

**The Acceptability and Predicaments of Contemporary  
Taiwanese Tattoo Culture in Comparison with Western  
Tattoo Culture**

By

**Yao-Chiang Chen**

陳耀強

Submitted to the Faculty of  
Department of International Affairs in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs

Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages  
2022

WENZAO URSULINE UNIVERSITY OF LANGAUGES  
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

This senior paper was presented

by

Yao-Chiang Chen  
陳耀強

It was defended on

November 13, 2021

and approved by

Reviewer 1: Wen-Yi Lai, Chairperson, Department of International Affairs

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewer 2: Yu-Jane Chen, Associate Professor, Department of International Affairs

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Adviser: Yu-Hsuan Lee, Assistant Professor, Department of International Affairs

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Copyright © by Yao-Chiang Chen 陳耀強  
2022

## **The Acceptability and Predicaments of Contemporary Taiwanese Tattoo Culture in Comparison with Western Tattoo Culture**

Yao-Chiang Chen

Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, 2022

### **Abstract**

This study examines the acceptability and predicaments of contemporary Taiwanese tattoo culture. In the beginning, popularity of tattoos in western culture is compared with that in Taiwan, followed by the investigation of the social understanding and context of tattoo culture over last decades in Taiwan. After building up the historical backgrounds, I interview practitioners and consumers who help me look into why youngsters get tattooed and how it affects their lives by conducting in-depth interviews. Finally, the effect of smartphones and social media on this younger generation is studied, and 2 approaches are proposed to promote Taiwanese tattoo culture.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction .....	7
Background .....	7
Motivation.....	8
Research purpose .....	9
Research questions.....	9
Limits .....	10
Delimits.....	11
Chapter Two: Literature review .....	12
2.1 Tattoos, Crime, and Students .....	12
2.2 Motivations for getting tattooed among general population.....	14
2.3 Motivations for getting tattooed among athletes .....	15
2.4 Imperceptible issues in modern society .....	16
Chapter Three: Methodology .....	19
Context.....	19
Participants: sampling and access .....	19
Interviews: the process of sharing.....	20
Chapter Four: Research results and analysis .....	22
4.1 Consumer Motivations.....	22

4.2 Consumer Experience .....	32
4.3 Consumer Value.....	33
4.4 The Roles of Media and Social Media, and Recommendations .....	34
Chapter Five: Conclusion .....	37
Appendix A.....	41
Appendix B .....	42
Bibliography .....	43

## Chapter One: Introduction

### Background

In western culture, tattoos, sometimes referred as body inscription, have long been widely accepted and can be seen on numerous mainstream and underground artists.<sup>1</sup> Without biases and discrimination, most western people neutrally regard tattoos as individual signatures and characteristics. Tattooists adhere to notions of non-conformity, unconventional artistry and professionalism within the cultural values and aesthetics of cool.<sup>2</sup> However, the perspective in contemporary Taiwan society is significantly different and the issue is more complicated.

Tattoos, traditionally, represent a rebellious character or a member of certain social classes. For example, in the underworld it is regarded as a test of membership or an expression of courage; it is also used as an approach for peer identification during fights between different gangs. Therefore, tattoos often give people a negative impression.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as judicial officers and educators generally are models with high moral standards, they are usually not allowed to have tattoos on their bodies; even the admission brochure of the military police academy states that anyone with tattoos on any part of their body is not allowed to apply and will be unqualified.

---

<sup>1</sup> FI Swagazine, "Perception of Tattoos: East vs West," <https://rampages.us/fiswagazine/2015/03/27/perception-of-tattoos-east-vs-west/> (accessed March 25, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Simpson and Alison Pullen, "'Cool' Meanings: Tattoo Artists, Body Work and Organizational 'Bodyscape,'" *Work, Employment and Society* 32, no. 1 (February 1, 2018): 169–85, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017017741239>.

<sup>3</sup> 黃寶慧、賴芳儀，「台灣地區刺青消費動機、體驗及價值之研究」，於高雄應用科技大學 2011 第三屆管理創新與行銷專案研討會（2011 年 7 月）。

Collectively, it is believed that Taiwanese people's impression of tattoo culture has been very stereotyped, and it is often viewed with a strange, discriminatory, or fearful perspective. Fortunately, thanks to globalization and introduction to foreign cultures in over these decades, Taiwanese people have had more opportunities to get exposed to body inscription in different cultures. With the ubiquity and omnipresence of internet and social media, any information and news regarding tattoos now can be rapidly spread.<sup>4</sup> In addition, a body of proposals have been published to promote the legitimacy and validity of tattoos both in governmental and non-governmental organization, and therefore people nowadays are not opposing tattoos like before.

However, despite of such changes led by internet and globalization, gaps between generations and predicaments to promote tattoos remain. Although young adults facing the most the rise of internet and social media sites are more exposed to tattoo culture and more open-minded, the traditional and negative impression of tattoo culture has still been firmly established and not devastated among middle-aged and older adults and children taught by conservative parents, who all together is another large population in Taiwan society.<sup>5</sup>

### **Motivation**

The reason why I personally want to take this opportunity to examine the acceptability and predicaments of contemporary Taiwan tattoo culture is because I have encountered a plenty of stereotyped problems and queries since I had tattoos on my body. Even now, several years after I got my tattoos, I am still worried about what

---

<sup>4</sup> 茉莉，「台灣刺青文化探討研究」碩士論文，國立政治大學國際傳播英語碩士學程，2018。

<sup>5</sup> 陳逸軒、陳重穎、郭昱嘉，「台灣刺青文化發展」，私立慈幼工商資訊三禮，2019。

my family think about them. Growing up in a conservative family, I always have difficulty telling them about my tattoos because they might belittle me or misunderstand my original intention.

