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Office of International Cooperation

2023 JUL - AUG

Historic Taipei

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CULTURAL SPOTLIGHT

/Pic by Eagan Hsu
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The Ghost Month Festival in Taiwan

Article by Iris Calderon

Introduction

The Ghost Month Festival is a fascinating aspect of Taiwan’s rich cultural heritage, blending together various religious and cultural motifs. This month-long tradition, which has deep roots in longstanding practices, provides meaningful insight into the intricate beliefs and customs that shape Taiwanese society.

Understanding the Ghost Month Festival holds particular significance for the community of foreign students. As we engage with Taiwanese society, gaining insights into its cultural and religious practices becomes an avenue to foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. By delving into the customs that underpin this festival, we not only expand our knowledge but also enrich our experience as residents of this diverse and dynamic nation.



▲ A person pays their respects in Longshan Temple during the Ghost Month Festival. /Photo: Isis Calderon

In line with the Chinese lunar calendar, the entirety of the seventh month bears the name “Ghost Month.” In the year 2023, as per the Gregorian calendar, this intriguing span is set to commence around August 16 and conclude near September 14. This temporal alignment provides a unique opportunity for us, as foreign students, to delve deeper into the cultural tapestry of Taiwan and embrace the essence of the Ghost Month Festival.

Origins and Significance:

Emerging from the amalgamation of Buddhist and Taoist underpinnings entwined with indigenous convictions, the Ghost Month Festival, referred to as “Zhong Yuan Jie” (中元節) in Mandarin, blossoms within the seventh lunar month, typically stretching across the months of August and September. Central to its essence is the unwavering belief that the gates of the netherworld creak open, facilitating the transition of departed ancestors and wandering spirits into the realm of the living.

This core belief mirrors analogous celebrations across the globe, such as the renowned “Dia de los Muertos” or “Day of the Dead” observed in Mexican culture. Just as the Ghost Month Festival bridges the gap between the living and the spirit world in Taiwan, El Dia de los Muertos serves as a poignant juncture where the departed are welcomed back to the realm of the living, reuniting families and communities in a shared remembrance of loved ones.

Cultural and Religious Practices:

Central to the Ghost Month Festival is the practice of erecting intricate altars adorned with an array of offerings. These offerings are intended to appease and honor the spirits of departed kin, serving as a conduit to the afterlife.

The meticulously prepared feast often includes sumptuous dishes that were favorites of the deceased, along with symbolic paper money known as “ghost money”.



▲ Folding and burning of paper money. /Photos: Isis Calderon

The carefully arranged feast often includes delicious dishes that were loved by those who have passed away, along with the burning of special paper money called “ghost money.” This symbolic currency is considered the official money in the world after death.

Family members who are still alive give these special paper notes to their ancestors who have passed away. This ritual is done to try and please Yanluo, an important figure in Chinese stories and beliefs. Yanluo is thought to be the ruler of the land of the dead, and he has the authority to decide what happens



to souls when they leave the world of the living. By offering ghost money, families hope to make things easier for their ancestors in the afterlife, or even to help them avoid any troubles or punishments. It's like giving them a way to have a more comfortable life in a world beyond our own.

This practice of using ghost money to appeal to Yanluo connects with similar ideas found in different cultures. In Greek stories, Hades has a similar role as the ruler of the afterlife, and in Egyptian stories, Osiris plays a similar part. Giving ghost money is a way that people show their deep beliefs and the importance of honoring their ancestors, a tradition that resonates across many different societies and histories

Moreover, during the Ghost Month Festival, people come together near rivers, lakes, temples, and open areas to create a magical scene. They light up the surroundings with many lanterns that flicker like stars, and the air is filled with the pleasant smell of incense. This incredible sight is thought to help lost spirits find their way back to their home in the spirit world. It's like a bridge between our everyday world and the mysterious realm of spirits, bringing a unique feeling to the air that's both earthly and otherworldly.

Another meaningful aspect of the Ghost Month Festival involves showing compassion to spirits that have been forgotten. Through gestures of kindness, like adopting these forgotten entities or orchestrating dedicated ceremonies in their honor, the festival underscores the profound values of ancestors, memory, and paying respects. These principles lie at the core of Taiwanese society, encapsulating the essence of unity and shared responsibility within the community.



▲ Celebration of Ghost Month Festival.
Wide arrange of offerings can be observed.
Creator: Craig Ferguson / Copyright: ©2011 Craig Ferguson

During the Ghost Month, a series of customs and traditions shape how the living engage and move through this period. While some elders may hold these rules more closely, it's essential to comprehend their origins. Here are some of the customs and social cues observed during this period:

Cautious Around Water:

Swimming and water-related activities are usually put on hold during this time. The belief is that hidden spirits below the water's surface might take advantage and unexpectedly grab people.

Nighttime Quiet:

Whistling is kept hushed after dark. It's believed that the sound of whistling could draw wandering spirits and encourage them to come closer, something that's best avoided.

Dusk's Caution:

As the sun bids farewell and twilight descends, an unspoken curfew gently settles in. People tend to head back home before nightfall, wary of any potentially malevolent spirits that could emerge under the shroud of darkness. After sunset, it is believed that ghosts gain strength, fueled by the yin energy from the moon, making it wise to be safely indoors before the sun disappears.

Respectful Manners:

During Ghost Month, people follow polite ways. Hugs and kisses are kept quiet, and saying bad things about those who passed away is not nice during this special time. According to a Chinese story, we all have invisible flames on our shoulders that protect us from bad spirits. So, it's better not to get too touchy with your friends and avoid touching their shoulders, because it might put out their protective flames.

The Ghost Month Festival weaves beliefs, spirituality, and social rituals into a beautiful weaving that is imprinted in Taiwanese culture. Through complex rituals, this ancient tradition links the spirits of the deceased and the living. Discovering the cultural and theological significance of this festival allows us to understand more of the world around us in Taiwan during this time.

Understanding the Ghost Month Festival enables students to appreciate the profound connections Taiwanese people have between the living and their ancestors, the significance of ancestor worship, and the role of spirituality in shaping society. Moreover, this festival showcases the value of unity, collective responsibility, and respect for the departed, serving as a bridge that connects generations and instills a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage.

If you would like to delve deeper into this important cultural and religious festival, make sure not to miss the [2023 Keelung Mid-Summer Ghost Festival](#) - renowned as one of the grandest celebrations of its time, this festival has been officially designated as one of the 12 major festivals by the Tourism Bureau. Spanning approximately a month, the festival hosts daily ceremonies with immense historical and folk cultural significance. It is a great opportunity to get familiarized with many of the rituals done during this time.

Thank you for reading, and don't forget to share the social cues during this period with your friends!



CULTURAL SPOTLIGHT

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Historic Taipei - A Field Trip to Finalize an Insightful Course

Article by Iris Calderon



▲ Students visit Longshan temple. Photo Credits: Isis Calderon

The Master's Program in Global Communication and Innovative Technology (GCIT) organized in June a remarkable field trip as part of the "Between Tradition & Modernity: Cases of Taiwan and Asia" course. This course aims to address issues related to the transition and connection between the past and the present as seen from Taiwan and its geographically and politically adjacent international community. This educational journey provided students with an immersive experience, delving into Taiwan's history and its relevance in today's global context.

After a semester of dedicated study on Taiwan's historical past and dynamic present, the Historic Walking Taipei tour was the perfect finale for the students. This captivating journey took them through Taiwanese history, starting from the traditional beliefs of the late Qing dynasty, experiencing the cultural shifts under Japanese rule, and finally, exploring the political landscape after the arrival of the Nationalist government in 1949. The tour covered all the essential attractions in West Taipei, allowing the students to immerse themselves in a 3-hour walk that brought to life around 300 years of Taiwanese history. It was an opportunity to physically connect with Taiwan in different eras, from the

echoes of colonization to the remnants of Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese dream. The trip was an enlightening way to conclude the semester and offered the students a profound understanding of Taiwan's rich heritage and its relevance in shaping its contemporary identity.

