

THE KEY INFLUENCERS OF MAINLAND DEGREE STUDENT SATISFACTION IN TAIWAN: TWO YEARS AFTER THE FIRST ENROLMENT

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ABSTRACT

In the year 2011, Taiwan for the first time opened its higher education to degree students from Mainland China. However, the number of applicants who took advantage of this policy in the first two years after implementation was much below Taipei government expectations. Given the growing importance of the overseas students to generate additional revenue for higher education, as well as the development of people-to-people contact across the Taiwan Strait, the goal of this article is to spot the main challenges that Taiwanese universities and policy-makers face in attracting more Mainland students. This research gleans information from the Mainland students' point of view through a survey conducted at thirteen Taiwanese universities nationwide. It applies a methodology called the Net Promoter Score (NPS), which grants respondents the freedom to express their opinions, perceptions and reflections without limitations set by the interviewer's perspective. This research has found that satisfaction of the Mainland degree students studying in Taiwan is mainly driven by a distinctive learning environment, as they appreciate the "free," "relaxed" and "open" atmosphere at Taiwanese universities. Secondly, the students highly prize opportunities for personal and professional development, and thirdly, they enjoy Taiwanese friendliness and culture and particularly appreciate the nurturing of traditions. However, these positives are offset by negative factors perceived by the students. Mainland degree students feel strong resentment towards the inequality and discrimination they face. There are two sources of this problem. The first is the guidelines established by the Taiwanese government regulating the stay of Mainland students. Those rules are described as detrimental to the future career development and therefore discriminatory. The second is the negative perception and attitude felt among Taiwanese towards people from the People's Republic of China (PRC). These factors are responsible for a very high percentage of dissatisfied degree students (41 percent) who are most likely to discourage their friends and relatives from studying in Taiwan in comparison with the relatively small percentage of extremely satisfied students (23 percent), who are very likely to actively encourage their compatriots to study in Taiwan.

Keywords: Mainland China degree-students, cross-Strait relations, study in Taiwan satisfaction, Net Promoter Score, Taiwan education

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is becoming increasingly international since the growing number of youth is deciding to pursue their studies abroad. The country that sends the most students abroad is the People's Republic of China (PRC, hereinafter also called Mainland China). Taiwanese institutions of higher education attempt to capitalise on these global tendencies by attracting foreign pupils. Yet due to the specific political situation across the strait, the students from the PRC (hereinafter also called Mainland Chinese or Mainland students) first were invited to study in Taiwan (the Republic of China or the ROC) for a short period to gain credits (they are called in the literature "credit mobility students," in Chinese: 短期研究生 *duanqi yanjiusheng*, and will hereinafter be called "credit students") and only in 2011, were allowed to enroll in entire degree courses (in Chinese: 攻讀學位之學籍生 *gongdu xuwei zhi xuejisheng*, those students will be further called "degree students") (Liu et al. 2011: 213).

Still, the opening of Taiwanese universities for Mainland Chinese was accompanied by a number of restrictions imposed on the students. According to the laws governing Mainland students in Taiwan,¹ as of the academic year 2011, citizens of the PRC can apply for selected higher education programs in Taiwan, including full-time Master and PhD programs at national universities; full-time Bachelor, Master and PhD programs at the private universities; and Associate Degree programs at national and private two-year junior colleges (Ministry of Education 2011b).² Only from the academic year 2013, with the amendments introduced to the rules, are national universities allowed to recruit Bachelor students (Ministry of Education 2013a). Moreover, the government, in order to secure the rights of local pupils or their access to higher education, established the so called "three limits and six noes principle" (三限六不 *sanxian liubu*). The three limits refer to the restrictions imposed on the number of Mainland Chinese students in Taiwan, academic institutions allowed to admit Mainland students and academic expertise with regard to recognition of educational credentials. The six noes include the rule of not granting Mainland Chinese students government scholarships or bonus scores in entrance examinations. Additionally, Mainland students cannot: a) take up the admission quota reserved for Taiwanese students; b) work during their studies; c) acquire professional license; and d) seek

employment in Taiwan after graduation (Ministry of Education 2008). Additionally, only the Mainland students, who are the residents of the six cities and provinces—Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong—are eligible to study in Taiwan. Only the Mainland students who have earned their bachelor degree from the 41 institutions in China approved by the Ministry of Education, from Taiwanese private and public institutions, from universities in Hong Kong and Macau or from foreign universities have the right to enrol in graduate studies in Taiwan (Liu et al. 2011: 219). The choices of Mainland students are restricted also when it comes to the university and department of study, since it is the Ministry of Education that approves the annual list of Taiwanese universities and departments that can admit the students from the PRC. In line with the University Act, students recruited from Mainland China "shall not be admitted to those schools, departments, graduate institutes and other degree programs designated as related to national security and secrets for studying therein" (Ministry of Education 2011a: Art. 25). Moreover, Mainland students cannot apply for the Alien Resident Certificate (ARC), which entitles the holder to join the National Health Insurance Program.³ The rules with respect to Mainland Students are much more restrictive than the government's guidelines for international students.⁴ Just to give an example, international students can apply for internships after they graduate from Taiwanese universities, can obtain the ARC and are obliged to join the National Health Insurance Program (Ministry of Education 2012a).

The main reason behind the opening of Taiwanese universities to Mainland degree students seems to be to generate revenue, since the Taiwanese education system, during these times of Taiwan's alarmingly falling birth rate, is increasingly facing the severe problem of shrinking enrolment (Cai et al. 2012: 17).⁵ Another argument frequently cited by the Taiwanese government defending this decision is the desire to promote mutual understanding between people on the both sides of the strait. Yet it is questionable whether any of these goals can be achieved, since, in the first two years, the number of the Mainland Chinese students who decided to pursue their studies in Taiwan was far below Taiwanese expectations. Out of the 653 posts open to Mainland graduate students according to the quota stipulated in the rules of the Ministry of Education, only 248 places were taken, including 220 Master students and 28 PhD students. Only 1050 undergraduate students were enrolled in the 1488 posts opened for them according to the quota (Liu et al. 2011: 221). According to the annual survey made on 15 October 2011 by the Ministry of Education, only 928 degree students from Mainland studied at higher education institutions in Taiwan, which was much below the quota of over 2000 students allowed by the

Taiwanese government. In the second year (academic year 2012), 1864 Mainland degree students joined Taiwanese on campus (see Table 1).

Table 1: The number of enrolled Mainland students in Taiwan (2006–2012).

Academic Year (AY)	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Degree students ①	–	–	–	–	–	928	1864
Credit students ②	1245	1146	1258	1307	1604	2265	2265
Total	1245	1146	1258	1307	1604	2532	4129

Source: On the basis of the information from the Ministry of Education (Republic of China) 2013b: 53.

Notes:

① The numbers of the degree students come from the annual survey made on 15 October.

② The number of the credit students for AY2012 is based on AY2011 data.

Taking into account that Taiwanese universities wish and, according to the government quota, are allowed to enrol more students from across the strait, the question arises how they can effectively attract Chinese youths in the future. From a marketing perspective, the answer is that they have to offer what their customers—here, the Mainland learners—are looking for. Satisfied students are the best advertisement for prospective candidates, while dissatisfied students are likely to discourage their friends and relatives from studying in Taiwan. Therefore, the first step to increase enrolment of Mainland Chinese students in Taiwan is to learn about their satisfaction.

