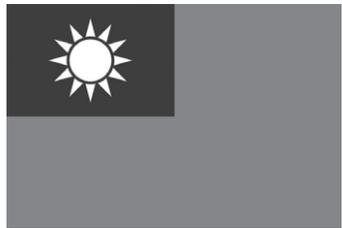


COMMUNITY NEWS

Battleground for Taiwanese identity shifts to US census

By Mahlon Meyer
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY



A group of young Asian Americans face the screen. A tall, willowy woman talks about the LGBTQ movement in Taiwan. The screen flashes a picture of her wedding with her partner. Another woman with long shoulder-length hair talks about the goal of their campaign.

"I know that Chinese culture is a lot more prominent here," she says, in English, "But it's also important for Taiwanese culture to be represented."

A Taiwanese group of mostly young working professionals has launched a campaign to encourage Taiwanese and Taiwanese Americans to promote a distinct ethnic identity in the 2020 census.

The Taiwanese American Citizens League (TACL) and its chapters in major cities, the Taiwanese American Professionals (TAP), have mounted a media campaign to

ask all Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) to fill out the census, and Taiwanese in particular to check the box, "other Asian," and then write in "Taiwanese."

Organizers played down any geopolitical goal, such as trying to influence recognition of Taiwan as a sovereign or independent country, which has been the goal of other write-in campaigns, most notably by the Formosan Association for Public Affairs (FAPA) in the 1990s.

FAPA is, however, one of the sponsors of this campaign, according to one of the videos produced by TACL.

Still, national and local leaders of the campaign insisted their goal was to increase awareness of the needs of the Taiwanese community in the U.S.

Census data is crucial not only to government decisions about funding for education and other programs, but is also widely used by businesses and local communities, they said.

"This is why campaigns are important because it is about the future. The count in 2020 will impact representation, policy, and funding decisions for the next 10 years!" wrote Christina Hu, TACL director of civic engagement.

This is the fourth time the

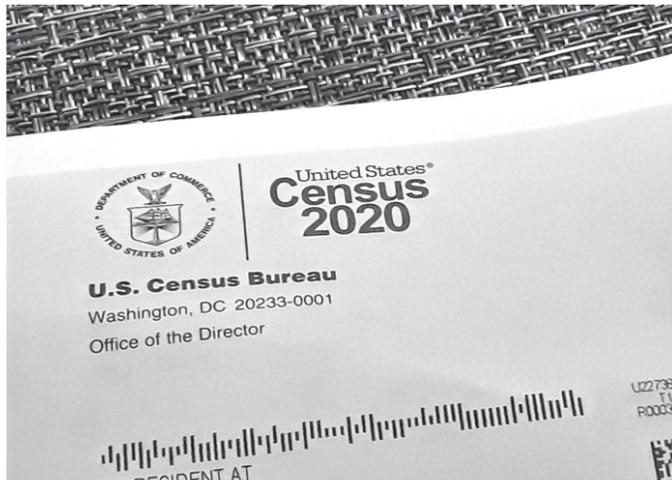


Photo by Ruth Bayang

organizations have promoted the campaign, which kicked off in 1990.

By way of showing its importance, organizers said that although 215,000 people wrote in "Taiwanese" on the last census, the figure reflected only a small portion of the actual number of people from Taiwan or Taiwanese Americans actually living in the U.S.

"It's the same type of thing for a lot of minorities," said Angel Hsu, president of TAP-Seattle. "They are undercounted because they don't fill it in."

The census form has distinct categories for "Asian Indian," "Chinese," "Filipino," "Korean," "Japanese," "Vietnamese," and

"Other Asian."

After "Other Asian" there is a box to write in any other distinct category.

As of press time, the Census Bureau had not responded to an inquiry as to how many write-ins it would take to create a new category.

Taiwanese identity

The word, "Taiwanese," has its own distinct history, laden with political associations, that have changed over time.

Until recent decades, it was used to distinguish those families whose ancestors had been born in Taiwan [benshengren] from those who had migrated to the island in 1949 at the end of the Chinese

Civil War [waishengren].

In the half-century following, any nativist sentiment, such as speaking the local dialect—also called "Taiwanese"—or advocating Taiwan independence, was forbidden and heavily punished by the ruling party, which had also transferred over from China.

But an opposition party has spurred democratic changes that have ultimately lessened affiliations based on family origins.

And ancestral distinctions have become further blurred as children intermarried.

So today "Taiwanese" is often used to refer simply to anyone with roots in the island.

A survey, given to residents of the island by the government's Mainland Affairs Council, has shown a massive increase in those who identify as "Taiwanese"—rather than "Chinese" or "both"—over the past 30 years.

In 1992, over 25% of islanders represented themselves as "Chinese," 46% as "both," and roughly 17% as "Taiwanese."

