2007-08 Wang Family Scholarship Essays - Taiwan

Christine Colcord
Wang Scholarship Recipient
Taiwan 2007-08

I arrived in Taipei at the end of August full of excitement and trepidation about the school year that was about to begin. Having been on summer break for the couple of months prior to my arrival, my Chinese was especially rusty and every mundane task seemed almost unmanageable. My classmate and I went about the business of setting up our apartment, arranging furniture and utilities, sorting out our resident status and familiarizing ourselves with the new environment. The orientation and registration process at school was another labyrinth of forms to be filled out, stamped and turned in, meetings to attend and activities to participate in. Lastly, we were required to submit ourselves to a series of tests, written and oral to establish our language level. Throughout the execution of these formalities I felt overwhelmed and unable to keep up with much of the communication required. I began to feel that communicative competence in Chinese was well beyond my grasp even with the upcoming year's worth of classes. It seemed an insurmountable task. Now four months later, I have a different perspective on the learning process and on my ability to successfully navigate Taiwanese society and to communicate effectively in another language.

Much about the program here at NTU was different than I expected, but the rigorousness of the class work met every expectation. One of the things I was most looking forward to about going abroad to study was the opportunity to step away temporarily from the responsibilities and obligations of my business in the United States in order to fully commit all of my energies to learning Chinese. I knew that the classes would be three to four hours a day and the homework would be about the same; what I didn't anticipate was just how overwhelming the course load would be. I imagined that after completing my daily homework, the time that I usually spend working in San Francisco could be spent making flashcards, compiling sentence patterns, writing sample sentences or engaging in language exchange. These are all things that I always wished I had the time to do more thoroughly in the US, but never had the opportunity. Unfortunately, I still haven't had the opportunity! Our coursework takes up every available moment from the time I wake up until the time that I go to sleep. If I'm not in class, sleeping or eating, I'm doing

homework or preparing for class. I've had only two chances to get out of Taipei since I've been here as the weekends have to be spent trying to get ahead in the next week's classes. In many ways I don't mind because we have eight weeks off over the winter break to travel or do some catching up, but I do feel like I spent a lot of time memorizing vocabulary that I quickly forgot instead of being able to spend the extra time doing the kinds of exercises mentioned that could help with long term retention. I felt like I was having a hard time processing the information because the flow of new information never stopped or slowed down. I felt a bit lost in how to tackle this problem until I thought of a way to use the Wang Family Scholarship to my benefit.

I decided that what I needed was regular one on one time with a professor to help me process the things I was having trouble with in class. Since the pace of the classes never slows, it is sometimes hard to fully grasp a subject well enough to incorporate it into active usage. Through the department, I found a Chinese professor who was willing to be my tutor. We met three to four times a week for an hour to an hour and a half working on my problem areas. Throughout the day, I would compile a list of questions or topics that I felt I was unable to explore enough in class and then we would go over them together. Since she had previously taught in the program, she was very familiar with our textbooks and was able to give me focused drills and more detailed explanations in my problem areas. The Wang Family Scholarship paid for this service and will pay for it again next semester. Almost immediately after starting with the tutor, I felt an increase in my competence and confidence while in class. Instead of struggling to keep up, I was able to use the class time to solidify my usage. It's hard to gauge one's own progress in a language because it always seems like there is so much more to learn, but I definitely feel a great improvement in my overall comfort level speaking Chinese. At first, I felt as if everyone was talking too quickly and when asked a question, I would freeze. Now I feel very comfortable in Taipei, whether it's ordering food, asking directions, shopping at the market or even making reservations over the phone. I certainly don't understand everything said, but I usually get what someone is trying to communicate. I also feel confident that if I don't understand, I will be able to ask and respond to enough questions to figure things out eventually. The fear is (mostly) gone!

I also feel as if I've been given a really unique opportunity to be in Taiwan at such an important time. The country is going through many changes that I see played out on the street, in the papers

and on the television every day. The legislative elections were just held here and I got to observe firsthand the enthusiastic way in which the citizens of Taiwan are exercising the rights bestowed by their still relatively young democracy. I've had very interesting discussions with Taiwanese residents of all ages on their views on current events, Taiwan's place in the international community and the relationship with Mainland China. It is a fascinating place and an exciting time to be here. I look forward greatly to the upcoming presidential election and referendum on Taiwan's bid to join the UN under a new name. It will be interesting to see how the public responds to both of them. I must stress again that none of these experiences would be possible without the help of the Wang family and the Wang Family Scholarship. I hope that after another four months here, I can use Chinese to write about the elections and the success of my studies. It no longer seems an insurmountable task.

