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# Experiences of International Students from the New Southbound Policy Countries in Taiwan: Their Motivations and Negotiations of Cultural Differences

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## Abstract

This study investigated international students from countries involved in the New Southbound Policy. We explored the motivations for why they chose to come to Taiwan and their strategies in adapting to a new culture. We recruited 23 students using purposive and snowball sampling. Data were collected using the qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews. Academic and economic considerations were the largest pull factors. Specifically, academic considerations constituted a large pull factor among students from developing countries in South and Southeast Asia. However, for students from developed countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore, the academic environment in Taiwanese institutions of higher education was not the most attractive factor. Compared with students from other regions, social factors and the influence of alumni networks had a larger influence on students from Southeast Asian countries (especially Malaysian students, but not Singaporean students). The influence of cultural factors varied widely depending on whether the student was a degree-seeking student or was of Chinese ethnicity. For degree-seeking students, too many cultural and language differences may have a negative influence on their decision to study in Taiwan. For non-degree-seeking students, such differences engender a perception of Taiwan as exotic and represent a learning opportunity, thus constituting a pull factor. Moreover, because overseas Chinese students are, on average, more conversant in Chinese, cultural similarity is a pull

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factor. For non-Chinese students, their Chinese language proficiency is a major consideration. With regard to adapting to life in Taiwan, most students reported adapting well. However, differences in culture, dietary habits, and language were challenges for some students. This study also discovered that students establish individualized adaptation strategies for dealing with challenges during study in Taiwan. These strategies facilitate cultural exchange by blurring cultural boundaries, thereby enhancing their learning competence and acceptance of cultural differences.

**Keywords:** boundary negotiation, intercultural communication, life adaptation, New Southbound Policy, motivations for studying abroad

## Introduction

### **The New Southbound Policy of the DPP Government in Taiwan**

After the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) President Tsai Ing-wen took power in Taiwan in May 2016, she announced a regional strategic policy called the New Southbound Policy (NSP), which was meant to facilitate bilateral ties and interactions with countries in South and Southeast Asia as well as with New Zealand and Australia. Following President Tsai's policy ideas, Chih-Fang Huang, the director of the international department of the DPP, revealed that the NSP had been designed to expand the diversity of relations with countries of South and Southeast Asia, with the scope of the policy including the economy, society, culture, people, and so forth. Huang explained that people-oriented strategies are central to the NSP and that, based on this, the NSP would strengthen cooperation in the areas of technology, industry, talent, and education. The DPP government expects this policy to help Taiwan reduce its economic dependence on Mainland China and to build a sense of community among the countries involved (Yang, 2016). Based on the core policy idea of being "people-oriented," the Ministry of Education announced a project called the Three-Years Program of Talent Cultivation between Taiwan and the NSP countries. The policy goals are that, from 2017 to 2020, the number of students from NSP countries studying in Taiwan would grow by 20% per year; moreover, the DPP government expects to attract 58,000 students from South and Southeast Asian countries by 2020 (Yang, 2017).

### **The Number of Students from NSP Countries Studying in Taiwan**

Reviewing the statistical data from 2007 to 2017 shows in Table 1, the number of degree-oriented students from NSP countries has risen rapidly. In 2007, the number of degree-oriented students from NSP countries was 8,760, and this number grew annually to reach 25,268 in 2017 (representing a growth rate of 188%), in which degree-oriented students from NSP countries accounted for 43% of the total number of degree-oriented international students in Taiwan. Of the 18 NSP countries, most students come from Malaysia, followed by Indonesia, India, Thailand, and Myanmar. Moreover, the most popular disciplines for students from NSP countries are business and management, engineering, humanities, and communications studies. However, environmental studies, transportation, social services, law, and mathematical studies are the five most unpopular disciplines for these students (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Table 1

*The Degree-Oriented Students from NSP Countries in Taiwan from 2007 to 2017*

Country / Year	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Malaysia	13,433	12,689	11,534	9,925	8,141	6,927	6,039	5,444	4,828	4,106	3,775
Vietnam	4,465	3,165	2,895	2,741	2,568	2,535	2,244	3,442	1,623	1,169	873
Indonesia	4,063	3,131	2,725	2,345	2,043	1,855	1,677	2,301	1,392	1,353	1,287
Thailand	847	784	768	816	799	725	718	680	659	638	571
Myanmar	597	567	467	412	407	433	558	726	994	1,229	1,582
Singapore	193	196	190	199	181	179	158	136	117	84	75
Philippines	272	212	174	171	190	178	159	172	200	193	144
Brunei	17	22	18	16	13	14	11	8	6	7	6
Cambodia	13	8	3	2	2	6	7	6	11	17	28
Laos	23	5	4	4	4	2	1	0	0	0	0
India	1,034	933	804	649	496	439	388	368	342	323	309
Nepal	70	32	34	29	28	21	16	18	16	15	11
Pakistan	66	34	36	21	14	8	3	3	2	2	2
Sri Lanka	85	14	17	15	15	13	5	8	7	5	4
Bengal	22	17	15	13	20	22	22	17	16	14	11
Bhutan	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Australia	41	42	31	35	27	38	36	39	47	49	45
New Zealand	26	30	31	34	34	35	30	29	34	35	37
Total	25,268	21,882	19,747	17,428	14,983	13,430	12,072	13,397	10,294	9,239	8,760

*Note.* "Education of the New Southbound Policy," by Ministry of Education, 2017. Retrieved from <http://ws.moe.edu.tw/001/Upload/7/refile/8053/51384/5fd31e54-beb7-48c1-b018-22ccf3de1e19.pdf>

Table 2 shows the number of non-degree-oriented students from 2007 to 2017. In 2007, the number of non-degree-oriented students from NSP countries was 3,105, whereas the number was 12,731 in 2017, representing a growth rate of 203% during this period. In 2017, most of the non-degree-oriented students came from Malaysia, accounting for 29%, followed by Vietnam (23%), Indonesia (19%), Thailand (10%), and the Philippines (4.6%) (Ministry of Education, 2017).

In the last decade, the growth rate of degree-oriented students from Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and India to Taiwan was more than 200%, while the growth rate of students from Thailand and the Philippines was 33% and 41% respectively. In total, the number of students from NSP countries doubled in the last ten years, which makes students from NSP countries the largest international student population in Taiwan at present (Chen, Hsu, Lu, & Chou, 2018).

Table 2

*The Non-Degree Oriented Students from NSP Countries in Taiwan from 2007 to 2017*

Country / Year	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Malaysia	3,646	3,362	3,412	3,361	3,224	2,563	2,196	417	430	173	223
Vietnam	2,874	1,609	1,148	974	1,065	1,383	1,668	1,917	1,161	739	634
Indonesia	2,390	1,943	1,669	1,214	1,143	1,048	898	1,487	901	1,537	1,243
Thailand	1,278	965	713	719	747	721	586	532	509	413	364
Myanmar	141	78	112	76	33	23	7	4	7	6	30
Singapore	577	434	557	479	425	242	196	159	123	118	83
Philippines	584	446	359	395	336	317	314	211	185	169	144
Brunei	15	15	7	7	12	6	6	1	0	1	1
Cambodia	11	2	1	2	2	0	2	0	3	7	8
Laos	21	1	0	1	0	1	1	3	0	0	0
India	498	377	339	208	149	149	157	109	96	85	106
Nepal	19	14	20	24	9	14	14	7	5	6	7
Pakistan	27	9	3	2	3	4	3	5	0	1	1
Sri Lanka	2	4	1	1	3	5	4	3	1	1	2
Bengal	2	1	0	3	2	3	4	4	1	0	0
Bhutan	13	8	14	11	5	2	0	2	0	4	5
Australia	484	305	376	336	286	233	219	231	212	158	162
New Zealand	149	76	72	48	67	63	75	59	40	69	92
Total	12,731	9,649	8,803	7,861	7,511	6,777	6,350	5,151	3,674	3,487	3,105

*Note.* "Education of the New Southbound Policy," by Ministry of Education, 2017. Retrieved from <http://ws.moe.edu.tw/001/Upload/7/relfile/8053/51384/5fd31e54-beb7-48c1-b018-22ccf3de1e19.pdf>

The main goal of NSP countries' students in Taiwan is to obtain a degree; however, the number of both degree-oriented and non-degree-oriented students has grown rapidly in the past ten years. In this regard, the policy effects of attracting students from NSP countries to Taiwan have been remarkable. Because more and more NSP students are coming to Taiwan, they have increasingly become a group that warrants more concern. With this in mind, the present study will explore this group to understand the factors they consider with regard to studying abroad and their life adaptation experiences in Taiwan as well as their strategies for intercultural communication and negotiating cultural differences. By so doing, this study contributes to our understanding of the effect of the educational aspects of the NSP and the life experience of NSP countries' students. Moreover, by adopting the theoretical framework of international mobility to interpret the data, this paper will add

to the small number of studies examining how NSP countries' students adapt to life in Taiwan.

