Exploration to Reduce Purposelessness in the Young Adults of Taiwan

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Taiwan, often celebrated for its academic accomplishments, mirrors the educational success characteristic of many East Asian countries. The island has long been recognized for producing students who excel in various academic fields that contributes to its global esteem. However, beneath this reputation of achievement lies an underrepresented concern, a burden borne by students navigating the demanding Taiwanese education system: the issue of student well-being and burnout (Kuan, P.-Y., 2018). The intense exam-based education system often demands supplemental tutoring, leaving students without time during the day to find their true passions in life (Chen, I.-C., & Kuan, P.-Y., 2021). The intense familial and societal pressure to succeed academically also leaves students suffocated by stress, anxiety, and self-doubt (Chou, C., Yuan, J., 2011). These young adults face a profound lack of clarity about their identity, passions, and aspirations, with over fifty percent of students stating that they feel lost in their lives (City Wanderer, n.d.).

Our sponsor, the City Wanderer Education Association, is a non-profit organization with an innovative solution. Founded in 2013 and formally established in 2015, they provide young adults with a sense of purpose through "Wandering Challenges". In these challenges, students in groups of three aim to complete 30 tasks in three weeks, with goals ranging from making food for a homeless person to traveling to a location purely through hitchhiking (City Wanderer, n.d.). These challenges aim to ignite a passion in these youths through exploration and meaningful interactions with society in order to instill within them the idea that they can make a true impact on the world during their lives. The association encourages participants to explore beyond their comfort zones and cultivate a profound sense of responsibility to contribute towards creating a more positive world (City Wanderer, n.d.). Today, the organization has executed more than 100 wandering challenges totaling over 14,000

participants and impacted more than 1,000,000 individuals through its service around the world.

Our project aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts of the City Wanderer Education Association to help young adults find meaning in their lives through exploratory challenges. To accomplish this, we aim to create three to five 'Missions' for the City Wanderer Education Association to use in their future Wandering Challenges, with our research centering around the connection between these tasks and purpose. The Sustainable Development Goal we are working towards is Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being, as we consider mental health a component of overall well-being. By implementing targeted exploratory challenges, the collaboration intends to encourage more young adults to explore out of their comfort zones and pursue their passions.

2.0 BACKGROUND

To give insight into our Sponsor and the nature of our project, our literature review navigates our proposed main cause of purposelessness, the meaning and definition of purpose, and existing solutions to purposelessness that are prevalent in Taiwan. We also discuss past missions City Wanderer has completed and their effects. Our background section serves as the foundation for our comprehensive understanding of the educational and mental health challenges faced by Taiwanese young adults and the potential solutions that exist for modern-day purposelessness.

2.1 Education in Taiwan

Chapter 2 gives background information on the cause of youth purposelessness, the Taiwanese Education system (Section 2.1.1), and how it affects young adults' mental health (Section 2.1.2).

2.1.1 Taiwan's Exam-Based Education

We begin by discussing our proposed root cause of purposelessness in Taiwanese young adults, Taiwan's exam-based education system. Here, we explore Taiwan's societal emphasis on academics, the role of cram schools, and the resulting mental health challenges faced by students.

Taiwan boasts a robust and highly competitive education system that places a strong emphasis on academic achievement. This profound reverence for academic pursuits and intellectuals, like various East Asian societies, is a value system shaped by the influence of Chinese Confucianism (Chou, C., Yuan, J., 2011). Confucianism, originating from the teachings of Confucius (Kong Fuzi) (551–479 BCE), emphasizes the significance of education and intellectual pursuits as essential components of personal and societal

development. In Confucian philosophy, the pursuit of knowledge, moral character development, and the cultivation of wisdom are highly valued (Tan, C., 2017). This concept leads many in Taiwan to believe that if one can enter a better high school or university, they will become more successful in their careers and lives (Chou, C., Yuan, J., 2011). This historical context provides valuable insight into the importance of education in Taiwan.

Structurally, Taiwan divides its education into three main levels: elementary education (grades 1-6), junior high school (grades 7-9), and senior high school (grades 10-12). Additionally, there are vocational schools, junior colleges, and universities that students can pursue (Taiwan Ministry of Education, n.d.). Upon completing elementary school, students move on to junior high school, where they continue to study a standardized curriculum. The goal of junior high school is to prepare students for the high school entrance exams, which are critical for determining their educational trajectory (CAP, n.d.). While senior high school is not compulsory, the majority of students still chose to attend as it is crucial for university admissions. The main goal of high school education is to prepare students for college entrance examinations (CEEC, 2019). In order to best prepare for these entrance exams to enter highly ranked high schools and universities, many Taiwanese students decide to participate in 'cram schools'.

Cram schools, also known as Buxiban, are a prominent feature of Taiwan's education landscape. For a significant financial cost, these private institutions offer supplementary tutoring and exam preparation to students in addition to their regular education, aiming to enhance their academic performance (Chou, C., Yuan, J., 2011). The high schools typically release their students from standard school hours at around four or five in the afternoon, with cram school typically beginning shortly after and continuing until the late evening (World TESOL Academy, 2023).

Cram schools are especially popular during high school years when students are preparing for entrance exams, but they can offer education for students even in preschool age. According to the Taiwanese Ministry of Education, more than 50 percent of senior high school students in Taiwan attend cram schools (Taiwan Ministry of Education, n.d.). A study by Jeng Liu in 2012 where they analyzed the academic performance of cram school attendees has proven Cram schools to be effective in improving students' academic ability: "Attendance at an academic cram school does enhance learning performance. Adding cram schooling per hour, the general analytical ability score increases 0.063 (0.067–0.004) and the math score increases 0.067 (0.071–0.004). And both of them are statistically significant" (Liu, J., 2012). Improved academic ability directly contributes to higher chances of admittance to a better high school or university, which many in Taiwan believe directly links to success in life. While they provide additional support, the intense focus on exam preparation negatively impacts students' overall well-being (Kuan, P.-Y., 2018).

