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Master's Thesis

碩士論文

**Does Taiwanese Soft Power
Work? Evaluating the Influence of
A Higher Education Scholarship
Program on Its Central American
Allies**

台灣的軟實力有用嗎？

評估高等教育獎學金對其中美洲

邦交國的影響

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research was to find an answer to the question: Is Taiwan's Higher Education Scholarship Program an effective soft power tool for the to use with its Central American diplomatic allies? If Yes, which factors make Taiwan attractive? If No, which factors make Taiwan unattractive? The findings after conducting the research suggest that Taiwan's higher education scholarship program serves as an effective soft power tool to use with its Central American allies given the influence its pulling factors (A positive perception of the basic information available about the country, positive perception of the Taiwan's Higher Education System as a high quality one, knowledge of Taiwan's Higher Education Scholarship Program, reinforcing positive perceptions of the Taiwan's fully funded scholarship program and its high-quality higher education system from participants' local social circle, reinforcing positive comments of Taiwan's fully funded scholarship program and its high-quality higher education system from participants' social links living in Taiwan and scholarship financial benefits) exert to drive them to come; combined with a series of fostering factors (Sense of safety, freedom, entertainment scene, culture, societal values, positive perceptions about study program's administrative staff, perceptions of university's international office administrative staff, perceptions of local classmates, perceptions of study program's professor staff, easiness to communicate with home country, perception of Taiwan as a place for career development, and desire to search for a job in the Taiwan) exert to generate and maintain a positive opinion about the country among international scholarship recipients from Taiwan's Central American allies despite the presence of a series of deteriorating factors (Skin color/country of origin discrimination, negative experiences in the educational environment with staff members , local classmates and/or professors; unpleasant climate/weather, perceived averseness of Taiwanese employers to hire international graduates and a perceived averseness of Taiwanese employers to hire international graduates from home country).

Keywords: Central America, higher education, scholarship, soft power, Taiwan

摘要

本研究之目的在於釐清台灣的高等教育獎學金是否能夠作為有效的軟實力工具，協助台灣鞏固其與中美洲邦交國之關係？若答案是肯定的，那究竟是何種因素所促成？若答案為否定，那又是何種因素所導致？本研究發現，台灣高等教育獎學金計畫確實能作為一個有效的軟實力工具來吸引中美洲學生前前來台灣就學。對台灣現有的基本情況以及台灣高教系統的高品質存有正面看法、對台灣高等教育獎學金計畫的認識、從歷屆受獎生分享的台灣經驗以及其在台居住親友之分享與獎學金提供的經濟利益，上述因素都加強了其對台灣全額獎學金和台灣高等教育系統之正面觀點。儘管存在著許多的負面影響因素(deteriorating factors)，例如對膚色或國籍之歧視、與學校行政人員或同學或教授互動之負面經驗、台灣糟糕的天氣，以及台灣雇主不願僱用外國人或自台灣學校畢業之外國畢業生等等，然而，仍有一系列的正面促進因素(fostering factors)能夠讓獲得台灣獎學金的中美洲受獎生依然產生並保有對台灣的正面看法，這些因素包括台灣所帶來的安全感、自由的氛圍、文化藝術以及社會價值觀的良好氣氛、與學校行政人員或同學或教授互動之良好經驗、通訊設備與網路健全使其易與家人聯繫，或者將台灣視為生涯發展之地並試圖在此尋覓一份工作等等。

關鍵詞：中美洲、高等教育、獎學金、軟實力、台灣

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List of Acronyms

AEI: Australian Education International	
HDI: Human Development Index	
HE: Higher Education	
HEI: Higher Education Institution	
ICDF: International Cooperation and Development Fund	
IECDF: International Economic Cooperation and Development Fund	
IMF: International Monetary Fund	
LATAM: Latin America.....	
LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer.....	
MOE Ministry of Education	
MOFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
NTU: National Taiwan Normal University	
PRC: People's Republic of China.....	
PUP: People's United Party	
UK: United Kingdom	
UNGA: United Nations General Assembly.....	
WHA: World Health Assembly	
WHO: World Health Organization	

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Motivation

Honduras is one of the countries with the worst social indicators in the region, particularly lagging behind in the areas of child malnutrition and quality of education having a Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.625 which is below the average of 0.751 for Latin American and Caribbean countries and also with a slightly lower value than that of neighboring countries such as El Salvador and Nicaragua (Calderón, 2018). With the indicators that mostly affect the positioning of Honduras being income and low average in years of schooling. This information means that there is a need to have an educational system that not only reaches high enrollment goals but that also substantially improves its quality level. In particular, higher education has the fundamental mission of responding to the challenges posed by globalization and technological advances, in order to have more equitable and developed societies (Calderón, 2018). However, Honduras has the lowest number of enrolled students in higher education from all Latin American countries¹ (despite the advances in the enrollment rate observed in recent years) and has a large number of young graduates of secondary education who do not have access to studies in higher education. In addition, most of the available programs are offered only at the bachelor level with master and doctorate level programs being so scarce that opportunities to pursue research are limited. Moreover, the higher education system has been dominated by the areas of social sciences, commercial education, and law

There are few alternatives of study in strategic areas such as agriculture, the health sciences, the natural sciences, and the technology sector (Calderón, 2018).

Knowing this, the diplomatic relationship between the Republic of Honduras and the

¹ The number of students in the bachelor or equivalent level experienced a quick increase, coming from 144,504 students in 2007 to 201,821 in 2015, which represents a 40% increase. Enrollment at the master's level has also shown significant growth: from 2,957 in 2006 to 4,568 students in 2015, an increase of 54% with 57% of the master students being women. (Calderón, 2018)

Republic of China (Taiwan)² became increasingly valuable for Honduran students in particular wishing to pursue a high-quality higher education and be part of the policy-setting structures in the public sector, contribute to research and development projects in the non-governmental sector or enhance the human talent in the private sector of the country. This interest stems from the growing reputation among the Honduran society of Taiwanese universities as world class institutions and the availability of fully-funded scholarships in all levels (undergraduate, master and doctorate) in a wide variety of programs that local universities lack.

With this in mind and knowing about Taiwan's current diplomatic stance in the region,³ I began to wonder if higher education scholarship programs (as part of a wider foreign policy strategy guiding their relationship with the Central American diplomatic allies [including Honduras]) are used as a soft power tool by Taiwan to enhance and strengthen the current formal diplomatic ties it has with other countries in the region⁴ who also have a similar higher education system as Honduras. It results very motivating to research about the importance higher education scholarship programs, in particular, might have as an important element of the Taiwan-Central American relationship. Also, it would be significant to be able to contribute to the literature we currently have regarding this diplomatic relationship.

1.2 The Puzzle

For Taiwan, delivering humanitarian and development aid to its developing allied countries has become a core element of its foreign relations policy because it supports the country's diplomatic interests. An important component of Taiwan's focus on development aid is the international education and training component where the aim is to educate the young human capital coming from its developing partner countries like

² Referred only as Taiwan further in the thesis.

³ A stance that has been weakened after both El Salvador and Panama cut off unilaterally diplomatic ties with Taiwan in the last 3 years reducing its allies in the region from 6 down to 4.

⁴ Other than Honduras, Taiwan currently has formal diplomatic with other 3 countries in Central America: Guatemala, Belize and Nicaragua.

those in the Central American region (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua), who cannot get a quality education in their ailing higher education systems, through its International Higher Education Scholarship Program. This program serves as an opportunity for these young students to pursue higher education at every level in one of Taiwan's most prestigious higher education institutions with a fully funded scholarship. Taking this into consideration, and aside from achieving its development aid objectives, this program has another very important goal for Taiwan: Enhance its international profile and wield its soft power to those aforementioned countries of the Central American region and secure its position of influence in the region by giving out this scholarship to higher education students from those countries so they can develop positive views of the country and thus contributing to the Taiwan's soft power, while studying and living in the country.

Also, they might become international diplomatic assets to promote Taiwan's reputation as they move up in their professional career and become part of the policy-setting structures in their local government sector, international and national advocacy networks, or part private sector of the country where they can promote it while doing their professional activities.

After receiving preliminary empirical evidence after speaking with two current scholarships from Guatemala and Belize respectively and two recent and former scholarship recipients from Honduras and Nicaragua, I can get an idea on what is the effectiveness that the above-mentioned goal of promoting soft power through an International Higher Education Scholarship Program and what particular factors are associated with the scholarship program that allow Taiwan to exert soft power. Despite all of them showing a favorable opinion of the country in general terms, and finding many aspects of the country attractive (quality higher education, welcoming environment, culture [including language], perceived safety, etc.), which may lead us to think that the scholarship program is effective indeed, the students stated some factors like limited knowledge and accessible information about the country and/or the scholarship, geographic remoteness, fears of a potential culture shock among other things including an unfriendly university program as discouraging factors that could diminish Taiwan's international scholarship program's effectiveness as a soft power

tool. With everything mentioned above, a puzzling issue arises. Also, and after reviewing the literature, no particular explanation of what are or might be the driving factors that push the positive view of international students from this particular region in the Asian continent in general or Taiwan in particular, which only show the necessity of evaluating the higher education scholarship program of Taiwan's government serves as an effective soft power tool to use with the country's Central American diplomatic allies and to identify clearly what are most salient factors that Central American higher education scholarship recipient students identify to drive their view of Taiwan.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the above the proposed questions to answer with this research would be: *Is Taiwan's Higher Education Scholarship Program an effective soft power tool for the to use with its Central American diplomatic allies? If Yes, which factors make Taiwan attractive? If No, which factors make Taiwan unattractive?*

1.4 Main Findings in Brief

Taiwan's Higher Education Scholarship Program is an effective soft power tool for the country, given a list of **pulling factors** and **fostering factors** the country possesses, alongside nonexistent **detering factors** and a list of concerning yet non-majoritarian **deteriorating factors** that do not change the dominant positive opinion regarding Taiwan among the international scholarship recipients from its current Central American diplomatic allies (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua). The factors pulling the aforementioned students to come to the country and generating a positive opinion before their arrival **are a positive perception of the basic information available about the country, positive perception of Taiwan's Higher Education System as a high quality one, knowledge of Taiwan's Higher Education Scholarship Program, reinforcing positive perceptions of Taiwan's fully funded scholarship program and its high-quality higher education system from participants' local social circle, reinforcing positive comments of Taiwan's fully funded scholarship program and its high-quality higher education system from participants' social links living in Taiwan and scholarship financial benefits (full**

coverage of tuition and living expenses). The factors fostering their opinion after arrival are: **Safety, freedom, entertainment scene, culture, societal values, positive perceptions about study program's administrative staff, perceptions of university's international office administrative staff , perceptions of local classmates, perceptions of study program's professor staff; easiness to communicate with home country , perception of Taiwan as a place for career development, and desire to search for a job in Taiwan.**

Finally, the factors that deteriorated the opinion of a significant portion of the students are: **Skin color/ Country of origin discrimination, negative experiences in the educational environment with staff members, local classmates and/or professors; unpleasant climate/weather, perceived averseness of Taiwanese employers to hire international graduates and a perceived averseness of Taiwanese employers to hire international graduates from home country.**

1.5 Research Method

The data required to produce the empirical evidence for this research was collected by firstly interviewing two international scholarship recipient students from each of Taiwan's four diplomatic allies in Central America (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) respectively to inquire the possible driving factors of their opinion about Taiwan. After that, 24 selected international scholarship recipient students were interviewed to prove which factors are the most salient or important to them in determining their opinion about Taiwan for a total of 32 international scholarship recipient students which comprise the total sample. A sample that was selected using a snowball sampling methodology which answered a structured questionnaire containing close and open-ended questions about their before and after-arrival opinion of Taiwan.

These students came from each of Taiwan's Central American allies, study and reside in different places all-around Taiwan, pursue different levels of higher education (Undergraduate, Master, and Doctorate), represent both genders in an equal manner and

In sum, the snowball sample is balanced in terms of gender, degree pursued,

nationality and place of residence.

1.6 Structure of Thesis

The structure of this thesis will be as follows. Chapter 2 will be comprised of six subsections. Firstly, the concept of soft power as regarded by some authors is presented in section 2.1. Secondly, presents how the concepts of soft power and higher education relate to each other in section 2.2. Thirdly, what the literature has to say in regards how higher education scholarship in particular generate or create soft power and the ongoing debate on whether if it is an effective tool for states to create soft power is presented in section 2.3. Furthermore, literature explaining what factors drive international students' views of a country will be addressed alongside a summary table of this literature at the end of section 2.4. Last two subsequent sections of this chapter will detail the puzzle (section 2.5) and the argument (section 2.6) of this thesis.

Chapter 3 will present the research design for this thesis as well as a qualitative analysis of the interview questionnaire outcomes. Section 3.1 will address the research method to be applied (interviews), detail how those interviews will be conducted, feature the structure of the interview questionnaire as well as a sample of the sample interview questionnaire for international scholarship recipient students from Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Section 3.2 will describe the sample methodology as well as the criterion to be followed when selecting the international scholarship recipient students that will be part of it. Section 3.3 describes the sample selection and data gathering process. Finally, Section 3.4 presents the research limitations of this thesis.

Chapter 4 presents a qualitative analysis of the data given by the 32 participants from Taiwan's Central American allies during the data recollection process of this research is presented. This chapter is divided in four large sections. Section 4.1 describes the main pulling factors driving a favorable opinion from international scholarship recipient students of these four Central American countries about Taiwan before their arrival in the country. Section 4.2 describes the main fostering factors that drove their opinion after their arrival in Taiwan. Section 4.3. describes the main deteriorating factors pushing back their opinion after their arrival in Taiwan or as seen with concern by those

holding a positive opinion. Section 4.4 presents a before and after-arrival to Taiwan opinion analysis including cases within the interviewee sample for the purpose of exemplifying their after-arrival opinion change. Finally, a chapter discussion (Section 4.5) is presented to summarize and detail the relevant key points obtain from this research qualitative analysis.

Chapter 5 presents the statistical analysis to review the relative importance of each of the pulling, fostering and deteriorating factors, as well as the positive and negative, variables associated with the before and after- arrival opinion change that compliments the qualitative analysis done in the previous chapter. Section 5.1 presents a detailed analysis of the before and after-arrival opinion distribution of the 32 international scholarship recipient students from Taiwan's Central American diplomatic allies. Secondly, section 5.2 describes briefly the variable conceptualization used for the statistical analysis. Thirdly, section 5.3 presents an analysis of the cross-section tabulation tables relating the participants opinion change and certain participant' questionnaire responses singularities (**gender, degree, mandarin fluency, time living in the Taiwan), home contact frequency , school experience, non-school experience and education experience**). Fourthly, section 5.4 describes the statistical model and presents the associated discussion with the information given by the 32 participants in the interview questionnaires. To finalize the chapter, section 5.5 presents the chapter discussion.

Finally, Chapter 6 comprises all the resulting conclusion of this thesis (Section 6.1) as well as some policy suggestions to Taiwan's government (Section 6.2).

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The main goal of this chapter what soft power is and find out the favorable preconditions that make soft power work in order to find out the important factors for this study when constructing the interview questionnaire. Firstly, the concept of soft power as regarded by some authors is presented in section 2.1. Secondly, presents how the concepts of soft power and higher education relate to each other in section 2.2. Thirdly, what the literature has to say in regards how higher education scholarship in particular generate or create soft power and the ongoing debate on whether if it is an effective tool for states to create soft power is presented in section 2.3. Furthermore, literature explaining what factors drive by international students' views of a country will be addressed alongside a summary table of this literature at the end of section 2.4. Last two subsequent sections of this chapter will detail the puzzle (section 2.5) and the argument (section 2.6) of this thesis.

2.1 Soft Power

The term “soft power” was first devised by Joseph Nye in 1990 where he defined it as: “when one country gets other countries to want what it wants-might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants” (Nye, 1990, p. 166). He further advanced the concept in his 2004 book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. In this book, Nye clearly defines soft power as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments and this “arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies” (Nye, 2004, p. x). He also expresses that soft power “rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others” (Nye, 2004, p. 5). When a foreign audience respects and admires a country's practices, values and ideals, soft power is taking root.

Nye in his 2011 book *The Future of Power* further explains that there are three sources of soft power for countries to draw on – cultural (in places where it is attractive to others), political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad) and foreign policies (when others see them as legitimate and having moral authority) (Nye, 2011).

Soft power resources are the assets that produce attraction which often leads to compliance. Nye asserts that, “Seduction is always more effective than coercion, and many values like democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities are deeply seductive” (Nye, 2004, p. x.). Angelo Codevilla observed as well that an often-unnoticed vital aspect of soft power is that different parts of populations are attracted or repelled by different things, ideas, images, or prospects. Soft power is hampered when policies, culture, or values repel others instead of attracting them (Waller et al., 2009).

Authors like Carnes Lord expressed (according to Nye’s perspective) that soft power is a more difficult instrument for governments to wield than hard power for two main reasons: many of its critical resources are outside the control of governments; and soft power tends to “work indirectly by shaping the environment for policy, and sometimes takes years to produce the desired outcomes” (Waller et al., 2009, p. 66).

In the most recent decade, a multitude of events and singularities have seen the notion on soft power proliferate in academia, government, media and even in public discourse. Articles abound in publications like *Foreign Policy* and online media such as gulfnews.com, focusing particularly on American, Indian and Chinese soft power in the context of larger geopolitical shifts in economic might (Mullen & Ganguly, 2012; Correspondent, 2018).

Global affairs and lifestyle magazine *Monocle* have begun publishing an annual soft power survey in collaboration with the Institute for Government in the UK, and even public relations firms like Weber Shandwick have adopted the concept as a keystone of their research and practice.

Changes in technologies and socio-economic structures over the past decade have enabled and accelerated the mediums through which soft power is projected. These include the increasing ubiquity of broadband and wireless internet, the exponential growth of social media, the introduction of low-cost carriers, and a rising middle-class in a fast-developing Asia more generally. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) cited statistics from the World Tourism Organization in its report last year stating that international trips by Chinese travelers alone had exploded “from 10 million in 2000 to

83 million in 2012” (BBC, 2014). These trends indicate that there is now an unprecedented surge in the global flows of knowledge and people; new networks and platforms for knowledge exchange are being created on a regular basis and diverse people-to-people interactions are growing tremendously as a result of the tourism boom, increased migration and new media technologies.

In a world more globalized than ever, competing ideas and norms are spreading faster and wider, hence ensuring that the wielding of soft power is a hotly contested one in which state and non-state actors are employing or at least considering all available avenues to secure their positions of influence.

With this mind frame, **it becomes evident that higher education, as one of those avenues, could play a significant role in exerting that influence.** This is especially so as there is a rising demand for and growing internationalization of higher education.

2.2 Soft Power and Higher Education

Major English-speaking countries like the United States, United Kingdom and Australia have for some time recognized the soft power potential of scholarships and other higher education initiatives in reaching out to an international public. Many of the international students on scholarships are potential leaders who eventually return to their home countries to take up executive positions in the public and private sectors where they can contextualize and spread the knowledge learnt through their university education. The Fulbright Program, UK Chevening Scholarships Program and Colombo Plan Scholarships are some of the examples through which governments use higher education as a mode of development assistance as well as projecting their norms through educational exchange.

Stetar et al., (2010 p.193) notes that a country’s education system conveys norms and values not just through institutional collaborations but also by students **“bringing with them the perspective of the country where they were educated” back home, and often further in the future as they progress professionally.** Shields & Edwards, (2010 p.237) expresses that the “pattern of student mobility from periphery to core countries

has been widely accepted as a mutually beneficial, or symbiotic, relationship”. **Destination countries gain by advancing their foreign policy objectives, accessing skilled labor, and (increasingly) funding their own higher education institutions** (HEIs), while sending countries access new skills and knowledge networks (Altbach, 1989) There is therefore a general consensus that these educational exchanges provide a largely positive outcome for all the parties involved.

More attention has been given in recent years to trends in the internationalization of higher education and the connection this has to the contest for regional/global influence. Higher education researchers have pointed out that building soft-power is a key strategic function in the development of education hubs particularly around the Asia-Pacific region. Some scholars in the region focus particularly on the “influence of high-quality human capital, local and global human network, and high-valued intellectual capacity” elements of soft power in forming **“an intangible regional network and leadership position, which will extend its long-term political, cultural, and social impacts in the region and beyond”** (Cheung et al., 2011 p. 482). Other authors like Ka Ho Mok acknowledge the development of education hubs as a vital policy tool for states to assert soft power in an ever more competitive global marketplace (Mok, 2012). Additionally, Deodato and Borkowska argue that Universities have traditionally risen above violent and ideological conflicts happening around them to offer “an unbiased perspective on historic, political, cultural and economic issues... (where an) exchange of ideas, information, arts and culture on the one hand and the cascade effect of education on the other facilitate the academic soft power performance.” (Deodato & Borkowska, 2014, p.8) This means that universities can serve as potentially important neutral bridges between otherwise unfriendly nations, brandishing soft power in a subtle yet profound manner.

The nexus between higher education, development assistance and foreign policy is an area that is worth exploring to see how the different objectives and goals are reconciled, and to tease out the underlying assumptions in the policy making. Liping Bu points out that “thirty-three universities with the highest foreign student enrolment (forty-two per cent of total foreign student population) were also most heavily involved in... university contracts for foreign aid” (Bu, 1999, p. 405).

