

National Taiwan University Delegation in Kuwait

2015.11.21-28

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I Came, I Saw, I Loved.

+ National Taiwan University Delegation in Kuwait +
2015.11.21-28

Veronika Song
Graduate Program in Translation and Interpretation



Prologue | The Spark

My adventures with the Middle East began last year when I visited United Arab Emirates for the first time in February. My curiosity about the Middle East and the Islamic culture came out in full bloom. Before the trip I had always imagined Dubai as an epitome of extreme luxury, but after spending a week there, I saw its appeal not in the long list of the world's number ones, but in the diverse community with expats accounting for 75% of the population. Dubai might not have a long history, but the people from different parts of the world contribute to that history in their own interesting ways.

I never left a country with so many surprises and questions. And just by coincidence, Kuwait University Training Program came up in March. Our

responsibility was to translate lectures to the trainees. During the five-day session, the title of faculty vs. student was never a barrier. We were their windows to Taiwan and vice versa. Our conversation ranged from political and economic status, clothing, identity, and even to an exhilarating debate on the roles of men and women. We became such good friends, and I remember vividly what I put down in my journal: “next stop, Kuwait.”

And here I was. I never expected myself to be so lucky to visit Kuwait so soon. I will begin with what I hoped to bring back from the visit, and later share my experience and thoughts on the 10-day journey.

Gender equality has been the issue I am interested in. Our gender and sexual orientation are both fluid; other than anatomical differences, binary classification will only confine our roles in the society. So I was very keen to observe how differently gender roles play out in an Islamic society where there are distinct expectations on men and women.

The condition of expat workers is also what I would like to see for myself. Kuwait, like most Gulf countries, has the population of more expatriates than nationals. Because Taiwan is a comparatively monoracial society, I would like to see when locals become the minority in numbers, how the city would look like and how people interact.

Chapter One | Suit & Tie

This is the second year National University had a delegation to Kuwait University. Observing last year’s schedule, students visited different departments in the morning. We had the honor to meet the university president Dr. Husain al Ansary. We also visited the College of Business Administration, College of Engineer and

Petroleum, Deanship of Student Affairs, engineering and science library, dental clinic, College of Pharmacy and College of Information Science.

The College of Engineer and Petroleum was where most questions were asked due to its particular strong tie to the Middle East. I remember so well one of us raised the question of how much engineers are paid in Kuwait, and Dr. Abdallah Khalil Cherri did not answer the question directly. He made it clear that salary is just a number; there are other considerations to be taken in such as rent and other living expenses (It costs 70,000 NTD alone to rent an apartment in downtown Kuwait City). I love how he approached the matter. The idea of extreme wealth in oil countries is so deeply rooted in outsiders' mind that money seems to be the first thing they care and ask about. But it should not be, and the same goes with life.

Dr. Cherri also noted that there are more women in the engineering department than men. He said one of the reasons is that women in Kuwait generally perform better in academic than men. Another factor is that more men study abroad and women stay in Kuwait due to a more conservative view on women, which further increasing the gender ratio.

Now we move on to the science and engineering library. The staff us who gave us a tour was one of the delegates to NTU this year. She was very impressed with the multimedia center in our library and expressed the desire to create a similar space in their university. It was a pity to learn that they do not have a multimedia center because I would very much like to see what movies Kuwait is producing. Later I learned from some Kuwaiti friends that film industry is very small in Kuwait. They are more well-known for their TV shows. The majority of Arabic cinema comes from Egypt.