From another perspective, I want to investigate this topic because I would like to know more about this distinctive tattoo culture and learn how to introduce it to more people. Through this project, I seek to understand more about the history, changes of tattoos, and the shift of this culture. More importantly, I expect my project can empower those who want to destigmatize tattoos, changing the disgraceful understanding and promoting it in Taiwan.

### **Research purpose**

The main purposes of this research are 1) to illustrate the changes of consumption and development of tattoos in Taiwan by literature review, 2) to identify the acceptability and predicaments of contemporary Taiwan tattoo culture by comparing it with western tattoo culture and conducting in-depth interviews, and 3) to propose a feasible approach to promote Taiwan tattoo culture.

In a specific way, consumer motivation, consumer experience, and consumer value will be thoroughly examined. Consumer motivation includes self-feelings, interior and exterior sentiments, inspiring models, while consumer experience involves relative incidents including setbacks and difficulties, emotional reaction, and prices. Additionally, an individual's life, story, and meaning (consumer value) corresponding to the tattoo will be found out.

### **Research questions**

With the advancement of technology, globalization, and introduction to foreign cultures, Taiwan's society has changed significantly that is the modern context to bear a witness of tattoo culture. The following shows the research questions which are framed by some fore knowledge of the tattoo culture in Taiwan. For example, I assume consumption and development of tattoos are more common and acceptable nowadays in Taiwan. Also, I thought different demographic variables might have significant differences in attitudes toward tattoos. Finally, all this would lead to dramatic impacts on social acceptability of tattoos and the consequent predicaments impeding the spread of tattoo culture.

Based on such assumptions, the research questions are followed:

1. How have the consumption and development of tattoos changed in Taiwan?
2. In comparison with western culture, how has the acceptability of tattoos in Taiwan changed?
3. In comparison with western culture, what are the current predicaments that contemporary Taiwan's tattoos culture facing?

### **Limits**

Due to the complexity of this issue, there are several limitations I think I will face before and during this research, which include but not limited to

1. It is difficult to randomly find interviewees on the street because their tattoos might be covered up by clothes.
2. Due to the low accessibility of tattoo shops to the general public, it is difficult to issue a large number of questionnaires in a short time.
3. Due to the previous anti-tattoos atmosphere, interviewees might only provide guarded, superficial responses, making it more difficult to go in-depth. Moreover,

the consumers' motivation for tattoos is generally private and personal, interviewees might not tell their true feelings if they do not know the researcher.

4. It might be impossible to know what consumers are thinking and feeling instantaneously during the process of tattooing because of privacy, and therefore the interviews only can be post-tattoo and the response they provide might not be able to precisely illustrate their thoughts and feelings at tattooing moment.

### **Delimits**

Due to the abovementioned limitation for recruiting interviewees, the sample population of my study are the people who are more accessible to me. In this case, they might have their responses relatively unguarded, and I therefore can acquire more precise information. With the difficulty issuing and returning a large number of questionnaires in a short period of time, the methodology is going to be in-depth interviews with limited number of participants. Additionally, as the instantaneous thoughts and feelings during tattooing are hard to illustrate, my research will only focus on asking pre-tattoo and post-tattoo experience.

## Chapter Two: Literature review

In recent years, we have seen and experienced considerable changes in the market of tattoos and changing attitudes toward tattoos, both in daily life and the literature. The number of studies has been surging with methods ranging from simple survey or case study to in-depth interview or large-scale questionnaire. This section aims to compare the tattoos culture in Western Culture and Taiwan, and to demonstrate the current understanding of tattoos in Taiwan.

### 2.1 Tattoos, Crime, and Students

As tattoos were believed to be related to gangs and crime before, the relationship between tattoos and crime is one of the major preoccupations among early researchers. A study investigating the relationship between tattooing and delinquency among Taiwanese juveniles in 2005 presents that about half of delinquent juveniles are tattooed and those who had severer sentences generally have more tattoos, while 60% of them regret getting a tattoo; the reasons of getting tattooed in these delinquent juveniles include being curious, to acquire identification in gangs, and self-expression.<sup>6</sup> In another cross-sectional study examining middle school students' attitude toward tattoos in Taiwan, Lin (2003) presents that among 397 middle school students, 4.8% of them are tattooed.<sup>7</sup> The results of these two publications are

---

<sup>6</sup> 林瑞欽、黃秉輝。「犯罪少年刺青行為的調查研究」，本土心理學研究 no. 23 (June 2005): 321–72. <https://doi.org/10.6254/2005.23.321>.

<sup>7</sup> 林美智（2003），「國中生刺青態度相關因素之研究」，碩士論文，國立中正大學犯罪防治研究所。

consistent to previous stereotypes and can explain why people had a negative perspective on tattoo in the early years.

On the contrary, in the western world, both tattoos and body piercing were more widely acceptable and burgeoning in the late 1900s. “Since the 1980s, tattooing has emerged anew in the United States as a widely appealing cultural, artistic, and social form.”<sup>8</sup> Another study investigating the prevalence of tattoos in the US suggests that 24% of the population had tattoos and it was equally common in both sexes.<sup>9</sup> A similar study surveying the prevalence of tattoos and body piercing among undergraduate university students in 2008 notes that more than 22% of students had tattoos during two consecutive 5-year samples.<sup>10</sup>

Thanks to the introduction of foreign cultures and facilitated information exchange rate by the internet, the perspective on tattoos among Taiwanese people, especially the younger, has changed significantly in these years. In a recent study asking the attitude toward tattoos, high school students believe that getting tattooed is

---

<sup>8</sup> Margo DeMello and Gayle S. Rubin, “Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community,” January 1, 2000, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822396147>.

<sup>9</sup> Anne E. Laumann and Amy J. Derick, “Tattoos and Body Piercings in the United States: A National Data Set,” *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* 55, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 413–21, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaad.2006.03.026>.

