

## NEWS



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### NYCU Bilingual Psychological Counseling Service — Listening to Every Exhausted Heart



*“Don’t hesitate to seek help—NYCU’s counselors are here to support you!” said Betty and Iris.  
(Photo from ZDunemployed studio)*

By [NYCU Elite](#)

According to the data from the Executive Yuan Ministry of Education Tertiary Institutions Academic Information Open Platform, a total of 1,300 international degree students (including students from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macao, overseas Chinese students, and other international students) and about 850 international non-degree students (e.g., foreign exchange students, short-term study students, and students from Center for Mandarin Learning, etc.) have studied in National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University (NYCU) in the 112 academic year. More than 2,000 international



*Ko Ming-Chun (Iris), the bilingual counseling psychologist at the Chiao Tung Campus (Photo from ZDunemployed studio)*

Iris believes learning Mandarin can help with some issues, but students need to take responsibility for their choices and the outcomes if they’re



students who travel across the ocean to study abroad at NYCU bear more significant pressure than local students in terms of schoolwork, finance, family, language, culture, interpersonal relationships, etc.

The English psychological counseling service provided by NYCU Mental Health and Counseling Center has successfully assisted many international students in getting to know themselves better, enhancing their environmental adaptability, and fostering happiness in emotions and interpersonal relationships for many years. With the number of international students continuously increasing, two full-time bilingual counseling psychologists were recruited in 2023 to expand the service capacity. By doing so, NYCU aims to provide more comprehensive and detailed counseling services

### When Speaking Becomes Cravings

Hsu Szu Min (Betty), the NYCU bilingual counseling psychologist at the Yang Ming Campus, thinks that seeking psychological counseling services is like visiting a clinic for being uncomfortable. When someone finds something wrong with their mental state or emotions, they may try to talk to a psychologist. Betty, who studied in the U.S. for a master's degree, observes that "language capability," "homesickness," and "isolated interpersonal relationships" are common issues for overseas students. For international students studying in Taiwan, "establishing interpersonal connections" is a more significant pressure source.



unwilling to put in the time and resources. As the age distribution of international students is relatively wide, they inevitably have to face various life pressures from their families of origin, such as marriage, employment, finance, etc. "I will discuss their needs and expectations with them (students), the possible situations they may encounter, and the costs they must bear no matter what they choose. During the study, most students experience self-identity conflicts of Erikson's psychosocial development theory. They need support and company from others and then explore what they want. But I will still return the right to determine or choose to them," Iris said

### Open the Gate to Embrace the World

In addition to two full-time bilingual psychologists who serve as daytime counselors at NYCU, many part-time foreign language psychologists are stationed at night at the Mental Health and Counseling Center on both campuses for international students. The [Mental Health and Counseling Center's official website](#) provides detailed information on bilingual counseling services. During first-year orientation, both campuses will provide counseling services introduction or touring guide activities. The Mental Health and Counseling Center also works with the OIA to plan various mental health activities, such as lectures, workshops, and group counseling activities with different topics according to the needs of students every semester. Psychologists also screen students with different levels of risk through questionnaires or group counseling activities for arranging further individual counseling.

"We encourage students to participate in the support group we hold once every two weeks," Betty said. "We use a non-structured group format, and the members will discuss the group's content. We invite



*Hsu Szu Min (Betty), the NYCU bilingual counseling psychologist at the Yang Ming Campus (Photo from ZDunemployed studio)*

"I was told by an international student that he hasn't been talking to anyone for almost two weeks!" Betty reminded. She also encountered an international student who felt isolated. At first, he was about to initiate a conversation with someone to make friends, but the person turned his head away immediately. Betty explained to the student, "It is not because he doesn't like you. Most likely, he was just afraid of speaking English." In the classroom, some professors tend to use Mandarin to give lectures; likewise, local students speak to each other using Mandarin. Thus, international students with limited Mandarin language skills may feel relatively isolated and helpless. "In addition to fostering the communication between international students and professors or class advisors, we also seek systemic help to support them in finding study companions by cooperating with the Office of International Affairs (OIA). Local students can use their subject specialties in exchange for the English skills of international students," Betty said.

