

## **Report on Participation in Field Research in East Asia**

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During our field trip to Taiwan, we participated in an academic presentation workshop at the National Taiwan University, attended several lectures at National Chengchi University, visited the Taiwan-Japan Relations Association, where we participated in a very open questions-and-answers session, visited the company headquarters of the Lite-On group and went to the city of Sanzhi, where the inhabitants achieved a very successful transformation and transition from conventional agriculture to a sustainable organic and multifunctional agricultural model which also incorporated aspects of touristic development.

I had high expectations for this trip, and I am happy to report that these expectations were fulfilled to my utmost satisfaction in more than just one fashion. The lectures at National Chengchi University and in particular the meeting with the Taiwan-Japan Relations Association made me much more aware of the difficult political position Taiwan finds itself in due to its relations with mainland China. The presentations and conversations I participated in helped me learn much about the difficult and delicate ways in which non-Chinese states in general and companies in particular deal with the political ramifications of Taiwan's current political relationship with mainland China, and the extra steps that are being taken to avoid offending the Chinese government.

As a part of the trip, each participating student member was required to give a short presentation on a certain topic during our bus rides to the field trip sites and universities. Since my research focuses on agricultural tourism, I was given the task of introducing Taiwan's tourism development policies. In my preparations for this presentation, I found that the tourism industry of Taiwan has put a bigger emphasis on Eco-Tourism and agricultural tourism in recent years and was named one of the Top 8 agritourism destinations of the world by Mother Nature Network (MNN) as early as 2012.

To my great surprise, I also found that large parts of the tourism development framework employed by the central Taiwan government were based on European and German tourism development programs, and that recent pushes for expansions and new creations of the so-called "leisure farms" that combine home-stay like accommodation with product tasting, harvest experiences and educational tours were based on existing successful businesses in rural areas of Germany and other regions within the European Union. This became particularly apparent during the literature research for my presentation, during which I found a surprisingly large volume of academic publications featuring comparisons between the Taiwanese and the German/European tourism development models. Up until this point, these publications had not been within the scope of my literature review for my PhD research topic regarding agricultural tourism in Japan, and finding them at that point made me all the more aware of the lack of similar comparative research regarding Japanese tourism development models.

My personal highlight of the trip was our excursion to Sanzhi, a town at the Northern coast of Taiwan. We were guided by a local farmer who led an initiative to turn farmers away from the conventional methods of modern agriculture and instead rely on more means of cultivating and maintaining the land. Our guide told us that before the start of his initiative, the surrounding farmers initially didn't know much about land development and heavily relied on agrochemicals to manage their crops, and that the area was regularly plagued by landslides, which were partially

caused through land mismanagement of neighboring non-agricultural companies. Many patches of land had also been abandoned. The initiative identified education as a first prerequisite for a revival of the rural town, and formulated a plan with several additional steps including land recreation, environmental improvement and preservation and cultural reservation, with economic aspects being considered the least important part of the project.

Among other things, we were introduced to a plant-based, multi-layered water filtering system that purified and cooled the water in several stages before being introduced into the fields further down the terraces. Instead of industrial herbicides and insecticides, the farmers rely on bacterial fertilizers and insect deterrents that they themselves create through fermentation of a specific plant formula. To avert the risks of crop failures, farmers would diversify their crops and grow seasonal produce. Communication and education take place in a community center that was specifically created for this purpose. One very interesting aspect I found about the case of Sanzhi is that the project basically started from nothing, without any governmental support, and was only acknowledged after over seven years had passed and significant progress had already been achieved. In a way, it demonstrated a development path that is quite opposite to the ones I have observed in Germany and Japan.

This trip has been an eye-opening experience for me in many regards. As a young researcher, identifying a pronounced lack of research regarding a certain topic, such as what happened during my preparations for the trip, as well as the experiences I made during the trip may very well turn out to be career-defining experiences. Agritouristic development in Taiwan had not been within the scope of my inquiries thus far, and I may very well consider it as a topic of interest for future research endeavors. In conclusion, I am quite happy to say that the trip has provided me with a new outlook not only on my own research, but on my future academic career choices as well.