Despite the significance of understanding the Mainland degree students for recruitment purposes, the satisfaction of their study in Taiwan remains a neglected area of research. The purpose of this article is to help address this gap by providing insight into the degree students' real satisfaction once they are in Taiwan. While Taiwanese policymakers describe their universities as an "ideal destination" for students from the PRC due to the shared culture and language (Taiwan Today 2013) and while the literature points to a number of advantages of Taiwanese universities for Mainland students (Liu et al. 2011: 214), this study inquires opinion from the students themselves. It asks about the level of (dis)satisfaction of Mainland Chinese degree students when they engage in education in Taiwan and about the factors accounting for it.

It is important and urgent to answer this research question at this point, since in line with the process of cross-cultural adaptation, we can expect the opinions of the students to evolve over the period of their four-year study.⁶ Therefore, the results of this work will provide a valuable starting point for comparison with future research on related issues. By understanding the main factors influencing student satisfaction (later called "influencers") as well as their dissatisfaction, Taiwanese universities can enhance their marketing strategies. The findings of this research may also

contribute to public debate on the policies governing the stay of Mainland students in Taiwan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the opening of Taiwanese universities to Mainland degree students is a new phenomenon, there has not been much research done on their experiences.⁷ Existing literature is scarce and limited to the credit students (Cai et al. 2012; Chiang 2010). Yet we cannot assume that the findings on the credit students are relevant for the degree students.⁸

The literature on international students has mostly described their experience within a problem and adjustment framework. There is a widespread agreement that living in a new culture and society and using a different language is a stressful situation that may lead to socio-cultural distress and even psychological or other health problems (Jou and Fukada 1997; Liu 2009; Sam and Eide 2008; Searle and Ward 1990; Ying and Liese 1991). Besides the difficulties associated with living in a foreign culture, overseas students may experience problems similar to those of the other students, such as difficulties with coping with the academic setting and problems often encountered by young adults or rooted in the student's personal characteristics (Sam 2000: 317–318; Williams et al. 2003). Moreover, they may encounter physical difficulties in facing a different population density and climate or coming in contact with local cuisine and new diseases (Berry et al. 1987: 492). Yet Church points to a number of studies that demonstrate that despite the difficulties the students face, the majority of them are able to adapt to a new environment (Church 1982: 545). This body of literature on adjustment, acculturation or adaptation asks about various factors that may exacerbate or mitigate the stress of living and studying abroad, how the individuals who have immigrated manage to adapt to a new cultural context (Sodowsky and Plake 1992; Ward and Kennedy 1993), what cultural changes result from life in the new environment (literature on acculturation) and about the psychological changes experienced and their eventual outcomes (literature on adaptation) (Berry 1980; Berry and Sam 1997).

Even though acculturation in principle is neutral in the sense that it takes place both in the sojourner and the people from the host culture (Berry 2006), the majority of literature on acculturation as well as on adjustment and adaptation focuses on the change of the international student, and very often this change is treated as the equivalent of assimilation. This stress on the problems of the international students and their need to adapt to a new

environment fails to recognise the responsibility on the side of the host country, society or university to support the foreign students and to provide the best possible conditions for them. This work agrees with Perrucci and Hu, who notice that "the weaknesses or inadequacies of the host society [...] should be opposed or changed rather than accommodated" (Perrucci and Hu 1995: 496). Therefore, in order to point to the weaknesses or inadequacies of the host, it turns attention to the subjective evaluation of satisfaction from study in Taiwan made by the students. This endeavour is in line with the current approach to the institutions of higher education, which are treated as service industries and thus, one of the measures of their success is whether they satisfy the students—their customers. Ensuring international student satisfaction is crucial, as satisfied students are the most effective in influencing the decisions of prospective students (Ward and Masgoret 2004). Accordingly, the most recent research on international students turns attention to the question of (dis)satisfaction (Generosa et al. 2013; Van Aart 2011; Ward and Masgoret 2004; Yang et al. 2008).

Yet the literature examining the sojourners' satisfaction does not provide a single definition of satisfaction or an agreement on how to measure it. For Perrucci and Hu (1995) satisfaction means assessment of the quality of the academic program, appointment (as teaching or research assistants) and nonacademic social relations, including for example instruction, faculty support, housing, financial assistance, while Sam (2000), interested in satisfaction with life among the international students, defines it as the "global evaluation of a person's quality of life based on the person's own chosen criteria." According to Athiyaman (1997: 529–530), (dis)satisfaction results from the comparison of the real experience with the attitude towards the experience before it took place. What all these definitions have in common is that they treat satisfaction as a subjective experience of the person involved. This study agrees with this point and defines satisfaction from higher education as a gap between student expectations and actual gains (Zeithaml et al. 1993). Learners who decide to pursue studies internationally have certain expectations towards their stay abroad (or motivations) before they set on journey to the host country. During the stay abroad, they acquire a subjective opinion or attitude towards what they actually gain (Athiyaman 1997). If the learner believes that what he or she gains or experiences does not meet expectations, then he or she will be dissatisfied; however, if gains meet or exceed expectations, satisfaction will result.

Due to the various definitions of satisfaction, its various dimensions are taken into account in the literature. The report on satisfaction of international students in New Zealand pays attention to the learning, living

and support experience (Generosa et al. 2013), while the authors of the survey on international students in Europe do not impose any categories, instead leaving the respondents free to specify the factors that influence their (dis)satisfaction (Van Aart 2011). Perrucci and Hu in their study on satisfaction of the international graduate students at one particular university in the U.S. are looking for the determinants of satisfaction from the academic program, academic appointment and nonacademic social relations (Perrucci and Hu 1995: 506), while the report on the international students in New Zealand inquires into their satisfaction with "educational, pastoral and support services, living conditions and social circumstances" as well as with the academic performance (Ward and Masgoret 2004).

This study, in a manner similar to the research on European students (Van Aart 2011), is not interested in any particular dimensions of satisfaction *a priori* but seeks the factors that influence the experience from the students themselves. Still, the analysis of the literature should be of help for the prediction of the students' possible expectations/motivations and gains/experience from their study abroad. The research provides abundant factors responsible for the overseas students' mobility and which fulfilment or failure to fulfil by the overseas university may contribute to student (dis)satisfaction. As the examples may serve: a) *push factors of the sending country*—forces that drive students outward, as for example increased demand for trained personnel, lack of training facilities, limited capacity of tertiary education and very high competition or failure to pass examination for school admission (Altbach 1991: 309; Cummings 1984); b) *pull factors of the receiving country*—forces that attract foreign students to the receiving country, as for example the job opportunities, high standard of education, international reputation of higher education institutions, geographical proximity, overall knowledge and awareness of the host country in the student's home country, the recommendations received from relatives or friends about the place of destination, overall expenses involved in the study, the environment of the host country, social links of the student with the host country, the university's reputation, signed international agreements, host country support of international students (Altbach 1998; Mazzarol 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar 2001); c) *pull factors of the sending country*—forces that encourage students to stay at home, as for example relevance of domestic education, increasing internationalisation of domestic education, relevance of studies in a home country for a future job and desire to stay with family (Li and Bray 2007: 795); d) *push factors of the receiving country*—forces which repel foreign students, as for example tight immigration policies, concerns with obtaining visas, discrimination toward foreigners due to political/religious reasons or the circumstances of the

sending/receiving country, uncertainties in government regulations concerning foreign students, high cost (Altbach 1991: 309; Chow 2011: 7; Li and Bray 2007: 795); e) *individual factors*—individual perceptions and characteristics, as for example pursuit of professional development and improvement of qualifications, desire for adventure, prospects of employment, access to scholarships, possibilities of immigration in the future, socio-economic status, language competence (Altbach 1991).