2.1.2 Exams and Mental Health in Taiwan

Taiwan's education system is renowned for its high academic standards and rigorous testing, placing substantial pressure on students to excel academically. While the pursuit of excellence is deeply ingrained in Taiwanese culture, the relentless focus on standardized tests creates an environment of heightened stress and anxiety among students. The fear of academic failure and the consequences it may entail weigh heavily on their minds, with parents often contributing by exerting significant pressure on their children to perform exceptionally well (Chou, C., Yuan, J., 2011). The expectations from family, coupled with societal pressure to secure a spot in prestigious universities, create a daunting environment for students.

As stated previously, Taiwanese students also often face demanding study schedules that extend beyond regular school hours. The integration of evening cram school sessions, weekend classes, and extensive homework contributes to long hours of study leading to burnout, exhaustion, and a lack of time for relaxation and leisure activities (Chen, I.-C., & Kuan, P.-Y., 2021). Social isolation is not uncommon for cram school attendees, with its time commitment undermining the development of crucial interpersonal skills through lack of social interaction. The emphasis on academic achievement as a measure of personal worth may also lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt (Kuan, P.-Y., 2018).

The Taiwanese Ministry of Education has made efforts to address these mental health concerns, such as creating new versions of curriculum guidelines and textbooks to relieve student's exam pressure and to combat rote-memory studying. However, according to the International Institute for Asian Studies, these reform efforts have failed at relieving students' stress. More students than ever have been attending cram schools, with the number steadily increasing over time (Chou, C., Yuan, J., 2011). City Wanderer has listed Taiwan's intense academic culture as the main contributor to purposelessness, stating that it leaves Students without time to find their true passions. It is this problem that they aim to solve through their 'Missions' (City Wanderer, n.d.).

2.2 Purpose

Section2.2 shifts the focus to the concept of purpose and its crucial role in mental well-being. It delves into the development of purpose during the formative years of emerging adulthood described by Jeffrey Arnett (Section 2.2.2) and highlights the mental health concerns prevalent in Taiwan (Section 2.2.3). Section2.2.4 then explores current solutions to purposelessness, including medication, gap years, and innovative approaches like drama therapy.

2.2.1 What is Purpose and Why it Matters

Discovering one's meaning in life is a deeply personal process that is unique to each individual. However, many in modern society enter adulthood without ever having developed a clear sense of purpose to guide them. With purpose, life's trials and tribulations are but parts of a larger journey towards making the world a better place, and each failure is an opportunity to learn about oneself and grow into the best version of oneself. In fact, finding a sense of purpose in one's life is so impactful that one study suggests having a "strong purpose in life continues to have meaningful reductions in the risk of dying" (Hill and Turiano 2014). In this study, it was found that "for every one standard deviation increase in purpose, the risk of dying over the next 14 years diminished by 15%" (Hill and Turiano 2014). The survey results were significant across both age and sex and indicate that living a long life is closely tied to how strong one's sense of purpose is.

Further, having a strong sense of purpose can comfort a person through stressful days, while providing assurance that today's struggles are necessary components of a larger journey. Another study found that purpose-driven respondents "showed less of an increase in negative affect and physical symptoms on stressor days than on stressor-free days" (Hill et al 2018). Mental health symptoms, including suicides, often manifest themselves when one is most stressed, suggesting that a clear sense of purpose can act as a protective factor against the most harmful outcomes of mental distress. The pursuit of meaningful goals allows one to channel stress and discomfort into personal development (Lester, D., & Gunn, J. F., 2016).

Through understanding the definition and importance of developing a strong sense of purpose in life, we hope to develop exploratory missions for our sponsor which effectively engage participants in a way conducive to developing purpose.

2.2.2 Development of Purpose

Given the importance of a strong sense of purpose to a fulfilling life, the next logical question is how do people develop purpose? Jeffrey Arnett suggests that the most formative years for developing purpose come during the period of emerging adulthood from ages 18 to 25. During emerging adulthood, individuals experience frequent change and exploration. Most people leave their parents for the first time at 18 when they go on to pursue either work or higher education. By the time they reach 30, most people have settled into long-term commitments like marriage and parenthood. Hence, the age of 18 - 25 is a crucial window for emerging adults to explore various career paths, romantic relationships, and personal beliefs (Arnett 2000). During this explorational phase, emerging adults have the chance to test their limits, discover their passions, and define their values, which are key parts to developing a life's purpose.
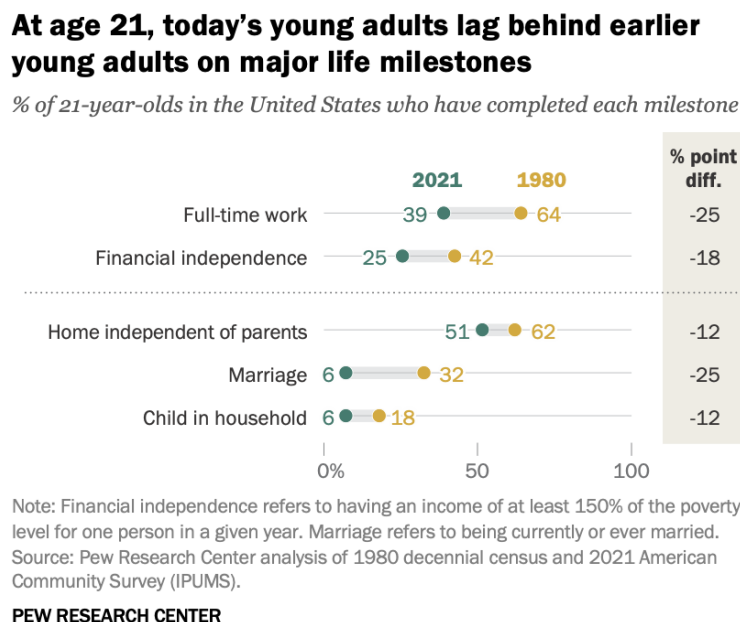

