

Graduate Student Migration to Taiwan : Leave, Stay, and Return

The Case of Vietnamese Students at National Cheng Kung University

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to go deeper into the motivation to study abroad as well as the ability to adapt to Taiwan society and intention to immigrate through Vietnamese graduate students studying at National Cheng Kung University (NCKU). In Taiwan, Vietnamese students increase by 330 percent over three years, and the number of Vietnamese students coming to Taiwan in 2020 remains unchanged despite the pandemic. However, the impression of the Vietnamese student community in Taiwan is quite blurred in comparison with the significant groups of Vietnamese workers and brides there, and the number of studies on this group is quite modest also. This study provides a relatively general overview of Vietnamese graduate students who have been studying at NCKU in particular and in Taiwan in general. The study also discovered a number of interesting factors that affect Vietnamese students' overseas life such as region and gender. This not only helps to better understand the migration situation of students, but also outlines the migration trend of this student group in the future.

Keywords: student migration, Vietnamese students, Taiwan education, NCKU, study abroad

Introduction

Migration is not a new phenomenon, but in the context of globalization and integration, it has become an active activity that takes place regularly around the world. According to the International Organization for Migration, UN Migration, from 1970 to 2019, the annual number of migrants always tends to increase, from about 84 million in 1970 to more than 270 million in 2019 in many types, such as environmental migration, labor migration, family migration, marriage migration, student migration, etc. (World Migration Report, 2020). Despite 2020 being a difficult year for the whole world when the Covid-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented crisis, the total number of migrants did not decrease, but still increased to about 280.6 million (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). That fact not only shows that migration has been and is one of the main trends in the world today, but also brings with it a lot of consequences in terms of economy - society, culture - education, security - politics in both sending and receiving countries.

Although being only a small part of the overall picture of worldwide migration, student migration is gaining more attention. As defined by UNESCO, international students or international mobile students are “students who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled

outside their country of origin” (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2021). From about 2 million in 2000, the number of international students increased to more than 5.3 million in 2017. The United States of America welcomes the most international students, followed by the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany and the Russian Federation, which are the countries of top-quality education in the world. Meanwhile, the People's Republic of China for many years was prominent sending countries of international students, followed by India, Germany, Republic of Korea, Nigeria, France and Saudi Arabia (Migration Data Portal, 2021).

Notably, the student migration situation in East Asia in recent times has had many profound changes. East Asia is not only sending a large number of international students but also becoming a destination for more students in and outside the region. In recent years the economic and educational achievements of countries such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan and China have resulted in the number of international students coming to these countries, particularly at the tertiary level, has increased rapidly and turned the region to a hotspot of student migration on the world map (World Migration Report, 2020).

Located in Southeast Asia, Vietnam is not a big country but has made a significant contribution to the migration process of the region and the world, especially since the period of Doi Moi (Renovation) in late 1980s and early 1990s. With unique historical circumstances and

a young population force, Vietnamese people have migrated to all over the world in many different identities, from refugees and victims of human trafficking to those who leave for work, family reunification, marriage or study.

According to official figures of the Vietnamese government, in the period 2012-2016, each year Vietnam had about 5-6 million people leaving, of which thousands of students went to study abroad. The top destinations for Vietnamese students in 2013 were Australia (26,015), the United States of America (19,591), Japan (13,328), China (13,000), Singapore (10,000), France (6,700), Taiwan (6,000), the United Kingdom (5,118), Russia (5,000), and Germany (4,600) (ICEF Monitor, 2021). Vietnamese students have even become one of the key groups of international students in several countries, such as the United States and Australia. In the United States, Viet Nam was the sixth largest sender of students to the United States after China, South Korea, Germany, Mexico and Brazil in 2013. Meanwhile, in Australia, Vietnamese students held the second position, just behind Chinese group, with more than 10% out of 16,693 international secondary school students in the country (Viet Nam Migration Profile 2016, 2017).

