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From: Commanding Officer, Company A, Marine Cryptologic Support Battalion
To: Major Jonathan F. Brown, International Affairs Program Coordinator (PLU-8), International Affairs Branch, Plans, Policies, and Operations, Headquarters, United States Marine Corps
Subj: REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN) LANGUAGE TRAINING AFTER-ACTION REPORT (AAR), 6-20 JUL 2012

1. Purpose. To report on official travel to the Republic of China (Taiwan), from 6-20 July 2012, by Captain Gary J. Sampson, USMC, 8243 Northeast Asia (China) Foreign Area Officer (FAO).

2. Summary. As an experience-track FAO via the Olmsted Scholar Program (OSP), I designed this trip with two aims: first, to address language shortfalls that have become apparent to me since returning to the United States in 2011 at the end of my OSP experience; and second, putting language skills to practical use while visiting major cultural and tourist venues in northern, central, and eastern Taiwan to round out my Taiwan experiences.

3. Discussion. My choice to visit and study in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, was purposefully done to give me exposure to a different part of the country than what I experienced while assigned to Kaohsiung, Taiwan as an Olmsted Scholar from 2009 - 2011. Kaohsiung, a somewhat gritty industrial mega-seaport, is situated in Taiwan's far south, while Taipei, the political, cultural, and economic center of Taiwan, is at the far north of the country. As the main hub of Taiwan, Taipei offers a preponderance of language school choices. On the advice of an OSP colleague currently assigned to Taipei, I chose to attend classes at the Chinese Culture University's Mandarin Learning Center (CCU MLC), Zhongxiao campus. I also considered the very well-regarded (but more expensive) Taipei Language Institute (TLI), which also has branch campuses in Taichung, Kaohsiung, and other large cities across Taiwan.

a. CCU MLC provided a tutor for the one-on-one classes I requested. I attended eight (8) days of classes while I was in Taiwan, at three (3) hours a day, for a total of 24 hours of intensive instruction during the trip.

b. As that guidance for these types of FAO language refresher/sustainment trips indicates specifically that a major aim is to improve speaking skills in particular, I was heartened that the major focus of my coursework was speaking and listening, almost in a conversational style. Unlike the experience I had at the Defense Language Institute (DLI) while a student in the Chinese Mandarin Basic Course in 2008-2009, this was just me and the instructor - there was no "taking a break" while the instructor worked with other students. It was "all me, all the time," and I rather enjoyed it and got a lot out of it. We also did some reading and worked a bit on new vocabulary words. Grammar was a very minor part of the instruction, and writing was not featured at all. I was quite pleased with

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how my memory for the Chinese language was stimulated by the classes and being surrounded by the language every day. Chinese words and phrases learned at DLI or from the two years I lived in Taiwan would seemingly pop into my head at random, and I would recall their meaning and intonation.

c. Arrival in Taiwan was delayed by one day due to airline-related issues which were beyond my control. I started my trip as planned, departing Denver on 6 July, but due to a ground delay in Denver, I arrived late in San Francisco for my connection to Tokyo and onward to Taipei. As a result, the boarding doors for my onward flight in San Francisco were already closed by the time I arrived and I had to remain overnight in San Francisco, resuming my travel on the next available flight on Saturday, 7 July. This had me arriving in Taiwan on Sunday, 8 July quite late in the evening. It did not impact the start of my Chinese language classes first thing Monday morning, but it did make my planned adjustment to the new time zone a bit more difficult than it might have been.

d. My selected accommodations during the trip were planned with the intent of being able to ride the subway (Mass Rapid Transit, or MRT) to class each day, but I soon realized that it was even more convenient just to walk 10-15 minutes from the hotel to class. Since the trip only encompassed one stop on the MRT, it was actually more of a hassle to queue up for the subway train and ride it to class. This actually was beneficial from a cultural immersion standpoint as well, for it afforded me the convenient opportunity to sample local breakfast cuisine on the way to class and to exercise my Mandarin in informal settings with local people.

e. With my mornings filled with Mandarin Chinese instruction, the afternoons and evenings each day were left open for cultural explorations. I think that I did a very respectable job in filling these times with constructive visits and activities that filled gaps in my previous exposure. Full details are included in the below itinerary. (See item i.) As a part of my travels, I was able to resolve the use of Taiwan's high-speed rail system (HSR) to support travel to Chiayi (for the Jade Mountain hike) and Kaohsiung as well as the regular railway system in support of my travel to Hualien and Taroko Gorge on the east coast. These feats elicited not a small level of admiration from my Chinese language instructor.