But in 2019, only 3% identified as "Chinese" and about 34% as "both." Those characterizing themselves as only "Taiwanese"

see CENSUS on 12

Our community calendar page has been suspended due to the uncertainty surrounding events over COVID-19 concerns. We apologize for any inconvenience.

View the solution on page 14

					5		
				7	4	9	8
		3	4			5	
7						3	2
				5		8	
9	2		3				
8		1			2	7	
	7	5	8			4	9

northwest **asianweekly**

ASSUNTA Ng

Publisher
assunta@nwasianweekly.com

JOHN LIU

Associate Publisher
john@nwasianweekly.com

RUTH BAYANG

Editor
editor@nwasianweekly.com

HAN BUI

Layout & Web Editor
han@nwasianweekly.com

Account Executives

REBECCA IP

rebecca@nwasianweekly.com

KELLY LIAO

kelly@nwasianweekly.com

JOHN LIU

john@nwasianweekly.com

GEORGE HIRA

ghira@nwasianweekly.com

The only weekly English-language newspaper serving Washington's Asian community. The NW Asian Weekly has one simple goal: "To empower the Asian community."

The Editorial Board reserves the right to reject any advertisement, letter or article. Subscriptions cost \$40 for 52 weeks of the NW Asian Weekly and \$30 for 52 weeks of the Seattle Chinese Post. The NW Asian Weekly owns the copyright for all its content. All rights reserved. No part of this paper may be reprinted without permission.

412 Maynard Ave. S., Seattle, WA 98104 • t. 206.223.5559
editor@nwasianweekly.com • ads@nwasianweekly.com • www.nwasianweekly.com

RESTAURANT CLOSURES from 1

what we hold most dear, our lives and the lives of our loved ones.” The measure has \$175 million going to the public health system and the remainder to a dedicated unemployment fund for coronavirus impacts. The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Washington has the highest number of deaths in the U.S., with most being associated with a nursing home in Kirkland. By March 17, the number of positive cases topped 1,000.

Inslee imposed strict new rules this week to help slow the spread of COVID-19. He mandated an immediate two-week closure of all restaurants, bars, and recreational facilities. The governor also revised his ban on events to prohibit gatherings of 50 or more people. Previously the size limit was more than 250.

The new orders went into effect at 12:01 a.m. on March 17 and will be in place through March 31.

“If we are living a normal life, we are not doing our jobs as Washingtonians,” Inslee said. “We cannot do that anymore. We need to make changes, regardless of size. All of us need to do more. We must limit the number of people we come in contact with. This is the new normal.”

The state Employment Security Department did not immediately have data on the number of unemployment compensation applications since the state was hit by the pandemic, but Inslee said

“We feel really good about where we are in unemployment compensation. We’re going to remain committed one way or another to get people unemployment compensation through this crisis. We know how critical this is. We know how many people that are going to experience, we hope, short-term unemployment. We want to be there for them.”

— Gov. Jay Inslee

that the state’s \$4.7 billion unemployment trust fund was “very, very robust.”

“We feel really good about where we are in unemployment compensation,” he said. “We’re going to remain committed one way or another to get people unemployment compensation through this crisis. We know how critical this is. We know how many people that are going to experience, we hope, short-term unemployment. We want to be there for them.”

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. The vast majority of people

recover from the new virus.

A clinical trial evaluating a vaccine began on March 16. The National Institutes of Health is funding the trial, which is taking place at the Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute in Seattle. Public health officials say it will take a year to 18 months to fully validate any potential vaccine.

Inslee said it was possible the Legislature, which just adjourned its 60-day session last week, might have to be called back into a special session if additional money is needed for the crisis.

“We can call a special session at any time that becomes necessary, and I would not be reluctant to do so,” he said. He said he has told legislative leaders to be prepared to do their work even if needs to

be done remotely due to social distancing requirements.

At the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, it is not business as usual right now, Port of Seattle officials said. This time last year, 50,000 passengers would be headed through airport security checkpoints at the beginning of spring break travel season, officials said. The airport, which remains open and operating, is currently averaging 16,000 passengers through its checkpoints.

On March 17, Secretary of State Kim Wyman and county election officials called on the governor to cancel a special election set for April 28 across 18 counties. Wyman said in a news release that none of the elections is to elect anyone to office, but are levy and bond elections.

“While public contact in an election is greatly reduced because Washington is a vote-by-mail state, the staffing requirements to conduct an election remain,” Wyman and county officials said in a letter to the governor. “From courthouse closures, to workforce reductions of election staff, postal staff ... circumstances outside of our control could make it impossible for counties to meet statutory election requirements. These include mail processing, voter registration, canvassing results, and certifying an election,” the letter said.

Wyman and others to find alternative options, including holding the elections during the August primary or November general. ■

CENSUS from 6

skyrocketed to almost 60%.

Some of these changes are due to the dying off of the first generation of arrivals from China, who mostly characterized themselves as “Chinese.”

But the trend culminated in the reelection of Tsai Ing-wen as president earlier this year.

