

Exchange Report National Taiwan University –
2017/18 Academic Year

Introduction

Art Historians who focus their studies on East Asian Art are required to not only speak at least one language of this region, but to also own a funded knowledge of this part of the world. Because my own opinion is that you cannot get to know a country by only reading about it, I applied at Heidelberg University's International Office for some exchange programs in order to do a semester abroad in East Asia. My goals were to either start learning Japanese or to improve my Chinese (which I already studied for over five years then) as well as finding a topic for my Master's Thesis. Thus, I was very happy when I finally got accepted for an exchange to the National Taiwan University – the best university in Taiwan. Studying there, I had the chance to learn classical Chinese characters for the first time, to take part in interesting courses (in English and Chinese), to find many new friends and to travel to a range of exciting places in and around Taiwan. Later, I really found a topic for my Master's Thesis and got into contact with some museum curators, who helped me in conducting my first (field) research on it. I feel now, that I have gained a whole lot of practical experience in Taiwan and I am more than thankful for having had this opportunity.

Living at the International Youth Center (Guo Qing Dorm) at the NTU

The dormitory I picked as "preferred" in my application was the Guo Qing Dorm, which is located at the back gate of NTU campus, and I got a twin shared room there. We had two separated desks, a small bathroom and a lot of cupboards and wardrobes to store our stuff. Although cooking is not allowed in the dormitory, there were some facilities to heat up frozen food or prepare instant noodle soups. One could also go and get something at the 7eleven on the ground floor, the buffet on B1 or in the food street, just across the road. With those facilities (plus a washing machine and a dryer on every floor), a nice roommate, the great dormitory staff and the MRT station "Technology Building" in walking distance, I had a quite convenient stay there.

Classes at the National Taiwan University

Because I was so curious about the courses at NTU, I picked six of them, although some people told me later, that students normally take four courses per term. My Chinese course was just perfect. We had a very nice teacher (his name is Pharaoh Chiu) and a lot of fun working through his exercises. I also very much enjoyed visiting a course about Taiwanese museums as well as two lectures about Southeast Asian Art and World Cultural Heritage Sites in West and Central Asia. Aside from that I also took a lecture about calligraphy and a course on the exchange of decorative arts between China and the West.

All in all, it was quite a lot of work, not only because assignments and examinations were lining up throughout the whole semester, but also because most of the courses at the NTU are held for three hours and I was only accustomed to classes taking one and a half hours. During the first weeks of the semester, there was also a Student Club Fair, where a lot of very unusual student clubs would present themselves in little booths all around the campus. As I had already picked so many courses, I could not visit every club I liked, but at least I got to participate in the Chinese Painting Club, which gave me some insight into how to paint classical Chinese paintings with different brushes and ink.

Facilities at the National Taiwan University

Sometimes I wished for having a copying machine at the dormitory, but at least the “computer center” was not far away. I also spend many hours at the main library, although lending books there is pretty convenient, too. You can reach everything on the campus by foot or bike and there are some places to get food every morning, at lunch time and in the early evening. Thus, the NTU offers all the facilities that students need.

Taiwanese People

Taiwanese people are without exaggeration the most helpful and nicest people I ever met. If you have any problem, you could just ask the next passerby for help and they would see what they can do for you. If they did not speak enough English, they would at least find someone who can – this way, was never lost or stayed without answers to my questions.

Taiwanese Museums and Cultures

My favorite part during this semester was to learn everything about Taiwan’s history and

different cultures, preferably by visiting as much museums as I could. And I was surprised to see that all Taiwanese museums are very well designed and engaging. My favorite museums are now the Chimei Museum in Tainan (about European art, international crafts, musical instruments, furniture, natural history...), the National Taiwan Museum in Taipei (about Taiwan's flora, fauna and aboriginal art) and of course the National Palace Museum (about Chinese art). But I still did not see all the museums I wanted to see!

The National Taiwan University also owns a broad range of university museums. My favorite NTU museum definitely is the NTU Herbarium, not only because you can learn a lot about Taiwan's plants there (which I often encountered during my hiking trips), but the volunteers at the Herbarium are also very knowledgeable and will give you funny tours through the building and the garden.

Travelling in and around Taiwan

There are many beautiful places in Taiwan and five months are clearly not enough to discover all of them. During my stay I went to many cities as, for example, Hualien, Tainan and Taizhong and learned that they are all a bit different from each other.

Taiwan is also a perfect starting point for travelling to all the countries in East and Southeast Asia. I had classmates going to Malaysia, South Korea and Japan for a few days, but if you want to go to China, you can also take a plane to Hong Kong and get a China visa there.

During my stay in Taiwan I went to the Philippines and Hong Kong, but after the term was over, I proceeded to go to Macau, China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand to get an impression of Southeast Asia. This should also provide me with a basic knowledge of this part of the world, which I can hopefully use in my later profession as a curator at a museum of ethnology.