goods, including much of its food, due to a lack of arable land (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service 2024). Thus, the country's heavy reliance on trade limited Tsai's options in shutting down international travel to the country.

Further, if she chose to shut down the country, there were concerns surrounding the extent of the shutdown. Even considering that travel between Taiwan and China accounted for much of Taiwan's overall travel, temporarily terminating travel to China seemed logical given that the country harbored the first COVID-19 outbreak. However, as news of more cases, although relatively isolated at the time, began popping up in other nearby countries, the possibility of a travel ban to the entirety of Asia, or even the world, became more likely. Each option took an increasingly conservative approach to public health, but also an increasingly higher economic and political risk. These questions, yet again, complicated Tsai's path to a clear decision.

Finally, Tsai was also forced to consider if Taiwan was prepared to endure the pandemic with limited international support. Recent conflicts between the Chinese and Taiwanese governments, alongside China's renewed interest in controlling Taiwan, led to another dip in cross-strait relations. The increasingly strained relationship between China and Taiwan left Taiwan politically isolated. Due to the lack of support from the WHO and China, who placed immense pressure on other countries to ignore Taiwan, Tsai found it difficult to share and obtain information about the pandemic with other countries. This left Taiwan largely on its own to handle the pandemic. The urgency to act quickly was also compounded by Taiwan's proximity to China—Taipei, Taiwan's capital city, is only a two-hour flight from Wuhan. While most other countries had the luxury of both time and information before COVID-19 reached them, Taiwan had neither, forcing Tsai Ing-wen and fellow officials into a tight spot. There was no doubt that the threat of COVID-19 was real and that the disease would likely ravage the country. The only aspect that could be controlled was the extent to which the country would suffer under the disease. The magnitude would depend almost entirely on Tsai's decisions surrounding the potential lockdown and other public health measures which were as unpopular as they were restrictive. Additionally, on the one hand, if Tsai implemented these inhibitory precautions, she could be labeled as "controlling" and "emotional," criticisms that could easily be used to attack her position as a female leader just as she had previously been attacked by sexist comments arguing that her leadership style was too "emotional" and "extreme" (Lu and Jiang 2016). On the other hand, should she decide to pursue a riskier course of action with fewer public health precautions to grant more individual freedoms, she risked being classified as "weak" and "incompetent," insults that could also be used to attack her position as a female leader. All of these considerations and possibilities surged through Tsai's mind as she weighed the decision that would change the course of the nation.

On January 21, 2020, Taiwan reported its first case of COVID-19. By January 26th, all of Tsai's deliberations culminated in the first step of her nearly three-year-long handling of the worst public health crisis of the 21st century.

Conclusion

Tsai Ing-wen's resolution on how to govern the COVID-19 public health crisis in Taiwan was set to be the most important decision she had to make while in office. The decision would

Commented [CH78]: This paragraph is PERFECT!

Commented [SS79]: Find a better word

Commented [CH80]: Add Tsai explicitly into this sentence — it'll read clearer and keep her front of mind

Commented [SS81]: You had a whole great section about the history of Chinese-Taiwanese politics earlier, but you don't do a great job of connecting that thread through. You and I both know that that history had an impact on all of these questions and options, but I want to see you explicitly saying it

Commented [CH82]: So. Good.

Commented [CH83]: Okay, this might be a big ask, but I think it would be useful to include a section about the news of COVID reaching Taiwan. Was it just the government that was aware of it, or did Tsai have to mediate public fear of an unknown disease as well? You have this fantastic sentence in the beginning: "While citizens hesitantly prepared travel plans for the upcoming festivities amidst rumors of a "pneumonia" outbreak, the Taiwanese government prepared for a far more serious scenario: a global pandemic." I'd like to see you build this out a bit more. Illustrate that Tsai not only had to figure out what to do, but also mediate public discourse about it and make sure that panic didn't spread. I think that would help flesh out the stakes of this decision even more! Plus you definitely have space since you're such an excellently concise writer. Let me know if you want to discuss how to do this.

Commented [CH84]: Brilliant, powerful ending.

Commented [CH85]: Okay, this solidifies, for me, the need for an additional few paragraphs or another section, if only to build out this timeline. When exactly was Tsai deliberating on these decisions? When did she first hear about COVID? I know Taiwan reported their concerns on Dec 31, but how soon after they found out about it was that report? When did the Taiwanese public find out about it? I think you have the beginnings of these t... [1]

Commented [SO86R85]: i'm not really sure how i should structure the paragraph since i am worried... [2]

Commented [SS87]: I hope my lack of intensive comments on this section tells you how impressed I am - you do a great job tying the dilemma together!

