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在台灣留學之西方國際生對台國家的態度改變研究

Before and after:

Non-Asian international students' perceptions of the nation
brand Taiwan

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Student: Paulina Machado

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Advisor: Hong-Chi Shiau

中華民國 108 年 7 月

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Abstract

This article aims to realize the non-Asian international students' contrast in perception before and after having a studying/living abroad experience in Taiwan, by identifying the most frequent concepts extracted from in-depth interviews conducted to non-Asian international students across the country. Therefore, this research provides helpful insight into the key themes to use in order to attract international students and ultimately promote the nation brand Taiwan.

Key Words: nation branding, intercultural encountering exchange, transformed identities non-Asian, sojourning experiences, perception towards Taiwan, millennials.



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CHAPTER ONE. Introduction

A fair share of students from all over the world has decided to privilege concepts such as diversity, globalization and interculturality when continuing higher education. Nowadays the never ending quest of providing meaning to our lives, seems to have set its roots in the unknown. This concept of the unknown apparently relies in the world outside one's local frontiers, to resignify points of view and to get in touch with the concept of self.

Globalization is undoubtedly linked to this phenomena and it can be defined as the process in which different countries societies and economies are strengthened and become more closely integrated (Nilson, 2010).

Globalization is rapidly reaching every corner of the earth, from cities to countries having to compete with each other in order to get a piece of the share of the world's consumers, represented by investors, entrepreneurs, tourists, and more. In this case, what we are more interested in is in the educational market, with the final purpose of gaining the attention and respect from the media, every other country and their respective people.

That is to say, this is in many ways a very broad marketplace, many students don't have enough time to learn about each and every other country. In turn, most countries are only armed with clichés and stereotypes as a reference. Whether positive or negative, they are still a way to reach people in other corners of the vast world (Anholt, 2007).

In addition, massive access to social media and the globalization of economy, have increased not only the number of travelers who want to wander around the world and discover new places, look for business opportunities or even work mobility possibilities offshore, but rather crafted new instances to access knowledge, through a variety of exchange programs and even scholarships that fund degrees outside one's country.

According to the report Higher Education in Asia carried by UNESCO in 2014, many governments see universities and particularly, the research carried by these institutions, as incoming assets. Since research is conducted at a graduate level, investing in graduate education would increase the economic competitiveness of the country.

The globalization of higher education is favoring the emergence of new competitors. Institutions dedicated to postgraduate training, belonging to countries other than the traditional ones in this sector, are trying to expand their offer. That is why territories such as countries, regions and cities, have begun to apply marketing techniques to make said territories more attractive to countries.

In order to attract students, countries all over the world are turning into nation branding theories, to promote their country's image internationally. According to Caldwell and Freire (2004), "places can be branded in much the same way as consumer goods and services". However, that makes the race even harder, because every country and every city in the world are investing in nation branding, in order to build an international reputation that can surpass stereotypes and clichés.

In the words of the expert in nation branding, Simon Anholt (2006), "all responsible governments, on behalf of their people, their institutions and their companies, need to discover what the world's perception of their country is, and to develop a strategy for managing it" (p. 16).

Moreover the author suggests, this aspect seems to be key component when trying to build the reputation of a country in a very genuine and powerful way to allow them to reach economic, political and social development for the sake of its own people. This is a clear reflexion of what a progressive government in the XXI century looks like (Anholt, 2006).

1.1 Motivations

Since nation branding is directly linked with the image and reputation a nation holds internationally, it is defined by the perceptions of people outside the country. Perceptions are influenced by stereotyping, media coverage and personal experience. This study aims to understand Taiwan's nation brand image in the eye of the non-asian international students currently pursuing studies in the country, this information could certainly be applied into marketing campaigns that can help invigorate Taiwan's image internationally and ultimately set it apart from China's.

As a student awarded with a scholarship funded by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan, this research has the desired purpose to retribute, even in a small scale, the country that made it possible, by unraveling the perceptions of non-asian international students to craft marketing campaigns that help portray Taiwan in a more successful way, beyond clichés and independent from the shadow-like presence of China in the global imaginary.



CHAPTER TWO. Literature review

2.1 Nation Brand and concepts related to it

Starting from the basics, it seems pertinent to first define the concept of brand. Brands function as medium in which a product or service differentiates from its competitors. Furthermore, according to Holt (2003), “think of the brand as the culture of the product. Over time, ideas about the product accumulate and “fill up” the brand markers with meaning. A brand culture is formed” (p. 2).

As stated by Anholt (2006), the man behind the concept of nation branding, there are four different aspects associated with the brand itself:

- Brand identity: core concept of the product, very visible and recognizable.
- Brand image: perceptions of the brand in the collective imaginary, it can also be related with reputation.
- Brand purpose: corporate culture or internal image of the brand.
- Brand equity: by building a positive image and therefore gaining the support of the consumers to keep developing product or services.

When it comes to nation branding, as explained by Kotler and Gertner (2002), “beyond serving as brand names, countries can be products as well. They compete in the market for tourists, factories, businesses and talented people” (p. 258).

And just like a product, every populated place on the face of earth has a reputation, that can be crafted through the use of advertising and marketing. It is a fact that perceptions linked to a place tend to be more complex and at some point even random, but they are still very important to be analyzed, because people’s perceptions have a greater impact than reality. In consequence, the reputation of a country is deeply attached to the influence of its engagement with other countries, ultimately shaping its economic, social, political and cultural progress. (Anholt, 2006).

2.2 Brand Taiwan 101

Going online is the best way to get acquaintance with a place. Brand Taiwan still holds a very positive image abroad and this is some of what can be found, after doing some light research.

Taiwan is an island country, that limits with Japan to the north, the Philippines to the south and Mainland China to the west. Taiwan is 377 kilometers long and 142 kilometers broad at its widest point. It has a total land area of nearly 36,000 square kilometers and around 23 million inhabitants (Executive Yuan, n.d.).

Multicultural and multilingual are key characteristics of Taiwan since its population includes four ethnic groups. The national language is Mandarin Chinese, but Hokkien is also widely spoken, as well as Hakka and various other Chinese dialects.

The island country has experienced a long tradition of Han Chinese migration, due to a difficult political situation. In turn, 70% percent of the population is Hokkien Chinese, who migrated before Japanese rule. Native population nowadays represents around 3% of the population (Van der Horst, 2016).

Two geographic sections divide Taiwan. 90% of the population is spread throughout the flat gently rolling hills to the west. To the east, there can be found a luscious scenery of forest-covered mountains.

Moreover, Taiwan offers a total of nine national parks that showcase the diverse terrain and the flora and fauna of the island. The country is also rich in the diversity of its biological species. According to a survey released by the Council of Agriculture, Taiwan boasts more than 50,000 endemic species, which makes up 2.5% of the world total (Ministry of Education, 2018).

During 2018, Taiwan rejoiced by the increase in its tourism flow, with a staggering 11 million international travelers throughout the year, as stated by Taoyuan International Airport (Noticias de Taiwan, 2019). Paving its way as a worldwide go to foodie and outdoors destination.

In words of Taiwan's Tourism Bureau (2018), "this little island in the Western Pacific is a combination of Asia's most beautiful characteristics. Taiwan's breath-taking tapestry of landscapes offers impressive gorges, high mountains, adventurous coastlines, colorful corals, and volcanic islands. This is contrasted with its 21st-century cities, fused with traditions and cultures; hundreds of years old in the modern world. Far-East-Flair, Asian culture, and subtropical nature come together to form the enchanting Heart of Asia" (p. 3).

Economy wise, Taiwan ranks n°20 according to the annual report on the world's most valuable nation brands, developed by Brand Finance in 2017. As a further matter, as stated by the 2019 Index of economic freedom, "its economy is one of the wealthiest in Asia. Taiwan's dynamic capitalist economy is driven largely by industrial manufacturing, especially exports of electronics, machinery, and petrochemicals" (para. 3).

When it comes to lifestyle, Taiwan is ranked n°1 in the quality of life index 2018 and n°2 in the world's most popular expat destinations ranking, both conducted by InterNations in 2018. As maintained by InterNations, Taiwan is an attractive destination for expats, who are satisfied with their lifestyle, job opportunities, and career possibilities. The document highlights Taiwan's excellent quality of life and safety.

2.3 Brand Taiwan SWOT analysis

According to the previous information, it can be extracted the following:

- **Internal factors:**

- Strengths: Diverse and multicultural nation, located in the heart of Asia. Boosting economy and very proud of their democratic values.
- Weaknesses: Sovereignty issues and international recognition. Undermined by China when trying to promote their country's image, labelled as China, Taipei in international events and economic and cultural offices worldwide.

- **External factors:**

- Opportunities: Taiwan holds a global image attached to certain stereotypes thanks to pop culture and food staples, such as bubble milk tea, the rest is unknown, so there are great chances to give meaning and enhance positive feedback and perceptions thanks to a well crafted nation branding strategy.
- Threats: Ongoing threat of international blocking by China.

2.4 Internationalization of higher education

Education is the key component in the creation of an imperishable image of the country for the future generations to hold on with pride. It also affects the perceptions of future investors, residents, visitors, and supporters. For instance, if a foreign student decides to pursue studies in Taiwan, all the experiences related to his/her exposure in Taiwan will result in a perception that will be passed to others back home, establishing the existence of such place/society in the minds of a different community (Anholt, 2006).

Choosing to continue education in an entirely different country can be explained

through the globalization phenomena. Globalization of higher education has revolutionized the way students perform shopping processes when looking for an exchange program destination or pursuing a degree abroad. That is to say, one's home country is not necessarily the most relevant nor obvious choice to access higher education anymore, especially when it comes to an entire generation of millennials and their ever-changing consumer trends.

The concept of globalization applied to higher education can be seen through the internationalization of higher education, which is an area of great importance in most universities in the world. Thanks to the internationalization of higher education institutions can integrate international or intercultural aspects into their teaching, research and services, that way they offer more skills to their prospective students and at the same time gain recognition to forge new alliances with institutions abroad, to promote foreign language programs and cross-cultural exchange (Jibeen & Asad Khan, 2015).

The past three decades has witnessed the rapid increase of students enrolled outside their home countries. In 1975, international students represented 0.8 million worldwide growing exponentially in the data extracted in 2011 that stated the presence of 4.3 million students abroad. Only in the 2000-11 time span, the number of students enrolled in tertiary education almost tripled, with numbers showing a constant annual growth rate of almost 7% (OECD, 2013).

Regions, like Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, are experiencing a significant growth in numbers related to international students enrolled in local universities, which certainly reflects the internationalization of their academic offer (OECD, 2013).

Asian students mobility is ever changing. Traditionally, Asia is the global talent pool, since is the country of origin of most foreign students in the world. However, the region has recently become a destination for fellow international students (Campus France, 2014).

Taiwan is no stranger to this global trend and has a nurtured offer of different scholarships and it is a country that holds a reputation of a very steady economy with strong democratic values. But what lies beyond the economic growth charts and manufactured technology?

Taiwan's interest in attracting international students holds deeper roots. Eventhough educational exchange is a very well-known practice known since the early decades of the past century, only after 1950s became a key component for international education and world diplomacy, as a mean to bring together different cultures and cater mutual understanding in between different nations (Grünzweig and Rinehart, 2002).

This trend has signified a chance, for countries that are not traditionally known as a reference in the education field, to expand and look for students outside their nation's boundaries.

This is particularly relevant for Taiwan, which is a country with a complex political situation. China's ongoing attempts to isolate Taiwan diplomatically, often hinder the nation's efforts to broadly advertise its products or services worldwide. As stated by the Financial Times (2019), "the Chinese government claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has not ruled out the use of force against the island to achieve unification. Over the past three years, in addition to pressure on companies, Beijing has ramped up military activities near Taiwan-controlled territories and blocked Taiwan's diplomatic and trade initiatives" (para. 6).

This is certainly a tough scenario, but at the same time offers a great opportunity to push unconventional and original strategies to promote Taiwan internationally based on the perceptions of non-Asian international students currently pursuing degrees in the island country.

2.5 Study in Taiwan

2.5.1 Choosing Taiwan

A positive branding image can certainly influence students when choosing a university. However, there are educational institutions that do not have a strong branding image, therefore, the student will analyze broader aspects to make a decision and the most significant one is a positive nation brand image. Nation brand image is one of the elements that influence the consumer in the evaluation process (Khachaturian & Morganosky, 1990).