In addition, Betty indicated, "Compared to the advanced cultural atmosphere in Taiwan, the traditional authority in some countries is still playing a significant role in people's daily lives. Some international students are living under a great amount of family pressure while studying abroad. In some countries, females' right to speak is being deprived. Additionally, communication skills and self-esteem in romantic relationships are also common issues among international students."

### **Understanding Your Choices**

Ko Ming-Chun (Iris), the bilingual

everyone to join us and participate in conversations about activities that interest them. For example, in the last semester, we organized activities such as hypnosis, meditation, hiking, and even making handmade desserts." Iris said, "About 5 to 7 students from various countries will attend group counseling. Through this activity, students know that many people may have common pressure and can meet students from other countries. I think this is a good solution. At the present stage, the number of group counseling is relatively small. In the future, it is hoped that group counseling can be developed into something similar to clubs or long-term group counseling."

Looking into the future, NYCU is considering the increasing number of international students year by year, and at the same time, many international students come from non-English-speaking countries, including Southeast Asian international students or overseas Chinese students, and the demand for counseling is increasing, the Mental Health and Counseling Center is also thinking about how to use AI assistance, for example, as real-time interpreting resources and the possibility for AI assisting in the initial interview. Currently, the Ministry of Education is also proactively amending the Student Guidance and Counseling Act in the hope of adjusting the ratio of professional counseling manpower in tertiary institutions to less than 1 to 900 (professional counseling staff: the number of students) so the number of full-time psychologists is expected to increase continuously.

### **Finding the Exit of the Heart Together**

Betty and Iris find that many students think that stepping into the Mental Health and Counseling Center or seeking counseling assistance are labeling themselves as "having mental



counseling psychologist at the Chiao Tung Campus, who has been in charge of international student cases since her intern psychologist phase, said that the most challenging situation is the “survival issue” for international students.

“Many international students depend on scholarships to study abroad in Taiwan. Their scholarship may be reduced if they do not get a satisfactory grade. For this reason, some international students will sacrifice their studying time to do part-time jobs, leading to a vicious circle,” Iris said. The Emergency Relief Grant for Students or NYCU’s part-time job opportunities may relieve the economic pressure on international students. Still, the impact of culture and viewpoints needs more time to adapt.

“Some international students from certain cultural backgrounds struggle to accept how Taiwanese girls dress and behave. Some may even appear to be commanding or assertive towards female students. These are cultural conflicts from international students influenced by their home country’s cultural frameworks,” Iris indicated. Because they cannot handle interpersonal boundaries properly, some international students cannot understand why others “dislike” them or mistakenly consider someone “likes” them, resulting in intangibly increasing risks for triggering gender equity controversy.

issues.” Instead, they encourage students not to view counseling as something too serious or solemn. Betty and Iris believe any student is free to come to the Mental Health and Counseling Center for a talk at any time if they are perplexed about their lives. Counselors will accompany students to find out what they want and what solutions are suitable for them. For international students who need specific help and support, as long as they are willing to walk into the Mental Health and Counseling Center, there are always psychologists who are willing to listen to international students and convince them to find “the exit of heart.

“Counseling cannot always find the answer, but psychologists will completely accept and encourage students to speak up about what they feel and their problems. As long as students are willing to speak up, you can feel that their emotions and bodies are relaxing gradually. These processes are actually helpful for the students,” Betty shared the value and the sense of achievement of engaging in counseling work.

“Some students may feel that they are not such a good person when they admit their vulnerability or limitations. But I think humans are not 24-hour working machines; it’s important to have a chance to stop and examine what is in the heavy backpack you have been carrying around. This is important. The counseling process is to open up the backpack and clean it out, take out what you don’t need, and then get back on the life journey again, which is a perfect thing,” a romantic but realistic note about counseling service said by Iris at the end.





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