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Contemporary Trends in East Asian Higher Education:

Dispositions of International Students in a Taiwan University

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Abstract

This article details a mixed methods study conducted during the 2007 – 2008 academic year at the National Chengchi University (NCCU) in Taipei Taiwan. It contributes to discourse examining the opportunities and challenges of international student enrollments in institutions of higher learning around the globe. In scope it details an empirical study exploring the dispositions of NCCU international students in terms of their academic and social spheres. Trends in Taiwan reflect traditional East Asian patterns; substantial numbers of university students from Taiwan studied in the United States and Britain while very few incoming international students chose the island nation as a host destination. In recent years the influx of international students to Taiwan has increased significantly, rising from 6,380 in 2001 to 21,005 in 2007. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods provided clarity and extended critical interpretations of the issues and dilemmas surrounding the international student experience in Taiwan. Results indicate that the capability of the NCCU as a host institution to sustain and attract increasing numbers of incoming international students is linked to factors such as the unique opportunity to study traditional as opposed to simplified Chinese characters, the availability and accessibility of Taiwan government sponsored scholarships, and the high standard of the NCCU Mandarin Studies program. Implications suggest that universities committed to internationalization are called to address the realities – both positive and negative – of operating as globally competitive institutions. As such,

attracting the right kind of international students at the NCCU and determining standards for their contribution to campus life are more important goals than the total number of international students.

Keywords: international student, internationalization, globalization, Taiwan, mixed-method study

Contemporary Trends in East Asian Higher Education:

Dispositions of International Students in a Taiwan University

The cross-border mobility of international students constitutes a critical element of the internationalization of higher education. Heightened interest in recent decades has shifted traditional mobility patterns from an elitist experience characterized by scholarship or fellowship recipients to the mass movement of individuals and groups (Teichler & Jahr, 2001). In the 21st century a select number of students define themselves as members of elite groups enrolled in high-quality degree programs in popular host destinations; the majority, however, leave home nations to obtain degrees at any personal financial expense. Others are motivated to acquire international experiences that complement concurrent academic programs in home nations. Traditionally international students migrated for association with world renowned scholars or to further a disciplinary knowledge base in nations such as the United States or Britain; in the contemporary era university students are more likely to study in the global arena in newly established host destinations for advancement of degrees, diplomas, or professional certification (Williams, 1981).

The Institute of International Education (IIE) definition of an international student is, one who undertakes all or part of his/her higher education experience in a country other than the home country (Project Atlas, 2004). More broadly, cross-border education is classified as a borderless asset of the global education industry that redefines traditional patterns and trends of international student mobility (Kwiek, 2005). Since 1995 the total number of international students has all but doubled, reaching nearly 2.7 million (OECD, 2006). Correspondingly the demand for global cross-border education is forecasted to increase from 1.8 million international students in 2000 to 7.2 million in 2025 (Bohm, Meares, & Pearce, 2002). Analysts predict that 70 percent of the global demand will be generated within the Asia Pacific region (Olsen, 2003).

In the contemporary era many nations have shifted foreign student policies from an aid approach to a trade rationale (Smart & Ang, 1993). Thus, signaling that cross-border education is a commodity of free trade rather than a public responsibility (Kirp, 2003). Given this the market for international students has become a dynamic growth industry sustained by universities, government agencies, private corporations, and entrepreneurs motivated by financial profit (Altbach, 2003). National governments are keen to sustain active involvement through their Ministries of Education or dedicated promotional agencies (Kemp, 1995), that capitalize on the benefits of international student populations as linked to skill migration, economic growth, public diplomacy, and research associated with a knowledge society (Kishun, 2007).

Contemporary patterns of cross-border mobility encompass a complex, contradictory,

and expansive discourse shaped by the discussions, policy issues, and mission statements of individual universities as well as the themes of education policy and global trade within the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (van der Wende, 2001). This discourse impacts newly established competitor nations that are expanding incoming international student enrollments, as well as the United States and Western Europe as leading yet declining host nation destinations (Zachrisson, 2001). The case of China exemplifies this position. In 2004, China was a leading sending country as defined by the nation's 343,126 university degree seeking students who studied abroad annually (UNESCO, 2006). In recent years China has also emerged as a popular host nation, as noted by expanding incoming international student enrollments from less than 45,000 in 1999 to more than 141,000 in 2005 (McCormack, 2007). Similar trends are occurring in Japan, South Korea, India, Malaysia, Thailand, and Taiwan.

