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The Enthusiasm for Studying in China: The Study and Life Experience of Taishang Schools' Students, and the Effects on Their Choices of Higher Education

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CCKF-ERCCT 2019 Young Scholars Workshop Paper

The Enthusiasm for Studying in China: The Study and Life Experience of Taishang Schools' Students, and the Effects on Their Choices of Higher Education

Yung-Chen Yuan

Abstract

The development of China's economy has attracted a number of Taiwanese migrants, even including student migration for higher education. This study focuses on Taishang's children who come to China with their parents, and they have living and studying experience of China. Based on 1010 questionnaires data and 48 in-depth interviews with three Taishang schools' students in China, this article aims to explore the future study plan of Taishang's children and the effects on their choice. The research result shows that the majority of interviewees would like to go back to Taiwan for higher education. However, the economic factors are still the main reason that affects Taiwan students' choice of staying in China for the high education.

1. Introduction

Since Taiwan's government acknowledged the diplomas issued by 41 specified higher education institutions in China from 2010, the mainland-issued diplomas no longer hamper Taiwanese students' future studying and career plans, therefore, some Taiwanese students started to choose to study at China's universities. In 2016, a total of 155 higher education institutions and 191 colleges in China were recognised by Taiwan's government. In recent years, along with the boom in economic development in China, China's employment opportunities increase, coupled with the better ranking of Chinese universities in the world than Taiwanese universities, which has attracted many Taiwanese students to attend China higher education, and to understand their community and build up networks with local people for their future career in China.

The statistics of Taiwan Straits Admissions Service Centre shows, there were about 11,217 Taiwanese students enrolled in Chinese universities or colleges in 2017. According to Taiwan's government statistics, from 2013 to 2017, each year there were around 2,000-2,500 Taiwanese students choosing to study in colleges or higher education establishments in China (Mainland Affairs Council, 2017).

Meanwhile, there are a group of Taiwanese students (Taisheng) who are Taiwanese businessmen's (Taishang) children, come to China with their parents since childhood. Therefore, these Taishang's children live in China and have experience of elementary or secondary education in China, and have better knowledge about Chinese society, comparing with the students who grew up in Taiwan then go to China for higher education. Taishang's (Taiwanese businessmen's) children moved to China for family unity and harmony, because their parents work and live in China.

With more and more Taishang's children moving to China, education has become the most important consideration for Taiwanese families in China. In order to solve those issues for *Taishangs* and their children, the Taiwan Businessmen Association Dongguan sought assistance from the governments of Taiwan and China to establish *Taishang* schools in China since 1995. Taiwan Businessmen's Dongguan School opened and started to enrol students in 2000. Since then, Huadong Taiwan Businessmen's school was established in 2001; and Shanghai Taiwanese Children's School in 2005.

These three *Taishang* schools use Taiwan's curriculum and textbooks, and replicate Taiwan's educational environment. For Taiwanese government, besides solving Taishang children's education problem and enhancing their knowledge and understanding of Taiwanese society and culture, Taiwanese government expected to generate the Taishang and their children's cohesion within Taiwan by funding the Taishang schools' teaching materials and equipment, as well as providing grants for the Taishang schools' students (Proceedings of Education and Culture Committee 92: 50 [29.10.2003]). On the other hand, the Chinese government's attitude aimed to resolve the educational problem of Taishang children, in order to attract Taishang investment and stable development in China (Lin, 2002). Moreover, from a political perspective, if Taishang children were willing to attend local institutions and accept

local education they could potentially cultivate emotional identification with the Chinese nation, benefitting China's goal of achieving Cross-Strait reunification (Wu 2015).

According to the statistic of Taiwan's Ministry of Education, between 2010 and 2015, every year all of three Taishang schools had more than 70% of graduating students who chose to go back to Taiwan for their higher education. From 2016, the proportion of graduating students who chose to attend Taiwan's higher educational institutions has dropped significantly. In 2017, apart from Huadong Taishang School which still had nearly 60% of graduating students who went back to Taiwan, both Dongguan and Shanghai Taishang schools only had 35% of graduating students who chose to study in Taiwan's higher educational institutions. However, this statistic does not indicate those Taisheng who do not chose to attend Taiwan's higher education, whether they chose to continue their further study in China, or go to another country. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore Taisheng's future study plan and the effects on their choice.

This study aims to understand whether Taisheng's experience of living and studying in China will affect their impression of China and their future plans for further studies.

