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# The Ebb and Flow of Study Abroad: A Comparative Analysis of PRC and International Students in Taiwan

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**Abstract:** The dialogue about study abroad is a contemporary trend. Since 2011, enrolments from the People's Republic of China (PRC) have gradually increased and PRC students have now become one of the largest groups of incoming study abroad participants in Taiwan. In this study, investigators explored the characteristics of PRC students in comparison with other international students studying in Taiwan universities. Data were collected from 1870 study abroad students. Data collected include the various study abroad goals, prior study abroad experiences, the Short-term Study Abroad Situational Change Survey, the revised East Asian Acculturation Measures, the Study Abroad Acculturative Hassles, and their overall study abroad satisfaction. Data analyses included computation of the mean, frequency, cross-tabulation of respondents' responses for identified questions, and various group comparisons. Implications suggest that the characteristics of PRC students are valuable and potentially transformative markers for sustainable cross-strait ties. Study abroad programs in Taiwan are noted as one piece of the emerging discourse for sustainable co-existence between Taiwan and the PRC. As such, PRC study abroad participants along with faculty and students in Taiwan universities have an opportunity to play a role in reshaping future exchanges as well as transforming themselves into stewards of a trans-Pacific community.

**Keywords:** study abroad; cross-strait collaboration; comparative study; acculturation

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## 1. Introduction

Advancing the conversation about study abroad is a contemporary trend given by the sheer number of students who leave home to pursue either short- or long-term education programs in other countries. The demand is expected to increase from 1.8 million study abroad students in 2000 to 7.2 million by 2025 [1]. Reports have noted that there were approximately 6.1 million students studying outside their home countries just prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic [2]. Sixty-six percent of the international student market is actually concentrated in five places—the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Western nations have dominated the study abroad market, yet Asia-Pacific countries have established a series of policies and niches designed to attract more international students. Examples include the option to remain in host countries after degree completion [3,4], and offering degree programs using English as the language of instruction [5].

The Asia-Pacific region has become an emerging host destination that continues to expand its share of the study abroad market. This trend includes intra-regional mobility, meaning incoming study abroad students who travel to host countries within their home regions [6]. Intra-regional study abroad between the island of Taiwan and the PRC is a unique case in point. This focus represents a less studied and smaller segment of the market, with unique insights and discovery for students given the politically charged climate between the respective governments [7]. Study abroad programs in politically

charged environments afford opportunities, which might otherwise be unavailable, to gain a more nuanced understanding of diverse historical and political perspectives, as well as personal identities and values [8].

The 2010 Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) between Taiwan and the PRC symbolized change, with a shift toward economic partnerships and the easing of political tensions. The ECFA positively impacted cross-strait collaboration in the education arena. As a unique model, cross-straitization prioritizes multidimensional sustainable coexistence between Taiwan and the PRC as well as cultural and educational exchanges [9,10]. In 2009, the Taiwan Ministry of Education (MOE) lifted a long-standing ban on study abroad recruitment of PRC students [11]. The more than 900 PRC study abroad degree-seeking students in Taiwanese universities, beginning with the 2011 academic year, marked a significant pivot from interactions, collaborations and decision making based on internationalization to the cross-straitization of higher education institutions [12].

In recent years, PRC students became the largest group of incoming study abroad participants in Taiwan. Total numbers reached 41,975 in 2016 and began to decline in subsequent years to 35,286 in 2017, 29,603 in 2018, and 25,049 in 2019 [13]. The decline signaled either a collapse in cross-strait political and economic relations or contributed to decisions leading to 2020 travel restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, announcements in the respective systems noted changes with study abroad programs in response to the prevention and control of COVID-19. In January 2020, the Taiwanese government temporarily barred entry of PRC students and in April of the same year, the PRC Education Ministry suspended study abroad options in Taiwan universities.

While there is expanding capacity and an initiative globally to endorse international student mobility [14], scholarship examining the educational context and uniqueness of the PRC study abroad student group in Taiwan universities is limited. In an article analyzing how student mobility in Spain changed after the 2008 economic recession, Mihi-Ramirez [15] argues that it is important to understand how the current situation affects international mobility in the higher education system. In response, the aim of this investigation is to redress a gap in order to describe and provide insight for the cross-strait experience of PRC study abroad students in comparison with other international student groups in Taiwan. Scholars note the significance of comparative studies to recognize study abroad students as dynamic groups across as well as within categories such as culture, language, and place [16]. Beginning research questions include:

(1) What are the similarities and differences among PRC study abroad students and the general international student (IS) population enrolled in Taiwanese universities?
(2) What are the implications for the design of Taiwanese study abroad programs to prepare for and harness the uniqueness of intra-regional cross-strait collaboration in the education arena?

These questions reflect attention to a new model for study abroad programs, framed with reference to the current state of the world and in particular cross-strait collaboration between Taiwan and the PRC.

This article contributes to conceptual approaches addressing the complexity of student mobility in higher education across the Taiwan Strait and serves as the basis for further reflections, international comparisons, and related studies. Because there are few quantitative studies exploring the outcomes of study abroad [17], this article also serves as a springboard to more complex quantitative analyses investigating the impact of study abroad.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Study abroad students in host nations cannot avoid experiences induced by culture shock and change, noted here as processes of acculturation. They can, however, be defined as dynamic groups of study abroad students who are able to tackle *culture shock* [16]. Appropriate coping strategies are generally associated with low levels of stress, while the opposite (insufficient coping strategies) suggests high levels of stress that often induce depression or anxiety [18]. As noted in Berry's transactional model of stress and

coping [19], psychological well-being and adjustment impact the acculturation process, level of stress, and capacity for appropriate coping skills. Stress-coping approaches are defined as affective elements that contribute to life changes in the traveler experience and as natural components of the acculturation process [20]. The acculturation process is either positive and thus enhances the overall experience in the host environment or negative. Negative acculturation processes can be attributed to the challenge of change and adaptation required for unknown cultural and social expectations.

The lens of culture-learning and social skills assumes that study abroad students arrive to host nations with limited social and cultural skills [21]. The capacity to acquire host environment cultural and social characteristics is necessary for overall success. Scholars note that patterns of adjustment are dynamic and success is dependent on many conditions such as [22]:

- Host language ability and academic achievement,
- Knowledge about the host country,
- Prior travel experience,
- Degree to which the experience was voluntary or influenced by external factors, and
- Intercultural communication in terms of understanding the host communication system and culture.

In brief, students' level of success is a complex process involving multiple processes of adjustment [23]. Adjustment requires time, effort, and support.

Host institutions are called to design study abroad programs that help international students reach their potential. Yet, the purposes and objectives of study abroad programs are varied and debatable [24]. Stakeholders argue that overarching objectives should be based on social science disciplines and the humanities to enhance opportunities for students and scholars—both those who travel and those who remain in home campuses [25]. Study abroad programs are often marketed as a vehicle to globalize students' consciousness while holding constant the specifics of individual and collective identities [26]. Such programs are viewed as a strategy for access to a mobile social class [27,28], in which students become cosmopolitan as well as independent, with academic and professional endeavors leading to graduate school, international business and various other opportunities based on gains in social capital. Other programs follow government recommendations for alignment with the needs of home nations in world affairs. This design holds the academy's traditions and spirit of scholarship close, contending that study abroad contributions are a byproduct of scholarship generalizable to world affairs.