The adventure began at Longshan Temple, a sacred site steeped in historical significance. Dating back to the Qing Dynasty, this well-preserved temple showcases a captivating blend of Southern Chinese and Taiwanese architectural styles. Longshan Temple is dedicated to Guanyin, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, as well as other deities from Taoism and Chinese folk religion. This unique combination of religious influences showcases Taiwan's diverse cultural heritage. As the students entered, the air filled with the soothing aroma of burning incense, and the gentle sound of chanting created a serene atmosphere, offering a glimpse into traditional spiritual practices. They also got to learn about the Jiaobei, divination tools that originated from China, which are used in the temple to seek divine guidance in the form of a yes or no question.

Next on the itinerary was the Bopiliao Historic Block, a cultural treasure in the heart of Wanhua District. This area once served as a bustling commercial center, facilitating trade between Chinese immigrants and the indigenous community. Today, it stands as a testament to Taiwan's diverse heritage, boasting cultural facilities, art galleries, craft shops, and tea houses. The students were enthralled as they delved into Taipei's past, gaining a deeper appreciation for its cultural richness.



▲ Students gather at Bopiliao Historic Block while eating ice cream and drinking Taiwanese tea.
/Photo Credit: Isis Calderón

Continuing their journey, the group ventured to the vibrant Ximending Red House, an iconic landmark with a fascinating history. Originally established during the Japanese colonial era as Taiwan's first public market, the Red House has evolved into a creative hub and bustling market. Its Red House Theater, an emblem of acceptance and inclusivity, hosts numerous LGBTQ+ cultural events, performances, and exhibitions, reflecting Taiwan's progressive stance on LGBTQ+ rights. The area around Ximending Red House has become a focal point for Taipei's LGBTQ+ community, with many LGBTQ+-friendly bars, clubs, and establishments. Visitors can enjoy a diverse and inclusive environment, with various events and parties held regularly, especially during pride celebrations.

The Presidential Office Building held a prominent place on the tour, serving as the official residence and workplace of Taiwan's President. Its neoclassical architecture, blending Western and traditional Chinese design elements, stands as a symbol of political power. The building's representation of the



▲ Ximending Red House.

sun, an important Japanese motif, bears historical significance, reflecting Japan's influence during Taiwan's colonial era.

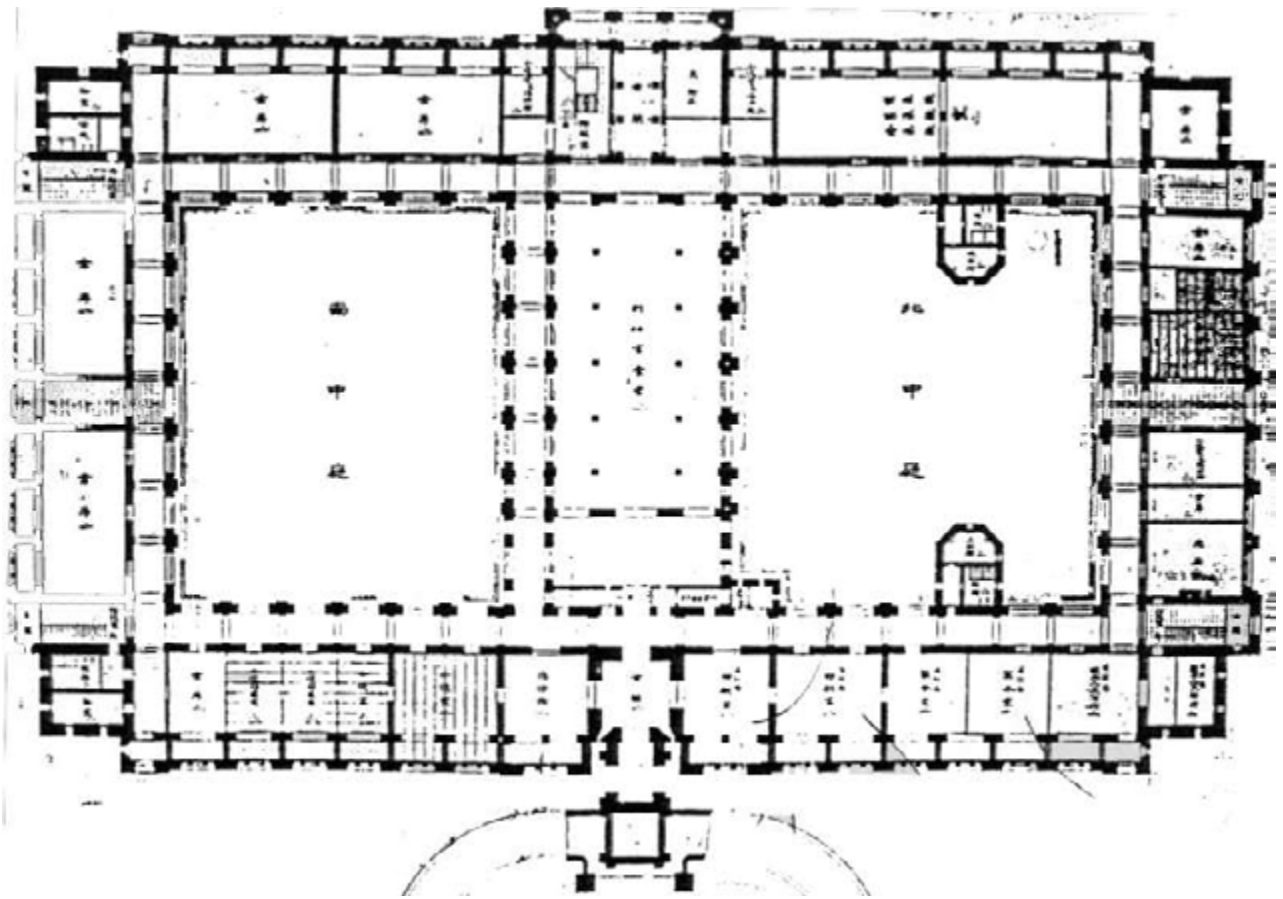
The eastward-facing structure added a touch of symbolism, signifying the direction where the sun rises.



▲ Presidential Office Building./Photo Credit: Department of Special Affairs, Office of the President

The final stop left a lasting impression on the students as they stood in awe of the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall. Honoring the former President of the Republic of China, this majestic structure harmoniously combines traditional Chinese architecture with modern elements, exuding an aura of authority and importance. Liberty

Square, encompassing the hall, has witnessed crucial moments in Taiwan's political history, making it a poignant location symbolizing the nation's journey through time.



- ▲ One intriguing piece of information that the students discovered during the building's introduction is that its architecture forms the shape of a 日 (sun), which holds significant importance as a prominent Japanese symbol and concept.

Description: Ground plan designed by Morinosuke Matsuyama (reprinted from Compilation of Documents of the Office of the Governor-General · 臺灣總督府公文類纂)



The Historic Walking Taipei tour proved to be an invaluable experience, enabling students to forge a tangible connection with Taiwan’s cultural heritage and its significance in the modern world. By immersing themselves in these historical sites, the students profoundly understood Taiwan’s evolving identity, bridging the gap between its treasured traditions and its forward-looking aspirations. This memorable journey truly exemplified the essence of the “Between Tradition & Modernity” course and left the students with a deeper appreciation for Taiwan’s place in the global community.