The highlight of the department visits was probably our last stop: department of information science. They had a very special and engaging activity for us: we were to

create a drawing by using paint and other materials such as cotton balls, plastic bottles, stamps and even sand. Some people painted their impression on Kuwait, and some



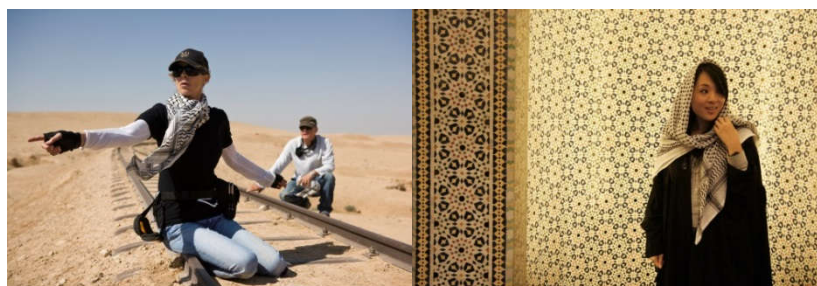
drew the beauty of Taiwan. It had been a while since I painted, so I am very grateful that KU gave us the opportunity to express ourselves on canvas again. We were all very pleased with the piece of us that we gave to Kuwait.

Photo with a portrait of Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Emir of Kuwait.

Chapter Two | But First, Let Us Take a Selfie

After the official visits we would go on a tour for the attractions. We were so lucky to have been to many places including Othman Museum, Kuwait National Museum, Sadu House, National Bank of Kuwait, Souk Al-Mubarakiya, The Avenue Mall, The Grand Mosque, Youm Albahar Heritage Village, and the desert!

My favorite places are Souk Al-Mubarakiya & the Grand Mosque. Before I went to Kuwait I had always wanted to buy a scarf with a particular pattern. The scarf was worn by director Kathryn Bigelow when she was shooting *The Hurt Locker* in Jordan. Though her recent films *The Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty* are not exactly the Middle East-friendly type of movies, seeing a woman putting on traditional male attire, directing a war film in a region where women's role is still somewhat limited, is just exhilarating and inspiring. I was so pleased to find the same type of scarf as soon as I entered the souk.



Speaking of female directors in the Middle East, I should mention Haifaa Al-Mansour who made *Wadjda* in 2012. She is the first Saudi woman to direct a feature length film. Because of the restriction placed on women in Saudi Arabia, she was not allowed to interact with her male crew in public. During the shoot she would sit in a van parked nearby and watched the scene through a monitor while giving instructions via walkie-talkie. It was hard to believe when I learned about this.

Of course, public interaction between non-related male and female in Kuwait is not forbidden, but it is also not common. The male and female division is clear. Male faculty would lead the boys and female faculty led us. Boys and girls sit separately in classrooms and in the library, and they barely interact on campus as well. This leads us into wondering how people can really understand the opposite sex when there is so little contact between men and women. We asked about their ‘dating process.’ The official explanation is very formal and involves parents from the beginning. No one, except one person who is married, talks about her romantic story. I had the impression that even though dating without parents’ knowledge isn’t non-existent, showing affection in the public or talking about underground relationships still will be condemned to various degrees.

Let us return to the attractions. The Grand Mosque is another fascinating place. While Abu Dhabi’s Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque which I visited last year has a



grandiose façade, The Grand Mosque reminds me of Scandinavian architecture: subtle exterior with an exquisite inner beauty. We were lucky to witness the preparation of a Quran recital competition. All the children sat

solemnly with nervous faces. I can see how much they valued the competition. It was the true testimony of how important Quran is in their life.

In addition, Dean of Business Administration, Dr. Jasem Al Mudhaf was so kind to invite us to his chalet, where we spent a wonderful evening enjoying boat ride, BBQ, singing, dancing, and playing with his grandchildren. Our photographer and videographer Ali took the initiative to show us around Souk Al-Mubarakiya and the Heritage Village, where we walk into traditions and marveled at its history. On the last day we had a hearty breakfast in Esraa's place with Miriam. In the afternoon Muneera offered us a makeup tutorial that ended our last day beautifully. A big thank you also goes to Dalal and Lulu, who gave us an amazing tour around the Kuwait City.

Chapter 3 | Bits and Pieces

I would like to make this section into bullet points, to document some thoughts that are more difficult to incorporate into other paragraphs.