Regardless of design, study abroad programs are charged with development of formal and non-formal education experiences in order to promote good will and understanding [29,30]. Inclusion of guiding concepts such as acculturation are important to fully capture compatibility (or incompatibility) of cultural values, norms, attitudes, and personality between incoming study abroad students and their respective hosts. Acculturation can be viewed as the process of cultural and psychological change that follows interactions between distinct cultures. Incoming study abroad students who understand the acculturating process are better able to engage with established host communities [31].

Program attention to the processes of acculturation honors the ideal of peace in diversity but is meaningless without direct and practical application to the study abroad experience [25]. Capturing the study abroad experience as *practice* infers experiential learning and cross-cultural understanding between people from different cultures. Scholars refer to the practical application as a set of *soft action strategies* including active listening, breaking down stereotypes, and speaking foreign languages—all of which harness active and ongoing interactions between incoming study abroad students and their hosts [32].

The notion of practice infers that incoming study abroad students assume the role of cultural ambassadors; this role involves the ability to use and apply ethnographic skills, global awareness, world learning and emotional intelligence. As cultural ambassadors, students create relationships with people that endure beyond the study abroad experience, combat stereotypes about their home country, and build a foundation of trust between

members of different cultures. They are called to reach beyond the formal learning environment to navigate language barriers and more importantly, create neutral platforms for interpersonal contact. The integration of soft action strategies and concepts in program design showcases the contemporary study abroad experience in which participating students encounter a wide range of attitudes, ideally crystalizing commitment to listening to what others have to say, while also challenging aspects of personal identity.

## 3. Research Design

This study was designed as descriptive quantitative survey research [33], and defined as an exploratory study concerned with conditions or relationships that exist; practices that prevail; beliefs; points of views or attributes that are held; processes that are ongoing; and effects or trends that are in the process of development [34]. The investigation was initiated with a review of news sources to develop a contemporary reference for the dilemmas and issues of study abroad students in Taiwan universities and cross-strait collaboration. Scholars, who conduct research involving international dimensions note the importance of primary sources to inform the research process [35]. 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 was ongoing during all stages of investigation.

Data collection and analyses were completed by means of an online survey using the volunteer sampling technique [36]. The survey questionnaire design included analyses of previous instruments and findings from research by Roberts, Chou, and Ching [37], Chou, Roberts, and Ching [38], and Lewis, Ching, and Su [39]. In addition to participant demographics, the survey included the following variables: study abroad goals, prior study abroad experiences, the Short-term Study Abroad Situational Change Survey (SSCS) [40], the revised East Asian Acculturation Measure (REAAM) [41], the Study Abroad Acculturative Hassles (SAAH) [41], and overall study abroad satisfaction.

Data collection took place over one 16-week semester during the academic school year in Taiwan. Invitation posters were mailed to all International Student Offices and Chinese Mandarin Language Centers in Taiwanese universities. A convenience store cash certificate (100 New Taiwan Dollars/approximately 3 US Dollars) was offered as an incentive to students who participated in the survey. Informed consent with a brief description of the study together with how the collected data are to be analyzed and used were also provided. In addition, participants are able to withdraw from the survey any time they wish without any consequences.

A total of 1958 responses were collected. Eighty-eight participants withdrew from the study after just reading the informed consent section. Data were screened for outliers and participants with minor missing data were imputed using the expectation maximization algorithm [42,43]. Missing data imputed accounted for less than 10% of the entire dataset [44]. Table 1 details participant background demographics. The average age of respondents was 26 years, with males ($n$ = 945) and females ($n$ = 925). Duration of the study abroad stay averaged from 6 months for short-term programs to approximately 2 years (23 months) for degree-seeking participants. Of the 816 PRC students, 131 students had scholarship from the PRC, while the rest were self-paying students (either by their parents or with their own savings).

**Table 1.** Background demographics of the participants.

| Age (Years)/Gender | Female | | | Male | | | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean Age | *n* | % | Mean Age | *n* | % | Mean Age |
| International students | 25 | 539 | 29 | 27 | 515 | 28 | 26 |
| PRC students | 24 | 386 | 21 | 26 | 430 | 23 | 25 |
| Total | 25 | 925 | 49 | 26 | 945 | 51 | 26 |
| **Duration (Months)/Type** | **Degree Seeking** | | | **Exchange** | | | **Overall** |
| | **Mean Duration** | ***n*** | **%** | **Mean Duration** | ***n*** | **%** | **Mean Duration** |
| International students | 19 | 215 | 11 | 6 | 839 | 45 | 8 |
| PRC students | 27 | 675 | 36 | 6 | 141 | 8 | 23 |
| Total | 23 | 890 | 48 | 6 | 980 | 52 | 15 |

*N* = 1870. Overall number of international students (IS) = 1054 (56%) and PRC students = 816 (44%).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### *4.1. Push Pull Factors*

As suggested in Table 2 item, prior study abroad experiences, the majority of respondents dedicated effort to learn about Taiwan in preparation for study abroad experiences (either by sourcing information from the internet or by asking someone who had previous travel to Taiwan). This is actually a good sign, wherein respondents knowingly prepared and acquainted themselves with Taiwan as the host nation. Results presented in Table 2 detail study abroad goals that align with previous studies wherein *to experience a new culture* (*n* = 1368 or 73.16%) and/or *experience life outside my home country* (*n* = 1368 or 73.16%) were major pull factors for choosing Taiwan as a host nation [12,37,38].

Respondents placed value on the possibility of pursuing education elsewhere; a sort of *stepping-stone* as coined by Li and Bray [45] study of PRC students in Hong Kong and Macau. Findings from this study suggest that the overarching rationale to study in Taiwan was to experience a culture *different* from their own. Similar to related studies, a dominant pull factor was the ability to experience living in a different country [46,47].

Chi-square tests were performed on each item in Table 2 to compare significance between PRC and IS respondents. Significant differences were found with study goals *to become more mature and independent* with $\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 1870) = 7.417, $p$ = 0.006, $V$ = 0.0005; *to learn a new language* with $\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 1870) = 15.38, $p < 0.001$, $V$ = 0.0005; and *to make preparation for further studies* with $\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 1870) = 11.88, $p$ = 0.001, $V$ = 0.0005—all denoting very small effect sizes [48]. In addition, the items detailing prior experiences—*talked with people who have been to Taiwan*, $\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 1870) = 6.95, $p$ = 0.008, $V$ = 0.0005 and *travel to/visited Taiwan*, $\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 1870) = 11.88, $p$ = 0.001, $V$ = 0.0005—were computed to be significantly different also with very small effect sizes [48]. Note that $V$ or Cramér's $V$ values that are nearest to 1 signify a stronger association between the two variables [49].

To further understand potential push and pull factors [51], satisfaction ratings with regard to respondents' study abroad experiences in Taiwan were collected using a 5-points Likert-type scale [52], with ratings from 1 denoting least to 5 indicating most satisfied. Various satisfaction factors such as academic interactions, satisfaction with studying alone and/or with students of other nationalities; leisure interactions, satisfaction with travel or having fun around Taiwan alone and/or with students of other nationalities; campus facilities, satisfaction with using the host institutions' resources; study experiences, satisfaction with the overall quality of education related services; and community experiences, satisfaction with interactions in local community settings are collected. Respondents' overall satisfaction was computed at 3.56 (*SD* = 0.54) denoting moderately high rating.