2. Literature Review

Why do people migrate? The migration scholar proposes the push-pull effect to explain the migration behaviour from an economic perspective. This theory is based on the idea that the migration is primarily motivated by economic factors (Thomas 1973). The countries with poor economic development will push people toward the countries with better economic conditions. In contrast, the countries with better economics will attract people to come for better economic opportunities. However, Everett S Lee (1966) suggests that migration theory should consider other external factors, such as factors associated with the area of origin and the area of destination, the intervening obstacles during migration process, and personal factors. Moreover, previous studies indicated the connection between life-course and migration (Bailey, 2009). Besides, young adults are the most mobile group (Bernard, et al. 2014), and

education completion, labour force entry, getting married, and first childbearing are the four key life-course transitions associated with migration. Therefore, this research will discuss the factors influence Taisheng's choice of higher education by exploring their life-course stage, and their life experience in Taiwan and in China.

From a sociological perspective, social interaction, such as friendships and networks, are influencing people's attitudes toward immigrant countries. As Gordon W. Allport's 'Contact hypothesis' (1954) emphasises, social contact will affect a person's attitude to others. Social contact between majority and minority groups may reduce prejudice (Allport, 1979), whilst contact will make re-categorisation possible. After a certain degree of exposure to others, people may begin to think of themselves from a larger group perspective (Pettigrew, 1998) and help blur the boundaries between them, emphasising similarities (Perdue *et al.*, 1990).

However, people would tend to have contact with those who already have similarities to them (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2013). This homophily principle structures people's network ties. As McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook's study explains, 'homophily limits people's social world in a way that has powerful implications for the information they receive, the attitudes they form, and the interactions they experience' (2001: 415). Migration breaks the geographical limitations and allows people to have more interactions with people from different national backgrounds. The inter-group and out-group contacts have a more important impact on immigrants.

John Berry (1997) also expresses that cultural distance is a factor that influences acculturation: when different groups of people come into contact with each other, social distance determines the extent of acceptance between them. A large difference between two cultures will lead to poorer adaptation. Immigrants who have ethnic and cultural affinity with local people will be integrated into receiving countries more easily, such as the examples given by Castles and Miller (2003; 2009): Western Europeans in North America are quickly assimilated, with Britons in Australia are virtually indistinguishable from the host country citizens. Cultural nepotism emphasises that people tend to feel more intimate with those whom they feel they share a common culture with than with those they do not. Immigrated assimilation

presumes 'a more profound effect on ethnic consciousness' and a relatively smooth social incorporation of migrants who have ethnic and cultural affinity with their hosts than other foreign groups who have no ethnic and cultural relevance with their settlements (Tauda, 2009: 7).

In this study, Taiwanese students in China are subject to all of these different identity formation processes. They do not have the same shared set of cultural elements with Chinese people. Cultural heritage is fluid and 'changing depending on the context of space and time' (Ford, 2010), with these cultural practices passed on from one generation to the next. Although Taiwanese society inherited a part of Chinese culture, it has also been influenced by aboriginal culture and Japanese culture. Besides, Taiwanese society has also developed its own social values that differentiate it from Chinese society, forming its own characteristics and elements. Even though Taiwanese people use the same spoken language and share some customs with Chinese people, they do not have the same set of shared cultural elements. The Taisheng might have varying degrees of cultural distance and affinity with Chinese people because their social backgrounds are different. Also, some previous Taishang studies present that cultural affinity did not bring Taiwanese and Chinese people closer (Lin, 2009; Wei, 2016). Chinese researcher, Zhilan Yan's (2014) found that although the Taishang have the advantages of shared language and cultural affinity with Chinese people, the Taishang in China have dominant foreigner characteristics with an economic and cultural privilege that makes them lack the initiation to actively integrate into Chinese society.

Whether these cultural and social similarities and differences will influence on Taisheng's integration with Chinese community, and whether their extent of their integration will have impact on their decision for future study would be explore in this study.

Earlier theories of migration suggest emigration/immigration spells the loss of nation and its replacement with a new one, in which the immigrants' identity will more or less be gradually influenced by local communities after long-term residence in the host country. As Alfred Sauvy (1969: 460-461) claims, international migrants have to experience three stages to complete the process of migration after relocation:

settlement, adaptation and total assimilation. After long-term exposure to the new social and cultural environment, immigrants will get used to local customs, language and social values, which might help them integrate into the local society.