Figure 2.1 - Adulthood Milestones between 1980 and 2021

However, in the last few decades, many of the traditional markers of adulthood have been pushed back further in life (see Figure 2.1). For example, in the United States, from 1970 - 2000 the average age of marriage increased by 4 years on average for men and women (Arnett 2000). While in China, a study found that between 2010 - 2020, the average age of marriage increased by 3.63 years for men and 3.95 years for women, with the average length of education increasing from 9.08 to 9.91 years (Arnett et al 2023). A Pew Research review of US Census data reveals significant shifts in traditional adulthood milestones at age 25 between 1980 and 2021: the share of Americans working full-time dropped from 64% to 39%, financial independence dropped from 42% to 25%, and housing independence dropped from 62% to 51% (Pew 2023). This shift in traditional adulthood milestones has significant impacts on emerging adulthood across the world, as marriage and career development happen later in life, the period of exploration is extended further into adulthood. While this longer period of exploration may offer individuals more time to refine their interests and discover their purpose, which is why it is so important that organizations like City Wanderers are providing purpose development assistance to young adults during the crucial developmental window of emerging adulthood.

2.2.3 Mental Health in Taiwan

Mental health is an important issue in Taiwan. In 2006, rates of suicide peaked, and this was the second leading cause of death among Taiwanese youth aged 15-24 (Chang et al., 2012). Due to societal and parental stigma associated with using psychiatric services, most patients opt into seeing their primary care physician for help first (Chang et al., 2012). In order to mitigate these stigmatizations, Chang et al. proposes that non-psychiatric practitioners should train to recognize risk signs and school teachers should make mental health resources available to their students. In the 15-24 age group, female students were

more likely to utilize mental health resources advertised in their schools. The education system is a high-stress location for Taiwanese students, so providing mental health resources in these locations destigmatizes their use and is one of the main reasons the rate of suicide in Taiwan has decreased since its peak in 2006. After this peak, Taiwan took action such as implementing hotlines, informational websites, safety nets, and outreach visits to prevent these widespread rates. Between 2010 and 2023, suicide has remained outside of the top ten leading causes of death in Taiwan (Department of Health, Taiwan 2023).

Parental and academic pressure results in a lot of stress on Taiwanese students. A student's academic and professional life is a direct result of standardized exams. Parents push extra studying upon their children with the goal to see them perform well (Gao et al., 2020). This prevents youth from exploring their identities outside of school due to their rigorous schedules. With no time to develop a sense of individualism due to education and cram schools, youth feel purposeless (Chou, C., Yuan, J., 2011). A sense of purpose is significant in positive mental health outcomes for youth.

2.2.4 Current Solutions to Purposelessness

Negative portrayal of medication in the media, such as in television advertisements, decreases the rate of necessary prescriptions. In 2010 during a period of negative portrayal of ADHD medication in Taiwanese media, the rate of prescription dropped abruptly, only to rise again steadily the next year once media outlook shifted to a more positive light (Wang et al., 2016). It is important to portray the positive effects of medication on mental health, in this case allowing for increased focus and functionality during school. Research performed by Ping-Yin Kuan reveals that intense cram schools, intended to academically improve high school exams, raise the risk of depression among young adults in Taiwan (Kuan, P.-Y., 2018). For students with mental health challenges, developmental disabilities such as ADHD,

or learning difficulties, these high school exams are inaccurately dictating the direction their professional lives will go. In a study, a year after treatment, students performed better in comprehension and object assembly (Tsai et al., 2013). Medication is a necessary tool to help students succeed academically and emotionally.

Taking a gap year after high school has recently increased in popularity among Taiwanese youth, who have noticed this concept in European education programs (Yen M., 2015). A Miley Yen survey shows firsthand the insight of Taiwanese students on gap year programs, where 75% of students knew of these programs and 97% thought they are beneficial in some way (Yen M., 2015). This gap year allows students to explore the world and develop life skills, as well as take time to discover their purpose before diving headfirst into college career preparation (Lee, S. H., Yang, Y. C., 2021). In gap years where students travel, they report having increased communication and language skills as well as an increased understanding of global relations (Wu, H. Y., & Chou, H. C., 2020). Through this time off from school, students report finding a sense of purpose and an increased connection to the world around them.

Drama therapy is a recent solution to the mental health crisis in Taiwan that enables students to build relationships and communication skills. In these programs, students use theater and performance as a creative outlet (Wen-Lung et al., 2019). The goal of this therapy is to strengthen the function of learning in education, understand emotions, and connect with others. This builds a sense of purpose among youth through community engagement and social activities (Araujo et al., 2014).

These solutions to purposelessness in Taiwanese youth rely on the ability to explore the world, try new things, and understand themselves better. The City Wanderer Education Association aims to help the youth have an outlet to explore through their missions.

2.3 Missions

It is important to define what a 'Mission' is before moving forward, considering that City Wanderer runs them regularly. Additionally, 3-5 Missions are the deliverables of our project, so an understanding of them is necessary. The following chapter defines Missions (Section 2.3.1), provides examples (Section 2.3.2) and addresses the effects of Missions (Section 2.3.3) on young adults who have participated in Wandering Challenges in the past.

2.3.1 Mission Definition

City Wanderer makes use of a system they call the "Wandering Challenge", where participants are placed into groups of three and must complete thirty tasks in three weeks. These tasks, referred to as Missions, are all meant to push participants out of their comfort zones and explore new viewpoints while interacting with people and the world around them. There are four categories of City Wanderer Missions: Self-Awareness, Adventure & Challenge, Connection Rebuilding, and Social Participation (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3).