The literature on overseas Chinese students provides certain clues with respect to the sources of their (dis)satisfaction. The PRC higher education difficulty to meet demand and the relatively high competition among the candidates would constitute a strong push factor of the sending country (Li and Bray 2007: 796; NESO 2005).⁹ The high demand for trained personnel and the need to attract foreign knowledge may also add to the Mainland students' willingness to gain a degree abroad (Yang 2011; Zhang and Chen 2012).¹⁰ Therefore, it may be expected that the students will feel satisfied if they gain a degree and skills valued at home during their stay abroad. The increasing internationalisation of Chinese education (Altbach and Knight 2007; Yang 2002), the desire to stay with family and the lack of social support networks would work the opposite way (Lu 1990; Williams et al. 2003), and the students may mention these issues as the sources of dissatisfaction with education overseas. The geographical proximity, high awareness of Taiwan among the Mainlanders, the social links of some PRC students with Taiwan and the relatively low living and study expenses on the island when compared to that of other countries would "pull" the Chinese youths toward study in Taiwan and may contribute to their satisfaction (Yang 2007). Moreover, since research shows that the main stressor of the Chinese students abroad are language issues, some of them may be satisfied with study in a Chinese speaking environment (Pan et al. 2008). The similarity in culture that manifests itself, for example, in the teaching and learning styles, may also influence the choice of Taiwan and student satisfaction (Major 2005; Mehdizadeh and Scott 2005).¹¹ On the other hand, government regulations concerning the Mainland students (as described in the previous paragraphs), adding to the uncertainty related to future employment prospects (Yang 2007) as well as the negative attitudes on the part of Taiwanese society towards the Mainland Chinese (push factors of the host country), may lead to their dissatisfaction. It can be expected that the individual characteristics such as, for example, the ability to cope with a new situation thanks to personal self-esteem or the inability to handle issues of responsibility and freedom may also play a role (Mak and Nesdale 2001; Yang et al. 2008).

Additionally, the literature points to a number of important influencers of Chinese student experience from their study abroad that are difficult to classify as pull or push factors of Taiwan. Still, we can expect that the young respondents will show considerable concern with such issues. The most frequently mentioned factors in this group are academic issues, such as "teaching assistance; becoming involved in class discussions; making oral presentations and taking exams; becoming accustomed to different classroom communication styles and types of interaction from those of the home country; and adjusting to changes in curriculum in the multicultural classroom" (Pan et al. 2008: 221).

METHODOLOGY

The Survey and Focus Group

This study applies a relatively new but popular methodology called Net Promoter Score (NPS). It is a survey to measure satisfaction from product or service and likeliness that it will be recommended to others. It asks one main question that enables calculation of the "net-promoter score," i.e., the ratio of promoters to detractors. In the business world, the question might be "How likely is it that you will recommend our company to a friend or colleague?" Respondents answer on a 0 to 10 rating scale, where 0 stands for "no, not at all likely" and 10 for "yes, extremely likely." Based on the responses, the interviewees are divided into "promoters" (9–10 rating), "passively satisfied" (7–8 rating) and "detractors" (0–6 rating) (Reichheld 2003: 1). In this study, the "promoters" are those who are extremely satisfied and very likely to actively encourage their friends to study in Taiwan; the group of "passively satisfied" includes students who are in general satisfied but not enough to actively promote study in Taiwan; and "detractors" who are unsatisfied students most likely to discourage their friends and relatives from study in Taiwan. The NPS is calculated after the percentage of detractors is subtracted from the percentage of promoters. The highest result thus may be +100 in the case where everybody is a promoter and the lowest –100, where everybody is a detractor. The higher the number is, the more satisfied are the respondents and the more likely they are to promote the service or product. Additionally, a second open question is frequently introduced. It asks about the reasons for (not) recommending.

The NPS has been selected for this study as the method to measure satisfaction for its several advantages in comparison to traditional surveys. First, it is very short, and thus the response rates are usually quite high. This

is quite an important factor for this research; the author, after consulting a Taiwanese specialist on the Mainland students and then questioning the students themselves, has learnt that she can experience serious difficulties obtaining a satisfactory return rate from the survey, since the students are frequently inquired about their opinions on study and life in Taiwan by the Taiwanese universities, scholars or students writing their dissertations and thus simply become tired of responding. Second, the interviewees decide on their own what constitutes the most important driver of their satisfaction, instead of this being suggested by the questionnaire. If we look at the surveys conducted among the Mainland students about their studies abroad, we can see that the traditional survey methods, with the close-ended questions or those with suggested answers prevail (Yang 1999). This type of survey is also the most popular in research focused on cross-border flows of students in general (Perrucci and Hu 1995; Lewthwaite 1996; Chow 2011). In the traditional questionnaire, the structure of the questions introduces a certain bias. Although the interviewer keeps control of the answers, he/she will not learn of the respondents' own opinions, reflections or interpretations. The interview participant is expected to retrieve information from a number of given answers in a passive mode. The NPS method, in turn, provides a free format open-ended and in-depth exploration of the particular aspect of life in which the interviewer is interested. It obviously grants the respondents the type of freedom that allows them to express opinion without limitations set by the interviewer's perspective or suggestions implicit in his/her questions. Third, the outcomes of the NPS are easy to interpret and communicate; thus they may provide a valuable guide for future decision-makers based on a number of practical recommendations offered by the respondents. Their satisfaction is measured in a very straightforward way, which truly helps to understand the target group. NPS has been applied by international companies such as Apple and Proctor & Gamble, non-profit organisations such as AIESEC, and various public institutions including the European Commission (Van Aart 2011: 1).

In this survey, the main question is, "How likely is it that you will recommend studies in Taiwan to your friends and relatives back home?" The respondents were also asked a second question, "Why? What are the main reasons you will (not) recommend Taiwan to pursue higher education?" The answers to this question allow for identification of the top-of-mind reasons why Mainland students will or will not recommend their compatriots to study in Taiwan (Van Aart 2011: 2). In order to clarify findings of the second question of the questionnaire and to obtain deeper understanding of the perspective of Mainland students, the study has made use of a focus group discussion. The focus group was composed of eight degree-

students—four males and four females—from Mainland China and lasted for one hour (for the questions in the focus group discussion, see Appendix II). A comparison of the findings from: a) the second question of the questionnaire—the open question about the reason for (not) recommending; b) focus group interview; and c) those from the literature led to the classification of the items-reasons in the findings into the seven thematic groups. The overview of categories is presented in Table 2: *Cost, Personal and Professional Development (or Personal Growth), Academics (Study Experience), University Services, Social Life and Environment*, and subcategories, which were the same for the degree and credit students (Table 5 and 6). The category *Cost* contains living expenses, tuition fee, general expenses (unspecified by the respondents) and funding possibilities. The funding possibilities include grants, scholarships and various opportunities of earning income as, for example, internships or part-time jobs. The category *Personal and Professional Development* covers issues related to future job opportunities, continuation of study opportunities, future prospects in general and personal development. Personal development or broadening of horizons is understood as learning and understanding a different culture, a new way of thinking and a distinct political system, as well as attaining a new type of knowledge. Typical topics in the category *Academics* include teacher quality, learning environment and atmosphere, classmates, courses, recognition and reputation of the institution. The category *University Services* contains the following subcategories: registration, equipment and administrative services. *Social Life* includes comments related to making new friends, socialising with local people, student associations and activities and language. The category *Environment* contains nature, appearance and atmosphere of the cities, society, culture and everyday life. The responses that were too general for classification into any of the above categories were organised under the heading *General*.

Aside from these two main questions, the respondents were asked general questions about age (fill in), sex (male/female), date of arrival in Taiwan (fill in), previous visits to Taiwan (yes/no), the name of the University and the Department attended in Taiwan (fill in), the year of study (first, second, third, fourth, Master first, Master second, PhD, other), the type of a stay in Taiwan (short-term—credit students, long-term—degree students) and the student's status in Taiwan (self-financed, exchange student, other).