Commented [SS88]: This is a critical piece of the case that you're missing - you need to include a conclusion before the epilogue that pulls together the main di... [3]

Commented [SO89R88]: I added the conclusion here! Please let me know if this works! I wasn't sure how long/short to make it since I felt like I ended up re... [4]

Commented [CH90R88]: This conclusion looks pretty great. There are parts that get repetitive, which I've flagged. The only thing I'd say is that I think yo... [5]

Commented [CH91]: I think you can fairly confidently say that this was the most important decision she ... [6]

significantly affect the lives of the approximately 23 million Taiwanese residents—it was quite literally a life-or-death choice. Additionally, not only were the nation's health and stability in jeopardy, but Tsai's own political reputation and legacy hung in the balance. After years of carefully climbing the political ladder, she had done the unthinkable and become president. Any misstep could destroy years of dedication and effectively end her political career and legacy. The moment was sure to determine the future of her career and how her presidency would be remembered. Thus, it was expected that any shortcoming of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic might be framed as a shortcoming of Tsai's own aptitude and ability to lead Taiwan. Not only that, but as the first female president in Taiwan, the outcome of her verdict was likely to be critiqued with a gendered lens, just as her past political moves had been. The reception toward her choice could thus destroy or facilitate the opportunity for the election of another female head of state in the future.

The decision was one full of questions. How much did Tsai need to consider her position in Taiwanese society and politics when considering the fate of her country? Was it irresponsible to do so? Was she doomed to be criticized no matter her approach? Labeled "emotional" if she took a strong approach, or "timid" if she waited? How might her leadership affect future and current female politicians?

Tsai had to make a calculated, yet rapid decision before the disease spread out of control. First, she had to consider how to mitigate the factors working against her. The most pressing of these factors were the lack of international support from the WHO and other nations, close proximity to the source of the outbreak, and prejudiced doubts of how she would lead Taiwan because she was a woman. However, there were also many aspects of Taiwan that she could use to her advantage to implement strict yet efficient prevention measures. Taiwan was an island nation that could be easily isolated from global travel, the nation had a collectivist culture more likely to give up personal freedoms for the safety of the nation, and Taiwan's health system was better equipped for a disease outbreak after increased infrastructure implemented after the 2002 SARS outbreak. Yet, the one valuable aspect Taiwan lacked was time, meaning that Tsai Ing-wen needed to make a decision, and she needed to make it quick.

Epilogue: a COVID-19 Miracle

The success of Taiwan's COVID-19 management has largely been attributed to the swiftness with which Tsai and her public health officials acted at the beginning of the pandemic (Cheng and Liu 2024). International leaders and reporters have credited both the weight of the memory of the SARS epidemic and Tsai's action-prone leadership style for the management of the crisis (Summers et al. 2020). Tsai's ultimate plan for COVID-19 involved six main components: strict border control, self-monitoring after possible exposure, testing and seeking care when symptomatic, supervised quarantining when diagnosed, contact tracing, and a system designed to prevent community spreading (Wu and Nordling 2024).

The first, and arguably the most important, measure was implementing strict border control. On January 26, 2020, Tsai and her government decided to ban all travel between Taiwan and Hubei, China, the province in which Wuhan is located (Aspinwall 2020). Just two months later, on March 20, 2020, Taiwan closed its borders to everyone except foreign residents, who were still required to go through a 14-day quarantine after entering the country (Aspinwall 2020). Tsai and her government also created the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) and appointed the CECC to act as the main government agency responsible for managing COVID-19 matters (Cheng 2021).

Commented [CH92]: Find, if you can, a word with a bit more oomph

Commented [SO93R92]: changed from "considerably" to "significantly" i'm not sure if it gives it a big oomph but i think a bit more so than "considerably"...let me know what you think

Commented [HC94]: Give us a powerful ending statement, this feels a little lackluster. You do an excellent job of this with the ending statement of nearly every section—I want to see a similar vibe here.

Commented [HC95]: This paragraph is pretty similar to the first paragraph of your conclusion. I don't think you need this. Instead, merge the two together, and focus on those broader implications that I mention in my comment at the beginning of the conclusion.

Commented [CH96]: Passive voice

Commented [CH97]: No comma between the last name and et al. Check for this throughout your case.

