

# Cross-Straitization of Higher Education: Voices of the Mainland Chinese Students Studying in Taiwan

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**Abstract**—Recent changes in the political atmosphere between Taiwan and Mainland China has led to the lifting of the long-time ban on recruiting Chinese students to study in Taiwan. In September of 2011, more than 900 Chinese students were admitted as degree-seekers to study in Taiwan universities. While, the number of short-term exchange programs numbered by the thousands. In light of the current changes from internationalization to cross-straitization; the phenomenal changes in policies that deals with Taiwan and Mainland China, this presentation shall seeks to understand the various push - pull factors and implications with regards to the Chinese students studying in Taiwan.

**Index Terms**—Cross-straitization, study abroad, internationalization, study mobility, push-pull theory.

## I. INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, Taiwan's higher education institutions have been embracing the concept of internationalization [1], [2]. Until recently the patterns of cross-mobility in Taiwan reflected traditional trends; large numbers of Taiwanese university students studied in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), while very few incoming international students chose to study in Taiwan. However, in August of 2010, in response to closer cross-strait ties between Taiwan and Mainland China; the government lifted the ban on recruiting Mainland Chinese students [3]. For the first time after the separation of Taiwan and China since 1949, more than 900 Chinese students were admitted as degree-seekers to Taiwan in September of 2011 [4], [5].

The unique model of cross-straitization is prioritizes on cultural and educational exchanges [3]. Within such model, acceptable forms of communication based on mutual respect and understanding are being accomplished. More importantly, cross-straitization is a channel to facilitate Taiwan's sustainable coexistence with China and the rest of the world [6].

Within the cross-straitization of Taiwan higher education (the opening up of Taiwan universities for mainland Chinese students), many rules and regulations are imposed which

seems to create a barrier in attracting Chinese students.

Such as: a.) Once their student identity is forfeited, they must leave the country within 10 days; b.) Once their studies are completed, they must leave within a month of graduation; and c.) Students cannot study in classes, majors, or fields related to national security, just to name a few [7].

In the US, the number of mainland Chinese students enrolled in US universities is currently at an all-time high [8]. However, in Taiwan the number of Chinese students studying degree programs is much lower than the expected 2000 quota. In a recent statistics, Kuo [9] reported that around 20% of the 56,000 international students in Taiwan are mainland Chinese students who are on short term studies. Private schools were unsatisfied with this number, saying that there are simply too many legal restrictions. Currently, the number of mainland Chinese students in Taiwan is limited only to 2% of a university's total enrollment. While, public (national) universities are only permitted to accept graduate students [5]. The entity of Taiwan universities as both the mediators and reactors of the mainland Chinese students is a critical area of debate and investigation. Yet to date empirical studies examining factors within the Taiwan context are limited.

In light of the current changes from internationalization to cross-straitization (the changes in policies that deal with Taiwan and mainland China), this presentation shall seek to understand the various pull factors and implications with regards to the mainland Chinese students in Taiwan. It is noted that study abroad opens up opportunity to various insights and built-up necessary skills to interact with people who are different. More so, with the current emphasis on doing businesses in China, understanding how mainland Chinese students react in a new environment is a step towards better future cooperation. Lastly, it is understood that educational institutions provides the venue for study abroad that are quite important for opening up a range of opportunities in achieving social and economic mobility, securing employment, and developing future life skills.

### A. Research Questions

With a primary objective of understanding the mainland Chinese students' perceived study experiences in Taiwan, initial research questions are generated as follows:

- What are the basic demographical backgrounds of the students?
- What are the differences in comparison to their home?
- What are the students' acculturation difficulties?
- What are the students' study experiences?
- What are the students' push-pull factors in study abroad?

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## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Internationalization; more specifically in the East Asian sector, has become a major drive force by most higher education systems in the region [10]. Recent policy initiatives dedicated to expanding the cross border mobility of both inbound and outbound students have been established being established. These initiatives have actually changed into the inter-regional exchanges as compared to the previous international ones.