**Table 2.** Comparative analysis of study abroad goals and prior experiences.

| **Study Abroad Goals** [1] | | **Total** | **IS** | | **PRC** | | **Chi-Square** [2] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ***n*** | **%** | ***n*** | **%** | $\chi^2$ | ***p*** |
| To experience life outside my home country | Yes | 1368 | 770 | 73 | 598 | 73 | ns | |
| | No | 502 | 284 | 27 | 218 | 27 | | |
| To experience a new culture | Yes | 1368 | 774 | 73 | 594 | 73 | ns | |
| | No | 502 | 280 | 27 | 222 | 27 | | |
| To become more mature and independent | Yes | 1256 | 680 | 65 | 576 | 71 | 7.42 | 0.006 |
| | No | 614 | 374 | 36 | 240 | 29 | | |
| To make new friends | Yes | 1173 | 681 | 65 | 492 | 60 | ns | |
| | No | 697 | 373 | 35 | 324 | 40 | | |
| To learn a new language | Yes | 777 | 396 | 38 | 381 | 47 | 15.38 | 0.000 |
| | No | 1093 | 658 | 62 | 435 | 53 | | |
| To make preparation for further studies | Yes | 676 | 345 | 33 | 331 | 41 | 11.88 | 0.001 |
| | No | 1194 | 709 | 67 | 485 | 59 | | |
| **Prior Experiences** [1] | | **Total** | **IS** | | **PRC** | | **Chi-Square** [2] | |
| | | | ***n*** | **%** | ***n*** | **%** | $\chi^2$ | ***p*** |
| Check internet for places to visit | Yes | 1518 | 852 | 81 | 666 | 82 | ns | |
| | No | 352 | 202 | 19 | 150 | 18 | | |
| Basic knowledge of the Chinese culture | Yes | 1508 | 840 | 80 | 668 | 82 | ns | |
| | No | 362 | 214 | 20 | 148 | 18 | | |
| Read about life in Taiwan | Yes | 1441 | 812 | 77 | 629 | 77 | ns | |
| | No | 429 | 242 | 23 | 187 | 23 | | |
| Talk with people who have been to Taiwan | Yes | 1393 | 760 | 72 | 633 | 78 | 6.95 | 0.008 |
| | No | 477 | 294 | 28 | 183 | 22 | | |
| Have Taiwanese friends | Yes | 957 | 531 | 50 | 426 | 52 | ns | |
| | No | 913 | 523 | 50 | 390 | 48 | | |
| Travel to/visited Taiwan | Yes | 676 | 345 | 33 | 331 | 41 | 11.88 | 0.001 |
| | No | 1194 | 709 | 67 | 485 | 59 | | |
| Previous study abroad experiences | Yes | 620 | 357 | 34 | 263 | 32 | ns | |
| | No | 1250 | 697 | 66 | 553 | 68 | | |

*N* = 1870. IS (*n* = 1054) and PRC (*n* = 816). ns = non-significant.[1] Arranged from highest to lowest. [2] To compensate for the overestimation of the Chi-square value within a 2 by 2 analysis, the Yates [50] correction for continuity is used instead of the regular Chi-square test results.

Table 3 shows the various satisfaction factors together with their Cronbach [53] Alpha reliabilities ranging from 0.70 to 0.87 signifying moderate to high levels of reliability [54]. To summarize, all respondents were satisfied with the importance placed on physical interactions with the host culture (all scores are above 2; lowest mean score of 2.81 is collected from the PRC students for the item *local peoples' acceptance of other culture*). Both PRC and IS respondents noted positive experiences (as shown with moderately high ratings in all of the satisfaction factors and items). Besides the overarching rationale of *experiencing a new culture* while studying in Taiwan, all respondents rated their *study experience in Taiwan* as the highest category (mean satisfaction of 3.80 for both groups). For individual items, respondents rated *international student affairs services* as the highest with an overall mean satisfaction of 4.07 signifying quite high ratings (mean satisfaction for IS = 4.10 and for PRC = 4.02). In addition, respondents rated the use of *library resource and facilities* with an overall mean satisfaction of 4.00 denoting high ratings (mean satisfaction for IS = 3.96 and PRC = 4.05). As for the lowest item, respondents rated the *local peoples' acceptance of other cultures* as partly satisfied with an overall mean of 2.85 (mean satisfaction for IS = 2.87 and PRC = 2.81).