That is to say, being able to understand the existing preconceptions and knowledge in the consumer about the product, in this case, the nation's image will certainly help develop successful marketing campaigns.

After learning all about Taiwan's overall features, it was the time to learn about actual universities and courses offered around the island. That's when "Study in Taiwan" came into the picture. "Study in Taiwan" owns a website platform in which all universities and programs all over Taiwan are featured, along with precise information about programs taught in English, as well as different scholarships and helpful information about lifestyle and everyday life in the city of your preference.

The rapid development of international competitiveness in the higher education field has resulted in marketers and policymakers wanting to acquire a deeper understanding of the shopping processes of potential students worldwide. In this case, "Study in Taiwan", serves as a platform that gathers information about Taiwan's top universities, programs, scholarships, and Chinese learning centers.

"Study in Taiwan" is a side project of the Foundation for International Cooperation in Higher Education of Taiwan (FICHET). Founded in 2005, it is a non-profit organization that "has been given the responsibility by the government to function as a platform for international cooperation between Taiwanese and foreign universities". Moreover, FICHET aims "to advance the globalization of Taiwanese higher education and to proudly exhibit its merits on an international stage" (FICHET, 2018).

Taiwan is a developed country, very attractive in terms of innovation and technology and its inhabitants are often portrayed as very friendly people. When it comes to higher education, Taiwan boasts a total of 157 colleges, junior colleges and universities scattered throughout the island (Ministry of Education, 2018).

As for the reasons behind the selection of Taiwan as a destination to continue education, according to a survey ran by FICHET (2017) the following were listed, “Taiwan provides a high-quality academic environment, rich cultural heritage, excellent living circumstances, reasonable tuition, scholarships, and opportunities to learn Mandarin Chinese” (p. 28).

This research aims to understand these perceptions and go even further in trying to convey the most relevant concepts behind non-Asian international students perceptions on the nation brand Taiwan.

2.5.2 International students in Taiwan

Taiwan has foreseen the implications of tertiary education in a globalized world and has been heavily investing in higher education since the beginning of the millennium. Attracting international students is not only a way to cultural exchange, but a mean to develop a global knowledge economy, managing demographic decline and combating brain drain (Yung, 2016).

As a way to level up with their regional and global counterparts, the government of Taiwan has passed policies to reform its higher education system, with stress on academic programs, regulation, financing, and internationalization.

Since 2000, The Ministry of Education (MOE) has launched three major internationalization programs, including "Enhancing Global Competitiveness Plan", "Development Plan for World-Class Universities and Research Centers of Excellence", and "Recognition of International Accreditation". In order to boost Taiwan's global competitiveness and achieve credentials as an international cultural reference and a higher education hub (Ministry of Education, 2015).

To be able to move forward in the higher education race and to be able to attract international talents, MOE re-organized its former international departments and established a unified Department of International and Cross-strait Education in 2013. Ever since, this new department has been responsible for “promoting Taiwan’s international education exchange programs and integrating cross-strait educational affairs” (Ministry of Education, 2018).

This strategy has most certainly paid off and as for 2017, Taiwan is ranked 17th in the “Higher Education and Training” record emanated in the Global Competitiveness Report 2017 published by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Politically wise, Taiwan faces a very complex scenario, however it still holds commercial relations with many countries around the world, allowing Taiwan to create a large set of networks and therefore nurturing them by allowing international students to apply to exchange programs and even scholarships to take part in Taiwan’s boosting academic environment, even in countries that openly supports the “One China policy”.

Scholarships in Taiwan are funded by the Ministry of Foreign Relations (MOFA) and the Ministry of Education (MOE) and allow international talents to pursue academic degrees, academic exchange, conducting research and learning mandarin while experiencing the local culture.

Since attracting students to apply to mandarin taught programs seems nearly impossible, the official organisms have promoted the creation of programs aimed for international students.

According to Graddol (1996), "English is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air traffic control, international business and academic conferences, science, technology, diplomacy, sport, international competitions, pop music, and advertising" (p.181). That is why, in 2018 there were 190 English-taught programs in several fields of study offered in 51 universities all over Taiwan in order to engage international students (Roc-Taiwan, 2018).

During the academic year of 2017-2018, more than 110000 international students were enrolled in different diploma and non-diploma programs in Taiwan (FICHET, 2018) and more than 600 students from 70 countries were recipients of Taiwan Scholarship (Taiwan Today, 2017).



CHAPTER THREE. Research gap

Nation branding strategies in higher education are still a developing concept, therefore it has rarely been explored in the context of Taiwan. This particular research will be focused on non-Asian international students, which represented 3785 enrolled students in diploma programs in the academic year of 2017-2018 (FICHET, 2018).

There have been vast academic efforts to study the perceptions of fellow Asian international students. However, perceptions of non-Asian international students have scarcely been put into perspective yet.

That is why the research question will have stress on how Taiwan is shaping its nation's image through nation branding strategies that foster higher education and how that affects the nation image of Taiwan over non-Asian students in the context of a globalized world.

Personally, seems like interesting research, considering non-Asian international students suffer from a higher cultural shock experience due to the contrasting cosmovision that still sets orient and occident apart. Which makes even more interesting to analyze their before and after perceptions on the nation brand Taiwan.

Moreover, this research can shed some light on how to craft a suitable nation branding strategies to attract international students, by exploring the key concepts that will be extracted in this thesis research by analyzing the perceptions of non-Asian international students regarding the nation brand Taiwan.

3.1 Research question

Given above, this research proposed the following research questions:

RQ1: How has studying in Taiwan transformed perception towards nation brand Taiwan among non-Asian international students?

RQ2: How are said perceptions reflected over the social media platform Instagram?

3.2 Theoretical framework

Social networking allows users to exchange information with their peers. A tool that certainly comes in handy when trying to differentiate and promote a nation brand such as Taiwan.

That is why the role of social media as a moderator of information is a very interesting one to analyze through the perspectives of non-Asian international students.

Taking into account choosing a destination and program when studying abroad is not a simple decision task. It considered pondering a sum of variants before actually making the ultimate decision of enrolling in a certain university in a certain country.

In this scenario is proper to state that social influence plays a key role in today's generation. As pointed out by Bakshy et. al (2012), "social networks may influence an individual's behavior, but they also reflect the individual's own activities, interests, and opinions" (p. 7).

As a consequence, there will be put into use two theories in order to be able to describe and give perspective to the phenomena: (a) brand concept-image management, (2) actor-network theory.

3.2.1 Brand concept-image management

Communicating a brand image, in this case, nation brand image, to a certain segment holds a challenging task. In order to be successful, said communication strategy needs to set up one's brand from the competition.

Positioning strategies are implemented when trying to differentiate a brand from its competitors by being able to communicate the brand's image in the most accurate way. Through a well-crafted communication plan, brands can work coherently, by developing and enhancing the image and ultimately building up a core personality for the brand (Park, et. al, 1986).

In order to achieve brand differentiation and as it has been stated throughout this proposal, it is important to understand the needs and mindset of the target audience wanted to be reached. Therefore the brand image needs to be attached to a *functional need*, to be able to solve consumption-related issues. On the other hand, functional needs are always tied to *symbolic needs*, linked to the internally generated needs fulfilled through the acquiring of the said functional brand. Finally *experiential needs*, are related to sensory pleasure, variety and/or cognitive stimulation (Park, et. al, 1986).

That is to say, as stated by Bath & Reddy (1998), “functional brands satisfy practical and immediate needs, whereas symbolic brands satisfy needs as self-expression, prestige. Symbolic brands practical usage is incidental” (p. 136).

In Taiwan's case, pursuing a degree stands for the functional need to be satisfied during the experience. When referring to the symbolic needs fulfilled, are a set of characteristics attached to Taiwan, that this research plans to uncover when it comes to non-Asian international students' perceptions on the matter. There is a practical and conceptual significance when examining the background information related to the symbolism of a given brand since it produces valuable brand outcomes.

When talking about dotting products or services with symbolic value, the term "cultural intermediaries" comes in very handy. In terms of Smith & Matthews (2012), there is

one popular direction followed by cultural intermediaries, which sets them "as market actors involved in the qualification of goods, mediating between economy and culture" (p. 1).

International talents get a unique chance to experience local culture first hand. Interacting with Taiwanese people and enjoying every aspect of the culture, ignites the desire to document the process on social media. That is to say, their close circle and also public in general in case their social media profiles are public, get the chance to have a glimpse of Taiwanese lifestyle, setting it apart from China y ultimately transforming these international students into cultural intermediaries (Bourdeau, 1984) in a hyper-connected society.

According to Street (1997), "the education system of a country is intimately tied to the making and consuming of popular culture" (p. 306). Therefore, international students in Taiwan become a referent for their close circle in terms of learning how is life in Taiwan, what are the best characteristics of living in the country as well as some aspects about popular culture.

Social network information diffusion (Bakshy et al., 2012) plays an essential role, since there is a constant reinforcement of the nation brand Taiwan and its particular culture and in consequence, there is a chain reaction taking place in a community or group of people through the spreading of a constant information flow about Taiwan, ultimately becoming familiarized with the nation brand.

What are the symbolic needs attached to Taiwan, that is to say perceptions, and how these perceptions can be used to craft a solid strategy to attract even more international students?

3.2.2 Actor-network theory (ANT)

As explained by Callon (1987), ANT is “reducible neither to an actor alone nor to a network...An actor-network is simultaneously an actor whose activity is networking heterogeneous elements and a network that is able to redefine and transform what it is made of” (p.93).

Furthermore, according to Mol (2010), “actors associate with other actors, thus forming a network in which they are all made into “actors” as the associations allow each of them to act. Actors are enacted, enabled, and adapted by their associates while in their turn enacting, enabling and adapting these” (p. 260).

When researching about the Taiwanese lifestyle, social media offers a large variety of platforms to look for this kind of information. But one social media with incredible growth and that has different ways to show information and everyday life events is Instagram. Further explained by the concept of homophily, which refers to the tendency of individuals with shared characteristics to associate with one another in this intertwined online society (Bakshy et. al, 2012).

From 2017 on, Facebook has been consistently seeing its users flee. Millennials and Generation Z seem to no longer engage in the platform. Solely in 2017, their 12-17 demographic (Generation Z) dropped by 1.4 million users. When referring to Millennials, the numbers are not very different. During the same time frame, Facebook lost 2.2 million Millennial users (Koprowski, 2018).

That is why, it is correct to state the most representative interface for both generations is Instagram nowadays. According to the information extracted by the Pew Research Center in 2018, 60% of Instagram users are between the ages of 18 to 29 in the USA, which are exactly the demographics wanted to be attracted.

Moreover, in the top 10 countries with the higher use of Instagram, 70% correspond to non-Asian countries, demonstrating that is also a highly popular app for the population of interest (Statista, 2019) and can be observed on **figure 1 on page 20**.