Trends in Taiwan reflect traditional East Asian patterns; substantial numbers of university students from Taiwan studied in the United States and Britain while very few incoming international students chose the island nation as a host destination. In recent years the influx of international students to Taiwan has increased significantly, rising from 6,380 in 2001 to 21,005 in 2007 (Ko, 2008). Between 2001 and 2005 incoming international student enrollments from Central and South America increased 208 percent and 95 percent from European nations. Incoming students from Vietnam comprise the largest group, followed by Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan and the United States. Scholars attribute the rising population of incoming international students to the global popularity of Mandarin studies, the growing reputation of Taiwan universities as world class institutions, and availability of scholarships administered by the Taiwan Ministry of Education (MOE) (Ko, 2008).

While increasing international student enrollments in Taiwan universities are applauded by academic communities; scholarship examining the educational context and complexity of the international student experience remains limited (Ko, 2008). In response the following article details a mixed methods study conducted during the 2007 – 2008 academic year at the National Chengchi University (NCCU) in Taipei Taiwan. The research underscores the importance of international students' interpretations of the multiple meanings associated with their academic and social experiences in Taiwan and the sense of belonging within the NCCU community. Implications are offered as an East Asian exemplar and point of reference for the vision of internationalization at the NCCU.

Review of Literature

The examination of globalization and internationalization as distinct processes is essential for serious scholarship addressing contemporary trends in higher education. Globalization is a multifaceted phenomenon enveloped by economic, social, political and cultural dimensions that meld 21st century higher education to international endeavors. The

impact of globalization poses challenges to the role of nations as the sole providers of higher education and to academic communities as the primary voice for education decision-making. Processes of globalization within university settings transcend the integration of research, the use of English as the language of academia, the expanding international market for scholars, the growth of multinational publishing, and reliance on information technology (Altbach, 2003).

Scholars agree that processes of globalization are unalterable while those representing internationalization remain fluid and changeable (Mok, 2007). Internationalism, says, Elkin, Devjee and Farnsworth (2008, p. 326) “is not something that is either achieved or not achieved: rather it is an engagement with a range of dimensions.” Processes of internationalism are intertwined with a multiplicity of university administration policy, initiatives, and practices adopted in response to the affects of globalization (Scott, 1998) as noted by association with terminology such as: transnational, global, world, international, and cross-border education (Knight, 2002).

The changing landscape of international student mobility signals significant shifts associated with the 21st century. Table 1 highlights the United States as the most popular destination, followed by the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Australia, and Japan. The 21 leading host countries include 12 member states of the European Union. Combined, these countries host nearly three quarters of a million international students, approximately 25 percent more than the United States.

----- Table 1 -----

The profile of ideal host destinations, as suggested by the mobility patterns of international students, are nations that use English as an academic language, are recognized as industrialized, and maintain stable systems of higher education.

The examination of international student mobility trends and patterns is well established by a body of research identified with the push-pull framework (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985; Altbach, 1997; Cummings, 1993; Fry, 1984; Sirowy & Inkeles, 1985). This research suggests that international student’s progress through developmental stages of decision making beginning with commitments to study internationally and ending with the selection of host institutions. Researchers defined research push factors as conditions in home nations that engender interest in university education beyond national borders. Pull factors are attributes of a host nation that attract international students and affect the decision-making process for study at particular institutions (Mazzarol, 1998).

Agarwal and Winkler (1985) quantified pull factors for the United States as a host

destination among students from 15 developing nations. They noted that the percentage of international students enrolling in United States universities has declined in recent years. This shift was attributed to the rising cost of United States tertiary education and the multitude of university program options in students' home nations. As such a contemporary trend is involves nations that traditionally sent large numbers of students abroad; in recent years these nations have also become successful international centers via the offering of degree programs in English at a low expense (Chan & Ng, 2008).

In a related study McMahon (1992) used a push-pull model to statistically examine the mobility patterns of international students from 18 developing countries. Findings suggested that student flow was dependent on the level of economic wealth, the degree of involvement of the destination country in the world economy, and the priority placed on education by the home nation government. McMahon noted a negative correlation between economic prosperity in home countries and the volume of international student flow. Significant pull factors included the size of host nation economies and their political interests as evidenced by foreign assistance, transnational cultural links, and availability of international student scholarships.