Within the student mobility issues, a major research theory is identified with the push-pull framework [2], [11]-[16]. Suggesting that international students goes through a series of developmental stages of decision making, which starts from the commitments to study internationally and ending with the selection of host institutions. More specifically, *push* factors are defined as the conditions in home nations that engender interest in university education beyond national borders. While, the *Pull* factors are said to be the how a host country could attract international students in studying at a particular university [17].

In a study by Roberts *et al.* [16] shows that the typical *pull* factors for international students in Taiwan are mostly related to the scholarship availability and together with the opportunity to study in a Mandarin Chinese language program provided to the students. Furthermore, in a wider follow-up study, Chou *et al.* [2] uses a revised version of the survey by Roberts *et al.* [16] resulted in tabulating the major *pull* factor as the word of mouth recommendations made by the international students' friends. Such result notes that when an international student is exposed to positive experiences, these experiences can be later translated into free advertisement. However, with the current issues for the mainland Chinese students; the study seeks to determine if whether the previous results from the international students' perception will also be true for the Chinese students.

In sum, the utility of the *push-pull* framework defined international students as a homogenized group rather than as clusters of individuals who have significant differences between and within their nationalities, hence, within the notion of cross-stratification; wherein the students are also of the same Chinese ethnicity, results should open up new variations within the paradigm.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Design

This study employed the descriptive research paradigm; a qualitative research that is concerned with how something that exists is related to some preceding event that has influenced or affected a present condition or event [18].

### B. Participants and Research Process

The survey was done in two folds, 1<sup>st</sup> phase is for the short-term mainland Chinese students (students who are in Taiwan for only a semester to a maximum of 1 year) and 2<sup>nd</sup> phase for the degree seeking mainland Chinese students. A revised version of the Chou *et al.* [2] survey was distributed to all the mainland Chinese students starting September 2011 until February 2012. A total of 415 valid respondents for the

short-term mainland Chinese students and a total of 395 valid respondents for the degree seeking mainland Chinese students was collected and analyzed. Besides the demographic information asked, the survey consists of the following sections: study goals, study experiences, perceived characteristics of Taiwanese people, and personal reactions (open ended). Cronbach validity for the 1<sup>st</sup> phase is .95 and .90 for the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase, which are considered quite reliable [19], [20].

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### A. Demographical Backgrounds of the Chinese Students

Table I shows the various demographical backgrounds of the participants. Within both degree seeking and short-term study program students; the number of female students is much higher than their male counterparts. As for the courses of study, *Business and Management Courses* still ranks the highest with around 27% of the 810 total participants. This is followed by *Engineering Courses* with 17% and *Law, Languages, and Broadcast Media* with 16%. For the level of study, as expected more graduate students are enrolled in a degree seeking program, while short-term study program involves more undergraduate students.

TABLE I: DEMOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDENTS (N=810)

Items	Degree		Short term		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender						
Female	203	25.10	272	33.60	475	58.60
Male	192	23.70	143	17.70	335	41.40
TOTAL	<b>395</b>	<b>48.80</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>51.30</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Course						
Business and Management	112	13.80	105	13.00	217	26.80
Law, Languages, & Media	69	8.50	63	7.80	132	16.30
Engineering	54	6.70	83	10.20	137	16.90
Humanities and Tourism	47	5.80	73	9.00	120	14.80
Arts and Design	45	5.60	24	3.00	69	8.50
Computer Sciences and IT	28	3.50	29	3.60	57	7.00
Health and Medicine	25	3.10	21	2.60	46	5.70
Natural Sciences	13	1.60	13	1.60	26	3.20
Education	2	0.20	4	0.50	6	0.70
Level						
Undergraduate	298	36.80	366	45.20	664	82.00
Master	88	10.90	45	5.60	133	16.40
PhD	9	1.10	4	0.50	13	1.60
Source China school type						
Public (National)	184	22.70	267	33.00	451	55.70
Public (Regional)	114	14.10	76	9.40	190	23.50
Public Technical/Vocational	10	1.20	19	2.30	29	3.60
Private	82	10.10	47	5.80	129	15.90
Private	5	0.60	6	0.70	11	1.40
Technical/Vocational						