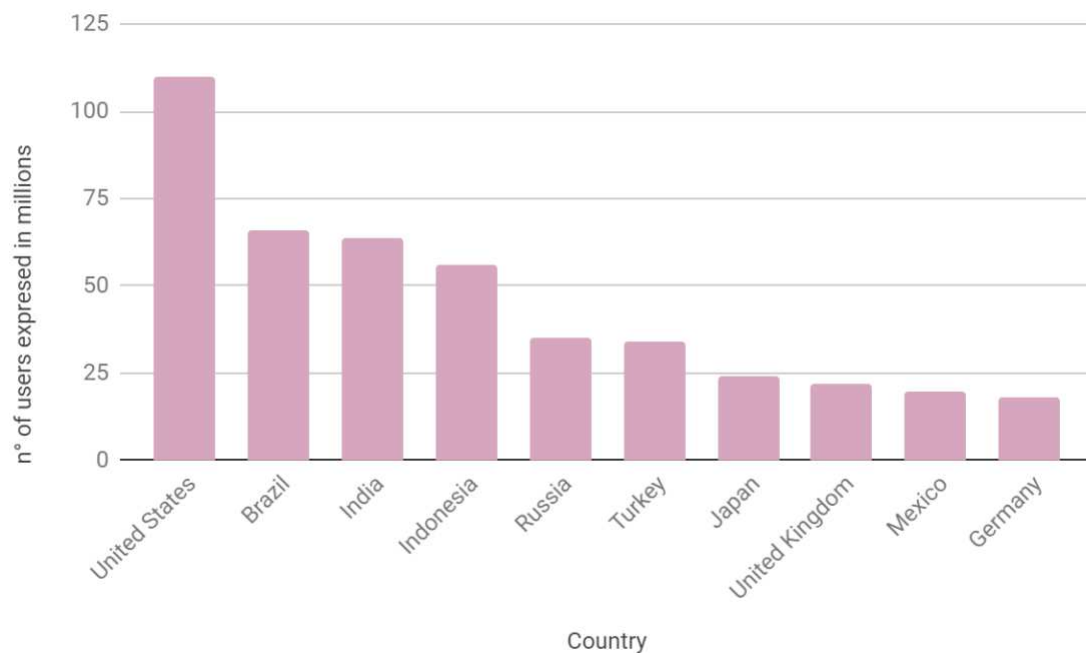
It is relevant to state, that international students might find attractive following accounts of people currently studying abroad in the destination country on Instagram, that way they would be able to access all kinds of content in the form of: pictures in the timeline, videos and snaps on Instagram Stories, even live events streaming or extended videos on the IGTV platform, with the extra perk of IG direct messaging.

When it comes to the researcher's experience whose student life in Taiwan has been highly documented over Instagram, allowing friends and family to become part of the journey and learn about a country that seems very exotic for her counterparts.

As an example of the way one actor can affect and modify the perceptions of others, it can be mentioned that during the researcher's stay, the posts about Taiwan on her personal Instagram account have gathered more than twenty three thousand (23k) likes. Thirty (30) of her closest friends have enquired about top places to visit in Taiwan and eight (8) of them have successfully traveled to Taiwan. Four (4) of her closest friends have inquired specifically about the scholarship and two (2) of them are participating in this year's process. And had one post about safety in Taiwan that gathered enough attention to be published by an NGO media channels.

The example above is a very impressive achievement for a normal student with an average Instagram following. This personal experience resonates with recent studies showing that traditional marketing is obsolete for the current generation. The research conducted by Auer and Bergström (2017) revealed that "users seldom interact with commercial posts, which pinpoints the need for a different content strategy" (p. 1).

**Figure 1. Leading countries based on number of Instagram users as of April 2019
(Statista, 2019).**



There is no doubt that in the networking world social media is the most relevant interface (Paus & Macchia, 2014). However, advertising in social media doesn't work the same way as traditional marketing because it depends exclusively on the participation of the user. For those who consume entertainment, news, and information online, recommendations from friends are important sources for such information.

As an observer of this phenomena, I decided to contact "Study in Taiwan" to start an interviewing project with them. Their Instagram account had only one hundred and twenty three (123) followers since all their efforts were going to Facebook, where they hold an impressive one hundred thousand and ninety five (195k) followers, but is it the right demographic the one being targeted there?

The proposal was to interview international students on different campuses all over Taiwan, so they could share the most positive aspects of living in Taiwan. The interview would be translated into a short caption along with a picture depicting their life in Taiwan.

This experience has also allowed the researcher to get acquaintance with international students with all kinds of different backgrounds, and most important of all, the need to contact them and research these phenomena on a deeper level.

Therefore, the Instagram accounts of the selected subjects were analyzed in order to see how their opinions and perceptions of Taiwan had suffered changes throughout their stay and how these so-called experiences can serve as a back up to their testimonies during the in-depth interviews process.



CHAPTER FOUR. Methodology

This qualitative research will be conducted among non-Asian international students and aims to understand the international students' motivations when choosing to enroll in a program in Taiwan, as well as the repercussions of said decision in the construction of their very own image of the nation brand Taiwan.

Moreover, this study aims to understand how the study in Taiwan experience, shape the perceptions on the country in each student's immediate circle through social network information diffusion, ultimately transforming them in cultural intermediaries/advocates, by highlighting their everyday lives in the context of the nation brand Taiwan.

4.1.1 Subsections

The research was conducted in five steps:

1. Twelve (12) non-Asian international students were contacted in order to schedule an in-depth interview. The students above mentioned were scattered in different campuses in the most important cities of Taiwan: Taipei, Taichung, Tainan, Hsinchu, Kaohsiung, and Hualien.

Objective: These cities were selected in order to better portray and contrast experiences of non-Asian international students living in different cities in the context of Taiwan.

2. The sample was conformed by twelve (12) non-Asian international students currently pursuing both graduate and undergraduate degrees in Taiwan, from 20 to 28 years old, that has lived in Taiwan for at least one (1) year. Each one of the participants was met to conduct an in-depth interview of semi-structure form.

Objective: To extract the most recurrent concepts associated with the nation brand Taiwan, before and while experimenting their studying abroad experience.

3. Each in-depth interview was analyzed to counterbalance the recurrent concepts that were subsequently contrasted to pinpoint the most prominent aspects of Taiwan's nation brand image according to the perceptions of the students that were interviewed during this research.

Objective: To extract categories by using open coding techniques, to get acquaintance with the most relevant concepts when discussing Taiwan's nation image in the eyes of non-Asian international students.

4. The respondents personal Instagram accounts were analyzed, in order to find a graphic extension of their experience, to be able to back up their narratives.

Objective: To facilitate the integration of the experience by accessing graphic content matching their narrative during the in-depth interviewing process.

4.1.2 Sample

This sample was selected out of purpose, since it covers different regions of Taiwan and considered face to face in-depth interviews with 12 non-Asian international students. In order to diversify the geographic representation of the interviewees and therefore being able to gather different opinions that might differ depending on the population density and other factors.

The 12 interviewees are currently pursuing studies in the following cities: Taipei, Hsinchu, Taichung, Tainan, Kaohsiung and Hualien. For a better understanding of the number of interviewees per city, please refer to **table 1 on page 24**.

Purposeful sampling is a very popular technique in qualitative research, used when identifying and selecting single or groups of individuals that are particularly acquaintance with the phenomenon to be researched (Palinkas et al, 2013).

It is certainly a challenge to cover different regions in such limited time, that is why selecting 12 students is a plausible number of interviews to be conducted throughout the field

research period, but at the same time is a significant number to be able to extract relevant data.

These students have been previously interviewed during the Instagram project instance, in which the researcher worked along with “Study in Taiwan” and have accepted to take part in this particular research.

The qualitative data analysis will take place after conducting: (a) in-depth interviews, (b) Instagram netnography.

Table 1. Interviewees organized by city.

City	N° interviewees
Taipei	4
Hsinchu	1
Taichung	2
Tainan	2
Kaohsiung	2
Hualien	1
Total	12

Table 2. Interviewees statistics according to the following categories.

Interviewee / Stats	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Age	25	25	20	28	23	27	25	22	25	20	28	24
Gender	female	male	female	male	male	male	female	female	male	female	male	male
Nationality	Poland	Sweden	Germany	Germany	Haiti	Chile	Italy	Paraguay	Turkey	Peru	France	Spain
Years in Taiwan	3	3	1	3	3	3	2	4	3	2	1	1
Level of study	graduate	graduate	bachelor	graduate	bachelor	graduate	bachelor	bachelor	graduate	bachelor	graduate	bachelor
Date of in-depth interview	04/01	4/3/2019	4/4/2019	4/5/2019	4/16/2019	4/19/2019	4/19/2019	5/10/2019	5/10/2019	5/11/2019	5/11/2019	5/15/2019



4.1.3 Techniques

During the research there were used techniques of data collection in the form of in-depth interviews and also nethnographic research to analyze audio visual and narrative content over the social media Instagram associated with the personal account of each interviewee.

If content was provided in a different language, it was then translated in order to fit the designated language in which the research is being presented.

4.1.4 Procedure

4.1.4.1 In-depth interview

As stated by Boyce and Neale (2006), “in-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation” (p. 3).

For that matter, 12 non-Asian international students from different campuses around Taiwan, will be selected to conduct in-depth interviews about their perceptions on the nation brand Taiwan. The number of interviewees is subject to change if the saturation level is or not reached by the end of this process.

The analysis of the in-depth interviews is going to be based on a descriptive approach of applied social research. This approach, according to Kotler & Armstrong (2005), aims "to describe the characteristics of various aspects, such as the market potential for a product or the demographics and attitudes of consumers who buy the product" (p. 132).

In order to be able to generate rapport and therefore fidelity with what is going to be researched, the in-depth interviews will have a semi-structured format. Allowing the interviewee to also pinpoint relevant subthemes. The interviews will be conducted face to face and will also occur using social media communication platforms.

Data is going to be processed by analyzing the semantic similarity of keywords, in order to determine concepts associated with the nation brand Taiwan. Moreover, open coding will be used to process the data, to identify concepts by categorizing them after reading each interview carefully, as a mean to define and describe the social phenomena.

4.1.4.2 Netnographic research

Since Instagram is one of the fastest growing social networks and the preferred interface for the demographics wanted to be reached through the nation branding campaign, it is relevant to conduct a research on this particular social media interface. Instagram was chosen specifically, due to its increasing prominence and because visual contents are pivotal on this social media.

For that matter, the Instagram profiles linked to the interviewees will be submitted to a netnographic research, in order to analyze how their perceptions towards the country change throughout their study abroad experience. This strategy will enable us to contrast their

opinions emitted during the in-depth interview process with their actual Instagram posts related to the nation brand Taiwan by analyzing their content from their own perspective.

To be able to fully grasp the implications behind each interaction, it will be applied to the Actor-Network theory framework. Allowing us to contrast the real self and the virtual self and its implications in the construction of nation brand Taiwan. This strategy allow us to conduct an extended following up with the interviewees, complimenting different research styles and to observe how students network in their everyday lives while experiencing the nation brand Taiwan.

4.1.5 Timetable

In order to meat the set goals regarding this research, the research schedule was be structured by assigning specific tasks to meet during a certain period of time, as seen on **table 3**.

Table 3. Schedule of activities.

M/D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
March	Theoretical framework wrap up and preparation of in-depth interview questionnaire																														
April	data collection through in-depth interviews																														
May	data collection through in-depth interviews																				Instagram netnographic analysis										
June	Data results' analysis. Conclusions' elaboration. Research wrap up																														

4.2 Interviewing process

4.2.1 In-depth interview questionnaire sample

The in-depth interview was of semi-structured form, however, in order to moderate the process, it was constructed a questionnaire sample, exemplified in **table 4 on page 28**.

Table 4. In-depth interview questionnaire sample

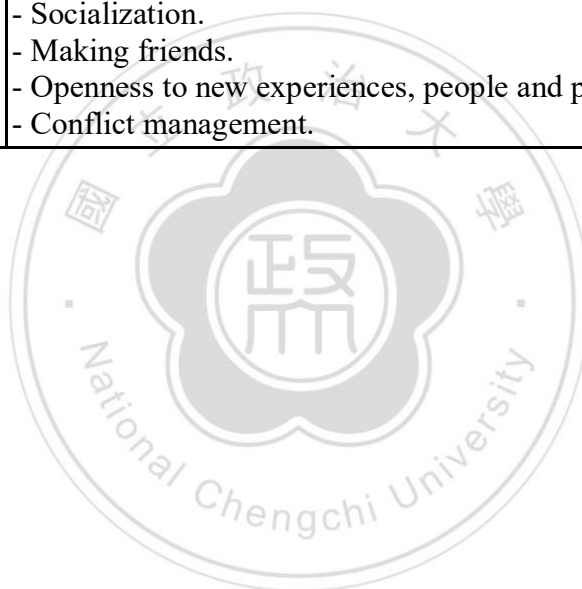
Nº	Questionnaire
1	Before coming to Taiwan, what was your opinion of the country?
2	How did it become an alternative for continuing your education?
3	How was your program and city selection?
4	Did you have any expectations before coming to Taiwan?
5	Once here, what surprised you from Taiwan? Did you encountered many unexpected things?
6	Have you experimented any form of cultural shock?
7	What is your current opinion about Taiwan?
8	What do you like about your everyday life in Taiwan?
9	Would you recommend other people to come and study here?