- ♦ Food etiquette in Arabic culture is very different from Taiwan's when it comes to offering food to people. In Kuwait when someone offers you food, it is considered impolite not to take it. If it is the case with Arabic coffee, you should at least drink the first round and shake the cup sideways if you no longer wish to have more. This is very different from Taiwan's etiquette. We sometimes turn down people's offer of food by saying, "I'm good" or "I'm full", as a polite gesture of not taking too much from other people.
- ♦ The staff in our dormitory cafeteria is all from Indonesia. One of them told me that she only goes home to her children once every two years. We also learned from the boys that their dormitory guard earns only 6500 NTD a month. Although they are already paid much better than they would have in their countries, but it is still difficult to see such a huge gap between the locals and the

expats.

- ♦ I used to be religious as a child but not anymore. So I always believe that being religious or not is an entirely personal choice. So when it becomes like a ‘national movement’ in the Middle East where everyone is a Muslim, it puzzles me how everyone would all agree on and believe the same thing. But perhaps the whole phenomenon can be compared to economy systems, such as capitalism or socialism. It is a way of life. We may all be capitalists even without knowing it.
- ♦ Last year I had a conversation with one of the KU administrators who came to Taiwan in March. I asked her about how the hijab works. She said that everyone can decide whether to wear it or not, but usually the female members of the family would encourage the girl to wear it. She said it is best for the girl to wear it as early as possible, or it will be really difficult if she starts wearing hijab when going to mixed school. One of the KU staff in this trip told us that she started wearing hijab only four years ago. She did not say why, but she does not like it. This leads to another question I’ve always been curious about. If certain aspects of your faith become an inconvenience or even obstacle to a life you want to pursue, what is the reason of holding on to something that does not show you the way but instead standing in the way? Does wearing a hijab take away one’s freedom of how to dress herself? Or is it an ultimate testament of her devotion to God? I would very much like to know each person’s thoughts, but it is a very sensitive subject and it was difficult to go deeper given the time and relationship we had.
- ♦ Same applies to gay issue. I understand that gendered behavior in the Middle East may not conform to western expectation, such as men holding hands in public is considered merely a gesture of friendship. But how do they see their tradition and religion when it is confronted with other parts of the world? The

Islamic society is so interesting in a way that its differences constantly generate ideological conflicts in my mind. I am curious how much do they actually feel oppressed, if at all? Or is it in fact we THINK they are oppressed because we apply the western standards on them? It is the one question that I would be so eager, but probably will take a long time, to find out.

Epilogue | As We Go On

As the journey ends, I cannot leave without thanking people involved. My biggest gratitude goes to National Taiwan University and Kuwait University that made everything possible. I would like to thank Chun-Tai Shih for the tremendous effort he put in. He pulled everything together and without him there would not be a team. I would also like to thank first secretary of the Taiwan Representative Office Mr. Saeed Lee, Ambassador Timothy Hsiang, Professor Luisa Chang, Professor Cheryl Chen, Professor Jyh-Ping Hsu, and Linda Chang for your guidance.

Great appreciation goes to our Kuwaiti friends: Esraa Alsabti, Mariam Aljeean, Muneera J. Al-Mudhaf, Mohammed S. Alejayan, Ali Dashti, Sarah Al Shawaf, Dalal Al-Sanea and Lulwa Alkhattaf. I have always felt that a journey without meeting people on the road is like a compass without pointing at any direction. Thank you so much for your hospitality.

I would also like to thank my fellow delegates. DoJohn Chang, whom I had the pleasure to work twice with in school film festival and graduation prom, is an exceptional team leader. Amy Su is the sweetest girl on the team, who is always so caring and supportive and makes everyone smile. I also loved it when she chose to wear both an abaya and a niqab when we landed in Taoyuan Airport, showing the beauty of Islamic culture is a way we hardly get the chance to see in Taiwan.