## **The Theoretical Framework of International Student Mobility, Adapting to Life in Taiwan, and Strategies to Negotiate Cultural Difference**

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of international student mobility and the considering factors of studying abroad, the following three theoretical frameworks will be considered: the economic/instrumental perspective, the environmental/social-cultural perspective, and the critical perspective (Lo, 2019).

### **Economical/Instrumental Perspectives**

Rational calculation and an economic perspective are important points of view to explain international students' motivation and consideration factors for studying abroad. This perspective suggests that a student's decision to study abroad is based on a calculation of how to maximize their economic and individual benefits. Notably, rational choice is one representation of this perspective. The perspective of rational choice suggests that everyone is rational, and individuals tend to rationally calculate the impact caused by different choices. However, considering that an individual has always lived in an environment filled with uncertainty, everyone might not exactly determine the consequences of their action or behaviors, therefore, making a rational calculation of the consequences is important for everyone. Through rational calculation, if students foresee that the experience of studying abroad would be helpful to maximize their individual benefit and individual capital, they will tend to decide to study abroad. Notably, from the perspective of economic and individual benefits, choosing to study abroad and accumulating experiences of international mobility could bring the following two benefits to students and countries: (1) to accumulate their individual capital, including cultural capital by intercultural learning, social capital by the establishment of overseas interpersonal networks, and (2) improved social status regarding their position in the social hierarchy of their home country, thereby increasing the upward mobility of students in society (Oleksiyenko, 2013; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014).

Regarding the benefits to countries, students' experiences of studying abroad and international mobility benefits the economic development of their host countries and the social and economic development of home countries from the new knowledge, professions, and skills learned by students. Hence, from the perspective of economic, students' experiences of studying abroad and international mobility are relevant to the perspectives of new liberalism and the discourse of enhancing national competitiveness in the globalization era (Lomer, 2018).

However, it is worth noting that the decision to study abroad cannot be fully made by this kind of pure rational and economic consideration because people are bounded rationality under most circumstances. Regarding bounded rationality, there are still some factors that should be included when students consider whether they should go studying abroad or not such as social, cultural, and non-material factors. Therefore, the second perspective, the environmental/social-cultural perspectives regarding students' international mobility, will be discussed next (Robeyns, 2006).

## **Environmental/Social-Cultural Perspectives**

For the environmental/social-cultural perspectives, the push-and-pull theory is one of a typical and representative point of view. In terms of this theory, the main factors students consider regarding studying abroad include the social and cultural issues between the home and host countries. The push factors of the home country that encourage students to study abroad include education, politics, language, economics, and more. If these factors are provided for in a better manner in the host country than in the students' home country, students will have more motivation to study abroad in host country. For example, when an educational environment and resources are lacking in the home country or the economic development is worse in the home country than the host country, students will have more motivation to study abroad. In contrast, the pull factors of a host country attracting students to study include a better educational environment and resources, abundant scholarships, an open policy for overseas students, better living environment and conditions, better social development and security, a similarity of history and culture between the home and host countries, cultural diversity, and more (Chang & Yu, 1999; Szelényi, 2006).

In addition, whether there are enough alumni or whether or not students have pre-existing interpersonal and social networks that can provide useful information (e.g., cultural, social, learning, and life experiences) in the study destination country are important consideration factors for students when it comes to deciding on studying abroad. If there are a great number of alumni and a strong social network in the host country, it will encourage students to study abroad there. In fact, the following social functions could be provided by social networks in the host country, thereby facilitating the students' motivation and willingness to study abroad. For example, social networks in the host country could provide advice and suggestions to incoming students, thereby assisting them in making their decision to study abroad. These alumni and members of social networks have abundant learning and life experiences in the host country, therefore, they could also help new students to adapt well there, and these experiences could also be helpful for new students to reduce their negative emotions and anxiety toward their new life in the host country. Moreover, it is also

helpful for new students to establish their cultural mobility through the above learning and life experiences shared by these alumni and members of social networks (Beech, 2015; Gargano, 2009).

## **Critical Perspectives**

In addition to the above economic/instrumental perspective and environmental/social-cultural perspective, a critical perspective could also be adopted to explain student motivation for studying abroad or international mobility. For some scholars, they suggest that the mobility experiences of international students could encourage international students to establish an awareness and identity of global citizenship, which is also the educational responsibility of universities around the world. In terms of their views, the purposes of studying abroad for students is not just an accumulation of individual capital or an increase in economic competitiveness under the economic structure of globalization and new liberalism, instead, the goals of studying abroad for students are enhancing their multicultural knowledge and competence and even facilitating their concern for and involvement in global issues. Therefore, while studying abroad, universities are important environments in which the above knowledge and competencies of international students could be cultivated (Haigh, 2008; Ng, 2012; Stier, 2010).

Furthermore, some scholars adopted the perspective of individuals' capacities to explain the students' overseas learning and international mobility experiences. In terms of their views, the promotion of the internationalization of higher education and even students' purposes for studying abroad are not just to accumulate individual capital and their competence for international mobility, instead, they suggest that the purpose of studying abroad for students is cultivating all aspects of their capacities. These capacities are not just the simple increase of knowledge, more importantly, all aspects of students' capacities could be empowered by their overseas learning and international mobility experiences, thereby facilitating them to achieve their life goals (Chiappero-Martinetti & Sabadash, 2014; Nussbaum, 2006; Robeyns, 2006).

In sum, it is worth noting that the goal of this present study is not discussing the pros and cons of the above three perspectives to explain students' consideration processes for studying abroad and international mobility because, to some extent, every perspective mentioned above could explain some part of these students' motivations, experiences, and goals of studying abroad. Instead, this study expects to provide more comprehensive perspectives to readers by the theoretical framework, so that the students' experiences regarding studying abroad and international mobility can be understood more completely. Notably, in terms of deciding whether to study abroad, it is a back and forth thinking process where every factor and social environment issue mentioned above will be



considered rationally. Not any single factor could completely explain the complexity and dynamic of the process to decide to study abroad. Instead, all considering factors will have an impact on the students' thinking process and decision-making. Therefore, to completely explore and understand the motivation of students from NSP countries to study in Taiwan, all the perspectives mentioned above should be taken into consideration.

## **Negotiating the Cultural Differences and Constructing Strategies of Cultural Learning**

Notably, after students arrive in the host country, they might encounter an array of problems and challenges regarding adapting to life in Taiwan. In this regard, Oberg (1960) is the first scholar to point out that international students might face several aspects of culture shock in their new life in the host country. The cultural shock defined by Oberg is a situation where international students have a disorientation problem after they leave the culture and interpersonal networks, they are familiar with. In this regard, these international students, who arrive in the host country with an unfamiliar culture and life experiences, may become more mentally and physically fragile in such an environment. Moreover, cultural shock covers all aspects of culture and life including language use, interpersonal communication, diet habits, social norms, interpersonal networks, and the issue of emotional management caused by intercultural communication, and so forth. In this regard, a lack of knowledge about the culture, social norms, social values, and customs in the host country may cause difficulties for an international student in negotiating cultural differences. Encountering these cultural differences may negatively affect the student, who might develop feelings of nostalgia, isolation, and loneliness (Brown, 2008; Holmes, 2004; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Moreover, several studies have demonstrated that international students have a limited number of interpersonal networks during their sojourn life experiences in the host country. A survey from Ward et al. (2001) shows that just 17%-29% of international students had built interpersonal relationships with local counterparts and about 45% of international students claimed that most of their friends came from the same country or the same ethnic background. Furthermore, 70% of international students stated that they did not have real and close friends while they studied abroad. Furthermore, the relevant studies show that, generally, international students face more serious learning and living pressures while studying abroad. This would tend to make international students feel anxious, lonely, helpless, isolated, sad, nostalgic, and other negative emotions (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010).