Brenda Yuan
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
Taiwan 2007-08

I would like to say thank you again for the opportunity to receive the Wang Scholarship. I encourage all students applying for study abroad Taiwan and Beijing to apply for this scholarship because it really helps you if you have financing problems and a great opportunity.

The best thing to do before leaving is to research about the country in which you studying in. In my case it is Taiwan or as the people here also calls Formosa. The participant guide for studying abroad is a good place to start when researching about your new host country. Before students leave the U.S.A. it is important to remember to read the handbook of the host school in which the student will be studying because all the rules and regulations are important to know. I found that signing up for a local student volunteer of National Taiwan University to show students around campus is a very good way to start your stay in Taiwan. I highly recommend for future students to sign up for a volunteer because they can pick you up at the airport, show you where to go, how to register, where your orientation is, and how to extend your visas; they are probably the first Taiwanese friend you will be acquainted with.

The National Taiwan University if very big, so the administrative and other students will suggest buying second hand bikes to move around in, but this will be after you familiarize yourself with everything on the campus. The dormitory is really close to where the students will be taking classes so that is very convenient. The first thing would be for students to register as NTU students then take the placement testing for classes. I was under the impression that we would be able to choose our own classes, but that is not true. We are placed in courses suitable for us according to our placement tests. There are three core classes which are taught in Chinese and a course taught in English.

The program in Taiwan is a language program so it would be best if you took Chinese courses and at least learn how to say some basic Chinese. The teachers and other faculties expect an all Chinese speaking environment in the building in which the students have classes in. I can not emphasize how important it is to speak Chinese or as they call it Mandarin, in the Foreign Language Center. It is best to know all the regulations regarding the program and how it operates before hand. I say this because I was a little surprised when I first arrived. I say get to know the advisors and coordinators because they are the bridge between the student and home campus. Overall, the courses are not as hard as I thought it would be, it is mostly understanding the context and being able to have a group discussion. Conversation and getting the students to actually speak Mandarin is the main goal in this program. There are sometimes road blocks when you learn a different language, but the teachers here are here to help.

The culture here is very different so bear in mind that there are some things best not to talk about or say. I found that the people in Taiwan are really friendly and likes to help foreigners, but they are also very conservative. I would say do not do anything to offend the people here. There are a lot of places to see and eat just in Taipei city alone, but whenever there is a break, take the chance to travel around Taiwan to experience the different lifestyle. Don’t be afraid to try new things, because Taiwan is full of surprises.

I really enjoyed my semester at National Taiwan University. I hope those that are interested or will be going abroad next semester enjoy it as much as I do.

Kelly Cheng
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
Taiwan 2007-08

The fact that I'm writing this two page descriptive summary must mean that my stay in Taiwan is already half over. How fast those 3 months have been. I don't think I can convey just how much I have learned or how much fun I have experienced. It is true. It can't really be explained in literature but must be experienced in person. This trip has definitely been one of the best choices I have made in my life. I apologize in advance for any errors in my English; I think it might have receded in ability ever since coming here. (Joking… just a little bit)

The visa process is extremely complicated, so allow me to break it down. I have heard differences in methods at the TECO (Taiwanese Economic and Cultural Office? or something similar) in San Francisco and the one in Los Angeles. Regardless, you will apply for a temporary 60-day multiple entry visa at that location. Once you have arrived in Taiwan, you will apply for a Resident visa at a location in Taipei under the reason of studying abroad. You can worry about the resident visa later once you have arrived in Taiwan because everyone else will also have to do it and you will be able to help each other out. I was very worried and confused about why I couldn't directly apply for a longer-period student Visa ahead of time in the TECO in Los Angeles though. Knowledge ahead of time that this could not be done would have been greatly appreciated.

Also, be prepared to take or order a lot of passport size photos as they are used a lot in the application process as well as general usage around Taiwan. For example, though the application states you need about eight photos, I've actually probably used closer to twelve. The extras not stated in the application were used once I got to Taiwan for application to the school's gym as well as the application for various Visas here. This isn't that big of a deal as there are a lot of photo booths around, but is a kind of unnecessary hassle.

I have all but my immediate family already residing in Taiwan, so I can't say much for any difficulties experienced from transporting from the Taoyuan airport to the National Taiwan University (NTU) campus. But the registration process was definitely difficult as you must go to several locations to complete it which is very difficult as NTU's campus is very large and somewhat complicated. I highly recommend checking the box on that application to get a volunteer. Aside from an additional friend in a strange location, they provide any answers to questions whether it's regarding campus life, class needs or cultural differences. My volunteer has been a huge benefit and other friends even go to him for help because they don't have a volunteer. A volunteer can also become a very close friend if time and your own personal opinion allows for it.