**Table 3.** Study abroad satisfaction.

| Factor/Items/Cronbach Alpha | All | | IS | | PRC | | *t*-Test | | Cohen's *d* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Mean* | *SD* | *Mean* | *SD* | *Mean* | *SD* | *T* | *p* | |
| Academic interaction (α = 0.70) | 3.41 | 0.89 | 3.40 | 0.87 | 3.43 | 0.90 | ns | | |
| SIA01. Study on my own | **3.91** | 0.95 | 3.92 | 0.95 | 3.90 | 0.94 | ns | | |
| SIA02. Study with Taiwanese classmates | 3.28 | 1.26 | 3.30 | 1.25 | 3.27 | 1.27 | ns | | |
| SIA03. Study with other international students | 3.11 | 1.34 | 3.05 | 1.35 | 3.20 | 1.32 | 2.41 | 0.016 | 0.11 |
| SIA04. Study with students from my country | 3.35 | 1.29 | 3.35 | 1.29 | 3.34 | 1.29 | ns | | |
| Leisure interaction (α = 0.70) | 3.66 | 0.82 | 3.60 | 0.82 | 3.73 | 0.80 | 3.39 | 0.001 | 0.16 |
| SIL01. Going out on my own | 3.66 | 1.17 | 3.63 | 1.18 | 3.71 | 1.16 | ns | | |
| SIL02. Going out with Taiwanese friends | 3.66 | 1.18 | 3.63 | 1.18 | 3.69 | 1.17 | ns | | |
| SIL03. Going out with other international students | 3.48 | 1.32 | 3.39 | 1.35 | 3.60 | 1.27 | 3.52 | 0.000 | 0.16 |
| SIL04. Going out with students from my country | **3.84** | 1.09 | 3.77 | 1.12 | 3.93 | 1.04 | 3.11 | 0.002 | 0.15 |
| Campus facilities (α = 0.70) | 3.64 | 0.73 | 3.67 | 0.72 | 3.60 | 0.74 | ns | | |
| SIU01. Campus sports facilities | 3.69 | 1.16 | 3.71 | 1.18 | 3.67 | 1.15 | ns | | |
| SIU02. Classroom facilities | 3.77 | 1.01 | 3.82 | 0.99 | 3.70 | 1.04 | 2.37 | 0.018 | 0.12 |
| SIU03. Dormitory facilities | 3.53 | 1.16 | 3.64 | 1.15 | 3.39 | 1.17 | 4.74 | 0.000 | 0.22 |
| SIU04. In-campus stores (food, supplies) | 3.59 | 1.08 | 3.68 | 1.06 | 3.48 | 1.10 | 3.86 | 0.000 | 0.19 |
| SIU05. International student affairs office | 3.86 | 1.07 | 3.91 | 1.08 | 3.81 | 1.06 | 2.03 | 0.043 | 0.09 |
| SIU06. IT resources | 3.87 | 1.11 | 3.84 | 1.14 | 3.91 | 1.07 | ns | | |
| SIU07. Library resources | **4.00** | 0.99 | 3.96 | 1.00 | 4.05 | 0.96 | ns | | |
| SIU08. Medical services | 3.41 | 1.31 | 3.33 | 1.36 | 3.51 | 1.23 | 3.07 | 0.002 | 0.14 |
| SIU09. School counseling services | 3.34 | 1.33 | 3.42 | 1.32 | 3.23 | 1.34 | 3.06 | 0.002 | 0.14 |
| SIU10. Variety of course selections | 3.31 | 1.19 | 3.35 | 1.22 | 3.25 | 1.16 | ns | | |
| Study experience (α = 0.87) | 3.80 | 0.71 | 3.80 | 0.71 | 3.80 | 0.72 | ns | | |
| SE01. Academic resources | 3.93 | 0.94 | 3.93 | 0.94 | 3.92 | 0.95 | ns | | |
| SE02. Amount of schoolwork | 3.98 | 0.94 | 3.96 | 0.95 | 3.99 | 0.93 | ns | | |
| SE03. Counseling services | 3.78 | 1.00 | 3.83 | 1.01 | 3.73 | 0.99 | 2.04 | 0.042 | 0.10 |
| SE04. International student affairs services | **4.07** | 0.91 | 4.10 | 0.90 | 4.02 | 0.91 | 2.06 | 0.039 | 0.09 |
| SE05. Qualification of the teachers | 3.77 | 0.96 | 3.73 | 0.97 | 3.83 | 0.95 | 2.27 | 0.023 | 0.10 |
| SE06. Quality of education | 3.64 | 1.06 | 3.61 | 1.09 | 3.68 | 1.02 | ns | | |
| SE07. School administrative personnel (including department/college personnel) | 3.80 | 1.02 | 3.81 | 1.02 | 3.78 | 1.03 | ns | | |
| SE08. School environment in general | 3.44 | 1.10 | 3.45 | 1.11 | 3.42 | 1.08 | ns | | |
| Community experience (α = 0.80) | 3.29 | 0.84 | 3.33 | 0.81 | 3.24 | 0.86 | 2.25 | 0.025 | 0.10 |
| CE01. Local peoples' understanding of your home country | 3.13 | 1.07 | 3.21 | 1.05 | 3.03 | 1.09 | 3.62 | 0.000 | 0.17 |
| CE02. Local peoples' world view | 3.45 | 1.07 | 3.48 | 1.06 | 3.41 | 1.08 | ns | | |
| CE03. Local peoples' acceptance of other culture | 2.85 | 1.10 | 2.87 | 1.11 | 2.81 | 1.10 | ns | | |
| CE04. Local peoples' acceptance of students from other countries studying in Taiwan | **3.72** | 1.01 | 3.74 | 0.99 | 3.70 | 1.03 | ns | | |

*N* = 1870. IS (*n* = 1054) and PRC (*n* = 816). ns = non-significant. SD = standard deviation. Values in bold are the highest scoring items for each group of satisfaction factors. Ratings: 1 = not at all satisfied, 2 = partly satisfied, 3 = satisfied, 4 = more than satisfied, and 5 = very satisfied.

For comparative analysis, independent-sample *t*-tests were performed on the satisfaction factors and items. Table 3 also shows the significant differences between IS and PRC respondents. Note that approximately 50 percent of the items had no significant differences; this finding suggests that the IS and PRC respondents had similar levels of satisfaction; their perception regarding the quality of services offered and resources available was the same.

Nonetheless, significant differences were also noted. The IS respondents ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.81$) were significantly more satisfied with their overall community experience in comparison to the PRC respondents ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.86$) with $t$ (1868) = 2.25, $p = 0.025$, $d = 0.10$. The PRC respondents ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.80$) were significantly more satisfied with their overall leisure interactions in comparison to the IS respondents ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.82$) with $t$ (1868) = 3.39, $p = 0.001$, $d = 0.16$, both having small effect sizes [48]. Further significant differences were also noted with PRC students having higher satisfaction ratings on items —

*studying with other international students* (PRC with $M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.32$ and IS with $M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.35$) with $t$ (1868) = 2.41, $p = 0.016$, $d = 0.11$, *going out with other international students* (PRC with $M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.27$ and IS with $M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.35$) with $t$ (1868) = 3.52, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.16$, *going out with students from my country* (PRC with $M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.04$ and IS with $M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.12$) with $t$ (1868) = 3.11, $p = 0.002$, $d = 0.16$, use of *medical services* (PRC with $M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.23$ and IS with $M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.36$) with $t$ (1868) = 3.07, $p = 0.002$, $d = 0.14$, and the perception on the *quality of teachers* (PRC with $M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.95$ and IS with $M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.97$) with $t$ (1868) = 2.27, $p = 0.023$, $d = 0.10$ — all of which denote low effect sizes [48]. Note that $d$ or Cohen's $d$ values lower than 0.25 are considered as low or small effect sizes [55].

These differences are promising indicators of PRC respondents ability and willingness to take on the mantle of international leadership for cross-strait cooperation and beyond. Perhaps these can be considered as ***gains*** to be contextualized as an important argument for the goal of continued study abroad between Taiwan and the PRC. What is evident is the widespread embrace among respondents for skill and qualities that contribute to cross-strait understanding and diplomacy. With the very best of intentions, Taiwan colleges and universities have an opportunity to emphasize enhancement of global competence, which in turn could increase PRC student and family interest in Taiwan study abroad programs.

In an attempt to understand and predict overall satisfaction, two separate step-wise multiple linear regressions were performed. For the IS respondents, regression analysis indicated that one predictor *to make preparation for further studies* ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = 0.050$) explained 0.4% of the variance, with $F$ (1, 1052) = 3.86, $p = 0.050$ and an overall model fit of $R^2 = 0.003$, which significantly predicted the overall study abroad satisfaction. This can actually indicate several issues: for instance, respondents might consider a completed degree from a Taiwan university, or the study abroad experience as plus factors for future professional endeavors. As well learning Mandarin Chinese in Taiwan could contribute to future plans. Similar findings were noted in a quasi-ethnographic study by Ching, Wang, and Wen [29], wherein participating IS respondents mentioned the value of learning Mandarin Chinese. However, based on the regression analysis, the item *to learn a new language* was not a significant predictor.

As for the PRC respondents, regression analysis indicated that two predictors *to learn a new language* ($\beta = 0.13$, $p = 0.001$) and *to make new friends* ($\beta = -0.09$, $p = 0.022$) explained 1.6% of the variance, with $F$ (2, 813) = 6.53, $p = 0.002$ and an overall model fit of $R^2 = 0.013$, which significantly predicted overall satisfaction. The significant item *to learn a new language* was an interesting result that might indicate that PRC respondents had increased opportunities in Taiwan to learn *English* and/or other foreign languages. Although both groups of respondents were quite satisfied with the study abroad experiences in Taiwan, the underlying goals and prior experiences that contributed to satisfaction were quite different.