<sup>10</sup> Lester B. Mayers and Sheila H. Chiffrieller, “Body Art (Body Piercing and Tattooing) among Undergraduate University Students: ‘Then and Now,’” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 42, no. 2 (February 1, 2008): 201–3, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2007.09.014>.

no longer related to gangs and represents an approach to express themselves and their experience.<sup>11</sup>

## **2.2 Motivations for getting tattooed among general population**

When it comes to the motivations for obtaining a tattoo, they are generally personal and diverse, including self-beautification, self-identity, commemoration of profound experience, and even a simple statement “just because I like it.” Having a tattoo generally makes people feel stronger and more confident. Most importantly, Instagram, which becomes extremely popular among the younger, appears to be the biggest influencer in the social media world.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, compared with 17~24 years old interviewees, Lai presents, those younger than 16 are more inclined to have an impulse to get tattooed ( $p < 0.001$ ); also pointing out the positive relationship among consumers’ motives, experiences, and value of tattoos, Lai suggests that the consumption of tattoos can be stimulated if individualized products are designed to satisfy the consumers’ motives and increase consumers’ experiences like commemorating. Moreover, when individuals decide to get tattooed, they generally are not discouraged by the prices.<sup>13</sup>

Similar determination can as well be observed in a study by Lou (2017). Lou examines the general attitude toward tattoos and what affects the decision of getting

---

<sup>11</sup> 葉思柔、李家寧、黃以勒，「刺青想法大不同-以樹德家商英文科為例」，私立樹德家商英文科。

<sup>12</sup> 茉莉，「台灣刺青文化探討研究」碩士論文，國立政治大學國際傳播英語碩士學程，2018。

<sup>13</sup> 黃寶慧、賴芳儀，「台灣地區刺青消費動機、體驗及價值之研究」，於高雄應用科技大學2011第三屆管理創新與行銷專案研討會（2011年7月）。

tattoos through the theory of planned behavior, which explains human behavior by 3 main variables including attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control. According to the theory, subjective norm involves social regulations and morals, while perceived behavior control involves the price of tattoos and individuals' ability. With the result showing that 72.6% of the objects had positive tattoo behavior intention, she summarizes that these 3 variables collectively have a significant influence on tattoo behavior ( $r=.46\sim.59$ ), and the most influential variable among is attitude, followed by subjective norm and perceived behavior control, an order which can explain the abovementioned determination.<sup>14</sup>

### **2.3 Motivations for getting tattooed among athletes**

On the other hand, motivations of getting a tattoo among athletes are worth discussing as well. In a case study, a basketball athlete got tattooed to remind himself of diligence and perseverance, meanwhile hoping that he could adhere to his belief and work toward his goal. While he had to remove his tattoo because of Taiwan's teachers regulation when he decided to apply for a teaching position at public school, the positive influence of his previous tattoos on him remains and keeps inspiring him in the rest of his life.<sup>15</sup> Another study examining athletes' tattoos demonstrates that their initiative motives involve breaking taboos, self-identity, commemorating, symbolism and healing, and motivating themselves; this same study as well reports

---

<sup>14</sup> 羅翊芳，「以計畫行為理論探討成人刺青行為意圖」，碩士論文，中臺科技大學醫療暨健康產業管理系碩士班，2017。

<sup>15</sup> 張佑誠，「身體圖騰，生命印記：一位刺青籃球選手的述說分析」，碩士論文，東華大學體育學系，2010。

that sports with more physical contacts have a higher population of tattooed athletes as they regard tattoos to be a symbol of strength, a new insight which is not seen among the general public.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.4 Imperceptible issues in modern society

Unfortunately, although the acceptability of tattoos seems to be increasing in these years in Taiwan, some issues arise at the same moment. It is proposed that such acceptability is superficial among Taiwanese people. After identifying five motivational reasons for making tattoos in literature, namely commemorative meaning, symbolic meaning, body beautification, self-identification and healing, and fashion, Tsai (2019) conducted a study with 65 samples to investigate Taiwanese people's explicit attitude and implicit attitude toward tattoos. He concludes that while people express positive explicit attitude toward tattoos verbally, in reality their implicit attitude remains negative. In addition, even people with tattoos bias others with tattoos as well.<sup>17</sup> Besides, probably due to this negative implicit attitude, people with tattoos have difficulty finding a job in general. In a study asking the attitude toward tattoos, while less than 30% of the subjects view tattoos negatively, more than 55% of the subjects believe that tattoos might be disadvantageous when it comes to job searching.<sup>18</sup> Similar study, which specifically investigates the effects of tattoos on

---

<sup>16</sup> 李芷蕎，「探索運動員身體印記-刺青意涵的閱讀與理解」，碩士論文，台北市立大學運動教育研究所，2020。

<sup>17</sup> 蔡孟寰，「台灣民眾對刺青的內隱與外顯態度測量研究」，碩士論文，樹德科技大學人類性學研究所，2019。

<sup>18</sup> 陳逸軒、陳重穎、郭昱嘉，「台灣刺青文化發展」，私立慈幼工商資訊三禮，2019。

job searchers with 828 subjects, shows that people with visible tattoos have lower chance to receive an offer regardless of the necessity of a job to meet customers face to face; based on such result, Hong (2019) concludes that current job market in Taiwan remains unfriendly to those with visible tattoos.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the job market, tattoos also affect women's identity in the society. Zhuang (2007) is one of the researchers studying such effects. While it was proposed that women might be able to gain power and strength and break the sex barriers after getting tattooed, Zhuang suggests that getting tattoos has actually broadened, rather than narrowed down, the boundary of sex barriers. Unlike males who mostly pick strength-oriented pictures, women are more inclined to pick smaller and more low-key pictures, strengthening the original stereotypes about women. However, from the perspective of tattoo alone, more women getting tattooed is a positive phenomenon, representing the increasing acceptability of tattoos among the public.<sup>20</sup> In another study interviewing 5 tattooed women, Siao (2017) presents three factors for ladies: 1) getting tattoos is a measure to record personal experience and memories, 2) the motives are subjective and of one's own accord, and 3) the meaning and attitude toward tattoos are not affected by others' thoughts.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> 洪沛語，「以貌取人？可見刺青求職者之既定印象」，碩士論文，國立中山大學人力資源管理全英語碩士學位學程，2019。