Table 2: The overview of categories.

Category	Subcategories				
Cost	Living expenses	Tuition fee	General expenses	Funding possibilities	
Personal and Professional Development	Future job opportunities	Continuation of study opportunities	Future prospects in general	Personal development	
Academics	Teacher quality	Learning environment and atmosphere	Classmates	Courses	Recognition and reputation
University Services	Registration	Equipment	Administrative services		
Social Life	Making friends and socialising with local people	Student associations and activities	Language		
Environment	Nature	Cities	Society, culture, everyday life	Cuisine	
General					

Note: The categories and subcategories were established after the comparison of the themes provided by a) the second question of the questionnaire—the open question about the reason for (not) recommending; b) the focus group interview and c) the literature.

The survey was examined by three experts and was pre-tested on three Mainland students to ensure that the questions were clear. The responses were collected through an online survey. The benefits of the online method include the ease and relatively cheap way of reaching and collecting data from a large group of respondents in a short period. The questionnaire was created with a Google Docs tool for creating surveys as a Google form and a web link (URL: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/16PDoqSZ5PIVI0nlfJIVFDOTsDInRtz-CIDN03Pm0wdM/edit> [in Chinese, the English translation is provided in Appendix I]) was shared through e-mail. It was sent to fifteen Taiwanese universities via the contact person responsible for the foreign students or Mainland students, depending on the organisation of the University's administration.¹²

THE EXPECTATIONS AND THEIR FULFILLMENT: THE OPINION OF THE MAINLAND STUDENTS

A total of 123 usable responses were obtained in a survey conducted from 21 March to 5 June 2013. The respondents were in the age range from 18 to 29, 46 percent male and 77 percent female. Out of the 123 responses, 87 were generated by the degree students and 36 by the credit students. The survey sample for the 87 responses constitutes 4.7 percent of the total population of the 1864 degree students enrolled at higher education institutions in Taiwan in the academic year 2012. In the case of credit students, the sample size of 36 responses represents approximately 1.6 percent of the total number of the 2265 Mainland credit students enrolled at higher education institutions in Taiwan in the academic year 2012. The results derived with this sample size were at a 90 percent confidence level and allow for the following margins of error: the sample size of 87 degree students gives a margin of error of 8.6 percent; the sample size of 36 credit students gives a margin of error of 13.6 percent. As the number of responses obtained from the credit students is low in relation to their whole population in Taiwan, it has to be stressed that these results provide only a rough comparison with the credit students; the focus is mainly on the degree students. For the purpose of research with its main focus on credit students, additional data must be collected.

Based on the responses, the students were divided into "promoters" (9–10 rating), "passively satisfied" (7–8 rating) and "detractors" (0–6 rating). For the group of degree students, the results are as follows: the percentage of detractors is 41 percent (out of the 87 degree students) and the percentage of promoters is 23 percent (Table 3). This outcome shows that 41 percent of the degree students are unsatisfied and are mostly likely to discourage their friends and relatives from study in Taiwan, while 23 percent of them are extremely satisfied and thus very likely to actively encourage others back home to enrol in university across the strait. The NPS calculated after the percentage of detractors is subtracted from the percentage of promoters to be the following: $NPS = 23 - 41 = -18$. The very low NPS (-18) reveals that a great number of degree students is negative about their stay in Taiwan and not likely to promote Taiwanese universities in China.

Table 3: The percentage of "detractors," "passively satisfied" and "promoters" among the 87 degree students from the PRC attending selected Taiwanese universities, academic year 2012 (where 87 students = 100 percent).

Rating	No of Students	Findings
0	4	Detractors 41 percent
1	2	
2	2	
3	5	
4	2	
5	12	
6	9	Passively satisfied 36 percent
7	17	
8	14	Promoters 23 percent
9	12	
10	8	
Total	87	100 percent

For the group of the credit students, the results are as follows: the percentage of detractors is 17 percent, and the percentage of promoters is 36 percent. The 36 percent of the extremely satisfied students are very likely to actively encourage their friends to study in Taiwan, while the 17 percent of the unsatisfied students are most likely to discourage others back home from studying in Taiwan. The NPS calculated after the percentage of detractors is subtracted from the percentage of promoters ($NPS = 36 - 17 = 19$, Table 4) and leads to the +19 satisfaction rate. It shows that the credit students are more positive about their study in Taiwan than the degree students, and they assess a period of study mobility in Taiwan as a relatively good investment of their budget and time.¹³ Still, this result does not fare well when compared with the NPS from research on international students in various European countries, where satisfaction rates range from 50 to 83.¹⁴

The Mainland students were also asked for the reason(s) they would or would not recommend their study experience. 123 respondents give 290 reasons, with the respondents made up of degree students (87 respondents) and 81 reasons by the credit students (36 respondents). The results are presented in Table 5 for degree students and in Table 6 for credit students. As the question is open-ended, the answers are not biased by the perspective of the interviewer as in the traditional questionnaire. Instead, in line with the NPS methodology, the answers represent the reasons that came to the students' minds devoid of suggestion by the interviewer. Therefore, the

reasons constitute the top aspects that affect student opinion causing their (dis)satisfaction.

Table 4: The percentage of "detractors," "passively satisfied" and "promoters" among the 36 credit students from the PRC attending selected Taiwanese universities, academic year 2012 (where 36 students = 100 percent).

Rating	No of students	Findings
0	0	
1	0	
2	1	Detractors 17 percent
3	1	
4	1	
5	2	
6	1	
7	6	Passively Satisfied 47 percent
8	11	
9	3	Promoters 36 percent
10	10	
Total:	36	100 percent

The analysis of the answers given to the second question of the survey reveals that the Mainland degree students are the most concerned with their study experience (*Academics*—57 comments), followed by *Personal and Professional Development* with 47 comments and thirdly the *Environment* with 39 comments. *Social Life* and *Cost* are less important for the students, while *University Services* matter to them the least. Within these categories, the strongest influence on Mainland degree student satisfaction are the "Learning environment and atmosphere" (28 positive comments), followed by "Personal development" with 26 positive comments and "Society, culture and everyday life" as the third factor with 19 positive comments. However, the second and third most important influencer of student dissatisfaction are also "Personal development" with 14 negative opinions and "Society, culture and everyday life" with nine negative opinions. The government rules, perceived as discriminatory, are the main driver of degree student dissatisfaction (29 comments).

Table 5: Influencers of Mainland degree student (dis)satisfaction in Taiwan (academic year 2012, 87 respondents, 209 reasons).

Category	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	%
Cost	12	0	4	16	7.7
Living expenses	3	0	1	4	1.91
Tuition fee	2	0	1	3	1.44
General expenses	4	0	2	6	2.87
Funding possibilities	3	0	0	3	1.44
Personal & Professional Development	19	0	28	47	22.5
Future job opportunities	3	0	0	3	1.44
Continuation of study opportunities	0	0	2	2	0.96
Future prospect in general	2	0	0	2	0.96
Personal development	14	0	26	40	19.14
Academics	13	2	42	57	27.27
Teacher quality	1	0	8	9	4.31
Learning environment & atmosphere	3	2	28	33	15.79
Classmates	3	0	3	6	2.87
Courses	3	0	1	4	1.91
Recognition & reputation	3	0	2	5	2.39
University Services	0	0	10	10	4.78
Registration	0	0	3	3	1.44
Equipment	0	0	7	7	3.35
Administrative services	0	0	0	0	0
Social Life	9	2	14	25	11.96
Making friends/socialising with local people	7	2	6	15	7.18
Student associations/activities	0	0	4	4	1.91
Language	2	0	4	6	2.87
Environment	10	0	29	39	18.7
Nature	0	0	7	7	3.35
Cities	1	0	3	4	1.91
Society, culture, everyday life	9	0	19	28	13.4
Cuisine	0	0	0	0	0
General	6	4	5	15	7.2
Total	69	8	132	209	100

Table 6: Influencers of Mainland credit student satisfaction in Taiwan (academic year 2012, 36 respondents, 76 reasons).