According to the International Organization for Migration, factors that promote studying abroad in Vietnam include: the high position of education in Vietnamese society, the State's

incentive policies, the process of national innovation and integration of Vietnam's economy over the past 30 years, the rapid development of information technology, the growth of foreign businesses operating in Vietnam, the significantly improved income of the Vietnamese people, overseas Vietnamese scholars as well as social networks in origin and destination countries playing an important role in promoting international exchange and cooperation on education and training, and finally, the increasing numbers of Vietnamese people learning foreign languages (Viet Nam Migration Profile 2016, 2017).

From a historical perspective, the trend of studying abroad in Vietnam can be divided into two main phases: (1) from the early 20th century to the opening period of 1986 and (2) from 1986 onwards. While before 1986, politics was the key factor deciding to study abroad, the current trend is dominated by economic goals. Studying abroad has now even become a public strategy of the State to improve the quality of human resources to serve the targets of industrialization and modernization and is seen as the 'key' for development of the country in the context of globalization and deep integration (Nguyen C. , Vietnamese international student mobility: past and current trends, 2013).

In one study of motivations for studying abroad and immigration intentions of current and future Vietnamese international students, Tran Le Huu Nghia discovered 12 factors that

motivated students to pursue studying abroad and 18 socio-cultural, economic and political factors that influenced their immigration intentions. Research results also show differences between the two groups of male and female students, as well as prospective students and current students. An individual's attachment to his or her home country and ability to adapt to the host country may determine his or her intention to immigrate (Tran, 2019).

Minh Hoang, Massoud Moslehpour, and Victoria Seitz learned about decision making model of Vietnamese students studying higher education in England. The results show that the main reason why Vietnamese students want to study abroad is their parents' desire and the need to improve their English proficiency, and at the same time, increase their chances of competing in a career through better professional qualifications after graduation. Agencies provide an important source of information, but friends, alumni and other independent agencies will help the prospective students to verify the information. Tuition and living expenses are considered first when choosing a university, followed by course content (Minh Hoang, Massoud Moslehpour, & Victoria Seitz, 2019).

In the article "Female Student Migration: A Brief Opportunity for Freedom from Religio-Philosophical Obedience", Kieu Nga Nguyen and Helen Jaqueline McLaren discovered that studying abroad can serve as an escape. Research on a group of Vietnamese

female students who are graduate students in Australia shows that studying abroad was chosen to escape the family, community and social burdens imposed on Vietnamese women by Confucianism, which is described as a 'living hell'. This statement is quite similar to the research results of Fran Martin when describing studying abroad as a strategy for female students and their families to get rid of China's 'risk society' and gender re-traditionalization (Martin, 2017).

The increasing number of Vietnamese students abroad has led to concerns about the 'brain drain' issue of the domestic economy. Some studies on international students also show that in addition to looking for a good study environment, studying abroad is also a good opportunity to settle. However, Nguyen Chi Hong in a review indicated that this issue really needs more empirical research (Nguyen C. , The Research Landscape of Current Vietnamese Skilled Migration, 2020). Meanwhile, research by Tran Le Huu Nghia indicated that "not all of the students were immigration hunters; many were willing to return their home for socioeconomic, cultural, and political reasons" (Tran, 2019). Another study by Le T. Anh shows that studying abroad in the United States has made many Vietnamese international students change so much that it is difficult for them to adapt to their old life in Vietnam when they return (Le, 2017).

Although Vietnamese students in Taiwan

increase by 330% over three years, and the number of Vietnamese students coming to Taiwan remains unchanged despite pandemic (Everington, 2021), Taiwan, in the mind of the majority of Vietnamese, is the land for labour and marriage migrants. Specifically, in the 2012-2016 period, Taiwan welcomed 274,890 Vietnamese people to work, ranking first among the destinations of Vietnamese migrant workers, nearly three times more than the second destination - Japan (107,975 people). At the same time, in the period 2013-2016, there were more than 14,342 Vietnamese people married to Taiwanese citizens, just less than US citizens (19,526 people) and Korean citizens (16,090 people) (Viet Nam Migration Profile 2016, 2017). That fact somewhat blurs the impression of the Vietnamese student community in Taiwan in comparison with the significant groups of Vietnamese workers and brides here.