TABLE II: MAJOR SOURCE LOCATION OF CHINESE STUDENTS (N=810)

Items	Degree		Short term		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Fujian Province	105	13.00	28	3.50	133	16.40
Zhejiang Province	76	9.40	49	6.00	125	15.40
Guangdong Province	71	8.80	56	6.90	127	15.70
Beijing City	41	5.10	8	1.00	49	6.00
Shanghai City	37	4.60	6	0.70	43	5.30
Jiangsu Province	32	4.00	18	2.20	50	6.20

As for the major source locations of the Mainland Chinese students, Table II shows that Fujian province ranks the highest due to its close similarity to the local Taiwanese

people (Southern Min people). In addition, the duration of the short-term students' stay in Taiwan was also noted in Table III. Table III shows that most exchange students stays for 1 semester.

TABLE III: SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS (N=415)

Durations	Short term	
	n	%
1 year	7	1.69
1 semester	312	75.18
4 months	93	22.41
3 months	3	0.72

B. Comparative Differences from Studying in Taiwan

For the comparative differences among the study experiences between the time their at home and in Taiwan, students were asked regarding their comments regarding the source of school information and their monthly expenditures. Table 4 states that students would actively check the websites of Taiwan universities. This is quite useful since most websites are quite extensively maintained. However, as compared to previous studies with international students (non-Chinese speaking); results in previous studies show that the English websites of Taiwan universities needs to be updated and maintained [21]. This clearly indicates a difference that is of importance.

For their choice host institutions, most mainland Chinese students would look into the websites of Taiwan universities and then decides which university to go to. It is quite interesting that some of the degree seeking students, tends to rely on other websites and internet resources (such as: discussion forums) for information.

Besides the websites, students who participated in the short-term exchange programs would get their information from their schools. In addition, to a surprise student also gets information from their parents. As later compared with the major source of financial supports, which is from their parents (shown in Table V). Results are justifiable, since the parents are the major source of support, they are quite concern to where their children will study.

TABLE IV: MAJOR SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR SCHOOL CHOICE (N=810)

Items	Degree		Short term		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Taiwan universities' websites	326	40	197	24	523	64.57
Parents	77	10	180	22	257	31.73
School's website and bulletin	67	8	170	21	237	29.26
Teachers recommendation	47	6	81	10	128	15.80
Classmates and friends	40	5	67	8	107	13.21

TABLE V: MAJOR SOURCE OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT (N=810)

Items	Degree		Short term		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Parents	314	38.77	407	50.25	721	89.01
Mainland China's scholarship	2	0.25	53	6.54	55	6.79
Personal savings	59	7.28	40	4.94	99	12.22
Taiwan's scholarship			10	1.23	10	1.23
Others						
Internship			3	0.37	3	0.37
Alumni scholarship			1	0.12	1	0.12
Teachers support	3	0.37	1	0.12	4	0.49

When asked regarding their perceived monthly expenditures, Table VI shows that most students mentioned

their expenses are just similar to that of their home country. Result indicates that this pull factor is not that enticing as compared to the notion of affordable livelihood while studying.

TABLE VI: COMPARISON OF MONTHLY EXPENDITURES (N=810)

Items	Degree		Short term		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Higher than China	125	15.43	185	22.84	310	38.27
Similar with China	228	28.15	217	26.79	445	54.94
Lower than China	29	3.58	13	1.60	42	5.19

C. Acculturation Difficulties

With regards to the difficulties and problems faced before and after studying in Taiwan, Table VII and VIII shows the breakdown of the major results gathered from the degree seeking students. The top difficulties as mentioned by the students are namely: getting accustomed to the *Local Taiwanese dialect*, *Transportation* – getting around Taiwan, *Political atmosphere*, *Home sickness*, *Cultural differences*, *Weather* – getting accustomed to the weather, *Taiwanese society in general* – how people go about with their life, and *Food*. In addition, besides the strict requirements in Mainland China; individual *VISA applications* for degree seeking students are the main barrier to smooth study abroad application.