The climate of Taipei is a very curious thing that I'm sure you have heard at least some comments about. In the summer it's extremely hot. In the winter, though it's not as cold as in the states, I think you'll find that you will have become accustomed to the warmer tropical weather and feel that the winters are still extremely cold. This definitely makes packing a hassle. I found that at first, I felt stupid for bringing so many hoodies and jackets because it was still hot in the beginning of September (and even worse if you decide to come earlier). However, those worries were alleviated when December came and now I'm wearing at least two or three layers of clothing all the time. Pack for summer and pack for winter is the best advice I can give. You can of course also buy clothes in Taiwan at night-markets for cheap prices… especially t-shirts and gym clothes. Bringing heavier jackets is advised as they are harder to find for cheaper prices.

Classes are amazing in the ICLP/EAP/CSUIP program. Classes consist of around 4-8 people per class. This means that you must be on top of your schoolwork or else it will be very apparent in class. Of course, this is to your benefit as you will find that your Mandarin Chinese will have definitely improved by the time the semester ends. The quality of the teachers and how much care they have in your improvement is truly remarkable. The smaller classes and various group performances also allow you to get to know your classmates very well.

When I first arrived in Taiwan, I felt that I should get to know people from other countries rather than the United States in order to take advantage of studying abroad. However, to my benefit or

detriment, I got to know the California classmates a lot better as they were the only ones in our classes (we are not mixed in Chinese classes with people of other countries) and obviously more comfortable being around. Yet, I'm still happy at the friends I've made and now that they have all finished the program and left, I have the opportunity to reach new friends from new countries while keeping in touch with those close to my home.

The dorms here are pretty much what you expect from a freshman dorm at any normal California State University or UC. Well, that is if you end up living in Guoqing International Dorms. The bathrooms are pretty dirty. There are two people to a room with desk, chair and ample closet space. Second floor and fourth floor (where most international students stay) are the only co-ed floors in the dorm. They are very serious about opposite sex trespassing into any of the other floors so respect the authority here as they are just not trying to bother the natives living here. The price of the dorms is very cheap compared to nearby housing outside the school, so I would definitely consider living here. It's a mere 5-minute walk to class and very convenient for making friends.

As far as transportation goes, get a bike when you get here in Taiwan, you will need it. NTU's campus is very large with two MRT/Subway station stops nearby. Just to walk across the campus would take about 30 minutes which is very taxing on the body and on your time so get a bike.

Have fun. So much of Taipei is in the palm of your hands: the people, the culture, the food, convenient transportation and the opportunity to improve your Chinese or take major courses. Whatever you choose to do you will enjoy your time here, I know I did!

Ngoc-Lien Nguyen
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
Taiwan 2007-08

My independent life in a foreign country, Taiwan, has been filling with incredible memories and experiences. Firstly, like many other students who leave their family and live on their own for the first time, I felt so nervous and scared when I arrived in Taiwan. After few months that I have been living and studying in Taipei, I felt that I have made a right decision in choosing to go

to Taiwan because I have learned so much new global informative affairs from other international students. Living in a new environment, I inevitably encounter some challenges such as language barrier; however, as a fast learner, I quickly overcome this challenge because I see that my Chinese listening and speaking have been improving a lot. Also, I can understand and have a simple conversation with local people.

I totally agree with the former exchange students who have studied in Taipei that Taipei is an overcrowded metropolis as well as a truly fascinating aspect of an international community. From early morning until midnight, the streets are crowded by scooter and car drivers, buses, bicycle riders, and pedestrians. Also, on both of the street allies, there are full of various cuisine restaurants, convenient stores, clothes shops, etc.

Grew up with Vietnamese culture, which has so much in common with Chinese culture in term of disciplines, I feel that Taiwanese lifestyle is very similar to Vietnamese lifestyle. Therefore, I can quickly adjust well to this new environment and make friends with the local students and people whose lives and perspective are not much different from my own. Moreover, as being open-minded, I not only can build a good friendship with Taiwanese people, but also with other international students who come from all over the world. Most importantly, I learned that when an exchange student is open-minded, he or she easily adapts to both new educational system and life style in a foreign country.
Challenging, Exciting, Fascinating, Meaningful, and Unforgettable are the words I want to use to describe my life experiences in Taiwan. And now I would like to share with you my real world in Taiwan in details.

THE WEATHER

Arrived in Taiwan around late August, I had a chance to experience the late summer weather in Taiwan, which irritated me a lot because of its hotness and humidity. Especially during noon time, it was so hot and humid to the point that I did not want to leave the dorm. In Taipei, it sometimes rained for a whole week long. Furthermore, the weather in Taipei is unpredictable. It can be sunny and raining within an hour. For example, one day that my friends and I went out together for lunch; when we left the dorm, the sky was blue and clear, but an hour later, it rained

so hard. Because we did not have umbrella and did not know when it would stop raining, we had to run in the rain to get back to the dorm. After this incident, my friends and I learned that every time we go out, we must bring umbrella along with us just for in case. However, the weather at night time is very wonderful, neither hot nor cold; I think this is one of the reasons why many Taiwanese people like to go out at night. Additionally, the fall's weather is much better, which is not hot and less humid. The weather becomes more cooler and cold at night time.