Consequently, the number of studies on student migration is quite modest, corresponding to the number of international publications on international students, which accounts for only 2.1% of peer-reviewed publications on international migration and health research (World Migration Report, 2020). In general, recent studies on Vietnamese international students mainly discuss trends in the phenomenon of studying abroad, motives for studying abroad and the return of Vietnamese international students. Therefore, in order to

contribute to the knowledge about graduate student migration in Taiwan, particularly the group of Vietnamese international students, this paper is an attempt to go deeper into the motivation to study abroad as well as the ability to adapt to Taiwan society and intention to immigrate through Vietnamese graduate students studying at National Cheng Kung University (NCKU).

The migrant journey of ncku vietnamese students

This study was mainly done by individual in-depth interviews, except twice in groups of two and once in groups of three from January 16 to 19, 2021. Each person was interviewed for about 30 minutes, especially in two cases lasting more than an hour. Interviews took place in many locations such as cafes, discussion rooms, or homes. A total of 17 Vietnamese graduate students were selected for interview through snowball sampling, specifically:

Name	Gender	Age	Region in Vietnam	Time in Taiwan	Work experience
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MS1	M	23	Central	1 year 5 months	Yes
FS1	F	27	North	4 months	Yes
FS2	F	25	North	4 months	Yes
FS3	F	30	Central	7 years	Yes
MS2	M	31	South	12 years	Yes
FS4	F	23	Central	4 months	Yes
MS3	M	30	North	6 years	Yes
MS4	M	34	North	2 years	Yes
MS5	M	26	South	2 years	Yes
FS5	F	29	South	4 months	Yes
MS6	M	24	North	1 year	Yes
MS7	M	32	South	2 years 6 months	Yes
FS6	F	29	South	4 months	Yes
FS7	F	28	South	1 year	Yes
FS8	F	26	South	4 months	Yes
FS9	F	24	South	4 months	Yes
MS8	M	25	Central	1 year 4 months	No

The main topics discussed include:

- The idea of studying abroad: The intention to study abroad and impact factors;
- Selection of destination: The reason for choosing Taiwan and knowledge about Taiwan;
- Application procedure: How to do it, what to consider and supporting factors;
- Family's attitude: The family's reaction to the decision to study abroad;
- Taiwan Education: Evaluation of the quality and difference with Vietnamese education;
- Life in Taiwan: Feeling about the land and people of Taiwan, difficulties and advantages, part-time jobs and personal changes;

•Future plans: Post-graduation plans and return to Vietnam.

The Idea of Studying Abroad: Continuation or Change

Studying abroad can be a continuation for young and inexperienced individuals such as MS3 and MS8. After earning a Master's degree in Vietnam, MS3 had become PhD student at NCKU and recently graduated after six years of study. MS8 is a Master's student at NCKU under a cooperation agreement between NCKU and his university in Vietnam.

MS3: In the past, when I studied a high-quality program, the school already oriented me (to study abroad). My seniors all went to study abroad, so I also had the idea to study abroad.

MS8: That was quite a coincidence, there was a delegation of professors from our school (NCKU) came to my university (in Vietnam) to interview students because there was a cooperation agreement between the two universities. I knew about that occasion and attended the interview. At that time, I did not intend to study abroad, but I wanted to participate in an interview to check my English. I felt fine because they understood what I said.

But for individuals who worked before, studying abroad comes from the desire to change. Unlike many undergraduate students who have to study abroad in order to satisfy their parents' wishes (Minh Hoang, Massoud Moslehpour, & Victoria Seitz, 2019), graduate students often think about studying abroad actively in the working environment. This group can be divided into two subgroups, one leaving because they want to change their living environment and the other leaving because they want to improve themselves.

Many students said that they felt bored and stuck with their current job and started thinking about studying abroad as a way to renew their lives. MS1 worked at the airport and was fed up with the rotation of life while FS1 is no longer interested in her job after a short time working.

