

The 42nd START Program (Taiwan)

For around two weeks from March 15th to 30th 2017, twenty-four first-year students along with Professor Hiroshi Arami (Graduate School of Integrated Arts and Sciences), Professor Yoshichika Honda (International Center) and one other supervising faculty member participated in the 42nd START program, studying at Fu Jen Catholic University (FJU) in New Taipei, Taiwan.

At FJU, along with Chinese classes students attended lectures on “Japanese in modern Taiwan”, “Taiwanese goddess (Mazu) and beliefs”, and other topics. They also went on study excursions to Taichung and Tainan; in order to maximize learning in the limited number of days they had, in the free time after lectures students participated in group travel to various places. Deciding on various conventions regarding safety management and discussing these conventions in daily meetings, through the students’ cooperation these group excursions were held without incident.

Split into three groups based on language proficiency, students attended Chinese language classes every weekday. In the free time after lectures students utilized what they had learnt to communicate with FJU students and local people, setting a common goal to complete their “input and output” learning cycle on a daily basis, and spend each day fully immersed in language practice and cross-cultural exchanges. Through consciousness towards these goals each student was able to accumulate daily cultural experiences. In their free time, sometimes accompanied by FJU students, students participated in group excursions to Jiufen district, National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, National Palace Museum, a night market, Taipei Zoo, Tamsui district, Lungshan Temple, and Mazu temples among other places. Along with extracurricular learning and cross-cultural exchange, students used these excursions to prepare and gather research for their group presentations.

Aside from this, students also participated in English-language lunches. Anticipating communication with people who could only speak English, students practiced English conversation in groups, under the guidance of a different supervising professor every day.

In the second half of the program schedule, students also had the chance to attend the Mazu Festival. Staying overnight at a hotel in Chiayi city, students conducted weekend field study in Taichung and Tainan and experienced the Mazu Festival for the first time at the Dajia Jenn Lann Temple and Nanyao Temple. There they observed a spectacular parade of three meter high dolls, walked through the city alive with the sounds of firecrackers and gongs and the smoke of tens of thousands of incense sticks offered by visitors, observed first-hand the religious rituals and were thus able to deepen their understanding of Taiwanese religion and culture. Aside from this festival, students were also able to visit Singang Feng Tian Temple, Singang Incense Artistic Culture Garden, Beigang Chao-Tian Temple and Nantou Chushan Zi Nan Temple.

Towards the end of the two weeks, in their three groups students gave presentations about the results of their language classes to an audience of around 60 people, comprised of the Director of the FJU language center, FJU staff, faculty members, and students. The HU students then held a presentation on Japanese traditional culture and art – some of the students from the Tokai district performed a traditional *Hyottoko* dance, and a group composed mainly of students from the HU Cheer team also gave a performance. The twenty-four students then presented a gift of 1800 folded paper cranes that they had made themselves to the language center Director and teachers as a token of their gratitude.

At the post-program session that was held after the students returned to Japan, students gave in-depth group presentations about the results of their pre-learning and on-site research in Taiwan. In individual presentations students also talked about how their experience had dramatically affected their consciousness towards overseas study, and their enthusiasm for studying language, displaying the comprehensive learning benefits acquired by each student through this program.



Group photo at the Nanyao Temple in Taichung; the students' first experience of the Mazu Festival.



During the English luncheon; conversing in English with FJU staff and graduate students



During a Chinese language lecture. Studying tenaciously during the everyday lectures produced remarkable results.



Cheer performance by students from the HU Cheer team at the completion ceremony.