<sup>20</sup> 莊妮娜，「從刺青看女性身體的性別建構與實踐」，碩士論文，世新大學性別研究所，2007。

<sup>21</sup> 蕭天文，「個人博物館：從刺青符號看生命歷程與情感記憶之轉換」，碩士論文，國立台北教育大學文化創意產業經營學系，2017。

As for the tattoo market, younger tattooists and female tattooists have brought a number of changes. Wu (2014) points out, with new people and participation in tattoo conventions, the exchanges are happening among insiders, which include tattooists and people getting tattooed, and between insiders and outsiders who are not tattooed. With the help of new media, more people are exposed. Thanks to the connection between fashion and modern tattoos, the market has been growing. All these factors create a totally new landscape of tattoo market: tattoo's destigmatization and intensive marketization.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> 吳冠臻，「新刺青時代-從場域競合探討台灣刺青文化（去）污名化及市場化的演變」，碩士論文，南華大學應用社會學系社會學碩士班，2014。

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### Context

To explore how contemporary Taiwan tattoo culture is accepted and challenged, a qualitative approach is drawn on here to elaborate practitioners and consumers' stories. The original plan of the researcher was to conduct in-depth interviews in face-to-face manner. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Taiwan on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the interviews were conducted virtually, either through facetime, Facebook messenger, or LINE, which are the most dominant chat apps in Taiwan.

### Participants: sampling and access

With the abovementioned limits which were reinforced by the pandemic, such as the difficulty in recruiting people with tattoos, people I was acquainted with were the first choices for me, as well as their referrals. These participants were contacted through Facebook Messenger or LINE. Luckily, they all agreed to talk or meet on different social medias. The total 9 participants include 2 tattooists, who were aged 29 and 40, and 7 tattoos consumers who were aged between 17 to 26, as showed in the Table 1 below. Although I knew a few older tattoos consumers, I chose a cohort of Generation Z representatives because they are the ones growing up in this internet revolution and greatly affected by the information online. Additionally, they are going to become the main consumers and parents in Taiwan population in the coming years, a fact which reflects that their opinions and experience regarding tattoos are going to last long.

Participant	Age	Job	1 <sup>st</sup> tattoo (age)	Source of inspiration	Social media
A(Mr.)	23	Engineer	18	Tattooist, internet	FB, IG
B(Mr.)	17	Mechanic	14	Internet	FB, IG
C(Mr.)	19	Salesman	16	Internet	FB, IG

D(Mr.)	20	Student	14	Friends, internet	FB, IG
E(Mr.)	23	E-commerce	17	Tattooist, internet	FB, IG
F(Mr.)	18	Auto-detailing	15	Tattooist	FB, IG
G(Mr.)	19	Teaching Assistance	13	Life, internet	FB, IG
K(Mr.)	40	Tattooist	n/a	Comics, God, Animals	n/a
L(Mr.)	29	Tattooist	n/a	Life, books, other tattooists	FB, IG

Figure 1.

### Interviews: the process of sharing

Each interview took at least 30 minutes, and it was conducted in Chinese. Due to the pandemic, the interview settings were virtual, either facetime or LINE. Prior to the interviews, I made participants familiar with my research purposes, such as why and how I conduct the study (see Picture 1 to Picture 3). Due to the rising concerns about privacy, I asked for their permission to substitute their names with pseudonyms in my research. In addition, they as well consented the information they provided to be used for my research. Only after their agreement did I start the interviews.



Figure 2



Figure 3

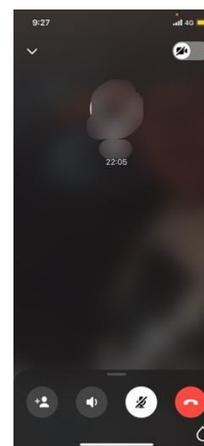


Figure 4

Similar to the privacy issue, the interviews were not recorded. However, interviewees approved of me taking detailed notes. Since I wanted to acquire more

detailed information and listen to more stories, throughout the interviews I take more of a “listen” than an “asking” approach. I started by asking the participants to share demographic information, such as who they are and what they are interested in. This will break ice and ease the unfamiliarity, making me to put questions more approachable to them. I learn that such an informal measure which increases the possibility of acquiring more detailed information. Afterward, I further used topics of their interest as a starting point for further conversation about their tattoos and the corresponding motivations. The participants were free to share anything they wanted. In addition, the roles of social media and social norms in their lives were discussed, as well as the predicaments they had been facing. Lastly, the interviews ended with questions about their recommendations for the whole society and the tattoo community, and about how, they hope, the general public can change the attitude toward tattoos. The list of questions asked in the interviews can be found in appendix A and B.

## Chapter Four: Research results and analysis

Due to the privacy issue, interviewees' names were substituted with alphabets. However, the alphabetical order in the following does not represent anything. It is just for convenience. In addition, their answers, when quoted, were translated to English extracts by myself in the paper.

After conducting all the interviews, I scrutinized my notes and found out the similarities and differences among these interviewees, namely consumer motivation, consumer experience, and consumer value, as well as their thoughts of social media and personal visions of Taiwanese tattoo culture.