In this, trickier questions arise on how appropriate it is for higher educational institutions to be perceived as vehicles for a state's political agenda. There is indeed an inherent tension in the relationship between governments and universities in that it is sometimes unclear as to who wields the ultimate authority – often unspoken and implicit – in how major, if at all, a role the institutions play within a state's foreign policy agenda

2.3 Soft Power and Higher Education Scholarship Programs

Although funding for scholarships has been a major part of foreign aid programs throughout the 20th Century and in some cases is expected to contribute to international relations or public diplomacy (Dassin et al, 2018). Few specific examples of assessments of impact or outcomes from influence could be identified. Many evaluations of scholarship schemes are tracer studies that track the career progression of alumni. These commonly refer to the challenges of keeping in contact with alumni as they change job or email address. This is especially the case where ex-post evaluations have tried to revive links with former students.

Kent (2018) argues for example that Australia's national interests are well served by having a large group of Australian-educated professionals, academics and government operatives in its region. This statement originates from a Senate review into public diplomacy in 2007 which asserted that "the network of current and former students provides an enormous pool of people. . .whom. . .can and do assist in promoting Australia's reputation" (Payne, 2007 cited in Kent, 2018 p.28).

Australia's temporary seat at the United Nations Security Council was in part secured by a rapid and short-lived expansion of the Australia Awards into Latin America and Africa. This illustrates that the award of scholarships themselves can form the basis of diplomatic bargaining, long before a returning scholar is able to influence home country policy or business practice.

While advertising a scholarship program to a population highlights the contribution that the donor country is making, it is less easy to demonstrate how soft power or influence over these scholars is created, or later exercised by alumni. The proportion of

alumni holding influential positions is often relied upon for assessing the outcomes of international scholarships, particularly those funded by governments (Kent, 2018). The number of government ministers who were educated in the donor country is a matter of pride. Research by the British Council in 2014, for example, claimed “analysis suggests that the UK is ten times more likely to produce a world leader than the USA – UK universities produces one world leader per fifty thousand graduates, whereas the US produces one per five hundred thousand” (Sowula 2014, cited in Kent, 2018 p. 34).

If these published stories foster some sense of pride in the higher-level education system and justify scholarship programs to taxpaying citizens, they do not measure the impact that period of study had on the life of the subject (world leader or not), nor the impact on the subject’s family or future colleagues (Kent, 2018).

Several of the authors contributing to the volume *International Scholarships in Higher Education* demonstrate that scholarship programs are an undefined academic space, somewhere between development, education and public diplomacy (Kent, 2018) (Dassin et al., 2018). Aside from the measurement of development objectives of many scholarship programs, there is at least a greater need to understand and quantify the soft power outcomes that scholarships can bring (Kent, 2018).

International scholarships form a substantial proportion of Australian development aid and have been retained within the aid program (when other elements such as the volunteer program was cut) and serve as a means of international influence and diplomacy (Abimbola et al., 2016).

The rapid expansion of Australian scholarships for Africa between 2005 and 2012 was used to achieve development in Africa and advance the influence of Australia. Despite the considerable spend via this aid mechanism over the years, Matt Mawer (Mawer, 2014) writes that they have not received much independent scrutiny and evaluation. “This may be due to the lack of clearly articulated theories of change which highlight how and under what circumstances scholarship program are expected to achieve their outcomes. On the other hand, the reason may be the diversity of potential developmental, diplomatic and economic outcomes that may result from scholarships to

study in high-income countries” (Abimbola et al., 2016 p.106).

An evaluation of the Australian scholarship programs in Africa from 2004 to 2011 showed improved career prospects for scholars upon return and favorable views of Australia (Bysouth and Allaburton 2012, cited in Abimbola et al, 2016), but the study did not explore how these outcomes were achieved. Assessing the impact of scholarship programs over time is challenging. Direct causality between the private benefits of higher education scholarships and the public good of development in benefiting countries is hard to track. Any assumption of a “trickle-down” impact of scholarships on development and diplomacy is therefore difficult to corroborate (Abimbola et al., 2016).

The authors note “ongoing relations between Australia and the alumni is perhaps necessary to foster diplomatic influence, especially as alumni are in a position to take on leadership roles within the government” (Abimbola et al., 2016 p. 114). Although these findings suggest that the scholarships achieve the aim of spreading Australian influence through returnee scholars, who have the capacity to become agents for development in their country, the investment needs to be nurtured. Providing ongoing support to develop skills in leadership in order to prepare returnee scholars for governance reforms in their country is a suggested strategy. Training teams instead of individuals may be a strategy to achieve quicker results. One critique of Australian scholarships is that they are “at the expense of more cost-effective in-country and in-region training...which yield much higher development returns” (Australian National Audit Office & Slattery, 2011, p. 66) and giving examples of direct collaborations between universities in the North and the South or the provision of training to all the key staff of a target department (as for example in the capacity building program for the Zimbabwe Revenue Agency where Australian Government provides a mix of technical training in situ and scholarships in African or Australian institutes).

Moreover, Andrea Perilli expresses in regard to the Erasmus Mundus Scholarship Program: **“Erasmus leads to changes in social and cultural perceptions independently of being a tool of EU soft power”** (Perilli, 2018, p. 27). He concludes that this scholarship program works as an effective soft power tool for the European

Union when: a) it is promoted in small countries, encourages students to return home and avoid brain drain, and increases student mobility to and from the recipient countries (Perilli, 2018).

As well, in the summary report of a short conference held in the United Kingdom (UK) on March 2016 (with the participation policymakers, international scholarship providers and leaders within Higher Education(HE),academia and business,[predominantly from the UK]) to discuss how to maximize the impact from international scholarships stated that: “International scholarships are evidently beneficial; scholars are an important source of talent, skills, and diverse thought to countries providing scholarships. **Scholarships are also effective tools in promoting and enhancing a country’s soft power, investing in future leaders, providing access and equity, and increasing research excellence in a nation’s academic institutions.**” (Guang, 2016, p.1).

Additionally, the report notes three important aspects of the scholarship:

1. Positive impact for academic institutions in the home country as returning scholars apply the transformative academic experience they have had which may help attract more talented people to conduct research in these institutions.

2. International scholars are exposed to the efficiency of British higher education institutions and infrastructure, they build friendships, create good memories from their time in the UK and develop positive views of the country, **contributing to the soft power of the UK.**

3. Alumni are inspired with a sense of giving back from the scholarships and help many others via social entrepreneurship. Alumni can achieve this much more easily with a strong global network in politics, business and academia. Alumni from developing countries that returned to their home countries can tap on their networks in other developed countries to help in their social entrepreneurship causes at home. (Guang, 2016).

Another important aspect that the literature addresses is the methodological challenges to evaluate scholarship programs as creators of soft power. Mawer (2018) offers an observation on evaluation research published between 2006 and 2016 noting that the quality of evidence and the methods used to assess scholarship programs varies enormously. In general attempts are made to track results or impact at three levels:

1. Micro: individual outcomes for scholarship recipients
2. Meso: organizational and institutional effects
3. Macro: societal impacts

He perceives that the greatest struggle lies in attributing impact within societies or upon international relations (the macro level). Much has been written about the different theoretical and practical complexities of social impact and the difficulty of “aggregating up” from the level of individuals to much broader social levels. There is sufficient evidence that alumni routinely hold leadership positions (Mawer, 2018) and the pathways towards influence have been described as:

- 1. Either the individual recipient goes on to be disproportionately powerful in a personal capacity (e.g. as an elected official, senior administrator or diplomatic position),**
- 2. Or they otherwise exert a disproportionate influence on public opinion and the actions others (e.g. as a teacher, journalist, or through public advocacy)** (Wilson, 2015).

The transfer of individual benefits to the broader levels of institutions and societies is widely hinted at, but rigorous evidence is scarce (Mawer, 2018). The evidence about outcomes achieved by scholarship recipients is often much clearer than how they are achieved.

Pathways from funding to outcomes at individual level are clearer and the evidence-base stronger. “Alongside these pathways are greater ambiguities, such as how

individual capacity and career progression is embedded in systemic institutional impacts, and **how individuals with a positive disposition generate soft power outcomes and stronger bilateral relations**” (Mawer, 2018 p.275).

Signaling goodwill and fostering international relationships is effective, if at all, only at the launch of international scholarship programs. Further investment is unlikely to increase political impact (Wilson, 2015). The activity of alumni after scholarship programs is a second major pathway to influencing international relations. Individual alumni willingly report forming and maintaining persistent ties with their host country and counterfactual evidence suggests they are more likely to maintain international contacts than non-recipients (Mawer, 2018).

Soft power-oriented scholarship programs claim significant impact from shaping well-disposed future leaders, given the potential for those individuals to influence diplomatic, trade, and military agenda. Beyond citing lists of famous alumni, scholarship research has done little to evidence this link, and nor does the relationship appear to be straightforward (Mawer, 2018).

For example, Dreher and Yu (2016) have investigated the dual influences of affinity with former host countries and the need to demonstrate political allegiance to home countries, among internationally educated leaders of non-industrialized countries.

Examining voting patterns at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) between 1975 and 2011, they show that the leaders were less likely to vote in line with their former host country, but more likely to vote in line with other industrialized countries generally.

Upcoming elections at home also influenced leaders toward voting less concordantly with their former host country suggesting that, at least in this highly public arena, concerns about demonstrating political allegiance can surpass feelings of affinity (Dreher & Yu, 2016).

In short, these three sections of chapter 2 presents how some authors define the

concept of soft power, how soft power and higher education relate to each other and how a state exert or wield soft power and drive its diplomatic interests through a higher education scholarship program and finally the ongoing debate on whether if it is an effective tool for states to create soft power. In other words, shows the literature connecting soft power, higher education and a country's higher education scholarship program as means to wield it particularly among international students from sending countries. The following section presents the factors that the literature considers as the ones driving the opinion international students have of a country.

2.4 Relative Studies and their Explanations

In 1992, Mary McMahon, after examining the flow of international students from eighteen developing countries to developed countries during the 1960s and 1970s, tested an outbound or “push” model and an inbound or “pull” model to explain international student mobility from one country to another usually a more developed one. Her push model suggested the student flow depended on the level of economic wealth, the degree of involvement of the developing country in the world economy, the priority placed on education by the government of the developing country, and the availability of educational opportunities in the home country.

Her pull model suggested student attraction to a host country was influenced by the relative sizes of the student's home country economy compared to the host country, economic links between the home and host country, host nation political interests in the home country through foreign assistance or cultural links and host nation support of international students via scholarships or other assistance (McMahon, 1992).

Mazzarol et al. (1997) expressed that the decision process through which the international student moves when selecting a final study destination appears to involve at least three separate stages. In stage one, the student makes the decision to study internationally, rather than locally. As noted before, this can be influenced by a series of “push” factors within the home country. Once the decision to study abroad has been made the next decision is the selection of a host country. **In this second stage, “pull”**

factors become important, making one host country relatively more attractive than another. In stage three, the student selects an institution (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

In their study, **six factors** have been found to influence student selection of a host country (Mazzarol et al., 1997).

The first one is the overall level of **knowledge and awareness**⁵ of the host country in the students' home country, which was influenced by the overall availability of information about the potential destination country and the ease with which students could obtain the information as well as by the reputation or profile of the country in which the student is seeking to study. This is not surprising and may explain why so many students from particular source countries choose to study where they do. Also, the destination's reputation for quality and the recognition of its qualifications in the student's home country are part of this factor (Kinnell, 1989).

A second factor was the level of referrals or **personal recommendations**⁶ that the study destination receives from parents, relatives, friends and other "gatekeepers"⁷ prior to making the final decision. In a study done by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) a series of focus group sessions with students from Indonesia and Taiwan, the importance of parental involvement in the decision-making was highlighted. Young female students from Indonesia indicated that they had been sent to Australia by their parents, even though they would have preferred to go to the United States. They explained that their parents thought Australia was "safe" and less likely to offer the girls "undesirable influences" that might be found in California. Most hoped to go to the United States as postgraduates.

⁵ It is considered a before arrival factor or in simple words, a "pull" factor because it is prevalent prior to student's arrival to host country.

⁶ Also considered a before arrival factor or "pull" factor because it is prevalent prior to student's arrival to host country.

⁷ In this particular case define as someone who has the power to decide who gets particular resources and opportunities, and who does not.

Among the students from Taiwan, the role of parents and family as influencing forces was also emphasized. Because many parents or relatives in Taiwan had studied in the United States or had a closer affinity with that country, they were more likely to influence students towards the United States than to other potential host countries (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

The third factor related to **cost issues**,⁸ including the cost of fees, living expenses, travel costs and social costs, such as crime, safety and racial discrimination. The presence of students from the student's country (social cost)⁹ and the availability of part time work (financial costs)¹⁰ also formed part of this factor.

A fourth factor was the **environment**,¹¹ which related to perceptions about the study "climate" in the destination country, as well as its physical climate and lifestyle. In the aforesaid study done (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) focus group discussions with students suggested that this environment could be a significant influence. Also included in the environment was the educational environment¹² which proves to be quite significant

⁸ This factor is prevalent after student's arrival on the country, so it can be deemed as a "fostering" factor despite the literature not referring directly to it as such.

⁹ Refers to the level of crime, the presence of racial discrimination and whether the host institution accepts existing qualifications for entry into study programs. Also, to the existence of an established population of international students within a host country is also part of this "cost" assessment. This appears to be due to a perception that such a population will make it easier for the student to become accepted (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

¹⁰ Refers not only direct cost of college fees, but also to the cost of living and other indirect factors, such as the opportunity cost of studying at home or not studying at all. In addition to the direct cost of fees and living expenses, students need to consider whether they can work part time during their period overseas. Many host countries offer students the right to undertake a certain amount of part time work under their visas (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

¹¹ This factor is also prevalent after student's arrival on the country, so it can be deemed as a "fostering" factor despite the literature not referring directly to it as such.

¹² Refers to the study "climate" not only in destination country but also to the study environment in their host Higher Education Institution (HEI). Specifically referring to perceptions of school staff (host higher education international office and degree program office), local classmates and faculty staff (professors) alongside perceptions their host higher education institution education quality.

for students' perceptions and foster international students' perceptions after their arrival to host country.

In tune with the abovementioned, a 2017 article written by Nancy Arthur expresses “Along with general support for making the transition from their home country context to the destination country, social and institutional support needs to be fluid to match ongoing and emerging challenges, while **fostering the academic and cross-cultural expertise of international learners from diverse countries and cultures**(Arthur, 2017, p. 888). Also, Arthur adds that “At all stages of the international transition experience, it is critical to consider how well the campus community is prepared to interact with international students. This includes learning about the macro and contextual **factors that influence international students' cross-cultural experiences in higher education**” (Arthur, 2017, p. 888).

Referring to some of these educational elements particularly to faculty staff and quality of education, Sheila Trahard and Fiona Hyland from the University of Bristol in a 2011 publication about experiences and perceptions of internationalization in United Kingdom's Higher Education stated “Arguably, international students pursue international education because, among other reasons, they are interested in learning about theory and practices within another country context. However, ethnocentrism in the curriculum is problematic when local practices are privileged by faculty or presented as the “best” or “only” way, often to the exclusion of “othering” or dismissing voices from other countries” (Trahar & Hyland, 2011). Expanding on the abovementioned Gillian Skyrme in a 2010 publication states “Transparency regarding learning objectives and course expectations, specific feedback on assignments, and availability for consultation are good practices for all students, but are particularly helpful for international students who may be adjusting to new pedagogical practices” (Skyrme, 2010).

Similarly, another element within the educational environment for international students is their relationship with local from host country. In this regard, Andrea Trice in a 2007 article expresses that interactions between international students and local students have a significant impact on the quality of their experiences. Language barriers,

different cultural norms, and a lack of time to participate in social activities may all act as barriers to social interactions between local and international students (Trice, 2007). In similar terms, Blake Hendrickson, Devan Rosen, R.Kelly Aune from the University of Hawaii in 2011 indicate that making friends with local students is essential for reducing feelings of isolation and homesickness and increasing satisfaction with the international experience (Hendrickson et al., 2011).

Last but not least, support from university staff (referring specifically to international office and degree program staff) are important for international students. In regards to this, Ewa Urban and Louann Bierlein Palmer from Western Michigan University in a 2016 article indicated that many issues can be addressed by host institutions by providing appropriate support structures and facilitating international students' integration into campus communities. Universities must better understand students' personal and professional goals, students' and institutions' efforts to support these goals, and the extent to which these goals are attained in order to identify specific barriers to international students' goal attainment (Urban & Palmer, 2016).

In a similar fashion, and emphasizing mainly on social support, Brendan Bartram from the University of Wolverhampton expresses in a 2007 publication that many students emphasized the importance of staff assisting them in developing and maintaining social networks. Bartram also refer to how attending international students' cultural is of great importance indicating that university staff needed to promote a much greater sense of sociocultural integration, which was of particular students who felt that the importance of this dimension was raised given international students' diverse religious and geographical backgrounds (Bartram, 2007).

The fifth factor was **geographic proximity**¹³ which is related to the geographic (and time)¹⁴ proximity of the potential destination country to the student's country. While less important than most of the factors, it helps to explain the strong flows of Canadian

¹³ Just like the two factors above mentioned , it is considered a before arrival factor or “pull” factor because it is prevalent prior to student's arrival to host country.

¹⁴ Referring specifically to time zone difference between home and host country.

students to the United States, Korean students to Japan and Indonesian students to Australia. However, it considered the least important factor only relevant to Indonesia students who selected Australia during the 1990s due to its close proximity (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

The final factor was **social links**¹⁵ which is related to whether a student has family or friends living in the destination country and whether family and friends are studying or have studied there previously.¹⁶ According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), the social links a student has that are studying in a host country is an importance influence on their destination choice for them.

Furthermore a study done by Eder et al. (2010) to identify the motivational and constraining factors that influence foreign students' decision to study in the United States confirmed the viability of the push-pull approach(model) with the important addition of structural factors to the abovementioned model. The study identified three push factors (personal growth, language, and career goals) and three pull factors (**college issues, physical geography, and U.S. culture**). Also, two important structural factors like visa related issues, and monetary issues. Among the identified motivation factors, personal growth as a push factor and college issues as a pull factor were observed as most important (Eder et al., 2010).

In addition, in a study done in 2019 to explore the push-pull factors and motivations of African and Asian international students in Chinese universities (Gbollie & Gong, 2019) found out the availability of scholarship opportunities, China's flexibility (visa and program entry) and perception of better education quality as important push-pull factors. It also discovered several new pull factors, including: citizens' attitude and good report,¹⁷ development potential and hospitality and receptiveness, while **career**

¹⁵ it is considered a before arrival factor or "pull" factor because it is prevalent prior to student's arrival to host country.

¹⁶ Refers to their opinion of not only their opinion about host country but also alumni of host country's Higher Education Institutions (HEI).

¹⁷ Refers about the opinions and attitudes citizens have of their home country

development¹⁸ and entertainment were found to be the most and least significant motivational factors, respectively.

A 2016 study done about international students' choice for studying in new Asian education hubs (i.e. Malaysia) indicated that key “pull” factors or attractive features of Malaysia are its **“comparatively low cost of living, low tuition fees, safe country for living, stable government, modern amenities, proximity in culture and religion and freedom from discrimination as important motives in their choice decision.”** (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016 p.175).

A study done in Turkey in 2011 discover that students coming to Turkey from non-Anglophone, economically developing countries are attracted by **its unique culture, the quality of academic practice (for a few number of universities), and relatively low cost of living** (Kondakci, 2011).

This finding shows partial similarity with what was expressed by Altbach and Knight who indicated that improving “the quality and cultural composition of the student body, gain prestige, and earn income”(Altbach & Knight, 2007 p.294) as rationales behind seeking foreign students in developing countries. This suggests that developing intercultural learning and cross-cultural understanding is more prominent than accomplishing economic gains.

It also mentions that for the students choosing Turkey, an Anglophone, economically developing, and a traditional destination of foreign students would be a more attractive choice; However, these destinations may have high living costs.

A 2017 a study about the motivations and constraints of moving abroad for Indian science and engineering students concluded that **the four most important factors that**

¹⁸ Just like the two previously mentioned factors, this factor is prevalent after student's arrival on the country, so it can be deemed as a “fostering” factor despite the literature not referring directly to it as such.

make a country more attractive to pursue a higher education were: better possibilities for career advancement/ development, better working and research conditions abroad, international exposure and economic benefits.(Hercog & van de Laar, 2017).

A recent study about international mobility factors for Latin American students in Australia mentions that international recognition of qualifications and education quality is a primary selection criterion. In addition, it expresses that lifestyle and environment (beaches) is important but a secondary consideration to **education quality**.

As well exposure to another culture and Australia's safe and tolerant environment was also mentioned. (MindTribes Pty Ltd., 2020). This same study also mentions that cost is not a primary factor for choosing a destination but is the second most important consideration for not choosing Australia, after its geographic remoteness (MindTribes Pty Ltd., 2020)

The results of this study are very similar with what was mentioned by AEI's International Student Survey in 2008 that shows that **the key reasons for international students to choose Australia as a study destination include the following: the desirability of studying and living in an English- speaking country; perceptions of safety and security; a desire to experience a different culture/lifestyle (with Australians generally perceived as easygoing and friendly); comparatively lower costs of living and tuition; relatively close proximity to home for students from Asia; and a pleasant climate** (Adams et al., 2011).¹⁹

To conclude this section, a summarizing table of the relative studies and explanations will be presented in the following page.