In a summative study Massarol (1998) surmised that six pull factors consistently influence students' selection of host nations and institutions. The overall level of knowledge, access to information, and awareness of the destination nation within students' home country represented a critical pull factor. The reputation of host institutions for quality and the recognition of their degrees in students' home nations were significant attributes of this factor. A second pull factor was the number of personal recommendations students received from parents, relatives, friends and gatekeepers. The third factor related to financial issues, including the expense of fees, living, and travel along with social costs, such as crime, safety and racial discrimination. The presence of other students from home nations and the option for part-time work were important attributes of this factor. Additional factors included: the environment, as related to perceptions about the climate in the host country; the geographic and time proximity between home and host nations; and social links defined as family or friends residing in the destination country.

The utility of the push-pull framework is apparent given the identification of factors affecting mobility patterns and trends of university international students from developing nations. Yet in some respects this framework compromises attention to the complexities associated with the international student experience. Limitations are noted in terms of the exclusion of international students from developed countries who pursue tertiary level education in either developing or other developed nations. The design of the push-pull framework, moreover, locates the national identity of international students as a reference for commonality; thus international students are defined as a homogenized group rather than as clusters of individuals who have significant differences between and within their nationalities.

Critics argue that scholarship addressing the complexities of the international student experience remains on the fringe of cross-border education literature due in part to a deficit of concepts to articulate the multidimensional complexities of international students' experiences. In response, a transnational lens is offered to illuminate theoretical and critical interpretations intended to examine the "persistent pull of 'locality' as a social space of identity formation" (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998, p. 22)

A transnational lens is defined as "an unbounded terrain of interlocking egocentric networks that extends across the borders of two or more nation-states and that incorporates participants in the day-to-day activities of social reproduction in these various locations" (Fouron & Schiller, 2001, p. 544). Case study research presented in the text, *Crossing Customs: International Students Write on U.S. College Life and Culture*, exemplifies this definition. An emphasis on participant voice was considered a central method to examine international student experiences in terms of contrasts between familiarity and differences of daily life experience and the academic arena of host institutions. Guiding themes reveal the importance of renegotiating identities and developing habits of mind to consider the multitude of personal and professional options offered by the international student experience. The case study research contributes to discourse that (a) addresses the intersections of students' past, present, and future; (b) challenges critical interpretations of the issues and dilemmas surrounding the international student experience and; (c) refutes generalizations that international students are a homogeneous group who share common experiences in host nations (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998).

Research Design

Research Setting

The East Asian island nation of Taiwan is internationally recognized for its economic accomplishments in high-tech manufacturing, including the semiconductor and optoelectronics industries (Yang, 2007). Taiwan ranks 19th worldwide in terms of knowledge based economic competitiveness (World Bank Assessment, 2007). Policymakers and scholars examining the *Taiwanese economic miracle*, Yang (2007) cite factors such as land reform, United States aid, the establishment of export processing zones, government industrial policies, and a strong work ethic as elements of economic growth.

In recent years, critics in Taiwan have associated the 2008 presidential election of Ma Ying-jeou; a Kuomintang politician, with the nation's lagging economic growth (Wong, 2008). Mr. Ma ran on a platform of improving the economy through closer ties with China. The presidential election was viewed as a referendum on policies for Taiwan independence instituted by the former president, Chen Shui-bian. The role and influence of education in the current political climate is viewed as a key to Taiwan's economic growth (Wong, 2008). In

2000 the Taiwan government launched a series of initiative to transform and restructure prominent universities such as the NCCU. These initiatives committed government investment funds to accelerate the establishment of Taiwan institutions as world class universities and further seal the internationalization of higher education across the nation.

As a leading Taiwan institution of higher education the NCCU is committed to produce leaders that are humane, professional, innovative and cosmopolitan for the 21 century:

We aim to serve as leaders in innovation and explore the new fields of knowledge in response to the changing times, in order to become the leading academic institution in Taiwan, Asia and even the world. We will develop our unique features in teaching, researching, and service, on campus and in internationalization (Wu, 2008).

The vision of the current NCCU president resonates with the institution's active efforts toward internationalization involving approximately 12,000 students, 33 departments, and 47 MA programs. Internationalization is an integral element of the NCCU mission statement and strategic plans. As such the NCCU maintains close global contact with more than 150 universities and research institutes through a wide range of national and international projects. Opportunities for faculty exchanges and recruitment of international students are ongoing via a wide range of mutual cooperation agreements with institutions in Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, India, South Africa, Korea, China and Latin America.

Data collection and Analysis

The research was designed as a mixed method study. Methodology from both qualitative and quantitative paradigms were systematically combined (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Beginning research questions included:

1. What are the benefits and dilemmas associated with the NCCU international student population in terms of institutional commitments for the expansion of internationalization?
2. What are the interpretations of participants in regard to the issues and dilemmas surrounding the NCCU international student experience?