My unforgettable experience involved with the weather in Taiwan was typhoon. For the first time in my life, I witnessed how serious and powerful typhoon is. So far I have witnessed two typhoons; the big typhoon was very serious that people did not dare to go out because the strong wind might blow them away, and most of stores were closed. I myself have experienced this such strong wind. On the typhoon day's morning, I tried to go out to buy food, and when I just opened the door and walked one step out, I felt like I was about to be blown away by the wind. Moreover, another experience was earthquake; but since I have been living in an area where earthquake occurs once in a while, I was not that anxious like other international students who have never experienced earthquake for the first time in their life. The earthquake was not very serious in our area, but we were a little shocked as it happened while we were sleeping. This experience seems scary, but now I gain a better understanding of typhoon and know how serious it can be, which helps me to be more alert in the future.

THE SOCIAL CLIMATE

The younger Taiwanese generation is very liberal. After I interacted with many different types of Taiwanese people, students and local people, I found out that these people are very friendly and nice. They try their best to help exchange students like me whenever we have any question or problem. This extra assistance from these local people helps me quickly adjusting to the new environment. Also, their friendliness makes me feel less lonesome. As a result, we become friends.

I feel gladly living around kind and warm-hearted people in this foreign country, which makes my life abroad so meaningful and memorable. I felt so touched and emotional as my Taiwanese friend's family welcomed and treated me so well like a family member when I visited them,

regardless of language barrier or culture difference. Additionally, I am very grateful to dormitory staff for their various activities—welcome party, barbecue, movie night, Halloween party, etc.—that allow all international students and local students get to know each other better.

HOUSING

International and exchange students have priority over local students in reserving the campus dorms. Living in the campus dorms is the cheapest way to live in Taiwan because for my ordinary room, I only pay $7,600 NT about $230 US for five months including internet fee. Although the dorms seem little old and dirty, but it's very convenient to go school and other places. When I first saw my room, I was kind of disappointed because the room looks so small and dirty. Furthermore, there are no cooking facilities in the dorms; thus, I have to eat all of my meals out. Besides these little inconveniences, I feel happily living with my friendly roommate. Washers and dryers are available in the dorms, each for NT$10 per load.

Most importantly, as I live in the dorm, I have a chance to meet and make friends with many international students who are from both Asian countries and European countries. I feel it's very interesting to learn about various cultures.

As National Taiwan University locates in downtown of Taipei, living in the dorm is not only cheap, but also is very convenient to go to places, especially in finding restaurants to eat. On campus, there is a school cafeteria and many small fast-food stores. Moreover, around the campus, there are abundance of many various cuisines, both Eastern and Western restaurants . Like in California, I can eat as inexpensively or as expensively as I like. What I like about my dormitory is that there is no curfew. Besides quiet time between 12:00 am to 8:00 am, students can go and come back anytime they want. Also, in order to enter the building after 9:00 pm, students just bring student ID card with them when they leave the building.

CUISINE

Taipei not only possesses the greatest variety of Chinese cuisine concentrated in one place in the world, but also has abundance of other Eastern and Western cuisines. As a person who loves to try new food, I feel so pleased to live in downtown of Taipei where I can eat whatever and whenever I want. With my bicycle, I could get to places nearby the campus and have explored

many restaurants such as Japanese, Korean, Thai, Italian, etc that are so cheap and good. In addition, I love to go to night markets where they have many cheap and interesting Taiwanese dishes. However, because Taiwanese food is too greasy, I do not like to eat it that much compared to other Eastern cuisines like Japanese or Thai.

I was very surprised to find out that Taiwanese people love to eat pig's, chicken's, and duck's organs and claws. Besides food, pearl drink is a very popular drink in Taiwan; there are at least three or four pearl drink stores on one street ally. Also, sweet tofu desert is a tasty desert that my friends and I love to eat the most. Before I came to Taiwan, my family and friends told me be careful in eating as well as drinking. Since I actually live in Taiwan, I discover that Taiwanese people are very careful and clean in serving food. For example, the waiter and waitress in some restaurants to where I have been often wear mask when they serve food. Even at the night markets, most of the food vendors wear gloves when selling food.

ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

In International Chinese Learned Program (ICLP), everyday I have three hours of Chinese classes. Besides Chinese classes, I have one weekly culture class titled Survey of Chinese Thought that is taught in English. My Chinese classes started out with a slow pace for the first two weeks because the teacher wanted to review and understand more about student's Chinese level better. Starting from the third week, the Chinese classes become more intense and fast, for everyday we have quiz and two tests per week. For me, everyday I spend about six to seven hours including class times in studying Chinese. In other word, I spend about forty hours per week in studying.

In addition, the teachers expect students to prepare the next day's material before coming to class. As we prepare materials before coming to class, we use class times to improve our listening and speaking skills through simple discussions in Chinese by using both our book materials and from real life examples. Also, I like this learning environment with small number of students because everybody has a chance to speak in class. In two months, we covered all materials that are supposed to be taught in three semesters at my home campus. Most importantly, besides teaching us from book's materials, our Chinese teachers teach us other basic daily use of Chinese conversation so that we can interact with local people. Therefore, I feel my Chinese listening and speaking abilities have been improved a lot.

In term of student and teacher relationship, I feel exchange students and ICLP teachers seem pretty closed because we openly communicate with each other like friends. They try their best in explaining until we all understand. We sometimes joke around with each other. Both students and teachers respect each other; therefore, we always have a good time in class.

VARIOUS SERVICES

Transportation

The Taipei MRT and bus systems provide frequent service throughout the day. Students get discounted when purchasing Easy Card, which is very convenient as it can be used for both bus and MRT. MRT is like Bart train in the Bay Area; there are four lines—blue, red, green, and brown [Muzha]. At first, I felt that the MRT's different color lines were very confused; therefore, I was lost when I took MRT to some places on my own. After this incidence, I learned that if I read the sign written in both Chinese and English, I would not be lost. Taxi fares are NT$70 for the first kilometer, and NT$5 is added after every .5 kilometer. After 11:00 pm, people have to pay extra NT$20. Buses and the MRT stop running nightly about 12:00 am. After midnight, taxi is the only public transportation available.

Transportation facilities within Taiwan are good, including bus, airline, and train services. Railway service is extensive and inexpensive. However, be aware that, during peak hours and holidays all transportations are indescribably crowded. Be prepared to stand on both buses and trains and expect to be pushed and shoved while boarding.

Health

The charges here are cheap. On campus student health center, every time international and exchange students go there with student ID card, they only need to pay NT$50 for registration. When people go to the hospital, it depends on the one's condition; mostly, people usually pay about US $20 for both registration fee and medications. Importantly, it is always better to go to the hospital with a Taiwanese person, who knows someone working at the hospital, because I heard from a friend that one receives better treatment over the other due to one's connection to hospital employee.

Obtaining Money While in Taiwan

I wish that I was informed clearly on how to obtain money in Taiwan before I came here. I learned that the good way to obtain money in Taiwan is exchanging US dollars with NT dollars. This means that I have to bring money [new dollar bills because old bills will be deducted some money when exchanged], for me to use for the whole year so that I will not be charged for any service fees when I want to get money. It is not hard to get money by using debit card from my Wellsfargo bank account, but every time I only can withdraw US$300 with US$5 service fee. Moreover, I learn that travel checks are very not good to use here because in order to use them, people have to fill out many forms.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Some available activities are Kung Fu, Tai Chi Chuan, tennis, badminton, bowling, ice and roller skating, swimming, and golf clubs. Soccer fields and basketball courts are located in the university gyms. However, as I do not like sports that much, I am not interested in any club. On my free time on the weekend, I like to leave Taipei, crowded city, by visiting the national parks such as Yang Ming Shan park or Sun Moon Lake or Xitou Experimental Forest to feel the fresh air and see green plants and flowers. During short break of three or four days, I traveled to other cities such as Kaohsiung located in southern part of Taiwan.

THE END

This is the story of my new life in Taiwan for last four months. Everyday besides studying, I enjoy my life abroad by going out adventure new interesting things. Lastly, I would like to thank Wang Family Trustee Committee for awarding me this scholarship, which makes my dream of studying abroad come true and let me experience the real world of Taipei and Taiwan.

Oscar Lopez Jr.
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
Taiwan 2007-08

Dear Wang Family,

I would like to thank you all for the support and the help given to me by nominating me as one of the few Wang Scholarship recipients. Without the scholarship, I would never be able to afford the trip to Taiwan. I met many interesting and wonderful people on my first semester abroad. I lived many wonderful experiences and I also faced many challenges. Since there were many constant changes in my life in this short period of time, I developed many skills to handle different situations. By living with regular National Taiwan University Students, I learned many things about the beautiful and friendly culture of the Taiwanese. I also learned many interesting things relevant to my major, which will help me in a near future.