¹⁹ It also very similar with what was above mentioned in the document by Vietnamese students in the Southeast Asia region.

Table 2.1 Relative Studies and Explanations Summary

Year	Author	Sample Country	Sample Students	Which level	Important Factor
1997	Tim Mazzarol	Australia	780 students (53% from Indonesia and 47% from Taiwan)	Undergraduate & Master 1	For Indonesian students Geographic Proximity. For Taiwanese, personal recommendations from friends and family
2010	Judith Eder, Wayne W. Smith & Robert E. Pitts	United States	21 students (13 male students and 8 female students from Austria, Germany, Japan, Brazil, Spain, Poland, Thailand, and the Republic of Slovakia.	Undergraduate	College issues, physical geography and U.S. culture. (Environment)
2019	Charles Gbolliie and Shaoying Gong	na	537 Africans and Asians students from 5 different universities (quantitative part) 30 students (qualitative part)	Undergraduate, Master and Doctoral	eer Development
2016	Syed Zamberi Ahmad & Frederick Robert Buchanan	aysia	24 full-time international students	Undergraduate and Master	Comparatively low cost of living, low tuition fees, safe country for living, stable government, modern amenities, proximity in culture and religion and freedom from discrimination as important motives in their choice decision. (Cost issues and Environment)
2011	Yasar Kondakci	key	331 international students	ergraduate 1	Unique culture, the quality of academic practice (for a few number of universities), and relatively low cost of living. (Environment and Cost issues).
2017	Mitka Hercog & Mindel van de Laar	a	412 science and engineering students from five universities in India.	Undergraduate, Master and Doctoral	Career advancement/ development, better working and research conditions abroad, international exposure and financial benefits. (Career Development, environment, and Cost issues).
2011	Tony Adams, Melissa Banks, and Alan Olsen ²⁰	Australia	198 graduate students (130 international students and 68 Australian students)	Undergraduate	Desirability of studying and living in an English- speaking country; perceptions of safety and security; a desire to experience a different culture/lifestyle (with Australians generally perceived as easygoing and friendly); comparatively lower costs of living and tuition; relatively close proximity to home for students from Asia; and a pleasant climate (Cost issues, Environment, and Geographic Proximity).

Source: The authors from the research organized in this table.

2.5 Expanded Puzzle

After Beijing replaced Taipei in the United Nations in 1971, the Republic of China's struggle for recognition has become more intense, especially in Latin America and the

²⁰ The authors cited the Follow-up International Student Survey from the Australian Government of 2007 and published in 2008.

Caribbean, where slightly more than half of the countries that maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan are located in this region, and particularly in Central America (with 4 of the 7 countries in the region currently having formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan) representing almost a one third of the country's current diplomatic allies in the international stage. In the following paragraphs, a brief diplomatic history of Taiwan's Central American diplomatic allies (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua,²¹ will be given as means to briefly and better understand the diplomatic relationship between the Republic of China and its Central American allies before continuing the description of the research puzzle.

Belize :It has maintained an uninterrupted diplomatic relationship Taiwan since 1989, largely due to the lobbying efforts of Belizean businessman and former ambassador William Quinto (伍永泉) alongside former Belizean Prime Minister George Price who held conversations with Taiwanese diplomat Gene Loh (陸以正) to discuss establishing relation between both countries. Initial talks were not successful because of the objection of the Guatemalan government at the time led by Rodolfo Lobos Zamora and the rise to power of an opposition party who favored establishing a diplomatic relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) which lasted only two years from 1987 to 1989 (Belize-Taiwan Relations, 2009: National Taiwan University, & Maggiorelli, 2018). However, by 1989 when the People's United Party (PUP) won the elections, formal ties were officially established and have not been interrupted ever since (National Taiwan University, & Maggiorelli, 2018).

Guatemala: Before 1935, the Republic of China and the Republic of Guatemala maintained relations with each other. In that year is when a Consulate General Taiwan was officially established in Guatemala. Later, in 1954, the Consulate General was raised to the rank of Diplomatic Legation, and this in turn was raised to the category of Embassy in October 1960 (Embajada de la República de China (Taiwan) en Guatemala, 2012).

²¹ 2 of them (Guatemala since 1935 and Honduras since 1941), have had the longest standing relationship with Taiwan in the region.

Honduras: Since 1941, the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Republic of Honduras have maintained uninterrupted relations with each other (National Taiwan University, Taiwan & Maggiorelli, 2018). However, it was not until 1965 when Honduras and Taiwan established a permanent mission in each other's territory (Portada et al., 2020). The year 2021 marks the 80th anniversary of the diplomatic relationship between both nations (La Tribuna, 2021).

Nicaragua: From 1962 to 1979, Nicaragua held formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan which were interrupted after the Sandinista Front arrived to the power led by Daniel Ortega who switched his country's recognition from Taipei to Beijing. However, in 1995, during Violeta Chamorro's presidency, Nicaragua returned to the Republic of China. Before returning to the presidency, Ortega threatened restore relations with the People's Republic of China. But finally, after his reelection in 2007, he stated that Nicaragua did not recognize the One China Policy and decided to maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan (National Taiwan University, & Maggiorelli, 2018).

Despite being diplomatically isolated, since the 1970s and 1980s the Taiwan has experienced an extraordinary economic growth (being one of the so-called "Four Asian Tigers" alongside Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore), becoming one of the world main exporters of manufactured products, and therefore accumulating large amount of foreign currency reserves **the sixth in the world (according Wikipedia Contributors (2021a))**, which in turn enabled Taipei to use its economic advantages to pursue ambitious foreign aid programs. The primary goal of Taiwanese cooperation is to retain diplomatic recognition, but also break its isolation and maintain the possibility to participate in a variety of international forums and multilateral organizations (especially those that do not require statehood, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization and the WHA/WHO) (Lu & Hsiao, 2018). Despite the criticism that the foreign aid from the Taiwan has not stop many countries to break diplomatic ties nor has it help in its efforts to rejoin/ join international organizations the emphasis on foreign aid as a diplomatic instrument has remained central to the Taiwan's foreign policy, and thus to Cross Strait relations.

With the abovementioned strategy, Taiwan could indefinitely trade development

assistance with diplomatic recognition from small and micro-states (Wang, 2002, p. 99). To organize and structure this aid in 1989, it created the Overseas Economic Cooperation and Development Fund (renamed the International Economic Cooperation and International Development Fund [IECDF] in 1991) as an effort to counter the increasing loss of diplomatic allies against the People's Republic China (PRC) after its recognition by the UN and the United States in the 1970s. With the multiplication of development projects, in 1996, Taiwan's government created the Taiwan ICDF²² as an independent organization, as a key instrument for outreach to its diplomatic partners in the developing world (ICDF, 2010). The removal of "economic" from the name of the agency reflects MOFA's preference to consider development aid as a means to serve Taiwan's diplomatic (rather than economic) interests (Tubilewicz, 2016). This assistance centers on four core operations: "lending and investment, technical cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and **international education and training**." (Taiwan ICDF, n.d.-c)

In this last item Taiwan ICDF aims to share Taiwan's "own development experiences with developing partner countries around the world. Our aim is to help these partner countries cultivate and nurture a talented pool of human resources" (Taiwan ICDF, n.d.-c). A particular way in which ICDF does this through its International Higher Education Scholarship Program which began in 1998 after they joined forces with the many universities in the countries offering English taught programs from the Bachelor level up until the Ph. D. level. However, this is not the only objective of this program, which is also an important element of Taiwan's soft power for important representatives of Taiwan Government including its current President Tsai Ing-Wen (蔡英文). During an event at the Presidential Office in Taipei receiving the credentials of new Nicaraguan Ambassador Mirna Mariela Rivera Andino on October 27, 2020, President Tsai expressed the following: "The reason why we set up the scholarship program was to attract younger generations from our allies to study in Taiwan and become a bridge for bilateral exchanges" (台北時報, 2020). Later she added: "Ambassador Rivera is an excellent testimony to the cooperation between our two countries. I believe that she will

²² Taiwan's International Cooperation and Development Fund.

become a strong promoter of more bilateral projects for more fruitful relations” (Taipei Times, 2020).²³ Also voices in the Legislative branch of the government like Jessica Yu In Wang (王郁雯), Legislative assistant to Lo Chih-Cheng (羅致政), a Democratic Progressive Party legislator who sits on the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee, expressed in 2018 that “These students might be future leaders in their home countries, becoming important diplomatic assets for us. Soft power is all about culture, values, ideologies, things you have to be in direct contact with to experience. “We can’t beat China over trading capacity or military strength, but we’re definitely more open, free and democratic. And hopefully these scholarship students see [the] value in that” (Hollo, 2018).

Moreover, Pai-po Lee (李栢淳), Taiwan ICDF’s Deputy Secretary General, views higher education programs as a “**triple win**” (Hollo, 2018). He expresses that the first win is helping target countries²⁴ educate their next generation of professionals and leaders, the second is fostering Taiwan’s international integration, and the third is consolidating future connections between Taiwan and target countries that will last for those students’ lifetimes (Hollo, 2018). These opinions only support how important foreign aid (including a Higher Education Scholarship program) is to Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) as it is expressed in its “*Foreign Policy Guidelines*” stating that Taiwan “spares no effort in implementing policies that enhance Taiwan’s prosperity and promoting foreign relations that strengthen the international status of Taiwan. Also, that it “continues to seek expanded international participation, while making concrete contributions to the global community, and enhancing its international profile through economic and humanitarian aid policies” (Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of Policy Planning, 2016) In other words, for Taiwan is of highest importance for its foreign relations strategy the strengthening of its profile and image through economic and humanitarian aid. Therefore, international higher education scholarship programs, are part of a much larger effort of Taiwan foreign policy

²³ Rivera was a recipient of a Taiwan sponsored scholarship and graduated from Ming Quan University in 2018.

²⁴ 75 percent of the scholarship recipients are from countries that maintain diplomatic relations with Taipei according to Pai-po Lee (Holl, 2018).

strategies. It is seen as important tool, particularly with its diplomatic allies to reinforce its bond with them and transmit Taiwan's culture, values, and ideologies to them through the scholarship recipients while they spend their time studying in the country as they would serve as important international diplomatic assets as they move up in their professional careers.

In addition, through the creation of a Taiwan ICDF Alumni Society within the international education and training operation, Taiwan aims to “make contributions to the development of their home countries by holding seminars, workshops and conferences related to the training they received in Taiwan” also “to sustain relationships and continued interaction among Taiwan ICDF Alumni in all countries, Taiwan ICDF personnel, and educational, cultural and governmental institutions in the Republic of China (Taiwan) and allied nations²⁵ around the world (Taiwan ICDF, n.d.-a).

In a few words, to establish an advocacy group for Taiwan within their allies' societies as part of a larger diplomatic strategy to reassure existing diplomatic ties with current allied nations.

As mentioned before the core operational item of **international education and training** is an important element of soft power within Taiwan's current diplomatic strategies. Exploring and evaluating its effectiveness and probably what factors lead to it comes as an important puzzle to research about, in a wider effort that could potentially contribute to the development, creation or reform of current strategies within a larger Taiwan's MOFA foreign policy towards its Central American diplomatic allies in particular.

Four Typical Cases

In the following paragraphs, the opinions and perceptions about Taiwan coming from

²⁵ Currently Taiwan ICDF sponsors the activities of 28 Alumni Societies in 27 different countries.

four current or former scholarship recipient students,²⁶ will be discussed. These four students were selected as exploratory cases because they provided a preliminary view of the opinions and perceptions scholarship international scholarship recipient students from Taiwan's aforementioned Central American allies (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) have about the country and what particular factors are important to shape their opinion which, in turn, help shape the argument I have that offers answer for the arising puzzle of this research.

Case 1 A Belizean Student (Positive opinion before and after arrival)

She is a 27-year-old medical doctor from Belize City, a student of the master's program in International Health at National Yang-Ming University, and an ICDF scholarship recipient. During the conversation with her she said that before even applying to the scholarship or the program she viewed Taiwan was "an island country with a democratic political system, a developed nation known for its innovative tech industries and one of the safest places to live in (both due to personal safety and COVID-19 wise)." Last, she also saw Taiwan as a "beautiful country, with friendly people and an efficient transportation system". After Taiwan awarded her with a scholarship and accepted into the master's program she added that "I was excited to be allowed to study in Taiwan; to learn and grow not only as a professional but as a person". When questioned about why she chose Taiwan as a destination to pursue a higher education this Belizean student expressed that at first, people around her (family, friends, former professors, former recipients, and community leaders) highly recommended her to pursue an education in the Taiwan. They emphasized "Taiwan's safety, great schooling (education) system, rich culture, and helpful/friendly people". Also, they mentioned Taiwan is known for "its renown healthcare system". This last element resounded with her because of her background as a medical doctor. However, a wide recommendation from people around her environment was not the sole factor of her coming to Taiwan. The Taiwanese environment (lifestyle, culture, values, university, climate) echoed positively with her, particularly praising her program and university stating the

²⁶ One from each Central American country allied with Taiwan (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua)

following “I love my university and program. I have excellent professors (who are really helpful) and lots of international students in my program”. Also, the possibility of having a welcoming community of her own country (also current and former scholarship recipients) who also recommended her to come was an important element in her decision to come to Taiwan. Members of the Belizean community mentioned to her that “Taiwan is a good place to live and study. There is much to do, explore and learn”. They also told her to “learn the language (Mandarin Chinese) as soon as possible”. She agreed and added that “Yes, that way you can get culturally immersed in a better way”.

Despite the mostly positive perceptions and opinions, she did express that Taiwanese humid weather, geographic remoteness, and fear for a so-called “culture shock” were deterring (or “unattractive”). Although, at the end of the conversation, she expressed: “Since I’ve been here in Taiwan, I have only pleasant things to say. Taiwan is an amazing place to live, learn, and grow. There is so much to do both inside and outside the classroom. I am looking forward to the upcoming months”.

In short, for this Belizean student, personal recommendations from her inner circle, appealing elements from the environment (lifestyle, culture, values, and university), and a welcoming Belizean community (Social links) were the factors driving her view of Taiwan positively despite expressing her concerns about a possible cultural shock, geographic remoteness from Belize and a humid weather as unappealing elements of Taiwan.

Case 2 A Guatemalan Student (Neutral before arrival to positive after arrival)

She is a 27-year-old chemical pharmacist from Guatemala City, a student of the master’s program in International Health at National Yang-Ming University, and a Taiwan ICDF scholarship recipient. During the conversation with her, she stated that before coming she only knew Taiwan was “An Asian country”. She pointed out that information about was not accessible to her and expressed that Taiwan should make information about its scholarship program easier to access.

When questioned about why she chose Taiwan as a destination to pursue her higher

education, she agrees with her Belizean counterpart and mentioned that a fully funded scholarship covering all her expenses was an important factor in her decision. However, a fully funded scholarship was not the sole factor of her coming to Taiwan. The Taiwanese environment (lifestyle, culture, values, university, climate) echoed positively with her, particularly praising her program and university stating, “They support a lot of international students and people (professors and fellow students) are so kind and friendly”. She also added that the possibility of learning the language (Mandarin Chinese was important because she could “live the culture better through the language”. A fairly important factor for here was the possibility to develop as a professional and a desire to look for a job in the future. Regardless of the most positive perceptions and opinions, she expressed her concerns for her safety as a student in Taiwan affirming “I have a little fear because of recent news (a girl killed and raped last month)”.

As I finish the conversation (and after two months in the country) she expressed: “Taiwanese people are very kind, friendly and they are always seeking to help others. People here are always trying to improve themselves (in study and work), so it is easy to find out a high level of education in them. They are very organized, and I believe that is the primary reason Taiwan, as a country, has developed so much in a brief time. I really enjoy going out of the high level of security compared to my own country. Besides, people are very respectful. The only thing I think the government can do better is taking care of city buildings to make them look pretty”.

In brief, for this Guatemalan student, having her education and living costs covered through a fully funded scholarship sponsored by the host country, an appealing environment, and the prospects of developing professionally as important elements driving her views of Taiwan positively despite expressing her concerns about the limited availability of information about Taiwan, a perceived surge in violence against women her dislike of the scenery around the country’s urban areas.

Case 3 A Honduran Student (Positive before and after arrival)

He is a 29-year-old Telecommunication Engineer that currently works as a Project Coordinator in the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan

from San Pedro Sula, Honduras, alumni from the International Master's program in Educational Leadership and Management Development at National Chung Cheng University, and a former Taiwan ICDF scholarship recipient. During my conversation with him, he expressed that his knowledge about Taiwan before coming was in the best case limited to knowing that Taiwan was a country with a good economy and a qualified higher education system because of not having sufficient access to information about Taiwan. When questioned about his general opinion of Taiwan given what he knew, he opined "Taiwan is a friendly country with a challenging language, culture and a strong technological environment".

When asked about why he sees Taiwan as an appealing destination to pursue a higher education, this Honduran student expressed that people around him (family, friends, former professors, and former recipients) highly recommended him to pursue an education in Taiwan. They highlighted that "Taiwan is a great place for professional career development" and "an opportunity to grow as a person through a different cultural experience". He also mentioned that feeling safe, having a welcoming Honduran community in Taiwan as important elements that made it less socially costly for him to be and stay in Taiwan. Their encouragement to apply for a scholarship and experience everything Taiwan offers was as well an important factor. He remembered them repeatedly saying "It is a life-changing experience".

He also positively stated that Taiwan's natural wonders, modern infrastructure (i.e., Taipei), entertaining social life, developed health system, and the possibility to develop professionally as other significant appealing factors that in his consideration Taiwan possesses.

However, he listed several aspects of Taiwan as unappealing. One of them being racism. This was a factor that echoed negatively with him as he shared an unpleasant experience: During a conversation addressing his English proficiency with a Taiwanese citizen, it surprised him when this citizen expressed "You speak English very well, but why? You are not white". The following aspect he listed was the clear social and cultural barrier Taiwanese placed between them and foreigners. Related to the above, he stated during his time living and studying on the university's campus his program and

university was not the most welcoming for international students. Finally, he expressed his frustration with Taiwan's administration processes not being English friendly to foreigners and international students in particular.

As we closed the conversation and after living for four years in Taiwan, he expressed: "Although there are some things I dislike, mainly lifestyle and some cultural elements, probably because I am not used to, there are plenty of positive things Taiwan has as a country. I considered Taiwan as a country with many strengths. As a foreigner, I do like Taiwan".

In sum, for this Honduran student, the personal recommendations of his inner circle, a welcoming and encouraging Honduran community, the possibility to develop professionally and particular aspects of Taiwan's environment including its natural landscape, the entertainment industry, and developed infrastructure are the factors that drive his opinion of Taiwan positively despite expressing negatively his concerns about racist behaviors, a clear social and cultural barrier against foreigners and an unwelcoming environment in his university and program.

Case 4 A Nicaraguan Student (Positive before and after arrival)

He is a 34-year-old English Teacher from San Rafael del Norte, Nicaragua, alumni from the International Master's program in Educational Leadership and Management Development at National Chung Cheng University, and a former Taiwan ICDF scholarship recipient. During my conversation with him, he stated he knew a lot about Taiwan before coming, including its political situation, historical background, weather, geography, and public safety. Given all he knew prior to coming Taiwan for him was a "developed and safe country." When asked about why he chose Taiwan as a destination to pursue higher education, this Nicaraguan student said that at first, people around him (family, friends, former professors, former recipients, and community leaders) highly recommended to leave the country pursue an education in Taiwan. They highlighted that Taiwan was "safe and nice".

However, a wide recommendation from people around her environment was not the

only factor his coming to Taiwan. Other important factors that he mentioned were: Having a fully funded scholarship covering all his expenses and the possibility to work part time and supplement his income, an encouraging and welcoming Nicaraguan community comprising current and former scholarship recipients, and Taiwan's culture and lifestyle as important and valuable factors that Taiwan possesses and that for him, makes the country appealing.

Regardless of this mostly positive perceptions and opinions, he expressed a negative opinion when describing his university and master's program stating that "The university doesn't care about international students or their problems. My program is mediocre." Also, when describing if he founded the climate in Taiwan appealing, he said, "Not so much ". Finally, and also in the negative side, he directs a criticism to the Taiwanese employment legislation for being a deterring factor for international students intending to develop their professional career stating: "Taiwan legislation does not make it easy for all foreigners to access the job market. The laws focus more on nationality rather than on qualifications".

As I closed the conversation and after living for a little over two years in Taiwan, he expressed: "Taiwan is a safe and convenient country to live in. Overall, people are nice and helpful to those who can't speak the language, especially to Westerners".

In conclusion, for this Nicaraguan student personal recommendations from his inner circle, fully funded scholarship covering his tuition and living costs, a welcoming environment, a welcoming and encouraging Nicaraguan community are the factors that drive his opinion of Taiwan positively despite expressing negatively his concerns about an unwelcoming university and program, an unappealing weather and an unwelcoming employment legislation for foreigners.