The length of living and studying in Taiwan was different before the Taiwanese students moved to China. Some have a long-term living and studying experience in Taiwan, whilst others may only have living experience without the studying experience, and others might have neither in Taiwan. Thus, it can be predicted that if immigration occurs after they grow up, there is a much stronger impact from their original country and that it may be more difficult for them to integrate into the settlement. Therefore, the age at which they immigrate and the length of residence in Taiwan and China are crucial indicators for observing change of sense of belongings. Whether long-term residence will give them a sense of belonging with the local society, and then willing to stay for further education is worth exploring. However, having contact does not guarantee identity transformation; interaction also causes immigrants to strengthen their original identity by being aware of explicit differences between each other. National identity is not only capable of defining who is a member of a community but also who is a foreigner. As Anna Triandafyllidou states, ‘for most national communities, there have been and there probably still are significant others.....from which the community tried to liberate and/or differentiate itself’ (Triandafyllidou, 1998: 594). Identity refers to how people define who we are and how they relate to others (Hogg & Abrams, 1999). Previous Taishang research indicated that the *Taishang* find differences between themselves and Chinese after they have more interactions with them (Lin, Keng & Schubert, 2012).

Besides language barriers, coupled with differences in lifestyle, habits and values, the experience of prejudice and discrimination in a receiving country can also affect the newcomer’s acculturation and sense of belonging. Berry (1997) argues that an immigrant’s social background, personal attitude to the host country, extent of contact with the host society, the immigration and acculturation policies, ideologies and attitudes in the dominant society, and social support all contribute to their adaption. He generalises four possible acculturation strategies for non-dominant groups to choose how they want to acculturate: assimilation, separation, integration and

marginalisation. These strategies reflect the extent of the immigrants' cultural and identity maintenance, contact and participation with the dominant society (Berry, 1997: 9-10). In Taiwan, Chinese people have become special others owing to Taiwan's status of being oppressed by China in the international community and threatened with force, leading to the Taiwanese people's resistance identity arising from feeling marginalised and threatened (Li-Wen Tung, 2013).

Apart from economic and social factors, the political factors may also affect Taisheng's choice of higher education. In April and May of 2018, numerous news media reported that the number of Taiwanese high school graduates chose to go to China for the higher education, especially those who attended the top-ranking high schools. These reports initiated public discussion and were concerned by the government.

Whether these news reports and public opinion are manipulated by China's influence operations, and the authenticity of the media reports and the implication of a serious brain drain of youth Taiwanese are questioned (Chen, 2018). The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) spokesperson Chiu Chui-Cheng said that it is essential to be aware of the China's "sharp power" offensive and these news reports of advocating young Taiwanese go to China for education and employment could be one of the influence operations (Shih, 2018). According to *The Economist*, "sharp power" is a form of influence which helps authoritarian regimes coerce and manipulate opinion abroad.

After the Sunflower Movement of 2014, the Chinese government has changed its strategy toward Taiwan, especially focusing on young Taiwanese people. China has put a lot of resources and effort to attract Taiwanese youth by emphasizing the exchange of experience and interaction, through subsidized Taiwanese students to participate in exchange camps and internships in China, and lowered the test score standards for high school students to apply for Chinese colleges, and set up youth entrepreneurship bases in various locations in China and provided funding to attract Taiwanese youth to work in China (Lin, 2018; Lin and Su, 2017). Chinese government hopes that through these cross-strait interactions, it might able to change

the perception of Taiwan's younger generation to China; therefore, they will no longer hate China, even like China (Wu, 2018).

But not like Taiwan's high school students, generally have no experience in China, Taisheng are living in China, and may have more or less interaction with local community, whether their experience in China will affect their choice of further education will be discussing in this article.

3. Methodology

This study is a multi-methods approach, and I had adopted in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys to understand Taisheng's choices of future study plan. The participant observation in the field supplements the previous two methods. The participants in this study are senior high school students of Taiwanese businessmen's school, usually aged between 16-18 years old, to ensure some homogeneity of their intellectual development and capacity for independent thought. The majority of the primary data was sampled and collected during periods of field research between February and June 2013 in three Taiwanese businessmen's schools in China.

This study has looked at all three Taishang schools in China and a broader range of methodologies because I want to access Taisheng in different area, in different school types (boarding school and non-boarding schools) and access more of the Taishengs' thoughts and behaviour pattern. The three schools highlight something more significant, with a wider base of sample size; therefore, this research has provided a broader base for the interviews and a broader base for the survey questionnaires. The participants included senior high school students of all three Taiwanese businessmen's schools. The fieldwork was conducted in Shanghai, Kunshan and Dongguan from January-June 2013, and interviewed 48 students and collected 1010 questionnaires.