Teddy Chen is probably one of the most interesting people I've met. People

never stop laughing as long as he is present. His endless curiosity and ways of approaching things also inspires me to be the same. Allen Sheng, who originally nicknamed “Winnie the Pooh” has found his new identity: “The Pope.” Our Pope is an incredibly talented calligrapher, who we always turn to when there is Chinese writing involved. We marveled at his work just as much as the Kuwaiti people did.

Sandy Lin is such a beautiful girl inside and out. Few years ago we visited Beijing together in an exchange held by the Student Activity Division, and I feel so lucky to see the world with her again. Everything becomes a poem through her eyes, her painting and her photographs. Jun Chen, the president of the student association, is one of the strongest and fearless girls I’ve known. I am sure she will be the Sheryl Sandberg in any field she desires. So generous and cheerful, she is the type of person you would love to keep company with.

Sarra A. Al-Shaour, or Princess Sarra, is our lovely guide to the Middle East. The trip would not have been complete without her telling us so much about the way of life here. I would also like to particularly thank her for acting as a translator and mediator in many occasions. Abby fu is the perfect roommate everyone wants to have. She is so kind and fun to talk with. Almost every meal we sat in the cafeteria together and chatted away about our impression and reflection of things we encountered. I enjoyed our conversations so much!

Yu-Min Lin is a relatively quiet person and I didn’t get to know him much. But I would like to thank him for recording a short clip on the first day as I was interviewed by Kuwait University. Sam Hsu is no doubt a fashion icon. He can sport what Luisa claimed to be what she wore twenty years ago and still nailed it. And the fact that he chose “和尚端湯上塔，塔滑湯灑湯燙塔” to teach one of our Kuwaiti friends showed just a fraction of his unique approach to the whole exchange experience. Vic Chiang and I have quite a few things in common. We both come from foreign languages and

literatures background, and we both did an exchange year in Sweden. He would like to see how the Islamic society views homosexuality, and that is the issue I am very interested in as well.

I feel so fortunate to be a part of this, to be able to see and feel so much. I'll miss all the crazy selfies, the delicious food that we couldn't stop stuffing into our mouths, our secret survival code 63777... and of course, all the interesting conversations I had with both people from Kuwait and Taiwan. I can't say how much I enjoyed this ride. Thank you all!





KUWAIT

2015 November

Words & Photography - Man-chuan Lin

A Journey To Kuwait - 11/20-28 (text file with photos)

“Conversely, the absolute absence of a burden causes man to be lighter than air, to soar into the heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movement as free as they are insignificant.” — Milan Kundera



I was listening to the last movement of Mahler's Symphony No.3, as I read through those words from Kundera. "If eternal return is the heaviest of burdens, then our lives can stand out against it in all their splendid lightness." the words hit me with the concept that every journey is worth recorded as they are the one and only.

With the symphony started to rise high with the strings and the horns, the timpani began to add on strong drum rolls and my body felt extremely lighter than ever, as if I am going to do a free-fall from high above. I realized that it is now or never to put my thought together for the days i spent in Kuwait.



Flying over Persian Gulf

As the wheels of air plane left the ground and soared into the sky, I felt air ran through the wings and carried the entire air craft up to the sky as if we were flying on an animal.

It seems unreal to me that even every single of my cells and nerves were fully awaken due to the excitement of going to the middle east for the first time. Hovering over Persian Gulf was a magical moment. The landscape seemed like sand piles scattered into the ocean, merging with blue water body and forming a breath-taking scenery, like a water color painting.



The Kuwait Bay

The afternoon that we arrived was truly sunny. It was rather quiet and the sun was soft as silk lingering on the skin. The weather in the late November was being very kind to us.

After 30 minutes of walking, we came to a beach named Suwaikh. We slowly approached to the pier and sit for a while. The skyline of Kuwait city was drawn between the sky and the ocean, as if there was a line of camels passing through the dessert.



