

Life in Taiwan: a perspective from the other side of the world

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Abstract

This article describes my experiences as a foreign resident in Taiwan. First as a student-researcher and later on as an entrepreneur. I also describe the process of selecting Taiwan as the place for doing my master degree, while detailing the benefits of Taiwanese scholarships. Through my article I highlight the advantages that Taiwan and its society have for newcomers. I hope to give useful information to anyone that is planning to study in Taiwan or starting its own business in here.

Key words: MOE scholarship/ part-time researcher/ entrepreneur/ foreign resident/ internship

Making the decision

November 2016, was the last month that I experienced as an undergraduate student at law school at La Plata's National University. During that last month, I was going to make one of the most important decisions in my life, what should I do after my graduation.

Honestly speaking, I was interested in applying for a master degree long before my graduation. I can recall that my interest in studying abroad popped up in my last years of high school. Even though I knew what to do after graduation, I did not know where to do it. Because I was (and still am) interested in Asian culture and I was well aware of the solid economic performances of the Asian economies, it made sense that the destination was in Asia.

After I narrowed the scope down, making a decision became easier. Taiwan was an attractive destination to pursue my master studies, since I had already been to the country (back in 2015). The charms that Taiwan offered me, democracy, freedom of speech, an open society and a free and democratic academia were not beaten by other competitors. The decision was made, I was going to apply for the Taiwanese Ministry of Education (MOE) scholarship in order to do my master degree in Taiwan.

Application process

After I graduated from La Plata's National University, I started preparing all the relevant

documents. In the mid-time, I was researching Taiwanese universities, their available programs and the available classes. After a long research process I chose National Chengchi University, since it was the best university in Taiwan for social sciences studies. In addition, it offered an interesting program, International Master in Asia Pacific Studies (IMAS), which has a multidisciplinary approach to Asia-Pacific relations. The combination of these factors made me choose National Chengchi University as the place for doing my master degree.

February 2017 was my first time at the Taiwanese Trade and Cultural Office in Argentina. On that occasion, I introduced myself and explained what my plans and goals were. Thanks to the great service provided by the employees of the office I was able to start preparing all the required documents for the MOE scholarship. One month later, I submitted all the required documentation.

In the early days of May I received good news, I had been accepted by National Chengchi University as a student. The days after were pure bliss and excitement as I waited for the response to the Taiwanese MOE in regards to my scholarship application. Some weeks later, I got another great news: the Taiwanese MOE accepted my visa application. After this, time flew and I barely had time to say goodbye to my friends and my family. In August 2017, I was officially in Taiwan.

The first days of my new life

The 40 something hours journey from Argentina to Taiwan, left me with no energy. So, while I was resting in my hotel room I started to plan which things I should buy when I moved into the university dorm. When the day of moving in finally came, I was filled with excitement of what was to come. After a long ride from downtown, I arrived at National Chengchi University Campus.

My first glimpse at the campus that was going to be my home for the next three years, left me speechless. A campus built on the mountains, with breathtaking views, with rivers across it was astonishingly beautiful. I stood for some time appreciating the view, when I came back to my senses I went to the Office of International Cooperation as I needed to pick the keys of my room.

When I got to the Office of International Cooperation, I was warmly welcomed by the staff. The staff explained to me the basics of campus life and then took me to the campus bus stop. After a short bus ride, I arrived at my new home. The brand new dorm building had all the amenities a student needs, gym, kitchen, study rooms. After unpacking all my belongings, I started exploring the surroundings. The hiking trails around the dorm were incredible.

Before the semester started, I met my roommate who later on will become one of my best friends. We went together to the orientation Q &A done by the Office of International Cooperation. There I met the rest of my IMAS

classmates. My IMAS generation was a diverse group with people from around all the world. Immediately after the Q&A was over we took our first steps to socialize. From that moment onwards, a great group of classmates was established.

Starting the program

A couple of days later, the semester started. The professors came from various backgrounds, international relations, sociology, economy among others. Naturally, their teaching methodology was different. While some professors made an emphasis on reading a wide range of academic papers with different points of views, others preferred to learn by doing methodology. In addition, professors have different political ideas and encourage debates in class. All this contributed to create a harmonic academic environment where students could pursue their academic interests in a free and democratic way.

Even though the classes' workload was demanding, thanks to the MOE scholarship I was able to focus on my master degree. Since the grant provided by MOE was enough to live comfortably without needing to work. Furthermore, with the funds provided by MOE I was able to afford Mandarin classes, which are extremely useful in your daily life in Taiwan.

Before the end of the first semester we had to submit our final papers, this meant long-sleepless nights. On the bright side, the

great resources provided by National Chengchi University Library meant that all the books I needed were there. Even if the National Chengchi Library University did not have the book I needed, I could always borrow the book from other libraries. This great library system ensured that I could access any material I needed. Furthermore, National Chengchi University Library had free subscription to academic magazines as well as a large database to read academic papers. Thanks to this library system I was able to write insightful academic papers.

Life as a foreign resident in Taiwan

Even though living in Argentina is quite different to living in Taiwan, I was able to adapt to my new life quite easily. The openness of the Taiwanese society meant that I was able to fit quickly in this society. The social events held by National Chengchi University meant I got to know people from other departments. It was great to be in contact with a wide range of people. In addition, I joined the boxing club of the University which was another great way of socializing. The club had both foreigners and Taiwanese members. Apart from our weekly training we also had events like gatherings or dinners.