MS1: After a year of working, the job became so boring, I thought I should go to study abroad to change my life, step out of my comfort zone. [...] I can work in the offices of textile companies, but I don't like it because it feels like a vicious cycle, and such a vicious circle is very boring.

FS1: After more than one year and a half working, I felt bored with my current job.

Meanwhile, most of the remaining individuals realize that their work capacity is not good and hope that studying abroad will help them improve themselves. In particular, among the skills, many people mentioned Chinese as one of the important motivations for their decision to go to school.

FS2: When I went to work, I felt that my ability was not enough so I wanted to take extra classes and improve my Chinese.

MS6: When I was in school, I learned Chinese as a second foreign language, I found Chinese very interesting and I knew that I loved Chinese language, so I decided to go to a Chinese-speaking country to learn Chinese and economics.

The intention to study abroad is further motivated when individuals often witness other people, especially friends, studying abroad. The fact that friends go to study abroad gives individuals the feeling that they can do the same, or even better. The image of international students has had a profound transformation in the minds of individuals, from an impossible splendid image suddenly turning into a completely achievable opportunity.

MS1: When I graduated from university, I thought I would never study again because I was so tired [laughs] but after working for a year and seeing people around me starting to study abroad, I thought again because even my friends who were worse at school than me were able to study abroad, at that time I started thinking about studying abroad.

MS8: When I was young, when I thought of international students, I thought that those people must study very hard and be good at foreign languages. The older I get, the easier

it is to access to study abroad. If you are interested, there are still many opportunities for studying abroad.

Interestingly, individuals from the South seem to have decided to study abroad much more suddenly than those from the North and Central Vietnam. Many people had never thought about going to school at all until someone suggested it, while the Central and North groups usually thought long before decision. This is probably due to the distinctive character of each region, in which the Southerners are liberal while the Northerners and the Central people are more cautious. Below are the situations of MS5 and FS7, two representatives from the South.

MS5: When I graduated, I didn't have any intention of studying abroad, but after that, my instructor recommended that I should study abroad if I want to change majors.

FS7: After studying abroad, my friend recommended me to follow her to change the atmosphere and make my life comfortable, so I just went.

When asked about the goal of studying abroad, in addition to professional knowledge, life experience and maturity were the two most common answers. Interviewees, especially young female individuals, often hope to gain independence through being away from home and taking care of their own daily lives.

FS4: Studying abroad is going to another country and having new experiences, so I want to go, I want to experience.

FS2: I have never lived away from my mother before, so I want to go to school to become more mature, to learn how to take care of myself and my parents in the future.

FS1: I think Vietnamese women often get married early, so it is necessary to go to school to experience as soon as possible so that later you won't regret after marriage.

Choosing Taiwan: The Dream Option

Obviously, Taiwan does not have a prestigious education like the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and is even ranked below some neighboring countries such as Japan, Korea and Singapore. However, after considering a variety of factors, Taiwan has become an optimal choice for many Vietnamese students. Commonly cited criteria include: quality of education, admission requirements, scholarships, cost of living, culture, lifestyle, safety, security, and geographic distance.

In terms of quality, although not so famous, many universities in Taiwan still hold high positions in world rankings such as NTU, NCTU or NCKU. It is worth mentioning that despite the good quality, the entry conditions of Taiwan's universities are easier and more flexible than other universities in the region and the world, some even accept TOEIC in the enrollment application. Studying in Taiwan is also described as not as stressful as neighboring countries such as Korea and Japan.

FS3: [I want] a language I can learn while I'm at school, learning at the same time, not having to learn it first like Japanese. If I have to study Japanese for a year before I can study the official program, I find it a waste of time.

FS5: I choose a country where the criteria are a bit low

because I'm a bit old, so my ability to compete with other candidates will be reduced. I researched and found that Taiwan accepts TOEIC, which is generally quite comfortable compared to other countries such as Europe.

FS9: When I came here, I studied differently from my university major. I find Taiwan an easy environment to accept that change.