▲ Presidential Office Building./Photo Credit: Department of Special Affairs, Office of the President

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Unveiling the Impact of Women PR Professionals: A Comprehensive Analysis of Leadership in Public Relations - Insights from Dr. Juan Meng's Lecture

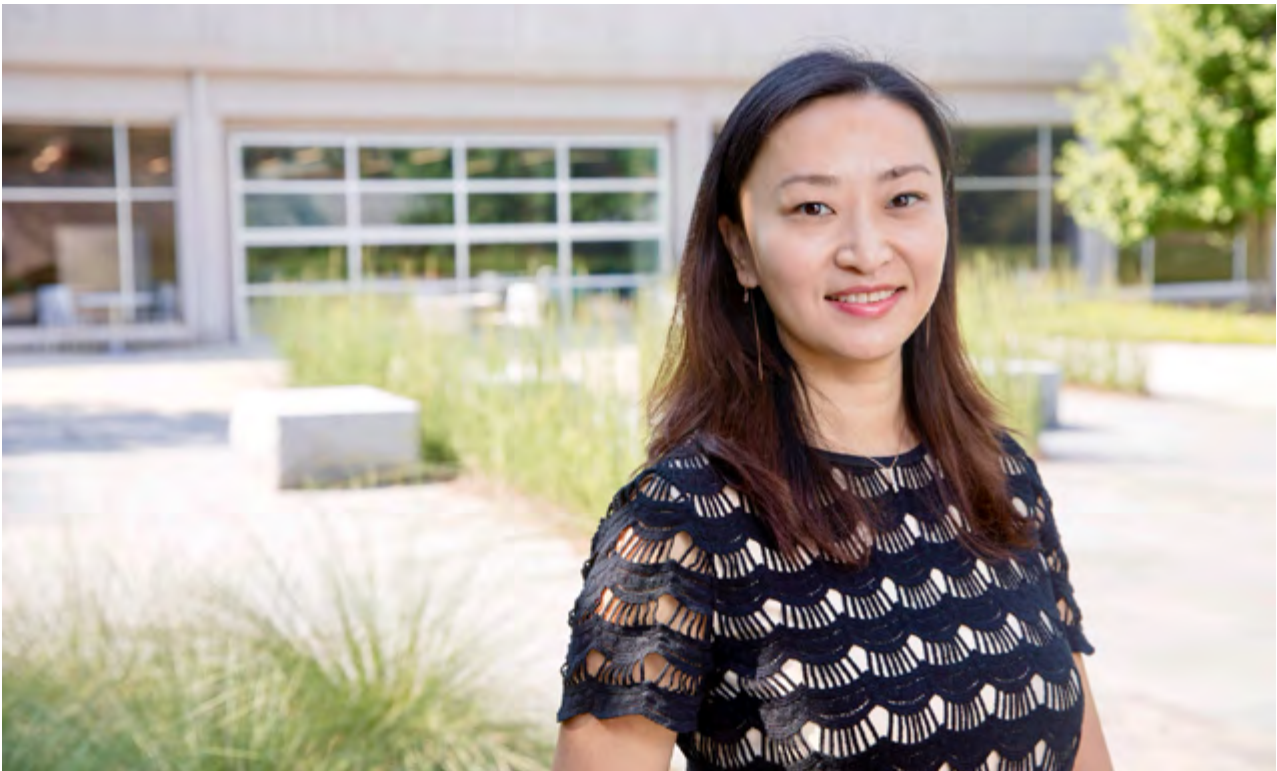
Article by Isis Calderon

A special lecture titled “Leadership Research in Public Relations: PR Women with Influence” was held on May 16, 2023, as part of the doctoral program at National Chengchi University’s College of Communication. The lecture was imparted by Dr. Juan Meng, a distinguished professor and the Head of the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Georgia. The event aimed to delve into the role of leadership in the field of public relations, with a specific focus on influential women professionals.

Dr. Juan Meng is a distinguished figure in the field of public relations, renowned for her expertise in leadership-related topics. With over 75 published articles, book chapters, and research reports, she has made significant contributions to the understanding of public relations leadership, leadership development, diversity, and global communication.

Dr. Meng’s remarkable career extends beyond research and academia; she is actively involved in teaching various courses at the University of Georgia (UGA) and has founded programs that promote global education, such as UGA’s “Go Global Choose China” program and the “Cooperative Education 3+1+1” programs with prestigious Chinese universities.

Her exceptional leadership skills have earned her positions on the national advisory board of The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations and the executive committee of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Educators Academy. As an elected member of the Arthur W. Page Society, Dr. Meng continues to shape the field of public relations through her valuable contributions and influential role in both research and professional organizations.



▲ Dr. Juan Meng.

One of the key takeaways from Dr. Meng's lecture was the importance of recognizing and promoting diverse voices and perspectives within the public relations industry. She emphasized the value of creating an inclusive environment that nurtures the growth and success of women professionals. By providing equal opportunities and empowering these talented individuals, organizations can leverage their unique insights, creativity, and leadership abilities, thereby driving positive change within the field.

Additionally, Dr. Meng highlighted the critical role of mentorship and networking in shaping the future leaders of public relations, particularly women. She emphasized the influential power of mentors in guiding and empowering emerging professionals through sharing experiences and providing invaluable support. By fostering robust mentorship relationships, educational institutions facilitated the development of future leaders equipped with the necessary skills and confidence to excel in their careers.



▲ Dr. Meng emphasized the value of nurturing growth and success of women professionals. /Photo credit: pexels

Besides from championing diversity and mentorship, Dr. Meng also emphasized the need for continuous learning and adaptability in the ever-evolving landscape of public relations. She stressed the significance of staying abreast of the latest trends, technologies, and best practices in the industry. By embracing change and actively seeking knowledge, students, and professionals can navigate the dynamic nature of public relations and position themselves as leaders within the field.

The insights presented during this lecture hold immense significance for students and educational institutions alike. The principles of promoting diversity, fostering mentorship, and embracing lifelong learning extends beyond the realm of public relations and apply to all aspects of life. As

students, it is crucial to recognize the power of mentorship and seek guidance from experienced individuals who can provide support and wisdom throughout our journey. Moreover, it is essential to proactively develop leadership skills and embrace continuous learning, empowering us to excel not only in public relations but also in all endeavors we pursue.



▲ Dr. Meng also emphasized the need for continuous learning and adaptability in the ever-evolving landscape of public relations. /Photo credit: NARA & DVIDS Public Domain Archive

By promoting diversity, fostering mentorship, and embracing lifelong learning, educational institutions can cultivate a new generation of leaders in public relations who will navigate the complexities of the industry, bring fresh perspectives, and make lasting contributions that shape the future of public relations.



The exploration of leadership is a continuous process, whether it is within doctoral or master's thesis research or in other aspects of our lives. Just as a tree grows, branching out into different areas, our understanding of leadership should expand and evolve. By consistently enriching our knowledge and research capacity, we can develop a stronger and more comprehensive comprehension of leadership and its application in various contexts.

Explore Dr. Meng's most recent scholarly book, *PR Women with Influence: Breaking Through the Ethical and Leadership Challenges* here: <https://grady.uga.edu/research/pr-women-with-influence-breaking-through-ethical-and-leadership-challenges/>

▲ Just as a tree grows, branching out into different areas, our understanding of leadership should expand and evolve. Photo credit: pexels

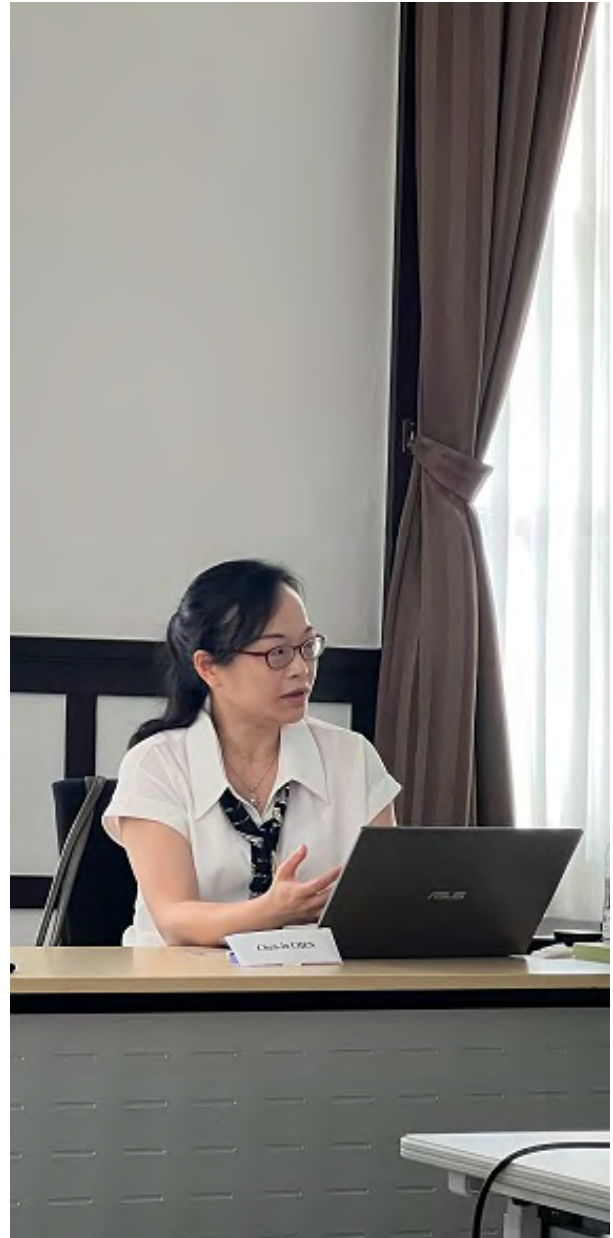
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International Law Course to be Taught in English by Professor Chen

Article by Maria Wilkinson

A special lecture titled “Leadership Research in Public Relations: PR Women with Influence” was held on May 16, 2023, as part of the doctoral program at National Chengchi University’s College of Communication. The lecture was imparted by Dr. Juan Meng, a distinguished professor and the Head of the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Georgia. The event aimed to delve into the role of leadership in the field of public relations, with a specific focus on influential women professionals.