Next, Taiwan encouraged citizens to self-monitor for possible symptoms of COVID-19 after known exposure. The public was advised to watch for identifiable symptoms of COVID-19 such as a dry cough, shortness of breath, fever, fatigue, and loss of taste or smell (Mayo Clinic 2024). If someone observed the presence of any of these symptoms, they were advised to notify their local authorities and seek medical attention to diagnose the disease and, if needed, treat symptoms (Lai, Lee, and Hsueh 2023). If diagnosed with COVID-19, the patient would be placed under a mandated quarantine for 14 days. The quarantine was monitored by the government, and noncompliance could result in legal repercussions such as fines (Yen and Liu 2021). To monitor citizens' quarantines, the local government sent daily texts to remind people of quarantine regulations, and the federal government would follow up with a second text once again reminding people of the quarantine regulations and checking in on their health (Yen and Liu 2021). The next step of the process was to track the location of known people in quarantine through their phones or personal devices. The government achieved this mass surveillance by using phone towers to track people's personal devices when they reached the designated quarantine zone. Once monitoring was activated, an alarm would be set off if the person's device lost signal or moved outside of the quarantine area, at which point a local official would be sent to check on the affected person (Yen and Liu 2022).

Alongside these measures, Tsai implemented contact tracing (Cheng and Liu 2024). Contact tracing was regarded as one of the most effective measures the Taiwanese government implemented, and was accomplished through a messaging system that would alert people if they had a possible exposure to the disease and urge them to follow quarantining and masking precautions or seek treatment if they began experiencing symptoms (Wu and Nordling 2024). To track and trace potential exposures, the government required everyone to scan QR codes before entering schools, offices, and stores. This way, if someone was confirmed to be infected with COVID-19, the contact tracing system would be able to retrace the patient's most recently frequented places, as well as compile a list of other people who scanned into these places and alert them of a potential exposure. The system worked like a well-oiled machine and kept citizens informed and alert.

As part of the system designed to prevent community spread of COVID-19, Tsai also prioritized stockpiling masks early on in the pandemic to ensure an adequate supply. In January 2020, after the first case of COVID-19 was registered in Taiwan, the government issued orders to halt all shipments of masks out of the country and laid temporary claim to mask-production companies in Taiwan in order to maintain a sufficient amount of masks throughout the pandemic (Chiang, Chiang, and Chiang 2020). In addition, the government set price limits on masks to avoid price-gouging and guarantee that everyone would be able to access the necessary protective measures (Chiang, Chiang, and Chiang 2020). Therefore, as other countries, such as the U.S., struggled to maintain an adequate supply and suffered shortages, Taiwan was able to keep a steady stock of masks throughout the pandemic. Not only did the country stock masks, but it also drew from and expanded its broader stockpile of personal protective equipment (PPE) created by the government in 2011 after the SARS epidemic (Chen, et al. 2017).

Midway through 2020, Taiwan had a surplus of masks and medical equipment due to their stockpiling and the fact that they had few reported cases following the implementation of their successful precautions (Chiang, Chiang, and Chiang 2020). Seeing an opportunity, Tsai began sending out shipments of masks and other medical equipment such as infrared thermometers to allies and countries in need (Schleich 2020). By June 2020, the Taiwanese government had donated over 17 million masks to places such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the

Commented [SS98]: Such as

Commented [SS99]: Be specific or use a better word

Commented [CH100]: Wow, this is amazing.

Commented [SS101]: Make sure you're citing everything

Commented [CH102]: I think you'd just write this as (Chiang, Chiang, and Chiang 2020). See page 42 of the style guide

Commented [HC103]: I think you'd just write this as (Chiang, Chiang, and Chiang 2020). See page 42 of the style guide

Commented [CH104]: Passive voice

Commented [HC105]: I think you'd just write this as (Chiang, Chiang, and Chiang 2020). See page 42 of the style guide

Middle East, Europe, and the Pacific Islands (Schleich 2020). This "Taiwan Can Help" campaign allowed Taiwan to build and maintain its international connections through soft diplomacy, especially important considering Taiwan's exclusion from the WHO and international support.

Ultimately, the public health measures that Tsai quickly and effectively implemented in Taiwan allowed life in the country to be largely "pre-pandemic" until their third large outbreak in April 2021 (Cheng and Liu 2024). During this time, schools continued to operate, people continued to physically attend work, citizens continued to take part in large events with thousands of people, and, unlike most of the world, Taiwan went months without a single reported case (Wu and Nordling 2024).

As the leader of Taiwan during the COVID-19 pandemic, Tsai received a large share of the praise and recognition for the country's successful management of the crisis, and rightfully so. Yet, it is important to note that, while Tsai and her government deserve the praise they have been given by the international community for their management of the pandemic, the Taiwanese public also deserves some of the credit. Measures such as mass masking and self-quarantining when potentially exposed to COVID-19 are aspects of pandemic mitigation that must be done on a mass scale and thus require large-scale cooperation of the public. Tsai had to trust that her people would follow the regulations she put into place, and their compliance holds nearly as much credit as Tsai's leadership and the policies themselves.