The Dessert

It was another sunny day as usual. The destination was two hours away by car. The fact that we slowly approaching to the dessert is a rather romantic idea to me. Being in the middle of the dessert I somehow felt calm instead of panic. Being on a vast land is like one learning to be alone, there is no objects to lean on nor voice to listen to, only the wind.

The camels were taller than I thought and lighter when they ran. As they ran into the horizontal line, they got smaller and smaller till vanished beneath the sky.

The Dessert

2015 November



On The Road

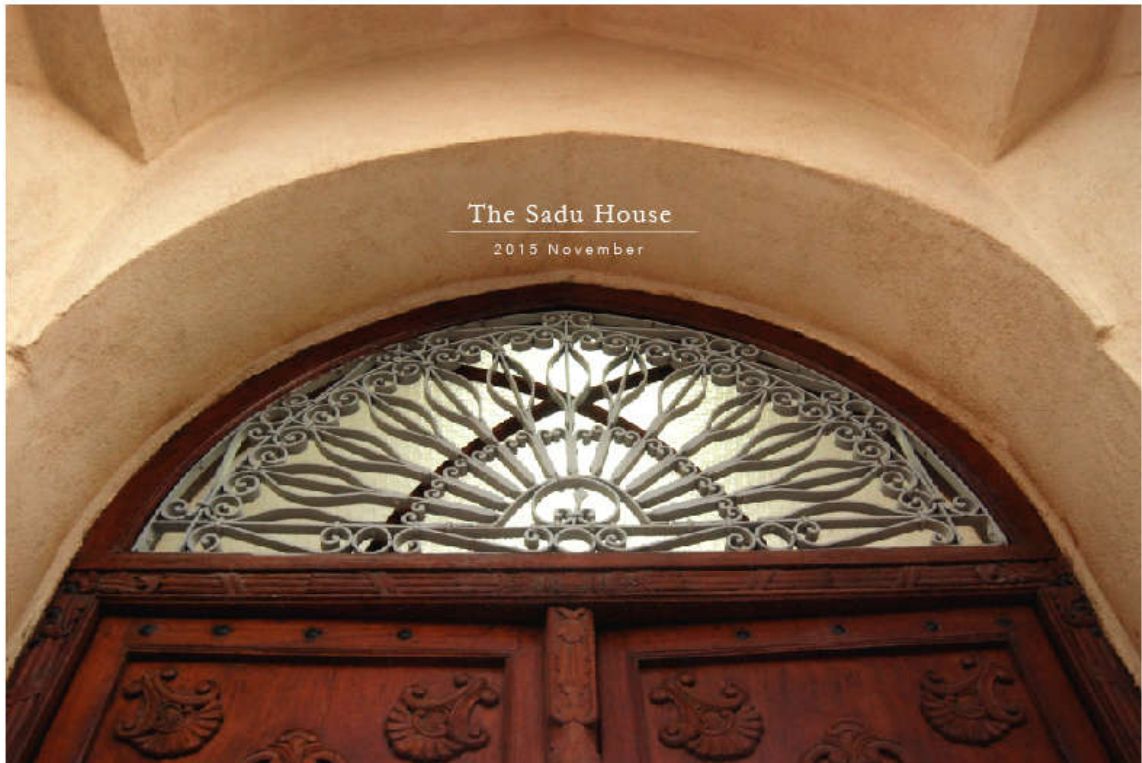
On the way back to downtown, I couldn't help but looking out from the window for the entire way. Exotic music was played by the bus driver as we driving away from the desert. In Arabic rhythm, the scenic drifted away like a film movie in the old days. Though time to the universe is simply nothing, the thought that we were once on this soil was already a precious memory to me.