Category	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	%
Cost	1	0	1	2	2.47
Living expenses	0	0	0	0	0
Tuition fee	0	0	0	0	0
General expenses	1	0	1	2	2.47
Funding possibilities	0	0	0	0	0
Personal & Professional Development	4	0	9	13	16.05
Future job opportunities	1	0	1	2	2.47
Continuation of study opportunities	0	0	0	0	0
Future prospects in general	1	0	0	1	1.23
Personal development	2	0	8	10	12.35
Academics	4	2	20	26	32.1
Teacher quality	0	0	4	4	4.93
Learning environment & atmosphere	2	2	10	14	17.28
Classmates	0	0	0	0	0
Courses	1	0	6	7	8.64
Recognition & reputation	1	0	0	1	1.23
University Services	0	0	5	5	6.17
Registration	0	0	0	0	0
Equipment	0	0	4	4	4.94
Administrative services	0	0	1	1	1.23
Social Life	1	0	8	9	11.11
Making friends / socialising with local people	1	0	5	6	7.41
Student associations / activities	0	0	0	0	0
Language	0	0	3	3	3.7
Environment	0	0	20	20	24.69
Nature	0	0	4	4	4.94
Cities	0	0	1	1	1.23
Society, culture, everyday life	0	0	11	11	13.58
Cuisine	0	0	4	4	4.94
General	5	0	1	1	1.23
Total	15	2	64	81	100

The analysis of the answers given to the second question of the survey by the credit students reveals that they are similarly most concerned with their study experience (*Academics*—26 comments). However, in opposition to the degree students, they consider the *Environment* (20 comments) as more important than *Personal and Professional Development* (13 comments). *Social Life* (mentioned 9 times) and *University Services* (mentioned 5 times) are less important to the students, while *Cost* (mentioned twice) matters to them the least. Similar to the degree students, none of these factors—*Social Life*, *University Services* and *Cost*—constitute important influencers of student (dis)satisfaction. Within these categories, the factors with the strongest influence on Mainland credit student satisfaction are "Society, culture and everyday life" (11 positive comments), followed by "Learning environment and atmosphere" (10 positive comments) and "Personal development" (8 positive comments). As in the case of the degree students, the government rules are the main driver of credit student dissatisfaction (10 negative comments).

Originally, the government rules did not constitute a separate thematic group in this research but were included in other categories and subcategories with which they overlapped, including the category *Cost*, *Personal and Professional Development* and the subcategory "Society, culture and everyday life" in the category *Environment*.¹⁵ As the government rules constitute the main "influencer" of respondents' dissatisfaction with their study in Taiwan, for the reason of clarity, they are additionally presented separately in Table 7 for degree students and in Table 8 for credit students.

Table 7: The government rules as a driver of Mainland degree student dissatisfaction.

Government rules	Cost	Career prospects	Lack of work experience	Discrimination	Expression of dissatisfaction	Total
No scholarship	2	1	0	2	1	6
No work permit	1	3	3	0	1	8
No possibility of internship	0	1	0	0	0	1
No ARC	0	0	0	1	0	1
No health insurance	0	0	0	2	1	3
The limit set on Taiwanese universities open to Mainland students	0	0	0	0	2	2
Three limits, six noes policy in general	0	3	0	3	1	7
Government rules in general	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	3	9	3	8	6	29

Table 8: The government rules as a driver of Mainland credit student dissatisfaction.

Government rules	Cost	Career prospect	Lack of work experience	Discrimination	Expression of dissatisfaction	Total
No scholarship	0	0	0	0	1	1
No work permit	1	1	0	0	2	4
No possibility of internship	0	0	1	0	0	1
No ARC	0	0	0	0	0	0
No health insurance	1	0	0	0	1	2
The limit set on Taiwanese universities open for the Mainland students	0	0	0	0	0	0
Three limits, six noes policy in general	1	0	0	0	1	2
Government rules in general	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3	1	1	0	5	10

The government rules brought up by the students include: no possibility of receiving scholarship, no work permit, no possibility of internship, no ARC, no health insurance, the limit on Taiwanese universities open to Mainland students, the "three limits, six noes" policy and government rules in general. According to the students, these rules have led to the increase in the cost of

study (overlapping with the category *Cost*), confine their personal and professional development and particularly their personal development and lead to their lack of work experience, which is also perceived as disadvantageous to their careers (overlapping with the category *Personal and Professional Development*). The rules also constitute the manifestation of discrimination of Mainland students in Taiwanese society (overlapping with the subcategory "Society, Culture, Life" in the category *Environment*). Several students mention the rules just to express their dissatisfaction with such treatment by the Taiwanese government (overlapping with the category *General*).

Below follows a categorised detailed overview of all influencers of satisfaction in a descending order from the most to the least commented categories according to the degree students (including number of comments).

Influencer 1: Academics (27 percent of all comments, 42 positive, 13 negative and 2 neutral)

Within this category, the main driver of Mainland degree student satisfaction is the "Learning environment and atmosphere," as it has received the highest number of positive comments out of all the reasons indicated by the degree students (mentioned 28 times, Table 5). One of the most recognised and assessed as a positive factor when it comes to the learning environment is a difference between the study environment in China and in Taiwan. Nine students appreciate the different study environment and its quality. One student describes studies in Taiwan as comparatively "lively," while the other expresses satisfaction with its comfort ("If you compare Taiwan to the Mainland, the study environment in Taiwan is more comfortable"). Moreover, in describing the academics, students apply the word "free" eight times to refer to the teaching environment or academic atmosphere in Taiwan ("In comparison with China, Taiwan provides a more free and more multi-cultural academic atmosphere"). One student prizes Taiwanese education for its lack of pressure but another perceives its lack of competition as a factor that inhibits student development. In one case, the education in Taiwan is compared to the European system, and it is recognised as a positive phenomenon. In another case, the quality of teaching in Taiwan is described as higher than in the Mainland. The atmosphere of studying is referred to four times as good or very good. In three instances, the atmosphere is described as not satisfactory. The students blame the lack of competition as a discouraging factor.

The students are generally satisfied with the teaching quality (eight positive and one negative comment) and recognise the attitude of Taiwanese

classmates or roommates to be an important factor in their studies. The skills of Taiwanese pupils are described as low twice, and one time Taiwanese students are pictured as childish and lazy. In two instances, the respondents express satisfaction about the fact that with their poor academic record at Chinese universities, they would only have been able to enrol in a much worse university in the Mainland than in Taiwan.

The degree students refer to the courses four times, including three negative opinions. In the negative assessments, the student criticises the overly high pressure and expectations towards the Taiwanese master students and another notes the comparatively low number of courses to choose from at the science department. One student describes the local news media as parochial and criticises such an environment as uninspiring for studying media. The only positive comment acknowledges the high quality of courses.

The international recognition and reputation of Taiwanese universities is mentioned five times, including two positive and three negative opinions. The fact that the respondent is able to study at a much better university in Taiwan than his/her results would have allowed in Mainland China is in two cases affirmed and in one case discredited as proof of a poor level of Taiwanese higher education. The two other dissatisfied students refer to the low level of Taiwanese universities and comment that students from Mainland who choose Taiwanese universities are academically mediocre or below average. The respondents are in general satisfied with their Taiwanese teachers ("The teachers are very hard working"). Only in one out of the nine cases are the professors criticised ("There is a very poor academic atmosphere [...] the teachers just curry favour with students during class [...] the teaching level is unexceptional as well.").