Scholars, who conduct research involving international dimensions, note the importance of primary sources as a viable option for data collection (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1996). In response the investigation was initiated with a review of sources to develop a contemporary reference for the dilemmas and issues of globalization in Taiwan and the NCCU. The inspection of written documents such as books, periodicals, newspapers, and legal documents to gain a foundation for the history, geography, ecological needs, and community efforts at work in Taiwan were ongoing during all stages of investigation.

Procedures for both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analyses were completed in sequential phases by means of a convenience sampling technique (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Data collection involved 88 participants from 17 countries, enrolled in the NCCU Mandarin Studies Program as full-time language students or with transition status to undergraduate and graduate programs. For the purposes of this research, participants were defined as those who (1) were citizens or permanent residents of a country other than Taiwan; (2) had legal residence outside of Taiwan; and (3) were in Taiwan solely for educational purposes on temporary student visas. The qualitative data set included 5 videotaped and voice recorded focus group interviews, the daily upkeep of a focus group field log, and biweekly researcher debriefing sessions. The quantitative data set consisted of a structured survey questionnaire designed to provide both descriptive and inferential evidence. Summaries and descriptions of the data collection procedures and analyses are outlined as Phase One and Two.

Phase One: A standardized written announcement was posted throughout the Mandarin Studies building and public student areas one week prior to scheduled focus group interviews. The announcement briefly introduced the study, included researchers' contact information, as well as the dates, times, and location of focus group interviews. In May 2008 focus group interviews convened on five consecutive days during the student lunch hour in a public yet semi private space near the Mandarin Studies classrooms. Participation was voluntary; pizza, cheese cake, and soft drinks were offered as incentives. Each focus group included 6-12 students along with one bilingual Chinese-English interviewer and assistant. Participants included 33 students ranging in age from 18 to 36; they represented 17 nations (Belgium, Brazil, Chile, France, Hungary, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kiribati, Korea, Mexico, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Philippines, Russia, Ukraine, and the United States). Interviews were conducted in English; participants responded using both English and Chinese.

Development of the interview guide followed principles outlined by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) as the funnel approach; six unstructured, open-ended questions were ordered from general to specific as a strategy to engage the interest of participants. Interview procedures included an introduction of the group discussion, overview of the topic, ground rules, and the initial question. All interviews were videotaped and voice recorded.

Documentation and analysis followed Stenhouse's (1985) categorization style of case data. The interviewer summarized key themes, reflections, and insights in a field log after each session. Minor adjustments were made for subsequent interviews based on a review of the field logs. Researchers independently reviewed field logs and focus group recordings to generate a list of key themes. Biweekly two hour sessions were scheduled to individually present and discuss emerging themes. The aim of the biweekly sessions was to identify trends and patterns that reappeared within either a single focus group interview or across them. A case record was established for each focus group interview. Data were kept intact as a way to

illuminate meaning and insights in relation to case by case processes and to glean themes and sub-categories across all cases under study. This approach limited the possibility of losing important themes of each case (Stenhouse, 1985). Primary themes were determined after all data were transcribed as case records. Topics and emerging themes were recorded and a master list was generated. A reexamination of case records was completed followed by formation of one case study.

Phase Two: A survey questionnaire was developed based on key themes generated from analysis of the focus group interviews and a review of the push-pull model literature. A pilot test was administered to a small sample and minor revisions were made. The survey questionnaire was administered on a voluntary basis in June 2008 in a public area of the Mandarin Studies building during the student lunch hour. Incentives for completion of the questionnaire included NCCU pens, candy, and various Taiwan souvenirs. The questionnaire was written in English and required approximately 10-20 minutes for completion.

A total of 45 participants' representative of 22 countries completed the questionnaire. Table 2 shows that English was the predominant first language of participants (27%), followed by Spanish (11%), and German (9%). Participants' second languages included English (44%), Mandarin Chinese (26%), and French (10%). Just over half of the sample (51%) consisted of international students studying abroad for the first time. Approximately one-third of the participants were enrolled in NCCU degree programs; all others were full-time students in the university Mandarin Studies program.

----- Table 2 -----

Data gathered from the survey questionnaire were encoded and analyzed using the Statistics Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 15. Internal consistency using Lee Cronbach's (1951) coefficient alpha (Cronbach's alpha) was computed at 0.89, suggesting a high level (Nunnally & Bemstein, 1994). Descriptive analysis included the mean, standard deviation (SD) and cross-tabulation of participants' multiple responses for identified questions.