SOUK AL JUMMA

The Friday Market - Souk al Jumma

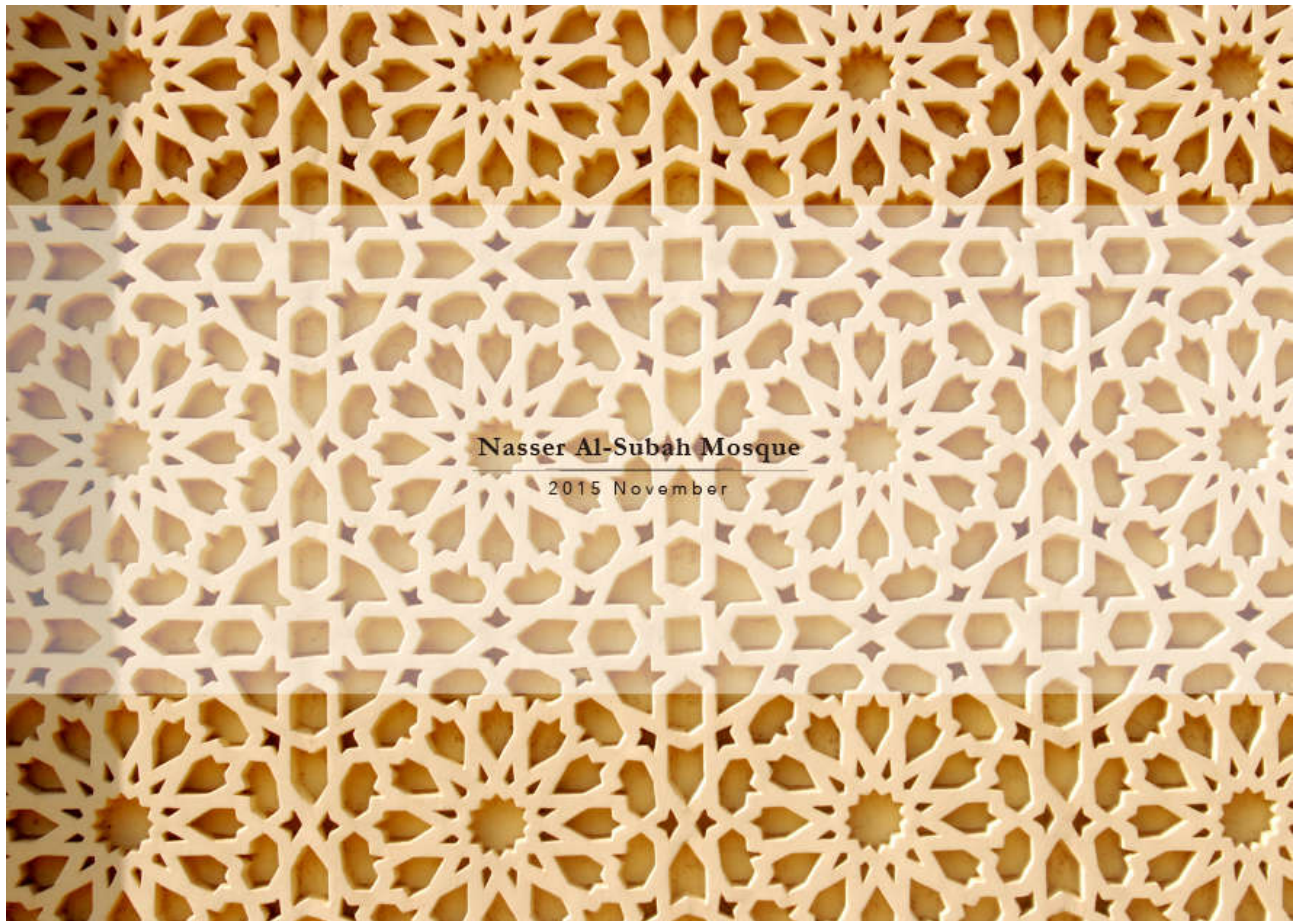
Getting to know a culture from everyday objects, especially used ones, seems pretty interesting to me. From those objects, you could see that time had left not only physical marks on them but gave them some kind of emotional touch. Invisible stories were written inside. Seeing Arabic coffee pots, islam ceramics, Persian carpets surround me, this was a moment that i felt myself both in and out of the place.