However, at National Chengchi University (NCCU), Associate Professor Chen Chen-Ju (陳貞如), jointly appointed by College of Law and College of International Affairs, is actively working to introduce students to the field of international law. As an expert in the Law of the Sea, she has made significant strides in this area.



▲ Associate Professor Chen Chen-Ju (陳貞如)

One of her initiatives is the biannual joint seminar on international law, organized in collaboration with Kyoto University and NCCU. This seminar provides a platform for students and scholars from both institutions to engage in discussions and share their expertise on various aspects of international law. By fostering an exchange of ideas, this seminar contributes to the global understanding and development of legal principles.

In addition to the seminar, Professor Chen will be teaching an international law course in English during the upcoming Fall semester of 2023. This course aims to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of international law principles and their applications. By offering the course in English, Professor Chen aims to attract a diverse range of students, both local and international, to raise a multicultural learning environment.

Professor Chen's journey into the field of international law began with her pursuit of a Master's degree in Law of the Sea at National Taiwan Ocean University. Following that, she embarked on an academic journey that took her to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. There, she earned a Master of



▲ 2023 NCCU-Kyoto Joint Student Seminar on International Law

Laws in International Law. Later, she furthered her research and obtained a PhD in Law from the University of Hamburg, Germany.

When asked about her decision to focus on international law and the law of the sea, Professor Chen admits that it is a complex question. During her Master's studies in 2004, the prevailing trend in Taiwan and the U.S. was to study trade law. Taiwan's formal membership in the World Trade Organization in 2002 led to a surge of interest in trade law among students. At Georgetown, many students were attracted to the renowned Professor John Jackson, often referred to as "the father of the WTO." The

choice to study law of the sea over trade law was not entirely Professor Chen's decision but rather a path that unfolded before her.

Throughout her academic journey, Professor Chen encountered various opportunities and influential faculty members, which further shaped her interest in the field. Her experiences can serve as guidance for students currently searching for their specialization. Our career paths often evolve based on current events and the opportunities that arise, allowing us to find our niche.

Given Taiwan's geopolitical location and its border consisting of extensive coastline, there is a strong demand for research in the law of the sea. Shipping law and marine environmental issues are continuously evolving, necessitating ongoing legal research. Taiwan's involvement in the East China Sea as well as South China Sea Disputes and its territorial claims over the Tiaoyutai Islands (釣魚台, also known as Senkaku Islands [尖閣諸島] in Japan and Diaoyu Islands [釣魚島] in the People's Republic of China), as well as South China Sea islands, adds complexity to



▲ The location of Diaoyu island

the region. The involvement of various stakeholders, particularly the United States, further complicates matters. The differing interpretations and ideas about the international order in this area between China and the U.S. impact regional security and state capabilities. These ongoing disputes challenge the international order, making Taiwan an integral part of the discussion.

Professor Chen's course, "Global Governance and International Legal Development", will cover the Law of the Sea and more. Students who enroll in this class can expect to develop a foundational understanding of international law. This knowledge will enable them to better navigate future international events and apply international law concepts.

Offering the course in English has the added advantage of encouraging international students to participate. By promoting a diverse classroom environment with both local and international students, class discussions can incorporate a global perspective. This setting reflects the true nature and dynamics of international society and international law.

The course aims to provide students with a solid foundation in the principles of international law. Through case studies and interactive discussions, students will explore key topics such as state sovereignty, human rights, international dispute settlement, and the role of international organizations. By examining real-world scenarios and analyzing international legal frameworks, students will develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are essential for a career in law or any field with a global dimension.

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For those interested in Professor Chen’s course, the course code is [60I36800I; 65IB3600I]. Moreover, for those specifically interested in the Law of the Sea, Professor Chen will be offering a course in that area during the upcoming Fall semester, with the course code [2538I500I; 60I66600I; 65220000I].

In conclusion, Associate Professor Chen Chen-Ju’s dedication to the field of international law, particularly the Law of the Sea, has not only enriched the academic landscape at NCCU but also provided students with valuable opportunities to explore international legal issues. By organizing joint seminars and offering courses in English, she ensures that students receive a comprehensive and multicultural education. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, understanding international law and its implications is crucial for aspiring legal professionals.



▲ the International court of Justice at Hague, Netherlands

PEOPLE

OIIC CONNECT

Rik de Busser, Linguist professor, and Bunun language specialist

Article by Isis Calderon

In today's piece, we introduce Professor Rik de Busser, an esteemed descriptive linguist and a leading linguist on Bunun, an endangered Austronesian language spoken in Taiwan. With over a decade of dedicated fieldwork on various Bunun dialects, Professor de Busser's expertise lies at the intersection of language structure, the social and physical environment, human cognition, and linguistic methodology. Currently serving as an assistant professor at the prestigious Graduate Institute of Linguistics, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan, he brings a wealth of knowledge and passion to his work.

Professor de Busser earned his Ph.D. from the renowned Research Centre for Linguistic Typology at La Trobe University in Melbourne. Having continued his research journey as a postdoctoral researcher at both the same center and the Institute of Linguistics of the esteemed Academia Sinica in Taipei, he has established himself as a prominent figure in his field.



▲ Professor Rik de Busser portrait

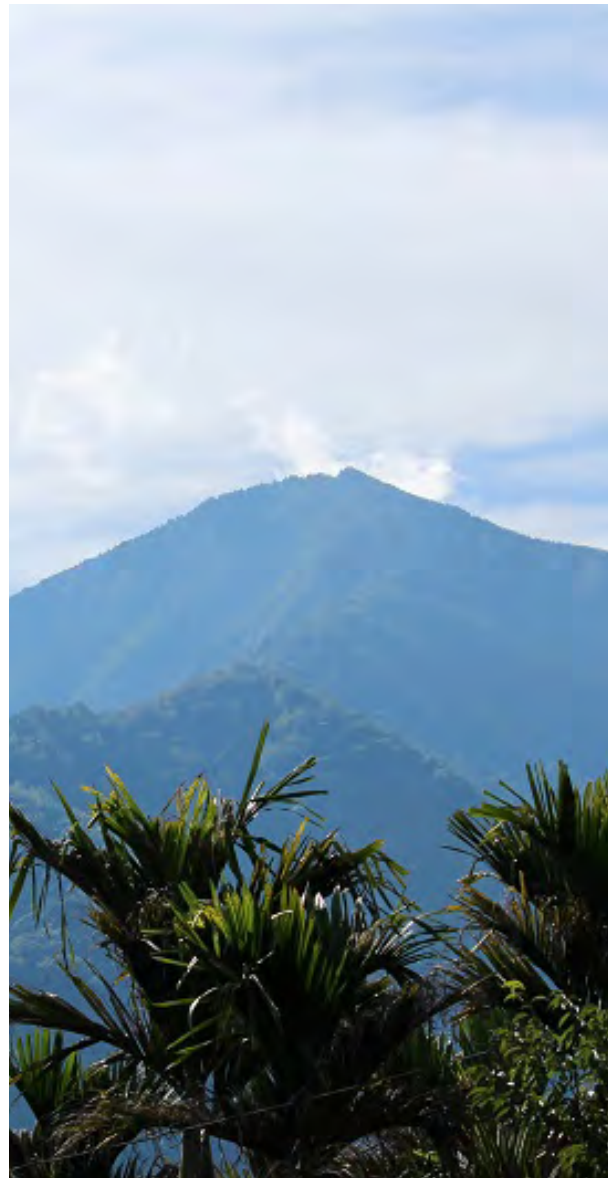
He graciously shares his enthralling journey of how he developed a keen interest in the Bunun language, his motivations for delving into linguistics, and even reveals some of his hidden hobbies. Join us on this exploration of a remarkable scholar, whose passion for linguistics has made a lasting impact on the linguistics world of Taiwan.