However, recently, more and more studies have suggested that overemphasizing the negative impact of culture shock on international students may lead to the ignorance of the international

students' agency for negotiating and navigating these cultural differences and building adaptation strategies (Tran & Vu, 2018). In this regard, Hwang, Martirosyan, and Moore (2016) argued that under the limitation of cultural differences and social structure, international students would develop individual and specific strategies to negotiate the cultural and life differences between their home and host countries. For this concern, both studies conducted by Alba (2005) and Zolberg and Woo (1999) indicated that, in terms of the human being's negotiation experiences regarding ethnic boundaries and cultural identity, there are three possible types of cultural difference negotiation. The first type is boundary crossing, where individuals adopt the norms, values, and practices of the majority society they are in; they move from one side of the boundary to the other side, but the boundary itself does not change. The second type of negotiation is boundary blurring, which describes the way a group can become part of the majority of society without having to abandon most of their norms, values, and identity. The final type, boundary shifting, involves the relocation of the boundary itself. This means that groups of people who were outsiders now become insiders.

## Literature Review

Currently, the results of studies regarding the international student and Southeast Asian students' experiences of studying in Taiwan could be divided into the following two aspects: the motivation to study abroad and adaptation to life in Taiwan.

Regarding study motivation, the study conducted by Wang and Chang (2016) found that international students' motivations to study in Taiwan are learning Chinese, exploring Chinese (Taiwanese) culture, and getting more opportunities to find a job in Taiwan after graduation. However, they also pointed out that the current government and higher institutes in Taiwan expect to attract more international students to Taiwan by developing more courses taught in English and constructing an English learning environment. It is apparent that this is a difference regarding expectation between the universities and international students. Moreover, the study conducted by Ma (2014) also focused on this issue, which not only indicated that the social networks and interpersonal factor have limited impact on the decision-making of international students on studying in Taiwan, but also found that international students' consideration factors for studying in Taiwan are multiple and complex rather than a single consideration factor. This study further indicated that among many considering factors, academic, cultural, and economic factors are often taken into consideration by international students when it comes to studying in Taiwan, however, whether they will study in Taiwan still depends on their background, language proficiency, culture, source of

finance. In addition to the above, for the exploration of study motivation of NSP countries' students studying in Taiwan, the most relevant and complete is the study conducted by Chang (2017). Through interviews with 13 NSP countries' students, this study found that the following factors encouraged them to study in Taiwan: the short distance between Taiwan and their home country, higher living standards, well-developed academic environment in Taiwanese universities, fewer admission requests, working opportunities after graduation, opportunities to learn Chinese, reduced tuition fees. Moreover, this study also raised some constructive suggestions and admission strategies regarding higher education promotion of the NSP.

Moreover, regarding adaptation to life in Taiwan, the study conducted by Tsay and Sirinat (2013) on recruiting Thai students studying in a central Taiwanese university as research subjects, explored their adaptation to life and challenges during their period of study in Taiwan, which indicated that Thai students generally encountered 11 difficulties and challenges related to life adaptation, including homesickness, finance, diet, accommodation, fluency of language, social customs, lack of support, and the extension of interpersonal relations. In this regard, this study suggests that Taiwanese universities should provide international students with more supportive resources to assist them to more easily adapt to life staying in Taiwan. Moreover, the study conducted by Pare and Tsay (2014) also found similar results. They interviewed eight international students studying in a central Taiwanese university to explore their adaptations to learning and life in Taiwan, and they found that international students often encounter three difficulties during their stay in Taiwan: cultural adaptation, learning adaptation, and interpersonal adaptation. In addition to the above, the study carried out by Chen and Liu (2010), focused on international students' experiences of adaptation and diet during their period of study in Taiwan, and found that most international students only have limited understanding of the contents, meaning, and subjectivity of Taiwanese cuisine before studying in Taiwan, but also indicated that if they had positive experiences of the cuisine in Taiwan it would be helpful to improve their cultural adaptation and reduce their negative emotions and homesickness.

Furthermore, the financial burden is also an issue for international students. The study conducted by Sheu, Lee, and Su (2007) focused on the adaptation to life in Taiwan of overseas Chinese students who study in Taiwanese universities. They pointed out that overseas Chinese students often have part-time jobs in Taiwan because they cannot afford the cost of living during their stay in Taiwan. Notably, 87% of overseas Chinese students in this survey had part-time jobs, and 92% of overseas Chinese students said that they had financial problems. Among all the overseas Chinese students in this survey, over 50% of overseas Chinese students indicated that financial

pressure is one of the main challenges when studying in Taiwan, and even a higher proportion of students with part-time jobs had a negative impact on overseas Chinese students' learning performances. Besides, language proficiency is also important to the adaptation of international students. According to the study carried out by Pham, Wu, and Blohm (2017), which focused on the learning satisfaction of international students in Taiwan, they pointed out that their Chinese language proficiency was the main impact factor for their learning performances, rather than their gender, origin of home country, education level, or even their period of stay in Taiwan.

In sum, according to the above literature review, some features of current studies regarding the experiences and adaptation to Taiwanese life of international students and overseas Chinese students could be identified. First, the results of parts of these studies were mere conclusions of the life and learning experiences of international students and overseas Chinese students who studied in a specific Taiwanese university. Second, although some studies have explored the potential challenges and difficulties that international students and overseas Chinese students encounter during their stay in Taiwan, there are few studies that further explore how students could build up individual strategies to more easily negotiate and navigate the cultural differences and facilitate their adaptation to sojourn life in Taiwan.

In this regard, based on the foundation of the above studies, this study aims to adopt an international student mobility perspective to further explore the NSP countries students' study motivation, life adaptation, and adaptation strategies. The following research questions will be explored:

1. What consideration factors were included in the NSP countries students' decision-making process for deciding to study abroad in Taiwan?
2. What is the situation of learning and life adaptation of NSP countries students during their sojourn in Taiwan?
3. In terms of potential challenges and difficulties of the new life in Taiwan, how could the students construct their own strategies for navigating and negotiating the cultural and life differences between their home and host countries?

## Method

The aim of this paper is to explore the study motivations and life adaptations of students from NSP countries in Taiwan. To accomplish this goal, a qualitative approach was adopted to collect and analyze the data. In qualitative research, in-depth interviews are frequently used for collecting data,

also being regarded as an effective means of collecting the experiences, feelings, and daily practices of human beings so as to assist researchers in gaining a deep understanding of respondents' feelings and constructions of meaning in their everyday lives. In addition, in-depth qualitative interviews can provide more opportunities for participants to conduct self-discourse so as to explain their different life experiences in their own words (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Both convenient and snowball sampling methods were employed to select the research respondents for this study. First, some NSP students in Taiwan who were familiar to the researchers were selected to participate in interviews, after which they were asked to recommend other student sojourners to be recruited as respondents. In total, 23 student sojourners studying in Taiwan were interviewed: 13 were male and 10 were female; 15 were degree-oriented and 8 were non-degree-oriented; 14 were overseas Chinese and 9 were foreigners from NSP countries; 7 were from Malaysia, 4 from Vietnam, 3 from Thailand, 2 from India, 2 from the Philippines, 2 from Indonesia; and the remaining 3 were from Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore. The demographic information of the research participants and the interview outline are included in Appendix 1.

The students determined the venue for the interviews, which included dormitories, student restaurants, and cafés. In addition, some of the students were interviewed via Skype, Line, or Facebook (i.e., through social media). The researchers used a pen coder to record each interview, which ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. The interview outline is shown in Appendix 2. After the interviews, the researchers transcribed the audio data into verbatim transcripts for analysis. Prior to the data analysis, the codes for the verbatim transcripts for every student were clearly defined so that excerpts from every student could be easily delineated in the results section. The code for each student is comprised of an English letter and a number. In this sense, the English letter "S" represents "student" while the numbers range from 1 to 23 to signify the first to twenty-third student in this study. Notably, the order of numbers was determined by the order of interviews, e.g., S1 was the first student interviewed by the researchers. For the data analysis, this study employed thematic analysis to gather, sort, and analyze the data. First, the researchers read the verbatim transcripts repeatedly and in-depth; during the reading process, the researchers encoded and conceptualized the data before generating the key concepts. Second, the concepts that had similar attributes and contents were categorized as analysis themes with higher-level concepts. Finally, the relationships between the themes were established (Berg, 2009).