### 4.1 Consumer Motivations

First of all, consumer motivations to obtain tattoos were examined. Surprisingly, contrary to my previous expectation that each of the interviewees would have an inspiring or momentous story behind each tattoo, the original reason why they got their first tattoos is unbelievably simple—just because it looks great. 100% of the interviewees (n=9) indicated that they got their first tattoos because it looked cool for them, when they were still juveniles.

*“When I turned 18 years old, I got tattooed just because I wanted a tattoo. It looked cool for me. It wasn’t because of any valuable reason,”* (Mr. A).

*“When I was in junior high, I saw other people’s tattoos and thought they were special. So I went to get my tattoos,”* (Mr. B)

Interviewees D and E as well indicated that they went to get tattooed with their friends at middle school and high school respectively, believing that tattoos would help them stand out. These results echoes the view by Lin<sup>23</sup> in the Chapter 2. It indicates that teenagers, who crave for attention from others, get tattooed on impulse and without deep consideration. This is regarded as a stage of identity construction. According to their personal narratives, they are greatly influenced by how peers recognize them. In particular, the appearance is a way to show self-esteem, confidence, and solidarity among peer groups.

---

<sup>23</sup> 林美智（2003），「國中生刺青態度相關因素之研究」，碩士論文，國立中正大學犯罪防治研究所。



Figure 5. Interviewee A's tattoo



Figure 6. Interviewee B's tattoo

However, despite such simple motivation, they had inclinations to specific style when it came to the texture. 33.3% of the interviewees (n=3) suggested that they like Japanese new-tradition style texture because it demonstrates strength, fierceness, and toughness, implying that they did not want to get bullied when they were young.

Interviewee G specifically presented that he chose Japanese Samurai (日本武士) and Guanyin (觀音) to respectively represent “never give up” and “God bless!” Tattooist

L also said that most of his clients prefer Japanese style texture. Other interviewees suggested that they would discuss with tattooists to decide the texture.



Figure 7. Interviewee F's tattoo

According to their preferences, it could be assumed that teenagers are mostly doubtful about themselves. Lacking confidence, they not only want to look cool but

also want to look strong. From this lens can we notice that Taiwanese teenagers might not acquire coherent recognition in their daily lives and become afraid of being iced out, a phenomenon which implies that they would change their will by time.

On the other hand, interviewees meanwhile presented that their thoughts about tattoo have been changing with their ages. While they wanted to look cool when they were younger, now they get tattooed because they regard it as an art.

***“This tattoo originated from a texture I saw on the internet. It is so beautiful. I showed my tattooist and he changed it a little bit and put it on,”*** (Mr. E).

Interviewee A also indicated that he now thinks tattoos are more artistic than cool and really appreciates the discussion in line with the aesthetics.

Such transformation reinforces the previous assumption that interviewees got tattooed on impulse sometimes. There are not simple factors determining their decisions during the early adult period. Once they grew up and started to take looking cool or strong as less important, their perspectives change. They can begin to appreciate tattoos from aesthetic aspects. However, this does not represent that they disregard their original impulses to get tattooed. Instead, they are viewing their tattoos from a bigger picture and still pursue self-identification, just from different perspectives.

Beside different motivations, what's more astonishing is that 71.4% of customers (n=5) agree that getting tattooed has become an addiction to them.

***“It is really addictive, you know. I want my tattoos look balanced or symmetric,”***

(Mr. A).

Enjoying seeing their favorite textures scripted on their bodies after each painful tattoo session, interviewee F and G felt accomplished.

***“It’s worth it. It feels like I accomplished something big.”*** (Mr. F and Mr. G).



Figure 8. Interviewee G's tattoo

On the contrary, about 28.6% of customers (n=2) said that they now do not have an eagerness to get more tattoos.

*“I am satisfied with my current looking,”* (Mr. C).

*“I might get more tattoos in the future, but I don’t think it is an addiction. I don’t agree with this saying,”* (Mr. D).

The discrepancy among interviewees, I assume, might be attributed to their different level of accomplishment in their lives, because loss of something makes people keep filling the void. If one can acquire satisfaction or recognition in his/her life, the chance of addiction might be lower because there is no need to seek more accomplishment from tattoos. On the other hand, if insufficient recognition still exists when one grows up, he/she might be addicted to tattoos more. For example, they might still don’t know their ultimate goals of their lives, or the relationship with other people is getting worse in these days. However, this is just a conjecture, and the real answers are unknown until further questioning. More research is needed to validate this assumption.

When it comes to the source of inspiration, it is surprising that 66% of the interviewees (n=6) do not have inspiring models like singers or actors. Only Mr. B and Mr. C mentioned Sunny Wang (王陽明), while Mr. D mentioned 館長. The others indicate that the major source of inspiration is the internet, which involves other tattooists’ masterpieces on Instagram and Facebook.

**“Honestly, I don’t follow singers/actors but tattooists, and I generally do a lot of research on how express their thoughts and textures and try to figure out which I fit,”** (Mr. A).

Interestingly, tattooist K indicated that his source of inspiration comes mainly from comics, God, animals, and some pictures on the internet, while tattooist L said he is mostly inspired by his life experience, books, as well as other tattooists' works. This confirms the theory that human society is complex because it is mediated; people always understand the world through the mediation of Semiotics and pictogram. Overall, most people do not rely on an individual to get inspired. Instead, customers rely on the internet and tattooists, who are inspired mutually and by life experience.