After receiving preliminary empirical evidence after speaking with two current scholarships from Guatemala and Belize respectively and two recent and former scholarship recipients from Honduras and Nicaragua, I can get an idea on the what is the effectiveness that the above-mentioned goal of promoting soft power through an International Higher Education Program and what particular factors are associated with

the scholarship program that allow Taiwan to exert soft power through it. Despite all of them showing a favorable opinion of the country in general terms, and finding many aspects of the country attractive (quality higher education, welcoming environment, culture [including language], perceived safety, etc.), which may lead us to think that the scholarship program is effective indeed, the students also stated some factors like limited knowledge and accessible information about the country and/or the scholarship, geographic remoteness, fears of a potential culture shock among other things including an unfriendly university program as discouraging factors that could diminish Taiwan's international scholarship program's effectiveness as a soft power tool. With everything mentioned above, a puzzling issue arises. Also, and after reviewing the literature, no particular explanation of what are or might be the driving factors that push the positive view of international students from this particular region in the Asian continent in general or the Republic China in particular is given, which only show the necessity of evaluating if the Higher Education System of Taiwan's government serves as an effective soft power tool to use with the country's Central American diplomatic allies and to identify clearly what are most salient factors that Central American s higher education scholarship recipient students identify to drive their view of Taiwan.

In conclusion, for the Taiwanese government, its higher education scholarship program is an important tool within a much larger development-assistance oriented foreign policy strategy aiming not only to achieve the country's development assistance objectives and help its allies in the developing world in general and in the Central American region in particular, but also to wield its soft power to strengthen the position of the country and the diplomatic ties with allied nations particularly those in the Central American region (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua).

When looking at the preliminary evidence in conversations with four current or former international scholarship recipient students I discover that despite having an overall positive view of the country driven by many factors ranging from scholarship economic benefits to a welcoming environment, which might lead us to think that the scholarship is an effective soft power tool, many are the negative factors that could diminish or outright change the view of the country from a positive one to a negative one. Considering what was mentioned above, and after a review the literature, a puzzling

issue arises that takes us to evaluate if the abovementioned higher education scholarship programs serves its purpose of being a soft power tool as well as identifying clearly what are the most salient factors that Central American international scholarship recipient students identify as driving their view of Taiwan.

2.6 My Argument

As the literature shows us, many factors drive the attractiveness or positive view of a host country to international students during their time studying and living in them. The literature also shows us that a positive view they might have during their stay contributes to the host nation's soft power by pushing that nation's diplomatic interests through these international students as they move up in their professional careers and integrate themselves in policy setting structures in their country's public sectors (including important diplomatic and foreign affair positions), important national or international private sector structures or influential international or national advocacy networks in the non-governmental sector where they could become important assets to advocate for the host country diplomatic interests while carrying out their professional activities within those structures.

For the particular case of this research, I can argue that for the Republic of China Taiwan (acting as host country) its current Higher Education Scholarship Program is an effective soft power tool given a list of **pulling factors**²⁷ that , combined with the **absence of deterring factors** generate a positive opinion of the country before their arrival among scholarship recipients students from Taiwan's Central American diplomatic allies, opinion that given the presence of a series of **fostering factors**²⁸ and

²⁷ Positive nature of the basic information available to them about Taiwan ,positive perceptions of its higher education system and higher education scholarship programs, reinforcing positive personal recommendations of Taiwan's fully funded scholarship program and its high quality higher education system from research participants' local social circle; Reinforcing positive comments of Taiwan's fully funded scholarship program and its high quality higher education system from participants' social links living in the country, and scholarship financial benefits (full coverage of tuition and living expenses).

²⁸ Perceived public safety, physical societal and environmental factors (culture, entertainment scene, and societal values), educational environment factors (perceptions about study program's administrative

despite a series of concerning yet non-majoritarian **deteriorating factors**²⁹ also present after arrival remains positive among the international scholarship recipient students from its current Central American diplomatic allies and sending countries (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua).

Taking the aforementioned in consideration, the goal of the research design (which will be described in the next chapter) was to provide the necessary framework to obtain the empirical evidence the supports the argument of this research that intends to answer the research questions derived from the arising puzzle. The argument is: Taiwan's Higher Education Scholarship Program is an effective soft power tool for Taiwan, given a list of **pulling factors** and **fostering factors** the country possesses, alongside nonexistent **detering factors** and a list of concerning yet outweighed **deteriorating factors** that not change the dominant positive opinion regarding Taiwan among the international scholarship recipients from its current Central American diplomatic allies (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua). In sum, with this research I planned to find out which are these attractive(positive factors)/ unattractive (negative factors) factors driving their view of the country (Taiwan). In the following chapter, the aforementioned research design is thoroughly presented and detailed alongside a thorough qualitative analysis of the interview outcomes.

staff, perceptions about International Office Administrative staff, perceptions about local classmates, and perceptions about study program's professor staff, high-quality education, easiness to communicate with home country, perception of Taiwan as a place for career development, and expressed intent to search for a job in Taiwan.

²⁹ Skin color/ country of origin discrimination, negative experience in educational environment, climate/weather, a perceived averseness of Taiwanese employers to hire international graduates, and a perceived averseness of Taiwanese employers to hire international graduates from home country.

Chapter 3 Research Design

The main goal of this chapter is to present the research design for this thesis. It is comprised of five subsections. Firstly, section 3.1 addresses the research method to be applied (interviews), detail how those interviews were conducted, feature the structure of the interview questionnaire as well as a sample interview questionnaire applied to the international scholarship recipient students from Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Secondly, section 3.2 describes the sample methodology as well as the criterion followed when selecting the international scholarship recipient students that were part of it. Thirdly, section 3.3 describes the sample and data gathering process. Finally, section 3.4 details the research limitations of this thesis .

3.1 Introduction and Brief Description

With the purpose of carrying out this research and get the necessary data for a posterior analysis of the information that can lead us to answer the aforementioned research question (evaluate the effectiveness of Taiwan's Higher Education Scholarship Program) and provide empirical evidence to support my argument, an interview questionnaire was designed taking as a basis the push and pull model (presented in the above-mentioned literature review) and the valuable perceptions from the four international students from Taiwan's Central American allies (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) part of the preliminary interviews.

This interview questionnaire includes several questions falling within particular factors of analysis which I want to look at based on what was mentioned in the literature and summarized in Table 1 of Chapter 2, which include: Knowledge and Awareness, Personal Recommendations, Cost Issues,³⁰Environment, Geographic Proximity, Social Links and Career Development. Also, questions about the interviewee's background and questions addressing their developing view of the country (before and after questions) are included. The questions are both close and open-ended, which allow me to recollect the data in a better way, do a proper analysis of it and retrieve important and valuable

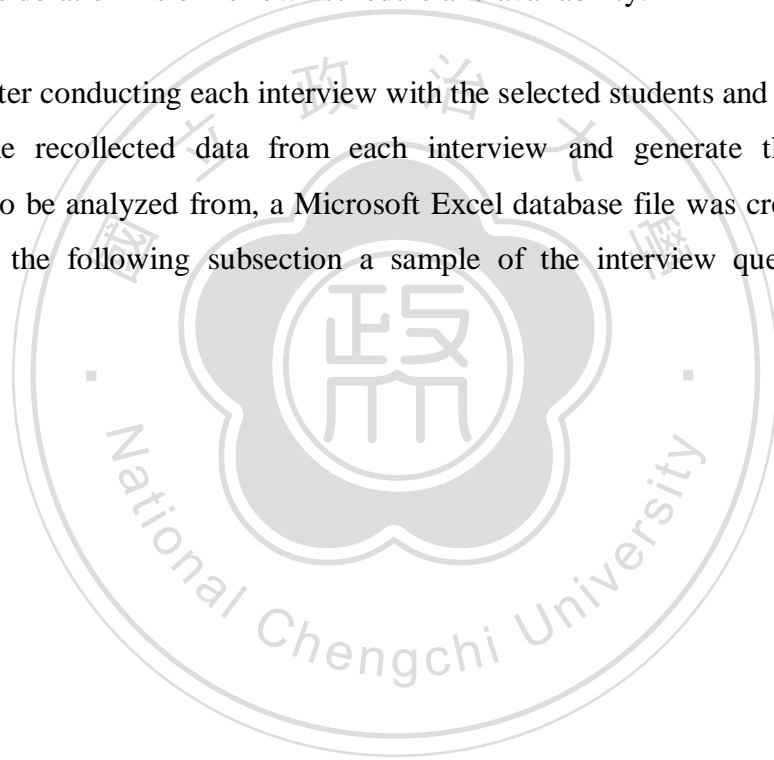
³⁰ Includes financial and social costs.

information required for this research.

Furthermore, and prior to conducting any interview with the selected participants, and in my role as an interviewer, a detailed and thorough explanation of the purpose of the interview was given, as well as asking the interviewees if the valuable data given by them to me could be used for the intended purpose of this research.

Also, it is important to indicate that each interview was conducted in person (using their preferred language [Spanish or English]), if possible, or via any video chat software. Each interview was done in the time and place of preference of the interviewee taking in consideration his or her own schedule and availability.

Finally, after conducting each interview with the selected students and in order keep record of the recollected data from each interview and generate the necessary information to be analyzed from, a Microsoft Excel database file was created for that purpose. On the following subsection a sample of the interview questionnaire is presented.



Sample Interview Questionnaire for International Scholarship Recipient Students from Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua

General Background of Interviewee

1. What is your country of origin? a) Belize b) Guatemala c) Honduras
d) Nicaragua
2. What is your gender? a) Male b) Female c) Neutral
3. How old are you? _____
4. What academic degree are/were you pursuing in Taiwan?
a) Undergrad Degree b) Master's degree c) Doctorate Degree (PhD)
5. In which city are you living in? _____
6. Do you profess any religion? a) Christianity b) Islam c) Judaism
d) Buddhism e) Other: _____ f) None
7. How religious would you consider yourself? a) Very religious
a) Somewhat religious d) Not religious at all
8. What is your father and mother's professional background and
current occupation? _____
9. How many months have you been living in Taiwan? _____

Knowledge and Awareness

1. Did you know about Taiwan before applying for a scholarship?

a) Yes b) No
2. Did you know about Taiwan Scholarship Program? a) Yes b) No
3. If so, can you briefly describe what you knew?
4. Was information about Taiwan easy for you to obtain before coming?

a) Yes b) No
5. Did you consider Taiwan's Higher Education System as a high quality one before coming? a) Yes b) No
6. Did you study some Mandarin Chinese before coming to Taiwan?

a) Yes b) No
7. If yes, how fluent were you before coming? a) Very fluent b) Basic

c) Just a little
8. Given what you knew, what was your overall initial opinion about Taiwan before coming to pursue your higher education?

Please, briefly detail your answer.

Personal Recommendations

1. Who of the following recommended you go Taiwan and pursue a higher education?

a) Parents and members of your family

b) Former scholarship recipients from your country

c) Professors

d) Friends

e) Other_____

2. What was the main reason for them to recommend Taiwan?

a) Fully-Funded Scholarship Availability b)

b) High Quality Education

c) Safety

d) Climate

e) Opportunity for self-growth

f) Better quality of life

g) Other_____

Cost Issues

Financial Costs

1. As an international student, can/could you afford

without much difficulty Taiwan's living expenses with your scholarship stipend?

a) Yes b) No

2. Will you still have come to Taiwan even if your travel, living and tuition costs

were not fully funded by a scholarship stipend?

Please briefly detail your answer

3. Do/Did you work part time to be able to cover your life expenses

while pursuing your degree in Taiwan? a) Yes b) No

4. If yes, how many hours per week do/did you worked? _____

Social Costs

5. Is/Was it important to you to have close other people from

your home country in Taiwan? a) Yes b) No

6. Did/Do you feel/felt safe living in Taiwan? a) Yes b) No

7. Do/Did you feel/felt that you could freely express who you are without fear? a) Yes b) No

8. Have/Did you ever experienced discrimination in Taiwan due to your skin color from Taiwanese citizens? a) Yes b) No

9. If yes, can you briefly describe that experience?

Environment

Physical, Societal and Cultural Environment

1. Do you find Taiwanese's lifestyle attractive? a) Yes b) No

2. Do you find Taiwanese's culture attractive? a) Yes b) No

3. Do Taiwanese's societal values resonate with you? a) Yes b) No

4. Do you find Taiwan's climate pleasing? a) Yes b) No
5. Do you find Taiwan's entertainment scene amusing? a) Yes b) No
6. What is/was the overall opinion of the city or urban center where you are/were pursuing your studies? Please briefly detail your answer.

Educational Environment

7. Is/Was the staff working in your program's office friendly, helpful and hospitable towards you and other international students? a) Yes b) No
8. Is/Was the staff working in your university's international office friendly, helpful and hospitable towards you and other international students? a) Yes b) No
9. Are/Were your local Taiwanese classmates friendly, helpful and hospitable towards you and other international students? a) Yes b) No
10. Do/Did you considered the professors in your program understanding, respectful and friendly towards you and other international students while taking his or her course? a) Yes b) No
11. Do you think your study program's quality was what you expected? Would you consider it better than a similar program in your home country? a) Yes b) No
12. Did you have any negative experience with any of the abovementioned (staff members, professors, local classmates)? a) Yes b) No
13. If yes, can you briefly describe what happened?

Geographic Proximity

1. Was Taiwan's remoteness and extreme time zone difference from your home country a deterring factor in your decision to come and pursue a higher education? a)

Yes b) No

2. Is it easy to keep in touch with your relatives back home through internet and/or phone? a) Yes b) No

3. If yes, how often do you talk to them? a) Everyday b) Once a week c) Once a month d) Once a year.

Social Links

1. Did you had friends or family from your home country residing in Taiwan when you arrived who were or are currently pursuing a degree? a) Yes b) No

2. Did any of them came here through a Higher Education Scholarship given by the ROC(Taiwan) government? a) Yes b) No

3. What did they tell you about Taiwan? Please briefly detail your answer.

Career Development

1. Do you consider Taiwan a place to develop as a professional in your area of interest? a)Yes b) No

2. In your opinion, are Taiwanese employers prone to hire international graduate students? a) Yes b) No

3. In your opinion, are Taiwanese employers prone to hire international graduate students from your country? a) Yes b) No

4. Are you currently searching for a job or are you planning to find one in the future?
a) Yes b) No

5. Are you currently working in Taiwan? a) Yes b) No

Final Question and Opinion

After spending some time here, what is your overall current opinion about Taiwan?

What aspects of Taiwan do you like?

What aspects of Taiwan you do not like?



3.2 Sampling Methodology and Selection Criterion Description

To conduct this research and given the nature of it (which implicates large amounts of field research for interviewing a specific population) the **snowball sampling**³¹ methodology was used. This methodology is a nonprobability sampling method often employed in field research whereby each person interviewed may be asked to suggest additional people for interviewing (Babbie, 2020, p. 193). In other words, it relies on social networks/connections of the members of the target population (in this case international scholarship recipients students of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) the researcher can locate and contact initially.

This method, as any other, can provide a researcher with a few advantages and disadvantages when using it. These advantages are:

- a) Facilitates the access, trust and cooperation of new interviewees with the researcher by using the connection the former interviewees have with them. This is achieved when investigators act in good faith and establish good working relationship with the initial interviewees.
- b) Allows the researcher to include a more diverse group of people through the initial interviewee sample's social networks.
- c) Since initial interviewees are used to locate future potential interviewees and make them part of the interview sample, less money and time is invested to do the sampling. Also, it does not require complex planning for its (Wikipedia contributors, 2021).
- d) The sample finding process in itself might be part of the inquiry by revealing “the dynamics of natural and organic social networks”(Noy, 2008, p. 329)

On the contrary and as follows, some disadvantages can be present when using this

³¹ Also known as chain sampling, chain-referral sampling or referral sampling.

method. These disadvantages are:

a) The snowball own nonrandom nature can work against since it might not be quite representative of the targeted population. However, it seems inevitable since social systems are beyond a researcher's ability to recruit randomly. ("Snowball Sampling," 2016).

b) Initial interviewees inability or reluctance to identify and locate other members of the targeted population within their social networks (Waters, 2015).

c) The method's reliance on the researcher's skill and experience to conduct the sampling and establish the correct initial connections can be counterproductive if he/she does not have skills and experience to do it in the right away. (Wikipedia contributors, 2021)

d) Since it relies on the initial sample to locate and identify the rest of it, the researcher has little control over the sample itself as it becomes dependent on the original and subsequent interviewees who can add anyone to the potential sampling pool possibly may not follow the desired criteria (Wikipedia contributors, 2021).

Despite the above-mentioned disadvantages, and as it would be further detail afterwards in the upcoming paragraphs, weighing a selection criterion can compensate the non-random nature of the method, provide diversity to the sample and reduce or attenuate any possible sampling errors.

After briefly describing the sample method, a more detailed description of the selected interviewee sample distribution is given. For this research, I interviewed 8 international students from each of the four Central American diplomatic allies of Taiwan (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua) to get the required information to pursue this research. In the following paragraph, a more detailed description of the selected interviewee sample distribution and the selection criterion will be given.

Firstly, I interviewed an initial sample of 8 selected international scholarship recipient students from each of Taiwan's four diplomatic allies in Central America

(Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua) with whom I have established a previous contact with in the past to prove the possible driving factors of their opinion about Taiwan as well as connecting with their social networks and selecting the subsequent interviewees that will integrate the rest of the sample.

After that, I interviewed 24 selected international scholarship recipient students from each of the initial interviewees networks to show which factors are the most salient or important to them in determining their opinion about Taiwan adding up to a total of 32 international scholarship recipient students who will make up the total interviewee sample.

To reduce any implicit type of selection bias and to get the most diverse pool of answers and compensate for the nonrandom nature of the snowball sampling a selection criterion for the interviewee sample's selection process was developed.

The criterion was the following:

- a)** Interviewees will come from the Taiwan's four Central American diplomatic allies.
- b)** Interviewees will come from different Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of China.
- c)** Interviewees, if possible, will be residents of different urban centers of the Taiwan all around the country (to avoid a geographic proximity bias).
- d)** Interviewees will come, if possible, from each level of higher education: Undergraduate, Master and Doctoral (to avoid an education level bias).
- e)** A balance number of male and female students will be part of the interviewee sample (To avoid a gender bias).

3.3 Sample Selection and Data Gathering Process Description

International students from the abovementioned Central American allies of Taiwan were contacted to be part of the research sample. The data gathering process was carried during a 30-day time span from Tuesday March 9, 2021 to Thursday April 8, 2021 (see Appendix A). The students were initially contacted through different means of communication to ask them if they wanted to be part of the research. With their acceptance granted, a second contact was scheduled to provide them a more detailed explanation about the research and to answer any questions regarding the interview questionnaire before they proceed to answer it. This contact was carried out either in person (given the proximity with several of the interviewee's place of residence) or online (given the distance of my residence with some of the interviewee's residence). After the data gathering phase, the data was registered during a 7-day time span from Friday April 9 to Friday April 16, 2021 in an Excel file created for that purpose and also for the qualitative and quantitative analysis described in the next section.

With the intention of getting a diverse pool of answers and avoid any sorts of selection bias (in accordance to what was expressed in the previous section), the interviewee sample selected for the research was quite diverse in terms of nationality (8 interviewees came from each of the four Central American diplomatic allies of the Taiwan: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua), gender (half of the interviewees of each country were female students and half were male students), higher education level pursued (half of the whole sample being Master level students (**16**) and the other half distributed among Undergrad (**15**) and PhD (**1**) students, respectively) and come from different places of residence and study. In few words, the sample was balanced according to nationality, gender, level of higher education pursued, and place of residence and study.

3.4 Research Limitations

In the paragraphs below, the research limitations of this thesis would be addressed and detailed.

Career Development at home not considered: Given that the respondents of this research mostly reside and study in Taiwan, the questions asked about their career development perceptions were limited by only asking about the possibilities of development in the local field (Taiwan) and not taking in consideration the possibilities for development international field including the respondents' home countries given the knowledge acquired and skills learn in Taiwan's higher education institutions. Therefore, it is suggested that any comparable research should take this to consideration when carrying it out given that it will lead to obtain much more fruitful information to not only discover the perceptions of students concerning their career prospects in the local and international given the skills learned and knowledge acquired in Taiwanese HEI but also discover if Taiwan's image and soft power is improved by this element or not.

Geographic Location of participants: Due to a lack of enough financial , logistical means alongside time constraints to travel around Taiwan and visit a variety of regions in the country , most of the international scholarship recipients students participant on this research that were interviewed, reside in Taipei's metropolitan area and studied in higher education institutions also based on the abovementioned metropolitan area .

This, of course, and given the differences in the physical, societal, cultural and educational environment between the metropolitan areas and the more rural and less populated where international scholarship students also live and study, may lead to a degree of geographic location bias of the fostering factors in the findings of this research because of an over similarity in the urban environment influencing students from metropolitan areas and lack of variety in the particular experiences of students living in non-metropolitan areas who experience and are influenced by a different physical, societal, cultural and educational environment as the ones living in Taipei's metropolitan area.