Lastly, additional computations were conducted to account for the confounding influence of the students' background demographics, such as age, gender, duration of stay, and type of study abroad program (short-term or degree-seeking) [56]. For the IS, after controlling for their age, gender, duration of stay, and type of study abroad program, hierarchical multiple linear regression result shows that the total explained variance increased to 0.7%. For the PRC students, similarly after controlling for their background demographics, hierarchical multiple linear regression result shows that the total explained variance increased to 2.4%, hence further strengthening the importance of *to make preparation for further studies*, *to learn a new language*, and *to make new friends* as the persistent goals of study abroad.

### *4.2. Strategies for Acculturation*

The study abroad literature notes that when students are exposed to unfamiliar environments, they may experience anxiety, confusion, and depression [41,57]. Difficulty mastering the target language can be a major barrier for adjustment to the host education arena and society in general. Interactions with local students can be problematic

as well. Factors that predict how well individual study abroad students adjust in their first semesters generally includes gender, age, family circumstances, emotional coping strategies, understanding of the host institution and society, foresight about potential difficulties, and language capability [58].

Given the close proximity of culture, history, and language between PRC respondents and Taiwan; the elements of acculturation were not as problematic as typically expected for study abroad students new to Taiwanese universities. Students of more diverse cultures are noted to encounter more difficulties with adjustment [59]. Successful study abroad is much dependent on how students manage their transition upon contact with a foreign culture [31]. To understand and compare how IS and PRC respondents managed this transition, acculturation strategies were collected using the REAAM [41]. This survey was adapted and based on four strategies popularized by Berry [20,60–62], wherein *assimilation* (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.88$, in the original study) denoted the full acceptance of the host culture, *integration* ($\alpha = 0.82$) denoted the retention of own and acceptance of host culture, *separation* ($\alpha = 0.84$) denoted the reluctance to accept the host culture, and *marginalization* ($\alpha = 0.93$) denoted the rejection of both own and host culture [41]. The survey items used a 5-points Likert [52] type scale with ratings from 1 denoting *not at all* agree to 5 indicating *strongly* agree, hence, the higher the rating the higher the perceived agreement or association with the said item.

Table 4 shows the acculturation strategies together with their Cronbach [53] Alpha reliabilities ranging from 0.81 to 0.92 signifying high levels of reliability [54]. For the comparison between IS and PRC respondents, independent-sample *t*-tests were conducted. Results show that by group, respondents had no significant differences with *assimilation* and *separation* strategies. Only one assimilation item *I get along better with local Taiwan people* was computed to be significantly different, with IS respondents ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.14$) getting along slightly better with local people in comparison to PRC respondents ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.13$) with $t\ (1868) = 2.03$, $p = 0.042$, $d = 0.10$, denoting small effect size [48].

Results also show that PRC respondents ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.89$) were significantly more integrated than IS respondents ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.86$) with $t\ (1868) = 2.34$, $p = 0.020$, $d = 0.11$. Interestingly, the data also show that PRC students ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.73$) are significantly more marginalized than IS ($M = 1.60$, $SD = 0.68$) with $t\ (1868) = 2.74$, $p = 0.006$, $d = 0.13$, both denoting small effect sizes [48]. To further understand the relationship of *integration* and *marginalization* strategies, correlational analyses were conducted. Results show that both groups IS respondents ($r = -0.25$, $n = 1054$, $p < 0.001$) and the PRC respondents ($r = -0.30$, $n = 816$, $p < 0.001$) exhibit small to medium negative correlation [48]. This means that the more integrated the students are, the less marginalized they are.

As for the *integration* and *marginalization* items, several items were found to be significantly different. The PRC respondents scored slightly higher than their IS counterparts, while denoting small effect sizes [48] (see Table 4 for more details on the items). For the *integration* item *I have both Taiwan friends and friends who are from my country*, the PRC respondents ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.09$) scored significantly slightly higher than the IS respondents ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.12$) with $t\ (1868) = 3.46$, $p = 0.001$, $d = 0.16$. Within all of the acculturation strategies this item scored the highest for both groups (mean scores of above 4 denoting quite high in agreement). This means that both groups of respondents were getting along just fine socially, while having friends from different cultures.

**Table 4.** Acculturation strategies.

| Factor/Items/Cronbach Alpha | All | | IS | | PRC | | *t*-Test | | Cohen's *d* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Mean* | *SD* | *Mean* | *SD* | *Mean* | *SD* | *t* | *p* | |
| Assimilation (α = 0.87) | 3.12 | 0.94 | 3.13 | 0.94 | 3.09 | 0.95 | ns | | |
| As01. I find it easier to communicate my feelings to local Taiwan people | 2.80 | 1.13 | 2.80 | 1.12 | 2.81 | 1.13 | ns | | |
| As02. I feel that local Taiwan people understand me better | 2.85 | 1.07 | 2.85 | 1.07 | 2.86 | 1.08 | ns | | |
| As03. I feel more comfortable socializing with local Taiwan people | 3.29 | 1.14 | 3.32 | 1.13 | 3.25 | 1.14 | ns | | |
| As04. I get along better with local Taiwan people | **3.52** | 1.14 | 3.56 | 1.14 | 3.45 | 1.13 | 2.03 | 0.042 | 0.10 |
| Separation (α = 0.82) | 3.08 | 0.93 | 3.07 | 0.91 | 3.10 | 0.96 | ns | | |
| Se01. I feel relaxed around people from my country | **3.36** | 1.16 | 3.34 | 1.14 | 3.39 | 1.19 | ns | | |
| Se02. I prefer to go out with someone from my country | 2.94 | 1.24 | 2.92 | 1.22 | 2.97 | 1.27 | ns | | |
| Se03. I prefer going to gathering wherein most of the guests are from my country | 3.06 | 1.26 | 3.06 | 1.22 | 3.06 | 1.30 | ns | | |
| Se04. I have more in common with my ethnic group than any other ethnicity | 3.20 | 1.24 | 3.21 | 1.22 | 3.18 | 1.26 | ns | | |
| Se05. I feel that people who are from my country treat me as an equal, more so than the local Taiwan people does | 2.86 | 1.23 | 2.82 | 1.23 | 2.91 | 1.23 | ns | | |
| Integration (α = 0.81) | 4.01 | 0.88 | 3.97 | 0.86 | 4.06 | 0.89 | 2.34 | 0.020 | 0.11 |
| In01. I feel that both Taiwan friends and friends who are from my country value me | 3.95 | 1.00 | 3.91 | 0.99 | 3.99 | 1.02 | ns | | |
| In02. I have both Taiwan friends and friends who are from my country | **4.11** | 1.11 | 4.03 | 1.12 | 4.21 | 1.09 | 3.46 | 0.001 | 0.16 |
| In03. I feel comfortable around Taiwan friends and friends who are from my country | 3.97 | 0.98 | 3.96 | 0.96 | 4.00 | 1.00 | ns | | |
| Marginalization (α = 0.92) | 1.64 | 0.70 | 1.60 | 0.68 | 1.69 | 0.73 | 2.74 | 0.006 | 0.13 |
| Ma01. I find it hard to communicate with anyone | 1.69 | 0.93 | 1.64 | 0.89 | 1.76 | 0.97 | 2.72 | 0.007 | 0.13 |
| Ma02. People find it hard to accept me | 1.57 | 0.82 | 1.54 | 0.79 | 1.60 | 0.86 | ns | | |
| Ma03. I find it hard to make friends | 1.73 | 1.00 | 1.67 | 0.94 | 1.80 | 1.06 | 2.68 | 0.007 | 0.13 |
| Ma04. People have difficulty understanding me | 1.59 | 0.87 | 1.56 | 0.85 | 1.63 | 0.89 | ns | | |
| Ma05. I find it difficult to socialize with anybody | **1.85** | 0.97 | 1.77 | 0.93 | 1.94 | 1.01 | 3.75 | 0.000 | 0.18 |
| Ma06. I think no one understands me | 1.66 | 0.97 | 1.61 | 0.92 | 1.73 | 1.02 | 2.72 | 0.007 | 0.12 |
| Ma07. I am uncomfortable when I am around other people | 1.60 | 0.89 | 1.58 | 0.87 | 1.63 | 0.93 | ns | | |
| Ma08. I feel that nobody likes me | 1.58 | 0.89 | 1.56 | 0.90 | 1.60 | 0.88 | ns | | |
| Ma09. I do not trust anyone | 1.48 | 0.85 | 1.46 | 0.82 | 1.50 | 0.87 | ns | | |

