

The Portuguese were not wrong. It is really "Formosa"

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In August of 2002, I received a call from one of my best friends, she was just calling me from Istanbul to tell me that they had crossed the Bosforo Strait. So, she was calling me from Asia. I laughed and answered her:

"Asia? I will live in Taiwan for some weeks." Just a few days before this, the Council of Science and

Technology of Spain approved the research project my PhD supervisor had applied. In this project we planned some stays; people of my laboratory should travel to Tainan, to the laboratory of Professor Hor, who is part of the international group formed for the project, and people from her laboratory will visit us in Spain. Then, after some months and a long trip from Valencia on the east coast of Spain-I landed in Kaohsiung International Airport. What did I feel at that moment? I was afraid, for the first time I was terrified. Several questions appeared in my mind such as if I could manage alone in this country...without knowing any Chinese? Will I like the



people of the laboratory and will they like me?...Fortunately, all those doubts disappeared a few days after and I think between us began a good friendship.

One of my big fears before travelling was the food. I didn't like the one served in the Chinese restaurants in Spain. What's more, it wasn't done well and I felt bad for two or three days. I supposed here the food would be different from this one but I was afraid; if I did not like it, what should I eat? Now, I have eaten several kinds of Asiatic food (Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese...) and I like near all of them, but, I don't love them. I suppose your way of cooking is really



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different from that I'm accustomed to. This is one of the reasons I prefer to rent an apartment for this year instead of the cheaper choice of a room in one of the dormitories of the university. In my kitchen I cook some Spanish meals; the ingredients are not a problem as I find here some that are similar to the Spanish ones. And I have surprised myself; I have some cooking skill unknown for me until now.

Besides some obvious differences, such as the food or the religions and their culture as the temples, I don't find big differences. At least that was my first impression, but I was completely wrong. In your behaviour there are some details that shock me sometimes, because I think it would never happen in my country like a boy carrying the handbag of his girlfriend, a person who combs himself after taking off the helmet in the street or when three or even four people ride the same motorcycle. Sometimes, I think they are childish like your passion for the cartoons or the soft toys, just look

at all these teddy bears in some bouquets or when a couple of lovers wear the same T-shirt. But, at the same time all these things make you so special, and I love it.

One night (after being here around one month in my second stay) having dinner with some people of my laboratory, two girls came to ask me if they could make an interview with me. If I understand correctly, it was part of their work for being licensed as the teachers. Anyway, they wanted to know the impressions of the foreign women about some aspects of Taiwan. For the comments and questions they made, I could guess that one of the most criticized things of your country is the traffic. And I agree, your way of driving is the most crazy that I have ever seen in my life. In fact, since I obtained my driver's license 10 years ago and thousands of km, I had driven in other countries, even in Rome which is famous for its also crazy cars and motorcycle drivers. But, when my boss asked me to rent a car in Taiwan

to move from Taipei to Tainan I rejected immediately, despite it would be the cheaper way to do it.

I come here to study and work in the Professor Hor's laboratory, but I did not throw away the opportunity and I had done some tourism around the country. I visited Taipei twice, once last year in the New Chinese Year Holidays and I remember that I felt so little in an enormous city. I visited some tourist spots and the National Palace Museum which impressed me so much that I wanted to visit again this year with my supervisor, Professor Carmen Amaro, and one of my mates of the Spanish laboratory, Paco. But, unfortunately, it was impossible. Instead of this, we went to the zoo once my supervisor recovered from the jet lag. I had a lovely day walking in Kaohsiung accompanied by the postdoc of the lab and some friends and having dinner in a Spanish restaurant (I think it is called "Hola" which in Spanish means "Hello") that is located in this big city. If you have

to choose, I recommend you the restaurant. And, of course I will remember always the weekend we spent in Kenting; its paradisiacal beach and its sightseeing were amazing. We had a lot of fun and adventure like the "anana boat trip". Spain is mainly a dry country, so the vegetation you could find there is quite different to the one I could admire here. Just take a walk in the Tainan streets could be a botanical experience for me as I see such a lot of trees, flowers and I always desire that my grandmother, who loves them, could be with me in those walks.

Last, I do not forget talk about the laboratory, at the end it is the place where more time I spend every day. My laboratory in Spain had few previous contacts with the molecular biology, but in this project we need to use some techniques we do not manage. So, one of the objectives of my trip is to learn some skills to develop the goals of my project. Although I have some problems in my work (who does not

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have them when doing research?), I think I have acquired some skills to go on with the experiments in my country. But over this, I think it is more important the personal experience I have had in Taiwan, the people I have met here, the places I have visited... But, I still have the impression that Taiwan is an unknown country, that I still have to learn more about you. And the curious thing is that this feeling is getting stronger every day instead of disappearing.

Now, I am in my last 10 days here

before returning to Valencia and I am counting the days, as you could imagine, after three month at 12000 km of distance, I miss my family and friends very much... But, I am sure that the places I usually go, the people I usually talk with will be different for me, that I will have the feelings of "not fit there" and this will be only because I will miss my life here. I know that because I have the same impressions once, when I returned to Valencia from Tainan last year.