Such phenomenon of not having inspiring models for tattoos could be possibly explained by contemporary usage of the internet and social media. According to interviewees, many of them, regardless of their ages, got their first tattoos around 2014~2018, mostly 2015. In these years, technology was blooming, and the use of smartphones and internet was burgeoning. The population of Instagram users had grown from 300 million in 2014 to 1000 million in 2018,<sup>24</sup> while the number of Instagram users in Taiwan in the end of 2018 came to 8 million.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the population of smartphone users in Taiwan had grown from 69.9% in 2015 to 77.6% in 2018.<sup>26</sup> Although this could be a coincident, it is reasonable to correlate the growth of

---

<sup>24</sup> Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/253577/number-of-monthly-active-instagram-users/> (accessed Oct 22, 2021).

<sup>25</sup> NapoleonCat, <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/social-media-users-in-taiwan/2018/12/> (accessed Oct 22, 2021).

<sup>26</sup> Insider Intelligence, <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Mobile-Taiwan-Look-Highly-Mobile-Market/1014877?ecid=NL1007> (accessed Oct 22, 2021).

smartphone usage and Instagram users with greater exposure to tattoos. It is possible that such exposure facilitated the growth of intention to get tattooed among these interviewees.

## 4.2 Consumer Experience

After the investigation of motivations comes the research on consumer experience. Among the 7 tattoo consumers, 4 of them had conflicts with their families, 1 of them did not tell his family, and the other 2 people's families stayed neutral but complained about the money they spent on tattoos.

*“They hated it, and even wanted me to have laser surgery to get rid of it. But you know, when I got more and more (tattoos), they actually couldn't do anything,”*  
(Mr.B).

Interviewee A indicated that he could see why elders don't like it (misdemeanor) but meanwhile he thinks it (tattoo) is more acceptable among youngers. Interviewee D suggested that he did not let his family know because they think of tattoos as gangs and misbehaviors.

For the 2 tattooists, K has a supporting family, while L had a certain degree of disagreement with his family in the beginning.

*“They disagreed with me when I started, but they didn’t stop me because I had another job at that time, which means that being a tattooist just a hobby. And when I had more and more clients, they just let me do whatever I wanted,”* (Mr. L).

According to the hard time between interviewees and their families, we can infer that despite of greater exposure to tattoo culture under the internet in Taiwan, most parents are still very conservative and refuse to accept the trend and individual choices. It is obvious that parents, the middle-aged, and elders are the target markets if we want to make some changes for the tattoo culture in Taiwan.

#### **4.3 Consumer Value**

After the motivations and experiences, the consumer value is investigated. What dawned on me is that none of these interviewees has an impressive story or a significant event behind their tattoos.

*“I think it really depends on each individual. Some might want to commemorate an important event in their lives, but for me it (my tattoo) is purely my appreciation of art,”* (Mr. A).

However, it is apparent that tattoos have made interviewees more confident of themselves (n=7). They all agree that it is a way to express themselves.

*“I think I became more confident and unique,”* (Mr. D).

*“I feel like I am getting more attention. It’s like a plastic surgery which makes you look better,”* (Mr. E).

As interviewees mentioned that they wanted to look cool when they were teenagers, it is understandable that they became more confident after getting tattooed, like what is analyzed in consumer motivation section. However, we also have to agree with Mr. E that it’s like a plastic surgery which makes you look better. People might be looking for measures to gain confidence and getting tattooed actually is not a bad way.

#### **4.4 The Roles of Media and Social Media, and Recommendations**

As traditional media including TV news and radios often report crimes at different areas in Taiwan and relate such behaviors to the body inscription on suspects, interviewees consent that it is not a friendly platform for tattoos culture and sometimes might be detrimental. Instead, they believe that the internet is a better place to promote tattoos, as all of them use Facebook and Instagram to look for inspiration and connections to other people and tattooists, a phenomenon which corresponding to the mentioned population growth of smartphones and social media users in 4.1 Consumer Motivations. With such amazing algorithm, social media are able to understand users’ tastes, in turn providing them with more and more information about tattoos and tattooists.

Tattooists K and L also have their own commercial accounts on FB and Instagram to promote their businesses.

*“I think the social media nowadays mostly helps the tattoo industry build a positive impression among the public,”* (Mr. L).

Lastly, the predicted difficulties to promote tattoo and corresponding recommendations were collected from interviewees to understand the current needs of Taiwan’s tattoo culture. Many of them agree with that a great population still have a stereotype of tattoos as misdemeanor, especially the elders. The interviewees also suggest that let the public know why people get tattooed is a measure to promote tattoo culture; having traditional media reporting positive stories about tattoos is another possible approach. Interestingly, a few interviewees point out the need to re-educate people how to remain neutral and respect others.

*“We cannot control each individual’s thoughts, but I hope the public can have a right mindset and respect, instead of criticize, those with tattoos. I also hope that people can respect and trust tattooists more. Tattoo itself is neither good nor bad. Being good or bad depends on an individual’s mindset and heart. I have seen people without tattoos doing all the bad things but people with tattoos helping others. Nothing superficial is sufficient to judge a person. It is not an individual’s appearance but heart that can be based on to truly find out one’s kindness or evilness,”* (Mr. A).

*“In other words, tattoo is same as cosmetic surgery. People change their appearances in order to look better, transforming themselves to what they like. When we were young, teachers taught us ‘Do not judge a book by its cover.’ We can explain to the*

*public that tattooing is like carving a picture or something memorable into bodies and it becomes a part of them. I think in this way we might be able to flip others' stereotypes,"* (Mr. E).

In addition to mentality in the society, some practical or occupational difficulties were motioned as well. Tattooist L indicated that maintaining the same posture when giving tattoos is a serious occupational injury, which is detrimental for both eyes and wrists. From a bigger picture, despite of the growing acceptability among younger generations, some elders still stand against the tattoo culture, an existing phenomenon which is not friendly to young people and might make finding jobs more difficult. To make changes, it is important to educate the general public and let them understand why people get tattooed and what their stories. More importantly, telling the public that those with tattoos are not evil.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this study, the acceptability to tattoos both in western countries and Taiwan was first examined, followed by discussions about the motivations and imperceptible issues behind and scenes. After explaining the methodology and identifying current context in Taiwan, I conducted interviews with 9 people and analyzed their answers in Chapter 4.