4.2.2 In-depth interview themes

The following table portrays the different aspects treated during the in-depth interview process, as seen in **table 5 on page 29**. Each interview followed a chronological order from when the interviewees: a) made the decision process of coming to Taiwan to pursue studies while still at their home respective home countries, b) upon arrival in Taiwan, first impressions, c) after living in Taiwan and getting accustomed to their everyday lives.

Table 5. Preliminary results of in-depth interviews.

Pilot of in-depth interview	
Developed areas	Information extracted from interviews
Academic / Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language barrier. - Cultural understanding. - Experience with different academic system and professors. - Valorization of education in Taiwan.
Lifestyle / Everyday life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adaptation process to a different culture and language. - Getting around Taiwan: travel experiences. - Culture shock. - Exploring new concepts in everyday life situations.
Personal / Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural exchange. - Understanding the cultural differences. - Different student life exposure. - Socialization. - Making friends. - Openness to new experiences, people and places. - Conflict management.



CHAPTER FIVE. Results

The research results showed that studying abroad stands an influence in a student's life. The results demonstrate the positive influence of the experience on the personal development, as well as academic commitment, and career paths of the students who enrolled in Taiwanese universities to pursue a degree.

It is relevant to mention, for 1/12 of the interviewees, coming to Taiwan was their first ever study abroad experience.

5.1 Before coming to Taiwan

Regarding the way they prepared for their trip, almost all mentioned practical issues such as buying clothes for tropical weather, continue with their preparation in the language, find accommodation or try learning some basics in case they did not study before and also looking for online information about the cities where they would live, or talk to people who had lived in the same place to receive advice on transport, areas where to live, and so on as mentioned by interviewee n°9:

I have friends working on an airline as a cabin crew, so I called them, because I know they have been in Taiwan many times. They told me Taiwan was way better than Beijing, Seoul or even Tokyo, in terms of human rights and quality of life.

Interviewee n°9, male, Turkey.

When discussing the image of Taiwan prior to becoming an alternative as a study abroad experience, only 2/12 of the interviewees had previous relevant information about the country, as stated by interviewee n°8:

My sister lived in Taiwan a while ago, so before coming I could get a lot of information from her. Everything I heard really influenced me, so I even visited her once before deciding coming back as a student.

Interviewee n°8, female, Paraguay

The rest agreed (10/12) on the lack of information about Taiwan, previous to become and alternative to continuing studies:

Taiwan is pretty much ignored unless it is a special university that already has a niche in Taiwan studies. I took so many classes in history, literature and politics and Taiwan was never mentioned.

Interviewee n°1, female, Poland.

Although 4/10 of them reported having an idea of the country due to a variety of stereotypes, as stated by interviewee n°3:

Honestly, I didn't really knew about Taiwan. I thought it was really similar to China and some mix in between north and southeast Asia, so I had both stereotypes in mind.

Interviewee n°3, female, Bosnia.

Another kind of stereotypes were due to movies and popular culture related to Asia, as mentioned by interviewee n°5:

When I was a kid I watched a lot of tv shows about kung fu, so I really thought everyone would know about this in Taiwan. But when I came here everything was totally different, it was just on the movies.

Interviewee n°5, male, Haiti.

Continuing with the comparisons, some of the above mentioned even compared Taiwan with other countries in the region, annexing characteristics of those countries to Taiwan, as told by interview n°6:

I really didn't have much information about Taiwan. I just knew a little bit about asian culture, because I studied korean before, so I thought Taiwan being a developed country should be a little bit like South Korea.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

In general, since the vast majority did not have information about Taiwan, 11/12 of the interviewees did not hold expectations previous to their study abroad experience, as mentioned by interviewee n°12:

Ever since I knew I was coming, I was really excited about the trip and I didn't really wanted to set any expectations about it, I wanted the country to surprise me and it did. I came here with the fixed idea of enriching myself with everything I saw and burst the bubble I lived in by being a city boy my whole life. I really wanted to leave the comfort zone.

Interviewee n°12, male, Spain.

Following this idea, there is a clear inclination of all the interviewees to challenge themselves, by setting themselves in a completely different scenario from the one they are used to, as stated by interviewee n°10:

The main goal of this whole study abroad experience was having a chance to explore the world and broadening my mind, learning new things and meeting new people.

Interviewee n°10, female, Peru

5.1.1 University and city selection process

When discussing the decision making process behind city and university selection, half of the students looked for the best universities in Taiwan in their respective fields, 3/12 looked for an university with outdoor activities access, 2/12 privileged living in a big city and 1/12 preferred a city with nice weather all year round, as shown in **figure 2 on page 32**.

When analyzing the city and university selection process, half of the interviewees agreed on looking for the best universities in Taiwan, by checking international rankings and outside sources, to better know the positioning of taiwanese universities locally and globally, as mentioned by interviewee n°5:

I knew I wanted to study computer science and the best university in the country for that program is National Chiao Tung University, which is the school I am studying in right now.

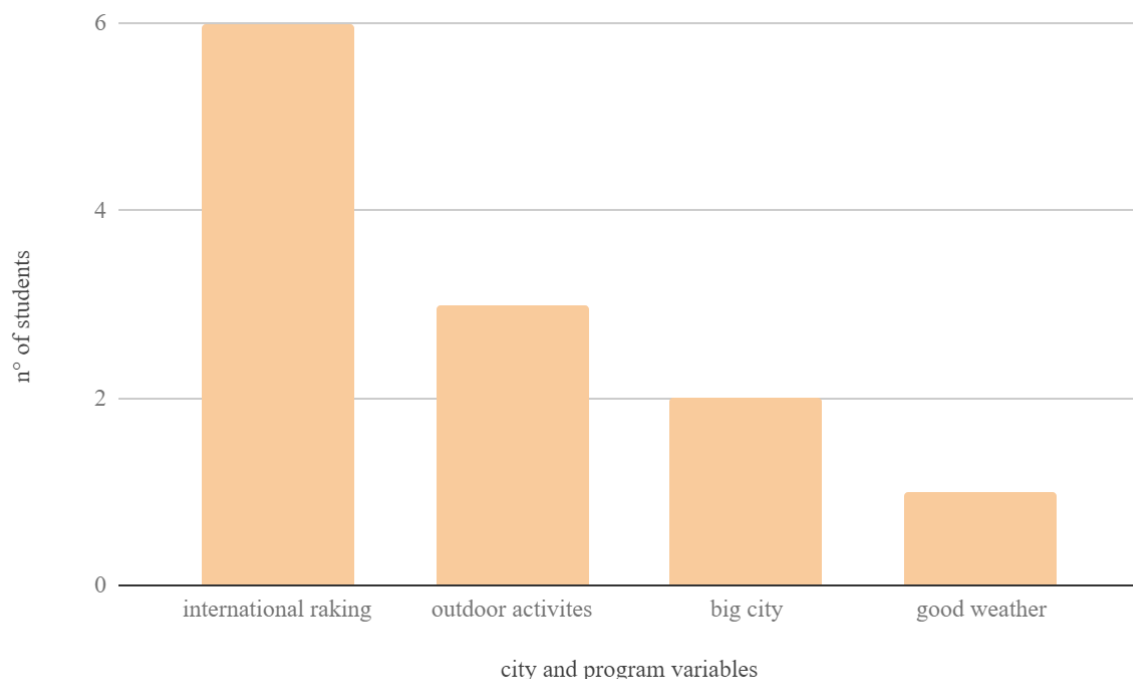
Interviewee n°5, male, Haiti.

This information was also backed up by interviewee n°2:

I basically wanted to come to the best possible university in Taiwan and I applied to the top universities in my field and I also did a little research on the professors as well. In science especially, is a must to research about professors. So I applied to NTU and Taipei Medical University.

Interviewee n°2, male, Sweden.

Figure 2. Students preferences for city and program selection



Regarding the international rankings used to measure Taiwan's universities, there were mentioned two highly well known examples: 1) Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2) Times Higher Education.

Outdoors activities and their easy access was an aspect mentioned by ¼ of the interviewees, as seen in the comment by interviewee n°11:

Taipei was too big for me and I research of universities and the south and found one really close to the beach and I really wanted to enjoy the sun in Taiwan and Taiwanese lifestyle.

Interviewee n°11, male, France

The majority of the interviewed students lived in major cities in their home countries, that is why choosing a big city in Taiwan was the go to option in order to maintain a suitable lifestyle by 2/12 of the interviewees, as stated by interviewee n°3:

I definitely wanted to live in a big city, because it is easier for a foreigner, more people would know English and more character translation. Also, my program is in English, I focus more on diplomacy and I think that is really cool since Taiwan is not even a recognized country.

Interviewee n°3, female, Bosnia.

Taiwan is a country with tropical weather, that is why a fairly 1/12 based their decision on the weather, as brought by interviewee n°8:

After learning chinese for a year in Taipei, I decided to look for a different city, I don't like Taipei's weather, it rains a lot, so I wanted to look for programs in cities like Chiayi, Tainan or Kaohsiung, to be able to enjoy a sunny weather. According to that I started to look for programs that suited me and I ended up living here.

Interviewee n°8, female, Paraguay.

When discussing about the best ways to research for information, one of the students mentioned “Study in Taiwan” website, as a helpful tool to find information about the programs and universities, as stated by interviewee n°6:

I didn't really use strict parameters, but it was important for me that the potential university was well ranked internationally. The main tool I used was Study in Taiwan's website, there I could search for the programs I was interested in and also which of them was taught in english.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

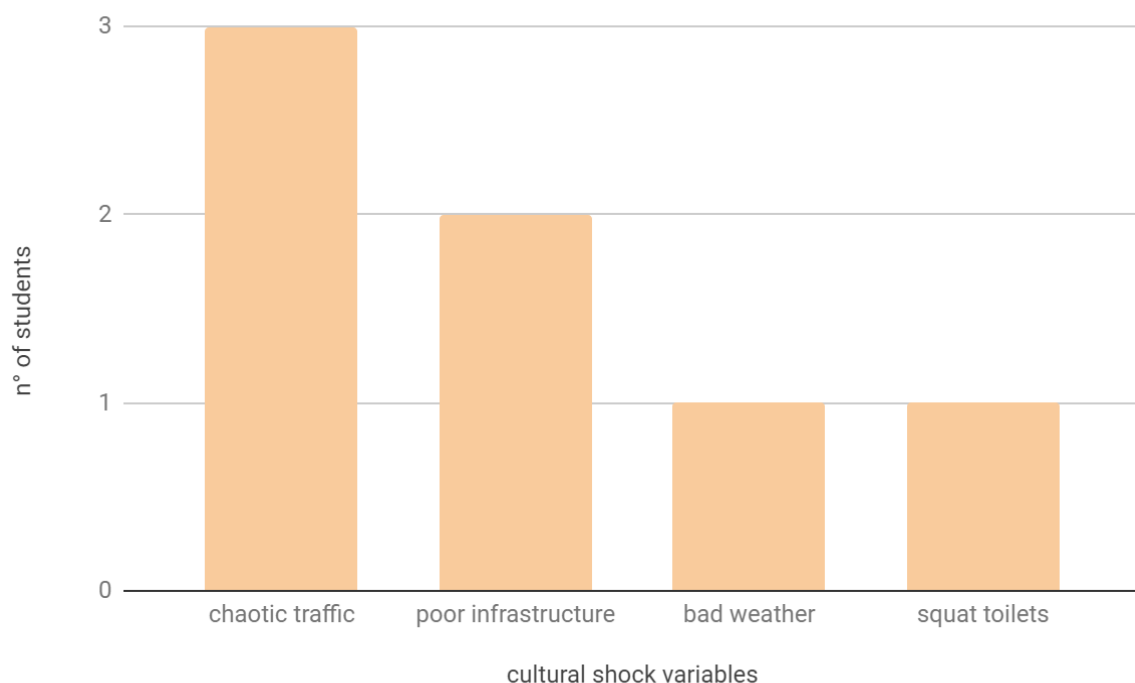
5.1.2 Just landed: first impressions on Taiwan

After discussing the interviewees' perceptions on the nation brand Taiwan before flying to Taiwan, it was time to analyse the aspects that were complete opposite and contrasting from their own realities back home.

According to the interviewees they unanimously commented on suffering from cultural shock, to be more precise, for 7/12 of them that initial shock was due to negative aspects and for the remaining 5/12 was due to positive aspects.