Results and Discussions

Factors Influencing International Students' Decisions to Study in Taiwan

Choosing a host nation involves decisions made with high involvement and commitment, due in part to the expanding options for study abroad destinations around the globe (Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006). Eight factors identified as reasons for choosing Taiwan as a host

nation are presented in Table 3. While all factors contributed to the decision to study in Taiwan, some were significant to a majority of participants while others to only a small percentage.

The availability of established and highly recognized Mandarin language programs was rated as an important deciding factor. The significance of this factor is not surprising given that nearly all institutions of higher education receiving international students offer intensive courses in the primary languages of host nations. That said the importance of this factor suggests that Taiwan is globally profiled as a viable host destination. The availability of the NCCU Mandarin Studies Program provided participants with a foundation of Mandarin for both social and academic mobility in Taiwan.

Additional factors included safety and security (14%) the view of Taiwan as a technologically modern nation (13%), the democratic system and political stability of the nation (9%), and word of mouth recommendations from former teachers (3%).

----- Table 3 -----

The most intriguing results were the unique opportunity that Taiwan provided to study traditional Chinese characters as opposed to simplified characters (9%) and the importance of Taiwan government sponsored scholarships. Twenty seven percent of participants rated Taiwan scholarship awards as critical to their decision to study in Taiwan.

Table 4 illustrates that 91% of participants received scholarships offered by either the Taiwan Scholarship Program (jointly funded by the MOE, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Nation Science Council, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs) or the MOE Mandarin Enrichment Scholarship Program (funded by the MOE). Applications for both scholarships are submitted to Taiwan overseas missions located in students' home nations.

The availability of host nation government scholarships is well established as a significant pull factor (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985; Cummings, 1993). Given this, the popularity of Taiwan government scholarships could be viewed as a contributing factor for the expanding international student enrollments. That said participants' rationale for receiving Taiwan scholarships was not typically linked to financial hardship. Table 4 illustrates that approximately 87% of scholarship recipients labeled themselves as either middle or upper socio-economic status. Thirty percent of participants labeled their parents as professionals or self employed business entrepreneurs and reported that 31 % of parents had obtained graduate degrees.

The scholarships provide financial support from one to four years of study and range from NT 25,000 monthly for undergraduate students to NT 30,000 monthly for graduate

students. Thirty-two percent of participants reported that the scholarships were not sufficient for living expenses in Taiwan and 63% reported that the awards provided just enough in terms of financial support. These findings suggest tremendous discrepancy in living standards given that newly graduated college students in Taiwan earn from NT 26, 000 to 28, 000 monthly (CENS, 2008).

----- Table 4 -----

In many nations incoming international students represent the premier source for university internationalization. As a newly emerging competitor host nation, Taiwan envisions its national system of higher education as an international center, where people from around the world come to learn from each other. As such the MOE government scholarships enhance the cultural composition of Taiwan universities' student bodies and contribute to institutional prestige (Lo & Weng, 2005; Mok & Tan, 2004). The immersion of international students among the NCCU local students represents, therefore, a pivotal objective of the university efforts for internationalization.

The concept of immersion suggests a deep level of engagement or involvement among the Taiwan students and participants. With this in mind Table 5 summarizes 7 institutionally sanctioned NCCU organizations that provide opportunities for the immersion of NCCU international students with local students. The Table also displays the percentage of participant involvement with campus organizations. Strikingly, more than seventy percent of participants reported non-involvement with the NCCU organizations.

----- Table 5 -----

The lack of participant involvement is a complex and multifaceted issue which calls for close examination. Foremost it represents a responsibility of the NCCU administrators and decision-makers charged with standard-setting, capacity building and the formulation of policies and strategies to meet the challenges posed by internationalization.

International Students' Satisfaction at the NCCU

Table 6 highlights participants' reasons for choosing the NCCU as a host institution. Results indicate that the strength of the NCCU is anchored by the reputation of the Mandarin Studies program as a premiere language institution. The remaining factors including, recommendation of family and friends, recommendation by the embassy or cultural offices,

environment conducive to learning, informative website, and availability of course programs are well documented in the literature as important factors of the student decision making process.

----- Table 6 -----

Taken a step further, Table 7 summarizes 7 factors and associated attributes that measured participants' satisfaction as NCCU international students. Values in bold above 3.90, signify significant rankings. The high values associated with three of the four attributes of the factor, Mandarin Study Program, were not surprising, as few participants would seek to complete language study in a foreign country at an institution where education standards were low. That said, these attributes were not sufficient to ensure participant selection of the NCCU as a host institution. All of the significant values outlined in table 7, work together to profile the NCCU as a reputable host institution (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). In other words, the NCCU must have a reputation for quality support staff; its academic qualifications moreover must be recognized by prospective international students; and Taiwan as a host nation must maintain a high international profile.