Although not providing much money, diverse scholarship programs have attracted many international students to Taiwan. Except for Taipei, the scholarship amount still allows international students to have a relatively comfortable life elsewhere with a moderate cost of living and rich job opportunities. This feature is especially suitable for middle-class families and students who want to be financially independent without depending on their parents.

FS2: After learning about studying abroad in general and studying in Taiwan, I found that Taiwan offers many scholarships for Vietnamese students.

FS3: I thought about European countries but also thought about funding because I don't want to depend on my parents too much.

Culture and lifestyle are two special criteria where Taiwan has an advantage, especially when compared to countries in Europe, America or Australia. Most of the interviewees had an interest in Chinese language and culture, possibly influenced by movies and music. But when comparing China and Taiwan, Taiwan's civilized and progressive lifestyle is more appreciated than China's seemingly chaotic society. During the interview, female students

often emphasized the cultural similarities between Vietnam and Taiwan, and some of them repeated it during the interviews.

MS1: When watching online reviews, I felt that Taiwan is worth living, Taiwanese people are very friendly, Taiwanese food is delicious, Taiwan's scenery is very beautiful, Taiwan's climate is very good. Taiwan's education is also good, there are also some high ranked schools in the world. [...] I don't like China because it doesn't allow Facebook. [...] China is crowded, exhausting and complicated.

FS1: Studying abroad in Europe is different from studying in China, Korea or Taiwan because Vietnam shares the same culture with the East Asian group [...] If studying in Europe, the difference is a lot, but if you study abroad in China or Taiwan, life is similar to Vietnam, so you will adapt easily.

MS4: A few years ago, I had an invitation to study in Korea. However, I do not like Korean culture very much because the way of life and way of thinking in their culture is not close to me, it is a bit heavy on patriarchy and hierarchy, so I did not choose Korea.

MS8: I really like language Chinese because since I was a child I have watched martial arts movies, I really like them and I like listening to Chinese music also.

Although in terms of distance, China, Korea or Japan are not too far from Vietnam when compared to Taiwan, but Taiwan is better appreciated for its high level of safety and security. Female students often use the word 'peaceful' or 'slow pace of life' to talk about Taiwanese society and feel very secure when they come here to study.

FS2: I want to find a peaceful country [...] I find Taiwan quite peaceful.

FS3: I like the kind of life that is slow and not too crowded.

Information about studying in Taiwan is often searched by students on the internet and people who have a lot of practical experience in Taiwan. Similar to online shopping, in addition to the design and price, the reviews of previous customers are very important in evaluating product quality. Here, the reviews of teachers, friends or colleagues are sometimes like the final confirmation step before pressing the purchase button. Many individuals even immediately decided to go to school after a simple encouragement from friends.

MS4: About three years ago, I met two colleagues, Dr. L and Dr. N, and I asked about Taiwan and found out that Taiwan has a comfortable living environment, a professional working environment, and especially easy mobility between Hanoi and Taiwan, so easy to visit family.

FS7: After studying abroad, my friend recommended me to follow her to change the atmosphere and make my life comfortable, so I just went.

Application Procedure: The Power of Digital Age

Despite having little experience, in general, the process of preparing application is quite convenient and most of them were prepared by the students after consulting online information as well as experience of other international students, especially from the website of Taiwan Diary. Two students from Central Vietnam faced some difficulties in applying for documents from the local authorities but were able to complete

them after spending a lot of time and effort.

MS1: I only connected with people who were applying to study abroad online a few days ago and then followed them. During the process of preparing the documents, I encountered many difficulties, for example, notarization or consular legalization only needed twice, but I had to do it four times to get all the documents.

MS8: It would have taken about 7 to 10 days to do all things together, but in fact it took me about 15 to 20 days to work in two places.

Study abroad counseling centers seem not to earn many potential customers from the Taiwan market. Only MS6 asked for the support of the service but then regretted it because he believed that he could do better on his own after spending a large amount of money. It proves that the procedure to study in Taiwan is relatively simple and social groups on the internet are gradually replacing the services of traditional study abroad centers with an almost zero cost.