When talking about the negative aspects of Taiwan's first impression were due to: 3/7 chaotic traffic, 2/7 poor infrastructure, 1/7 bad weather and 1/7 squat toilets, as seen on figure 3.

Figure 3. Concepts associated with a negative first impression on Taiwan.



Squat toilets seem to have a negative connotation in other parts of the world, since they are apparently linked to less developed areas, usually in the country side or rural areas of some western countries, as stated by interviewee n°3:

The toilets really surprised me, the squat toilet. In some areas of eastern Europe, there are squat toilets, so I connect squat toilets with poverty and poor infrastructure. So getting to a big modern city and finding squat toilets didn't really match.

Interviewee n°3, female, Bosnia.

The traffic was discussed due to the enormous quantity on scooters on the streets, which seems to be very uncommon for western students, as explained by interviewee n° 6.

Traffic was very shocking in the beginning, because Taiwanese people don't really respect the laws of transit, there is a lot of speeding and no car or scooter would stop on a zebra crossing, so it was really difficult to cross the streets and sometimes I even had to walk on the streets, because in some areas there are no sidewalks, so it was stressing.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

Figure 4. Interviewee n°3 complaining about traffic in Taipei, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



On **figure 4**, interviewee n°3 posted a picture of a busy street on her campus and states, “政大 (NCCU) campus life and the daily struggle of crossing the street”, which might suggest a discomfort in terms of traffic.

The overall look of the cities was also discussed, since Taiwan is a developed country, the students were expecting to see modern cities, which are usually associated with crisp architecture, both forward and also pleasing to the eyes, as further detailed by interviewee n°9:

The housing conditions shocked me. Houses and buildings are mostly small and old. I was expecting shiny buildings and fancy districts, but no, there are some parts that

are a little more developed, but constructions are mostly unattractive, they are like a place to sleep, but not a home.

Interviewee n°9, male, Turkey.

When discussing about the aspects that were positive as a first impression of Taiwan, interviewees unanimously mentioned the kindness of Taiwanese people as a key factor, which will be analyzed in its own subsection on **page 44**.

5.2 After the acculturation process and change in perceptions

To have a better understanding of the research, the results were divided into three (3) main themes, that were recurrent throughout the in-depth interviews and each of them subdivided into subcategories, which are derived themes corresponding to actual characteristics of the main themes, therefore they will be developed as follows:

1. Taiwan's rich culture:
 - a. Experiencing the local culture.
 - b. The kindness of the Taiwanese.
 - c. Safety first.
 - d. Under the weather.
2. How convenient is Taiwan?:
 - a. Transportation system.
 - b. From the city to the wilderness.
 - c. Accessing products and services.
3. On campus experience:
 - a. Chinese: the struggle is real.
 - b. Class environment.
 - c. Faculty.
 - d. Scholarship program.

5.2.1 Taiwan's rich culture

Culture and in this case, Taiwanese culture, seems to have a set of characteristics that differentiate it from other. After extracting the key concepts during the in-depth interviews analysis, the culture category was subdivided in: a) local culture, b) kind taiwanese people, c) safety and d) weather issues.

Each concept along with the response marked with “O” if mentioned by the interviewees is detailed on **table 6**.

Table 6. Subcoding extracted from “rich culture” coding.

Coding / Name	Rich culture			
	Local culture	Kind taiwanese	Safety	Weather issues
1	O	O	O	O
2	O	O	O	
3	O	O	O	O
4	O	O	O	
5	O	O	O	
6	O	O	O	O
7	O	O	O	
8	O	O	O	O
9		O	O	O
10	O	O	O	O
11	O	O	O	O
12	O	O	O	O

5.2.1.1 Experiencing local culture

Taiwanese kindness was highlighted unanimously by the interviewees and will be talked about in the following section. In terms of culture, a large majority of the interviewees mentioned the concept of culture, as brought up by interviewee n°1:

For me it was like a revelation, why didn't I know about this. There's this tiny island that has amazing modern culture and amazing literature and seems to have preserved a lot of traditional culture.

Interviewee n°1, female, Poland.

Besides Taiwanese people attitudes towards foreigners, 5/12 mentioned how Taiwanese was a very forward society in terms of human rights and social freedom, as mentioned by interviewee n°4:

Taiwanese society accommodates modern mindsets, and show adherence to human rights and efforts to tackle global issues of the 21st century, from climate change to minority rights (gay marriage).

Interviewee n°4, male, Germany.

Interviewee n°9 compared human development in Taiwan and the developed countries in the region:

Taiwan is unlike Japan, Korea or China, where life seems a little bit artificial. Life seems very real here and it is a country that is far more developed when talking about human development.

Interviewee n°9, male, Turkey.

Figure 5. Interviewee n°3 marching during Pride in Taipei, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



In the picture of **figure 5**, we can see interviewee n°3 taking part in the Pride march held every year in Taiwan to secure equality for the LGBT+ community in the country. The picture was captioned, “no love left behind”.

However, there is more than meets the eye when it comes to local culture in terms of aspects that would help shape Taiwanese local culture. One of them would be the strong relationship Taiwan has with food. 11/12 of the interviewees mentioned Taiwanese food, as mentioned by interviewee n°12:

My landlord is an amazing man, he would always invite me to try his new creations in the kitchen. Everything is always terrific and I can tell he always cooks with love. It is crazy! And now you know how big of a fan of food I am as well. This will be one of

my fondest memories in Taiwan, I know that.

Interviewee n°12, male, Spain.

When talking about preconceptions about Taiwanese food, interviewee n°6 commented:

I am really picky when it comes to food, so I am not going to lie, I was worried about that, but I have to admit I truly love Taiwanese food, it is very tasty and very diverse, I would never get tired of it.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

Figure 6. Interviewee n°6 having mango shaved ice Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Source: Instagram



In the post in **figure 6**, interviewee n°6 uploaded a post having shaved-ice in Kaohsiung, which graphics the process of local food exploration by the interviewee.

Moreover, some of the interviewees admitted stereotyping related to food associated with Taiwan, actually helped them get in touch with those food staples as soon as they arrived, exemplified by interviewee n°3:

I was expecting to have lots of bubble tea, mango shaved ice and all the stereotypes you can think of and I got them all. I love being able to run into a tea shop anywhere and try different kinds of bubble tea flavours.

Interviewee n°3, female, Bosnia.

Figure 7. Interviewee n°8 having tea in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



In the post made by interviewee n°8, as shown on **figure 7**, can be read the caption, “night train and tea”, which might suggest the interviewee’s inclination for this particular beverage, which is a staple beverage in Taiwan.

Food plays an important role en every festivity in Taiwan, which seems to have a particular dish associated with every mark on the calendar, as explained by interviewee n°10.

I was shocked to know that during Chinese New Year the country would be paralysed for a week. People really celebrate here and share with their families during this festivity. They would stop working and really immerse in the celebration. A classmate actually invited me to participate in her family’s celebration and it was amazing. Every course had a meaning and people ate them all, I couldn’t keep up with them, it was too much food.

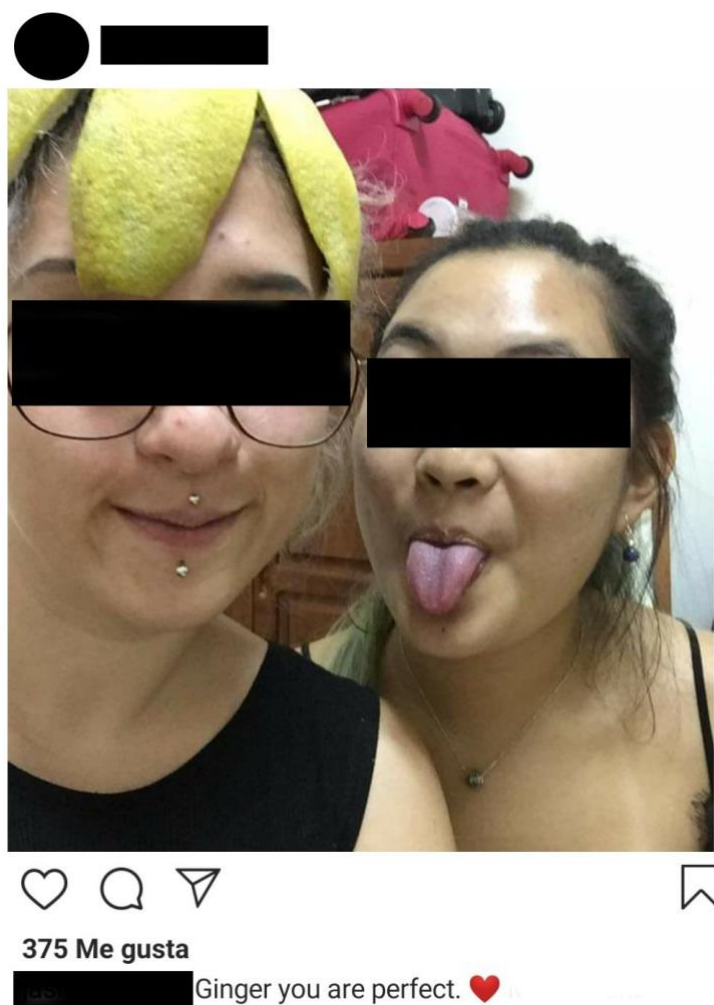
Interviewee n°10, female, Peru.

Figure 8. Interviewee n°6 having zongzi in New Taipei City, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



On the post extracted on **figure 8**, interviewee n°6 captions, “studying is not everything in life, sometimes I also cook and do some crafts”, which suggest the interviewee was part of a zongzi making event. Zongzi is the staple dish during the Dragon Boat Festival, the dish is made with sticky rice “loaded with nuts, meat, egg yolks, and mushrooms, all wrapped in a large leaf and tied with string. These delicious snacks are the highlight of the day for many and can be found on sale throughout the region in the weeks leading up to the festival” (Culture trip, 2019, par. 9).

Figure 9. Interviewee n°7 with pomelo hat in Taichung, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



On the post presented on **figure 9**, interviewee n°7 is sporting a pomelo hat, which seems to suggest she was celebrating Moon Festival, since the pomelo hat is a popular tradition during the holiday in order to “bring good fortune. The older generation believed that Chang’e, the lady in the moon, would have a better view of children wearing these hats made from her favorite fruit and so answer their prayers. These days it’s just a fun activity for kids and part and parcel of the festival” (Culture trip, 2019, par. 8).

5.2.1.2 The kindness of the Taiwanese

As stated in the literature review, Taiwan is ranked 17th in the “Higher Education and Training” record emanated in the Global Competitiveness Report 2017 published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), which graphics the key role education plays for Taiwanese society in terms of social development.

The incoming asset in education has to do with the impact a good education provokes in coming generations by start forming better-informed children and definitely more willing to proudly promote and advocate for their own country. In doing so, people demonstrate more amiability towards foreign people or tourist, overall impacting positively on the image those people will hold about their host country (Anholt, 2006).

In the words of Taiwanese president, Tsai Ing-Wen, “Taiwan is voted the most friendly country in the world. We are grateful for this compliment from our friends around the world” (Smiles made in Taiwan, 2019). Said statement is back unanimously by the interviewees, who agreed on the politeness and kindness of the Taiwanese as an unexpected, yet highly valued trait, as mentioned by interviewee n°3.

I was really surprised by how the people were. Eventhough they don't speak in English, they try to help you with even signs.

Interviewee n°3, female, Bosnia.

Interviewee n°7, makes a reflection on the impact Taiwanese manners has had on her:

It really surprised me how respectful people are. Of course every country in the world has good and bad people, but I dare to say the majority of people in Taiwan are so respectful and polite. Everybody wants to help you. One time, while I was running with my friend, he lost his phone, without realizing we got in a bus and we see this guys running, he found the phone and ran all the way to the bus to give it back. He had to get off in the next stop, he didn't even needed to take the bus.

Interviewee n°7, female, Italy.

Moreover, the kindness of the Taiwanese can be trespassed to everyday life situations in which they are certainly valued by the students, as detailed by interviewee n°6.

I love knowing I will always find nice people and I would never have a hard time around a Taiwanese.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

In order to try to explain the phenomenon a little better, interviewee n°10 stated:

Taiwanese people are so nice and they also have a culture of avoiding conflict. I would say foreign people tend to behave a little irresponsibly in Taiwan and Taiwanese are very patient and generous.