One credit student criticises the level of courses in Taiwan as substantially lower than in China, while two students express neutral opinions. One stresses that Mainland students should be aware of the different teaching environment in Taiwan and the other states the fact that the educational system in Taiwan is different from that in Mainland China. Two respondents describe a different study environment as a positive and worthwhile experience. Similar to the degree students, the group of credit students apply the word "free" (four times) to describe the learning environment, also using the words "relaxed" and "open." The level of courses is perceived among the credit students in six cases as very satisfactory. The students are particularly content about the fact that they do not need to take courses required back home, such as Marxism, Thinking of Mao or Theory of Military Affairs. The focus group discussion reassured this point, as the participants were particularly enthusiastic about freedom

and lack of pressure at university. However, the respondents of the survey hold different opinions on whether this freedom is a positive or a negative factor in their studies. One respondent, a credit student, compliments the "holistic teaching system" ("I really like this type of holistic teaching system at Fuda" [*Furen Daxue*, i.e., Furen University]). Two students express dissatisfaction with the atmosphere and refer to the study environment as "too weak" and the academic atmosphere as "inferior" to that of the Mainland, while two students characterise the study atmosphere as very good. One respondent articulates worries about the recognition of Taiwanese diplomas ("Regardless of what perspective you take, it is good to study in Taiwan; the one problem is with the recognition of Taiwanese academic qualifications").

Influencer 2: Personal & Professional Development (23 percent of all comments, 28 positive and 19 negative)

Personal development is recognised 26 times as an important positive aspect of studying in Taiwan, which makes it the second highest positive influencer of student satisfaction, right after the learning environment and atmosphere (Table 5). It is mentioned that studying in Taiwan broadens horizons; leads to understanding of different culture, knowledge, local customs and the Taiwanese way of thinking; and allows the student to experience a distinct environment and system not found in China ("Broadens horizons, different experience," "You can gain a very special experience"). The students express satisfaction from gaining this life experience and an ability to look at questions from a new perspective. One student mentions that staying in Taiwan provides a great opportunity to exercise the ability to adapt to a new environment ("Thanks to the Taiwanese level of teaching, which is higher than in the Mainland and where the culture is different, one can cultivate in oneself a capable person," "The various activities provide lots of opportunities for personal development").

The most frequently mentioned determinant of dissatisfaction with Taiwanese universities when it comes to personal and professional development are the rules established by the Taiwanese government. They are recognised as a factor limiting future job prospects and personal development 12 times (63 percent of all the factors given as having a negative impact on personal and professional development) by the degree students. The students give only two other reasons for their negative views regarding the possibilities for development. The first respondent states that news and media in Taiwan are of a very low quality; thus studying in this field "limits the outlook of the students." The comment of the student who

writes, "There is nothing outstanding in Taiwanese culture or writing" is also recognised as negative.

When it comes to the setbacks to personal and professional development of the degree students, the rules of the Taiwanese government in general are noted one time ("the unclear rules about the Master and PhD research make prospects uncertain"), no possibility for scholarship is once mentioned as having a negative impact on career prospects, no possibility for work permit is mentioned three times as limiting career prospects and three times as making impossible the accumulation of work experience during studies, no possibility of internship is mentioned once as circumscribing career prospects, and the rule of the "three limits and six noes" is mentioned three times, also as limiting career prospects (Table 7).

Negative opinions toward future job opportunities are linked to the perceived lack of recognition of Taiwanese universities and the teaching curriculum ("It is better to go to an American University since the recognition of Taiwanese higher education diplomas by employers is even lower than their recognition of Mainland diplomas," "It is possible that the knowledge and way of thinking that we learn in Taiwan will be useless after we return home").

In the responses of the credit students, the broadening of horizons is mentioned five times. Similar to degree students, they mention a "completely different life experience" and distinct culture. Two credit students refer to a positive side of gaining understanding about the "other China" ("We can better understand democratic China and observe a different realisation of Chinese culture," "[studying in Taiwan] can improve understanding between the students on both sides of the strait and form a strong fundament for the future development of our relationship"). With respect to the government rules, the lack of a work permit and no possibility of internship are recognised as factors diminishing their job prospects and limiting job experience (Table 8).

Influencer 3: Environment (19 percent of all comments, 29 positive and 10 negative)

The subcategory "Society, culture and everyday life" is mentioned 19 times by the degree students, which makes this subcategory the third top factor influencing their satisfaction. The students particularly appreciate the personal culture of Taiwanese people and the way they preserve traditions ("Cultural life is comparatively profound in Taiwan, so it is worth learning," "The cultural atmosphere is great," "The culture is different here"). They also point out that the life environment is open and free. In general, they

admire Taiwan's natural beauty ("Taiwan is so beautiful"). Two students express their willingness to travel around Taiwan in their free time ("I am very happy to organise backpacker trips around Taiwan in my free time," "It's great to go around and have fun"). In one case, the Taiwanese climate is mentioned ("The Taiwanese climate is very agreeable").

The opinions of credit students are very similar. They are very satisfied with the culture and the great traditions. They assess life in Taiwan as "easy" and "convenient" and the life environment as "open," "liberal" and "free" ("Taiwanese society is very humanistic. For example, they work in every possible way to accommodate the disabled. You do not see this in Mainland China"). One student cheers that travelling around Taiwan provides a great opportunity to fully experience Taiwanese local customs and hospitality.

One issue stands out in the answers of the degree students. When they mention "Society, culture and everyday life," eight students refer to the government rules to express dissatisfaction. In their opinion, being barred from scholarships, ARCs and health insurance, in other words the rule of "three limits and six noes," make their lives more difficult and constitute a manifestation of discrimination and violation of their basic rights. Out of nine negative opinions in this subcategory, only one does not relate to the government rules ("Taiwan development is slow and the society is conservative, not seeking change. Therefore, it does not provide a good environment for a 20-something student to grow").

Influencer 4: Social Life (12 percent of all comments, 14 positive, 9 negative and 2 neutral)

The opinions on making friends and socialising with local people are divided. Taiwanese friendliness is praised in six responses, and seven negative remarks are expressed about Taiwanese people. The latter group recognises a degree of discrimination and prejudice in Taiwanese society towards themselves (the word "discrimination" is applied twice and "prejudice"—twice). In one instance, the narrow-mindedness of Taiwanese people is mentioned. Two students criticise the distance between Taiwanese and Mainlanders, stating that it is difficult to be accepted by Taiwanese people and almost impossible to get into their circles ("In [Taiwanese] society, there exists a barrier to a certain degree"). Two comments are quite neutral, and one of them conveys advice for the prospective students: "The other point to make is getting along with Taiwanese classmates. I think that there is no need to stick to your political opinions and ideas. Everyone has grown up in a different environment and has learnt differently, really; there

is no need to quarrel about politics with Taiwanese classmates. If you do it, it won't make anyone happy. After all, there are some questions that none of us can solve. If you put politics aside, it's possible to make close friends with Taiwanese classmates." The other group of students—seven respondents—praises Taiwanese people for their exceptional friendliness. ("The best thing about Taiwan is the people," "Taiwanese people are very nice"). For two students, it is a positive fact that there is no language barrier but one student points out that teachers tend to speak Taiwanese in class, which makes studies more difficult. Student associations are mentioned only twice and in a positive light, and two respondents praise the abundance and variety of school activities, as well as the freedom to choose among them. Similarly, the credit students note the fact that it is difficult to mingle with Taiwanese people. As a result of this, the Mainland students live separate lives from the locals. At the same time, there are five comments praising Taiwanese people ("The people here are so great!", "Taiwanese are so nice that it is great to be here," "Taiwanese are so warm and friendly," "Everyone in Taiwan is very nice," "Most people here are exceptionally friendly, it is such a warm-hearted small island!"). Three students comment that it is good not to worry about the language barrier.