In addition, three approaches were employed in this study to strengthen the trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis (Merriam, 2002):

## **Intercoder Reliability**

Two researchers with experience of qualitative analysis independently coded the data collected in this study. The coding results, such as codes, coding rules, and emerging concepts, were discussed at regular intervals, thereby ensuring both the consistency and accuracy of coding results. All disagreements regarding codes and concepts were discussed in order to achieve consensus among coders. The intercoder reliability for all coding results was .89, illustrating that the coding consistency was acceptable (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

## **Respondents' Confirmation**

Verbatim transcripts and preliminary results should first be checked by research participants so that researchers can revise them according to their feedback (Reason & Rowan, 1981). In this study, the researchers sent both the verbatim transcripts and the preliminary results to the respondents via e-mail, and they were invited to correct any inappropriate content. Then, the researchers revised the information according to their feedback so that the completeness and accuracy of the information could be ensured. In this study, no further revision was made because all respondents agreed with the information provided.

## **Peer Debriefing**

This can assist researchers in confirming whether the collected data has reached theoretical saturation. In this regard, research colleagues were regularly invited to peer debriefings, where in the data analysis process and results were discussed, resulting in constructive feedback to enhance the credibility of the study. For example, the preliminary results only highlighted the study motivations and life adaptation of NSP countries' students; however, through peer debriefing, the value of exploring NSP students' life adaptation strategies were discussed. Hence, the researchers collected more data to clarify how NSP countries' students deal with cultural and life differences while staying in Taiwan, thus resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of their sojourn experiences in Taiwan.

## Results

### The Motivations and Considerations of NSP International Students for Studying in Taiwan

#### *Academic Factors*

In this study, 16 of the international students (70%) indicated that Taiwan's reputation for good quality higher education and the international ranking of its universities led them to study in Taiwan. This study also found that academic factors were more attractive to students from South and Southeast Asia than from Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore. S3 came from India to study at the National University in the south of Taiwan. Sharing his motivations to study in Taiwan, he said:

*At that time, I passed IELTS with a 7.5; I also got an offer from the top universities in the UK and Australia. My major is related to technology, and some of the universities in Taiwan have good international reputations for teaching in this field. For this reason, I also submitted applications to Taiwan's universities. I then got the admission offer and a full scholarship from the university where I study now. I think I was attracted by the university's good reputation and international ranking.*

S7, with a major in communications, came from Malaysia and studied at the National University in Taipei. She explained the considerations that had led to her decision by comparing the universities in Mainland China, Singapore, and Taiwan:

*I got my bachelor's degree in journalism from a university in Malaysia, and after that I considered getting a graduate degree in another Asian country. At the time, I just thought about where I wanted to go: China, Singapore, or Taiwan? Then, I thought that Taiwan had a more open and friendly public media environment than China and Singapore. Moreover, communication studies at this Taiwanese university are well ranked within Asia. As a result, I decided to come and study in Taiwan.*

However, for students from Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore, academic factors were less influential. S5 and S9 came from Singapore and Australia respectively, and they explained why they had chosen to study in Taiwan:

*Actually, the academic factors or the international ranking of Taiwanese universities are not crucial considerations for us because, in Singapore and Australia, we have more famous top-ranking universities.*

In this sense, the present study found that academic factors were more attractive for students from South and Southeast Asia than those from Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore. It is worth noting that the direction of international student migration traditionally runs from the Global South to the Global North, with students from developing countries studying in developed countries because the universities in the Global North have better reputations and international rankings; by studying in developed countries, students not only gain an educational experience but also accumulate cultural and social capital, and their experiences of studying abroad could help them to achieve vertical social mobility when they return to their home countries. However, the experiences of intra-Asian mobility between Taiwan and South and Southeast Asian countries also create positive effects for the students, allowing them to accumulate cultural, human, and social capital and enhance their competitive abilities in the academic and job markets in both the home and host countries (Chan, 2013). In terms of the admission strategies of international students in Taiwanese higher education, the international rankings of Taiwanese universities in each evaluation of international higher education is one of the important factors attracting students from Southeast Asia and South Asia to study abroad in Taiwan. However, only two Taiwanese universities were ranked in the top 200 universities in the world in the 2018 QS world university rankings. Most Taiwanese public universities and a few private universities rank somewhere between the top 200 and 1,000 in the world. Compared to East Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, the performance of higher education in Taiwan is not excellent in terms of the rankings. Hence, facing increased competition regarding the internationalization and admission of higher education throughout the world, not only should education departments and each higher education institution in Taiwan develop comprehensive and effective international admission strategies as soon as possible, but the Taiwanese government should also improve the international ranking of Taiwanese higher education institutions and even assist them in developing their educational features so that the attraction of Taiwanese higher education for students from South and Southeast Asian countries can be increased (Chiang, 2008; Lu & Chang, 2018).

### ***Economic Factors***

In this study, 20 interviewees (87%) indicated that the availability of sufficient scholarships and grants from the Taiwanese government and universities were among the most crucial factors



influencing their decision to study in Taiwan. According to data from the University Entrance Committee for Overseas Chinese Students, the Taiwanese government currently provides more than ten types of scholarships and grants for overseas Chinese students who apply to study in Taiwan (e.g. the Elite of Overseas Chinese Students' Scholarship; the Overseas Chinese Students' Admission Scholarship from the Ministry of Education; the Overseas Chinese Students' Scholarship and Grant from the Overseas Chinese Association; and the Studying Hard Scholarship from the Overseas Community Affairs Council). The scholarships from these organizations provide students between 5,000 to 300,000 NT \$ every month or year (University Entrance Committee for Overseas Chinese Students, 2018). The Taiwanese government also provides the Taiwanese Scholarship of 30,000 NT \$ every month to degree-oriented foreign students. The scholarships are provided for 4 years for students seeking a bachelor's degree, 2 years for those seeking a graduate degree, and 4 years for a doctoral student (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). An international student must spend approximately 78,447 to 240,637 NT \$ to live in Taiwan for a year (including tuition fees and the cost of living). If an international student can get a scholarship from the Taiwanese government or university, it could help them to cover most of their expenses while studying in Taiwan. Ma's (2014) survey shows that nearly 70% of international students in Taiwan received a scholarship from the Taiwanese government or the university in Taiwan, and approximately 90% of students from South and Southeast Asia received a scholarship from the Taiwanese government or university. For international students, and especially for those from South or Southeast Asia or developing countries, getting a scholarship is the most influential factor in their decision to study in Taiwan. Indeed, scholarships were one of the most important deciding factors for the students participating in this study (Ma, 2014). Moreover, there is a difference between international students and overseas Chinese students in terms of scholarship amounts and criteria when applying to most Taiwanese universities; therefore, some of the overseas Chinese students felt that the situation was unfair towards them and thought that the scholarships awarded by Taiwanese universities were not appealing to them when compared to other universities in East Asian countries. In this regard, faced with the fact that universities in East Asian countries provide for considerable scholarships as an important tool for international admissions, Taiwanese universities should consider how to increase the attraction of scholarships and reduce the differences between international students and overseas Chinese students in terms of scholarship amounts and applicant qualifications. The above issues have an importance impact upon international students and overseas Chinese students in terms of whether or not to study abroad in Taiwan (The Merit Times, 2010).

