

Report on Participation in Overseas Field Research to Taiwan

Shin Yoshieda
Year level: M2
Faculty/Graduate School of: Economics
Kyoto University

Participation in the Overseas Field Research to Taiwan has been a fruitful experience to broaden my perspectives both for my future career development and for the research towards my Master's thesis. Since I am interested in the economic development of Asian countries, especially in the role of international trade, Taiwan has always been one of the countries that fascinated me with its development story. Thus, visiting Taiwan and conducting field research there provided me with a great experience of seeing a successful case of economic development using international trade effectively, with my own eyes.

Academically, one of the themes that were brought up over and over throughout the trip was how Taiwan has a very strong economic connection with countries like China and the US despite its complicated political relationship with those countries. Through a lecture provided by professor Zheng at National Chengchi University, I learnt how most of Taiwan's export is intermediate products and the majority goes to mainland China. Through a lecture provided by professor Lu, I learnt how Taiwan and mainland China, together with the US, have a complicated relationship in which both mainland China and the US have their own so-called "One China Policy." On the other hand, within Taiwan, there are people who support its independence and people who do not. Because the topic of my Master's thesis is ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and its economic integration especially focusing on trade structure, personally I had a lot to learn from this complicated relationship between China and Taiwan. ASEAN also has countries with many different political structures, ranging from democratic countries like the Philippines, to a socialist country like Vietnam. The relationship between Taiwan and China suggests that economic integration can be strengthened even with the presence of complicated politics. However, it also suggests that strong economic ties do not necessarily lead to strong political ties. Coming to this field trip gave me a valuable opportunity of hearing opinions about this complicated Taiwan-China relationship both from Taiwanese students, professors, and the officers at the Taiwan Japan Relations Association, and from other participants of the program who are from mainland China.

This field research also contributed to my thesis research by giving me an opportunity to present my research at an international academic setting. Through presenting my research to students and faculties at National Taiwan University, I gained confidence in my English presentation ability. Also preparation process for the presentation was a great time to learn how to make my research communicable to the audience who are group of economists but not necessarily in my particular field. Not only through my own presentation, but also hearing others' presentation was a helpful experience. I was able to see how other students are approaching many other problems using many other methods. It was a great reminder that the way I approach my own research is just one approach out of many potential alternatives. This broadened perspective motivated me to see my research question from different points of view to reevaluate if my approach is the best approach of all the alternatives. Moreover, thanks to the kindness of the students at National Taiwan University, I was able to have meaningful conversation discussing about my research topic over lunch and dinner.

Observing the economy of Taiwan both at a personal level and firm level gave me one model of development

that I can study more about as I continue my career in development economics. Having lived in a Southeast Asian country, I was surprised by how safe it is in Taiwan. I was able to walk alone in the night without any fear. Of course, there must be many social problems that I could not observe with my short stay in Taiwan, however, it seemed to me that many people enjoyed relatively satisfactory quality of life. The visit to Lite-On was an opportunity to see a company that produces high-tech products that represents Taiwan's economic development. It surprised me that their products are used in so many things that I normally use, yet I had never heard of the company. This represents the importance of being a part of international production chain for development rather than doing everything within one country.

Overall, this field research to Taiwan was a great program through which I learned a lot about economic development. Now, I will do my best to make use of this experience to conduct better research and develop a better career for my future.