By living in regular NTU dorms, I met many friendly and interesting friends. After a few weeks, these friends were the closest to a family for me. I started calling them brothers after one month. They were extremely friendly, and helped me with everything I needed. When I had trouble with finding the immigration offices, they were there for me. We also did many wonderful activities together. For example, they took me to impressive and unique night markets that I never imagined that existed. They introduced me to famous local cuisine that was a bit different from my culture.

One of the many experiences while living in Taiwan was when one of my roommates invited me to his home town near Gaochong. His family opened the doors of their home for me as if I was a member of their family. My roommate, Tim, took me to many beautiful places filled with nature. Tim's family took me to a bamboo forest, mountain climbing, and to celebrate the Moon festival with his entire family. It was an unforgettable experience. The food and barbeque was tasty. I would love to repeat that experience.

Just like I lived many interesting and unforgettable experiences, I also lived some hard times in Taiwan. When I arrived to Taiwan, it was a different world compared to the ones I have lived. Everything was in Chinese, and the food was very different. I studied Chinese every day. After a few weeks, I started dreaming in Chinese. It was an unforgettable moment. I was dreaming in English, Spanish, and now Chinese. The language program was very intense. There was a lot of pressure over my shoulders because I considered myself a very competitive person. At the same time, I was having a few family problems. This happens all the time when you are abroad. I was

thinking about my family, school, and friends all the time. There were times that I thought I was not going to make it, but I did. Many of my Taiwanese friends helped me and spent time with me to release all that pressure.

My Taiwanese friends taught me many things about Taiwan. Without them, I would never expand my knowledge about Taiwan at a fast pace. My friends took me once in a while to night markets, which catch the attention to many foreigners. I bought some clothes that I will not be able to find in the United States. They also took me to temples when I was stressed. My favorite temple was the Long Shan Temple, which is very popular with the locals and many Japanese visitors. Another great experience that I had was KTV. KTV is a room that a group of people rent and sing their favorite songs. It was the first time I did that. I was singing in English, Spanish and Chinese. I cannot wait to visit KTV again. As I become closer to my friends, I realize how friendly and beautiful the Taiwanese culture is.

Now that I have lived, worked, and learned from the Taiwanese culture, I feel this experience has opened many doors that are relevant to my major. I learned which companies control Taiwan's petroleum and distribution. I also learned brands of electronics and technological advances that are still not found in a regular electronic store in the US or other places in the world. I also learned about medical advances in natural medicine which are still not fully accepted by western medicine. The most important thing I learned is working with the Taiwanese culture and how friendly they are to foreigners.

As I learned many relevant things to my major, I feel it opened many doors for my future. By sharing and living moments with Taiwanese students, I realize how beautiful and friendly the Taiwanese culture is. As I faced many great moments and faced many challenges, I realized that I started developing skills to handle different situations. As time goes by, I will learn many things but I will never forget how wonderful and warm the Taiwanese culture is. All this was possible thanks to The Wang Family Scholarship.

Stephanie Luu
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
Taiwan 2007-08

My first three months in Taipei, Taiwan far exceeded any expectations I had. Although I frequented blogs about Taiwan authored by expats and collected all the literature I could find about the country, in addition to contacting a few people who had spent time over there, I really didn't know how different it would be once I arrived. I didn't have any family or friends who were already living there, unlike most of my classmates, so this was really unexplored territory for me. Taipei has the big city feeling, but somehow with a friendlier and more welcoming side to it.

I think at first, it's normal to make a lot of comparisons between your home country and the host country. It didn't take long for me to get accustomed to "squat toilets," the lack of a car for transportation, and eating out for every meal. My dorm room on the second floor was comfortable, but definitely needed cleaning before moving in. It can be pretty noisy too, both inside the halls and outside the building (because of ongoing construction work), but I think it's not too different from college dormitories at home. The dorm advisors are very nice and accommodating; if there were any problems, they'd be more than willing to help. I wouldn't trade living on the second floor for another place. It's nice being grouped with the other international students. It provides better opportunities to meet and make friends. However, if making friends with local Taiwanese students is a bigger priority, I would recommend living on another floor.

I can't overstress the importance of venturing outside your dorm room. It might be tempting to spend all your time studying or going online to chat with contacts back home, but the best experiences are found while wandering the streets. I personally didn't even carry a map with me most of the time. I loved stumbling on hidden alleys filled with vendors and restaurants, where I'd discover things that guidebooks could never inform on. It's very easy to get around on foot, but there's always the MRT, the bus, or a bike. The MRT is highly efficient and convenient. I took it to see almost every major attraction in Taiwan. The even better part is public

transportation is cheap, so taking countless trips back and forth through Taipei is easy on the expenses.