*N* = 1870. IS (*n* = 1054) and PRC (*n* = 816). ns = non-significant. SD = standard deviation. Values in bold are the highest scoring items for each group of acculturation factors. Ratings: 1 = not at all agree, 2 = partly agree, 3 = agree, 4 = more than agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

As for the other distinct differences within the *marginalization* items, these results signified that there were slight differences between how the PRC and IS respondents personally felt. Although some scholars note that study abroad students' social activities are somewhat related to their personalities [63], these *marginalization* items scored the lowest among all the other acculturation strategies, which is actually quite promising. In essence, even though some respondents felt that they were experiencing some marginalization, the majority of the time they were quite positive with regard to social interactions.

Various behavioral, cognitive, and affective situational changes are also shown in Table 5 with Cronbach [53] Alpha reliabilities ranging from 0.67 to 0.86 signifying appropriate to high levels of reliability [54].

**Table 5.** Study abroad situational changes survey.

| Factor/Items/Cronbach Alpha | All | | IS | | PRC | | *t*-Test | | Cohen's *d* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Mean* | *SD* | *Mean* | *SD* | *Mean* | *SD* | *t* | *p* | |
| Academic (α = 0.86) | 2.24 | 0.84 | 2.18 | 0.80 | 2.31 | 0.87 | 3.42 | 0.001 | 0.16 |
| Ac01. Participating in class discussions | 2.19 | 1.09 | 2.14 | 1.05 | 2.25 | 1.13 | 2.23 | 0.026 | 0.10 |
| Ac02. Reading and understanding lesson materials | 2.26 | 1.12 | 2.26 | 1.14 | 2.25 | 1.11 | ns | | |
| Ac03. Expressing ideas or opinions during class | 2.32 | 1.11 | 2.25 | 1.09 | 2.41 | 1.12 | 3.05 | 0.002 | 0.14 |
| Ac04. Understanding lectures | 2.22 | 1.09 | 2.15 | 1.07 | 2.31 | 1.10 | 3.01 | 0.003 | 0.15 |
| Ac05. Taking notes in class | 1.99 | 1.07 | 1.92 | 1.07 | 2.08 | 1.07 | 3.20 | 0.001 | 0.15 |
| Ac06. Fulfilling school work | **2.45** | 1.10 | 2.35 | 1.04 | 2.58 | 1.17 | 4.36 | 0.000 | 0.21 |
| Leisure living (α = 0.81) | 1.88 | 0.80 | 1.84 | 0.76 | 1.93 | 0.85 | 2.51 | 0.012 | 0.12 |
| Le01. Shopping and buying things | 1.88 | 0.99 | 1.83 | 0.95 | 1.95 | 1.04 | 2.52 | 0.012 | 0.12 |
| Le02. Going to coffee shops, groceries, or restaurants | 1.75 | 0.98 | 1.70 | 0.93 | 1.83 | 1.03 | 2.82 | 0.005 | 0.13 |
| Le03. Sightseeing around Taiwan | **2.08** | 1.08 | 2.05 | 1.04 | 2.12 | 1.13 | ns | | |
| Le04. Using the mass transportation system | 1.80 | 0.96 | 1.78 | 0.93 | 1.84 | 0.99 | ns | | |
| Local viewpoints (α = 0.85) | 2.69 | 0.96 | 2.68 | 0.94 | 2.70 | 0.98 | ns | | |
| Lo01. Seeing things from the Taiwanese point of view | 2.70 | 1.11 | 2.69 | 1.09 | 2.71 | 1.12 | ns | | |
| Lo02. Taking a local perspective on cultural issues | 2.62 | 1.10 | 2.61 | 1.08 | 2.63 | 1.12 | ns | | |
| Lo03. Understanding the Taiwanese world view | **2.76** | 1.10 | 2.75 | 1.09 | 2.76 | 1.12 | ns | | |
| Daily living (α = 0.81) | 2.16 | 0.92 | 2.11 | 0.91 | 2.21 | 0.94 | 2.22 | 0.026 | 0.11 |
| Da01. Adapting to the local pace of life | 2.11 | 1.06 | 2.05 | 1.04 | 2.19 | 1.07 | 2.82 | 0.005 | 0.13 |
| Da02. Adapting to student life in Taiwan | 2.12 | 1.11 | 2.06 | 1.08 | 2.21 | 1.15 | 2.92 | 0.004 | 0.13 |
| Da03. Adapting to the local etiquette | **2.23** | 1.07 | 2.23 | 1.09 | 2.23 | 1.05 | ns | | |
| Responsive (α = 0.71) | 2.47 | 0.92 | 2.43 | 0.90 | 2.51 | 0.94 | ns | | |
| Re01. Dealing with someone who is unpleasant, offensive, or aggressive | **2.61** | 1.19 | 2.56 | 1.16 | 2.68 | 1.22 | 2.26 | 0.024 | 0.10 |
| Re02. Dealing with unsatisfactory service | 2.42 | 1.15 | 2.39 | 1.15 | 2.45 | 1.15 | ns | | |
| Re03. Dealing with people staring at me | 2.37 | 1.13 | 2.35 | 1.10 | 2.38 | 1.17 | ns | | |
| Suppressive (α = 0.67) | 1.93 | 0.79 | 1.92 | 0.78 | 1.94 | 0.80 | ns | | |
| Su01. Being able to talked to my family/friends anytime | 1.69 | 0.98 | 1.71 | 0.99 | 1.67 | 0.98 | ns | | |
| Su02. Being able to use the things that I'm accustomed with | 1.80 | 1.02 | 1.76 | 0.99 | 1.85 | 1.07 | 1.98 | 0.048 | 0.09 |
| Su03. Being able to speak my native language | **2.30** | 1.06 | 2.28 | 1.05 | 2.31 | 1.07 | ns | | |

*N* = 1870. IS (*n* = 1054) and PRC (*n* = 816). ns = non-significant. SD = standard deviation. Values in bold are the highest scoring items for each group of situational changes factors. Ratings: 1 = not at all difficult, 2 = partly difficult, 3 = difficult, 4 = more than difficult, and 5 = very difficult.