To sum up, there are several insights throughout my study. First and foremost, an inspiring story is not necessary for individuals to get tattooed. Instead, aesthetics and the desire to look good are more common reasons behind tattoos. In addition, becoming more confident seems to be a positive effect of tattoos on individuals. Secondly, the internet, not a model, is more influential on generation Z than any other resources, a trend which is contemporary with the growth of the internet and social media usage. Third, the acceptability in Taiwan society as a whole is superficial like previous studies pointed out. Not only the elder but also the job market are not friendly enough to tattooed population. Interviewees recommend increasing the overall exposure to tattoo culture and stories among the public. Subject to three research questions brought up in the beginning, I came up with 3 explanations and 2 proposals, which are in the following.

### **RQ1. How have the consumption and development of tattoos changed in Taiwan?**

Corresponding to the growth of population of smartphone and social media users, especially Instagram users, most interviewees got tattooed around 2015, when most of them were teenagers. The consumption of tattoos has become more

acceptable and accessible for youngers, but the disagreement with parents still stubbornly remains. In addition, an inspiring model for tattoos seems to be unnecessary for this internet-using generation. People in such generation are able to naturally find motivations on the internet by themselves.

**RQ2. In comparison with western culture, how has the acceptability of tattoos in Taiwan changed?**

According to the studies in literature review and answers from the interviewees, it is obvious that the acceptability has significantly grown in recent years. Youngers nowadays regard getting tattooed as a method to express themselves and to become how they want to look like. More importantly, youngers respect and generally do not criticize each other when it comes to what they do and their decisions.

**RQ3. In comparison with western culture, what are the current predicaments that contemporary Taiwan's tattoos culture facing?**

Unlike western culture which emphasizes individualism and characteristics, Taiwanese culture focuses more on the society and uniformity. Though it seems like the acceptability of tattoos has increased among the younger generation, predicaments in Taiwan's tattoo culture remain, such as the significant gap between generations and superficial acceptability in the job market. As indicated by interviewees and studies in literature review, people with tattoos are still worried about their career possibilities and pay. Moreover, traditional media mostly correlating misbehaviors with tattoos are

unfriendly to the whole tattoos culture. From an occupational perspective, it is common for tattooists to have occupational injuries.

**Proposal 1:** To increase the social acceptability and promote tattoos culture, people with tattoos could openly share their stories both on the internet and in real lives. Through their stories can the public more understand the meaning and attraction of tattoos. In addition, this method can increase the public's exposure to tattoos culture as well. Without communication, mutual understanding is impossible to be made.

**Proposal 2:** Tattoos promoting organizations could try to cooperate with governments and local businesses to have exhibitions or special events, as interviewees pointed out that more exposure opportunities are needed. Placemaking is a possible tryout, because it not only promotes tattoos culture but also expediate local businesses.

On the other hand, while a deeper understanding of tattoo culture has been made in this paper, further confirmation regarding the observation is necessary and a few issues remain to be discussed deeply. First, the sample size in this paper is too small to make confirmative conclusion for the whole population. Second, studies looking into elders are necessary to truly understand how they feel about tattoos and what the predicaments are in this era. Third, like most of the other papers in the field, this paper focuses on interviews and some case study- similar method for convenience. However, it is not sufficient to have a big picture. Therefore, to have a more holistic

perspective, future research could either recruit a significant amount of people, which include young generations and elders, for surveys and interviews, or have a broader, systematic review on current literature to cover the population on different sites of the spectrum.

## Appendix A

### 一般人刺青訪談問題

1. 年齡、性別、工作
2. 請介紹一下自己，你是誰？有什麼愛好？喜歡哪種音樂、電影、運動？有沒有特別喜歡的活動？平常都和誰在一起？會去看演出、展覽、等等嗎？
3. 有沒有刺青的經驗？刺青的數量？
4. 什麼時候有第一個刺青？
5. 為什麼刺青？什麼原因？你知道刺青有風險嗎？
6. 你的刺青在哪裡？為什麼刺在這裡？
7. 為什麼這樣的設計、樣式、圖案？
8. 現在有考慮新的刺青嗎？你覺得你有「上癮」嗎？
9. 你周遭朋友有刺青的人多嗎？
10. 你周遭的人（朋友、家人）對你有刺青這件事有什麼感想？
11. 你是否同意，至今刺青在台灣一般大眾眼中仍然帶有負面的刻板印象？可以請你描述一下台灣現在的刺青文化如何嗎？會不會大家可以接受西方人（style）的刺青但不能接受台灣人（style）的刺青？為什麼會這樣？
12. 你的刺青使你更能察覺體現自我嗎？為什麼？
13. 你在刺青之後有感受到什麼不一樣嗎？
14. 你的刺青是否加強你的自信或自愛？
15. 你覺得在刺青議題中社群媒體的角色是什麼？
16. 你都用什麼社群媒體當作刺青議題的媒介？
17. 你是否認為社群媒體可以緩解大家對刺青的刻板印象與誤解？
18. 你是否認為社群媒體提供了一個關於刺青的交流平台也吸引了更多對刺青文化有興趣的大眾？
19. 哪些是您在社群媒體有興趣／追蹤對象（任何人，例如藝人）？
20. 你會願意使用社群媒體來分享您自己的刺青嗎？如果是的話，為什麼？為了誰？
21. 在社群媒體上有任何人給你對刺青的啟發或動機嗎？請問是人或者是設計圖案？
22. 你有在 FB, instagram 追蹤任何人嗎（刺青相關）？
23. 你認為 FB, instagram 是否扮演今天刺青文化主要的交流平台呢？
24. 你有用過 pinterest 嗎？有的話有追蹤什麼刺青相關的人事物嗎？
25. 你覺得台灣刺青文化現在遇到的難題是什麼？
26. 你覺得有什麼辦法可以讓一般人更理解、接受刺青嗎？
27. 有任何你想補充的意見或看法嗎？