One of my great loves will be Taiwanese food. Luckily, I never felt queasy after a meal, and I didn't know anyone who really did. I think the best cuisine is to be found in the street food. It only takes a visit to one of Taiwan's many colorful, exciting night markets to taste some local specialties. My best advice is to just try it. It may look or smell unusual, but chances are it's going to be really good. Around the university are tons of options, and it's very possible to have all three meals for less than $5. Coffee costs about the same as Starbucks would charge. Oh, and beware of the bakeries that could be found on almost every block. The smell will draw you toward it before you're seduced by the cases of freshly made mouthwatering breads and pastries. They're dangerously accessible.

There is a lot to appreciate about Taiwan's cultural and recreational aspects. There are many temples, all worth a visit to, even if you're not religious. Parks are nice for strolling, and they're much bigger and more common than in Southern California. There's a museum for everyone's interests, even one that displays miniature replicas of houses. Malls are much fancier than the ones I've visited at home, meaning they're more likely to carry luxury brands. I wish I could list every place worth visiting, but a good way to start is just by picking up an MRT map and checking off the recommended spots to visit. Don't wait until the last month to try and see everything because chances are you won't have enough time. While I was visiting one place, it was very often that I'd discover something along the way that I wanted to go back to in the future.

Finally, I will comment on the classes and my teachers. I had no idea that in just three surprisingly short months, my language ability greatly improved. I arrived in the country not even capable of ordering food, but by the end of my first semester, I could have a conversation with my language exchange partner. The teachers in the program are excellent. They're always willing to answer your questions and will even venture beyond the textbook to tell you about the local lifestyle. I definitely spent a lot more time studying than I thought I would, which was great because I really felt like I was making the effort. Classes are small, about 5-8 students,

which is more conducive to greater class participation. Don't expect to open your book in class. Class time is spent either in discussion or in improving speaking skills. I feel this made the greatest difference in helping me learn, as opposed to classes back home where there was less emphasis on speaking during class. I also took the initiative to have a language exchange partner because I wanted to get to know more about Taiwan from a local, in addition to practicing my language skills. Overall, I enjoyed my classes very much. Sometimes I felt like the class period wasn't long enough!

Coming to Taiwan to study was one of the greatest decisions I ever made. I must remind myself that I've only been in Taipei, and have not seen much outside of this area yet. Taiwan, I heard, is also very different in the south. I still have another semester to go, but I am already looking forward to returning in the future possibly to pursue a teaching career. I am very thankful for this opportunity and hope other students will find Taiwan worth a visit as well.

Alex Rosenkrantz
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
Taiwan 2007-08

Dear Wang Family,

Thank you for awarding me the Wang Family Scholarship for the year 2007-2008. I would like to describe some of the amazing experiences that I have had in Taiwan on my stay abroad.
I would first like to talk about the experiences and interactions I have had in and around the dorm. My dorm experience has been absolutely amazing. I live on the second floor of the Guo Qing Dormitory on National Taiwan University (Taida) campus. I will try to detail and explain all the great things that I experience on a daily basis. The second floor is filled with exchange students from all over the world with mainly a focus in learning Chinese while studying at Taida. I really enjoy that I am able to practice my Chinese conversation everyday without even leaving the same floor. I practice with exchange students from Japan, America, Europe, Korea, Singapore, and of course Taiwan without even leaving the same floor that I live on. It is amazing! My level of improvement was definitely affected by living in such an open and

positive environment. Having so many people together with the same interest in studying Chinese is really motivating and exciting. Together we share the same interest, difficulties, experiences, teachers, books, and cultural differences. This one aspect of living in Taiwan definitely makes for a great living experience.

The teachers here at Taida are amazing. Their level of expertise and guidance are hard to fathom. When I first arrived in Taiwan four months and twenty days ago, my Chinese conversational and listening comprehension level was extremely low. With the great teaching, guidance, and encouragement I got, I am now able to converse with people wherever I go. Here is one example of using my Chinese in Taiwan:

> Today, I went with a group of friends from my dorm to an elementary school here in Taipei to teach some sixth grade students our home country's stories, songs, and games. We all had a blast. I taught them "London Bridge is Falling Down" the song along with the accompanying game. I was able to explain the meaning of the song, the bridge's history and the reason why we sing the song, and also explain the movements and rules of the accompanying game. This is just one example of how my Chinese is being used here everyday in Taiwan. I was offered this great opportunity to interact with Taiwanese kids by the managers of the Guo Qing Dormitory. There are often great opportunities like this that are offered to Guo Qing Dormitory residents that live on the second floor.