FS3: Actually, I went to the consulting office so I knew the steps that needed to be done, and then after the steps that I thought I needed to ask them to do for me, they actually told me I still had to go to work, so I thought I would do it myself.

MS6: At first I asked the company to help me because at that time I still worked. The procedures for studying abroad as well as immigration documents for me were very vague and I thought it was very complicated so I left it to the company to do it with a total cost of 1200 USD.

Students' Families: Diverse Reactions

When learning about their children's plans to study abroad, most families support them. Interestingly, while some mothers encouraged their daughters to go to school to broaden their horizons, several fathers worried about their daughters living away from home.

MS8: My parents advised me that if I had a chance, I should go to school, because I'm young, my brain can still work, so I should go to study.

FS6: My mother used to say "Don't stay in one place, if you have the opportunity, you should go to many countries to gain more knowledge and new perspectives".

Southern families often received the information freely and supported their children's decision to go to school. In their eyes, going to school is a normal activity, nothing too special, just like moving to another city to study or work.

MS7: My family doesn't think going to school as something monumental but very normal [...] Studying abroad is just a small thing "like a rabbit" !

MS5: It's normal for me to go, Taiwan is also very near.

Families in the Central and Northern regions often had quite strong reactions such as questioning, even fierce opposition in the initial stage. But the later attitude was completely opposite, they often felt very proud and saw that as a great pride of the whole family or clan.

MS1: When my parents found out that I had planned to study abroad, in the first days they shouted at me [...] but the last five days we had parties every day [laughs].

MS3: The family held a big party [...] In the countryside, if children can study abroad, their parents are very proud.

MS6: My clan held a big party to celebrate because I was the

first one to study abroad.

Taiwan Education: Good Quality, Freedom and Difference

In general, the majority of old and new NCKU students admitted that Taiwan has a good quality education, which is reflected in the professional qualifications of the professors, teaching methods and equipment as well.

MS2: The facilities in Taiwan are much better than in Vietnam. I can download articles very easily. Most of the lecturers here are from Europe and America, their thoughts are quite good and they are open-minded [...]

FS2: The teachers here are very professional, very good at English, and very enthusiastic with their students.

FS4: The teachers are enthusiastic [...] The teacher in the class makes us talk and interact with each other [...] every school day is a fun day [...]

MS6: Overall assessment of Taiwanese education is very good [...] Many universities are in the top of the world [...] Taiwan's education system is very developed.

Corresponding to the quality of teaching is a rather high requirement of learning. Many Vietnamese students, especially new students, feel quite pressured because they are not used to the intensity of study and the new way of learning. However, the students also realize that the requirements of the subjects are high but not too harsh and there is a certain flexibility.

FS2: I have to work harder to catch up with my classmates.

MS5: The subjects are [...] more difficult, and the teachers' requirements are also higher.

FS7: Studying is so hard [...] I don't have time to hang out.

MS8: During exams, the time for students is not too strict, for example the exam is said to last one hour, but when the time is up, teachers can give you another fifty minutes or an hour.

The freedom in schools of Taiwan is one of the most surprising things for many Vietnamese. Here, students freely express themselves, behave naturally and claim rights that students in Vietnam have never thought of.

MS4: [Education] is more liberal [...] In Vietnam, it's impossible to listen to lectures and eat at the same time [...] Students argue with teachers like friends [...] the teachers here are quite patient.

MS8: Taiwan's education system is quite respectful of learners [...] Teachers do not force students to do or not do anything during class [...] Taiwanese people can wear shorts to class, as long as it is comfortable for their studying. Students bring food into the classroom to eat, but as long as it does not bother others, it is acceptable.

Vietnamese people often think that Taiwanese students are friendly, hardworking and have high self-esteem. However, there is an opinion that most Taiwanese students have unbalanced and unhealthy living and are quite shy in communication.

MS6: Students here study very hard, when I go to the cafe, I see many students studying together and I feel very surprised [...] They always want everything to be right.

