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Ya Ping Hsiao

Interview with Ya Ping Hsiao

Name: Ya Ping Hsiao PhD

University: Open University of the Netherlands

Function: PhD student / researcher

Topic: Innovative learning arrangements



Ya Ping Hsiao, who is doing her PhD at the Open University of the Netherlands, is already in the Netherlands for a long time since she married a Dutch. She associates the Netherlands with cheese, wind mills, blue sky, tidy houses, lovely sheep, and people who sit down on the grass and are reading a book or magazine. The biggest differences between studying a PhD in the Netherlands and Taiwan, is that you get a salary for being a PhD student in the Netherlands and that you don't need to do a lot of chores for your supervisors, which can sometimes be irrelevant to the research project.

What study are you doing in the Netherlands?

My study is about innovative learning arrangements at the Open University of the Netherlands in Heerlen. It is about how to arrange a learning environment for lifelong learners who want to do non- formal learning. This is a very new way of education because the current research is mostly focussed on formal learning.

How did you find your PhD-position in the Netherlands?

After reading articles from the same research school, I became particularly interested in the research done by one professor. I wrote him an e-mail and then he told me they have this vacancy.

What do you think of the climate of studying/working in the Netherlands?

Good: Teachers and students do not have much status distance! In Taiwan, we dare not to speak out what we really think (this is especially true for the older generations, but nowadays this has changed quite a bit). In the Netherlands, I don't have to agree with my supervisors all the time. I can have my own opinions.

How is studying/working in the Netherlands different from studying/working in Taiwan, China?

In Taiwan, you do not have a salary for being a PhD student. In addition, in Taiwan you need to do a lot of chores for your supervisors, which are sometimes irrelevant to the research project.

What is the added value of doing a PhD / Post Doctor / Professorship in the Netherlands?

It might be easier to find a job afterwards! This counts for the Netherlands as well as for Taiwan, China.

What would you like to do in the future?

I would like to continue doing research at universities. I want to do research in educational sciences and Chinese language teaching and learning. I think it's interesting to further research how we can support lifelong learners in a good way, so they can learn better. Also some teaching is fine, as long as I can do it in English.

What made you decide to go to the Netherlands?

Because of the family formation: I married a Dutch.

Where do you think are the opportunities for Chinese and Taiwanese in the Netherlands?

Research work in the Netherlands is interesting. A good thing is a good comprehension of the English language is sufficient to be successful.

What were the things you noticed the most when you were just in the Netherlands in terms of cultural differences?

Dutch people can be a little bit rude and too direct in their manner to express emotions and feelings. They can improve these two things. And frankly speaking I become more like the Dutch and I am also quite direct and a little bit rude now. When I am on holidays in Taiwan, people sometimes have problems with my directness. So, I should also adjust myself when I am back in Taiwan now.

What do you associate with the Netherlands?

Cheese, wind mills, blue sky, tidy houses, lovely sheep, and people who sit down on the grass and are reading a book or magazine.

How do you keep in touch with family and friends in Taiwan?

Telephone and e-mail at least once or twice a week.

What did your family and friends in Taiwan say about you going to the Netherlands?

"Great!", "Good decision!". They said this because this is my decision and they know that I don't change my mind once I have made a decision.

What are prerequisites for successful integration in the Netherlands?

To really integrate in the Netherlands Dutch language comprehension might help and a strong personality is necessary.

Can you give some similarities between the Taiwanese and Dutch culture?

Almost no similarities, maybe the passion for popular politicians. But let me explain to you some of the differences. The way of thinking makes such a huge difference between these two cultures. I am not saying which is good and which is bad. It is just the essential difference which deeply influences the way of thinking!

We Taiwanese are Taoists, which means we look for a kind of balance of life. This has a lot of influences on the way we think and do things. The balance is the most important. We are also a kind of Buddhists, which means we look for harmony of life. To keep balance and harmony we sometimes have to put away our own thoughts to reach a NO-I state. Here, it is the opposite. "I" is in the centre. Well, the Netherlands still has balance and harmony based on making a lot of rules. While Taiwanese don't really have such rules to regulate people. It is implicit in the way of Taoism and Buddhism. So, it also means: if you don't do it, no consequence occurs; if you do it, you get peace! This is of course not very easy for Dutch to understand!

What is a prerequisite for success at work/study in the Netherlands?

Do as the Dutch do. So try to adjust yourself to the Dutch culture and environment. It is of not easy to do, but it is important. For example, you cannot expect to eat warm lunch in the Netherlands because they eat bread for lunch. This is basic but if you don't adjust yourself to their habit, you will feel miserable, especially in the winter.

Do you have any tips / tricks for Taiwanese and Chinese who also want to come to the Netherlands?

Become independent! And deal with the cultural differences, by trying to understand and accept them!

What do you think about the activities of AcademicTransfer?

Good! I also would like to vote for a forum for people who want to come to the Netherlands to discuss their questions. I think that can be very useful.