### ***Political and Policy Factors***

Political factors were not among the most important considerations for international students. In this study, only 9 interviewees (39%) indicated that they had decided to study in Taiwan because they were attracted to the democratic political system and the free society in Taiwan. S6 came from Malaysia and studied law at the National University in central Taiwan, and he explained why political factors were among the reasons he had decided to study in Taiwan:

*I am really interested in the subjects of law and politics; however, in my country the political elites sometimes utilize their political power to influence the functioning of the legal system. As a result, when I decided to study abroad, I wanted to choose a country in Asia that has a democratic political system and an independent legal system. Taiwan was the first name that came to my mind, which is why I am here.*

Other students indicated that they were attracted to the open and friendly environment of the university, and because of that environment they chose to study in Taiwan. S1 come from Vietnam to study at a university in north Taiwan explained:

*In Vietnam, politics is still relatively closed and not free, and this also affects the atmosphere in the university. The professors and the students in the university do not feel free to discuss and say some things they want to say. They still have to consider political issues. But Taiwan's political and university environments are quite open and free. For me, this is very attractive.*

Although political factors were not the main concern for NSP students when deciding whether to study in Taiwan, some students indicated that they had decided to study in Taiwan because of the NSP. S17 is from Indonesia and is a PhD student studying at the National University in the south of Taiwan:

*I chose Taiwan to do my PhD because of the New Southbound Policy. Since the Taiwanese government enforced this policy, more and more Taiwanese universities have come to my country to promote and attract students to study abroad in Taiwan. I participated in an admissions seminar a year ago, and at that seminar the university. I now study at encouraged me to apply to their university and for a Taiwanese scholarship. So, here I am.*

In recent years, more and more Taiwanese universities have decided to attract students from NSP countries. In 2016, three universities in the National Taiwan University System — the National Taiwan University, National Taiwan Normal University, and National Taiwan University of Science and Technology — organized several joint international student admission seminars in the NSP countries to promote the Taiwanese higher education environment and attract students to study in Taiwan. The director of the International Affairs Office at the National Taiwan University indicated that by actively promoting the Taiwanese universities in NSP countries, students from these countries have already become a vital international student population for Taiwanese universities (Lee, 2017).

Moreover, to attract international students to study in Taiwan, the Ministry of Education encouraged and cooperated with universities to establish the Taiwan Education Center. After the Taiwanese government initiated the NSP, the Ministry of Education cooperated with Tunghai University, National Taiwan University, National Sun Yat-sen University, and Asia University to establish 10 Taiwan Education Centers across Jakarta, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Surabaya, and Indonesia. In 2019, the Ministry of Education cooperated with Taiwanese universities to organize 29 international admission seminars, with 14 of them being held in NSP countries, which accounted for 48% of the sessions in total. The effects of the NSP in attracting students to study in Taiwan are remarkable. In 2016, the number of international students from Vietnam (including degree and non-degree-oriented students) was 4,774, whereas this had increased to 7,339 in 2017 (an increase of 54%), while the number of international students from Indonesia also increased from 5,074 in 2016 to 6,453 in 2017 (an increase of 27%). Moreover, the growth rates of students from NSP countries studying in Taiwan after the policy was enforced were 21% from Thailand, 30% from the Philippines, 50% from Australia, and 65% from New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Based on the previous discussion, although political factors are not a critical concern for most students in deciding whether they want to study in Taiwan, for some students from non-democratic countries or non-free societies, the democratic political environment in Taiwan is still one of the factors that makes Taiwan an attractive destination. Moreover, the NSP has had positive effects on Taiwanese universities in attracting NSP countries' students to study in Taiwan. Moreover, the Taiwanese government has implemented the Southbound Policy several times in the past two decades; however, as different parties have taken power, the contents and implementation of the policy have changed. In this respect, it is important to consider how to protect the current outcomes of internationalization and admission efforts made by Taiwanese higher education institutions in Southeast and South Asian countries from being influenced by changing political parties; this

depends on whether Taiwanese universities can develop solid collaborative relations with NSP countries and universities and even whether the Taiwanese government can really fulfill the “people-oriented” goals of the NSP (Hsiao & Yang, 2018).

### ***Cultural Factors***

With regard to cultural factors, the study found that they have different effects on degree and non-degree-oriented international and overseas Chinese students. For degree-oriented students, cultural differences and different language use may have paradoxical effects on students deciding to study in Taiwan. On the contrary, a Chinese culture with Taiwanese characteristics and a Chinese language-learning environment are two attractive factors for non-degree-oriented students when deciding whether to study in Taiwan.

S21 came from India and is now studying a science Ph.D. program in a national university in central Taiwan:

*For me, as a degree-oriented PhD student, if I want to study in Taiwan, I have to stay for several years. In this regard, the cultural and linguistic differences would be the main challenges for me. In this regard, the huge differences in culture and language use provide challenges and obstacles when deciding where I want to go.*

S12 is from Malaysia and is a non-degree-oriented student studying at a university in the south of Taiwan:

*For me, I am just an exchange student, so I will not stay in Taiwan for a long time. In this regard, I just want to experience the cultural and lifestyle differences in Taiwan. As a result, the cultural and language use differences are factors that attract me to have a short-term stay in Taiwan.*

Accordingly, the present study found that cultural factors have different effects on degree and non-degree-oriented students. For degree-oriented students, more time and resources are required to complete a masters or PhD degree, and therefore cultural and language differences that are too large may reduce the motivations of degree-oriented students to choose Taiwan as the study destination. On the other hand, the cultural differences and Chinese learning environment in Taiwan are attractive factors for non-degree-oriented students enjoying short-term study in Taiwan.

However, both cultural factors and the Chinese-speaking environment have positive effects with

regard to attracting overseas Chinese students and foreign students from NSP countries. Despite this, cultural factors have different effects for the two groups: for overseas Chinese students, the Chinese culture with Taiwanese characteristics and a Chinese-speaking environment are important pull factors, whereas for foreign students the effectiveness of such pull factors depends on their Chinese proficiency levels.

In our study, 14 interviewees were overseas Chinese students and 12 of them (86%) indicated that they had decided to study in Taiwan because of its comprehensive Chinese language-learning environment. S13 came from Indonesia, had grown up in an overseas Chinese family, and studied at a university in the south of Taiwan:

*When I stayed at home in Indonesia, my parents talked to me in Chinese, and that is why I can speak Chinese and read a bit. When I discussed my plan to study in another country with my parents, they told me that Mainland China and Taiwan offer Chinese language-learning environments. However, they indicated that, in Mainland China, Chinese words have been modified, whereas Taiwan has maintained more traditional Chinese language characteristics and Chinese culture. As a result, they suggested that I study in Taiwan.*

Moreover, regarding the impact of cultural factors and a Chinese-speaking environment for foreign students, S9 (from Australia) indicated that he had come to study in Taiwan because of the Chinese language-learning environment:

*In Australia, I had several years' experience of learning Chinese; I took the Chinese courses at the Chinese language school in Australia, which is overseen by Taiwanese immigrants, and they taught us traditional Chinese words. I think I was influenced by my previous Chinese language-learning experience in choosing Taiwan for my study-abroad destination.*

According to S9's explanation, whether a foreign student has previous Chinese language-learning experience or not is one of the critical factors influencing one's choice of whether to study in Taiwan. Moreover, Ma's (2014) study found that foreign students who have higher Chinese language abilities are more likely to be attracted by the Chinese language-learning environment and thereby have greater motivations to study in Taiwan. The same study also pointed out that overseas Chinese and foreign students with higher Chinese language abilities were more likely to be attracted

to studying in Taiwan by cultural factors than those with lower language abilities. According to the above discussion, cultural factors have an important impact on the decision of students from NSP countries to study abroad in Taiwan. In this regard, how to maintain and increase the influential capacities of Taiwanese higher education and cultural soft power on NSP countries is an important issue that should be of significant concern in the future implementation of the NSP. Lin (2019) suggests that the Taiwanese government could consider turning the five Taiwanese schools currently located in South-East Asian countries into strongholds for promoting cultural soft power regarding Chinese language and Taiwanese culture in NSP countries. Furthermore, the Taiwanese government should proactively assist overseas Taiwanese schools in developing collaborative projects with local schools in NSP countries to deepen the promotion of the Taiwanese higher education environment and Chinese language course in Taiwan, thereby enhancing the attraction and reputation of Taiwanese higher education in NSP countries (Lin, 2019).