Q: What initially sparked your interest in linguistics, and what ultimately led you to focus your research on the traditional languages of Taiwan, such as Bunun?

A: The decision to study linguistics and my research focus on traditional languages in Taiwan happened at different times, spanning around 10-15 years. It all began when I chose to pursue linguistics after completing secondary school, as I was drawn to its theoretical nature. In Belgium, the options were limited. I said to myself “I’ll just start with language because that’s probably the closest to what you want to understand if you want to understand how human society works.” I appreciated its scientific approach, contrasting with the more subjective interpretation often found in the literature.

The shift towards Taiwanese languages came unexpectedly during my involvement in computational linguistics, where I worked on AI and automatic summarization systems. I arrived in Taiwan coincidentally, attending a conference organized by Academia Sinica. At the time, I had a set idea of wanting to learn Chinese for a year - you know, the goal of “I want to learn Chinese before I’m 30” And I decided to stay in the affordable and diverse southern region of Taiwan,

fate intervened when I met indigenous people in Tainan. They suggested that I conduct research on their language, which was relatively underexplored. I thought that I could potentially do it, although I was quite unsure of what the process would be like



▲ Overseeing the Hualien Mountains

Fortuitously, there was a scholarship available in Australia specifically for describing minority languages worldwide. I applied and was fortunate to receive it, leading me to spend about six years in Australia, with some time dedicated to learning the Bunun language in a village in Hualien. Immersing myself in the village's tranquil surroundings was an unforgettable experience, and it allowed me to conduct in-depth linguistic research.

So in the beginning, it was kind of weird, because I had to start doing research. The initial phase takes about a year, 9 to 10 months. So I had to go to the village and say, like, I want to live in your village for 10 months. And they were like "What?" - But at some point, one of the families kind of adopted me. I lived with them for about nine months. The village, nestled on the edge of the mountains, and I remember it being quiet and driving my scooter around.

Q: And how did you end up being a professor at NCCU?

A: After finishing my research in Taiwan, I went back to Australia and worked on a postdoc there. However, due to various reasons, including the financial crisis in 2009, it took a lot of work to find a job in

Australia. Then I got an opportunity at Academia Sinica in Taiwan, and I took it. After a few years, I became a professor at NCCU, and these two opportunities allowed me to continue my research, which is something I was clear I wanted to continue working on.



▲ Professor Rik de Busser portrait

Q: Your teaching experience at NCCU seems quite diverse. Which course did you find most rewarding?

A: My teaching experience at NCCU has indeed been diverse, and I find the course on fieldwork methods to be the most rewarding. It's always fascinating to witness the impact it has on students. Even for Taiwanese individuals, visiting indigenous villages is typically done as tourists, briefly passing through and trying out local delicacies. However, in this course, students get to fully immerse themselves in village life, engaging in field research on the language and interacting with the local community. This hands-on experience leaves a profound impression on them.

Last time, I took a group of foreign students who lived in a village for a couple of days. Seeing them fully embrace the cultural exchange and interact with the villagers was incredibly rewarding. It's undoubtedly the most enjoyable and impactful part of the course.

Q: Why do you think educational institutions should include linguistics in their curriculum for general courses?

A: Oh, it's actually very simple. The inclusion of linguistics in general educational courses is of utmost importance. People often discuss language and share their opinions on it, sometimes even politically, without truly understanding its intricacies. This lack of awareness surprises me, even among students. For instance, some might question the survival of a language because it lacks its own script. However, it's essential to clarify that scripts and languages are distinct entities; any language can be represented using various scripts. Moreover, most languages have historically thrived without a written form, relying solely on oral communication.

This kind of knowledge should be considered fundamental because misconceptions abound. People often hold incorrect beliefs about how language works and what it can or should achieve. The problem lies in the lack of informed perspectives. For example, it's crucial to understand that language always possesses a structure, and there's a significant difference between memorizing words and comprehending

how they combine through grammar in a language. Accents, too, do not hinder one's ability to speak or understand a language; they are merely variations in phonological realization, separate from the semantic and grammatical aspects of communication.

Introducing linguistics in educational curricula can dispel these misconceptions and foster a deeper appreciation for the complex world of language. By promoting an informed understanding of linguistic principles, we can enrich students' perspectives and encourage thoughtful conversations about language's impact on society and culture.

The following question was inspired by something written on Rik de Busser's website: "I am also interested in research methodologies related to the description and documentation of minority languages. One reason why I think this is important is that many smaller languages today are under threat, usually because of reasons outside the control of their speakers. If nothing happens, most will eventually die out. These languages – and the people that speak them – deserve our attention and a fair chance of survival."

Q: What do you believe is the importance of language documentation for a country's history, particularly in the context of Taiwan?

A: The importance of language documentation for a country's history, especially in the context of Taiwan, cannot be underestimated. Before the Dutch arrived in the 17th century, there was minimal recorded history, making the study of indigenous communities vital to understand Taiwan's past. Learning about indigenous societies requires delving into their languages, customs, and anthropological studies. Relying solely on Chinese for research is flawed since many worldviews and concepts are language-specific.

Language extinction is a concerning phenomenon in today's world, as many languages are disappearing. Linguists strive to combat this by documenting languages to preserve their knowledge. Documenting languages is crucial not only for preserving information but also for potential revival efforts. Reviving a language requires substantial information, making thorough documentation essential.

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In particular, indigenous communities benefit from language documentation as it helps reinforce their sense of identity and self-worth. Official recognition of their language and people often relies on well-documented evidence, such as dictionaries. Therefore, in many countries, proper documentation is a prerequisite for recognition as an indigenous group.

Q: What's a talent or hobby you have that your colleagues would be surprised to learn about?

A: I don't know if they would be surprised! Yeah, there will be a little bit surprised, I guess. But I've already

been studying Seal Carving for quite a lot of years. I was taught initially in community college. I learned in community college taught by retired people, now I have a professor. It's kind of fun!

For additional pertinent details about Professor Rik de Busser, you can explore his [website](#), where you'll find a wealth of information about his background and work. Additionally, for in-depth insights into his research endeavors, you can refer to his [profile](#) on Academia. If you got to the end of this, thanks for reading!



▲ Professor de Busser on a hiking expedition in Taiwan





STUDENT LIFE



/Pic by note thanun
on Unsplash

Ernie Lee's Take on Publishing a Paper and a Discussion on Democratic Backsliding

Article by Maria Wilkinson

Ernie Lee [李其恩], is a Master's student in the International Master's Program in International Studies (IMPIS) at National Chengchi University (NCCU). Recently, Lee's research paper titled "The Age of Declining Democracy: The Approaches to Researching Democratic Backsliding" was published in the Taiwan Journal of Democracy. This article delves into Lee's journey of getting his work published and explores his research interest in democratic backsliding.

It started with a term paper. Lee knew he would write his Master's thesis on democratic backsliding, so for his research methodology course, he decided to write about the existing literature on democratic backsliding and provide his thoughts. After finishing the term paper, his professor encouraged him to submit his term paper to a publication.



▲ Ernie Lee



▲ Ernie Lee is from IMPIS, college of international affairs.

When asked about his decision-making process for choosing where to submit his article, Lee explained that several factors influenced his choice. Time played a significant role, and he also considered the journal's specific requirements and guidelines. Lee mentioned that most journals prefer concise and focused submissions. Initially, he submitted his paper to a journal that he recognized as a bit of a reach. However, within a few days, the journal rejected his submission. Lee, who had spent the summer working on the paper, was hesitant to spend more time altering it to meet the requirements of multiple journals.

After revising and refining his paper, Lee submitted it to the Taiwan Journal of Democracy, where he believed his work

would receive a more positive response. This experience taught Lee that social studies journals base their acceptance decisions on two main factors: the author's status (Master's Student, PhD Student, etc.) and the novelty of the subject matter presented in the paper.