TABLE VII: PROBLEMS TO ACCULTURATION (N=395)

Factors	Degree seeking	
	n	%
Local Taiwanese dialect	139	35.19
Transportation	113	28.61
Political atmosphere	87	22.03
Home sick	85	21.52
Cultural differences	79	20.00
Weather	76	19.24
Taiwanese society in general	75	18.99
Food	69	17.47
Traditional Chinese characters	40	10.13
Way of living (lifestyle)	38	9.62
Teaching and learning process	35	8.86
Parents high expectation	29	7.34
School policies	26	6.58
Teacher student relationship	9	2.28

TABLE VIII: PROBLEMS IN STUDY ABROAD (N=395)

Factors	Degree seeking	
	n	%
Taiwan VISA application	211	53.42
Lack of scholarship	75	18.99
Strict requirements in Mainland China	43	10.89
Lack of information on Taiwan HEIs	21	5.32
Lack of emotional preparation	7	1.77
Lack of information on courses of study	6	1.52
Communication problems with schools	4	1.01

D. Study Experiences

In the section regarding the mainland Chinese students' study goals, Table IX shows that the short-term exchange

students agrees that their main reason for coming to Taiwan is to *experience a culture different from their own* with 93%. This is then followed by *experience local Taiwanese culture* with 90%, *increased learning experiences* with 73%, and *increased personal competencies* with 68%.

With regards to the students' study experiences, major issues being discussed with local Taiwanese students are issues regarding *curriculum program and studies* (61% - short-term students, 65% - degree seeking students) and *places to visit in Taiwan* (85% - short-term students, 55% - degree seeking students). Further implications are also provided on the various perceptions provided by the mainland Chinese students (as shown in Tables X to XIII).

TABLE IX: REASONS FOR STUDYING IN TAIWAN (N=415)

Factors	Short-term	
	n	%
Broaden my viewpoints/new experiences	<b>384</b>	92.53
Experience local Taiwanese culture	375	90.36
Increased learning experiences	302	72.77
Increased personal competencies	284	68.43
Improved learning ability	247	59.52
Make new friends (social capital network)	248	59.76

TABLE X: TOPICS OF INTEREST (N=810)

Items	Degree		Short term		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Tourism	216	26.67	<b>348</b>	42.96	564	69.63
Academic studies	<b>255</b>	31.48	252	31.11	507	62.59
Arts and culture	153	18.89	206	25.43	359	44.32
Shopping	174	21.48	201	24.81	375	46.30
Health and wellness	200	24.69	163	20.12	363	44.81
Educational issues	149	18.40	140	17.28	289	35.68
Societal issues	118	14.57	139	17.16	257	31.73
Entertainment news	193	23.83	117	14.44	310	38.27
Political issues	50	6.17	103	12.72	153	18.89
Sports events	126	15.56	64	7.90	190	23.46
International news	45	5.56	39	4.81	84	10.37

TABLE XI: PERCEPTION ON TAIWAN (N=810)

Items	Degree		Short term	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Taiwanese people in general				
Empathy	4.41	0.730	<b>4.61</b>	0.603
Customer service (shopping/stores)	<b>4.47</b>	0.670	4.55	0.607
Basic courtesy	4.36	0.760	4.50	0.566
Civic mindedness and law abiding	4.25	0.730	4.48	0.648
Ecological awareness	4.35	0.710	4.46	0.639
Sense of democracy	4.03	0.890	4.19	0.726
Taiwanese acceptance of foreign culture	3.70	0.940	3.93	0.845
Taiwanese internationalization	2.76	1.260	3.23	1.077
Taiwanese understanding of China	<b>1.99</b>	1.020	<b>2.26</b>	1.139
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3.81</b>	0.857	<b>4.02</b>	0.761
Society				
Cleanliness (Hygiene)	3.97	0.760	<b>4.31</b>	0.656
Food and delicacies	<b>4.07</b>	0.880	4.26	0.807
Internet freedom	4.01	0.900	4.22	0.787
Sights and sceneries	3.75	0.870	4.19	0.716
News media freedom	3.75	1.120	4.11	0.890
Preservation of traditional cultures	3.95	0.930	4.11	0.820
Transportation and livelihood	<b>3.32</b>	1.210	<b>3.75</b>	1.057
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3.83</b>	0.953	<b>4.14</b>	0.819
Academic				
Campus environment	3.83	0.930	<b>4.33</b>	0.732
Learning resources	<b>4.06</b>	0.890	4.32	0.734
Value adding	3.89	0.790	4.06	0.836
Learning atmosphere (seriousness)	<b>3.22</b>	1.090	<b>3.36</b>	1.072
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3.75</b>	0.925	<b>4.02</b>	0.844