Results show that in general, students felt the various situational changes as partly to somewhat difficult to handle, with the mean factors scoring from the lowest *leisure living* (*M* = 1.88, *SD* = 0.80) to the highest *local viewpoints* (*M* = 2.69, *SD* = 0.96). These slight difficulties are actually understandable, since every encounter with a new culture is not without stress [62,64]. Furthermore, even though a PRC student basically speaks the same language as the Taiwan people (Mandarin Chinese), cultural differences still exist [65], hence, some difficulties in understanding of the local viewpoints is but just normal.

To better understand the differences between the IS and PRC students' behavioral, cognitive, and affective situational changes, independent-sample *t*-tests were conducted. Table 5 shows a majority of the differences falls on three factors (or categories)—*academic* (IS with *M* = 2.18, *SD* = 0.80 and PRC with *M* = 2.31, *SD* = 0.87) with *t* (1868) = 3.42, *p* = 0.001, *d* = 0.16, *leisure living* (IS with *M* = 1.84, *SD* = 0.76 and PRC with *M* = 1.93, *SD* = 0.85) with *t* (1868) = 2.51, *p* = 0.012, *d* = 0.12, and *daily living* (IS with *M* = 2.11, *SD* = 0.91 and PRC with *M* = 2.21, *SD* = 0.94) with *t* (1868) = 2.22, *p* = 0.026, *d* = 0.11 — all of which denote minimal effect sizes [48].

All items with statistically significant differences appear to have PRC respondents perceiving slightly higher difficulty levels than their IS counterparts. More important, results show that PRC respondents were significantly experiencing more academic pressure.

This might be partly due to parental educational aspirations exerted on PRC students [66], PRC students' pressure to return home upon graduation [67], or their being overly grade conscious [68].

Table 6 shows the Cronbach [53] Alpha reliabilities of the SAAH factors ranging from 0.80 to 0.86 signifying high levels of reliability [54]. Results suggest that both groups perceived everyday hassles as partly to almost difficult to handle with the mean factors scoring from the lowest *adverse feelings* ($M$ = 2.08, $SD$ = 0.85) to the highest *communication difficulties* ($M$ = 2.80, $SD$ = 1.23).

**Table 6.** Study abroad acculturative hassles.

| Factor/Items/Cronbach Alpha | All | | IS | | PRC | | *t*-Test | | Cohen's *d* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Mean* | *SD* | *Mean* | *SD* | *Mean* | *SD* | *t* | *p* | |
| Communication difficulties (α = 0.86) | 2.80 | 1.23 | 2.92 | 1.21 | 2.64 | 1.23 | 4.90 | 0.000 | 0.23 |
| La01. Difficulty in talking about yourself | 2.60 | 1.41 | 2.74 | 1.40 | 2.43 | 1.41 | 4.72 | 0.000 | 0.22 |
| La02. Difficulty in understanding jokes/humor | 2.77 | 1.29 | 2.92 | 1.30 | 2.58 | 1.26 | 5.64 | 0.000 | 0.27 |
| La03. Difficulty in making yourself understood | **3.02** | 1.45 | 3.10 | 1.43 | 2.91 | 1.46 | 2.81 | 0.005 | 0.13 |
| Adverse feelings (α = 0.85) | 2.08 | 0.85 | 2.08 | 0.81 | 2.09 | 0.91 | ns | | |
| Ad01. Being alienated by others | 2.01 | 1.07 | 1.99 | 1.03 | 2.04 | 1.12 | ns | | |
| Ad02. Being let down (disappointment) by others | 2.16 | 1.17 | 2.19 | 1.17 | 2.11 | 1.16 | ns | | |
| Ad03. Being isolated by others | 1.82 | 1.02 | 1.80 | 1.01 | 1.83 | 1.03 | ns | | |
| Ad04. Feel of inequality | **2.31** | 1.25 | 2.34 | 1.23 | 2.28 | 1.26 | ns | | |
| Ad05. Being taken advantage by others | 2.05 | 1.15 | 2.04 | 1.14 | 2.06 | 1.16 | ns | | |
| Ad06. Being ignored by others | 2.14 | 1.08 | 2.10 | 1.04 | 2.19 | 1.12 | ns | | |
| Struggles (α = 0.80) | 2.50 | 0.87 | 2.52 | 0.84 | 2.48 | 0.90 | ns | | |
| St01. Not having enough time to meet my obligations | 2.44 | 1.16 | 2.45 | 1.13 | 2.43 | 1.20 | ns | | |
| St02. Not being able to keep up with assigned tasks | 2.37 | 1.18 | 2.39 | 1.17 | 2.35 | 1.18 | ns | | |
| St03. Not being able to concentrate | 2.49 | 1.15 | 2.50 | 1.15 | 2.47 | 1.14 | ns | | |
| St04. Not being able to decide about my future career | 2.52 | 1.30 | 2.58 | 1.31 | 2.46 | 1.29 | ns | | |
| St05. Not having enough sleep | **2.66** | 1.33 | 2.64 | 1.32 | 2.70 | 1.33 | ns | | |
| St06. Not being able to attain expected academic grade | 2.52 | 1.21 | 2.56 | 1.22 | 2.48 | 1.19 | ns | | |

$N$ = 1870. IS ($n$ = 1054) and PRC ($n$ = 816). ns = non-significant. SD = standard deviation. Values in bold are the highest scoring items for each group of acculturative hassles factors. Ratings: 1 = not at all difficult, 2 = partly difficult, 3 = difficult, 4 = more than difficult, and 5 = very difficult.

As for the comparison of SAAH factors between the PRC and the general group of respondents, independent-sample $t$-tests show that only *communication difficulties* was statistically different (IS with $M$ = 2.92, $SD$ = 1.21 and PRC with $M$ = 2.64, $SD$ = 1.23) with $t$ (1868) = 4.90, $p < 0.001$, $d$ = 0.23 denoting with small effect size [48]. The items within the factor *communication difficulties* were significantly different with IS respondents experiencing higher difficulty levels (Table 6 items: La01, La02, and La03). These results mirror previous findings, wherein the general population of study abroad students report a high level of difficulty for expressing themselves or communicating in Mandarin Chinese [10].

Besides the abovementioned hassles, many Taiwan regulations are imposed that also create barriers in attracting PRC students. These include upon forfeiting student identity, the respective individuals must leave within 10 days; all study abroad students must leave Taiwan within a month of graduation; and study abroad students cannot enroll in courses and major areas of study related to national security.

In sum, these findings highlighted the various difficulties experienced by both IS and PRC students. More important, for the PRC students to become the future stewards of change various levels of positive interactions should be encouraged. In light of these findings, the current study suggests that study abroad educators should design projects, activities, and assignments to harness a complex view of culture, identity and locality and to recognize the pedagogical value of the study abroad experience for both PRC and local Taiwan students.

