

國立臺南大學
National University of Tainan
姐妹校交換學生心得報告
Inbound Exchange Student Report

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學號 School No			
交換系所 Host Department	Culture and Natural Ressources		
原學校 Home University	Université Paris 8 Vincennes/St-Denis		
原系所 Home Department	Sciences Politiques		
交換交流期間 Exchange Period	自 From __2012__年 year / __9__月 month 至 To __2013__年 year / __6__月 month		

Hello, my name is Florian Guais. I was involved this year in an exchange program at NUTN. I chose Taiwan as a destination for my studies because I traveled in the island two years ago whilst I was visiting some friends. Before that, I spend two summers in China three and four years ago, so during my first journey in Taiwan it was very interesting to learn more about chinese culture, history and to compare situations. But these journeys in Asia were too short, that's why I decided to go to Taiwan for my last year of my Master.

I arrived in september at the NUTN campus, excited and yet a little bit afraid to begin an academic year abroad. But as soon as I was in the university, many students and administrative staff helped me to complete my registration form as well as settle down into my room. Luckily, my previous trips to Taiwan had already prepared me to many aspects of the daily life there, like the food – which I definitively like very much – and the Taiwanese way of life.

After two days spent enjoying the surroundings of the campus and buying my room equipment, my courses began very fast. Once more, my department classmates helped me choose different classes. This is how I came to take courses in the Culture and Natural Ressources department about the history, religion, local folk customs, philosophy of culture, natural ressources management of Taiwan. In France I studied political sciences, so for a large part these aspects are out of my field of research. But it was precisely my wish this year to change and take time to learn more about Taiwan. And because the teaching in political science gathers many different subjects, I was familiar with the philosophical, historical or sociological method ; only the main subject – Taiwan – remained new. I had no background in Taiwanese studies, only a strong curiosity for this island, its past and present, its culture and people.

The fact that some teachers took the students out during the class time to visit interesting places of Tainan was a great surprise for me. It almost never happens in my french university ! That is how I discovered many temples in Tainan and enjoyed detailed explanations and commentaries about the multitude of gods and goddess. This aspect is very important for me because it is one of the great difference between France - my country - and Taiwan. The religious fact in France isn't as important as it is here and I came to realize just how much the taiwanese are faithful, and how temples ceremonies and celebration for believers represent such a big part of people's daily life in the island. To see people pray on a daily basis and visit places of worship made me feel very curious about the different religions, folk customs and spiritualities which are present in Taiwan. From there on when I was in the street or in a temple, I took on every opportunity to observe the proceedings of different rituals and understand more about this huge part of Chinese culture and way of life.

I had the fantastic opportunity to spend the Chinese New Year with a family of a taiwanese friend in Qinshui. It was very interesting to compare what I learned about this celebration during my class and what I actually saw in my friend's home. It is mainly women who prepare the dinner, then the children go upstairs with the food to pray and burn incense, and finally the whole family sits down for dinner. Food was delicious. After dinner every member of the family exchange red envelopes – the famous « hongbao » – and what a surprise it was to discover that they prepared one for me too ! The days after that we went to a local temple to pray and pay to extend the « lease » for the family light close to the statues. We proceeded in the direction of Dajia to burn incense in the big temple. On this occasion I talked a lot with the eldest child (who recently got married) and his parents about temples, family rules and their views on religious practices. I definitely enjoyed these days, my friend and his family really shared everything with me, very simply, and it was a very valuable experience.

I realized that one of the biggest difficulties this year was the language. I only had basic knowledge of chinese, and its not something you can just learn overnight ! Contrary to my expectations, my teachers spoke more mandarin than english. So I bought a good english to chinese dictionary (with pinyin, stroke count, definitions and idioms) to start working on the language as best I could. I spent a lot of time on the book that our chinese teachers advised us to buy. The classes were extremely helpful and serious, but also laid back enough for me to enjoy learning without getting mad at the countless chinese characters and their difficult pronounciations. I feel extremely grateful towards my classmates and teachers who helped me to translate the language, understand the class and find interesting ways by which I could actively take part and share my ideas. Some teachers prepared special materials for me in english, and sometimes even in french ! I have kept all of these materials with me until now.

As time went by my chinese skills improved dramatically, understanding and speaking became easier and easier. It was such a pleasure to be able to exchange in chinese - a language so different from mine.

During the year I dedicated all my freetime which was not spent on my reading and homework to engage in small trips around the island. Taiwan isn't so big and the transportation network is very convenient. People are so careful and polite and will always get out of their way to help you whenever you are lost or stranded. I guess that I never had felt so far of home and yet at home ! Taiwanese are beyond doubt the friendliest people I have ever met. The landscape and the scenery are superb. I hiked in the mountains towering over the horizon, coated in lush green tropical vegetation. I walked in the rice fields stretching from Taidong to Hualian, feeling a sense of humility in front of these wonders of nature.

Finally this year in Taiwan was a life changing experience for me. What I learnt greatly surpasses the strict acedemic purposes that I was originally there for. I was very stimulating to find myself mixing with students from all around the world. I really appreciated being alone (without friends and family), because I learnt a lot of things about myself by having to constantly open up to other people. I am sure that I want to come back to Taiwan : even after more than one year in total spent in this country, I am unable to find anything that I dislike, only friendly faces and godness springs to mind.