### ***Social Factors***

In terms of social factors, this study sought to determine whether students from NSP countries were influenced by reference groups when they made the decision to study in Taiwan (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). This study found that reference groups have more power to influence students from South and Southeast Asia than students from Australia and New Zealand. However, reference groups have the most influence on overseas Chinese students from Southeast Asian countries, especially Malaysia. In this study, most of the overseas Chinese students from Malaysia indicated that their international study decisions were influenced by reference groups. S7, S10, and S11 were all overseas Chinese students who came from Malaysia, and they shared how their international study decisions were influenced by reference groups. For example, S10 said:

*Actually, among our families, relatives, and the teachers at the private high school in Malaysia, several had study experiences in Taiwan. For example, our Chinese language teacher at school completed her bachelor's degree at Taiwan Normal University. As a result, when they knew we would like to go and study abroad, they encouraged us to go to Taiwan. So, we came here because we were influenced by our teachers, immediate families, and other relatives.*

In this sense, reference groups have an influence on students from Southeast Asia, especially on overseas Chinese students from Malaysia. A possible reason for this could be that, in recent years, most international students in Taiwan have come from Malaysia. In 2015, degree-oriented students

from Malaysia accounted for more than 58% of the total number of degree-oriented international students. In fact, the number of students from Malaysia in 2015 was three times that of students from Vietnam, which contributed the second largest number of international students in Taiwan. For a long time, many overseas Chinese and foreign students from Malaysia have studied in Taiwan, which has resulted in an abundance of interpersonal alumni networks between Taiwan and Malaysia. These alumni networks have played a crucial role in helping other students determine whether they want to study in Taiwan. The Federation of Alumni Associations of Taiwan Universities, Malaysia was established in 1974 and has been in existence for more than 40 years. Every year, this alumni group has organized an education fair to introduce students to the idea of studying in Taiwan and has also published a guide for studying in Taiwan. Additionally, the association has helped students buy cheaper flights by negotiating with the airlines. The goals of the federation are not only to bring the alumni together but also to encourage more Malaysian students to study in Taiwan and to facilitate mutual interactions between the universities and governments of Malaysia and Taiwan. According to statistical data from the federation, in 2003 there were 2,000 teachers in overseas Chinese private senior high schools in Malaysia, and more than half of these teachers had earned their degrees in Taiwan. In this regard, alumni networks and associations have played a critical part in helping students to decide whether to study in Taiwan (James-Maceachern & Yun, 2017).

Although reference groups have a powerful influence on students from Malaysia, this factor is less powerful for students from Australia and New Zealand, which may be due to the fact that studying abroad in Taiwan is not as popular or as a common choice for students from Australia and New Zealand. International students from Australia, New Zealand, and other developed or Western countries were fewer than 5,000 in the 1990s, but by 2008 the number of students from developed or Western countries had reached 10,000. It is worth noting that, in terms of international higher education, Taiwan is still seen as an emerging market and is not a popular choice for students from developed and Western countries. As a result, these countries do not have alumni networks and therefore lack the reference groups to help students decide whether to study in Taiwan. However, having alumni networks and associations could be effective resources for attracting students from NSP countries and helping them to decide whether to study in Taiwan (Office of the President Republic of China, 2018).

## NSP Students' Adaptation and Strategies for Intercultural Communication in Taiwan

### Navigating Cultural Shock and Cultural Differences Between Taiwan and the Home Country

Twenty participants (87%) indicated that they have good experiences related to learning, living, and adapting to life in Taiwan. The participants reported that the Taiwanese people are friendly and welcoming to international students, and the administrative departments of the university are active in helping students deal with the problems they encounter in Taiwan. In this regard, these 20 participants have not faced any serious issues with adaptation. However, this study found that cultural and language differences are two factors that could cause some adaptation challenges for international students. In terms of cultural differences, variations in eating habits between Taiwanese people and students from NSP countries may pose a challenge for some international students, who must adapt to Taiwanese eating habits and cuisine. Some students are influenced by religious considerations, requiring them to balance their religious heritage and the cuisine and eating style in Taiwan. For example, S17 is from Indonesia, his family is Muslim, and they do not eat pork at home. He shared his experiences regarding the challenges posed by adapting to different food habits in the initial months after arrival in Taiwan:

*Before coming to Taiwan, I did not have any idea about Taiwanese food or cuisine. My family in Indonesia is Muslim. Basically, we do not eat pork; however, in Taiwan, you eat pork almost every day and at every meal. This made it very inconvenient to find something to eat when I first arrived in Taiwan. Fortunately, my university is in Taipei, so I can find something to eat more easily than my friends who study in the rural areas in Taiwan.*

In recent years, the Taiwanese government has promoted the halal certification system to encourage restaurants and shops to meet the criteria for halal food, meaning that restaurants will be able to provide halal food to Muslim people, including international students. More than 400 restaurants and shops have obtained the halal certificate in Taiwan, which could further aid Muslim students to adapt more easily to their lives in Taiwan. To help international students find restaurants and shops that provide halal foods and products, several Indonesian students studying in the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology have developed a cellphone application called



Halal.TW, which provides users with information about more than 300 halal-certified restaurants, shops, hotels, and prayer rooms in Taiwan. S17 pointed out that using the Halal.TW application not only helped him find halal-certified restaurants and shops but also made the adaptation to student life in Taiwan easier. In this regard, social media use has a positive effect on international students, allowing them to adapt more easily to their new lives in the host country (Theodosiou, 2016).

In addition to issues of adapting to eating in Taiwan, some students from NSP countries indicated that Chinese language learning and the insufficiency of English courses at the universities also presented obstacles to adaptation. For example, S3, who is from India, shared how the Chinese language was an adaptation challenge in daily life:

*When I was in India, I had no Chinese language-learning experiences. I did not have any idea about Chinese when I arrived in Taiwan. However, in Taiwan, Chinese is everywhere, and if you do not have basic Chinese language abilities, you encounter obstacles in communicating with others and face adaptation challenges in daily life, especially in the initial period after arrival.*

S4 and S18, who are from Thailand and the Philippines respectively, indicated that their universities do not provide enough English courses, which limits their choice of courses. Toh's (2017) study also found that the failure of universities in Taiwan to provide sufficient English courses for international students has had a negative impact on recruiting and attracting international students to study in Taiwan. From the above discussion, although most NSP countries' students do not face many adaptation difficulties in Taiwan, difference with regard to daily practices and culture between Taiwan and NSP countries are still a challenge to the adaptation of NSP countries' students who have just arrived in Taiwan. In this respect, this study suggests that universities in Taiwan could imitate the experiences of universities in European countries and US to provide social integration courses for NSP and international students when they arrive in Taiwan. By doing so, not only would they obtain further understanding of Taiwan culture and life habits, but the problem of adaptation would also be improved and the length of adaptation to Taiwan could further be reduced (Senyshyn, 2019; Vertovec, 2010).

## **Constructing Strategies for Dealing with Cultural Differences and Interpersonal Relationship Management**

With an increase in the amount of time students are staying in Taiwan, NSP countries' students have experienced much more intercultural communication and inter-ethnic interaction. Many NSP

countries' students mentioned their positive interaction experiences in university life with other colleagues and teachers. By participating in the social activities held by universities, student clubs, colleagues, and through the use of social media, many students manage to overcome the shock of cultural difference, and their competence in cultural adaptation and interaction with different ethnic students is increasing.

S14, a student from Thailand who is studying at a university in central Taiwan, discussed his experiences and strategies regarding expanding his interpersonal networks and enhancing his cultural adaptation competences during his stay in Taiwan:

*I think the colleagues surrounding me treated me well, but I have to say that [...] we are foreigners, so it is reasonable that we should be proactive to meet more people. If no one wants to interact with me, I will chat with them proactively. For example, I like to share Thai food or snacks with my colleagues, or I like to invite them to have a meal in Thai restaurants. I think it is helpful for us to get closer because my colleagues like to eat Thai food as well. I also like to participate in “yè chàng” (the activity of singing all night) and “yè chōng” (the activity of riding motorcycles all night) as practiced by my colleagues. This is the way I expanded my interpersonal relationships. I have to say that I am an active person, so that is why I can more easily adapt to life in Taiwan.*

S8, an overseas Chinese student from Malaysia studying in a university in southern Taiwan, shared her experiences regarding the adaptation:

*At the beginning of studying in Taiwan, I was not used to anything because the lifestyle in Taiwan is different from my home country. However, I have to say that the buddy program provided by the university was really important to me. At that time, my buddy always assisted me in meeting more Taiwanese friends and even took me to participate in a lot of cultural events, such as the Dajia Matsu Pilgrimage (大甲媽祖遶境), firecrackers at Master Han Dan (炸邯鄲), and so on. It was really helpful for me to have more understanding of Taiwanese culture. As time passed, I gradually perceived that I liked the lifestyle and culture of Taiwan. And you know what? My buddy also became my boyfriend a year ago.*