As Lee awaited a response from the Taiwan Journal of Democracy, several months elapsed. During this period, the journal underwent a process of reading, editing, and peer review before extending an acceptance to Lee. Taking into account the time required to write the paper and go through the publication process, Lee estimated that seeing one's work published typically takes about a year.

On the Topic of Democratic Backsliding in Taiwan

When asked to define democratic backsliding, Lee emphasized the challenge of defining democracy itself. He noted that the concept of backsliding implies a regression in a linear progression toward democracy, suggesting a form of pushback. Lee explained that this notion is loaded conceptualization since it assumes that democracy inherently moves forward, while in reality, factors such as liberty and government power influence the developmental process.

Lee views democratic backsliding as a general description of a developing democracy or established democracy becoming less democratic. In his paper, he explores various ways to define this decline, including examining empirically observable events such as elections or less quantifiable factors like culture.

Regarding Taiwan's situation, Lee highlighted its delicate international position, particularly in relation to China's animosity. Nationalism is not always bad; it has helped to develop democracy and it has helped to add to nation-building. Following Chen Shui-Bian's [陳水扁] departure from office, the major political parties in Taiwan—the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Kuomintang (KMT)—have both shifted more toward the center of the political spectrum. Despite both being moderates, what creates the divide in determining KMT verses DPP is due to the identity politics that plays into one's sense of national identity.



▲ Ernie Lee's research interest is about politics, democracy and international affairs.

With each election, the question of Taiwanese identity arises—whether Taiwan is an extension of the Republic of China (ROC) or a sovereign island nation in its own right. Lee explained that this question shapes people’s perspectives on culture, country, and politics, and over time, Taiwan has become increasingly polarized in its attempts to define “being Taiwanese.” Lee considers this polarization as a form of backsliding, which positions Taiwan as a country potentially facing democratic decline. Lee’s Master’s thesis aims to provide more extensive research to ascertain if Taiwan is indeed experiencing democratic backsliding.

When asked about expectations for the upcoming election, Lee indicated that he saw few differences compared to past elections. However, he predicted that if the election results are closely contested, Taiwan could face a challenging political landscape over the next four years.

To read Lee’s paper, you can visit the following link: <https://www.airitilibrary.com/Publication/alDetailedMesh?docid=18157238-202212-202212130012-202212130012-177-198>



▲ Lee aims to provide more extensive research about democratic backsliding in the future.

Second Home Fey's exchange experience at NCCU

Article by Allie Highsmith

Feyzanur "Fey" Öner is a 21 year old college student from Ankara University in Türkiye studying Sinology. Fey just returned to Türkiye from her year abroad at NCCU as an exchange student and was kind enough to share her experience as an exchange student here at NCCU.



Feyzanur "Fey" Öner from Türkiye came to NCCU as an exchange student ►

During her year on campus, Fey was involved in plenty of club activities as well as things like the Maker in College podcast, run by a fellow student, and also worked a lot with the Turkish department to help other students practice their Turkish. In addition to regular extracurricular activities, Fey also made sure to participate in events put on by NCCU such as the music festival and world festival. Not only that, but Fey also helped organize efforts in February 2023 to raise money for victims of the Türkiye Syria earthquake with the Taiwan Türkiye Friendship Foundation.

Fey explained that, in addition to all these festivals, one of her favorite things about NCCU was the campus itself and the location. Although it's not right in the city center, Fey said she so enjoyed the locale because of the scenery nearby, like the adjacent river and mountains. Plus, as evidenced from Fey's taking advantage of the several festivals at NCCU, there are so many activities on campus, so it's easy to get involved.

Fey worked a lot with the Turkish department to help other students practice their Turkish. ►

As far as making friends goes, Fey explained that at first she found it quite difficult, but after a period of time she decided to try to go out of her way more to make herself uncomfortable and try to seek new friends. She was able to hang out at the Turkish Department office to help students and made friends that way, as well as through club activities, such as Photography Club.



Having just returned from Taiwan a few weeks ago, Fey explained that she was saddest to leave her friends and her very independent life as a student. However, in returning to Türkiye, she was most excited of course to see her family, as well as to get to have Turkish breakfast again! She described a typical breakfast as having a few small plates first, composed of things like olives, tomatoes, cucumbers, and cheese, followed by bigger plates, including things like small fried green peppers with turkish yogurt and tomato sauce, eggs, and fries, and of course, Turkish tea. On top of that, while she was abroad her cat had babies so she finally got to meet the kittens (that aren't so kittish anymore).

Fey would offer the following advice to students looking to study abroad in Taiwan: she said she wished she had gotten out of her comfort zone more from the jump. She found it so fun to be with herself, by herself, and to do activities on her own. Fey explained that when she has just arrived in Taiwan, she, like many exchange students, experienced some mental health struggles because she didn't feel connected or integrated. Therefore, she would advise other students to be more active earlier in their study abroad experience. Fey was also kind enough to share some of her

recommendations for other foreign students in Taiwan. Most of all, she raved about the sweet potato balls at the Raohe Night Market, describing an unmatched textural experience. She also loves biking on the NTU campus. Fey also really recommended going outside of Taipei, since Taipei doesn't reflect Taiwan as a whole. She's been to Jiufen three times, as well as Yilan, the Houtong Cat Village, Kending, and Kaohsiung. Fey also noted that she felt that her Halal dietary needs were easy to accommodate in Taipei and she was pleased with the amount of Taiwanese foods that could be easily made vegetarian.

Fey, entering her fourth year of college, hopes to return to Taiwan after graduation, perhaps for graduate school, referring to it as her "second home."



▲ Fey's been to Jiufen three times, as well as Yilan.

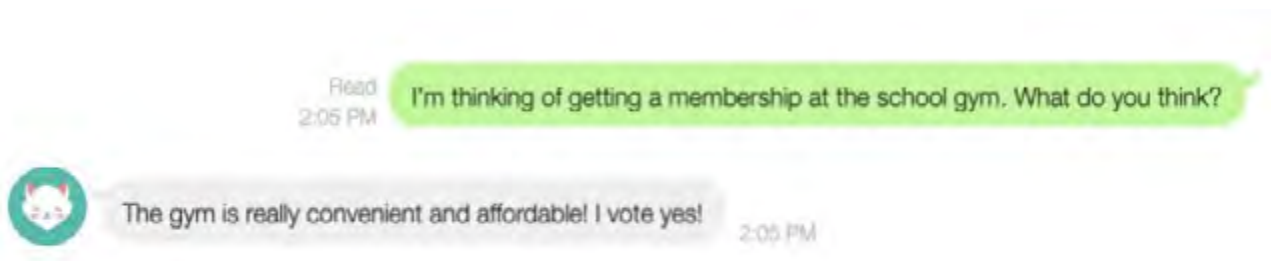
STUDENT LIFE

C CONNECT

Using the Gym at NCCU

Article by Maria Wilkinson

It's the beginning of a new school term and it's time to set healthy goals for a successful year. My first step to starting my year off right was to look for a gym to join. I considered alternative gyms, but most of my classmates recommended using the school gym (政大健身房 NCCU Fitness).



Some gym memberships in Taiwan can be haggled. The anxiety haggling brings me was reason enough to sign up for the school gym. Additionally, the school membership is significantly cheaper than other gyms. Below I provide an overview of the gym fees.

The following is an overview of what the gym provides, rules, and fees. If you are looking for a healthy activity or seeking to achieve a personal goal, I hope this information provides helpful in your gym hunt.



