

The 43rd START Program (Taiwan)

For around two weeks from August 9th to 23rd 2017, 16 first-year students led by Associate Professor Naoki Maeda (Graduate School of Social Sciences) and two other faculty members participated in the 43rd START program, studying at National Chengchi University in Taiwan.

The participants were divided into two groups where they attended lessons on Chinese language, Japan-Taiwan-China relations, Taiwanese economy after WWII, human rights, etc. The Chinese lessons were all taught entirely in Chinese, but they overcame their anxiety and acquired the language by following the lessons closely and doing the assignments every day. By the end of the program, participants were able to express their views and ask questions on the difference between Japan and Taiwan. In class, they had a productive discussion on what they learned about Taiwan beforehand and what they actually feel after going there.

Moreover, they visited the 228 Memorial Museum and the Deng Nan-jung Memorial Museum and learned about the martial law and the restriction of freedom of speech in Taiwan. And at the Deng Nan-jung Memorial Museum, participants exchanged views with students from National Chengchi University and National Taiwan Normal University on “Democratization”. They were inspired with the comments given by students of about the same age. During the group excursions to National CKS Memorial Hall and Lungshan Temple with local students, participants interacted with local students using Chinese and English and talked about a variety of topics such as hobbies and interests.

On the last day of their stay at the National Chengchi University, the participants were divided into four groups where they made group presentations on Taiwan-related topics of their interest. Understanding the difficulty of creating a comprehensive and well thought-out presentation, they carried out discussions over and over again and finally came up with high quality presentations based on curbside interview survey carried out in Taipei and field trips to public offices. After the presentations, they held a lively Q&A session where they exchanged sharp questions and opinions showing that this program exposed participants to look at things from multiple points of view.

On the weekend, participants visited the Green Island Human Rights Cultural Park, a detention center in Green Island, Taitung City for reforming political prisoners during a period of martial law in Taiwan known as “White Terror”. During their visit, they were accompanied by an 87-year-old former detainee who gave them a valuable lecture on his experience during detention. They were shocked to learn the fact that there was unreasonable suppression and at the same time, deepened their understanding about the complex history traced by Taiwan after the war.

For many students, this START program to Taiwan was the first experience to learn Chinese. By preparing for the lessons and doing their revisions every day, and putting what they learned at school into practice when doing shopping and other daily chores, their Chinese improved day by day. Through the interaction with local people, they realized the difficulty of communicating with others in a foreign language and the importance of conveying one's intention to others. At the follow-up session, many students expressed their enthusiasm for learning in their comments: “I would like to continue studying foreign languages to improve my skills.” Other comments included: “Next time, I would like to study abroad for a longer period of time.”, “The presentation techniques I learned in the group presentation is going to be useful in my future presentations in class.”, “I would like to learn to be as good as the Taiwanese students when making introduction of the culture and history of my own country.” etc. The experience gained through this START program inspired participants to strive for their goals and to take on new challenges.



In front of National Chengchi University where they attended lessons held in Chinese every day for two weeks



Lectures on Japan-Taiwan-China relations, and Human Rights held in Japanese, Chinese and English



Excursion trip to Green Island Human Rights Cultural Park, in Green Island, Taitung City



Earnest-looking presenters at the group presentation