Implicit Bias of participants: Is important to acknowledge that each participant's particular life experiences, conditions, values, believes and prejudices play a role in determining the degree of influence the same factor (positive or negatively oriented) can have in ultimately shaping each of their opinions in regards to the particular matters

addressed in this research. In other words, for some a particularly positively oriented factor (e.g. safety) may have a higher degree of influence or impact in shaping their particular opinion on some participants than others with the same situation occurring for a particularly negatively oriented factor (e.g. skin color/place of origin discrimination). Given the small size of this research's sample this bias may not be alleviated. Consequently, it is suggested that if a similar research is carried out in the future it should use a much larger sample to alleviate this bias and obtain less biased responses.



Chapter 4 Qualitative Analysis

In the following chapter, a qualitative analysis of the data given by the 32 participants from Taiwan's Central American allies during the data recollection process of this research is presented. This chapter is divided in four large sections. Section 4.1 describes the main pulling factors driving a favorable opinion from international scholarship recipient students of these four Central American countries about Taiwan before their arrival in the country. Section 4.2 describes the main fostering that drove their opinion after their arrival in Taiwan. Section 4.3. the main deteriorating factors pushing back their opinion after their arrival in Taiwan or as seen with concern by those holding a positive opinion. Section 4.4 presents a before and after-arrival to Taiwan opinion analysis including cases within the interviewee sample for the purpose of exemplifying their after-arrival opinion change. Finally, a chapter discussion (Section 4.5) is presented to summarize and detail the relevant key points obtain from this research qualitative analysis.

4.1 Main Pulling Factors driving Before Arrival Opinion about Taiwan

When looking at what the international students from Taiwan's Central American Allies included in this interviewee sample, I find out that an important pull factor driving their opinion about Taiwan is the **knowledge and awareness** about the country (Taiwan) and/or its scholarship program prior to their arrival prior to their application and later arrival to pursue their higher education. Approximately 94% of participants had some knowledge and where well aware of who Taiwan was. On top of that, 82% of respondents knew about Taiwan's scholarship programs.

When specifying on what they knew I found out that students knew for the most part that Taiwan has a diplomatic tie with their respective home country and offered fully funded higher education scholarships to their respective countries. A Honduran student said "That Honduras has had diplomatic relations with Taiwan for the past 79-80 years and was one of the few countries in the world to currently recognize Taiwan as an independent nation. Taiwan offers two kind of scholarship to students which covered 100% of the expenses in Taiwan". An undergrad student from Guatemala expressed as

well that “Taiwan is an ally of Guatemala and there's mutual cooperation between them. Also, that some people have studied in Taiwan through a scholarship”.

Likewise references about Taiwan’s long-standing conflict with the People’s Republic of China were made by some students. An undergrad Guatemalan student expressed “I knew about the division of the two nations (PRC and Taiwan) in school (high school) and how the PRC took over Taiwan’s seat in the United Nations.

Similarly, a Honduran master student stated: “Mostly, I knew about its history and its current situation in the international field. Did not know about the culture.”

It is worth noticing that almost 79% of respondents expressed that information about Taiwan was easy to access. As well, it is important to add that Taiwan’s higher education system was viewed by the majority of students in a positive light with an approximately 94% of all respondents praising it as a high quality one.

Another important factor “pulling” these students towards Taiwan was the **personal recommendations** given by people in their local social circle within their countries. The source of these recommendations were varied. 34% coming from their parents, 28% from former scholarship recipients, 25% from friends representing with the rest coming from high school or college professors (12.5%) and other sources including: Taiwan Embassy Officials, Taiwanese company executives, Students Associations, etcetera.³²

The main reasons for them to recommend Taiwan as a place to pursue a higher education revolved mostly along two reasons: **Fully-Funded Scholarship Availability** (14 respondents representing almost 44% of the total sample) and **Higher Quality Education** (11 respondents representing over 34% of the total sample) which represent almost an **80% of the participants**. Also, and not less significant, over 15% of respondents recommended Taiwan as an opportunity for self-growth. It is particularly interesting to see that the perception (or personal experience in the case of the former

³² Participants could select more than one option for this particular section of the interview questionnaire.

scholarship recipients) of Taiwan's Higher Education system as a high-quality one and the knowledge of a fully funded scholarship availability resonated on the international scholarship recipients' students and among their social circles in their respective countries.

A third "pulling" factor for the participants were their **social links** in Taiwan. This refers to the presence of a family relative and/or friend from their own country living and studying in Taiwan who shared their own opinions or comments about their life experience in the country with the upcoming international scholarship recipient students they had a link with, before their arrival. Of the 32 participants, 24 knew someone from their country before coming themselves to Taiwan (75%). Of those 24 respondents, 22 of them (92%) knew other current scholarship recipients who came before them and share a widely positive opinion (92%). For example, a Guatemalan student was told: "That it was safe here and had one of the best education systems in the world". A remark quite similar to the one given to a Nicaraguan student stating: "Taiwan has a high-quality education and if you have the opportunity to come here and study do not waste the chance". Others, referred to Taiwanese people stating: "Taiwanese people are friendly".

Finally, a not less important factor that was indirectly expressed previously as an important factor "pulling" the participants to choose Taiwan as their higher education destination was the **scholarship financial benefits (full coverage of tuition and living expenses)**. Despite most of the participants (more than 59%) expressing that the scholarship was not enough to cover living expenses in Taiwan and over 40% of them having to work part time to cover their living expenses; an outstanding **87.5%** of participants expressed that if they had not received the scholarship they would not come to Taiwan. For instance, an undergrad student from Guatemala stated clearly "No, because the reason I am here is because my parents could not afford my college education".

In the other hand, only 12.5% of participants would have made the economical effort to pursue their education in but under Taiwan certain conditions. This is exemplified by another undergrad Guatemalan student who answered: "Yes, only if I was allowed to work in Taiwan, otherwise it would be a little difficult to pursue an education in Taiwan

on my own”.

Finally, is important to notice that despite the considerable distance and time difference between their countries of origin and Taiwan, only about 9% of the participants considered to be a deterring factor prior to coming to Taiwan.

In conclusion, for the participants the main pulling factors driving their initial opinion about the Taiwan were : the positive nature **of the information available** that they knew or where aware of about Taiwan (including knowing they had the opportunity to access a fully funded higher education scholarship program to pursue their higher education) , reinforcing positive personal recommendations of Taiwan’s fully funded scholarship program and its high quality higher education system from the participants’ local social circle alongside similarly reinforcing positive comments from the participants’ **social links** in Taiwan and the opportunity to pursue their higher education with **a fully-funded scholarship** that covers their tuition and living expenses.

4.2 Main factors fostering the current opinion about Taiwan

A fostering factor that unequivocally stands out when reviewing the participants’ responses within the social cost factors is **safety/security**. A unanimous **100%** of the respondents agree that this is a “social cost factor” that drives positively their opinion about Taiwan. Similarly, almost **91%** of respondents feel that **freedom** to be themselves as another social cost factor driving their opinions positively. Despite what many might think, **home country links** (meaning the importance of having people from their home country residing in Taiwan) is not one of main “social cost” factors fostering the participants’ opinion with just 62.5% of them considering it important.

When reviewing the physical, societal and cultural environmental factors (culture, values, climate, lifestyle, entertainment scene and city of residence) three of them stand out positively with the participants: **Entertainment Scene** with up to 90% of the respondents praising it. **Culture** with over 87.5% of them liking the local culture and **Societal Values** with 81.25% of respondents sharing Taiwanese societal values. Nevertheless, two other factors (**lifestyle and place of residence**) with over 70 and 65%

respectively also contribute positively but in a lesser degree. In this regard, an opinion from a Belizean master student residing in Taipei clearly represents this when stating “Very convenient and developed. There are stores everywhere so I do not have to walk too far. The transportation system is amazing and modern, the environment is clean and very safe to raise a family. The public safety is world class and the people are so honest and friendly”.

Diving into some of the educational environment factors (which is the one in which they carried out most of their activities) interesting and significant results came in. 84% and 87.5 % of the participants respectively considered that the staff of both their study program’s office and their universities’ international office to be helpful, friendly and hospitable. Also, 75% of them also find their local classmates helpful, friendly and hospitable towards them as international students and over 80% find their professors to be understanding, respectful and friendly. Lastly, 23 participants (over 71%) considered their study program to be a high quality one.

When referring to the geographic proximity factor, and **easiness to communicate** given the distance and time difference with their home countries, almost 97% of the participants considered that it was easy to communicate with their loved ones when they needed to so.

Finally, it is important to ponder that some **career development factors** as driving the opinion positively with 69% of respondents seeing Taiwan as a place to develop professionally in their particular fields and 75% of them intending to find a job in the country to pursue their professional career.

In conclusion, for the participants the main factors fostering their current opinion (after arrival) about Taiwan were : a feeling of security (**safety**) , **a sense of freedom**, a preference for the physical, cultural and societal environment of Taiwan (particularly its **entertainment scene, culture, and local societal values**), educational social environment specifically referring to predominately **welcoming, friendly and helpful staff members (both in their study program and in the international office)**, **local classmates and professors**; **easiness to communicate with home country** (despite

time difference and geographic remoteness) because of their access to high speed internet and because they view Taiwan as a **place to develop professionally** in their respective career fields with a striking majority having the **intent to find a job in the country**.

4.3 Main Factors deteriorating the current opinion about Taiwan

The deteriorating factors are mostly present in their current opinion (after arrival) to Taiwan so for the purpose of analysis I am focusing on those abovementioned fostering factors. The factors driving negatively are the following:

Skin Color/Country of Origin Discrimination: Even though most of the “social cost factors” are overwhelmingly positive, when referring to skin color discrimination 14 participants or approximately 44% of the participants recalled experiencing a degree of discrimination due to their skin color and/or foreign appearance from Taiwanese nationals.

One Honduran master student recalls an experience he had while trying to attend an event he was invited to held inside his university’s premises stating: “I was kicked out of a building in my university because a staff member said, “foreigners do not come to this building”. I was later notified that she later made a report to the universities authorities saying, “a blonde foreigner was here, if anything was stolen, you should know” ”.

Also, a female Nicaraguan student recalls being racially discriminated when going to a job interview for a part time job she wanted, stating the following: “When looking for a job, and met the boss I found out that he was not looking for a dark-skinned person”.

Negative experience in university’s campus (educational environment): Although most of the “educational environmental factors” were overwhelmingly positively oriented, when referring to negative experiences within their campus with staff members, local classmates and/ or professors 13 participants or approximately 41%

of the participants evoked having some negative experiences with one of the abovementioned. For example, a female Guatemalan master student expresses her negative experience with her program and university's staff stating: "Many students in our program/university (including me) have been at risk because of another student with mental disorders that have threatened us for months, physically and verbally, but the staff of our program and university hasn't taken quick and efficient actions to solve this problem and I am in danger." In a similar way, a Honduran master student had some harsh words for the international office staff expressing "The international office actually discouraged and stopped international students from gathering together for Christmas which is disrespectful towards us and our freedom to gather and celebrate our religious festivities".

Climate/Weather: Despite most physical, societal and cultural environmental factors being tremendously positively-oriented, when referring particularly if they founded Taiwan's climate pleasant almost half of respondents (47%) responded negatively with one undergrad Guatemalan student stating: "I don't like the weather in Taiwan especially the hot summers".

Perceived Averseness of Taiwanese employers to hire international graduates (career development): In the perceptions of over 50% of participants, Taiwanese employers are not prone to hire international graduates. This number does not improve and, in fact, deteriorates when asked if employers in Taiwan are prone to hire international graduates from their same country of origin with almost 57% of respondents expressing that they are not.

In conclusion, for the participants the main factors likely deteriorating their opinion (particularly among those with a negative or neutral opinion) were: **Skin color/foreigner discrimination experiences** particularly in public spaces, **negative experiences in the educational environment** with staff members, students and/or professors and a perceived unpleasant **climate** particularly referring to its humidity and hot summers, and the **perceived averseness of Taiwanese employers to hire international graduates** in general and international graduates from their home countries in particular.

4.4 Before and After Arrival Opinion of Taiwan Analysis

Before their arrival, the Taiwan's opinion distribution was follows :24 participants (75%) participants expressed a positive opinion about the Taiwan , 8 participants (25%) neutral opinions about the country and no participants (0%) had a negative opinion about the country.

After being in Taiwan for some time (ranging from 6 months to almost 5 years) opinions were composed differently as follows :19 participants (almost 60%) expressed a positive opinion about Taiwan, 11 participants (25%) neutral opinions about the country and no participants (0%) had a negative opinion about the country. The after-arrival composition saw around a 15% loss in positive opinions going from 24 to 19 participants a 9% rise in neutral one's going from 8 to 11 participants going and 6% rise in negative opinions going from 0 to 2 participants . To better understand these numbers and trends a deeper analysis is presented in the upcoming pages of this section.

When analyzing the before arrival opinions of the participants, from the 24 positive ones, **14 (58.3%)** maintain their same opinion after arrival, **9 (37.5%)** change it to a neutral one and **1(4.2%)** change it to a negative one. In other words, 10 participants change their opinion to a non-positive one. When reviewing the 8 neutral opinions from the participants before arrival, I found out that only **2(25%)** participants maintain their same opinion after arrival, **1(12.5%)** of them change it from a neutral to a negative one and **5 (62.5%)** improve their opinion from a neutral one to a positive one. In brief, 16 participants maintain their opinion (positive or neutral one) , 11 deteriorate or change negatively their opinion (neutral to negative, positive to neutral, or positive to negative one) and only 5 improved their opinion (from a neutral to a positive one) after arrival . This shows that despite a third of participants deteriorating in some degree their opinion (**34.4%**) it did not significantly change the overall and majority positive opinion of the participants. However, it did reduce the amount of positive opinions given that it outweigh the percentage of improving opinions which was only **15.6%** which was not enough to “boost” the positive opinions and surpass the deteriorating trend.

When analyzing the configuration of the resulting amounts of positive (**19**) ,

neutral(11) or negative (2) opinions after arrival respectively, I found out the following : from 19 positive opinions after arrival, **14 (73.7%)** came from participants who did not change their opinion after arrival and **5 (26.3%)** came from participants that improve their opinions from a neutral to positive one. From the 11 after arrival neutral opinions, **2 (18.2%)** did not change their opinion after arrival with the remaining **9 (81.8%)** coming from participants who change their opinion from a positive one to a neutral one. Finally, the **2 negative opinions** come from 1 participant changing it from a neutral to a negative one and one participant changing it from a positive one to a negative one.

In a nutshell, the resulting number of after arrival opinions, is a combine interaction of a series of changing opinions among the research participants.

In the following paragraphs of this section , cases illustrating the different trends (linear, deteriorating and improving) will be presented as a means to exemplify the aforementioned trends in this section. Within each case I will detail the factors driving their before and after arrival respectively.

Case 1 Honduran Master Student (Positive before arrival and positive after arrival)

This Honduran master student expressed prior to her arrival in Taiwan “I thought it was a great place to live, it was flourishing in many aspects. It was flourishing in technology, and also health. What I was interested the most, was its healthcare system, due to the fact that they cover almost 99% of its population. Universal Healthcare is what most countries should achieve to do”.

This opinion was driven by her previous knowledge and awareness about the country and particularly Taiwan’s higher education scholarship program as one that “gave students complete funding for higher education programs. They covered tuition, books, living expenses in certain Universities around Taiwan”.

Also, personal recommendations from former scholarship recipients within her social circle telling her that Taiwan was an opportunity to pursue a fully funded higher

education alongside positive comments from fellow Hondurans living in Taiwan who commented to her that “it was a good place to live and that it was a good place to pursue higher education”. After 6 months, her current (after arrival) opinion was: “A country that is growing rapidly and needs to be seen in the eyes of the international community as an independent and self-sustaining country”.

This opinion was fostered by a sense of safety (security), convenient urban environment (including public transportation) and a positive view of Taiwanese society including its culture, lifestyle and societal values. Nevertheless, she pointed out a xenophobic experience against her and fellow international students when someone in a public setting said: “You foreigners are bringing COVID to Taiwan”, which was not a nice thing, as it was directed to me and fellow international students”.

In conclusion, **despite expressing concern about the abovementioned xenophobic expression towards her and her classmates, her initial positive opinion did not deteriorate after her arrival.** In fact, she still holds a positive opinion towards Taiwan (not much different from her initial one) fostered by the country’s safety, convenience, culture, societal values and lifestyle.

Case 2 Nicaraguan Master Student (Positive before arrival and Positive after arrival)

This Nicaraguan master student prior to his arrival to Taiwan over 18 months ago expressed this about the country “I thought it was a very modern country with big buildings and lots of industries. I also thought it to be a highly developed country”. This opinion was driven by his previous knowledge of Taiwan stating that: “I knew it was a relatively young country. I also knew about the Taipei 101 Building and some of its most famous dishes” alongside his social circle in Nicaragua (family members and former scholarship recipients) personally recommending Taiwan as a place for self-growth.

Currently and after over 18 months after his arrival, his opinion holds as a positive one expressing that “I think Taiwan is a great country with a lot of opportunities to grow

as a professional. It is a safe country where you can stay without being concern about your safety. It is also an excellent place to develop an academic career”.

This opinion was driven by his preference for the local culture, urban environment (including transportation system), safety, sense of freedom and access to a high-quality education. However, despite expressing an overall positive opinion not everything in his experience in Taiwan has been positive, he does express a concern for some latent racism he has perceived towards him while boarding public transportation or walking down the streets stating the following: “Sometimes Taiwanese people try to avoid sitting next to you, or they prefer to cross the street just not to be in the same sidewalk”. Alongside the abovementioned, he also expresses his concern for high housing costs a need of part time job to cover them as well as a concern for a troublesome language barrier with the staff members in his international master program.

In conclusion, **despite expressing a concern about the abovementioned latent racism, high housing costs and a language barrier with his international master’s program staff members, his initial positive opinion did not deteriorate after arrival.** On the contrary, it fostered into a more positive one if compared to his initial one, pondering positively Taiwan’s culture, convenient urban environment (including transportation system), safety, sense of freedom and access to a high-quality education. Understandably, this fostering was significant enough to maintain and likely improve his already positive opinion.

Case 3 Honduran Master Student (Neutral before arrival and Neutral after arrival)

This master student from Honduras prior to her arrival in Taiwan had this to say : “Taiwan could be a great partner for Honduras. We could learn from them and the people in terms of education, security, productivity, etc. Taiwan has become a strong economic country. Its people are very friendly. Unfortunately, they do not see Honduras as an attractive country to invest.”. Despite praising many of Taiwan’s positive elements, she perceives that it disregards its relationship with her home country (Honduras). In other words, her opinion is neutral neither positive or negative. Her

opinion was driven by a series of factors including her previous knowledge about the country expressing that “ Honduras has had diplomatic relations with Taiwan for the past 79-80 years and is one of the few countries in the world to currently recognize Taiwan as an independent nation. Taiwan offers scholarships to students which covered 100% of the expenses in Taiwan”. Also, she was reinforced in her opinion by Taiwanese company executives she interacted with, given her position within the Honduran public sector.

Currently, her opinion remains unchanged and holds up as a neutral one stating “Taiwan is a place where you need to speak Chinese to find a job. Taiwanese companies seek employees from Asian nationalities because they want to enter those markets rather than seeking to enter the LATAM market. It would be better if the scholarship program offered some basic training before coming to Taiwan. It would be wonderful if Taiwan could work with Honduras in selecting which students they (Honduras) would want to go to Taiwan an study in a specific and needed field so they (students) can come back and apply what they had learn.” This opinion is in tune with her before arrival one and remains practically unchanged besides the wording. However, and despite not improving her opinion, she does praise the reduce social costs in Taiwan meaning she feel safe and free as well as enjoying her educational and non-educational in the country. Particularly, she praised her city of residence (Taipei) stating : “It is super safe, convenient transportation and store hours. Also, it is language friendly (English) and people are willing to help. It is a highly developed city where people follow the rules.”

In conclusion, despite praising the Taiwan’s reduced social costs, educational and non-educational environment and previously admiring its economy and educational system she holds a particularly neutral opinion given that she perceives Taiwan’s disregards the country’s diplomatic allies given their small size and incomparable economy. In her case, no factor has been influential enough to eventually improve or deteriorate her opinion about Taiwan’s meaning it stayed in a linear trend.

Case 4 Nicaraguan Master Student (Neutral before arrival to Positive after arrival)

Before her arrival, this Master student from Nicaragua had this to say about the Taiwan: “I thought that Taiwan had a great higher education because professors studied abroad and have PhD.”. This before arrival was not negative in nature but it was not completely positive given that it did not give a complete picture of the country and focus mainly on the educational element . It was driven by what she **knew about the country** and the information available to her alongside her positive perceptions about the Taiwan’s higher education system which were reinforced by her professor’s own perceptions who recommended the country as a place for her self-growth.

In the other hand, about 18 months later , her after-arrival opinion is much more positive in nature expressing “I think that Taiwan is a good place to develop language skills where you can interact with people from all over the world and interact with their culture as well as Taiwanese culture. Also, is a great place to develop as a professional.” When reviewing her questionnaire’s answers, I could see why her opinion was much more well-rounded and positive. It was fostered by her both **positive educational and non-educational environments** declaring that she liked Taiwanese music, movies, and natural scenery around the country as well as her university’s environment where she had the opportunity to know people from other countries not only from Taiwan. In addition, she saw Taiwan as a place to **develop professionally** and even expressing she liked the salary conditions in the country.