Interviewee n°10, female, Peru.

Figure 10. Interviewee n°3 thanking Taiwanese friend in Taipei, Taiwan.
Source: Instagram.



On the post presented on **figure 10**, interviewee n°3 thanks her taiwanese friend for her friendship, which might have been shaped by it.

However, some students made a difference in between the kindness of the taiwanese and the actual bonding processes with them, that could ultimately lead to friendship. Half of the interviewees draw a line in between politeness and friendliness, as explained by interviewee n°3.

I didn't expect local people to be so shy. They are helpful and polite, but they wouldn't approach you and try to become your friends.

Interviewee n°5, male, Haiti.

Interviewee n°9 went a little further an suggested:

I would say Taiwanese are very nice and kind, but not friendly. Only the more international people, like the ones that have studied abroad or have many foreigner friends, and an overall broader way of thinking are more easygoing. I am not saying Taiwanese are not friendly, I am just saying it is hard to form a friendship with them.

Interviewee n°9, male, Turkey.



5.2.1.3 Safety first

Besides the kindness of the Taiwanese and the rich culinary offer, safety was a concept that was brought up unanimously by the interviewees. As stated by interviewee n°1:

I feel so safe here. I know that I can go anywhere I want at night, pretty much anywhere and I wouldn't feel in danger, on the contrary, people would try to help me if I'm lost. This level of security is really hard to find and it happens in very few countries. Maybe in some northern European countries like Iceland or some very specific towns you could feel like this.

Interviewee n°1, female, Poland.

Interviewee n°9 shared an event that helped him understand the local culture concerning safety:

I feel totally safe, I am always going out at night and feel safe. And I also know that if I forget my phone in here, nobody will take it. Once I went for dinner with a Taiwanese person, it was a hot pot place. So when I got up to get more sauce I noticed this person stood up and went to the bathroom leaving his phone behind. So I quickly went there and grab it. When he came back I told him: 'you didn't take your phone, be careful next time, someone might take it' and he replied really surprised: 'why would somebody take my phone'. It was a big realization moment for me.

Interviewee n°9, male, Turkey.

Interviewee n°3 compared her situation in Taiwan with her reality back home:

You can go anywhere at night and feel safe. It is much much safer than Europe. Can walk around at night and take a taxi without texting my boyfriend the license plate.

Interviewee n°3, female, Bosnia.

Interviewee n°4 referred to his lifestyle when discussing safety:

I am convinced to find myself in a safe and welcoming environment that allows me to continue my liberal lifestyle I've been used to from my home country. I like that I, as a boy, can kiss another boy in public without getting beaten by the police.

Interviewee n°4, male, Germany.

Interviewee n°5 shared personal anecdotes to explain safety in a more didactic way:

I think is one of the safest countries I've ever been in. I ride a scooter and I have left my wallet so many times at the front of the scooter and even my keys. I would go buy something or even an entire afternoon in class and everytime I go back I find everything there: wallet, keys. I think anywhere else, if you leave your things unattended, you probably won't find them once you are back. Here is totally different, it is so safe.

Interviewee n°5, male, Haiti.

Interviewee n°6 on the other hand linked safety with the concept of the kindness of the Taiwanese:

I really love the fact of feeling safe and relaxed any time of the day, knowing that I won't be exposed to any kind of danger, and knowing that even though my Chinese is not perfect, there is always someone willing to help me. All of that makes me feel really calm.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

Interviewee n°8 compared her expectations of safety before coming to Taiwan and her current opinion after being exposed to it:

I knew it was going to be a safe country, but I didn't expect to be this safe, it is amazing and people are also beyond nice.

Interviewee n°8, female, Paraguay.



5.2.1.4 Under the weather

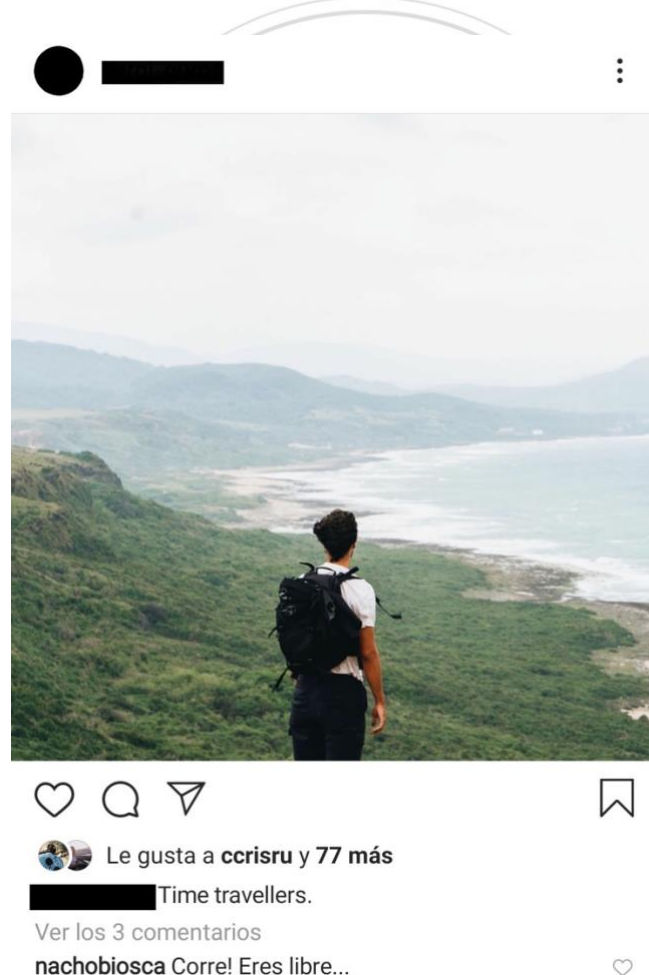
The weather seems to be a characteristic about Taiwan that brings both negative and positive attitudes towards it. During the interviewing process 4/12 mentioned feeling overwhelmed by the weather and an equal 4/12 mentioned the weather under a positive light.

On the positive 4/12 end, interviewee n°1 mentioned:

I had never lived in a tropical, subtropical country and I was so surprised to see green everywhere. So, even though I love being a city girl, I love nature. I've always lived surrounded by forest and mountains and I thought I was going to suffer a lot in Taiwan. But actually no, because it's greener than any average european city.

Interviewee n°1, female, Poland.

Figure 11. Interviewee n°12 enjoying the weather in Hualien, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



As seen on **figure 11**, interviewee n°12 seems to enjoy the weather by engaging in outdoors activities in the Hualien county.

On the other side, are the ones that are not very fond of Taiwan's weather, interviewee n°3 explained.

Since it is a tropical country I was worried about the rain and humidity and after living here it is very real.

Interviewee n°3, female, Poland.

Interviewee n°6 explains his attitudes towards Taiwanese weather and draws a comparison with the weather back home:

Considering I got here in summer, and also considering Chile is not humid nor hot, experiencing the humidity for the first time was really shocking. I sweated profusely and I couldn't see the end of it, it was awful. But I changed my mindset about it, because I know it is something that cannot be changed.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

Interviewee n°9 holds a stronger opinion about Taiwanese weather, but that does not diminish the overall opinion on Taiwan:

I didn't expect the weather to be this terrible. My mattress is already moldy, but I still like it in here. I like everything except the weather.

Interviewee n°9, male, Turkey.

As seen on interviewee n°9 post on **figure 12 on page 51** about the weather, which was captioned “Dear Ubike, I love you...and dear weather, I hate you”, which seems to describe the interviewees feelings about the weather in Taiwan.

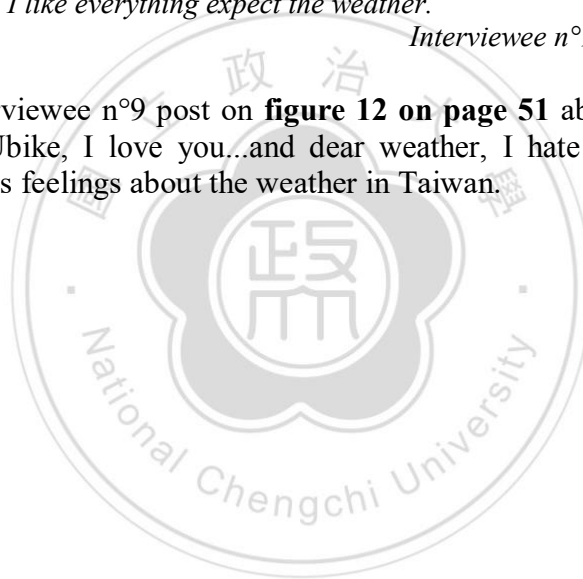


Figure 12. Interviewee n°9 complaining about weather. Source: Instagram.



Figure 13. Interviewee n°2 complaining about weather. Source: Instagram.



Something similar is suggested on interviewee's n°2 post on **figure 13 on page 51**, where the interviewee complains about the lack of consistency of the weather, which seems to be nice during the weekdays and awful during weekends, affecting activities associated to leisure for the interviewee.



5.2.2 How convenient is Taiwan?

10/12 of the interviewees mentioned Taiwan is a very convenient place, weather is it because of the cost of living or the easy access to products and services.

According the information extracted from the interviews, the following subcodes were extracted from the main code convenience: a) transportation system, b) outdoors activities, c) access to products and services.

Each concept along with the response marked with “O” if mentioned by the interviewees is detailed on **table 7**.

Table 7. Subcoding extracted from “convenience” coding.

Coding / Name	How convenient is Taiwan?		
	Transportation system	Outdoors access	Services and products access
1	O	O	O
2	O	O	O
3	O	O	O
4	O	O	
5		O	O
6	O		O
7	O		O
8		O	O
9		O	O
10	O	O	O
11	O	O	
12		O	O

5.2.2.1 Transportation system

When discussing convenience, 8/12 of the interviewees agreed on the convenience of the transportation system in Taiwan, which can easily help them move around the city or from once city to another. The 4/12 that didn't agreed currently live in: Hsinchu, Tainan and Hualien, which represents cities with low population density, therefore they might have a limited access to products and services as compared with major cities in Taiwan.

Supporting the majority of opinions, interviewee n°10 explained concerning on the reliability of the Taiwanese transportation system:

I love being able to visit new places in the city I am living in. If it is a further away place it is really easy to access it either by bus, MRT or train, paying with my easycard. Taiwan is a well-organized developed country. It is really easy to move around.

Interviewee n°10, female, Peru.

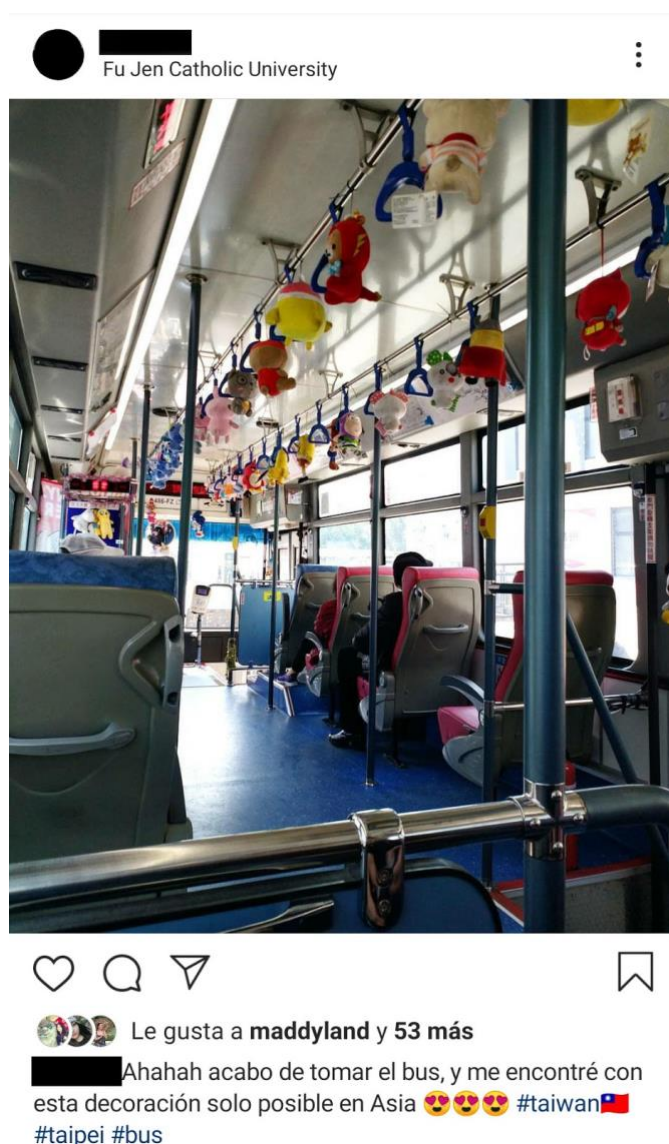
Interviewee n°6 expressed his personal valuation of the transportation system in Taiwan:

Transportation system in Taiwan is really convenient. Eventhough Taiwan is highly populated, buses or MRT are never really full, so it is nice to use even during peak times. It is also affordable and well connected throughout the city.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

On **figure 14 on page 55**, interviewee n°6 shares a post in which a public transport's bus is featured, with the following caption, "I just hopped on the bus and found this decoration that can only be found in Asia", which might suggest amusement and also a positive valuation of the public transportation system.