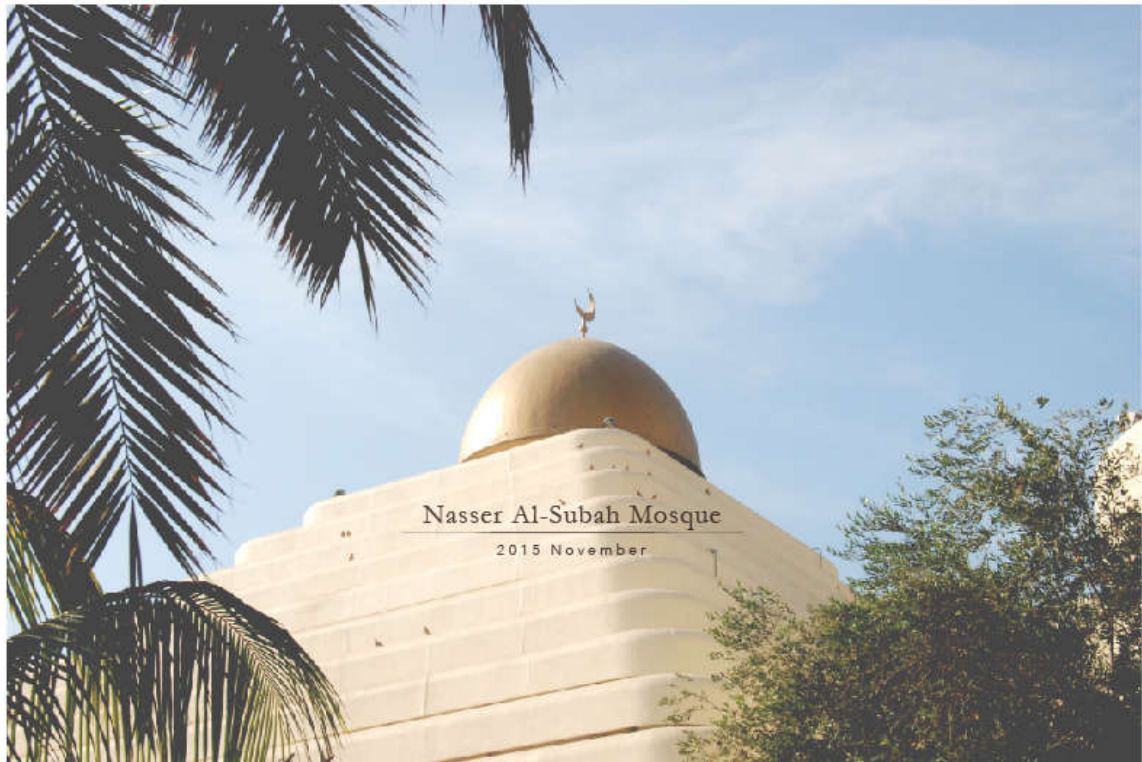
The Sadu House

As we walked into the Sadu house, the architectural decoration caught my full attention. The metal part of the windows were bended to form curvy lines and got transformed into a life-like pattern. And the wooden doors were carved with floral design as well. Those designs were enchanting to me that it was something unique and something I had rarely seen.

Islamic Patterns on Arabic Architecture (Nasser Al-Subah Mosque)



Many Islamic designs are built on squares and circles, typically repeated, overlapped and interlaced to form intricate and complex patterns. On the facade of a mosque, the patterns were like flowers blooming in the desert.



Nasser Al-Subah Mosque

Driving aside by the coastline of Kuwait city, we approached to a pyramid-like building with a golden dome. The architectural structure of the mosque was not like the others that we had seen. The Nasser Al-Subah Mosque was layered up into the sky as if it was a stairs connecting heaven and earth. For the first time to be in an Islam country, I found mosques here solemn but elegant.