4. Research Findings

In general, except for a small number of Taisheng who choose to go to the other country, and a quarter of Taisheng plans to continue their higher education in China,

the majority of Taisheng will choose to go back to study in Taiwan. Moreover, this study finds that there is no significant relationship between the *Taisheng's* plans for future study and their study experience. According to principle Chen of Dongguan Taishang School, building up connections with Taiwan's education system and Taiwanese students in China, and assisting Taiwanese students to continue their education in Taiwan, are the key missions and purposes for establishing Taishang schools in China (Chen, 2008). However, the survey data shows (Table 1) that not all Taishang schools' students will go back to Taiwan for higher education. This means that their future study will not be affected by whether they have studied in Taiwan or in Chinese public schools.

Table 1 Where do you plan to study in the future? Data organised by the length of study in Taishang school

	0.5-3 years	3.5-6 years	6.5-9 years	9.5-13 years	Total
Taiwan	55.4%	61.8%	57.4%	55.4%	56.9%
China	27.7%	22.6%	23.4%	28.6%	26.3%
Either Taiwan and China	5.8%	4.1%	6.4%	8.0%	5.8%
Other Country	7.7%	6.0%	6.4%	4.5%	6.7%
Don't know	3.4%	5.5%	6.4%	3.6%	4.3%
Total (N)	531	217	141	112	1009
			df	Sig. (2-sided)	Value
Chi-square test			12	.564	10.593 ^a

The Table 1 also shows that even if they have studied in Taishang schools for a long period, it does not affect their willingness to study in Taiwan for their higher education.

Based on the quantitative data (Table 2), nearly 60% of participants expect to go back to Taiwan for future study, with 26% of Taisheng wishing to stay in China for their higher education. However, there are differences in the participants' future plans between the three Taishang schools. Nearly half the students at the Shanghai Taishang School would like to go back to Taiwan, whilst another third wish to continue their studies in China.

Table 2 Where do you plan to study in the future? Data organised by Taishang school

	Huadong	Shanghai	Dongguan	Total
Taiwan	65.7%	47.7%	56.8%	56.9%
China	20.3%	33.9%	25.6%	26.3%
Either Taiwan and China	4.4%	5.4%	6.7%	5.8%
Other Country	6.4%	5.9%	7.3%	6.7%
Don't know	3.2%	7.1%	3.5%	4.3%
Total (N)	251	239	519	1009
		Value	df	Sig. (2-sided)
Chi-square test		24.050 ^a	8	.002

One possible reason to explain why Shanghai Taishang School's students are more likely to choose to study in China than the other two school is that Shanghai is a modern, international city, and one of the largest city in China. Dongguan, however, is a regional city known for manufacturing. Although the three Taishang schools are located approximately an hour drive away from the city centre, the differences in city development might lead the Taisheng to have different attitudes towards their host community. The Shanghai Taiwanese Children School students can easily access urban life, with some even living in the city centre. As the largest international city in China, the infrastructure and urban construction of Shanghai is complete and surpasses any city in Taiwan. Therefore, many students gradually have positive impression of China because Shanghai is a cosmopolitan city. The findings of this current research accord with Lin's (2010) study that Taiwanese immigrants living in Shanghai are more likely to have a positive impression of the local communities than those who live in Dongguan.

I think Shanghai is more like an international city than Taiwan. Nowadays, my opinion is that China has an international perspective and has fewer limitations than Taiwan, and Taiwan is a relatively exclusive and closed society to me. (SH02, Boarder, 6 years studying experience in international schools)

In my opinion, I think Shanghai is a relatively large city, although I've only lived in Taipei when I was in Taiwan. For instance, if you compare National Taiwan University and the university in Shanghai, the scale is important because Taiwan

has a small territory in which it is impossible to make things big. (SH10, non-boarder, 7 years studying experience in American schools, 4 years studying experience in the international division of local public school)

In contrast, the Taiwan Businessmen's Dongguan School is located in a rural town. The city centre of Dongguan is not urbanised and has a high crime rate, which may impact on the Taisheng's unwillingness to integrate. In this research, the local social environment was an essential factor affecting Taisheng feelings and impressions of local society. For the students of Shanghai Taishang school, their good impression of local society might be the reason why they choose to stay.

The interview data shows that the majority of interviewees would like to go back to Taiwan for higher education, (31 interviewees, accounting for 65% of all interviewees). On the other hand, 11 interviewees (23%) preferred to attend Chinese colleges, and there are 6 interviewees have not decided to stay in China or go back to Taiwan.