Research by Lawley (1997) and Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) showed that interpersonal influences are important factors influencing international students' satisfaction in host institutions. The overall value of 3.96 associated with the attribute, Embassy and TECO personnel, for example, suggests that the factor, Pre-Departure Preparation represents important elements of pre-departure preparation for participants. In a similar vein the high value associated with positive interactions with the International Center under the factor, Initial Impressions of the NCCU reinforce the importance of trained support staff to assist international students with their needs from pre-departure to adjustment at the host institution. The overall satisfaction with the NCCU was rated at 4.07, indicating that participants were satisfied with their decision to study at this host institution.

----- Table 7 -----

NCCU International Students: Challenges and Rewards

Tables 8 and 9 summarize factors identified by participants as the challenging and rewarding aspects of living and studying in Taiwan as NCCU international students. Table VIII displays 7 factors identified as the most challenging. The factor, memorizing Chinese characters was ranked as most challenging. This factor also represented a primary theme of

focus group interviews:

When I first got to Taiwan it wasn't just getting used to a new culture, a new way to take out the trash, or figuring out how to navigate around Taipei. It went all the way to figuring out how to study this new language that had absolutely no similarities to mine except the Roman alphabet used in pinyin. In the beginning I studied how I did in the states—with groups of people, talking about the class, going over notes. This didn't work because I was failing. I soon realized that Chinese required 100 percent dedication. I had to memorize the language instead of relying on the context to help me interpret. In place of interpretation I had to know exactly what I was hearing and speaking in order to be successful and progress in the Mandarin Studies Program. Most of my friends had a similar wakeup call (FGT1).

As newcomers, participants arrived to the NCCU with established systems for coping, studying, and socializing, yet often their strategies did not fit or conform to the standards of the Taiwan cultures and the NCCU academic community. Participants from Western nations, in particular, reported a process defined in the literature as renegotiating identities and developing habits of mind (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). This process was likened to the challenge of memorizing up to a hundred new traditional Chinese characters weekly, adaptation to differences in education systems, disparity in the philosophy and purpose of education, learning styles, and contrasting education values.

The remaining factors: adjusting to the climate; cultural gap, adjusting to the food; homesickness and loneliness; pronunciation of Chinese; and being a non-English speaker are documented in the literature as important factors of international students' adjustment and academic success in host institutions (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). These factors work together as a holistic interpretation of the influences that challenge participants in their responsibilities as NCCU international students.

----- Table 8 -----

Participants reported that living and studying in Taiwan added a stimulating dimension to their academic programs and a valuable investment in future careers. Table 9 displays 6 factors identified as rewarding aspects of international student status. The most significant factors, learning a new language firsthand and experiencing life outside of the home country are probably utilitarian; Cant (2004) notes that informed citizenship requires an understanding of other cultures and societies. Hence the ability to understand the Mandarin language and Taiwan culture was reported by participants as rewarding factors. Combined

these factors reflected a primary focus group theme defined by the sense of fulfillment and self-confidence born from the experience of living and studying at the NCCU:

Studying in Taiwan not only reinforced my intellectual capacity but through my Chinese studies I was given the opportunity to understand Chinese culture and the thought process of this area of the world. As a person who wants to be connected to the world and able to truly identify with someone from another culture. This was an invaluable learning and growing experience and one that I hold as a landmark of my development as a capable and independent person in a globalizing world (FGT2).

Ranking of the remaining factors: making new friends (17%); experiencing a new culture (12%); becoming a global citizen (11%); and becoming more mature (9%) reflect the value of international experiences in terms of the ability to better relate to others and to accept diversity and different lifestyles.

----- Table 9 -----

Studying at the NCCU offered participants first-hand experience to learn not only about cultural traditions, but to comprehend the place of East Asia in the world. Regardless of their academic areas, participants reported that they were better citizens because of an increased understanding of Taiwan. One participant addressed the idea of a global experience, “*Studying at the NCCU is a chance to see another culture and broaden my perspectives of the world*” (FGT2b). Key words repeatedly used to describe their experiences as international students included “*global consciousness*” and becoming “*a global citizen*” (FGT2c).