Figure 14. Interviewee n°6 at a public bus in New Taipei City, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



One of the most talked about public transportation means was the Ubike service, which is a short time bike rental and it is part of the public transportation system in Taipei, Hsinchu and Taichung. It works under the name Tbike in Tainan and City bike in Kaohsiung. As stated by interviewee n°10:

I really like being able to explore new places, it is as easy as finding a city bike station and renting a bike. It is a very convenient service and the bicycles are well-maintained. It is really easy to move around. On top of that there are so many beautiful places with bike lanes, like the Love River, I love going there at night and enjoy the beautiful scenery and special lightning.

Interviewee n°10, female, Peru.

On the other hand, interviewee n°1 discussed the state of the bike lanes in Taipei city:

Taipei is so liveable. Taipei and new taipei are huge, but taipei city is actually small and you can bike around their bike lanes. The air quality in Taipei city is actually good most of the times, so you feel safe in walking and biking and it is so well connected, that transport is actually better than in Rome.

Interviewee n°1, female, Poland.

Figure 15. Interviewee n°6 using ubike in Taipei, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



The post highlighted on **figure 15**, shows interviewee n°6 using Ubike in Taipei city along with friends, which might suggest is a great alternative to move around the city either for leisure activities or as an actual mean of transport to use to move back and forth from school.

Interviewee n°3 mentioned Easy card, as a great feature of the transportation system, since it can be used in a variety of services:

Yoyo card is really convenient, besides paying the transport with it, you can use it in any convenience store and even taxis. It is something that other countries should apply as well.

Interviewee n°2, male, Sweden.

On the other side of the spectrum, students living in less densely populated areas had a different opinion about the public transport, as interviewee n°5 told us:

Transport system is really easy and convenient, but in Hsinchu not really. Like if you want to go from school to Hsinchu station there are no buses after 7pm. So to live a comfortable life here you need to use a scooter.

Interviewee n°5, male, Haiti.

Figure 16. Interviewee n°11 riding his scooter in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



In the picture depicted on figure 16, interviewee n°11 can be seen riding a scooter, which might suggest that is his preferred way to move around the city.

5.2.2.2 From the city to the wilderness

A relevant aspect of Taiwanese lifestyle that is inherently linked to the convenience of the transportation system is the easy access to the outdoors.

The reliable Taiwanese transportation system, satisfied 10/12 interviewees, who mentioned how easy is to access rural or mountainous areas from the city by using local transport, either bus or train, such as interviewee n°1:

You can just jump on the mrt and ride for as little as 10 minutes and there would be a tiny hill or natural park that you can climb. I've never lived in a place like this, where you can do an actual hike 15 min from here or you can go as far as an hour to the seaside, all by mrt. It doesn't take you that far at all.

Interviewee n°1, female, Poland.

Interviewee n°5 named a variety of activities that can be accessed in Taiwan:

There are so many beautiful places to visit, so many beautiful mountains and beaches and I love outdoor activities, so there are lots to do.

Interviewee n°5, male, Haiti.

As told by interviewee n°12, it does not matter if it the city or rural areas, there is always going to be something new to experience:

It is a country that has beautiful mountains to do breathtaking trails, beaches in the south that are really gorgeous and the chaos in Taipei that will always allow you to find a new crazy aspect of it.

Interviewee n°12, male, Spain.

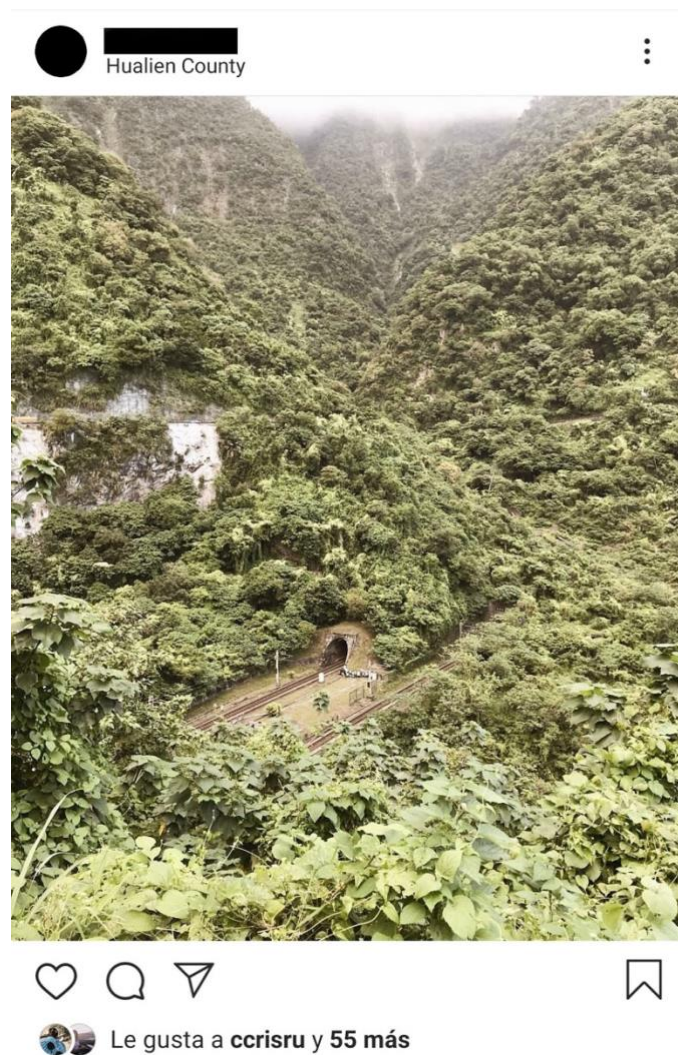
Interviewee n°11, mentioned the positive aspects of living in Kaohsiung when wanting to reach the country side:

If you want to travel throughout Taiwan, living in Kaohsiung is a really good thing,

because you get to experience the taiwanese lifestyle a in a better way.

Interviewee n°11, male, France.

Figure 17. Interviewee n°12 enjoying a day trip in Hualien, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



On the post depicted on **figure 17**, interviewee n°12 posted a picture of a rural area of Hualien, after doing a trail in the wilderness. On the other side, on **figure 18, page 60**, interviewee n°2 shared a post in which mentioned going into an unexpected trip, which might suggest the convenience of the transportation system, in order to take such decision.

Figure 18. Interviewee n°2 on a spontaneous trip to New Taipei City, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



5.2.2.3 Accessing products and services

Accessibility seems to be another characteristic of a convenient city, that is why 10/12 of the interviewees mentioned the easy access to products and services was a very important part of Taiwanese image, as stated by interviewee n°3:

I like that is super convenient, like convenience stores available 24 hours. Or the fact that you can go anywhere at night and feel safe. Get anything anywhere is very convenient. Like if I want chocolate at 2 am I can just go to the nearest 7 eleven.

Interviewee n°3, female, Bosnia.

Another aspect of accessibility are budget friendly services, was highlighted by interviewee n°4:

I like the fact that I can spontaneously decide to sit in a restaurant with friends and order from the menu without having to care about exorbitantly inflated prices.

Interviewee n°4, male, Germany.

Interviewee n°6 explained in great detail his opinion about products and services accessibility in Taiwan:

I like the comfort of living here, because it doesn't matter what I want or need, I will always find it at a short distance. Any kind of service, food or whatever it is easy to find and most important of all accessible and budget friendly. I also like feeling safe about my health, Taiwan has an excellent health insurance. In case of emergency, I know most, if not all my expenses would be covered and I would have access to excellent doctors and equipment.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

As a sort of backing up the opinion above, interviewee n°10 stated:

I also like being able to find many stores and services available 24/7, it is really convenient and easy living here.

Interviewee n°10, female, Peru.

Interviewee n°2 stated the importance of the Taiwanese health care system as a key component of service accessibility:

Access to services is very convenient in Taiwan, especially medical ones. As for products, you have everything you need here, but sometimes difficult getting hands on non-East Asian foods.

Interviewee n°2, male, Sweden.

On **figure 19**, interviewee n°6 posted his breakfast purchased in a Family Mart, as a proof of accessibility.

Figure 19. Interviewee n°6 eating at Family Mart in New Taipei City, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



Figure 20. Interviewee n°4 eating at a restaurant in Taipei City, Taiwan. Source: Instagram.



On the other side, interviewee n°4, depicted on the post on **figure 20**, enjoys a variety of taiwanese dishes, which might suggest the affordability and therefore accessibility to the them.

5.2.3 On campus experience

Since this study has a focal point on non-Asian international students seems relevant to make an evaluation of the interviewees on campus experience. To that effect, it were extracted the following subcodes, that represented the most recurrent concepts in this area: a) struggle with chinese, b) class environment, c) faculty and d) scholarship.

Each concept along with the response marked with “O” if mentioned by the interviewees is detailed on **table 8**.

Table 8. Subcoding extracted from “on campus experience” coding.

Coding / Name	On campus experience			
	Struggle with chinese	Class environment	Faculty	Scholarship
1	O	O	O	O
2		O	O	O
3	O	O		
4	O	O		O
5	O	O	O	O
6	O	O	O	O
7	O	O		
8	O	O	O	O
9	O	O	O	O
10	O	O	O	O
11	O	O	O	O
12	O		O	

5.2.3.1 Language: the struggle is real

When discussing about the language, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the interviewees stated having struggled with the language in the beginning of their study abroad experience, some of them still are, but in a lower scale. The remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ studied the language for at least three (3) years back home, having a basic to intermediate level of chinese before initiating the trip.

As shared by interviewee n°11:

In the beginning it was really hard, because I don't speak a very good chinese, but the more it went, the easier it went too.

Interviewee n°11, male, France.

Even the students that took chinese language classes previously struggled with the traditional characters:

At first it was difficult, since I came across traditional chinese for the first time and I had to speed up in my reading, because it didn't come as naturally as simplified chinese. It took me a semester to get used to it.

Interviewee n°1, female, Poland.

Interviewee n°5 discussed about the inefficiency of the language program coursed while in Taiwan:

All my classes are in chinese and my classmates are Taiwanese. At the beginning it was very difficult for me. I mean, I learnt chinese for a year, but the chinese I learnt was for everyday life and couldn't be applied in my field of studies. Now I am feeling more confident about it, because I have learnt all the concepts and key words about technology in chinese.

Interviewee n°5, male, Haiti.

On the other hand, interviewee n°7 decided to enroll in language classes after spending a while in Taiwan:

I decided to enroll in chinese classes, since people cannot communicate very well in english. I wanted to be able to communicate well with people here and be able to have a better experience.

Interviewee n°7, female, Italy.

In terms of everyday life, interviewees agreed unanimously on the language not diffculting their lifestyle, according that, interviewee n°6 stated:

When I first got here, I didn't know any chinese, but I never felt isolated or feeling I couldn't move around freely.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

5.2.3.2 Class environment

Discussing in class environment, there were mixed answers. 7/12 of the interviewees stated their classmates were very helpful and welcoming, meanwhile the 5/12 agreed on their classmates being very focus on school work, therefore less inclined to help.