Influencer 5: The Cost (8 percent of all the answers, 4 positive and 12 negative)

The cost of studying and living in Taiwan is described as high or too high (nine times) and as low (four times). The three students who refer to the high cost criticise the government rule that excludes them from the possibility of applying for scholarships and work. According to one of the students, this prohibition coupled with the high cost make students too dependent on their parents ("We cannot apply for scholarships, and we cannot work. We can only stretch out our hands in asking for money from our parents"). The student who criticises the high general expenses in Taiwan mentions that investing the same amount of money in education in Hong Kong would be much more advantageous. The respondent who describes the cost of studying in Taiwan as low compares Taiwan with the United States. In the one negative comment, the respondent criticises "the ratio quality-price" as not being high.

For the credit students, cost does not constitute an important "influencer" of their opinions. They refer to this category only twice. The first time, the opinion is negative. According to the student, the high cost makes parents "feel unsafe." The other student, who sees the cost as a positive factor, describes it as low in comparison to Hong Kong. This

difference in the approach to cost between the credit and degree students can be explained by the fact that the former are exchange students and their cost spans one or two semesters in Taiwan, which is low in comparison with the cost incurred while obtaining a degree that involves several years of study (all 87 degree students are self-sponsored).

Influencer 6: University Services (5 percent of all comments, 10 positive)

As for university services, the students bring up the registration procedures and the facilities and administrative services, including the dormitory, the campus and the library. This category does not figure as an important "influencer" of student satisfaction. Only ten opinions (4.78 percent) of the degree students and five opinions (6.17 percent) of the credit students touch upon this issue. The comparatively easy application procedures are seen as a positive aspect three times. The students are satisfied with the equipment and express positively about the university's facilities in general.

General Comments

As the title suggests, this covers responses that are too general to be categorised into any of the thematic groups outlined above. One example is the neutral comment: "The academic atmosphere [in Taiwan] differs from that in the Mainland, but the most important thing is what each person really wants. I have learnt here what I want and to enjoy my life every day. It is because everyone is distinct that different people make different choices." Another answer may be positive, such as, "It's great here!" Also, the five negative comments by the credit students about the government rules, which do not fit the above classification, but constitute a general expression of dissatisfaction over no possibility of receiving scholarships, no possibility of employment, no health insurance and the "three limits and six noes" are included in this category.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study is to provide insight into the Mainland degree students' real satisfaction once they are in Taiwan. The results are additionally compared to the satisfaction of the Mainland credit students. A total of 123 Mainland students have participated in this survey, being 87 degree students and 36 credit students. They were asked to indicate the

likeliness of promotion of their study experience in Taiwan among friends and relatives. The main outcome of the study—the measured satisfaction level—is minus eighteen (–18) among the degree students (on the scale of minus 100 where everyone would be dissatisfied and discourage study in Taiwan to plus 100, where everyone would be extremely satisfied and thus promote study in Taiwan). This score shows that the Mainland degree students do not feel positively regarding their study in Taiwan. In comparison, the credit students are much more satisfied, as their measured satisfaction level is +19. However, the result for the credit students has to be augmented with further research on a bigger sample size.

The low NPS for the Mainland degree students does not fare well for their future recruitment by Taiwanese universities. The satisfied students—the "promoters" who are the best advertisement for prospective candidates—are quite low within this group (only 23 percent). Most striking is a very high percentage of unsatisfied students, or "detractors," among the degree students (41 percent). They are most likely to discourage their friends and relatives from study in Taiwan.

Moreover, the study examines the main factors influencing student satisfaction (influencers). The Mainland students were asked to write the main reason(s) for recommending or not recommending their study experience in Taiwan. The 87 degree students have returned 209 reasons, and 36 credit students have responded with 81 reasons. These reasons suggest the factors that Taiwanese universities and policymakers should take into account if they wish to please their young Mainland customers. The dissatisfaction of the degree students is driven firstly by the rules established by the Taiwanese government, which inhibit personal development, discriminate and constitute a violation of basic student rights, and secondly by the discrimination as well as manifest prejudice in Taiwanese society against people from Mainland China, which makes social contact difficult. At the same time, the overwhelming and extraordinary friendliness of Taiwanese people is cited as the third most important positive "influencer" of degree student satisfaction. The Mainland degree students appreciate Taiwanese friendliness, culture and particularly the nurturing of traditions. The top positive "influencer" is a learning environment and particularly the fact that it is free and very different from Mainland China, as well as the high quality of teaching. The students highly value a "free," "relaxed" and "open" atmosphere at the Taiwanese universities, but some warn that too much freedom and particularly the lack of competition might become a factor discouraging students from diligent study. The second factor that has positively influenced their satisfaction are the opportunities for personal development, as according to the respondents, studying in Taiwan broadens

horizons, leads to understanding of different culture and knowledge of local customs and the Taiwanese way of thinking and allows one to experience an environment and a system distinct from that in the PRC.

The credit students in their responses raise the same three top drivers of satisfaction, including first and foremost Taiwanese friendliness and traditions, secondly a more than decent and very enjoyable learning environment and atmosphere and thirdly the opportunities for personal development. When it comes to their dissatisfaction, due to the small number of respondents and prevalence of the positive reasons indicated by the credit students, only one factor driving credit student dissatisfaction clearly stands out—the government rules, which do not allow Mainland students to apply for the ARC.

The students in their answers mention Mainland China, Hong Kong and the U.S. Hong Kong and the U.S. are noted with reference to the cost of studies. Taiwan wins the comparison with Hong Kong as a cheaper place to pursue studies and loses to Hong Kong in quality of investment in studies. The students bring up the low international recognition of Taiwanese diplomas and the lackluster reputation of Taiwanese universities in comparison to the U.S. and even China. However, Taiwanese universities are praised for their free atmosphere, especially when compared to Chinese universities.

Additionally, the research proves that the flow of Mainland Chinese degree students to Taiwan is part of the excess demand for education at home, as some Mainland students who are unable to secure enrolment at the top universities at home search abroad and choose Taiwan as a place that is comparatively cheaper than other destinations, as well as being relatively close to their families and in cultural proximity.