E. Push-Pull Factors

As for the gains (pull factors) of studying in Taiwan, Table XIV shows that students mentioned various issues with the *understanding of Taiwan* as the main advantage. One interesting gain is the notion of *travel planning*, students while studying in Taiwan tends to travel around the island. Furthermore, with the variety of travel options students spends a lot of time planning for their trips.

For the negative (push) factors, students mentioned the following: too many restrictions (part-time job, course of study), lack of opportunities to apply for Taiwan scholarship, misconception towards Mainland Chinese students, not much activities geared towards Mainland China (mostly focused on Western countries), and the need to help broadens the local students notion of Mainland Chinese students (positive issues).

TABLE XII: PERCEPTION ON LEARNING (N=810)

Items	Degree		Short term	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Library resources	<b>4.13</b>	0.850	<b>4.34</b>	0.804
Quality of faculty (professionalism)	4.09	0.780	<b>4.33</b>	0.783
Classroom environment	3.91	0.800	4.16	0.790
Educational technologies	3.98	0.750	4.14	0.703
Teaching pedagogy	3.89	0.830	4.13	0.775
Laboratory apparatus and equipment	3.90	0.800	4.07	0.763
Applicability of the courses	3.74	0.880	4.05	0.794
Quality of professional courses	3.89	0.830	4.03	0.816
Able to help students with special needs	3.96	0.800	4.03	0.795
Quality of general education	3.70	0.860	4.00	0.797
Able to discuss lessons with faculty	3.80	0.840	3.95	0.889
Course evaluations	3.74	0.790	3.90	0.866
Theoretical foundations of lessons	3.74	0.820	3.80	0.764
Discussions with local students	3.82	0.940	3.63	1.014
Internship opportunities	3.37	0.980	3.59	0.981
In classroom discussions	3.25	1.050	3.51	1.051
Taiwanese students' internationalization	2.73	1.190	3.16	1.103
Taiwanese students' learning motivation	3.03	1.130	3.07	1.120
Taiwanese students' learning attitudes	3.02	1.120	<b>2.98</b>	1.180
Students understanding of China	<b>2.16</b>	1.110	<b>2.40</b>	1.145
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3.59</b>	0.908	<b>3.76</b>	0.897

TABLE XIII: PERCEPTION ON SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION (N=810)

Items	Degree		Short term	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Personnel (staff) service attitude	<b>4.26</b>	0.740	<b>4.33</b>	0.762
Campus diversity	4.01	0.820	4.30	0.723
Quality of arts and cultural activities	4.10	0.790	4.30	0.752
Quality of activities	4.00	0.840	4.29	0.788
Sports and recreational resources	3.97	0.910	4.28	0.748
Dormitory quality and cleanliness	<b>3.43</b>	1.150	4.25	0.878
Dormitory resources (eg: beds, facilities)	3.81	0.960	4.22	0.825
Personnel (staff) work effectiveness	3.87	0.940	4.19	0.709
Dormitory management (security)	3.77	0.990	3.90	0.951
Food (meal) services	3.64	0.930	3.88	0.922
Medical services	3.53	0.980	3.71	0.910
Counseling services	3.63	0.820	<b>3.70</b>	0.767
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3.84</b>	0.906	<b>4.11</b>	0.811

With regards to the overall experience of studying in Taiwan, Table XV shows that the participants from both degree and short-term program all noted positive experiences. Moreover, above average expectations are noted on issues such as the value for money and supports of local school

administrations. Comparison with the degree seeking and short-term program students shows that the latter noted a much higher expectation rating than the former on most of the issues.