However, and despite still holding an overall positive opinion, she did express her concern about working benefits in Taiwan including a short maternity leave time and a limited amount of vacation time to visit her home country.

In conclusion, after her arrival around 18 months ago, her opinion improved and became much more well-rounded and positive (when compared to the opinion she before her arrival) and was fostered by a positive environment (educational and non-educational) , and prospects to develop her professional career in Taiwan. Nevertheless, a concern about not so good working benefits was raised.

Case 5 Guatemalan Undergrad Student (Positive before arrival to negative after arrival)

Her after-arrival opinion exemplifies the abovementioned deteriorating trend expressing the following after being in the country for 6 months: “It is a beautiful country, but the society is made up of a lot of old people who are racists.”

This is a highly contrasting and negative opinion if compared to what she thought about the Taiwan prior to her arrival stating: “It was an Asian country(Taiwan) that had one of the best educational systems and one of the best universities in the world (NTU)”.

When reviewing her questionnaire’s answers, I can see that her former positive opinion revolves around the **positive perceptions of the country** as being one with a **high-quality** education prior to her arrival based on what she knew, what her local social circle in Guatemala recommended alongside the comments from fellow Guatemalan students in Taiwan who stated, “That it was a beautiful country with a great education system.”.

By contrast, her current negative opinion centers on her negative **skin color/ country of origin discriminatory experience** in the country’s general environment in general and **her educational environment** in particular. She described a racist discriminatory experience while riding a bus in Taipei (her place of residence) affirming that “I was at the bus and there was an empty space, beside an old man, and the man told me not to sit there and that I could sit anywhere except there”. As well, she described a negative experience with one of her professors on campus stating “I had questions and went to ask them to the teacher. She got mad and told me to stop asking her and to go ask others”. Nevertheless, she does admit and praises as positive the Taiwan’s safety and higher education system.

In conclusion, **despite still praising the Taiwan’s safety and education system as she did in her initial opinion before arrival, her opinion did not improve after her arrival.** In fact, it significantly deteriorated if compared to her initial one, pondering negatively her educational environment and the racial discriminatory experiences she had over the aforementioned positive aspects. As a matter of fact, this deterioration was significant enough to change her opinion from a positive one to a negative one.

Case 6 Belizean Undergrad Student (Positive before arrival to Neutral after arrival)

The change from a positive to a more neutral can be exemplified in the opinion of this undergrad Belizean that prior to coming to Taiwan had quite positive opinion stating: “Belize has many Taiwanese citizens living there, so we are often exposed to their culture and cuisine. Because of this exposure, I knew that Taiwan is a very business-oriented country and that its people are very hard working, I also believed that Taiwan was very progressive in its politics and policies”.

However, after being for over 40 months in Taiwan he expressed a much more neutral opinion stating: “From my experience, I believe that Taiwan is very safe and convenient. It is very strategic in its policy making and diplomacy. I believe that Taiwan's citizens are very Westernized for the most part. However, despite being very progressive in terms of addressing sensitive topics such as women in politics, indigenous culture revitalization and LGBTQ+ rights, I still believe Taiwan has areas to improve. One of the main areas is the belief that “white is better”. This causes discrimination in many cases and makes it hard to give an overall positive review of the nation”.

For this Belizean student, his past positive opinion of Taiwan was driven by the previous knowledge of the country and positive perceptions of their culture, societal values and higher education system from the Taiwanese diaspora in his native country together with the personal recommendations from his friends and family and his fellow Belizean peers with he had social links in Taiwan who expressed to him that “Taiwan was very progressive and convenient. They shared that it was a very safe and that people were very friendly. They also told me that the Taiwanese transportation system was very nice compared to the one we have back in Belize”.

In this particular case, his opinion likely deteriorated due to a particularly negative **skin color/ country of origin discriminatory experience** when trying to look for a part time job. He described this event in the following way: “When I was applying for a part time job, I was told that my skin complexion was too dark and that would cause problems with parents”. However, and despite this experience, his overall opinion as

stated before was not fully negative and expressed a much more neutral approach as the above-mentioned opinion clearly expresses.

In conclusion, **despite praising the Taiwan's safety, convenience, progressive policies ,modernized society and societal values as he did in his initial opinion before arrival, his opinion did not improve after arriving.** In fact, it deteriorated if compared to his initial one, pondering negatively the perceived racism in its society. However, this deterioration was not significant enough to him to hold an overall negative opinion about the Taiwan. However, it deteriorated his opinion enough to change it from a positive one to a much more neutral one (which is in sharp contrast with the previous case).

4.5 Discussion

As it was previously mentioned in this chapter, the overall opinion distribution of the participants before their arrival was overwhelmingly positive (75% of respondents) or at least neutral (25% of respondents) with no respondents (0% of respondents) expressing a negative opinion about the country. After arrival, a different overall opinion distribution can be seen. within participants' overall opinion with positive opinions about Taiwan still being the majority (approximately 60% of participants) but 15% less if compared to the opinion distribution before arrival. The remaining opinions (40% of participants) are distributed in neutral opinions and negative opinions respectively with 34% holding neutral opinions and 6% a negative one which are approximately 9 and 6% if compared to the before arrival percentages. This difference is because after arrival, opinions about Taiwan either were maintain (positively or neutrally) , deteriorate (from positive to negative or from positive to neutral) or improve (from neutral to negative) which are trends exemplified in the selected cases . From the 32 participants, 14 held their positive opinion, 2 held their neutral opinion, 11 deteriorated their opinion in different degrees (from positive to negative, from positive to neutral, or from neutral to negative) and 5 improved their opinion from neutral to positive.

Logically, this caused the opinion distribution to differ before and after arrival. In the

after-arrival distribution, the positive opinions were composed of 14 participants maintaining their opinion plus 5 participants improving their opinion for a total of 19 participants holding a positive opinion after arrival. A much greater change in composition happened in the neutral opinions with only 2 holding up their opinion and as much as 9 participants deteriorating their opinion from positive to neutral for a total of 11 participants holding a neutral opinion after arrival.

Finally, negative opinions increased their number to 2 participants with a deteriorated opinion (one with a previously positive opinion and another one with a previously neutral one). This signifies also a larger deteriorating trend with 34% of participants that doubled the approximately 15% improving trend. However, this opinion deterioration did not alter the majority positive of Taiwan.

As two of the aforementioned selected cases presented in this chapter illustrate, among participants maintaining a positive opinion after arrival (either maintaining it or improving it from a previously negative) , negatively perceived elements (e.g. xenophobia and racism) are not strong enough to deteriorate their overall opinion about Taiwan which still holds as a positive one. It is also important to highlight that among those improving their opinion from a neutral one before arrival to a positive one after arrival , these and other negatively perceived factors, despite being acknowledged, did not deteriorate their opinion and on the contrary ,their opinion was fostered to a positive one given the strong effect of factors like a positive environment (educational and non-educational) and prospects to develop a professional career) had to ultimately foster their opinion.

When reviewing the cases where a neutral opinion was maintained neither of the aforementioned positively perceived factors or negatively perceived factors affected the overall after arrival opinion of these participants, despite being highlighted by them as such, which remained neutral. In other words, their opinion remained the same before and after arrival and were not affected to such an extent that it changed to a positive or negative after arriving to Taiwan.

Chapter 5 Quantitative Analysis

After discussing the interviews outcomes in the previous chapter, this chapter uses quantitative analysis to show the relative importance of each of the pulling, fostering and deteriorating factors, as well as the positive and negative, variables associated with the before and after- arrival opinion change.

This chapter lays out as follows. Firstly , sections 5.1 presents a detailed analysis of before and after-arrival opinion distribution of the 32 international scholarship recipient students from the Taiwan' Central American diplomatic allies. Secondly, section 5.2 describes briefly the variable conceptualization used for the statistical analysis. Thirdly, section 5.3 presents an analysis the cross-section tabulation tables relating the participants opinion change and certain participant' questionnaire responses singularities (**gender, degree, mandarin fluency, time living in Taiwan, home contact frequency , school experience, non-school experience and education experience**). Fourthly, section 5.4 describes the statistical model and presents the associated discussion with the information given by the 32 participants in the interview questionnaires. To finalize the chapter, section 5.5 presents the overall chapter discussion.

5.1 Distribution Analysis

This section presents a detailed analysis of before and after-arrival opinion distribution of the 32 international scholarship recipient students from Taiwan's Central American diplomatic allies. This analysis, at the end of this section, include at the end of the section a series of tables that summarize the main analysis points.

For the vast majority of interviewees (**75%**) the opinions before their arrival were positive driven by the following pulling factors : the positive nature **of the information available (94%)** that they knew or where aware of Taiwan (including knowing they had the opportunity to access a fully funded higher education scholarship program to pursue their higher education) , a **positive perception of its higher education system(94%) and higher education scholarship program (82%)** , alongside

personal recommendations(80%) from their local social circle (family, friends, professors, former scholarship recipients, etc.) and comments from the participants' **social links (92%)** of their country living in Taiwan (who are mostly scholarship recipients themselves), reinforcing the interviewees' positive perceptions with their own . In addition to the previously mentioned, the **scholarship financial benefits (87.5%)** which include a full coverage of tuition and living expenses is also an important pulling factor for the participants.

For the remainder **25 %** of the participants their opinion was neutral or in other words, no negative opinion prior to their arrival (**0%**). As well, is important to know that prior to their arrival the geographic remoteness and time difference **did not deter** them from coming with only a **9% of participants mentioning as such**. It can be interpreted then that this overall positive opinion that “pulled” them to come to Taiwan and pursue their education was driven by the above-mentioned factors.

Once “pulled”, for the vast majority of interviewees (60%)³³ the opinions after their arrival was positive. This significant positive opinion from the participants was likely maintained or improved by these fostering factors: a feeling of **safety (100%)** a feeling all interviewees coincided with (even those with an overall neutral or negative opinion), **a sense of freedom (91%)** , a preference for the **physical, cultural and societal environment** of Taiwan mainly referring to its **entertainment scene (90%)**, **culture (87.5%)**, and **local societal values (81.25%)**, **educational social environment** specifically referring to predominately welcoming, friendly and helpful: [staff members (study program and international office) with **84 and 87.5%** respectively , local classmates (**75%**) and professors (**81.25%**)] an **easiness to communicate with home country (97%)** (despite time difference and geographic remoteness) given their access to a high speed internet connection and finally, because they view Taiwan as a **place to develop professionally (69%)** in their respective career fields with a striking majority having the **intent to find a job in the country(75%)**.

For the remaining 40% of participants, distributed among 34% holding neutral

³³ Approximated Figure.

opinion and 6% holding a negative one, the main factors likely deteriorating their opinion or maintaining their non positive opinion were : **Skin color/foreigner discrimination experiences** particularly in public spaces (**44%**), **Negative Experiences in the educational environment** with staff members, local classmates and/or professors (**40.6%**), a perceived unpleasant **climate** particularly referring to its humidity and hot summers (**47%**), and the **perceived averseness of Taiwanese employers to hire international graduates** in general (**50%**) with a more deteriorating perception when asked about graduates from their home countries (**57%**).

In order to understand the opinion distribution after arrival and why the resulting amounts (and associated percentages) of positive, neutral and negative opinions among participants differ from those before arrival, a deeper analysis of this distribution is presented in the following paragraphs.

Initially and as it was abovementioned , the before arrival opinion was distributed as follows :75% (24 participants) had a positive opinion about Taiwan before their arrival, 25% (8 participants) had a neutral opinion and 0% (no participants) held a negative one. However, the after arrival the distribution looked quite different with almost 60% (19 participants) having a positive opinion , 34%(11 participants) having a neutral opinion and about 6% (2 participants) holding a negative one. This changing numbers and percentages were caused by participants either shifting (positively or negatively) or maintaining their original opinions after being in Taiwan for a given time. For the 24 participants holding a positive before arrival opinions it was as follows:**14 (58.3%)** maintain their same opinion after arrival, **9 (37.5%)** change it to a neutral one and only **1 (4.2%)** change it to a negative one .

In the case of the 8 participants with a neutral before arrival opinion it was as follows: **2 (25%)** maintain their same opinion after arrival, **1(12.5%)** of them change it from a neutral to a negative one and **5 (62.5%)** improve their opinion from a neutral one to a positive one. Finally, the **2 negative opinions after arrival** came from 1 participant changing it from a neutral to a negative one and one participant changing it from a positive one to a negative one. In summary, from the 32 participants in this research 16 participants maintain their opinion (positive or neutral one) , 11 deteriorate or change

negatively their opinion (neutral to negative, positive to neutral, or positive to negative one) and only 5 improved their opinion (from a neutral to a positive one) after arrival .

This shows that despite a third of participants deteriorating in some degree their opinion (**34.4%**) but did not significantly change the overall and majority positive opinion of the participants. However, it did reduce the amount of positive opinions given that it outweigh the percentage of improving opinions which was only **15.6%** which was not enough to “boost” the positive opinions and surpass the deteriorating trend.

With this in mind, the after-arrival opinion configuration of the 32 participants can be better understood and explained as follows: the 19 positive respondents are composed of 14 before arrival participants holding up their positive opinion plus 5 “new” participants improving theirs from a neutral one to a positive one likely because of the abovementioned fostering factors exerting a positive influence on them. Also, the 11 neutral respondents are composed of 2 before arrival participants holding up their neutral opinion plus 9 new participants whose opinion deteriorated from a neutral one to a positive one probably because of the deteriorating factors mentioned above. Finally, the 2 negative respondents are all “new” given that no one held previously a negative opinion. One of them a participant holding before arrival a neutral opinion and the other one is from a participant holding a positive one. These opinions likely deteriorating in a greater degree given the abovementioned deteriorating factors.

Table 5.1 Factors Summary

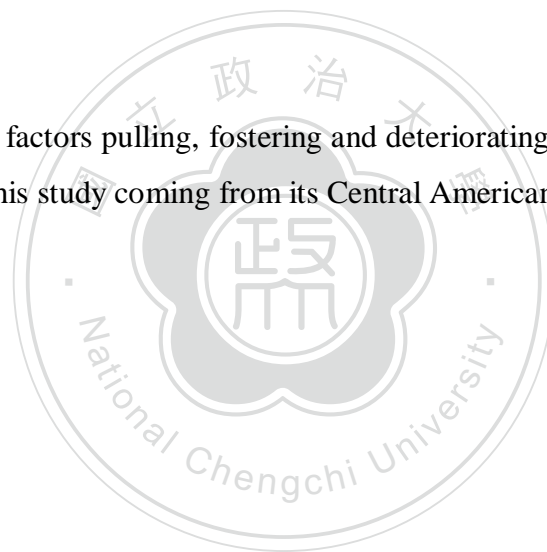
Factor Effect	Factors Category	Factor	Percentage	Positive Answers	Negative Answers	Total Number of Respondents
Ling Factors	nowledge and Awareness	Positive perception of the basic information available about the country.	94.00%	30	2	32
		Positive perception of Taiwan’s Higher Education System as a high quality one.	94.00%	30	2	32
		Knowledge of Taiwan’s Higher Education Scholarship Program .	81.25%	26	6	32
	sonal Recommendations	Reinforcing positive perceptions of Taiwan’s fully funded scholarship program and its high-quality higher education system from participants’ local social circle.	80.00%	25	7	32
	ial Links	Reinforcing positive comments of the Taiwan’s fully funded scholarship program and its high-quality higher education system from participants’ social links living Taiwan.	92.00%	22	2	24 ³⁴
	ancial Costs	Scholarship financial benefits (Full coverage of tuition and living expenses)	87.50%	28	4	32
Fostering Factors	ial Cost	ety	100.00%	32	0	32
		edom	91.00%	29	3	32
	Physical, Societal and Cultural Environment	ertainment Scene	90.00%	29	3	32
		ture	87.50%	28	4	32
		ietal Values	81.25%	26	6	32
	ucational Environment	Perceptions about Study Program’s Administrative Staff	84.00%	27	5	32
		Perceptions of University’s International Office Administrative Staff	87.50%	28	4	32
		ceptions of Local Classmates	75.00%	24	8	32
		Perceptions of Study Program’s Professor Staff	81.25%	26	6	32
	ographic Proximity	Easiness to Communicate with home country	97.00%	31	1	32
	reer Development	Perception of Taiwan as a place for career development	69.00%	22	10	32
		Search /Intent	75.00%	24	8	32

³⁴ Not all participants had family or friends in Taiwan prior to their arrival. Only 24 out of 32 participants did.

Deteriorating Factors	ial Cost	Skin Color/ Country of Origin Discrimination	44.00%	18	14	32 ³⁵
	educational Environment	Negative Experiences in the Educational Environment with staff members , local classmates and/or professors	40.60%	19	13	32 ³⁶
	Physical, Societal and Cultural Environment	imate/Weather	47.00%	17	15	32 ³⁷
	career Development	Perceived averseness of Taiwanese Employers to hire international graduates	50.00%	16	16	32
		Perceived averseness of Taiwanese Employers to hire international graduates from home country	57.00%	18	14	32

Source: Excel File created by author

This table provides a visual summary of the factors pulling, fostering and deteriorating the opinion about Taiwan held by international scholarship recipients students participants of this study coming from its Central American diplomatic allies.



³⁵ The percentage shown refers percentage of those who responded negatively or “yes” to having experience skin color or country of origin discrimination .

³⁶. The percentage shown refers percentage of those who responded negatively or “yes” to having a negative experience in the educational environment with staff members, local classmates and/or professors.

³⁷ The percentage shown refers percentage of those who responded negatively or “no” to liking Taiwan’s climate/weather.

Table 5.2 Before and After Arrival Opinion Distribution Comparison (Positive Opinions)

Positive (Before Arrival)	% of Total Amount of participants	Positive (After Arrival)	% of Total Amount of participants	Difference	%Difference
24	75%	19	59.4%	5 (loss)	15.6 %

Source: Created by author

This table presents a before and after-arrival opinion distribution comparison, in terms of number of participants and percentage of the total amount of participants, of the positive opinions about Taiwan held by the participants as well as the difference (positive or negative) between the before and after-arrival opinion distribution also in terms of number of participants and percentage of the total amount of participants.

Table 5.3 Before and After Arrival Opinion Distribution Comparison (Neutral Opinion)

Neutral (Before Arrival)	% of Total Amount of participants	Neutral (After Arrival)	% of Total Amount of participants	Difference	% Difference
8	25%	11	34.4%	+3 (gain)	+9.4

Source: Created by author

This table presents a before and after-arrival opinion distribution comparison, in terms of number of participants and percentage of the total amount of participants., of the neutral opinions about Taiwan held by the participants as well as the difference (positive or negative) between the before and after-arrival opinion distribution also in terms of number of participants and percentage of the total amount of participants.

Table 5.4 Before and After Arrival Opinion Distribution Comparison (Negative Opinion)

Negative (Before Arrival)	% of Total Amount of participants	Negative (After arrival)	% of Total Amount of participants	Difference	% Difference
0	0%	2	6.2%	+2 (gain)	+6.2%

Source: Created by author

This table presents a before and after-arrival opinion distribution comparison, in terms of number of participants and percentage of the total amount of participants., of the negative opinions about Taiwan held by the participants as well as the difference (positive or negative) between the before and after-arrival opinion distribution also in terms of number of participants and percentage of the total amount of participant

Table 5.5 After Arrival Opinion Composition (Participants with a Positive Opinion)

Category	Number of Participants	% of Total Amount of Participants with Positive Opinion
Participants maintaining their positive before-arrival opinion	14	73.7%
Participants improving their opinion from neutral to positive	5	26.3%
Total	19	100%

Source: Created by author

This table presents (both in number of participants and percentage of the total amount of participants holding a positive opinion) how the positive after arrival opinion was composed of. In this particular case, the after-arrival opinion positive opinions is composed of participants maintaining their before arrival opinion after arriving and of those participants who improved their opinion.³⁸

³⁸ In this particular case, no participants held a negative opinion before-arrival opinion thus the only possible opinion improvement possible was from those holding a neutral opinion before their arrival.

Table 5.6 After Arrival Opinion Composition (Participants with a Neutral Opinion)

Category	Number of Participants	% of Total Amount of Participants with Neutral Opinion
Participants maintaining their neutral before-arrival opinion	2	18.2%
Participants deteriorating their opinion from positive to neutral	9	81.8%
Total	11	100%

Source: Created by author

This table presents (both in number of participants and percentage of the total amount of participants holding a neutral opinion) how the neutral after-arrival opinion was composed of. In this case, the neutral after arrival opinions is compose of participants maintaining their neutral before-arrival opinion and participants deteriorating their opinion from a positive to a neutral one.

Table 5.7 After Arrival Opinion Composition (Participants with Negative Opinion)

Category	Number of Participants	% of Total Amount of Participants with Neutral Opinion
Participants maintaining their negative before-arrival opinion	N/A ³⁹	N/A
Participants deteriorating their opinion from positive to negative	1	50%
Participants deteriorating their opinion from neutral to negative	1	50%
Total	2	100%

Source: Created by author

This table presents (both in number of participants and percentage of the total amount of participants holding a negative opinion) how the negative after-arrival opinion was composed of. In this specific case, the negative after arrival opinions is compose of participants deteriorating their before-arrival opinion from a positive one to

³⁹ No participants had a negative opinion about the Taiwan before-arrival.

a negative one and participants deteriorating their opinion from a neutral one to a negative one.