MS8: Taiwan's personality in exam is extremely good, once the teacher says not to use materials, regardless of cellphones or books, Taiwanese people will not use because they have their self-esteem, and they respect the honesty in the exam.

FS2: They [Taiwanese students] study hard and are

perfectionists [...] I [Vietnamese students] have a balance between life and study [...] some Taiwanese friends have poor working hours such as studying very late at night and not sleeping enough.

However, Vietnamese students also pointed out some limitations of Taiwanese education such as some universities are not good quality, some professors are not enthusiastic or discriminatory in educational environment.

MS1: Students from the UK, from the US, from France [...] the teachers are more comfortable with them.

MS6: This school in Taoyuan is really not good, the way of teaching is unprofessional and there is discrimination against Vietnamese people, not really Vietnamese but anyone who look like Asia, especially Southeast Asia.

Taiwan: Land of Kindness

When talking about their feelings about real life in Taiwan, most said that the information they received before going to school was quite accurate. Although there may be some unhappy memories, all are extremely impressed with the civilized lifestyle and kindness of Taiwanese people. Through the stories that the interviewees shared, the vast majority of Taiwanese people are friendly and always willing to help others in any situation.

FS3: There was a time when I and my roommate went out but got lost and didn't know where to catch the bus, we met a family on their travel. They knew we're foreigners and we're not good at Chinese, but they're willing to take us in their car and find us a place to catch the bus.

MS3: Taiwanese people are very friendly and willing to help

[...] Once I was trying to find way to Tatung market, I met an elderly uncle. He did not know English and my Chinese was not good, but he led me to the place even though it was nearly 3 km away [...] Two or three times I dropped my wallet, but luckily I got it back.

MS7: At that time my motorbike ran out of gas, many Taiwanese asked me if I needed any help, they could lead me to a place to fill up or repair the bike.

The biggest difficulty many Vietnamese students find while living in Taiwan is the language barrier and the problem of eating. Most students who cannot speak Chinese find it difficult to communicate with Taiwanese people and that makes their daily life difficult. Regarding the issue of eating, the taste of food as well as the strange eating habits make many students feel uncomfortable, especially female students.

MS5: The disadvantage is that people here rarely use English, if you don't know Chinese, it is very difficult to live, and shopping is also very inconvenient.

FS3: I feel like Taiwanese don't need breakfast [laughs] Not many options for breakfast [...] I have a hard time finding food that suits my taste.

One big difference that many Vietnamese see in Taiwan is the issue of individual freedom. Everyone here has the right to live as they please as long as it does not bother others. On the contrary, individuals who behave differently often get a lot of attention in Vietnam.

FS3: People don't pay much attention to personal issues [...] In Vietnam, people feel closer to each other [...] I have seen old men and women in their 70s or 80s with colorful dyed

hair [...] people have no idea about it and don't think it is different.

MS8: One side [Taiwanese] respects the individual, and on the other side [Vietnamese] respects the community.

However, the habit of respecting individuals plus the language barrier can make many Vietnamese students feel that Taiwanese are not very open and quite cold. Therefore, the Vietnamese community here has an important meaning in creating a sense of belonging and comfort for international students living far from their homeland.

MS6: Sometimes I feel like they [Taiwanese] are quite cold if I can't speak Chinese.

FS3: When I was in the dorm, there were a lot of Vietnamese people, when I went to Yule Street, there were also a lot of Vietnamese people, so I used Vietnamese sometimes even more than English [laughs].

MS8: As far as I know, the Vietnamese community in Taiwan is the largest and I am happy because I want to get along with them, and if there are Vietnamese people, they can help you.

Individuals living in Taiwan for a long time often have experience of working part-time to earn money to pay for their living expenses, as well as improve their communication skills in Chinese. Through work, Vietnamese students assess that Taiwanese employers often treat their employees with dignity and kindness. However, many students want to do professional work rather than manual labor, so they only focus on study and research.