	Self-Awareness		Adventure & Challenge	
	Perception	**Self-development**	**Breakthrough Mindset**	**Grit & Perseverance**
1 Beginning	He/she is willing to take this mission; but from the mission result, the self-awareness on characteristics/behaviors and relevant thoughts cannot be seen.	He/she is willing to take this mission; but from the mission result, the realization and reflection on his/her own interests and abilities cannot be seen.	He/she is willing to take the mission; but through the mission result, whether he/she has challenged and broken through his/her comfort zone cannot been seen.	He/she is willing to take the mission; but through the mission result, the attitude on and resolution for encountering obstacles cannot be seen
2 Developing	He/she is not good at perceiving his/her own characteristics/behaviors, but through the mission, begins to have a conversation with and reflection on himself/herself.	He/she is limited to the realization on his/her own interests and abilities, but through the mission, is gradually clarifying his/her own purpose and direction.	He/she recognizes his/her own psychological challenges, somehow fearing things beyond the comfort zone but willing to break through a little bit.	In the mission, he/she endeavors to fix the problem to achieve the goal when encountering obstacles.
3 Practicing	He/she is able to perceive his/her own characteristics/behaviors, as well as willing to have a conversation with and reflection on himself/herself.	He/she shows the realization on his/her current interests and abilities, as well as recognizes what he/she still does not know well and is lack of his/her learning or understanding.	He/she has recognized his/her own psychological challenges, positively faced things beyond the comfort zone and bravely made relevant breakthrough.	In the mission, he/she endeavors to fix the problem, and finally finish the mission and achieve the goal.
4 Meet Expectation	He/she is able to perceive more his/her own characteristics/behaviors, as well as dares to have a conversation with and reflection on himself/herself.	He/she shows the full realization on his/her interests and abilities, as well as recognizes what still needs understanding and think about planning the next step based on his/her own purpose and direction.	He/she bravely breaks through his/her own psychological challenges, positively feces challenges beyond the comfort zone, as well as holds the faith to fix difficulties.	In the mission, he/she can stick it out, look the positive side of the failure, fix the problem proactively, and achieve the goal.
5 Excellent	He/she is able to perceive more his/her own characteristics/behaviors, as well as dares to have a conversation with and reflection on himself/herself, and even extends the mission into further step.	He/she shows the full realization on his/her interests and abilities; after recognizing what still needs understanding, he/she takes the next step of the mission based on his/her own purpose and direction.	He/she bravely breaks through his/her own psychological challenges beyond the comfort zone, as well as holds the faith to fix difficulties. Even, he/she extends the mission into further challenges on himself/herself.	In the mission, he/she can stick it out, accept the frustration and obstacles in the process, fix the problem proactively and even achieve more than the expectation of the mission.

Table 2.2 - Evaluation of "Self-Awareness" and "Adventure & Challenge" Categories

	Connection Rebuilding		Social Participation	
	Connectedness	**Communication**	**Empathy**	**Social Responsibility**
1 Beginning	He/she is willing to take the mission, but whether it has strengthened his/her supportive system cannot be seen in this mission	He/she is willing to take the mission, but his/her communicability with family/friends or strangers cannot be seen in the mission result.	He/she is willing to take the mission, but his/her attitude and ability related to listening to and empathy on others cannot not be seen in the mission result.	He/she is willing to take the mission, but his/her thinking on association of that issue and himself/herself as well as his/her social responsibility cannot be seen in the result mission.
2 Developing	He/she is not used to build the connection proactively to gain supports; but through the mission, he/she is willing to take the step into building the supportive system.	Through the mission, he/she begins to communicate with family/friends or strangers as well as try to get more understanding of their thoughts and standpoints.	He/she is not good at standing in others' shoes but is willing to listen to others.	Through the mission, he/she begins to care and think about specific issues and social phenomena.
3 Practicing	Through the mission, it makes him/her take the step, and hence facilitates his/her realization and relationship, as well as builds or strengthens his/her own supportive system.	Through the mission, he/she is able to realized and accept family/friends' or strangers' thoughts and standpoints different from theirs.	He/she is willing to listen to others as well as try to stand in others' shoes to get understanding of others' feelings and thoughts.	He/she cares and thinks about specific issues and social phenomena, and further finds association between these phenomena and himself/herself.
4 Meet Expectation	Through the mission, he/she builds or strengthens the supportive system; furthermore, he/she recognizes what kind of support he/she needs as well as plans the way to build or maintain the connection in the future.	He/she realizes and accepts family/friends' or strangers' thoughts and standpoints different from theirs, as well as expresses their own thoughts gently to communicate with others.	He/she is able to listen to others and realize others' feelings and thoughts, as well as gives responses accordingly.	He/she realizes that social phenomena are more or less associated with himself/herself, and starts to build his/her responsibility on the society as well as plan the next step he/she can take.
5 Excellent	Through the mission, he/she strengthens the supportive system and realizes what kind of support he/she needs; after planning the way for connection in the future, he/she has further built and strengthened the connection.	Except for realization and acceptance of different thoughts and standpoints, as well as gentle communication, he/she has profound reflection on communication and relationship maintenance with family/friends and strangers in the future.	Not only can he/she listen to and realize others' feelings to give responses accordingly, but further, to the best of his/her ability, take action for the relevant people or things about that issue.	He/she realizes the association between social phenomena and himself/herself; for the social responsibility, he/she takes the further action beyond the mission.

Table 2.3 - Evaluation of "Connection Rebuilding" and "Social Participation" Categories

The Self-Awareness category (see Table 2.2) emphasizes a participant's ability to reflect on their thoughts and actions to help them improve as they find their purpose. The Adventure & Challenge category urges participants to push the limits of their comfort in different situations to help them face challenges with ease. Connection Rebuilding (see Table 2.3) focuses on one's ability to form meaningful relationships and acknowledge any support systems they may have access to in their family and friends. Finally, Social Participation (see Table 2.3) advocates for empathy and social responsibility among participants. Participation in these Missions encourages those involved to listen to the people in their lives, and the actions they take to complete said Missions motivate them to respond accordingly.