When referring to the positive side of the spectrum, interviewee n°3 reacted the following way:

My Taiwanese friends are all from university. I mean I meet them outside as well, but I know them from campus. I mean, Taiwanese spend a lot of time at school, but mostly because their lives evolve around campus. They eat there and do their sports there a well. Time wise I just think that Taiwanese people work very not so efficiently, so they need more time.

Interviewee n°3, female, Bosnia.

Interviewee n°6 supported that notion:

Master's wise, it has been an amazing experience, my classmates have been very nice and friendly.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

Again the kindness of the Taiwanese was brought up, this time linked to another concept, in this case interviewee n°9 makes a stress on the help presented when something is unclear in the language:

My chinese is not perfect and my classmates always help me with that, if I didn't get some bits of the class or the homework and even if I have to do some paperwork, they would always help me.

Interviewee n°9, male, Turkey.

On the other side of the spectrum, 5/12 highlight the on campus centered life of Taiwanese students and the competitiveness in terms of academic performance, to be a downside of their academic experience. Interviewee n°2 commented:

People at NTU, since it is the best university in Taiwan, can get really cocky, knowing they are in the best university, well as in Sweden, people don't really go off about it, maybe since it has a different selection process with a very socialistic approach to things, so even if you are in the top university it wouldn't really matter, but people here would only focus on their studies. The same thing at the lab, people are really focused on their research and don't really care about other parts in life, which is something that I was really surprised about and didn't like that much.

Interviewee n°2, male, Sweden.

Interviewee n°7 also seconded the opinion, by stating:

It also shocks me that people practically live on campus, so they really know how to deal with numbers and university stuff, but they don't enjoy life so they don't have any social skills and definitely don't know how to deal with people in social events.

Interviewee n°7, female, Italy.

Interviewee n°10 shared a personal experience to detail the issue:

My classes are all in chinese and my classmates are all taiwanese. During my first semester in school, everyone was so nice, everybody wanted to know more about me, meet me, but one day everybody stopped talking to me and I was so confused and sad, because I never knew why. Taiwanese students are really competitive and really focus in school, maybe it has to do with that. I like to also enjoy the experience of living here, so we are very different in that aspect.

Interviewee n°10, female, Peru.



5.2.3.3 Faculty

On the other side of their academic experience, 1/4 of the interviewees highlighted the role of faculty members as a positive factor during their academic journey. Interviewee n°1 mentioned:

The thing is, the teachers are really nice. It's like, they are here not to create difficulties for you, unlike teachers in Italy, whose all purpose is make things difficult for you, they're like "school has to be difficult". But here in Taiwan, they try to be helpful and fair, this is the material and if you are active and know what you are talking about, you can get a perfect score.

Interviewee n°1, female, Poland.

Interviewee n°6 also experienced something similar:

The professors always helped me in every aspect and also encourage us to not only focus on studying but also enjoying our time in Taiwan.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.



5.2.3.4 Scholarship program

The scholarship program is a transversal topic when discussing the image of Taiwan, since $\frac{3}{4}$ of the interviewees were in Taiwan under a scholarship program, granted either by Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Education. Interviewee n°2 explained:

I came across an ad for a summer program so I came to do a summer internship and after that, I really liked it here. I thought the equipment at the laboratory I was doing my internship at was really good and I studied Chinese before, so I continued on doing that and later on applied to Taiwan Scholarship program.

Interviewee n°2, male, Sweden.

Interviewee n°4 mentioned his decision making process concerning his study abroad experience in Taiwan:

The Taiwan scholarship and the financial security deriving from it, and the fact that I had spent time in the country already and knew what I could expect, were the driving force for me to decide to begin anew and enroll in postgraduate studies overseas.

Interviewee n°4, male, Germany.

Interviewee n°5, highlighted the recommendation of his closest circle for applying to the scholarship program:

When I was in highschool I started looking for scholarship opportunities. One of my cousin's gave me the information about the Taiwanese scholarship, I thought it was a great opportunity, so I gave it a shot and got in.

Interviewee n°5, male, Haiti.

Interviewee n°6 summarized the different kinds of scholarships available in Taiwan:

First of all Taiwan has great scholarships, that cover either chinese language studies and also undergraduate and graduate studies. I thought it was a great idea to study the language first and then continue with my graduate studies. How I mentioned before the scholarships are really good and cover almost all expenses.

Interviewee n°6, male, Chile.

Recommendations is again mentioned as one way in which the scholarship opportunity is presented to students, in this case interviewee n°10 stated:

I studied chinese before and my sister helped me applied to the university. Once I finished studying chinese, I realised I really enjoyed living in Taiwan and decided to apply to a scholarship to continue my undergraduate studies. This time I new my way around Taiwan, so I looked for universities by myself.

Interviewee n°10, female, Peru.

CHAPTER SIX. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to analyze the perceptions of non-Asian international students with a stress on nation brand Taiwan's image and reputation, both before the study abroad experience and also after the acculturation process followed by the interviewees throughout their experience in Taiwan.

It is been demonstrated the role of online information and recommendations previous to the decision making process and during the preparation process of the study abroad experience. The findings related to peer recommendations are directly linked to the Actor-Network theory, in which, according to Cho et. al (2002), "affiliation with community has benefits that extend beyond that of knowledge building. People located in social networks offer guidance with regard to information seeking, as well. (...) The community around an individual can be a valuable resource by helping to guide information seeking"(p. 43).

The collected data offers a clear landscape of the minor success of the current marketing strategies developed to promote Taiwan internationally, since most of the interviewees lacked of any information regarding Taiwan, before making the decision of enrolling in a program in the country. Therefore, specific policies should be made in order to create successful marketing campaigns to dote Taiwan with a stronger and long lasting image abroad.

Nevertheless, the results shown in this study help map the most interesting aspects of Taiwanese culture in the eyes of foreign students currently enrolled in a graduate or undergraduate program in Taiwan.

A constant topic to be discussed about by the interviewees was Taiwanese distinctive culture. Culture plays a distinctive role in the global perception of a country. A rich cultural life sets the difference between a tourist destination and a fascinating whole place. Taiwan has a very rich and inviting culture that fascinates international students at large, concept associated with the symbolic and experiential needs further explained by the brand concept-image management theory, which certainly dotes Taiwan of characteristics that sets it apart from other countries in the region and in the world at large.

To present the findings, they were organized in a way that could graphic the most talked about concepts behind Taiwanese culture, which were: local culture, the kindness of the Taiwanese, safety and weather issues. All the concepts mentioned certainly help shape the Taiwanese culture and therefore the core of the nation's image, as stated by Anholt (2006) and are certainly linked to symbolic and experiential needs, rather than functional ones.

Moreover, the concepts extracted during the data analysis process, correlate to the ones presented by the quality of life index 2018 conducted by InterNations, in which Taiwan was ranked n°1, highlighting aspects such as safety and quality of life. Also, supporting the results shown by Taiwan's Ministry of Education 2018 brochure in which, Taiwanese, are portrayed as very friendly people.

Another major concept treated during the interviewing process was convenience, which was constantly mentioned in every interview. This concept presented three (3) subcodes, which were: transportation system, access to outdoors activities and access to

products and services. That is to say, the results in this category backed up the survey results previously conducted by FICHET in 2017, in which Taiwan was portrayed as a convenient and affordable country.

The above mentioned, were highly valued by the majority of the interviewees. On the other hand, the ones presenting lower rates of satisfaction in those areas, was due to living in smaller less populated areas of Taiwan, therefore, the access to certain services such as public transportation were limited, in comparison with those living in densely populated areas of Taiwan.

Subsequently, since the research was focused on the experiences and perceptions of non-Asian international students currently pursuing studies in Taiwan, it was relevant to analyze their perceptions on the academic services they were provided as well as the on campus experience.

During the interviewing process, we came across with four (4) subcodes, related to the university experience, that were the following: struggle with chinese, in class environment, faculty and scholarship.

As for the forgoing mentioned, the language barrier represents a struggle in the interviewees academic performance, but the same does not present any issue in daily life activities and does not have an impact on lifestyle.

In class environment was a sensitive topic, since it presented contrasting results. The majority of the interviewees have had a positive in class experience. While a large and still very relevant minority experienced a cultural shock when they noted the lack of interaction and engagement of Taiwanese classmates, whose life would revolve around campus and would not interact much with foreign students.

Faculty is a theme of high appreciation by the majority of students, describing professors as a guide, rather than the role professors hold in the western world, which represents much more intimidation and struggle.

When it came to channels in which the students could get familiar with brand Taiwan, the scholarship program was mentioned as the ultimate channel Taiwan holds with international students in order to attract them, considering 3/4 of the interviewees are in Taiwan under a scholarship program which funds the majority of their expenses, transforming it in a very alluring way to draw international talents.

Thanks to the back up of the social media Instagram, we were able to see the phenomenon and support the perceptions with graphic content, in which the interviewees were performing or expressing opinions about Taiwan over Instagram in the form of posts.

Certainly, this research has helped supporting previous studies, but has also shed a new light upon the concepts attached to the image of Taiwan from the perspective of non-Asian international students. Since symbolic and experiential needs, are the ones highly valued by students, they would be suggested to be the pivotal concepts when crafting a successful marketing campaign.

According to this research, said concepts should be centered in everyday life aspects related to local culture, convenience and on campus experience, doting the prospective students with a deeper and more meaningful insight of the kind of lifestyle they might encounter if choosing Taiwan as an study abroad destination.

In the SWOT analysis conducted in the literature review, **on page 7**, the mentioned opportunities are related to the construction of new meanings in terms of perceptions and also enhancing previous concepts Taiwan is known for, in oder to strengthen nation brand Taiwan. Therefore, by taking into account the findings presented in this research, and by nurturing them with new data and insights, Taiwan's official entities should be able to craft a successful marketing campaign based on differentiation to ultimately attract international talents and give a positive reputation to nation brand Taiwan.

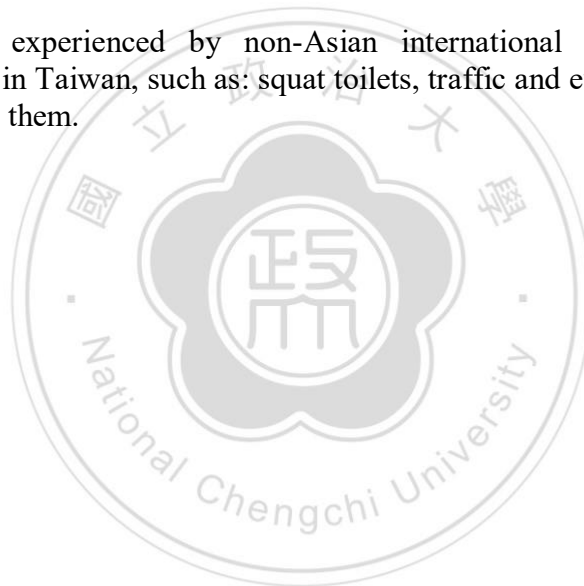


6.1 Suggestions

Since this is a scarcely explored topic in Taiwan, and considering the sample size was limited due to time constraints and limited personnel, it would be advisable to conduct a follow up research with an enlarged the sample size. It would also be advisable to include some instances of focus group interview, in order to compare responses of the interviewees in a private setting and later on a group setting. This would allow us to see if there is a change of opinion or, on the contrary, a profundization of the same.

There were an interesting number of concepts that can be further explained through research such as:

1. The effectiveness of chinese language programs in Taiwan, for students wishing to pursue higher education in Taiwan. Since some interviewees mentioned the chinese language programs only covered everyday chinese, leaving them behind when starting a graduate or undergraduate program due to the lack of technical language associated with a particular field of study.
2. Cultural shock experienced by non-Asian international students, with aspects everyday aspects of life in Taiwan, such as: squat toilets, traffic and even traditional food that might be uncommon for them.



6.2 Limitations

As stated before, due to time constraints and limited personnel, the sample size was reduced, but still significant, although it would be advisable to include more experiences to enhance the results.

Some of the interviews were conducted in Spanish, therefore, there is a translation of the responses, which may limit the lexicon resources originally used.

Lastly, the research intended to map the perceptions of non-Asian international students, but we were unable to contact students who belonged to the African and Oceanian continents, ultimately having no representation in terms of opinion of the aforementioned.



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