Traveling to, living, and studying in Taiwan at the NCCU sets precedence for unavoidable social and cultural encounters that stimulated participants’ intellect to adapt. Participants gained invaluable experiences unobtainable in classrooms and communities in their home nations:

I want to be part of an interconnected world; studying at the NCCU helped me realize that other parts of the world are real and that I am a part of them. Being here has helped me see progress in a positive manner and to operate within a system of connectedness. A lot of people in the world, in the United States, are losing consciousness, without this, without empathy and knowledge, we will never progress. I remember being reaffirmed of all this when I returned to my home for a visit. I realized you take the learning back home. I taught calligraphy to an art class in my old elementary school. Wow this really opened the eyes of not only the students but the teachers too. They loved it and asked me to return the following

week (FGT3).

In sum participants developed an appreciation of other cultures and the ability to effectively interact and participate in local, national, and international affairs.

Implications and Conclusion

This article contributes to discourse examining the opportunities and challenges of international student enrollments in institutions of higher learning around the globe. In scope it details an empirical study exploring the dispositions of NCCU international students in terms of their academic and social spheres. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods provided clarity and extended critical interpretations of the issues and dilemmas surrounding the international student experience. The combined sample size of the questionnaire and focus groups did not allow for broad generalizations of findings; they did however, generate a useful premise to stimulate further research.

The NCCU is aligned with twenty-first century universities facing tremendous challenges to sustain intellectual and cultural viability in a rapidly changing world and to prepare students to participate competitively in the globalized marketplace while managing the expanding surge of electronic information and knowledge. The internationalization of NCCU represents a trendy response to these challenges. Efforts of the Taiwan government to develop national policies and set targets to attract substantial numbers of international students are impressive. Key implications suggest that the capability of the NCCU as a host institution to sustain and attract increasing numbers of incoming international students is linked to factors such as the unique opportunity to study traditional as opposed to simplified Chinese characters, the availability and accessibility of Taiwan government sponsored scholarships, and the high standard of the Mandarin Studies program.

Universities committed to internationalization are called to address the realities – both positive and negative – of operating as globally competitive institutions. This implies that attracting the right kind of international students at the NCCU and determining standards for their contribution to campus life are more important goals than the total number of international students. The NCCU has been highly successful with international marketing campaigns and the recruit of international students on a global scale. Yet Davis (1995) notes that while a statistical measure provides an anchor for policy initiatives, it should not serve as an end point. Rather, a critical interpretation is paramount to the development of policies and practices supportive of the issues and dilemmas of expanding numbers of international students on the NCCU campus.

The term *diploma disease*, coined by Dore (1976) signifies this phenomenon. Dore argues that the sheer magnitude of students traveling internationally in the pursuit of advanced degrees, diplomas, or certifications has shifted the purpose and direction of tertiary education.

Education, says Dore, is not a commercial endeavor defined by time or space but rather the harmonious development of the physical, mental, moral, and social dimensions of life necessary for engagement with opportunities to gain both knowledge and wisdom. This stance suggests that determining the form of higher education best suited for the NCCU academic community should remain a pressing issue side by side engagement with contemporary processes of internationalization.

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Tables

Table 1

Leading Host Nation Destinations

Country	Quantity	Country	Quantity	Country	Quantity
US	547,092	Belgium	37,789	Netherlands	13,949
UK	222,576	Canada	34,536	Jordan	12,154
Germany	185,179	Austria	30,064	Portugal	10,998
France	134,783	Switzerland	24,729	New Zealand	7,603
Australia	69,668	Italy	21,229	Denmark	7,124
Japan	59,656	Sweden	20,631	Ireland	5,564
Spain	40,506	Turkey	17,635	Korea	2,737

Source. Project Atlas: Atlas of student mobility (Project Atlas, 2004)

Table 2

Participant demographics (N=45)

Factor	<i>n</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max.
Age	45		25.18	5.16	18	38
Gender						
Male	25	56	25.92	5.47		
Female	20	44	24.25	4.72		
First language						
English	12	27				
Spanish	5	11				
German	4	9				
Second language						
English	27	44				
Mandarin	16	26				
French	6	10				
NCCU Program						
Mandarin Studies	30	67				
Degree Seeking	11	24				
Exchange Student	4	9				
Study abroad experience ^a						
First time	23	51				
Two	13	29				
Three	7	16				
More than three	2	4				

Note. ^aNumber of short and/or long term study abroad experiences.

Table 3

Reasons for choosing Taiwan (N=101)^a

Factor	<i>n</i>	%
Scholarship	28	27
Mandarin Chinese study programs	19	19
Safety/security	14	14
Modern/technological advance country	13	13
Political/democratic country	10	10
Learn traditional characters	9	9
Recommended by teacher	3	3
Other	5	5

Note. ^aEach participant selected a maximum of three factors.

