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## Report

I arrived to Taiwan on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2017 as an exchange student for one semester. I was truly excited. In my home country, Poland, I am studying English philology with Chinese with translation specialization, that is why it was crucial for me to visit a Chinese speaking country, not only to improve the level of my Chinese, and get a real opportunity to listen to and use authentic Chinese, but also to get to know Chinese and Taiwanese culture better, which I considered important for my future job. Before coming to Dong Hwa University, I have already taken some classes on the history and culture of China, so I was aware of the complicated relations in the region. However, the stay has truly widened my horizons and given me a thorough insight into some important notions. It has also been a great time of fascinating trips, cultural experiences, genuine friendships and generally an unforgettable experience. I am sad truly sad, that those six months have passed so quickly.

### 1. Daily life at the campus

Upon arriving to Taipei the first thing that struck me was how different the streets look from what they do in Europe. It is a feeling difficult to describe but really apparent. I had a very good impression of Taipei and decided I have to go back there for sure, which I did later.

When me and my other Polish friend arrived at the Campus I was overwhelmed by the beautiful nature around the campus walls and its vastness. In Poland, we don't really have this kind of a campus, so it was a very new experience for me to live for six months in something that felt almost as a small city. Furthermore, I got to start using bike a lot, which I haven't done before. This in itself was also an interesting twist. Of course, the weather was also great, in comparison to a deep winter in Poland at that time. The classes started pretty quickly, with the course choosing period being during my flight, I was afraid that I won't the courses that I would like, but apart from Sport, I fortunately succeeded.

The first negative experience was to find out that there is, in fact, no mattress at all in my room. We had to buy our own ones, and unfortunately, only very thin ones fitted the bed, so that sleeping experience wasn't really the best. An important part of living in the campus was food. I am truly amazed by the food over here. The immense number of restaurants in the nearby town of Zhixue has really satisfied me. I still haven't visited all of them, but they allowed me to get a taste of authentic Taiwanese food, which I really like. The only problem for me is that they are usually closed from 14-17, which is a time that I am usually used to eat lunch. The stores in Zhixue are well-supplied so that I could basically get most of the important stuff in the town. What's more, the town is really well communicated with other parts of Taiwan, thanks to the nearby train station. It is really easy to take a train or a bus to Hualien city, which has some interesting things and stores to offer. I generally find transportation very well organized in Taiwan, especially thanks to the easy-card system, which is integrated with student's ID and allows to freely use communication and even pay with it, after uploading some money to the card. I think this kind of convenience would be appreciated in my country. Another major convenience are the Family Mart and 7 eleven convenience stores. They are open 24/7 and I can get almost everything there. Also, the vicinity of sports facilities and a swimming pool has really come in handy, however, I think it should be a bit bigger and opened more often,

since there is a huge interest with it. This together builds up as a very convenient environment to live in.

## 2. Studying experience

When it comes to choosing the courses I was amazed by how many options I have, even if only limited to the courses in English. Because of this, I ended up choosing as much as 7 courses, while actually I was only needed to take 2. All of them turned out to be really interesting. On the "Reading Contemporary culture in English" class we discussed vital aspects of contemporary society. It amazed me from the very beginning that the teacher encouraged to a discussion concerning most crucial topics and problems of the world today. It really helped me to keep up with the things happening globally during my stay. It also made me not only understand Taiwanese culture deeper, but see that, in fact, our countries have very similar problems and social issues, in spite of being so far away. I had a similar impression from the other class I have taken, namely the Topic on Asia Pacific Studies. In fact, I took both parts of this course, as I thought that it's a great opportunity to get to know the region better, an opportunity which I won't have in Poland. I was correct, the class was extremely insightful, I also met great people there, with a deep knowledge of many things, which also allowed me to expand my horizons. As I mentioned, while studying the history and social relations in the area of South-East Asia I got a constant impression, that our nations have had very similar historic experiences, which helped to shape our societies in a similar manner. It also helped me understand better the complicated matter of Taiwanese identity and the history of indigenous people. I also took Chinese classes, which was a bit hard at first, since I have only been learning simplified characters. The class allowed me to meet many international friends and really improved my Chinese skills, especially when it comes to talking, which is hardest to practice while abroad. The courses were well-taught and also consisted of a trip, during which we could explore Taiwan's beautiful shores and try genuine Taiwanese food. It's a pity that I didn't manage to log for the many interesting sport classes, however, I found some compensation in the gym and playing games with friends. I also really enjoyed the trip to the marvellous Taroko Natural Park, organized by the University. I would love to have discovered much more, but because I have taken so many classes I didn't have time for everything.

## 3. Social life

When we arrived here, I remember my friend worrying that there are, in fact, no clubs in Hualien and we won't have many opportunities to party. This only turned out to be partially true. On the one hand, there are indeed not so many opportunities to party in Hualien, however, there was a very nice concert organized, recently two really great graduation parties took place, and, what's more, the connection to Taipei is good enough to allow for weekend trips to Taipei to take place. And Taipei is a marvellous city when it comes to partying. While studying here, I met a lot of international students from all over the world, which I found fascinating in itself, as they could tell some stories about their fascinating cultures. We often hanged out together, played board games, basketball, and even organized some great trips! Once, we went to a hiking trip to the Taroko mountains and slept in the indigenous village. This was a very intensive but rewarding trip, as the views were really breathe taking. Recently, we also went in a small group to discover Philippines. The trip was truly amazing. A lot of my friends also went to Hong Kong, for which I unfortunately didn't have time. We also often went on some crazy biking trips just around the multiple forests and the river around the campus. That was a completely new experience for me, very spontaneous and primordial. I have also used the stay here to buy some cool looking clothes from Thailand and India, which in effect made me very recognizable at the campus. I fully understood how deeply I got attached to my friends over here, when the time of departures came, and we started having farewell parties, which of course were fun,

but also very sad, as we had to keep in mind that it is possible that we won't see each other again. I also met many Taiwanese and Chinese friends who really helped me improve my Chinese and organize some important issues, especially at the beginning of our stay.

All in all, I think that the stay here was a fascinating experience and an adventure of my life, which I will never forget. I will definitely want to come back to Taiwan, and I find it really convenient to leave here. The special atmosphere of the Dong Hwa campus is also something I would like to experience again someday in the future.