The classroom size for the EAP program varies from 2-8 people/classroom, which is very conducive to continued learning throughout the period of the class. This size of class makes it so that constant focus and attention is extremely important. Having this size of class was very beneficial to everyone in the class and made learning in a classroom efficient, effective, and very fun. An amazing relationship is built with your teachers. If you miss a day they are sincerely worried or wonder why you are gone. If you turn in your homework late, they firmly let you know that it's not ok, but are at the same time, very polite. They're classes are not easy and maybe some of the most intensive classes I have taken, but ended the semester feeling I had really learned a lot in such a short amount of time. I really appreciate they're enthusiasm to help us learn they're language. I feel it is a gift.

I have also joined the Taida Rugby team. This has been one of the wisest decisions I have made while here in Taiwan. I would highly recommend to any new exchange students that come to Taida in the future or any school/country for that matter, to join an athletic team of your school. After joining the Rugby team I have been able to meet friends, practice Chinese listening and conversation, exercise my body, and get a glimpse of Taiwanese culture five days a week for three hours everyday, all at the same time. I don't have to search for language partners because I have a language exchange with twenty or more people five days a week for three hours a day. They have been so accepting and helpful during my stay here. I will soon travel to Tainan in the south of Taiwan with the Rugby team for a week of practice, travel, and celebration. I am eagerly looking forward to it.

These entire collective experiences are unforgettable and I am very thankful for the scholarship given by the Wang Family because it has made all of these experiences easier to be grasped. The generous help is greatly appreciated. I hope this letter helps to show a little of how this scholarship has helped one student in having an amazing study abroad year in Taiwan. Thank you very much.

Yajoon Tien
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
Taiwan 2007-08

Dear Wang Family,

I am extremely grateful to have received the Wang Scholarship which has helped me greatly in my studies at National Taiwan University.

Taipei is the capital city of the Republic of China and also serves as the nation's major center for politics, commerce, mass media, education, and pop culture. The city is currently the site of 18 universities, 6 colleges and a number of major museums and libraries. The city's economy is driven by various industries including electronics, textiles, metals, ship-building, and

motorcycles. Taipei recently won international recognition as the World Teleport Association's (WTA) Intelligent Community of the Year for 2006, and among other up-and-coming urban hubs it is widely considered a "Gamma world city".

Taipei is in every sense a modern metropolis, with its sleek glass and steel architecture, advanced transportation system, and vast, lively scene of shopping malls, arts venues, hotels, restaurants and night spots. Since the 1970s, the city's eastern area has emerged as a bustling center of finance and commerce, and now features skyscrapers, wide boulevards and the Taipei World Trade Center. Yet the modern skyline retains a distinct Chinese flavor, in landmarks such as the Grand Hotel, the Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yat-sen Memorial halls, Longshan Temple, the Confucius Temple, and the National Palace Museum, to name a few examples.

While the city embraces modernity, cultural traditions and arts continue to thrive and color daily life in Taipei, where concerts, festivals and other events are celebrated in full splendor throughout the year. Nature lovers will appreciate the abundance of nearby mountains, greenery, urban parks and waterfronts. No matter what you enjoy—whether bustling cityscapes, the arts, scenic natural areas—Taipei and its environs offer something special for everyone.

While Taipei City offers many exciting cultural and recreational opportunities, there is much more awaiting your discovery throughout Taiwan. Called Formosa by Portuguese sailors in the 16th century, this "beautiful island" has everything from lush forests, to majestic mountains and sunny beaches. Located along the western arc of the Pacific "rim of fire", Taiwan's verdant landscapes and dramatic topography reflect the combined blessings of seismic activity and a tropical to sub-tropical climate.

Mountain climbing is naturally a popular activity, as the island hosts some 258 peaks that exceed 3,000m in height. A variety of distinctive land formations and scenery beg exploration in the six national parks scattered throughout Taiwan: Taroko National Park, Yushan (Jade Mountain) National Park, Shei-Pa National Park, Yangmingshan National Park, Kenting National Park and Kinmen National Park.

The government has also designated 13 national scenic areas under its protection, and some 18,400 species of wildlife, including thousands of rare or endangered species, are native to this

small but spectacularly blessed island. Add to this landscape a handful of bustling cities—Taichung, Kaoshiung, Puli to name a few—and you have a rich host of attractions beckoning throughout this splendid, culturally rich place.

Throughout the year, Taiwan sees periods of tropical, sub-tropical and temperate climate, with distinct transitions marking the seasons. The island enjoys an oceanic and subtropical monsoon climate with long, humid summers and short, mild winters. The typhoon season lasts from June through October. Average monthly temperatures range from 25 - 28°C (77 - 82°F) during the summer (with daily highs in the low 30° range) and the hottest temperatures occurring in July and August. Temperatures start to cool down near the end of September, and the winter cold extremes register around 15 - 19°C (cooler in the north) in January and February.