Commented [CH106]: These aren't countries. Pick specific countries within these regions or change the word you use to describe this list.

Commented [CH107]: Is this what it was actually called or is this your term for it

Commented [GU108R107]: this is what it was actually called i capitalized the other words to try to make it more clear that this is the campaign's name did that help?

Commented [CH109]: Passive voice

Commented [CH110]: Good, very thoughtful reflection and thorough epilogue!

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Commented [CH112]: Format all of your references with space before and after each reference.

Commented [CH113]: Should be formatted with a space between the vol. and no.

Ex: 9 (2): 391-422

Change this throughout your references.

Commented [CH114]: Initials should have a period after them. See page 18 of the style guide.

Commented [CH115]: Do not invert any of the names except for the first author. Also, for sources with ten or more authors, list only the first seven and then write et al. See page 41 of the style guide for more details.

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Commented [CH116]: Use headline style capitalization, not sentence case. See page 3 of the style guide.

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Appendix A: Photograph of Colleagues Preventing a Nurse from Jumping out of a Window

Wang, Ching-wei, and Pei-hsiung Chu. 2003. Taipei Times. *Banners Crying for Help Are Hung from the Windows of the Locked down Hoping Hospital in April 2003 during the SARS Epidemic.*

Appendix B: Photograph of People Trapped Inside Heping Hospital Holding Banners Begging to Leave

Wang, Ching-wei, and Pei-hsiung Chu. 2003. Taipei Times. *Banners Crying for Help Are Hung from the Windows of the Locked down Hoping Hospital in April 2003 during the SARS Epidemic.*

Page 85: [1] Commented [CH85] Harold, Carlotta I 12/7/25 12:33:00PM

Okay, this solidifies, for me, the need for an additional few paragraphs or another section, if only to build out this timeline. When exactly was Tsai deliberating on these decisions? When did she first hear about COVID? I know Taiwan reported their concerns on Dec 31, but how soon after they found out about it was that report? When did the Taiwanese public find out about it? I think you have the beginnings of these threads throughout your case, but I'd like to see at least a paragraph dedicated to exploring these questions.

Page 85: [2] Commented [SO86R85] Sam, Olivia G 1/20/26 12:06:00AM

i'm not really sure how i should structure the paragraph since i am worried about repeating a lot of information. here is the general timeline:

dec 31: a taiwanese health official notices that the "pneumonia" cases in wuhan are abnormal and notifies the who that day

jan 21: tsai and other government officials find out about taiwan's first covid case and alert the public

jan 26: tsai begins shutting down

there are a couple of steps in between (eg. some taiwanese health officials went to wuhan to investigate around jan 15) but there isn't much information on how tsai was/wasn't in charge of that decision so i wasn't sure if i should include? let me know what you think!

Page 85: [3] Commented [SS88] Soganich, Sydney M 9/24/25 6:31:00PM

This is a critical piece of the case that you're missing - you need to include a conclusion before the epilogue that pulls together the main dilemma and attaches it to the broader implications of your case. This should be a call to action for your readers to discuss the decision making elements and implications of your case. Look at past published cases (particularly those from 2-3 years ago) for strong examples of this!

Page 85: [4] Commented [SO89R88] Sam, Olivia G 10/31/25 4:28:00PM

I added the conclusion here! Please let me know if this works! I wasn't sure how long/short to make it since I felt like I ended up repeating a lot of the same information I talked about in previous sections

Page 85: [5] Commented [CH90R88] Harold, Carlotta I 12/7/25 12:51:00PM

This conclusion looks pretty great. There are parts that get repetitive, which I've flagged. The only thing I'd say is that I think you need to bring in the wide-scale implications of her decision. How does her decision matter for thinking about (female) leadership throughout East Asia—perhaps in relation to the traditional Confucian values you mentioned earlier—or even globally? What are the core, general questions that this case poses? You can literally include questions in the conclusion, if you want. This is what I did in my conclusion (not very gracefully though):

Is it possible to be an effective leader while maintaining a radical identity? How does one manage their political identity while governing a constituency that may not all hold that

same identity? Do identities that mainstream society considers “extreme” have to be hidden if in a position of leadership?

Page 85: [6] Commented [CH91] Harold, Carlotta I 12/7/25 12:35:00PM

I think you can fairly confidently say that this was the most important decision she had to make. Was there any other decision that would come close?