## 5. Limitations, Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

### *5.1. Limitations*

The primary aim of this study was to describe and provide insight for the cross-strait experience of PRC study abroad respondents in comparison with other study abroad student groups in Taiwanese universities. The survey instrument was useful and aligned with the same standards as any other approach; however, not without limitations. It is well established that study abroad students are not the same; they represent heterogeneous groups and diversity within groups. Detailed attention for understanding of respondent heterogeneity was missing from the study and therefore represents a limitation of research. Moreover, participant interpretation of the survey questions may have affected individual responses. The environment in which respondents completed the survey may have interfered with the level of concentration exhibited by each respondent. As well socially desirability bias could have been at play; participants may have answered according to how they would like to be, in comparison to how they actually felt about certain survey statements.

Drawbacks of using the volunteer sampling method were also a limitation. Study abroad students who selected to volunteer may have displayed similar characteristics in contrast to those who selected not to participate. This could have contributed to bias with an overrepresentation of respondents who had similar personality traits.

This study spurs opportunities for additional follow-up and future research. Future phenomenological or ethnographic research could further explain the quantitative findings. The focus was participating students themselves, more needs to be known about the professionals and the Taiwanese institutions that successfully navigate the intra-regional and cross-strait cooperation in support identified in the current study and ask study abroad professionals to rank the level of impact on incoming study abroad students for comparative analysis. Institutional factors should be explored to examine correlation between characteristics (such as location, region, type of city, institution size) and level of participation with cross-strait study abroad programs.

### *5.2. Implications*

On a grand scale, it appears that PRC students in Taiwan universities have the potential to engage with sustainable cross-strait cooperation as stewards of a trans-Pacific community. Due to the close proximity of culture, history, and language between PRC and Taiwan the elements of acculturation were not problematic as typically expected for IS students new to Taiwanese universities. Items with statistically significant differences, however, suggest that PRC respondents perceive higher levels of academic pressure in comparison to other IS groups. This might be due to parental educational aspirations exerted on PRC students [66], self-imposed pressure stemming from requirements to return home upon graduation [67] or being overly grade conscious [68]. In general, PRC respondents might assume that studying in Taiwan would be relatively easy because they speak Chinese, whereas other IS students, representative of diverse backgrounds prepares psychologically and emotionally for studying in a country where the majority do not speak their native language. The assumption is that PRC respondents are navigating in unchartered territory in terms of the education contrasts between systems. Their frame of reference is founded on the authoritarian Communist Party Chinese system, which is in sharp contrast to the democratic system in Taiwan higher education based on free inquiry and critical discourse.

In response, a sustainable Taiwan study abroad program design should be able to provide opportunities, both formal and non-formal, for students to use and apply ethnographic skills and develop areas such as global awareness, world learning, and emotional intelligence. ISs should be viewed as cultural ambassadors, who are expected to create relationships with others in Taiwan that endure beyond the study abroad experience. Commitment to constructive design and positive change to study abroad programs that is overtly responsible and critical is a beginning point; the following recommendations reflect this focus.

#### 5.2.1. Recommendation One: The Role of Communities of Practice

As university-sanctioned entities within larger campus communities, Taiwanese study abroad programs can be designed using Lave and Wenger's [69] social-learning model, Communities of Practice (CoP). Defined as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" [70] (p. 1). Niesz [71] and Takahashi [72] suggest that involvement in a CoP supports members to develop and co-construct a shared identity and beliefs. This focus includes themes of community, practice and participation to explore, and support IS transition and learning in Taiwanese higher education. Within this context, PRC students are supported in their transition to the Taiwanese higher education system.

As a conceptual lens, the CoP provides space for engagement with participatory action research (PAR) projects that emphasize action and reflection in holistic cycles. The use of a community-based, PAR has potential to create horizontal relationships among professionals, local students, ISs, and communities while also engaging ISs with learning that is their personal responsibility. Recommendations include PAR design that addresses cross-strait issues between the PRC and Taiwan. One option is to organize PRC students in small groups with local Taiwanese students; each small group is responsible for selecting a topic, researching and writing articles or developing film documentaries aimed at local audiences in both the PRC and Taiwan students' home communities. Groups should be organized as journalistic teams in which participants' unique backgrounds and cultural identities are equally valued and all members are expected to equally co-conduct the research process.

#### 5.2.2. Recommendation Two: Emphasis on Contemporary and Local Culture

> *In the classroom, of course, the instructor to a large extent calls the tune. However, outside the classroom, during study abroad in particular, it is the learner's views that matter, for they shape the learning opportunities that arise and the learning strategies that will be employed* [73] (p. 243).

Implications and recommendations contribute to conceptual approaches addressing the complexity of student mobility in higher education across the Taiwan Strait, thereby exemplifying a mix of collaboration and competition that involves interplay among various entities associated with global, regional and national settings. As noted in the above quote, one of the greatest benefits of study abroad is the abundance of opportunities for spontaneous interaction with native speakers (in this case the Taiwan people) in culturally authentic settings that include a mix of both formal and non-formal learning.

Taiwan educators responsible for the academic welfare of PRC students are called to develop learning structures for participants to take charge of their immersion in and learning about local cultures. Study abroad planners should provide a theoretical framework to help analyze and discuss local cultures along with personal representations and misconceptions. Students should have opportunities to examine the borders, contact zones, and liminal spaces of their host city, most likely the major centers of Taipei. Concepts such as *ethnoscapes* and *cultural flow fields* provide context to challenge assumptions about culture. These ideas are embedded in the work of cultural anthropologists who reject the notion of fixed and bounded cultural groups; they suggest that emphasis on borders breaks down the lines between us and them [74]. Contact zones, defined as *social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other* also contribute to this framework [75] (p. 38).

The aim would be to provide interventions to comprehend the rationale of cultural incidents that arise and how to cope with them. This approach might shift the focus, and alleviate the responsibility of having to adapt to the host environment to a more active instance in which all participants get involved and strive for a greater two-way benefit. The promotion of involvement of local students by catering activities that engage all participants is advised. For example, buddy schemes in which local students are in touch with PRC students before arrival and are the first point of contact upon arrival to the airport.

Taiwanese universities could aim for the implementation of schemes that promote a more multicultural living environment for students. For example, some institutional accommodations could be arranged thematically, in which incoming students have the opportunity to explore the culture of a specific region of their interest. Throughout their stay different activities to foster cultural knowledge can be launched, and be imparted possibly by local students. This might provide opportunities for incoming PRC students to understand the power of local action and struggle and consider how they view themselves as impacting local communities. Scholars such as Barber [76] can be used as a reference for the interplay between globalizing and localizing forces. Students should be introduced to local content including writers and critics; guest speakers should be included from a wide variety of areas beyond the scope of academic discourse.

### *5.3. Conclusions*

The higher education system of Taiwan represents a contemporary trend among East Asian nations in terms of recognizing incoming study abroad students as a valuable asset. Taiwanese study abroad programs are unique given the dynamics of intra-regional and cross-strait cooperation. The ebb and flow of multidimensional cross-strait collaboration between the PRC and Taiwan might be contingent in part on events of the COVID-19 world pandemic; but future world events will unfold side by side the atmosphere in Taiwanese universities as valuable and potentially sustainable transformative experiences for the general population of incoming study abroad groups as well as the cross-strait PRC students. While efforts toward sustainable cross-strait collaboration can expand within various dimensions, the education arena is unique in that it offers the freedom and spirit of discovery implicit in study abroad for participants temporarily suspended from social, economic, and political pressures of daily life in their home systems.

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