5.2 Conceptualization of the variables

In the following pages, and as a way to complement the distribution analysis given in the previous chapter, a deeper statistical analysis of the data given by the 32 participants during the data recollection process of this research is presented.

This analysis is divided in two large subsections: one discussing the after-arrival opinion change distribution alongside as well discussing the cross section tabulation tables relating the participants opinion change and certain participant' questionnaire responses singularities (**gender, degree, mandarin fluency, time living in Taiwan, home contact frequency, school experience,**⁴⁰ **non-school experience and education experience**)⁴¹ and the other one, describing and describing the statistical model that was created with the information given by the 32 participants in the interview questionnaires.

⁴⁰ Refers to the perceptions participants had of their **social interactions** with administrative staff from the university and their study program, faculty(professors), and local Taiwanese classmates within their educational environment(university's campus) outside of the academic life.

⁴¹ In contrast to school experience, educational experience refers to the participants perceptions of their educational learning experiences within their university campus. In particular, **referring to the quality of their study program and the non-social and more academic interactions they had with the administrative staff from the university and their study program, faculty members (professors), and local Taiwanese classmates** within their university's campus.

5.3 Tabulation Analysis

Table 5.8 After Arrival Opinion Change⁴²

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
-2	1	3.13	3.13
-1	10	31.25	34.38
0	16	50.00	84.38
1	5	15.63	100.00
Total	32	100.00	

Source: Created by author

Of the 32 participants in the research , 11 worsened their opinions about Taiwan in some degree (with 1 respondent having a largely worsened opinion and the remaining 10 also worsening their opinion but in a lesser degree) , 16 maintained their opinion (either positive or neutral) and only 5 improving their opinion. In terms of percentage, 34.38% of the participants worsened in some degree their opinion, 50% maintain it and only 15.63% improved it.

Table 5.9 Gender⁴³

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Gender		Total
	0	1	
-2	0	1	1
-1	7	3	10
0	7	9	16
1	2	3	5
Total	16	16	32

⁴² The “Frequency” column represents the number of participants who’s after-arrival opinion either largely worsened, worsened, remain constant, or improved. The “percentage” column represent in percentage the distribution of the after-arrival opinions among the total amount of participants ranging from largely worsened up to improved. Finally, the “Cumulative” column represents the cumulative percentage of the after-arrival opinion distribution percentages.

⁴³ The 0 value in the gender column represents male participants and the 1 value represents female participants.

Source: Created by author

From the 32 participants, and as it was mentioned before, 16 were male and 16 were female. In other words, the participants were equally distributed in terms of gender. Within male students 7 worsened their opinion (with none of them worsening his opinion) , 7 maintain it and 2 improved it. In the other hand , among female students 4 worsened their opinion (with only 1 of them worsening her opinion in a larger degree), 9 maintain it and 3 improved it.

This distribution shows that the majority of the participants improving and maintaining their opinion are the female students and that the majority of the participants with worsening opinions are male students. However, and despite representing the majority of the worsening opinions, is a female student whose opinion worsened the most.

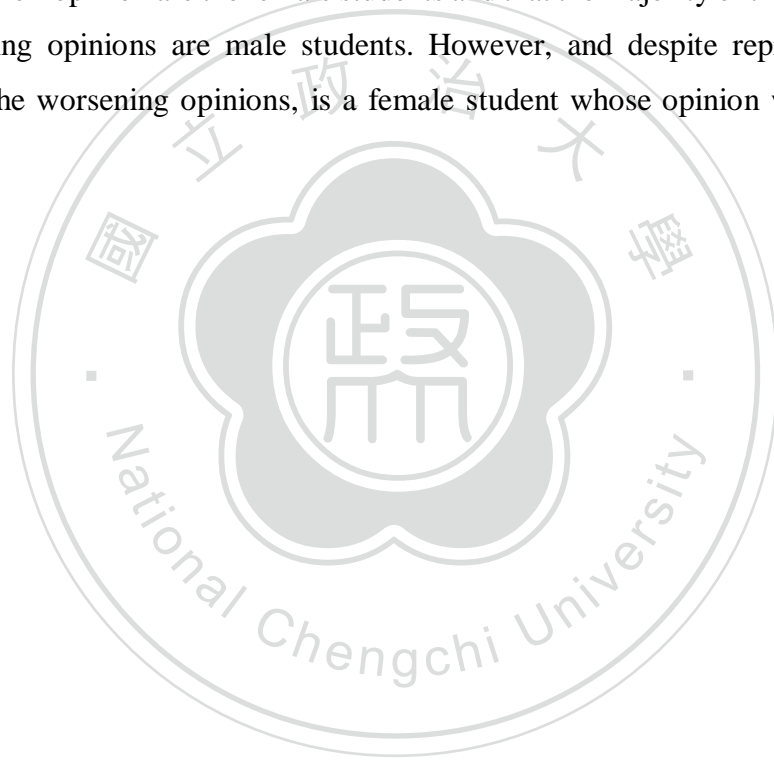


Table 5.10 Pursued Degree⁴⁴

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Degree		Total
	0	1	
-2	1	0	1
-1	6	4	10
0	7	9	16
1	1	4	5
Total	15	17	32

Source: Created by author

From the 32 participants, 15 were students pursuing an undergraduate degree and 17 were students pursuing a graduate degree (Master or PhD). In other words, the participants were almost equally distributed among students pursuing an undergrad or graduate degree respectively. Within the students pursuing an undergrad degree in Taiwan, 7 worsened their opinion (with only 1 undergrad student worsening his/ her opinion in a larger degree), 7 maintain it and only 1 student improve it. In the other hand, among the students pursuing a graduate degree, 4 students worsened their opinion (within no graduate students worsening his/her opinion in a larger degree), 9 maintain it and 4 improving it. This distribution shows that opinions worsened more among undergrad students than among graduate students which, in contrast, are a majority of the participants maintaining and improving their opinion about Taiwan.

⁴⁴ The 0 value in the degree column represents participants pursuing an undergraduate degree and the 1 value participants pursuing an graduate degree.

Table 5.11 Tuition and Living Costs^{45 46}

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Living Cost		Total
	0	1	
-2	1	0	1
-1	9	1	10
0	13	3	16
1	5	0	5
Total	28	4	32

Source: Created by author

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Tuition Cost		Total
	0	1	
-2	1	0	1
-1	9	1	10
0	13	3	16
1	5	0	5
Total	28	4	32

Source: Created by author

From the 32 participants, 28 were not willing to pay for the tuition and living costs associated with pursuing their degree in Taiwan only 4 were willing to do so. In other words, the majority of participants were not willing cover the associated costs to pursue their degrees in Taiwan . Within those 28 participants not willing to pay for the associated costs, 10 worsened their opinion (with only one worsening his/ her opinion in a larger degree), 13 maintain it and 5 improve it after their arrival . In the other side, within those participants willing to pay for their tuition 1 worsened his/her opinion, 3 maintain theirs and none of them improve it after their arrival.

This distribution shows that despite opinions mostly improving or being maintained among those students who were not willing to pay, it was also among them were most

⁴⁵ The 0 value in the degree column represents the participants who are not willing to pay tuition and living costs and the 1 value participants willing to do so.

⁴⁶ For both associated costs, the resulting distribution is the same.

of the opinions worsened but not in a large degree. It also shows that no improvement was made among the opinions of those willing to pay for the associated costs of pursuing their degree since all improving opinions were from those not willing to pay for the associated costs of pursuing their degree.

Table 5.12 Time Living in Taiwan⁴⁷

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Time in Taiwan								Total
	5	6	18	19	41	48	50	60	
-2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
-1	2	4	2	0	1	0	0	0	10
0	6	3	3	1	0	1	1	1	16
1	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	5
tal	11	7	9	1	1	1	1	1	32

Source: Created by author

From the 32 participants, 18 have been living in the Taiwan for at 6 months or less at the moment of the study., 10 between 18 to 19 months and the remaining 4 participants have been living between 40 to 60 months in Taiwan . In other words, the majority of the participants have been living in Taiwan for less than a year. Among the majority of participants with 6 months or less of their arrival in the Taiwan, 8 worsened their opinion (with only one worsening his/ her opinion in a larger degree), half of them (9) maintain their opinion, and only 1 person improved his/her opinion. For those living in the Taiwan for 18 to 19 months opinions, their after-arrival opinion was distributed as follows: 2 participants worsened their opinion, 4 maintain it and 4 improved it. Finally, from the remaining 4 participants, 1 participant worsened his/her opinion and 3 maintain their opinion with none of them improving their opinion about Taiwan.

⁴⁷ Each value in the “time in Taiwan” column represents (in months) the time participants have spent in the Taiwan after their arrival.

This distribution shows that those participants with 6 months or less in Taiwan maintain or worsen their opinion in almost equal numbers with just one person improving his/her opinion. As well, people with less than two years (24 months) maintain or improve their opinion in equal numbers with only 2 worsening their opinion but not in a large degree. Finally, it shows how among those with more than 36 months in the country the opinions are mostly maintain or slightly worsened but do not improved.

Table 5.13 Mandarin Chinese Ability⁴⁸

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Mandarin		Total
	-1	0	
-2	1	0	1
-1	5	5	10
0	7	9	16
1	2	3	5
tal	15	17	32

Source: Created by Author

From the 32 participants, 15 had no knowledge of Mandarin Chinese and 17 had little or basic knowledge of the language. In other words, none of the participants had a fluent level of the language but a slight majority had at least some knowledge of the language. Among those with no knowledge of the language, 6 worsened their opinion (with only one worsening his/ her opinion in a larger degree), 7 maintain their opinion and the remaining 2 improved it. In contrast, among those with a little or basic knowledge of the language, 5 worsened their opinion slightly, 9 maintain it and 3 improve it.

This distribution shows that among those with no knowledge of the language, opinions worsened slightly in a greater number, and not improve as much. In the other hand, opinions among those with some basic knowledge of the language do not worsen

⁴⁸ The -1 value in the “Mandarin column” represents participants with no knowledge or ability of Mandarin and the 0 value represents participants those with little to basic knowledge or ability of the language

as much and improve or are maintain in a greater number which given that opinions are maintain in a greater number along with the fact that those who maintain their opinion mostly have a positive one, is likely most of the after-arrival opinions of those with some knowledge is overall positive.

Table 5.14 Family Presence in Taiwan⁴⁹

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Family in Taiwan		Total
	0	1	
-2	1	0	1
-1	8	2	10
0	16	0	16
1	5	0	5
Total	30	2	32

Source: Created by author

From the 32 participants, 30 do not have a family member in Taiwan and just 2 of them do so. In other words, an overwhelming majority of the participants does not have a family member in Taiwan. Within those who do not have a family, 9 worsened their opinion in varied degrees (with just one of them worsening his/her opinion in a larger degree), more than half (16) maintain their opinion and 5 improved it. In contrast, among those who have family, both slightly worsened their opinion.

This distribution shows that most of the worsened opinions as well of the totality maintained and improved opinions come from those without family members in the country. Interestingly, it also shows that both participants with family presence in Taiwan have worst opinions if compared to their before-arrival opinion.

⁴⁹ The 0 value in the “Family in Taiwan” column represents participants who do not have family in Taiwan and the 1 value represents participants who do so.

Table 5.15 Part-time Job⁵⁰

Source: Created by author.

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Part Time Job		Total
	0	1	
-2	0	1	1
-1	6	4	10
0	12	4	16
1	1	4	5
Total	19	13	32

From 32 participants, 19 did not have part-time jobs while studying and 13 do . In other words, a significant majority of the participants are full-time students and do not work while pursuing their degrees. Within those who do not have a part-time job, 6 slightly worsened their opinion, 12 maintain it and just 1 improved it. In the other hand, among those working and studying, 5 worsened their opinion (with most slightly worsening their opinion) , 4 maintain it and 4 improved it.

This distribution shows that those participants who are not working hold a larger amount of worsened opinions , the least amount of improved opinions. In contrast, among those working and studying opinions improved the most and worsened the less in amount. However, they do have the only largely worsened opinion between both comparison groups.

⁵⁰ The 0 value in the “Part time Job” column represents participants who do not work part time and the 1 value represents participants who do so.

Table 5.16 Home Contact Frequency⁵¹

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Contact Home Frequency				Total
	1	2	3	4	
-2	0	0	0	1	1
-1	0	0	7	3	10
0	1	2	7	6	16
1	0	1	2	2	5
Total	1	3	16	12	32

Source: Created by author

From the 32 participants, 16 contact their homes once a week, 12 contact them every day, 3 once a month and 1 once a year. In other words, most participants contact their home often. Among those who contact home more often (daily or once a week), 11 worsened their opinion (with only of them largely worsening his/her opinion), 13 maintain it, and 4 improved it. In other side, among those who least contacted home (once a month or once a year), 3 maintained their opinion and 1 improved it with none them improving it.

This distribution shows that all of the worsened opinions come from people who contact their family frequently as well as representing most of those who improved or maintained their opinion. In contrast, no opinion worsened among those who do not contact their family often who mostly maintain their opinion be this opinion a positive or neutral one.

⁵¹ Each value in the “contact home frequency” column (1,2,3, &4) represents participants contacting their home once a year, once a month, once a week and once a day, respectively.

Table 5.17 Educational Environment (School Life Experience)⁵²⁵³

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	School Life Experience			Total
	-1	0	1	
-2	1	0	0	1
-1	1	0	9	10
0	1	2	13	16
1	0	0	5	5
Total	3	2	27	32

Source: Created by author

From the 32 participants, 27 had a positive educational environment,(school life experience) 3 had a negative one and 2 a neutral one. In other words, an overwhelming majority had a positive experience within their educational environment at their respective higher education institutions in Taiwan. Among those with a positive experience, 9 worsened their opinion about the Taiwan, 13 maintain it and 5 improved it. Among participants with a neutral experience within their educational environment, both of them maintained their opinion and none either improve or worsened their opinion about the country. Within the participants who had a negative experience within their educational environment, 1 largely deteriorated , 1 slightly deteriorated and 1 maintain his/her opinion.

This distribution shows that those with a positive school life experience represent all of the improved opinions (within the 32 participants) as well as most of the unchanged ones(be this opinion a positive or neutral one)with 13. Also, they do hold the majority of the worsened opinions within the 32 participants however it was mostly slightly worsening ones. Interestingly, and in contrast, those with non-positive experiences did not improve their opinions and either maintain it or deteriorate it.

⁵² Refers to a pondered assessment of the educational environment of each participant's relationship with local classmates, professors, university program and international office staff members.

⁵³ The -1 value in the "school life experience" column represents participants with a negative school life experience, the 0 value represents those with an average/neutral one, and the 1 value represents those with a positive school life experience.

Table 5.18 Non-Educational Environment (Life Experience outside School)⁵⁴⁵⁵

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Non-School Experience			Total
	-1	0	1	
-2	0	1	0	1
-1	0	2	8	10
0	1	3	12	16
1	0	0	5	5
Total	3	2	27	32

Source: Created by author

From the 32 participants, 25 had a positive life experience outside their educational environment, 1 had a negative one and 6 a neutral one. In other words, an overwhelming majority had a positive life experience outside their educational environment at their respective higher education institutions in Taiwan. Among those with a positive experience, 8 worsened their opinion about the Taiwan, 12 maintain it and 5 improved it. Among participants with a neutral life experience outside their educational environment, 3 maintained their opinion, 2 worsened their opinion and none improve or worsened their opinion about the country. The sole participant who had a negative life experience maintained his/her opinion after arrival.

This distribution shows that those with a positive life experience outside their educational environment represent all of the improved opinions (within the 32 participants) which as well as most of the unchanged ones be this opinion a positive or neutral one with 12. Also, they do hold the majority of the worsened opinions within the 32 participants however it was mostly slightly worsening ones. In contrast, those with non-positive experiences did not improve their opinions and either maintain it or deteriorate it. Finally, and also interestingly, the experience and after-arrival distributions are quite similar particularly in the fact in both of them the opinions

⁵⁴ Refers to a pondered assessment of each participant's preference of the non-educational societal, cultural and physical environment that surrounds him

⁵⁵ The -1 value in the "non-school experience" column represents participants with a negative non-school life experience, the 0 value represents those with an average/neutral one, and the 1 value represents those with a positive non-school life experience.

improved had a positive opinion.

Table 5.19 Educational Experience^{56 57}

After Arrival Opinion- Initial Opinion (Opinion Change)	Educational Experience			Total
	-1	0	1	
-2	1	0	0	1
-1	4	1	5	10
0	4	1	11	16
1	0	0	5	5
Total	2	1	2	32

Source: Created by author

From the 32 participants, 18 had a positive educational experience at their university in Taiwan, 11 had a negative one and 3 a neutral one. In other words, only a slight majority had a positive educational experience and the remaining participants did not. Among those with a positive experience, 5 worsened their opinion about Taiwan, 11 maintain it and 2 improved it. Among participants with a neutral educational experience, 1 maintained their opinion, 1 worsened his/her opinion and 1 improve it. Within the participants who had a negative educational experience, 1 largely deteriorated, 4 slightly deteriorated, 4 maintain his/her opinion and 2 improved it.

This distribution shows that despite most participants having a positive educational experience, opinions about Taiwan barely improved as much and either remain unchanged or deteriorated for the most part. Also, remarkably, most of those with a non-positive educational experience (neutral or negative) improve their opinion in a similar amount (1 and 2 participants respectively) those who had a positive educational experience. Lastly, and particularly those with a negative educational experience, deteriorated their opinion in a similar amount to those that had a positive one. Lastly, it

⁵⁶ Refers to a pondered assessment of the educational learning experiences each participant had within his university campus.

⁵⁷ The -1 value in the “educational experience” column represents participants with a negative educational experience, the 0 value represents those with an average/neutral one, and the 1 value represents those with a positive educational experience.

seems like the educational experience does not represent a singularity that affects positively the likeliness of a participant to have a positive opinion.

5.4. Statistical Model Discussion & Description

The statistical model in the next page is the result of the ordered logit model.

The Ordered Logit Model of Students' Attitude Change

Attitude Change = After opinion - Initial opinion (-2=largely worsened, -1=worsened, 0=remaining the same, 1=improved, 2=largely improved)	
Gender	1.174 (0.808)
Degree	1.797** (0.855)
Mandarin	1.472* (0.871)
Time of staying in Taiwan	0.036 (0.027)
Contact home frequency	-0.560 (0.576)
School experience	1.772** (0.856)
Non-school experience	0.803 (0.940)
Education experience	-0.933 (0.588)
Cut point 1	-3.249 (2.425)
Cut point 2	0.479 (2.198)
Cut point 3	3.577 (2.291)
pseudo R^2	0.193
Log lik.	-28.638
Chi-squared	13.661
Number of Observations	32

Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

In order to better predict the likelihood or odds of a participant(international scholarship recipient student) level of opinion/attitude change after their arrival to Taiwan to fall within certain (orderly) response categories (**largely worsened, worsened, remain the same/maintain , improve or largely improved**) with certain participant' questionnaire response singularities (**gender, degree, mandarin fluency, time living in the Taiwan, home contact frequency , school experience, non-school experience and education experience**); an ordered logit model was used given that it allowed me to see how positive or negative that level of change can be predicted by responses to other questions (e.g. mandarin fluency) and have multiple ordered response categories (which in this particular case, are 5). In other words, know the relationship between attitude/opinion change as the outcome variable of analysis, which can fall in any level of change and are in a natural order (from largely worsened to largely improved to largely worsened) , within the aforementioned responses from participants.

To be able to carry out the model for statistical analysis , all questionnaire responses of every participant were tabulated and assigned a numerical value. Close-ended questions were coded as 0=no and 1=yes . For those multiple-choice styled questions every option was given also a numerical value from 0 onwards (e. g frequency of contact to home country) For those open-ended questions (e.g. before and after arrival opinion questions) responses were coded with -1 for negative opinions, 0 for indifferent/ neutral opinions and 1 for positive opinion. This was done after thoroughly analyzing the responses of each of the respondent's different responses to those and other aforementioned open questions and objectively pondering if they were considered to be positively, neutrally or negatively oriented and then assigning the numerical value associated with their response.

Since **the important element** to assess was the opinion/attitude change among the participants after their arrival to Taiwan it what also necessary to assign a numerical value to each possible level of change within an ordered scale. The assign values for this scale of change were as follows: : -2 if opinion largely worsened, -1 if it worsened, 0 if it remained unchanged or was maintained, 1 if opinion improved or 2 if opinion largely improved. Each assigned value is given after deducting its after-arrival given value from its initial one. For example, a -2 value comes from deducting (-) an after-arrival value

of -1 to an initial value +1 [-1-(+1)=-2)].