2.3.2 Previous City Wanderer Missions

To get a better understanding of Missions, the project team looked over a few dozen Missions that City Wanderer has hosted in the past. Knowledge of past Missions gives a better understanding of both the scope and the content of the deliverables. The following discussion provides examples of Missions that fall under the subdivisions displayed in Tables 2.2 and 2.3.

Life's Checklist is a Mission from the Self-Awareness category. Participants must write down twenty actions as part of a "bucket list" for themselves. These actions could be life goals, places they want to visit, among other things. Upon completion, they write and submit a reflection on their list, highlighting any patterns they see, identifying what these items mean to them, as well as discussing how realistic it would be to achieve such goals (City Wanderer Association, Mission Description Statement).

The next sample Mission is part of the Adventure & Challenge category, titled **Journey of the Homeless**. Taking place in Taipei, those involved are required to prepare a meal for a homeless person, give them the meal, and then sit with them to listen to their story. Furthermore, the Mission requires participants to take note of their own initial biases, their reactions to the homeless person's story, as well as the reactions of passersby. Approaching and speaking to a homeless person on the street would be difficult for most, so this challenge is meant to push participants out of their comfort zones while building empathy (City Wanderer Association, Mission Description Statement).

Another past Mission is entitled **Free Hug, Free Care**. In this Mission, participants stand with a sign that encourages anyone to claim their free hug. The goal of the Mission is to spread positivity to people who may need it, despite how uncomfortable it may be. The merit of this challenge comes from forcing someone to pluck up the courage to ask a stranger for a

hug. This can be extremely difficult for most people, especially in places with cultures like Taiwan.

The last example is a Social Participation Mission, created by individuals who took part in the program. This Mission took place at Taipei Main Station, where countless tourists and people of different origins cross paths daily to commute by train. Participants asked people at the station about their hometown and its characteristics, learning about all sorts of places in the process. This Mission challenges preconceived notions that the participants may have had about places they've never been to (About City Wanderer).

The example Missions described in this chapter paint a clearer picture of what makes up a Mission, along with their estimated scope. Additionally, they help us understand that each Mission includes a written reflection that participants must complete after taking part in the challenge itself. The reflection is a chance for those involved to put their thoughts on paper and digest what they did for the Mission. When creating our Missions for City Wanderer, it will be useful to know how to structure both the Mission itself as well as the reflection to make it a worthwhile experience. Listed below are other examples of completed Missions for City Wanderer (see Figures 2.4 and 2.5).

Figure 2.4 - Two Wandering Challenge participants giving out hugs to strangers in the street

*as part of a Mission, titled **Free Hug, Free Care**.*

Figure 2.5 - Two Wandering Challenge participants taking a day trip to Tainan, Taiwan by

*hitching rides from friendly strangers as part of a Mission, titled **Zero Dollar Challenge**.*

2.3.3 Effects of the Wandering Challenge

City Wanderer has held their Wandering Challenge in more than two dozen cities across Taiwan, China, Japan, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and the United States, with over 44,000 Missions completed (City Wanderer Association, Mission Description Statement). Through describing their Missions as 'Challenges', they have found success by making their Missions more game-like to further engage participants.

73%	68%	81%	73%
participants more willing to face uncertainty	participants more confident in their problem-solving skills	participants willing to let go of stereotypes to understand others	participants willing to try taking actions on socials issues they care about

Table 2.6 - Student results after Wandering Challenges, According to City Wanderer

Table 2.6 features data collected by City Wanderer themselves. They surveyed past Wandering Challenge participants. Inferring from the data, City Wanderer's Wandering Challenge has a positive impact on young adults and their ability to find their own purpose.

2.4 Conclusion

Researching Taiwan's education system, purpose and mental health in Taiwan, as well as City Wanderer's Missions has been useful for developing an understanding necessary to move further with our project and eventually develop 3-5 Missions. This background information also serves as an important base for our methodology of data collection. In turn, the planning of our methods furthers our progress to creating our deliverables.

3.0 METHODS

Our methodology elaborates upon the ways we will work with Taiwanese young adults to help them mitigate purposelessness. We discuss our overarching goal as well as the objectives that we will complete along the way. Additionally, we go into detail about each method we plan to use and how they fit into our project while addressing the ethical concerns of our data collection process. We also mention the limitations that we will face with our proposed methods in addition to our plans upon landing in Taiwan.

3.1 Objectives and Overview

Before discussing our methods, it is important to state the goal of our project:

We aim to gain insight into the cause of young adult purposelessness in Taiwan in order to help young adults find meaning in their lives.

The methods we will use for our research include surveys, interviews, and archival research (see Figure 3.1). With these, we aim to help Taiwanese young adults find purpose. Deepening the community's understanding of this will allow us to deliver higher quality Missions for City Wanderer to use. Our objectives for accomplishing that goal are as follows:

(1) Determine key factors that influence purposelessness for Taiwanese young adults.

(2) Identify solutions from previous 'Missions' to address those factors.

(3) Define the types of 'Missions' that best develop purpose in Taiwanese young adults.

Between March 9th and May 1st, 2024, the project begins in Taipei. However, our team plans to travel to other parts of Taiwan to gather data. Our surveys and interviews aim to fulfill our objectives and move us closer to our goal. Staying at Soochow University will give us access to a pool of students who we hope will be willing to partake in some interviews for us. The latter sections provide more information on each topic.