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NOTES

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- ¹ The legal ground for inviting the students from the PRC was prepared in August 2010 with the amendments to the "three laws governing the Mainland students" in Taiwan, i.e., The Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area (*Taiwan Diqu yu Dalu Diqu Renmin Guanxi Tiaoli*), the University Act (*Daxue Fa*) and the Junior College Law (*Zhuanke Xuexiao*).
 - ² An exception to this rule was made for the national universities on the outlying islands of Kinmen and Penghu. The National Quemoy University (Kinmen) and National Penghu University of Science and Technology were already allowed to recruit bachelor students in the academic year 2011.
 - ³ Mainland students are issued only an Exit and Entry Permit for the Taiwan Area of the Republic of China, not the ARC (Ministry of Education, Republic of China [Taiwan], "Measures for Mainland Area People Coming to Taiwan to Study at the Schools above the Level of Junior College").
 - ⁴ The international student is defined in Taiwanese Law as follows: "An individual of foreign nationality, who has never held nationality status from the Republic of China (R.O.C.) and who does not possess an overseas Chinese student status at the time of their application" (Ministry of Education, Republic of China [Taiwan], "MOE Regulations Regarding International Students Undertaking Studies in Taiwan").
 - ⁵ The degree students from the PRC attend Taiwanese universities on full-tuition basis, without public subsidies.
 - ⁶ The examples of the models indicating that students during the period of study abroad go through different stages of adaptation and satisfaction over time are the U-curve model and its extensions (Lysgaard, S., "Adjustment to a Foreign Society: Norwegian Fulbright Grantees Visiting the United States; Adler, P., "The Transitional Experience: An Alternative View of Culture Shock") the models that approach cultural adaptation as a learning process (Adler, P., "The Transitional Experience: An Alternative View of Culture Shock") and the models that focus more on the individual strategies of the student to adapt.
 - ⁷ Existing studies focus mainly on the policies of the government; see for example: Liu, Q. Z. et al., "*Kaifang lusheng lai tai jiaoxue zhengce zhi fazhan*" (The Development of the Higher Education Policies of Accepting Mandarin Students in Taiwan); Yang, C. Y., "*Taiwan dui kaifang Lusheng lai Tai jiaoxue xiangguan yiti de shangque*" (Misunderstandings Related to the Open-door Policy for Mainland Chinese Students in Taiwan).
 - ⁸ According to research on credit students, Chinese youths come to Taiwan mostly out of curiosity to visit a new place, travel and gain a new experience. The other factors that the students discern as motivating them for short-term study in Taiwan are the scholarships received from their universities, recommendation by their teachers and sharing a common language (Chiang, Y. H., "Using AHP on the Determinants of China's Students to Study in Taiwan"). According to the literature on the international degree students, they pay attention to some of the above factors, as for example, the language ability or the cost, but at the same time, they may weigh those factors differently and instead consider other factors, such as safety, the international recognition of the host country's qualifications and the quality of education. See Ward, C. and Masgoret, A., "The Experience of International Students in New Zealand: Report on the Results of the National Survey." In consequence, satisfaction of the credit students varies from the satisfaction of the degree students.
 - ⁹ The institutions of higher education in the PRC do not meet demand, and admission to the universities is highly competitive. According to the Netherlands Education Support Office (NESO) in Beijing, in 2005, 8 million students competed in the National College Entry Examinations for just over 4 million places in higher vocational and undergraduate education and 1.2 million students for 316,000 positions for Master degree. Moreover, the enrolment in higher education is much lower in China when

compared to other developing countries. See Li, M. and Bray, M., "Cross-Border Flows of Students For Higher Education: Push-Pull Factors and Motivations of Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong and Macau"; NESO (Beijing), "Perceptions of European Higher Education in Third Countries."

- ¹⁰ In order to alleviate the problems of domestic education as well as to attract foreign knowledge and train domestic specialists, the Chinese as well as the local governments in China encourage students to go abroad mainly by the establishment of a variety of scholarship programmes. Besides, the Chinese students believe that foreign qualifications are opening doors to higher salaries and better job opportunities. See Yang, X. Y., "Mobility Strategies and Trends: The Case of China"; Zhang, Y. and Chen, W., "Factors Influencing Chinese Students to Study in Malaysian Private Higher Educational Institutions: A Cross-Sectional Survey."
- ¹¹ According to Mehdizadeh and Scott (2005), the students interact and adjust to the culture of the host country more easily if it is close to that of their own. For example, Major (2005: 85) refers to the finding of research on Asian students, which describes their educational experience as "teacher-dependent, passive, receptive, unquestioning and based on the rote learning" and may have particular difficulty "adjusting to Western dialogical practices in class such as questioning, criticising, refuting, arguing, debating and persuading" (Mehdizadeh, N. and Scott, G., "Adjustment Problems of Iranian International Students in Scotland"; Major, E. M., "Co-national Support, Cultural Therapy, and the Adjustment of Asian Students to an English-speaking University Culture").
- ¹² Chaoyang University of Technology, China Medical University, China University of Technology, Chinese Culture University, Chung Yuan Christian University, Feng Chia University, Fu Jen Catholic University, I-Shou University, Ming Chuan University, National Chengchi University, National Chiao Tung University, National Sun Yat-sen University, National Taiwan University, National Tsing Hua University, Providence University and Shu-Te University.
- ¹³ An NPS score higher than 0 is generally perceived to be good in service industries (Van Aart, J., "Key Influencers of International Student Satisfaction in Europe").
- ¹⁴ The author does not have similar data on the NPS for higher education in Asia.
- ¹⁵ For example, the government rules are included in the category *Cost*, as students express dissatisfaction with the government rules for restricting them from working and earning income for their study; or within the category *Personal and Professional Development*, as students write that due to government rules, they cannot work as interns and are unable to acquire professional experience; or in the subcategory "Society, culture and everyday life" in the category *Environment*, as government rules are described as unfair to the Mainland students in comparison to Taiwanese or foreign students.

APPENDICES

Appendix I

Questionnaire – English version

(The form of the questionnaire is available on the website only in Chinese)

Title: Teacher Anna's questionnaire on Mainland student satisfaction with their study in Taiwan.

Dear Student:

Hello! I am teacher Anna from the Department of Global Political Economy at Tamkang University. I have long been concerned with Mainland Chinese and foreign students in Taiwan. Today, I would like to invite you to participate in a survey about your satisfaction with life and study in Taiwan.

Below you can find the two questions aimed at understanding your satisfaction during study in Taiwan. The information you provide will be used only for the purpose of my research and will remain anonymous. The results of my research are not directly beneficial to the participants; however, they should be of value for those who are considering future study in Taiwan and for the Taiwanese decision-makers to improve their policies.

If you have any questions, please contact me at: annalaoshitamkang@gmail.com. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

Part I: General Information

Age: _____

Sex: Male Female

Date of arrival in Taiwan: _____

Have you been to Taiwan before? Yes No

The name of the University and the Department attended in Taiwan:

The year of study: 1st 2nd 3rd 4th Master 1st

Master 2nd PhD other

The type of a stay in Taiwan: short term – credit students long term – degree students

The student's status in Taiwan: self-financed exchange student
 other

Part II: Questionnaire

Before completing this questionnaire, please think about your life and study experience in Taiwan. What is your opinion on enrolment, campus life, equipment, teaching methods, syllabus, teacher qualifications, counselling and administrative support, career planning, future prospects, accommodation, Taiwanese culture, local customs and living environment, such as the basic cost (tuition and living expenses)? Now answer the following two questions:

How likely is it that you will recommend studies in Taiwan to your friends and relatives back home?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Why? What are the main reasons why you will (not) recommend Taiwan to pursue higher education?

Appendix II

Focus group

The focus group was organised to obtain detailed information and deep insight into the opinion of the Mainland degree students. Eight participants—the Mainland degree students from Tamkang University, i.e., four females and four males—were invited to meet with the author, who served as the moderator of the discussion, during lunchtime for one hour. The goal was to organise the discussion to be as free flowing as possible. It was conducted in Chinese. The author prepared the following questions in order to stimulate the debate and sharing between the participants:

Engagement questions:

1. Would you recommend studies in Taiwan to your friends and relatives back home? Why?
2. What do you like/dislike about your study in Taiwan?
3. Why did you decide to study in Taiwan?

Exploration questions:

1. What do you think attracts Chinese students to come to Taiwan and what discourages them?
2. Did you get used to the local culture?
3. Is the relationship between teachers and students in Taiwan different than in China?
4. Do you have any Taiwanese friends, or do you mostly spend your time with the Chinese students?
5. Are Taiwanese people nice and helpful? Have you encountered any discrimination?
6. Are the teaching methods in Taiwan different than in China?
7. Is life in Taiwan expensive?

Exit question:

Is there anything else you would like to say about your study and stay in Taiwan?

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