In addition, S23, a student from Thailand studying in a university in central Taiwan, shared his experiences regarding discrimination at the beginning of his stay in Taiwan and how he coped with

it:

*Due to my skin color [...], a little bit black I think, some Taiwanese used to call me “tài láo” (泰勞) or “wài láo” (外勞) or labor migrant in the beginning of my stay in Taiwan. Not long after, I gradually realized that it was discrimination. I have to say that it is not comfortable, and I think it is not funny. But, for me, I don't like to be looked down upon; instead, I think I have to educate them and even protect myself. Therefore, as long as somebody (Taiwanese) calls me that, I always educate them that “I came to Taiwan to study and I am not a worker here, and I even think that Thai workers are contributing to Taiwan's economy.” After saying what I wanted to say, I found that those Taiwanese felt awkward and even start treating me well. In my opinion, I think there is no huge differences among human beings. A lot of discrimination is caused by a limited understanding of each other. After explanations, I think discrimination could be solved.*

Moreover, the participants in this study indicated that social media use in their daily lives could help them deal with the adaptation challenges surrounding intercultural communication, interpersonal relationships, and emotional management. All the participants reported using social media in everyday life. S2 shared how social media use assisted him in overcoming obstacles in intercultural communication and helped him to expand his interpersonal networks in Taiwan:

*In Taiwan, my classmates are accustomed to utilizing Facebook and the LINE cellphone app to establish online platforms for discussing academic papers or homework. We also use these social media platforms for gathering classmates to prepare for the midterm and final exam together. Social media helps me meet and get to know more local and international students who take courses with me. Using social media allows me to meet new friends and expand my interpersonal networks in Taiwan. It is vital for me to use social media to maintain close connections with my friends and classmates in Taiwan.*

From S2's social media experiences during study in Taiwan, we can see that such usage experiences are not only beneficial for NSP countries' students with regard to communicating and interacting with classmates for academic purposes but could also further assist them in expanding interpersonal relations with Taiwanese students and other international students. In this regard, social media usage in daily life has the positive impact on NSP countries' students in terms of meeting new friends and obtaining bridging social capital. Furthermore, NSP students' social media use

experiences in Taiwan are similar to those of US students but different from European students. A study by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found that US college students not only adopt social media to maintain strong-tie relations with close friends but also to meet new friends and expand weak-tie relations; in this sense, usage experience could be helpful for them in increasing both bonding and bridging social capital. In contrast, research by Dohmen (2012) and Vergeer and Pelzer (2009) indicates that Dutch students and Belgium Flemish students mainly used social media to maintain relationships with existing friends and seldom to meet and make new friends and interpersonal networks. In summary, NSP countries' students displayed outward-usage habits in terms of social media use experience (similar to US students), whereas the usage experience of European students tended to be inward-oriented (Dohmen, 2012; Vergeer & Pelzer, 2009).

S13 explained how social media use in everyday life helped him to get emotional support and reinforce his attachments by frequently communicating with his family, friends, and girlfriend at home:

*Almost every day, I use Facebook, Skype, or LINE to communicate with my family and girlfriend in Indonesia. I utilize these social media platforms to share my study life in Taiwan and also to know their situation in my home country. It is important to me that, by doing this, I feel I am not alone. Although I am studying in Taiwan, by utilizing social media to maintain a high frequency of communication with them, it makes me feel like we are still together, and I get emotional support from them.*

Moreover, S16, who is from the Philippines, shared how she used social media to maintain contact with family members and share and make the home food with her families online:

*When I am homesick or miss my home country's foods, I always make a video call with my mom via Skype. And, you know, she teaches me how to cook this food step by step online. It is remarkable to me that I often have video calls with my family members during dinner time when I just arrived in Taiwan. They often enjoyed dinner with me online. It is really good for me and made me feel that they were still with me although I am in Taiwan. This gives me a feeling of being recharged again and ready to face new challenges.*

In this respect, interviewee S16's experience regarding social media usage and online food practices echoes the results of Marino (2018), who found that migrants use social media as a platform for conducting online "mealtime socialization" through food sharing with their families and

relatives in home countries. These online activities not only assist them in keeping touch with their families and relatives in home countries but also create a sense of “online/digital togetherness.” Such togetherness and “transnational virtual commensality” further promote the maintenance of transnational ties in migrants’ home countries and even improve adaptation experiences in their host countries (Marino, 2016).

In this regard, social media plays a crucial role in helping students adapt to the host society, get emotional support, and reinforce their attachments while in Taiwan. The social media use experiences of students from NSP countries not only help them to conduct intercultural communication with local Taiwanese students and other international students but also allow them to meet new people and expand their interpersonal and inter-ethnic networks. By utilizing social media to maintain close interactions and communication with family and friends in their home countries, students obtain emotional support and reinforce attachments online (Phua & Jin, 2011; Rui & Wang, 2015; Schroeder, 2016). Moreover, the multilayers of social meaning emanating from the social media use experiences of NSP countries’ students during study in Taiwan echoes with the “polymedia concept” proposed by Madianou (2014) and Madianou and Miller (2012), who point out that the social media usage experiences in migrants’ daily lives provide them not only with the function of online communication but also with multiple social values and meanings with regard to utilizing different social media platforms for a variety of purposes and social contexts. In this regard, the multiple social values and meanings of using social media in migrants’ everyday lives generally include the management and negotiation of interpersonal relations, emotions, and social interactions.

With regard to the above discussion, we know that NSP countries’ students proactively adopt various strategies and methods to manage their interpersonal relations and intercultural communications in order to deal with the cultural differences they experience after coming to Taiwan. No matter what of their experiences of social media use, buddy programs launched by universities or whether the Taiwanese public demonstrates positive ideas regarding NSP countries’ students are all crucial factors in making Taiwanese higher education a friendly and convivial environment for students around the world (Cairns, Krzaklewska, Cuzzocrea, & Allaste, 2018). However, from the above participants’ experiences, we can also note that, as the amount of time spent studying in Taiwan increases, NSP countries’ students gradually develop different strategies with regard to life adaptation. Through utilizing social media and proactive participation in activities launched by universities, student clubs, and colleagues, their adaptation to life and study in Taiwan is improved and cultural boundary blurring occurs after they learn more about Taiwanese culture and have more inter-ethnic interactions and experiences. This means that, in the context of unchanged cultural

boundaries, NSP countries' students have gradually developed individual strategies regarding life adaptation, which have assisted them in negotiating the differences in culture and lifestyle between Taiwan and their home countries, in addition to also increasingly accepting Taiwanese culture, customs, and lifestyles. In this regard, in terms of the negotiation and acceptance of cultural differences, NSP countries' students simultaneously show their individual agency for negotiating cultural differences and exerted their competencies regarding intercultural communication in their host society (Alba, 2005; Carter, 2010; Zolberg & Woo, 1999).

## Conclusion

The NSP is the most important regional strategy currently undertaken by the Taiwanese government, the most prominent aspect of which is that it is a people-oriented strategy. The Taiwanese government aims to facilitate mutual interaction between the people of Taiwan and those from the NSP countries. In this regard, attracting more students from South and Southeast Asian countries, as well as Australia and New Zealand, to study in Taiwan is one of the most important goals for the government. However, few studies have explored the study motivations and experiences of NSP students in Taiwan.

Among several factors for consideration regarding whether to study abroad in Taiwan or not, this study found that the academic factor and high-quality higher education environment are positive factors that attract more and more NSP countries' students to study in Taiwan. It is worth noting that the academic factor is more appealing to those students who come from developing countries in the South and Southeast Asia, however, it is less appealing to those students who come from developed countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore. Moreover, the economic factor is also important to most NSP countries' students, which determines whether they should study abroad in Taiwan. If students could get sufficient funding from the Taiwanese government or universities, it would help to increase the students' motivation to study abroad in Taiwan. Furthermore, regarding political and policy factors, this study found that the political factor is not an important factor for most of the students, however, for some students who come from countries with stricter political systems and social environment, the Taiwanese democratic political system and free social environment are a pull factor for students to study in Taiwan. On the other hand, because the NSP is proactively promoted by the Taiwanese government, most universities and colleges in Taiwan host admission seminars for potential students in NSP countries, which shows that this kind of policy factor has gradually become effective.