FS3: I work part-time to cover normal expenses [...] With a

part-time job, I have more opportunities to interact with more people and improve my language skills [...] for example, serving in restaurant, tidying hotel rooms, cleaning at schools [...] interpreter.

MS6: If in the future I find a job, I want that job to help me in learning Chinese, not just a manual one.

After a time in Taiwan, besides improving their knowledge, the biggest change that most international students feel is their maturity in thinking and behavior especially their daily habits such as maintaining hygiene, respecting the law, etc.

MS1: I used to say whatever I thought, but now I have to think carefully first.

MS2: I changed from small habits [...] When I came here, I found that the discipline and manners of the people here are very high, and their consciousness is very high too. For example, if we pick up a drop, we have to return it to the person who lost it, we must park our car in the right place.

Future Plans: Accumulate to Return

Most of the young and single students intend to stay and work to gain more work experience, but most of them want to return to Vietnam later rather than settle in Taiwan for a long time. Some students who have just finished their studies have expressed their eagerness to return to Vietnam with their families in the absence of flights due to Covid-19.

MS1: If you want to work, it's better to work in a Taiwanese environment, but if you want to enjoy life, you should live in Vietnam [...] because Vietnam is more beautiful, the food is

better.

FS8: Maybe I'll stay here or work in another country for a few years then come back.

The decision to return is often tied to the development prospects of the economy and job opportunities in Vietnam in the future while Taiwan's economy is currently slowing down. Also, Vietnam is still home, where family and friends live, where they can really enjoy life. Returning to the homeland is a natural desire in the heart of every Vietnamese.

MS2: Vietnam is still my homeland, my sweet home !

Conclusion

The decision of Vietnamese graduate students to study abroad can be a continuation of their university studies or a desire to change their living environment and improve themselves. The main goal in addition to knowledge is to have life experience and growth of each individual. There are certain differences between individuals from different regions in planning and making decisions to study abroad.

Education in Taiwan is chosen because of its good quality, but it is not difficult and expensive like Western countries, not pressured and stressful like Korea or Japan, not crowded and dangerous like China, but very friendly, culturally familiar, and geographically close. It is these advantages that have convinced increasingly Vietnamese students to consider Taiwan as a light and moderate option.

Study abroad applications are usually completed by students quite easily with the help

of effective information sources on the internet as well as social networks. Consulting companies seem not to play a significant role to Vietnamese graduate students in the process of studying abroad in Taiwan.

Contrasting reactions of Vietnamese student families in different regions show that studying abroad can be an invisible pressure on students in the North and the Central region while in the South, studying abroad sounds more comfortable. This partly reflects the Vietnamese people's tradition of respecting education, which is often quite heavy in the Northern and Central rural areas, while the South pays more attention to economic issues.

Despite a few limitations, Taiwan education is highly valued in the minds of most Vietnamese graduate students. Students are especially impressed with the free spirit in the school and feel quite satisfied with the knowledge they perceive. Taiwan is considered a civilized and progressive society. Many examples have been given to demonstrate the kindness of Taiwanese people. The biggest difficulty for Vietnamese students in Taiwan is the language, followed by the food and eating habits here. Many people after a period of studying in Taiwan have observed a positive change in themselves, especially in thinking and behavior.

Most consider Taiwan as a good educational environment to help improve themselves and wish to stay after graduation to

work and gain more experience, but most students want to return to Vietnam instead of permanently settling here.

It can be said that, Taiwan is an ideal destination for students who have a relatively low income but do not want to depend on family. Taiwan not only provides knowledge but also a self-training condition, where students become mature and independent in both life skills and social behavior. In fact, Taiwan has been a true educational environment rather than a destination for settlement in the minds of the majority of Vietnamese graduate students.

Through this study, we hope to provide a relatively general overview of Vietnamese graduate students who have been studying at NCKU in particular and in Taiwan in general, thereby not only helping to better understand the current situation of student migration but also contributing to the improvement of the quality of education in Taiwan today. In addition, the study also discovered some interesting factors that affect the study abroad journey of Vietnamese students such as regional factors and gender, thereby suggesting for further research in the future.

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