In the wake of the Hong Kong protests and threats from Beijing to forcibly take control of the island, voters soundly rejected an opposing candidate that had promised closer ties with China.

Taiwanese identity in the U.S.

Such resolve is reflected in the current campaign, said scholars.

“The word ‘Taiwanese’ is more akin to a nationality, a protest, and a symbolic yet important gesture in the U.S.,” said Zhou Yu, associate professor in the Department of Family and Consumer Studies at the University of Utah.

“It was juxtapositioned with the waishengren and benshengren debate and with the use of the Taiwanese dialect in Taiwan before, while it is much less so today,” he wrote in an email.

In a paper on the write-in campaign, “Assimilation and Rising Taiwanese Identity: Taiwan-born Immigrants in the United States, 1990-2000,” Yu suggested that globalization may also allow Taiwan-born immigrants “to maintain a closer tie with their country of origin than before, especially in times of crisis.”

Yu and others, however, said that not all Taiwanese simply wanted to distinguish themselves from Chinese.

While emphasizing that his current research has been informal, he said in the course of many interviews, he found that a number of Taiwan-born immigrants in the U.S. said that “most Americans do not know the differences between Chinese and Taiwanese, nor do they care.”

Rather, a greater factor in promoting participation in the

write-in campaign has been the huge growth in the number of immigrants from China in the U.S.

“Some of the Taiwan-born have felt that many mainland Chinese, especially new arrivals, often toe the line of the Chinese government and disrespect Taiwanese,” said Yu.

“Feeling threatened, many Taiwan-born immigrants have chosen to write in ‘Taiwanese’ on the census form,” he said.

By contrast, many Taiwan-born immigrants living outside Los Angeles—where there are fewer Chinese—might characterize themselves as “Chinese” on the census, added Yu.

Yet it is the freedoms offered by the U.S. government that have encouraged Taiwanese and Taiwanese Americans to want to express themselves, others said.

“A lot of people feel, ‘I’m not Chinese, why do you want to categorize me as Chinese? And we have a free society, and we want the government to respect us,’” said Alex Fan, Director General of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) in Seattle.

TECO is an informal office as the island does not have formal diplomatic ties with the U.S. Fan said his government was not materially supporting the campaign, but he had heard many community members talking about it.

“I understand why the TAP or others want to promote this campaign. The greater number of people you have answering as ‘Taiwanese,’ the more attention you will get from the government,” he said.

Younger Taiwanese Americans, however, are generally less politically active on issues relating to Taiwan, said one scholar of Taiwan studies, who asked to remain anonymous because of political sensitivities surrounding the subject.

“If they feel general anxiety with the current socioeconomic situation, they would probably express it in other ways that are more in line with current day progressive movements, such as expressing support for Bernie Sanders or Andrew Yang,” said the scholar, who works closely with Taiwanese American student groups.

TAP members range in age between 25 to 40, said Hsu, the president of the Seattle chapter.

TAP holds happy hours for young professionals and recently sponsored a film festival.

The group has some interaction with other Taiwanese organizations around Seattle, representing different age groups, such as speaking with Taiwanese student groups at the University of Washington or asking friends to pass on information about the campaign to church groups on Mercer Island.

TAP also invites other communities to its events.

And it has shared its media kit for the census campaign with other ethnic organizations wanting to imitate their efforts.

“The first step is to get all Asian Americans to just take the census,” said Hsu.

Asian Americans are the least likely to participate in the census, according to aapidata.com, which summarized a recent report by the U.S. census. They are also the group that is the most likely to fear that information they share would be used against them, aapidata.com also reported.

According to the 2010 census, there were 17.3 million Asian Americans in the U.S., accounting for 5.6 % of the population. Of that total, according to official numbers, roughly 3% were Taiwanese.

“But we feel pretty sure we are being undercounted,” said Hsu.

For proof of that, look no further than the only Asian American to run for president, Andrew Yang.

Both his parents are from Taiwan, noted Yu. But he identifies himself as “Chinese American.”

“This shows the limit of the Taiwanese identity in the U.S.,” he said. ■

For information about the write-in campaign, go to tacl.org/census-2020/

Mahlon can be reached at info@nwasianweekly.com.

PETS/DOGS (NEW THIS WEEK)

Goldendoodles & Bernedoodles. Puppies & professionally trained pets, Service, Therapy, PTSD, Autism, & ESA dogs. From the country's premier Dog Training Academy. DogologyNW.com 509-710-7998.

DONATE YOUR CAR TO CHARITY.

Receive maximum value of write off for your taxes. Running or not! All conditions accepted. Free pickup. Call for details, 855-635-4229.

ELIMINATE GUTTER CLEANING FOREVER! LeafFilter, the most advanced debris-blocking gutter protection. Schedule a FREE LeafFilter estimate today. 15% off Entire Purchase. 10% Senior & Military Discounts. Call 1-888-360-1582