f. I had planned to visit the U.S. Embassy equivalent, called the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), Taipei office, on the day before I returned to the United States, but in coordination with the Marine Corps Affairs Officer (MCAO) there, it became apparent that his schedule was not conducive to hosting my AIT visit during my second week in Taiwan. So instead I used one afternoon my first week in Taiwan to visit AIT. At AIT, I had very interesting discussions with the MCAO and representatives from the political and economic sections. One thing I made sure to ask the political and economic representatives about was the issue of U.S. beef and the recent decision by Taiwan authorities to allow beef with traces of ractopamine, a leanness enhancing drug used by U.S. ranchers, to be imported into Taiwan. This is a very controversial decision in Taiwan, so I wanted to see what kind of insights, if any, these "on-the-ground" folks had on the topic. The MCAO also gave me a full tour of the facility, including meeting personnel in the Liaison Affairs Section (Defense Attaché Office equivalent) and the Technical Section (Foreign Military Sales equivalent).

g. Changing the AIT visit to the first week opened up a full day during the second week (Thursday) where I had no scheduled language class. I

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decided to take advantage of this full day by taking a trip to Taiwan's most popular tourist attraction, called Taroko Gorge. Since I had chosen to use the single weekend that I would be in Taiwan making a trip to central and southern Taiwan, I did not think I would also have time to make a trip to Taiwan's east coast. I was very happy to have the extra day to visit this breathtakingly beautiful location, which I had never before visited. It is definitely a place that one needs more than a single day to explore fully.

h. One other issue that came up was the increased cost of the plane tickets as booked. When putting together my proposal for the training, I used the GSA City Pairs website, located at <http://apps.fss.gsa.gov/citypairs/search/index.cfm?ft>, to estimate the cost for air travel, which was entered in my language sustainment proposal of 29 Mar 12 at \$1322.00. When booked, the price of the tickets was \$3588.10. I remain unsure as to why there was such a large difference between what I presumed, based on the GSA website, to be the cost to fly to Taiwan and the price as booked. This is the principal reason that my claimed costs exceed by quite a large margin my anticipated expenses.

i. Taiwan itinerary:

8 Jul (Sunday)	PM	Arrive Palais de Chine Hotel (Taipei)
9 Jul (Monday)	AM	Chinese class
	PM	Dinner with Taipei-based Olmsted Scholar and family
10 Jul (Tuesday)	AM	Chinese class
	PM	Yangmingshan National Park hike; Shilin Night Market
11 Jul (Wednesday)	AM	Chinese class
	PM	Beitou hot springs; Danshui maritime commercial area
12 Jul (Thursday)	AM	Chinese class
	PM	AIT visit; Ximending shopping district
13 Jul (Friday)	AM	Chinese class
	PM	To Chiayi (central Taiwan) via HSR, onward movement to Dongpu Township to stage for Jade Mountain hike
14 Jul (Saturday)	AM	Hike Jade Mountain, Taiwan's highest point (12,966 ft.)
	PM	To Kaohsiung (via HSR)
15 Jul (Sunday)	AM	Attend church
	PM	Meet with former graduate school classmates; tour Cijin Island with new Kaohsiung-based Olmsted Scholar
16 Jul (Monday)	AM	Return to Taipei via HSR; Chinese class
	PM	Outdoor activities curtailed by rain; went to a movie
17 Jul (Tuesday)	AM	Chinese class
	PM	To Taoyuan via regular rail to visit a graduate school classmate
18 Jul (Wednesday)	AM	Final Chinese class
	PM	Travel via regular rail to Hualien; onward movement to Taroko Gorge
19 Jul (Thursday)	AM	Explore Taroko Gorge
	PM	Hualien; return to Taipei via regular rail
20 Jul (Friday)	AM	Catch flight back to the United States
	PM	Arrive Denver

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4. Recommendation. My current assignment in the United States does not make use of the Chinese language in any way, and this trip was a godsend in terms of getting me back into using Chinese, particularly spoken Chinese. I am tremendously appreciative for the opportunity to take this language and cultural immersion trip. These opportunities should continue to be offered in the future as the fiscal environment permits and I hope that all FAOs have a chance to take advantage of them. Projected cost of trip \$4909.00; claimed cost on voucher \$7,504.66.



G. J. SAMPSON