The main reasons for Taisheng choose to continue their study in Taiwan can be divided into four categories: 1) Taisheng prefer the living environment in Taiwan, desire to go back to their homeland, and they miss Taiwan's life and their family in Taiwan; 2) Taisheng who want to know and discover Taiwan deeper, because some of them moved to Taiwan when they were young, and they are unfamiliar with Taiwan; 3) Taisheng have good impression of Taiwan's colleges and yearn for experiencing the Taiwan's school life; 4) Taisheng feel that there are staying in China for too long, and would like to change the living environment, or they have negative impression and experience of China's living environment and school, which make them do not willing to stay for the higher education. For instance,

I plan to go back to study in Taiwan, I would like to know Taiwan more, and walk through every place in Taiwan, because I am not familiar with Taiwan. There is an enthusiasm for me to know Taiwan, but not here [China]. (HD12, boarder, 3 years studying experience in international schools)

However, it cannot be ignored, although Taisheng decide to go back to study in Taiwan's college, a few of them also admit that China's colleges have better reputation and provide more competitive advantage. Besides, some of interviewees mentioned that they will still

return to China to develop their career after finish their study in Taiwan, because China has more job opportunities.

The Taisheng who decided to continued their studies in China are mainly optimistic about the future development of China, but with variations between individuals, which can be summarised into four factors, first, Taisheng are optimistic about economic development and opportunities. Secondly, China has one of largest economy, where have more multinational corporations which offer more opportunities international cooperation especially in the global cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. In contrast, Taiwan's society and economy are relatively small and closed. Thirdly, Chinese universities have better ranking than Taiwanese universities. Finally, Taisheng who decided to study in China were influenced by their family, because their parents have factories or business in China, or their parents advocate that China has more career opportunities. An interviewee shared her parents' suggestion:

My parents think that the future development is in China, not in the United States, therefore, they hope I can study in Chinese university to know local people, to understand how the Chinese market operates, and how they do things. (SH10)

Another interview values the reputation of the university, she explained:

My mom said that I have been here for more than ten years, and should go back to experience the university life in Taiwan. Actually, I feel that graduating from Chinese universities will have a future full of promise, and I worry about the degree of Taiwanese university is not as good as the degree of China's Fudan University. (DG02, boarder, 2 years studying experience in Taiwan; 3 years studying experience in local private schools)

The research result shows that economic factors are still the main reason that affects Taiwan students' choice of staying in China for the high education. The optimistic economic development of China has continued to be the pull factor to attract Taisheng. But it cannot be ignored that the long-term residence does not give them stronger sense of belonging with Chinese society, and then affect their willingness to stay in China for further education. On

the contrary, owing to longer stay in China, which make Taisheng desire to go back to Taiwan for studying.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the main reason for Taishang schools' students choosing to continue their higher education in China is that Taisheng are optimistic about China's future economic development. Moreover, Taisheng are optimistic about China's future development. These findings show that China's economic development and employment opportunities are very attractive to Taiwanese students. Especially in 2018, the Chinese government has lowered the requirements further for Taiwanese students to apply Chinese universities and colleges, which might have a certain degree of attractiveness for Taiwanese students. The limitations of this study is that the research were collected in 2013, the social and economic environment in China and Taiwan has changed substantially, so it is necessary to conduct follow-up investigations. In addition, the influence of Taisheng's school choice on their future life and career development is also worth exploring.

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Appendix:**1. Demographical characteristics of Taisheng, by school**

Characteristics	Haudong	Shanghai	Dongguan	Total
N	252	239	519	1010
Sex				
Male	49.2	45.2	56.1	51.8
Female	50.8	54.8	43.9	48.2
Length of Migration				
0-5 years	21.0	22.4	18.4	20.0
6-10 years	51.6	40.5	34.1	40.0
11-15 years	20.6	27.6	32.7	28.4
16-19 years	6.9	9.5	14.9	11.6
Are you a boarder?				
Boarder	84.7	21.9	94.6	75.0
Non-boarder	15.3	78.1	5.4	25.0

2. Demographical characteristics of interviewees

	Haudong	Shanghai	Dongguan
N	15	16	17
Sex			
Male	9	8	8
Female	6	8	9
Length of Migration⁸			
0-5 years	0	4	5
6-10 years	12	6	8
11-15 years	3	5	3
16-19 years	0	1	1
Are you a boarder?			
Boarder	14	12	15
Non-boarder	1	4	2