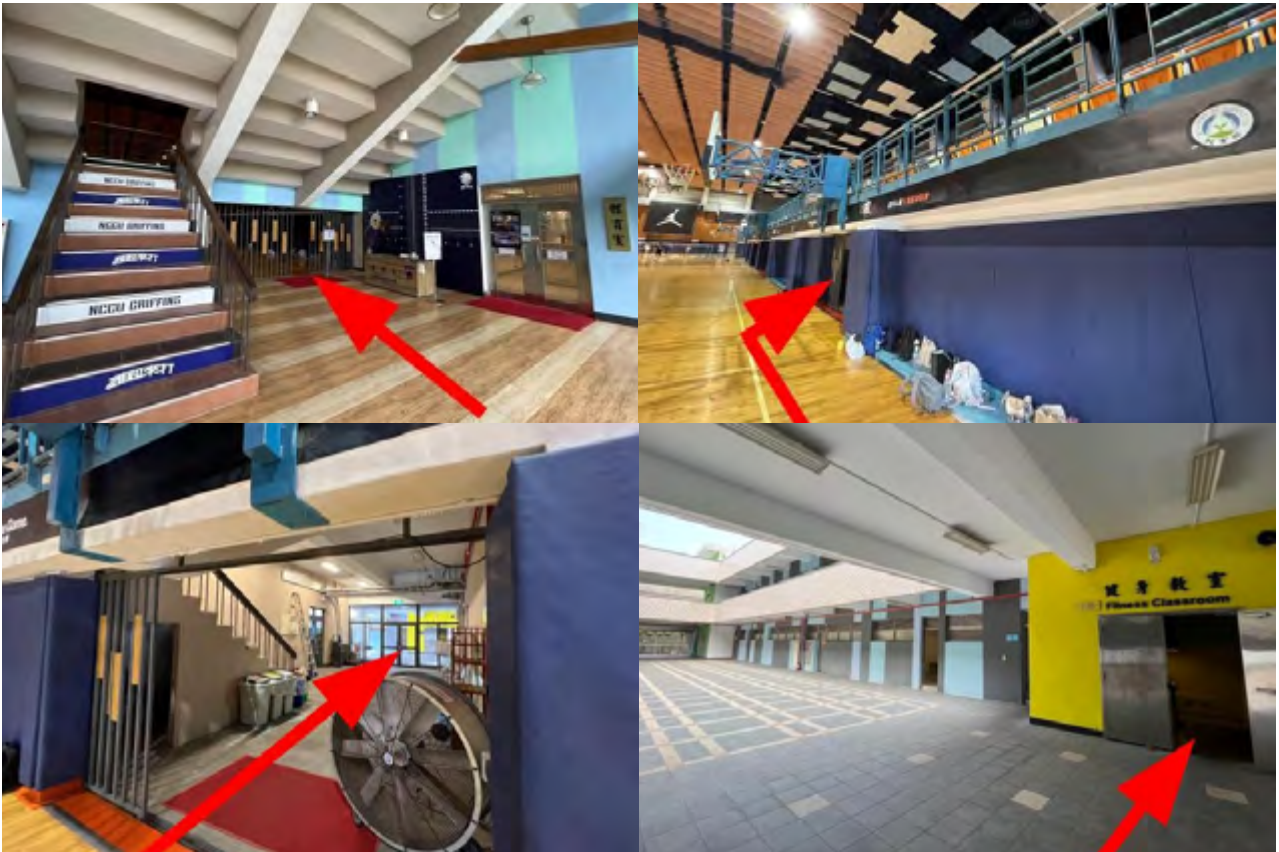
▲ NCCU Gymnasium

How to Get to the Gym

The gym is located in the basement of the NCCU Gymnasium. You can enter through the main doors, walk inside the basketball court, and to your right will be the doors leading to the hall where the stairs to the gym are located. In the hallway before the stairs are bathrooms and showers that you can use while at the gym. Once you go downstairs, the entrance to the gym will be straight-ahead.



▲ The entrance of the gym

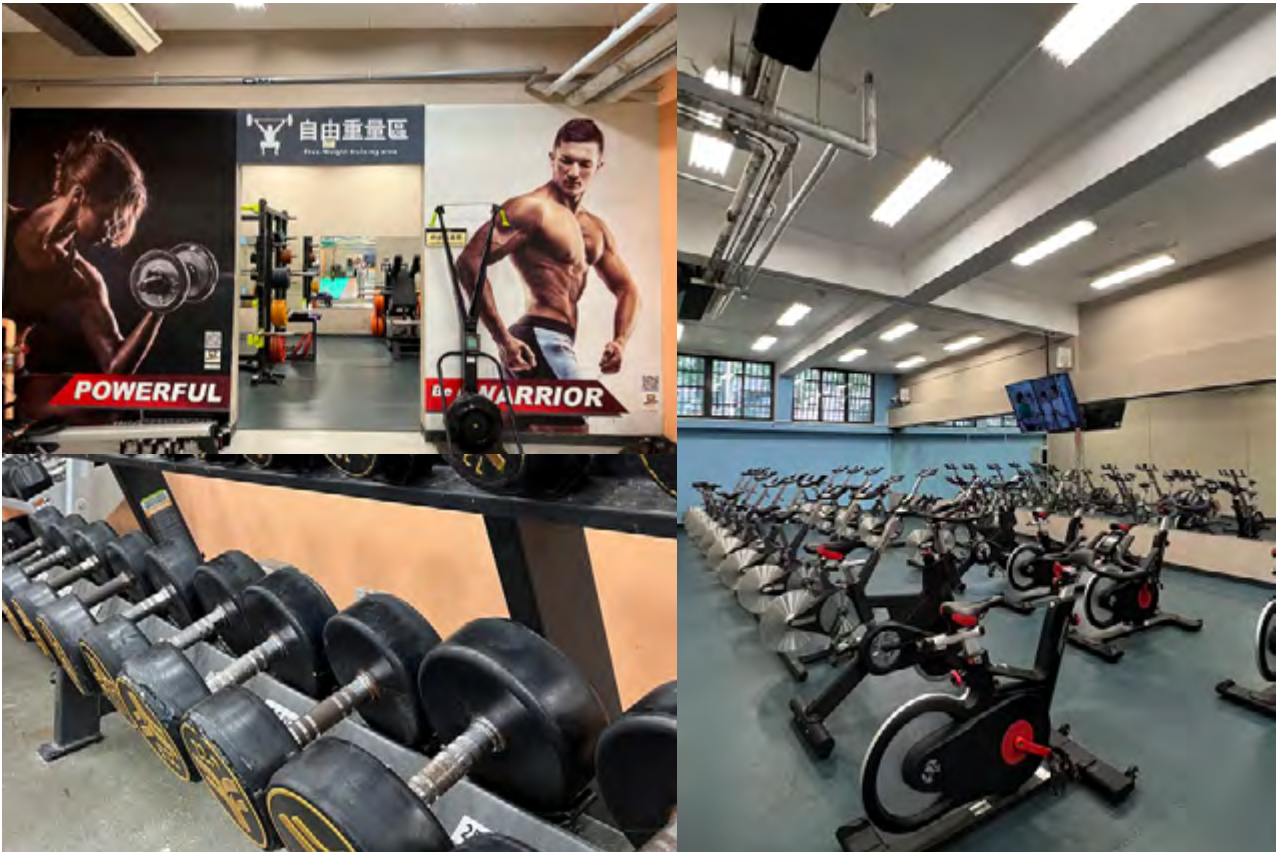


▲ How to get to the school gym

Equipment

The equipment at the gym was shockingly vast. There are a handful of bikes that you can use to pedal to your heart's content while not going anywhere. There is a punching bag, rowing machines, and strength machines. Additionally, there are dumbbells and even a free weight training area. The gym is equipped with so many different workout options, that it is likely you will find the workout you like to do.