I was really fond of travelling during the weekends or during the school holidays to discover new parts of Taiwan. I believe I have been to almost all the locations of Taiwan, with

the exception of Mazu, Kinmen, Orchid Island and Green Island. During my trips I saw a wide range of landscapes from mountains with spectacular hikes to white sand beaches in Penghu. The diversity was not only seen in nature but in the people as well. While in Taipei people are extremely focused on working, in areas like Penghu or Eastern Taiwan people have a more relaxed attitude. By far, the region I like the most is the East coast, to be more precise Yuli Township. Yuli Township has it all, great nature, amazing hikes, stunning rice fields and warm people. In the course of my studies, I made sure to always go at least once a year to Yuli in order to relax my mind.

I believe that in order to discover another culture you do not have to take a long bus ride. Instead, you can explore your own city. That's why I frequently went to explore the different neighborhoods of Taipei, their local life, their people and their religion. I always had the most fun during these times.

Being a part time researcher

Before leaving Argentina, the Taiwanese Trade and Cultural Office in Argentina introduced me to Juan Uriburu. Juan Uriburu, is a former MOE scholarship recipient that did its master program and Phd at National Chengchi University. He is a distinguished academic that was researching Argentina- China relations at Chihlee University of Technology. Juan Uriburu introduced me to Professor Antonio Hsiang and

Professor Chen Ching-Chon.

After the introduction made by Juan, Professor Hsiang and Professor Chen asked me if I was interested in collaborating with the Center for Latin American Studies of Chihlee University of Technology. I gladly accepted their offer.

When I was collaborating at the Center for Latin American Studies I was able to research the Argentinean- China relation as well as the Argentina-Taiwan relation. The papers I wrote were useful later on while I was working on my thesis.

Thanks to the generous invitations of Professor Hsiang and Professor Chen I took part in conferences about Latin America and East Asia relations. It was an unique opportunity to be in touch with the academic community that was interested in the topics that I was researching. In addition, Professor Chen invited me numerous times to his Latin America- Asia trade class. During those times, I was able to interact with the students and debate about the current status between Taiwan and Latin America.

I have fond memories of my times at Chihlee University of Technology. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity I received, the possibility of researching what I like and the kind people that I met there.

The process of writing my thesis

As the second year my program started I

began preparing for the hardest part of the program, the thesis. It took me a long while to finally choose a topic for my thesis. Choosing an advisor was easier though. However the whole process of thesis writing took me a long time. I experienced an amount of personal issues that made the whole process extremely hard. Some days I was not able to even write a word, I suffered from insomnia and my mood was not the best. Indeed, those were hard days.

Thankfully, my network of friends in Taiwan, my girlfriend and the professors I kept in touch with were extremely kind and generous with me. They helped me when I was in need. Through their words, or by sharing moments with them I was able to little by little start working on my thesis. I still had my ups and downs but all in all I could start writing once again.

My experience in the Argentinean Trade and Cultural Office in Taiwan

While I was working on the thesis, I interviewed the director of the Argentinean Trade and Cultural Office in Taiwan. Sometime after, he offered me a position as an intern, which I gladly took. The duties as an intern were related to my thesis topic so it was a great help for my thesis writing. My tasks include aiding Argentinean exporters who wanted to export the Taiwanese market, making market research analysis and helping Argentina promote its image in the Taiwanese universities.

It was very fulfilling for me to actually help Argentina. I always thought that I owe my country a lot and I believe that through my role as an intern I helped my country improve its economic performance. During my time at the Office, I also met great people that mean a lot to me. When the intern position term finished, I went back to work on my thesis.

Finishing a chapter of my life

Polishing my thesis was a demanding job, but with the help of my advisor I was able to do it properly. When the final defense finally came I was prepared to explain the main points of my thesis. The defense process took around 1 hour and a half, during that time I received interesting perspectives and ideas on how to improve my thesis. The following days I kept improving my thesis until it was ready to be submitted.

After all this was done, I got my master degree. It was a special moment for me that made me proud about my achievement. It was time to think what to do next. Even though I have enjoyed my academic experience, learnt new things and made new friends, I was not sure about staying in academia.

A new chapter

With the end of my master program, a new chapter started in my life. After 4 years in Taiwan, my local friends and network became large. Moreover, I got used to living in the Taiwanese society. I also appreciate the local

values and the advantages that I find here, such as a solid economic performance or the democratic life. The combination of these factors made me realize I do not want to return to Argentina yet, despite missing my homeland I have opportunities I should take in here.

That's why I believe I should apply the knowledge I got during my time as a student plus the experience I got when I was an intern in order to start my own project. Thanks to Taiwan's friendly legislation regarding young entrepreneurs, low taxes and the existence of a system that protects private property, I believe that Taiwan is the perfect place to start my project. I want to make a special emphasis on the entrepreneur visa that allows foreign entrepreneurs to open their company in Taiwan, live and work here legally, there are not many other countries with such an interesting policy.

My idea is opening my own company in Taiwan, to boost the trade between Argentina and Taiwan. From the Argentinean side, I believe food products have the comparative edge, while from the Taiwanese side, technological goods have a competitive edge. I believe that thanks to my abilities I can make a positive change in the Argentinean Taiwanese relation.

Closing thoughts

I went through a long journey that started 4 years ago. During that time many things changed, plans changed, new friends arrived and people left. As all journeys, it has its ups and downs but

through it I learnt many things.

I want to express my gratitude for all the warmth, knowledge and help I have received from Taiwan and its people. I am especially grateful to all the opportunities I have received, and most importantly I want to say thanks for believing in me as a suitable MOE scholarship recipient.



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