TABLE XIV: OVERALL STUDY GAINS IN TAIWAN (N=810)

Items	Degree		Short term		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Understanding of Taiwan	<b>289</b>	35.68	<b>347</b>	42.84	636	78.52
Respect for others (courtesy)	206	25.43	274	33.83	480	59.26
Travel planning	164	20.25	272	33.58	436	53.83
Independent	229	28.27	252	31.11	481	59.38
Interpersonal communication	195	24.07	234	28.89	429	52.96
Presentation skills	175	21.60	198	24.44	373	46.05
Openness to new experience	145	17.90	195	24.07	340	41.98
Cross-cultural adaptability	180	22.22	191	23.58	371	45.80
Self-efficacy	193	23.83	187	23.09	380	46.91
Creativity and innovation	121	14.94	172	21.23	293	36.17
Group work	153	18.89	150	18.52	303	37.41
Problem solving skills	134	16.54	140	17.28	274	33.83
Leadership skills	72	8.89	50	6.17	122	15.06

TABLE XV: OVERALL EXPERIENCE IN TAIWAN (N=810)

Items	Degree		Short term	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Encourage friends to study in Taiwan	3.91	0.950	<b>4.38</b>	0.701
Value for money	4.03	0.830	4.35	0.695
Support from local Taiwanese HEIs	<b>4.07</b>	0.790	4.24	0.670
Assistance in academic documents	3.84	0.930	4.15	0.794
Quality of relationship with dorm mates	<b>3.01</b>	1.120	4.08	0.763
Quality of discussions with local students	3.99	0.820	4.04	0.799
Ability to accomplish course related tasks	4.02	0.770	4.03	0.823
Quality of orientation upon arrival	3.99	0.920	4.01	0.862
Take on further studies in Taiwan	3.67	1.110	4.00	0.938
Teaching pedagogy	3.85	0.810	3.94	0.816
Rapport between classmates	3.94	0.870	3.89	0.816
Local social network (circle of friends)	3.89	0.900	3.88	0.863
Taiwanese students' creativity	3.59	0.980	3.84	0.940
Plans to work and stay in Taiwan	3.44	1.220	3.84	0.984
Special tourism activities for students	3.91	0.980	3.75	1.062
Airport pickup and sendoff services	3.44	0.960	3.63	0.853
Taiwanese students' idolatry in artists	3.28	0.990	3.31	0.972
Taiwanese students' sense of maturity	4.06	0.840	3.24	1.083
Taiwanese students' attitude in class	3.14	1.090	<b>2.98</b>	1.240
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3.74</b>	0.941	<b>3.87</b>	0.878

In sum, results show that besides *knowing the culture first hand*, the mainland Chinese students' major *pull* factors are the *opportunity to travel and experience life in Taiwan*, *various curriculum programs availability*, *numerous cultural related activities*, *shopping experiences*, and *healthy lifestyle*. As for their perception on Taiwan, Chinese students prefer the warm, courteous, and helpful attitudes of Taiwanese people in general. One interesting finding is that almost all of the mainland Chinese students are in Taiwan by their own expense. Such finding is actually contrary to the previous practice with the western counterparts; wherein quite a number of international students are in Taiwan with scholarships.

## V. CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study is to understand the

various pull factors and implications with regards to the mainland Chinese students studying in Taiwan. It is noted that participating in a study abroad program can lead to various insights and built-up necessary skills to interact with people who are different. More so, with the current emphasis on doing businesses in China, understanding how mainland Chinese students react in a new environment is a step towards better future cooperation. In essence, this study shall provide new insights in the paradigm shifts from internationalization into a cross-straitization of higher education institutions in Taiwan.

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