

Name: Eric Tada de Souza

Completion Report – NTUST Summer Program

From August 19th to 31st, 2018, National Taiwan University of Science and Technology (henceforth “NTUST”) hosted their annual Summer Program, which allowed students from 6 Japanese universities to have lectures at NTUST with local students, as well to visit companies and research institutes in Greater Taipei area.

In the first day, we had an introductory lecture on stress related to studying abroad for the first time and about Taiwanese culture, and then a welcome party gratefully offered by Kuramae Association branch in Taiwan. After that, we would have several lectures until the 30th, with some field trips in between. They were a visit to Garmin factory on the 23rd, a visit to Hsinchu Science Park and ULVAC on the 24th and a visit to the National Defense Medical Center on the 29th for an animal experiment. In the last day, we had a group presentation in which we talked about the main points of the program and, after that, we had a farewell dinner.

I believe I was able to adapt to their customs in terms like how to move around with their shared bicycle system, named U Bike, how to shop at their supermarkets (being Carrefour the one that amazed me the most, given the amount of Western products they have available) and how to choose a good restaurant (although ordering by writing on a paper with the menu written only in Chinese and no photos was quite a challenge).

The most impressive events

In general, all of the events related to the program were impressive. We had lectures of various fields, as well as cultural exchange and field trip events. Here, I describe 3 of the most impressive events, being one related to a lecture, one to a field trip and one to cultural exchange.

Lecture: Bioplastics

This lecture was given by Mr. Joseph Wang, who works at a Taiwanese company named Grabio. What impressed me more is the effort that Taiwan is doing to eliminate plastic bags and to substitute them into biodegradable ones. For example, in convenience shops and supermarkets, the shops do not offer plastic bags, and if you want one, you have to pay 5 NTD in order to compensate for the environmental damages caused by the plastic. In those terms, I think Taiwan is far more developed than Japan, since in here the shops give plastic bags for free even if you do not ask for them.

In the lecture, Mr. Wang showed about his company and their products, that include truly biobased and biodegradable plastics for consumers, as well as plastics for agricultural use, such as seedling pots that are degraded after the plant is grown. He alerted that some companies sell “fake” biodegradable bags, that contain non-degradable components. This lecture opened my mind on the plastic problem that the world faces, and, from then on, I have been trying to make an effort to refuse plastic bags in shops and to check the chemical composition of those that I eventually take.

Field trip: Garmin

We visited Garmin’s factory in Taoyuan city and, first, watched a presentation about the company. They are divided into 5 segments according to the purpose of their products: automotive (navigation systems, apps), outdoor (small computers for hiking, backpacking, etc), fitness (smartwatches, GPS for cyclists and golfers), aviation (navigation and communication systems) and marine (navigation and sonar systems). Being founded by a Taiwanese and an American, Garmin is a company that incorporates technologies from both countries to manufacture products, most of them related to navigation and sensors.

After that, we could enter and visit the assembly line of car navigation systems. They are built in an extra clean environment to prevent contamination, and undergo several tests, such as tests in both high and low temperatures. In the afternoon, we had a lecture by a sales representative of Garmin, which was perhaps the most interesting moment of the visit. He talked about his experience and on how to sell a product successfully. That requires good presentation and communication skills, and some points to be reminded are not to negotiate, since it may denote that one side is losing so that the other wins, and not to persuade. Figure 1 shows our group after visiting Garmin.

Cultural exchange: Day trip to Tamsui

On a Saturday free from lectures, we went to Tamsui, to the northwest of Taipei and close to the sea. We visited Tamsui Old Street, famous for its souvenir shops and street food, some of them being fresh seafood. Then, we rode a bicycle to Fort San Domingo, an old fort built by the Spanish in the 17th century that witnessed important events in Taiwan's history, such as the trials of the Europeans to set Taiwan as a colony. After that, we went to see the sunset and had dinner at a Chinese style seafood restaurant. Figure 2 shows our group in Tamsui.



Figure 1: Garmin



Figure 2: Tamsui

What I learned from the program

I was able to learn a lot in this program, in terms that the lectures offered a broader view not only of science (with lectures on energy, bioengineering, psychology, etc), but also on arts and legislation, since we had lectures on design, mobile photography and intellectual rights. And, of course, being the program hosted in Taiwan, I was able to experience their culture, visit amazing spots and, what I think it was the most important, to make friends with local students while talking to them about Japan and my mother country, Brazil.

Being myself a Brazilian, my idea of Taiwan before was that everything was same as Japan, but, after the program, I realized I was completely wrong. Their culture is very different (somehow closer to the West), their supermarkets bigger and their values different. I learned that Asia is not homogeneous and that every place is unique.

My honest opinion on the program

The program was very well organized in the sense that it could provide great lectures and a good environment to make friends. They provided local students to assist us with check-in and the staff was very kind. The accommodation was above expectations, although not very sophisticated. I believe that the program could be offered to more students in the future (out of 6 Japanese universities in the program, there were actually students from 2 of them). We, students in Japan, should honor the opportunities to visit other universities in order to strengthen the bonds between our universities and those in other places of the world in order to build a more international environment and to improve our university's reputation.