To accomplish the four objectives, this project uses archival research, surveys, and interviews. Figure 3.1 shown below links each of these methods with the objectives they support. The rest of this chapter expands on the individual methods, why the project team selected them, and how the project team will implement them. Combining archival research, surveys, and interviews through a mixed methods design allows the project team to neutralize individual weaknesses in each method (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018).
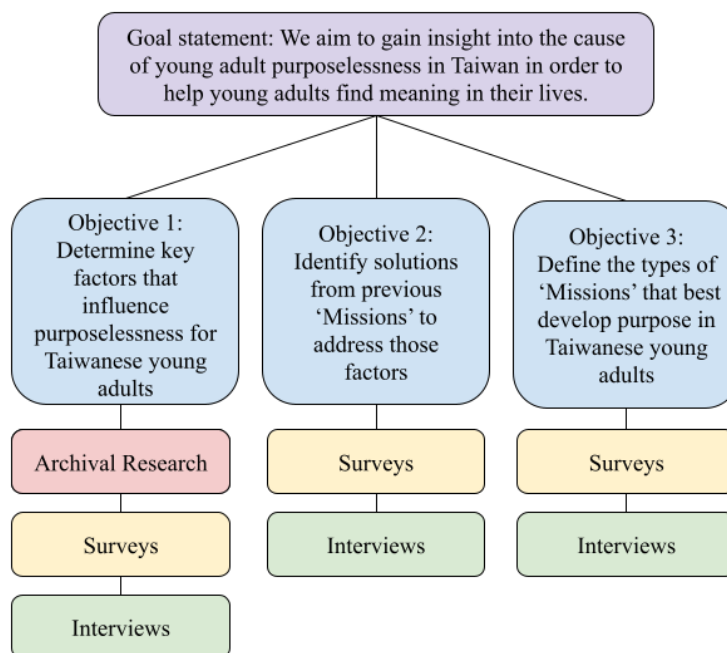

Figure 3.1 - Diagram linking methods with the objectives they support.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Archival Research

The project team used archival research to understand influences of purposelessness and how purposelessness affects young adults in Taiwan, but the project team also has plans to continue this research once they land in Taiwan, but the project team also has plans to continue this research once they land in Taiwan. Archival research is the process of analyzing primary sources to inform a literature review (Madden, L., n.d.).

Archival research was the first step in answering objective one, which will be further examined in surveys and interviews. Using archival research as a basis of understanding allowed the project team to develop necessary background information before diving into surveys and interviews. Researching recent peer-reviewed journals, focusing on sources published after 2010, helps gain a sense of knowledge that will be relevant to surveying and interviewing the current generation of young adults in Taiwan.

Although the project team performed this archival research primarily for the background, it is being left open for the potential of more research in Taiwan. With easier communication with the sponsor, The City Wanderer Education Association, the project team may be guided to sources that exhibit more relevance and importance to the project. Through archival research, the project team aims to enhance the quality of our decision-making. This approach will provide valuable insights, enabling the project team to make more informed and well-rounded decisions when creating the 'Missions'.

3.2.2 Surveys

During our time in Taipei, our team first plans to conduct surveys. Our surveys precede our interviews, as we mainly plan on gathering interview candidates through our

surveys, which we will elaborate on later. Our survey population is split into two groups: the general population of Taiwanese young adults, and past City Wanderer 'Wandering Challenge' participants. As there are over 14,000 previous participants (City Wanderer, n.d.), surveys will provide an efficient means to collect information from a very large population. Our sponsor has stated that our 'Missions' should be executable anywhere around the world, which is why we are aiming to survey the international population of past City Wanderer 'Wandering Challenge' alumni, but as most 'Wandering Challenges' are executed in Taiwan, we will be prioritizing responses from this location. Participants can also take surveys at any location and are usually less of a time investment than interviews, which allows for more flexible participation considering challenge participants exist all over the globe. We plan on receiving a list of emails from our sponsor of past participants and distributing our survey via email. For our general survey on Taiwanese young adults, we plan on discussing with our buddies which locations young adults frequent in order to distribute our surveys on the streets of Taipei. Surveys are also beneficial for easier identification of interviewees, as at the end of our survey we will allow participants to leave their email if they would be interested in a follow-up interview. This question will be on both surveys as we plan on interviewing both past City Wanderer participants and the general population of Taiwanese young adults.

We plan on using the survey platform 'Qualtrics' to build and distribute our survey. Only our group members will have access to the results of this survey and all survey responses will remain completely confidential. Survey participants will also have the option to skip any questions they do not wish to answer. We plan on using a combination of numerical responses, Likert scale ratings, and free responses to diversify our response data.

Our on-the-street style surveys on the general population of Taiwanese young adults will contain questions regarding how the individuals have found purpose and how certain aspects of their lives have influenced their purpose, among other questions. This will

contribute towards our first objective of determining factors that influence purposelessness. Our surveys on past City Wanderer participants aim to support our second objective of identifying solutions from previous 'Missions'. In these surveys, we will ask participants to assess the success of the 'Wandering Challenge' as well as requesting participants to state which missions most and least impacted their sense of purpose. This will help us identify which 'Missions' are most effective, and aid us in determining what key factors make a Mission successful. The information from these two sources will help us with our third objective: Defining the types of 'Missions' that best develop purpose in Taiwanese young adults.

In summary, our surveys on the general population of Taiwanese young adults are meant to give us an idea of which areas we could address with our designed missions, while our surveys on past City Wanderer participants are meant to give us better insight into how we should structure our missions for a better participant experience. These are to support our final goal of creating our own missions for the City Wanderer Education Association to add to their future Wandering Challenges. Our drafted survey questions can be found in our appendices.

3.2.3 Interviews

The project team aims to conduct ten hour-long interviews with Taiwanese young adults to understand purposelessness and discover what possible missions would help to best develop purpose. Interviews provide more in-depth and personal answers from interviewees than surveys do. The project team will ask in the email surveys if people would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. These interviews would have the option for in-person or on zoom, depending on the location and the preference of the interviewee. Interviews allow for participants to think about their responses and oftentimes give more meaningful answers.