Regarding the cultural factor, this study further found that there are different effects of this factor on students with different characteristics (i.e. degree-oriented students, non-degree-oriented students, overseas Chinese students, and foreign students). Notably, for degree students, if the differences of culture and language use between Taiwan and their home country is significant, it might be an obstacle for them to study in Taiwan. Therefore, proactively establishing friendly environments in Taiwanese universities and Taiwanese society, which promote multiple language use, is important to attract students (who have grown up in a different culture and language from those in Taiwan) to study abroad in Taiwan. Furthermore, for overseas Chinese students, the Chinese culture with Taiwanese characteristics and Chinese-speaking environment are important pull factors to them; however, for foreign students, the effectiveness of the above pull factors depends on their Chinese proficiency level.

For the social factor, the present study also found that it has a huge impact on Malaysian overseas Chinese students' decision to study in Taiwan if alumni associations with strong social networks and long history have been established between their home country and Taiwan. However, it is worth noting that Taiwan is still a developing market for foreign study in terms of international higher education, hence, the social factor has a limited impact on students who come from developed countries (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore) regarding the lack of sufficient alumni associations and social networks. For this concern, this study suggests that the existence of a strong alumni association and network between Taiwan and the policy countries is a crucial component of the effectiveness of the social factor on students. In sum, it is worth noting that there is no single factor that can explain the NSP countries students' decision-making process regarding their study in Taiwan, instead, it is a decision made by combining rational calculations with a complicated evaluation of the important factors.

The results of this study also indicate that NSP countries' students may encounter cultural shocks and the challenges of adapting to new life when they first start studying in Taiwan because there are differences in diet, language, intercultural communication, and interethnic interactions between the Taiwanese and students from the NSP countries. However, as time passed, these students gradually developed multiple strategies to adapt to life in Taiwan including the use of social media and proactive participation in activities held by universities, clubs, and colleagues. These strategies are helpful for students to learn about other cultures and increase their interactions with people of other ethnicities. Moreover, these multiple individual strategies regarding adaptation to life in Taiwan also facilitate a level of acceptance of the NSP countries' students toward Taiwanese culture, customs, and lifestyle, thereby exerting the effect of cultural boundary blurring, which

means their learning and intercultural competencies, tolerance, and acceptance of cultural differences are enhanced (Shaftel, Shaftel, & Ahluwalia, 2007).

To sum up, this study not only explored the NSP countries students' (degree and non-degree students, international and overseas Chinese students) decision-making process regarding studying abroad or short-term learning in Taiwan but also clarified the challenges regarding adapting to life in Taiwan. Notably, this study further explored how the students construct their own and diversity adaptation strategies to cope with the cultural and life style differences in their sojourn life in Taiwan. This is the main difference from other studies regarding adapting to life in Taiwan by international students. Most current studies merely indicate the challenges they might face while studying in Taiwan, however, how these students develop their strategies to cope with the challenges are seldom been explored. In this regard, the results of the present study could fill the research gap.

Regarding the limitations of this study, the information regarding study motivations and life experiences in Taiwan shared by the participants are mostly based on the following two dimensions: economic/instrumental perspectives and environmental/social-cultural perspectives. Therefore, future studies could further explore international students' experiences of studying abroad according to critical perspectives, thereby obtaining more comprehensive and complete understanding of this issue.

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## Appendix 1

*The Demographic Information of the Research Participants*

Code	Gender	Age	Country of Origin	Location of University Studying in Taiwan	Degree or Non-Degree / Major	International or Overseas Chinese Student
S1	Female	32	Vietnam	North	Degree / Social Science	International
S2	Male	21	Malaysia	South	Degree / Economic	Overseas Chinese
S3	Male	25	India	South	Degree / Technology	International
S4	Male	26	Thailand	South	Degree / Social Science	International
S5	Male	23	Singapore	North	Degree / Social Science	Overseas Chinese
S6	Male	27	Malaysia	Central	Degree / Law	Overseas Chinese
S7	Female	23	Malaysia	North	Degree / Communication	Overseas Chinese
S8	Female	24	Malaysia	South	Degree / Business	Overseas Chinese
S9	Male	19	Australia	North	Non-Degree / Business	International
S10	Male	22	Malaysia	Central	Non-Degree / Business	Overseas Chinese
S11	Female	29	Malaysia	North	Degree / Social Science	Overseas Chinese
S12	Female	21	Malaysia	South	Non-Degree / Business	Overseas Chinese
S13	Male	24	Indonesia	South	Degree / Social Science	Overseas Chinese
S14	Male	22	Thailand	Central	Degree / Business	Overseas Chinese
S15	Female	20	New Zealand	North	Non-Degree / Language	International
S16	Female	21	Philippines	North	Non-Degree / Social Science	Overseas Chinese
S17	Male	27	Indonesia	South	Degree / Social Science	International
S18	Female	23	Philippines	North	Degree / Social Science	International
S19	Female	21	Vietnam	North	Non-Degree / Communication	Overseas Chinese
S20	Female	22	Vietnam	South	Non-Degree / Social Science	Overseas Chinese
S21	Male	30	India	Central	Degree / Science	International
S22	Male	21	Vietnam	North	Non-Degree / Social Science	Overseas Chinese
S23	Male	28	Thailand	Central	Degree / Business	International

## Appendix 2

### *Interview Outline*

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1. Could you please share what reasons motivated you to study in Taiwan?
  2. In your consideration processes, what were the attractive and non-attractive factors that influenced your decision to study in Taiwan?
  3. After you arrived in Taiwan, did you feel any cultural, language, or lifestyle differences in daily life? How did you deal with it?
  4. What are your experiences of negotiating and managing the cultural differences and the interpersonal relationships during your period of study in Taiwan?
  5. Could you please share your experiences of taking the courses and participating in activities in your university life in Taiwan?
  6. Do you use social media in Taiwan? Why/why not? What is the meaning and function of your use of social media in daily life in Taiwan?
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## 新南向政策國家學生赴臺留學動機、 生活適應情形及跨文化調適策略之研究

林顯明

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### 摘要

本研究以在臺攻讀學位和短期留學之新南向國家學生為研究對象，藉以探究其赴臺留學動機、在臺生活適應情形，以及跨文化和生活調適策略之建構經驗。本研究成功地訪問了 23 位在臺攻讀學位的新南向國家學生。研究結果發現，學術因素與經濟因素為新南向國家學生考量是否來臺就讀時最重要的兩個考量因素，但本研究亦發現，學術因素對於來自發展中國家的學生有較大的吸引力，對於來自澳洲、紐西蘭和新加坡的學生而言，臺灣高等教育的學術因素並非吸引其前來臺灣就讀的最重要考量因素。社會因素方面，本研究發現，社會因素及校友網絡的影響力對於來自東南亞（特別是馬來西亞）的學生有著較大的影響力，而這樣的影響力對於來自澳洲、紐西蘭與新加坡的學生則較小。文化因素方面，其對於學位生和非學位生、外籍生和僑生有著不一樣的影響。對於學位生而言，過大的文化與語言使用習慣差異反而會使得學位生對於來臺攻讀學位感到卻步，但對於非學位生而言，不一樣的文化環境與語言學習機會，反而會吸引非學位生來臺進行短期之文化體驗和語言學習。另外，由於僑生具有較高的中文語言使用能力，因此臺灣的文化因素是吸引其來臺的因素之一，但文化因素對於外籍生的吸引力和影響力則會受到中文能力之差異而有所不同。生活適應方面，大多數受訪學生表示其在臺留學生活之生活適應情形良好；但文化、飲食習慣及語言使用等差異，對於部分來自新南向國家的學生而言，確實是生活中必須面對的適應問題。而本研究亦進一步發現，面對在臺生活相關的生活適應問題與挑戰，新南向國家學生在日常生活中亦會建立

各自多元的生活與文化調適策略，而這些策略促進了學生在跨文化生活經驗中展現文化邊界模糊（*boundary blurring*）的跨文化學習和生活適應能力。

關鍵詞：邊界協商、跨文化溝通、生活適應、新南向政策、出國留學動機