Table 4

Participants' SES, parents' background, and scholarship satisfaction (N=45)

Factor	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%	
Scholarship^a	Yes	41	91	No	4	9
SES^b						
Low		2	4		1	2
Middle		35	78		3	7
High		4	9		0	0
Parent /guardians’ profession^c						
Unemployed		3	7		0	0
Employed		18	40		2	4
Self-employed		9	20		1	2
Professional		7	16		1	2
Parents’ highest educational attainment^d						
High school		14	31		3	7
College		9	20		0	0
Masters		11	24		1	2
Ph. D.		3	7		0	0
Satisfaction towards scholarship (N=41)^e						
Not enough		13	32			
Just enough		26	63			
More than enough		2	5			

Note. ^aParticipants who are on scholarship grant given by the Taiwan government.

^bSocio-economic status of the participants' family in home country.

^cOccupation of the participant's parents / guardians (4 missing / no answer).

^dHighest educational attainment of participant's parents / guardians (4 missing / no answer).

^eScholarship recipient participants' satisfaction rating towards monthly stipend provided by the scholarship.

Table 5

International student participation in NCCU activities (N=45)

Factor		<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
Clubs ^a	Yes	6	13	No	39	87
Sports ^b		14	31		31	69
Calligraphy class		10	22		35	78
Cultural trips		24	53		21	47
Language buddy program		0	0		45	100
Language tutor/group		13	29		32	71
Student ambassador		4	9		41	91

Note. ^aNCCU organizations clubs: dance, mountain climbing, literary, book groups, etc.

^bNCCU sports such as basketball, volleyball, swimming, and many others.

Table 6

Reasons for choosing NCCU (N=91)^a

Factor	<i>n</i>	%
Recommended by friends/classmates	19	21
Mandarin Chinese study programs	18	20
Recommended by embassy/cultural and economic offices	16	18
Environment conducive to learning	12	13
Informative website	11	12
Course program availability/English programs	8	9
Others	7	5

Note. ^aEach participant selected a maximum of three factors.

Table 7

International students' satisfaction^a in Taiwan at the NCCU (N=45)^b

Factor	M	SD	Min.	Max.
Pre-departure preparation				
VISA application	3.76	0.883	1	5
Scholarship application	3.51	0.944	1	5
Embassy/TECO ^c personnel	3.96	1.043	1	5
Info on academic programs/scholarship	3.47	0.968	2	5
Initial impressions of NCCU				
NCCU website	3.49	0.787	2	5
Admission procedures	3.53	0.894	2	5
Course program selection	3.49	0.991	2	5
NCCU personnel	3.93	0.809	2	5
Academic, & emotional support	3.64	0.957	1	5
Mandarin Study Program				
Met academic needs	3.78	0.927	1	5
Provides a strong foundation	3.93	0.720	3	5
Teachers' qualification	3.98	0.812	1	5
Lessons and exercises	4.04	0.796	2	5
Word of Mouth Referral	3.98	0.892	1	5
NCCU facilities				
Library, gym, pool, and others	3.93	0.915	1	5
Living in dormitory	2.58	1.340	1	5
Future Expectations				
Becoming an Alumni member	3.44	1.035	1	5
Retain contact with NCCU	3.60	0.939	1	5
Overall				
Personal/academic challenge	3.69	0.848	1	5
Satisfaction with the NCCU as study destination	4.07	0.889	1	5

Note. ^a5 signifies very satisfied, while 1 signifies not very satisfied.

^bCronbach's alpha = 0.89

^cTaiwan Economic and Cultural Office.

Table 8

Challenging aspects of NCCU international students (N=100)^a

Factor	<i>n</i>	%
Memorizing Chinese characters	26	26
Adjusting to the climate/weather	24	24
Cultural gap	14	14
Adjusting to the food	11	11
Homesickness/loneliness	11	11
Pronunciation of Chinese Mandarin language	6	6
Being a non-English speaker	4	4
Others	4	4

Note. ^aEach participant selected a maximum of three choices.

Table 9

Rewarding aspects of being an international students (N=121)^a

Factor	<i>n</i>	%
Learning a new language firsthand	33	27
Experience life outside home country	27	22
Meet new friends	20	17
Experience a new culture	15	12
Opportunity of becoming a global citizen	13	11
Becoming more mature and independent	11	9
Others	2	2

Note. ^aEach participants were asked to select a maximum of three choices.