When interpreting the statistical model summarized in the table above, some interesting particularities from the participants (arising from the above-mentioned questionnaire responses) were identified as influential to participants likeliness to an opinion/attitude change about Taiwan. These are: **The degree pursued, mandarin fluency, and school life experience**. After reviewing the outcome value for each (1.797, 1.472, 1.772 respectively), which come between +1 and +2, it can be interpreted that those are the most influential to know which participants are likely to have an opinion/attitude change. Furthermore, and when diving inside each of those particularities, I find out the following:

a) **Participants pursuing a graduate degree are more likely to improve their after-arrival opinion than those pursuing an undergrad degree.**

b) **Participants with a good Mandarin ability are more likely to improve their after-arrival opinion than those who do not.**

c) **Participants with a positive school life experience (educational environment) but not with a positive educational experience are more likely to improve their after-arrival opinion than those who do not.**

After carrying out this quantitative analysis, certain singularities that affect participants (international scholarship recipient students in this case) likeliness to an opinion/change about Taiwan after their arrival were identified. In other words, which participants having certain singularities were more susceptible to an opinion change. Those singularities were: **degree level pursued, mandarin language fluency and how their school life experience was** . Within each of the aforementioned singularities some change it to a more positive one and others to a negative one. Those pursuing a graduate degree, with some degree of fluency in Mandarin and/or with a positive educational environment shaping their school experience were identified as more likely to have a positive opinion change about Taiwan after their arrival. Whereas, and in contrast, those pursuing a undergrad degree, not fluent in Mandarin and not having a positive

environment shaping their school life experience were identified as less likely to have a positive opinion change about the Taiwan. Also, it is quite important to mentioned that many participants expressed **not having a positive educational experience**, but it was not significant enough to be an influential singularity affecting the likeliness of an opinion change about Taiwan in either direction (positive or negative). In a similar fashion, none of the other analyzed singularities were significant enough to be an influential singularity affecting the likeliness of an opinion change about Taiwan.

These singularities leading to a more complete research analysis were identified following a ordered logit model that allowed me to see how positive or negative that level of change can be predicted by responses to other questions (e.g. mandarin fluency) and also to have multiple ordered response categories (which in this particular case, are 5). In other words, relate participants attitude/opinion change (as the outcome variable of analysis) with certain participant' questionnaire response singularities (**gender, degree, mandarin fluency, time living in Taiwan, home contact frequency, school experience, non-school experience and education experience**).

5.5 Discussion

Over a period of 30 days, 8 international scholarship students from each of the Taiwan's four diplomatic allies in Central America (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) with a diverse background in terms of gender, age, geographic location, and level of higher education being pursued were selected as the interviewee sample for this research and answered an interview questionnaire regarding their opinion about Taiwan (before and after arrival) and the factors driving their opinion either in a positive or negative way and consequently provide an answer to my research questions:

Is Taiwan's Higher Education Scholarship Program an effective soft power tool for it to use with its Central American diplomatic allies? If Yes, which factors make Taiwan attractive? If No, which factors make Taiwan unattractive?

After this data was recollected, it was registered and tabulated in a Microsoft Excel file which was the basis for the qualitative and quantitative research analysis that

followed. The qualitative analysis helped in identification of:

The main **pulling factors** influential in the international scholarship recipient students before-arrival opinion of Taiwan, the fostering factors positively influential in the international scholarship recipient students' after-arrival opinion of Taiwan , and deteriorating factors negatively influential in the international scholarship recipient students' after-arrival opinion of Taiwan and the before and after arrival opinion distribution and the opinion-change trends among them.

Following this qualitative analysis, and as a means to have a well-rounded and enriched analysis, a quantitative analysis was carried out. This analysis consisted in relating the participants after arrival-opinion change and certain participant' questionnaire responses singularities (**gender, degree, mandarin fluency, time living in Taiwan, home contact frequency , school experience, non-school experience and education experience**) using an ordered logit regression model for the student's opinion change to identify which participants having certain singularities were more susceptible to an opinion change. Finding out that the degree pursued, the level of mandarin fluency and school experience were those singularities that signaled the participants more susceptible to an opinion change.

In short, and at it was thoroughly described above, both the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the research results not only made the analysis well rounded and enhanced by allowing me to know the international scholarship recipient students' before and after-arrival Taiwan opinion intervening factors, their before and after-arrival opinion distribution, the opinion change that occurred after their arrival to the country and identify some particularities that influence their likeliness to change their opinion about Taiwan after their arrival in the country. Ultimately, they gave the answer to the abovementioned research questions which will be detailed below in the overall general conclusions of this thesis.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Main Findings

This research aimed to evaluate Taiwan's Higher Education Program education scholarship as a soft power tool to use with its Central American allies and identify the factors contributing to Taiwan's image and attractiveness.

Based on the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the interview questionnaire responses of 8 scholarship recipient student of each of Taiwan's four diplomatic in Central America (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua), it can be concluded that Taiwan's higher education scholarship is an **effective soft power tool** given that their opinion not only was overwhelmingly positive before arrival given the many strong pulling factors (**a positive perception of the basic information available about the country, positive perception of Taiwan's Higher Education System as a high quality one, knowledge of the Taiwan's Higher Education Scholarship Program, reinforcing positive perceptions of Taiwan's fully funded scholarship program and its high-quality higher education system from participants' local social circle, reinforcing positive comments of the Taiwan's fully funded scholarship program and its high-quality higher education system from participants' social links living in Taiwan and scholarship financial benefits [full coverage of tuition and living expenses]**), but remained as such after their arrival to the country given the strong influence of the fostering factors (**Safety, freedom, entertainment scene, culture, societal values, positive perceptions about study program's administrative staff, perceptions of university's international office administrative staff, perceptions of local classmates, perceptions of study program's professor staff; easiness to communicate with home country, perception of Taiwan as a place for career development, and desire to search for a job in the Taiwan**) outweighing the deteriorating factors (**Skin color/ Country of origin discrimination, negative experiences in the educational environment with staff members , local classmates and/or professors; unpleasant climate/weather, perceived averseness of Taiwanese employers to hire international graduates and a perceived averseness of Taiwanese employers to hire international graduates from home country**).

This research illustrates that a country's international higher education scholarship program, in this particular case Taiwan's, as part of a large and sustained effort of delivering humanitarian and development assistance to less developed and long-standing diplomatic allies (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua), can not only be an important element to contribute to their development, but also contribute in strengthening their diplomatic relationship. **It does that by being a tool for Taiwan to improve its image and consequently, increase its soft power by bringing young avid college-aged students from these Central American allies with an already mostly positive opinion of the country, given the aforementioned strong influence pulling factors it possesses, to come in, and through the influence the above-mentioned strong fostering factors it also possesses, can exert upon the scholarship recipients during their time in Taiwan, improve their opinion, and with that, strengthen Taiwan's position in the region and increase the amount of soft power it wields.**

Potentially, in the future, international scholarship recipients from the aforementioned allies could become international diplomatic assets to promote Taiwan's image and thus **increase Taiwan's soft power** as they move up in their professional careers and become part of the policy-setting structures in their local government and/or international organizations, join influential international and national advocacy networks, or become important executives within the national and international private sector where they can share life experiences they had, skills learned, the knowledge acquired in Taiwan and the opportunities they came across during their time in Taiwan when carrying out their labor in any of these institutions.

However, and based on the research results, some factors deteriorating in some degree the opinions of the students (e.g. skin/ country of origin discrimination) despite not being influential enough to overtake the overall positive opinion of Taiwan these Central American students have after arriving, show some significant discomfort and concern from the scholarship recipients that, if unresolved or undressed, may progressively become significantly more influential in the future, and pose a serious threat to the positive opinions Taiwan currently holds among most of the recipients and shift the opinion to a negative one. And on a bigger scale, tarnish in a significant degree Taiwan's image among its Central American allies and become a constant

element of tension in their diplomatic relationship. **In other words, and base on the findings of this research, the deteriorating factors aforementioned in this chapter can reduce in some degree Taiwanese soft power within its relationship with its allies in the Central American region.**

Although, if these issues are addressed and the image fostering factors(e.g. safety) alongside the pulling factors (e.g. scholarship financial benefits) become progressively more influential or at least maintain their current influence, the opposite could occur, and the current image Taiwan has among the scholarship recipients could either be maintained or enhanced or in other words ,increase Taiwanese soft power . It could have an increasing positive influence on the image the Central American allies have of Taiwan and be a contributing factor in further strengthening Taiwan's diplomatic relations with its longstanding diplomatic allies in Central America. **In other words, and base on the findings of this research, the pulling and fostering factors previously mentioned in this chapter can increase in some degree Taiwanese soft power within its relationship with its allies in the Central American region.**

With this in mind and given the importance Taiwan's foreign policy places in further strengthening its diplomatic position among its diplomatic allies on the international stage, I suggest that in the future similar researches could be carried out analyzing the responses and opinions of higher education scholarship recipients' students from the rest of Taiwan's diplomatic allies in the Pacific⁵⁸, Africa⁵⁹, Caribbean⁶⁰ and South America⁶¹.

Also, research could also be extended to former scholarship recipients living in Central America and the rest of the above-mentioned regions containing Taiwan's diplomatic allies by analyzing their responses and opinions. All these researches and the knowledge they might produce, could not only be an input to the Taiwan's government

⁵⁸ Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, and Tuvalu.

⁵⁹ Eswatini (formerly known as Swaziland).

⁶⁰ Haiti, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

⁶¹ Paraguay.

to better carry out its foreign policy regarding its higher education scholarship program with its diplomatic allies, but would also contribute in a substantial degree to a better understanding and acknowledgment of the importance Taiwan's diplomatic relationships have among its higher education institutions, academic institutions and society.

Finally, and in the same line of thinking as the previous paragraph, I want to remark the importance that I believe this research can have, not only as a contributing input to strengthen Taiwan-Central American relations by showing how both sides benefit from a higher education scholarship program but also as an element that combined with deeper and broader research could potentially shape the country's foreign policy towards its diplomatic allies in the years to come.

6.2 Policy Suggestions

Taking into consideration this research's findings, these policy suggestions down below will be oriented to address those issues that on the long run might tarnish Taiwan-Central American relations as well as those elements that might have the opposite effect and improve that diplomatic relationship.

First, establish a structured, integral and well-funded anti-discrimination policy that specifically addresses instances of discrimination on the basis of race or place of origin towards foreigners including those coming from Taiwan's diplomatic allies. This policy should address all proven discriminatory behaviors within Taiwanese society in the private and public sphere. A joint effort between law enforcement institutions, Taiwanese lawmakers, human rights advocacy organizations, higher education institutions alongside MOFA officials and representatives from Taiwan's formal and informal allies should be the right course of action for the creation, sanction and enforcement of this suggested policy. Prevent discriminatory behaviors, reduce its occurrence and promote equality among the local and international population should be the aim of this suggested policy. Finally, is important to know that as mentioned previously, if unaddressed, skin/place of origin discrimination could potentially, in some degree, damage Taiwan's image and consequently, the amount of soft power it can wield

in the international stage.

Secondly, and also in consonance with this research's findings, a structured, integral and well-funded job promotion policy towards international graduates, particularly those from Taiwanese's allies in the Central American region should be promoted, particularly because, as the findings show, Central American graduates see Taiwan as a place to develop professionally and have an intent to look for employment in the country. However, a perceived averseness from local Taiwanese employers to hire them hinders that desire to continue their professional careers in Taiwan in their preferred fields of study. For the creation, sanction and enforcement of this policy a joint effort led by Taiwan's Ministry of Labor, with the collaboration of Taiwanese private sector, HEIs, MOFA, and representatives of Taiwan's formal and informal diplomatic allies including its Central American allies would be the right course of action. This suggested policy should aim at extending and widening communication channels between international graduates and HR departments from Taiwan's private sector, loosening any possible restrictions currently present in Taiwanese law possibly deterring companies including: facilitating the obtainment of work and residence permits and actively promote initiatives that would facilitate international graduate employment. This policy could potentially be a catalyst to not only attract international talent to Taiwanese growing and international companies but to generate a different perception towards Taiwanese employers and thus, foster Taiwan's soft power among its allies in Central America which could possibly be extended progressively extended to the rest of Taiwan's diplomatic allies.

Thirdly, and given how important personal recommendations from current and former scholarship recipients can be in shaping an incoming recipient's image residing in Taiwan or in any of the sending countries (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras y Guatemala), Taiwan's MOFA should create a policy to promote the generation of a permanent, integrated, well-funded and active networking scheme between former, current and incoming scholarship recipient students from the Central American allies with the aim to be a platform for them to communicate with each other. As in other suggestions, a joint effort should be the way go. In this case, led by MOFA alongside student associations and diplomatic representatives of Taiwan in Central America and

vice versa (Central American diplomatic representatives in Taiwan). This policy would progressively increase the interactions among former, current and incoming scholarship recipients which, consequently, would be potentially a constant avenue where Taiwan's positive perceptions could be shared both inside and outside Taiwan.

Finally, and given how important a good school environment is to foster scholarship recipient students opinion about Taiwan, a structured, integral and well-funded student integration policy aiming to facilitate scholarship recipients integration to the social fabric of their educational environment (university's campus) whose creation, sanction and enforcement should be a joint effort led by MOFA and MOE with the collaboration of the different HEI where this international scholarship recipient students study, particularly with each of their international offices.

This policy should assimilate all of the individual efforts led by each of these HEIs into an integrated one. It should consist of efforts to reduce cultural clashes and differences between Taiwanese students, faculty and administrative staff and international scholarship recipient students by actively promoting cross cultural activities (both academic and non-academic) within universities campuses highlighting the importance of the longstanding diplomatic relationship between Taiwan and its Central American allies. This potentially would maintain and possibly improve even more the relationships within each university educational environment and thus, contribute to the promotion of Taiwanese soft power.

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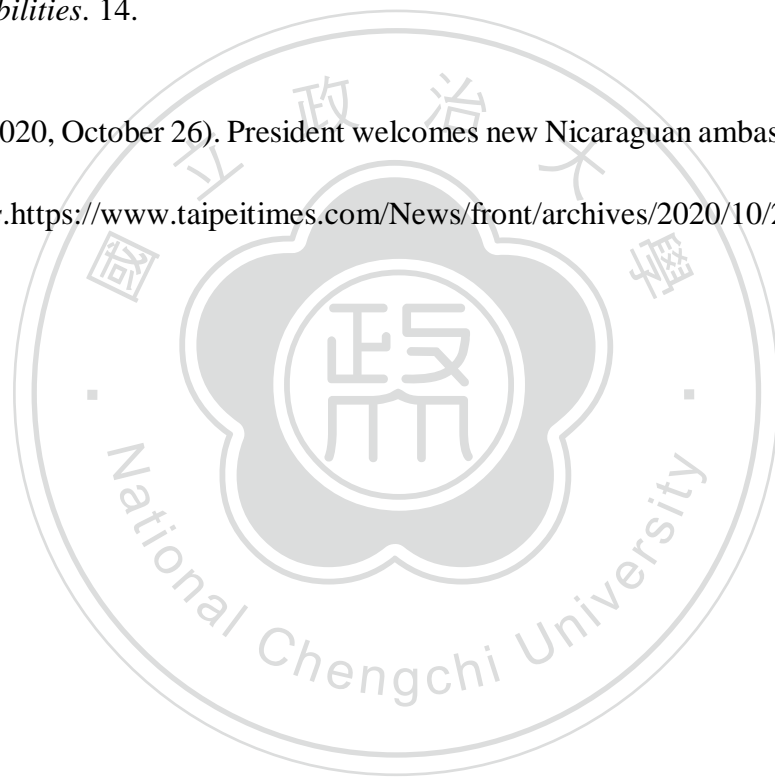
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Appendix A

Interview Log Diary

No	Country	Gender	Degree	Location	Start time	End time	Extent	Date
1	Guatemala	Male	Master	Apartment Café near National Chengchi University	5:00 pm	5:40 pm	40 minutes	Tuesday March 9, 2021
2	Belize	Male	Master	Apartment Café near National Chengchi University	6:00 pm	6:30 pm	40 minutes	Tuesday March 9, 2021
3	Honduras	Female	Master	2D Café near National Normal University.	3:05 pm	3:35 pm	30 minutes	Wednesday March 10, 2021
4	Honduras	Female	Master	Beitou (National Yang Ming University) ⁶²	3:38 pm	4:04 pm	26 minutes	Thursday March 11, 2021
5	Belize	Male	Master	Starbucks Café near Xngpu MRT Station	6:45 pm	7:20 pm	35 minutes	Thursday March 11, 2021
6	Belize	Female	Undergrad	Cama Café near National Chengchi University	1:05 pm	1:35 pm	30 minutes	Friday March 12, 2021
7	Belize	Female	Undergrad	Cama Café near National Chengchi University	2:10 pm	2:45 pm	35 minutes	Friday March 12, 2021
8	Honduras	Female	Undergrad	Chiayi (National Chung Cheng University) ⁶³	3:00 pm	3:44 pm	44 minutes	Friday March 12, 2021

⁶² Interview Questionnaire send to interviewee alongside an explanatory email on a previous date.

⁶³ Interview Questionnaire send to interviewee alongside an explanatory email. on a previous date.

9	Honduras	Male	Master	Vietnamese Restaurant near Dongmen MRT Station	8:30 pm	9:15 pm	45 minutes	Friday March 12, 2021
10	Belize	Female	Master	Dante Coffee near National Taiwan Normal University	3:00 pm	3:35 pm	35 minutes	Saturday March 13, 2021
11	Guatemala	Female	Master	Beitou (National Yang Ming University) ⁶⁴	4:40 pm	5:05 pm	25 minutes	Saturday March 13, 2021
12	Honduras	Female	Master	Beitou (National Yang Ming University) ⁶⁵	9:30 pm	9:53 pm	23 minutes	Sunday March 14, 2021
13	Honduras	Male	Undergrad	National Chengchi University Campus	3:15 pm	3:50 pm	35 minutes	Wednesday March 17, 2021
14	Honduras	Male	Master	National Chengchi University Campus	4:15 pm	4:50 pm	35 minutes	Thursday March 18, 2021
15	Belize	Male	Undergrad	Louisa's Coffee near Guting MRT Station	4:00 pm	4:30 pm	30 minutes	Friday March 19, 2021
16	Belize	Male	PhD	Chiayi (National Chung Cheng University) ⁶⁶	7:20 am	7:50 pm	30 minutes	Saturday March 20, 2021
17	Nicaragua	Female	Master	Taichung (Feng Chia University) ⁶⁷	1:45 pm	2:35 pm	50 minutes	Sunday March 21, 2021

⁶⁴ Interview Questionnaire send to interviewee aongside an explanatory email on a previous date.

⁶⁵ Interview Questionnaire send to interviewee alongside an explanatory email on a previous date.

⁶⁶ Interview Questionnaire send to interviewee alongside an explanatory email on a previous date.

⁶⁷ Interview Questionnaire send to interviewee alongside an explanatory email on a previous date.

18	Nicaragua	Male	Undergrad	National Taiwan Normal University Campus ⁶⁸	2:15 pm	2:45 pm	30 minutes	Tuesday March 23, 2021
19	Nicaragua	Female	Undergrad	National Taiwan Normal University Campus	2:15 pm	2:45 pm	30 minutes	Tuesday March 23, 2021
20	Nicaragua	Male	Undergrad	National Taiwan Normal University Campus	2:15 pm	2:45 pm	30 minutes	Tuesday March 23, 2021
21	Guatemala	Female	Undergrad	Bread of Life International Church Office	7:00 pm	7:30 pm	30 minutes	Wednesday March 24, 2021
22	Nicaragua	Female	Undergrad	Louisa's Coffee near Mingquan West Rd. MRT Station	2:11 pm	2:40 pm	29 minutes	Friday March 26, 2021
23	Nicaragua	Female	Master	National Chengchi University Campus	4:00 pm	4:30 pm	30 minutes	Friday March 26, 2021
24	Guatemala	Female	Undergrad	Louisa's Coffee in Da'an Park	5:00 pm	5:30 pm	30 minutes	Saturday March 27, 2021
25	Guatemala	Female	Undergrad	Louisa's Coffee Da'an Park	6:00 pm	6:30 pm	30 minutes	Saturday March 27, 2021
26	Guatemala	Male	Master	Bread of Life International Church Coffee Shop	1:30 pm	2:05 pm	35 minutes	Tuesday March 30, 2021
27	Guatemala	Male	Undergrad	Subway Restaurant near National Taiwan Normal University	11:15 am	11:45 am	30 minutes	Wednesday March 31, 2021

⁶⁸ A group interview was conducted at National Taiwan Normal University Campus with these three Nicaraguan Scholarship recipients at the same time.

28	Nicaragua	Male	Master	Louisa's Coffee near Guting MRT Station	6:40 pm	7:15 pm	35 minutes	Wednesday March 31, 2021
9 ²	Honduras	Male	Master	Chiayi (National Chung Cheng University) ⁶⁹	10:45 pm	11:20 pm	35 minutes	Sunday April 5 2021
30	Nicaragua	Male	Master	Taichung ⁷⁰	9:00 pm	9:30 pm	30 minutes	Monday April 5, 2021
31	Belize	Female	Undergrad	Ming Quan University Campus ⁷¹	4:50 pm	5:20 pm	30 minutes	Tuesday April 6, 2021
32	Guatemala	Male	Undergrad	National Taipei University Campus ⁷²	4:00 pm	4:30 pm	30 minutes	Thursday April 8, 2021



⁶⁹ Interview Questionnaire send to interviewee alongside an explanatory email on a previous date.

⁷⁰ Interview Questionnaire send to interviewee alongside an explanatory email on a previous date.

⁷¹ Interview Questionnaire send to interviewee alongside an explanatory email on a previous date.

⁷² Interview Questionnaire send to interviewee alongside an explanatory email on a previous date.