## Appendix B

### 刺青師訪談

1. 年齡、性別
2. 你為什麼入這行，做多久了？怎麼學？有師徒制嗎？
3. 客人來源、階層？他們刺青的理由？
4. 怎樣的客人喜歡怎樣的圖案？有性別年齡行業差異嗎？
5. 店家都怎麼跟客人進行溝通？
6. 什麼情況下不會替客人刺青？
7. 刺青有無禁忌？
8. 刺青圖騰是否分很多種類？各有代表的意義嗎？
9. 刺青師傅靈感怎麼來的？如何找創作素材？認同台灣刺青源自日本嗎？
10. 你的刺青風格是？為何走這種風格？理念為何？客人接受度如何？
11. 會接觸其他風格種類嗎？（西方）
12. 你有參加刺青比賽嗎？理由是？你覺得比賽可以帶來實質效益嗎？
13. 得獎的意義是？同行如何評價？
14. 有無使用社交媒體推廣，經營社群？(FB, Instagram, Pinterest) 會跟同業交流？
15. 媒體對刺青業者的影響或你們如何運用媒體創造刺青風潮？
16. 早期台灣刺青與近代刺青有什麼不同？包括刺青族群、圖案風格、店家經營模式？
17. 刺青行業的市場潛力你覺得如何？
18. 做了刺青施厚，眾人眼光跟自己的感受如何？這行業特質為何？
19. 家人朋友對你做這行的意見是？
20. 做這行的成就感或挫敗為何？
21. 你認為作為一個刺青師的條件？
22. 建議客人如何選擇店家？
23. 經營刺青店的甘苦談。
24. 你覺得台灣刺青文化遇到什麼問題？跟國外比起來如何？
25. 你覺得有什麼辦法可以讓一般人更理解、接受刺青嗎？
26. 有什麼其他想補充的嗎？

## Bibliography

Anne E. Laumann and Amy J. Derick, “Tattoos and Body Piercings in the United States: A National Data Set,” *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* 55, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 413–21, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaad.2006.03.026>.

FI Swagazine, "Perception of Tattoos: East vs West," <https://rampages.us/fiswagazine/2015/03/27/perception-of-tattoos-east-vs-west/> (accessed March 25, 2021).

Insider Intelligence, <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Mobile-Taiwan-Look-Highly-Mobile-Market/1014877?ecid=NL1007> (accessed Oct 22, 2021).

Lester B. Mayers and Sheila H. Chiffriker, “Body Art (Body Piercing and Tattooing) among Undergraduate University Students: ‘Then and Now,’” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 42, no. 2 (February 1, 2008): 201–3, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2007.09.014>.

Margo DeMello and Gayle S. Rubin, “Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community,” January 1, 2000, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822396147>.

NapoleonCat, <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/social-media-users-in-taiwan/2018/12/> (accessed Oct 22, 2021).

Ruth Simpson and Alison Pullen, “‘Cool’ Meanings: Tattoo Artists, Body Work and Organizational ‘Bodyscape,’” *Work, Employment and Society* 32, no. 1 (February 1, 2018): 169–85, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017017741239>.

Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/253577/number-of-monthly-active-instagram-users/> (accessed Oct 22, 2021).

吳冠臻，「新刺青時代-從場域競合探討台灣刺青文化（去）污名化及市場化的演變」，碩士論文，南華大學應用社會學系社會學碩士班，2014。

張佑誠，「身體圖騰，生命印記：一位刺青籃球選手的述說分析」，碩士論文，東華大學體育學系，2010。

李芷蕎，「探索運動員身體印記-刺青意涵的閱讀與理解」，碩士論文，台北市立大學運動教育研究所，2020。

林瑞欽、黃秉輝。「犯罪少年刺青行為的調查研究」，本土心理學研究 no. 23 (June 2005): 321-72. <https://doi.org/10.6254/2005.23.321>.

林美智（2003），「國中生刺青態度相關因素之研究」，碩士論文，國立中正大學犯罪防治研究所。

洪沛語，「以貌取人？可見刺青求職者之既定印象」，碩士論文，國立中山大學人力資源管理全英語碩士學位學程，2019。

羅翊芳，「以計畫行為理論探討成人刺青行為意圖」，碩士論文，中臺科技大學醫療暨健康產業管理系碩士班，2017。

茉莉，「台灣刺青文化探討研究」碩士論文，國立政治大學國際傳播英語碩士學程，2018。

莊妮娜，「從刺青看女性身體的性別建構與實踐」，碩士論文，世新大學性別研究所，2007。

葉思柔、李家寧、黃以勒，「刺青想法大不同-以樹德家商英文科為例」，私立樹德家商英文科。

蔡孟寰，「台灣民眾對刺青的內隱與外顯態度測量研究」，碩士論文，樹德科技大學人類性學研究所，2019。

蕭天文，「個人博物館：從刺青符號看生命歷程與情感記憶之轉換」，碩士論文，國立台北教育大學文化創意產業經營學系，2017。

陳逸軒、陳重穎、郭昱嘉，「台灣刺青文化發展」，私立慈幼工商資訊三禮，2

019。

黃寶慧、賴芳儀，「台灣地區刺青消費動機、體驗及價值之研究」，於高雄應

用科技大學 2011 第三屆管理創新與行銷專案研討會（2011 年 7 月）。