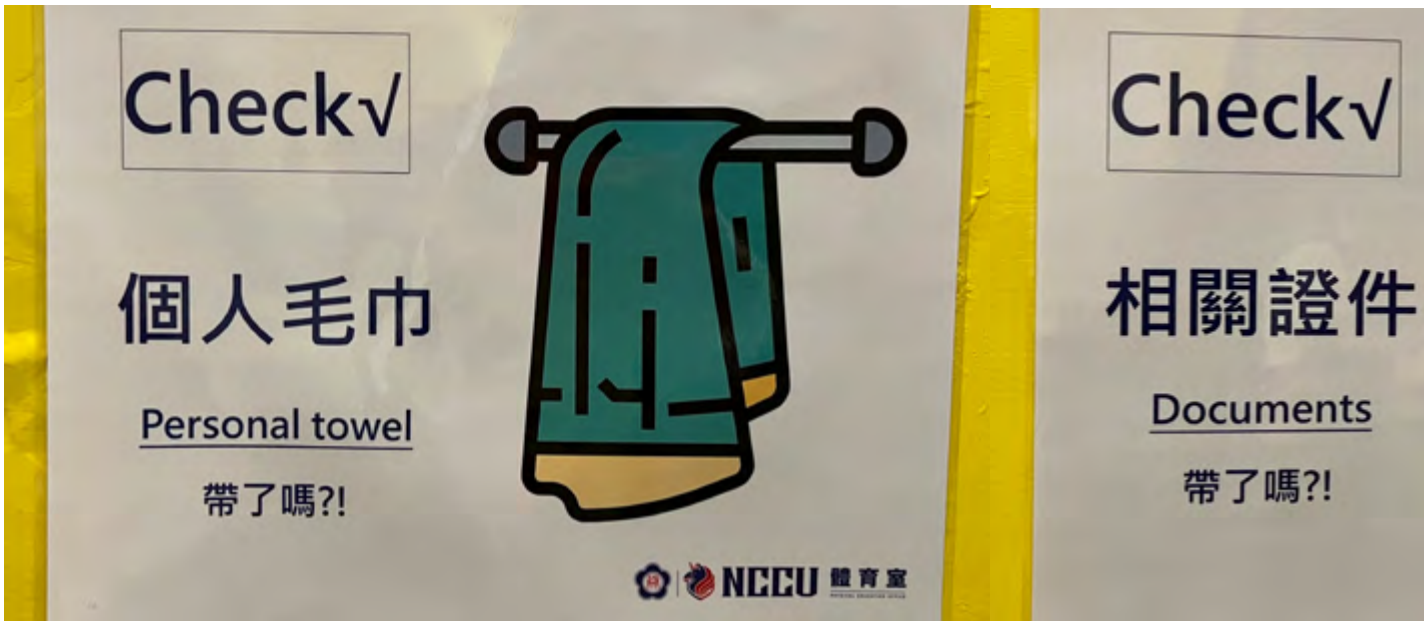


▲ The equipments of the gym includes bikes, dumbbells and a free weight training area

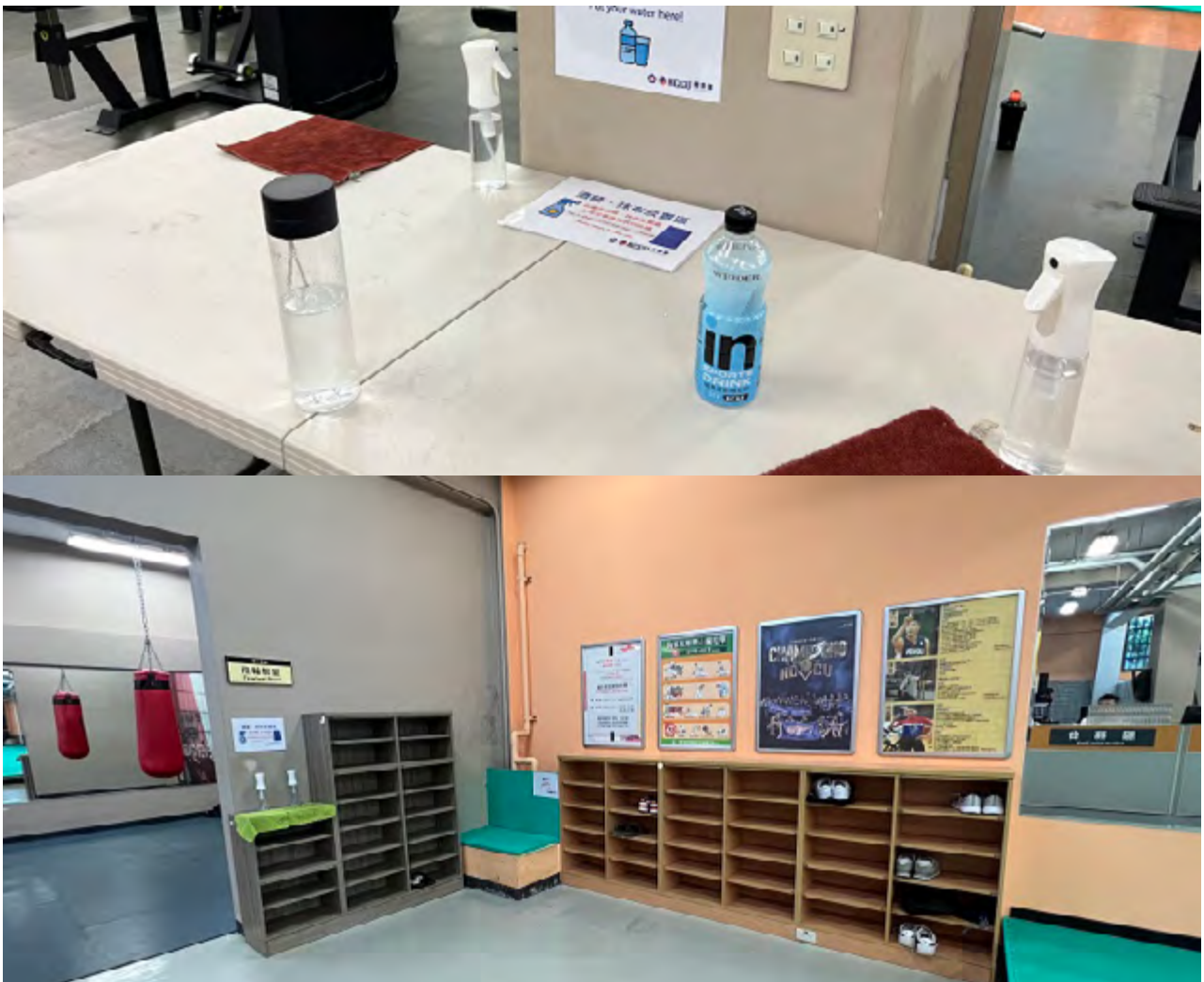
Rules of the gym

The rules of the gym are simple and are there to ensure a clean environment while you work out. The gym asks that you bring a personal towel (it is required) and you will be asked to change your shoes into a clean pair upon arrival. Additionally, you will need your student ID to get in. Other rules

are what you may expect at other gyms. You are prohibited from going topless in the gym and water is the only beverage allowed. Food is not allowed at all. Make sure you are using the equipment safely to ensure the safety of your fellow gym-goers and yourself.



▲ Three things you need to get into the gym



▲ You should put your water and shoes in certain area while using the gym



NCCU 體育室

Check✓

乾淨鞋子

Clean shoes

帶了嗎?!



NCCU 體育室

Hours of the gym

During the semester, gym hours are as follows: Monday to Friday 12:00-21:00 and Saturday to Sunday 9:00-12:00 and 13:30-17:00. The first Monday of every month is cleaning day so the gym is closed until 14:00. The gym typically gets its busiest after 17:00. At all other times you can expect just a handful of people. During the summer and winter break, the hours differ.

本月清潔日: 9/4 (一)
開放時間: 14:00

The First Monday of every months
is cleaning day.
Closed until 14:00p.m.

健身教室開放時間
FITNESS CLASSROOM

周一至周五 (Mon.-Fri.) 12:00-21:00

周六及周日 (Sat.&Sun.) 09:00-12:00
13:30-17:00

體育課期間不開放，如有遇
其他偶發狀況造成時間異動，
詳情請見體育室及場館公告!

Membership Fee

	One-time Entrance	1 Month	6 Months	1 Year
NCCU Student	50 NTD	200 NTD	700 NTD	1,300 NTD
NCCU Faculty	80 NTD	350 NTD	1,200 NTD	2,200 NTD

The fee depends on how long you would like to sign up for. As you can see above, the longer you commit, the cheaper the price is. To pay the fee, you will need to use an Easy Card. Before you go to the gym, you should make sure to top up your Easy Card with enough money as there is no value-adding function on site. You will need to fill out a membership form and provide two headshot photos for the application. You will also need to bring your student ID when signing up.

There you have it, all the information you need to start your fitness journey at NCCU. I wish you an enjoyable time at the NCCU Fitness gym.

STUDENT
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▲ The main gate of the gym

NT LIFE

CONNECT



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Editor-in-Chief | Jih-Syuan Lin
Managing Editor | Yi-Kai Chiu
Visual Editor | Tzu-Hsuan Yu
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