The project team may also conduct interviews after surveying people in public locations, such as at a mall or on the street, by asking if they would be willing to come back for an interview after they have completed the survey. Like the follow-up interviewees from the email survey, people surveyed in public locations would have the option for an in-person or zoom interview as well.

The project team will ask the interviewee for their consent to record the interview with the project team's smartphones. The interviewers will conduct the interviews in Mandarin, unless the interviewee would prefer for it to be in English. The interviewers will provide both languages to give the interviewee this option. Appendix D presents the project team's proposed interview questions. There are questions asking about the school system in Taiwan, gap years, career paths, hobbies, and social groups. The interview questions focus on purpose and how these various factors influence the interviewees' sense of purpose. As the project team collects survey answers, they will begin the process of contacting people who have consented to come back for an interview.

3.3 Ethics

Since the first goal of research is to do no harm, we have proactively mitigated several areas of ethical concern in our data collection.

In regards to privacy concerns, we plan on implementing informed consent in both our surveys and interviews to ensure that each respondent is completely aware of our intentions as researchers. In the surveys, this will take the form of a written notice informing the respondent about the intentions of the survey. In our interviews we will ensure informed consent by having the respondent verbally consent to the interview before we begin.

To ensure respect for respondents' privacy, we will promise respondents that we will never look into Qualtrics's collection of respondent email addresses..

In regards to sensitive topics, we will not enforce that respondents answer potentially uncomfortable questions. In the surveys, we will implement this by having sensitive questions be optional responses. In the interviews, we as interviewers will take extra caution to lightly introduce any sensitive topic and navigate away from the topic if it seems to make the interviewee uncomfortable.

3.4 Challenges/Limitations

For each of our methods of data collection, we have preemptively identified challenges or limitations. We hope that by making careful note of potential drawbacks of each method, we can be conscious of any possible data collection limitations during both our interviews and surveys, as well as during our following data analysis.

3.4.1 Limitations of Interviews

While interviews offer in-depth qualitative data from respondents, we anticipate there being barriers to conducting such interviews. Firstly being the inherent difficulty and time cost involved in setting up interviews. Since each interview will be scheduled to take around an hour, it may take a considerable amount of time to gather the necessary interviews because potential interviewees may be reluctant to consent to an interview if it will take such a long time.

We may also run into the issue that interviews are inherently hard to draw conclusions from. Since each interview records the subjective experience of the interviewee, it is unique from any other interview. It may be hard to draw conclusions from the interviews because an individual's unique way of expressing themselves may be misinterpreted by us researchers. With the large amount of data in an hour-long interview, we will be forced to condense the content into a set of meaningful takeaways. Such potential misinterpretations may cause us to

come to conclusions that are not representative of what the interviewees were actually trying to express.

In addition, we expect the language barrier to play a role in the efficacy of our interviews. Our project group has no native Mandarin speakers and only one member with intermediate proficiency. If the interviewee isn't fluent in English, we'll be limited to basic Chinese, potentially missing key points. A possible remedy to our language barrier could be to hire a translator, but that would introduce the potential for the translator to introduce a bias to the conversation and skew the interview direction.

Lastly, it is possible that mental health stigmatization in Taiwanese culture may cause people not to answer honestly during the interview. Since we likely will not know our interviewees before the conversation, there will not be a built-up level of trust between us and the interviewee, which may cause the interviewee to be reluctant to share personal reasons for purposelessness.

3.4.2 Limitations of Surveys

While surveys are quite effective for gathering quantitative information, we anticipate some obstacles getting a representative data pool. Firstly, online response bias: since we plan on surveying past Wanderer challenge participants, we will send an online survey to the emails of those who previously signed up for a challenge. It is very possible that we will encounter a response bias where only those who strongly loved or hated the Wanderer challenge will take the time to respond to the survey, which will skew our results.

We plan to use a 5-point Likert scale to gauge survey respondent's answers towards various questions, with possible answers ranging on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. By nature, these answers are somewhat hard to interpret, because one person's subjective "strongly agree" may be different than that of another person.

Also, as with the interviews, the language barrier may pose an issue when we are developing questions for the survey, but we anticipate it to be less of an issue since we will prepare the English and Mandarin versions of each question ahead of time and have them checked by a trusted translator.

3.5 Next Steps

Once we arrive in Taipei, we plan on discussing with our 'buddies' (our assigned Soochow University student helpers) where young adults in Taiwan frequent. The intent is to best locate areas where we can gather a large sample size for our surveys. Below you will find our intended timeline for our time in Taipei visualized graphically.

Task	Pre-IQP	March			April				April-May
	PQP	11-15	18-22	25-29	1-5	8-12	15-19	22-26	29-1
Research period Creating Survey/ Interview Questions	▓								
Network with buddies / finding best places to interview		▓							
Conduct Surveys			▓						
Conduct Interviews				▓					
Analyze Data and Create 3-5 'Missions'					▓	▓	▓		
Finalizing Report on Proposed Missions							▓	▓	▓
Final Presentation Week									▓

Figure 3.2 - 'Wanderers' Team Projected IQP Term Timeline

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Statement of Intent and Consent (Survey)

We are Liv, Logan, Charlotte, and Tim, a group of four American college students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute. We are working on a research project with the City Wanderer non-profit organization in Taipei to help Taiwanese youth find purpose and meaning in life. We would like to survey you because we want to understand the causes of purposelessness in life among Taiwanese young adults. We will use the results of this survey for research and assisting The City Wanderer Education Association with their 'missions' that aim to reduce purposelessness. We want to hear about your experiences with City Wanderer's Wandering Challenges. Taking part in this survey is voluntary and your information will be kept confidential and anonymous. You are free to stop the survey at any point if you have any concerns. You can skip any question you do not want to answer. If you have any questions before we begin, we will be glad to answer them. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact our team, at gr-wanderers-D24@wpi.edu.

Appendix B: Survey Questions for Past City Wanderer Participants

1. Current age
   - Drop-down menu

2. What age were you when you did the missions?
   - Drop-down menu

3. Nationality / Country of Residence
   - Drop-down menu

4. What is your highest level of education?
   - Some secondary school
   - High school degree
   - Some university
   - University degree
   - Other: Write-in section

5. I have felt purposelessness in life before.
   - 1 - Disagree (1)
   - 2 - Somewhat Disagree (2)
   - 3 - Neutral (3)
   - 4 - Somewhat Agree (4)
   - 5 - Agree (5)

6. In the last few months I have felt prolonged periods of purposelessness in life.
   - 1 - Disagree (1)
   - 2 - Somewhat Disagree (2)
   - 3 - Neutral (3)
   - 4 - Somewhat Agree (4)
   - 5 - Agree (5)

7. If you have ever felt lost or purposeless in life, please rate the impact that the Wandering Challenge had on this feeling.
   - 1 - Negative (Made you feel more lost) (1)
   - 2 - Somewhat Negative (2)
   - 3 - Neutral (3)
   - 4 - Somewhat Positive (4)
   - 5 - Positive (Helped you become less lost) (5)

8. Of the City Wanderer missions that you have participated in, which were your favorite? (Choose 3)
   - Drop-down menu with an option to input text

9. From your favorite mission, what is one thing you liked about a mission you participated in?

_____

10. From your second favorite mission, what is one thing you liked about a mission you participated in?

_____

11. From your third favorite mission, what is one thing you liked about a mission you participated in?

_____

12. Of the City Wanderer missions that you have participated in, which were your least favorite? (Choose 3)
   - Drop-down menu with an option to input text

13. From your least favorite mission, what is one thing you disliked about a mission you participated in?

_____

14. From your second least favorite mission,what is one thing you disliked about a mission you participated in?

_____

15. From your third least favorite mission, what is one thing you disliked about a mission you participated in?

_____

16. Rate the impact that your education has had on your personal purpose development.
   - 1 - Negative (Prevented/Inhibited finding purpose) (1)
   - 2 - Somewhat Negative (2)
   - 3 - Neutral (3)
   - 4 - Somewhat Positive (4)
   - 5 - Positive (Helped finding purpose) (5)

17. If you've taken a gap year during high school or college, rate the impact that your gap year has had on your personal purpose development.
   - 1 - Negative (Prevented/Inhibited finding purpose) (1)
   - 2 - Somewhat Negative (2)
   - 3 - Neutral (3)
   - 4 - Somewhat Positive (4)
   - 5 - Positive (Helped finding purpose) (5)
   - I have not taken a gap year (6)

18. Rate the impact that Wandering Challenges has had on your personal purpose development.
- 1 - Negative (Prevented/Inhibited finding purpose) (1)
- 2 - Somewhat Negative (2)
- 3 - Neutral (3)
- 4 - Somewhat Positive (4)
- 5 - Positive (Helped finding purpose) (5)

19. Rate the impact that Wandering Challenges has had on your personal growth and development.
- 1 - Negative (1)
- 2 - Somewhat Negative (2)
- 3 - Neutral (3)
- 4 - Somewhat Positive (4)
- 5 - Positive (5)

20. Is there anything else you would like to tell us that we have not covered?

_____

21. Our team would love to have a follow up interview to learn more about your story. You can help empower us to help even more young adults find purpose. This interview would only take an hour of your time. Please list your email below if you would be interested in a follow-up interview.

Email (Optional)

_____

Appendix C: Statement of Intent and Consent (Interview)

We are Liv, Logan, Charlotte, and Tim, a group of four American college students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute. We are working on a research project with the City Wanderer non-profit organization in Taipei to help Taiwanese youth find purpose and meaning in life. We would like to interview you because we want to understand the causes of purposelessness in life among Taiwanese young adults. We will use the results of this interview for research and assisting The City Wanderer Education Association with their 'missions' that aim to reduce purposelessness. We want to hear about your experiences with City Wanderer's Wandering Challenges. If you are comfortable, we would like to record the audio of this interview to help us with transcription. We will only use this audio recording for transcription, and it will be deleted afterwards. We will not be releasing this recording publicly or posting it on any social media platform. It will remain private and confidential. If you are not comfortable with this, please inform us and we will not record the audio of this interview. Taking part in this interview is voluntary and your information will be kept confidential and anonymous. You are free to stop the interview at any point if you have any concerns. You can skip any question you do not want to answer. If you have any questions before we begin, we will be glad to answer them. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact our team, at gr-wanderers-D24@wpi.edu.

Appendix D: Interview Questions for Past City Wanderer Participants

1. What is your highest level of education?

2. What is your opinion about the school system here? Tell me more about your experience with the skills you learned and what you did after you left/finished school.

3. Did school lead you to a passion or purpose?

4. Were you lost/purposeless in life at any point in time? Was it caused by school, and what led you out of it?

5. Have you taken a gap year? Did it lead you to a passion or purpose? Tell me more about this.

6. What do you do for a career/what is your career path?

7. How did you find this path/what led you here?

8. If you don't have one, are you actively trying to find one?

9. What helps you find purpose in life? Is this a hobby or a social group? Tell me more about the activities you do or the relationships you have that help you find this purpose.

10. Please describe your experience in high school and university. Please mention where (location) you went to school and tell us the relationship that you had with school. If school had an effect on your mental health or your life decisions please describe that as well.

11. Did your experience in school influence your sense of purpose in life or help develop passion? If so, how and what specific parts of your schooling had the most impact in your personal growth and development?

12. Please describe the role that a purpose, larger goal or passion has had in your life. If you do have a sense of purpose, what caused you to find it?