Bound with the ba

Kuwait is located on the coastal plain that rings much of the Persian Gulf. Locating between the ocean and dessert, Kuwait was a prosperous trade center for many centuries before the discovery of oil. Thus the bound formed between sea and people must be precious here in Kuwait. Trading on the ocean might not be the main engagement with the people, however, spending time walking, dinning, shopping along the coast is a common thing to do in nowadays.



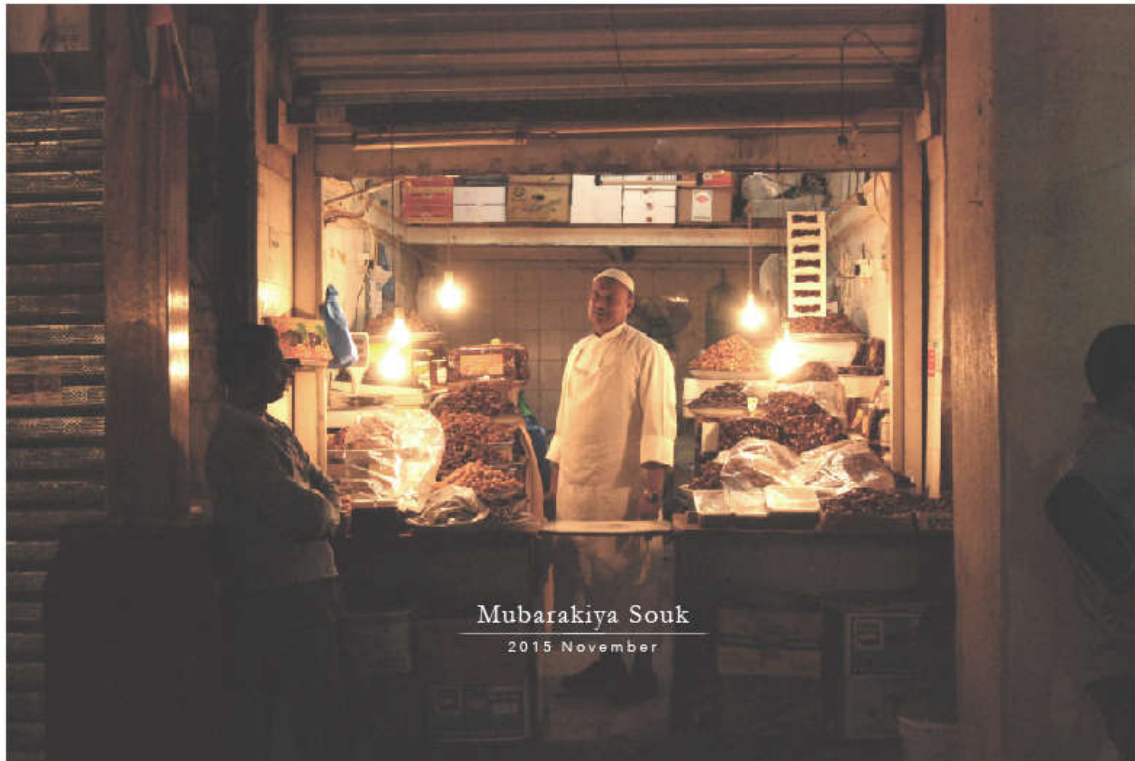
Skyline of Living

I looked down from the sixth floor in a quiet afternoon, overlooking the skyline next to the campus. The Kuwaiti style of living seemed rather slower than the Taiwanese. The speed of everyday living was slowed down to live a more present life. With little observation, you can find the unique style of architecture here in Kuwait. Houses using light colors is to avoid sand blown damages and to blend into the environment as well. The buildings looked like they were grew out of the desert as an organic creature.



The Flying Kites

Power lines sat on the horizon, paralleled to the free way beneath. Even from a distance I could easily see the colorful flying kites dancing in the sky. People gathered here not just to see kites fly, but to have wind blown on their skin, to look up into the sky, and to chase with the rising kites. To be on a vast land is to be on a free land, as if troubles are far away and they had no places to hide.



The Traditional Market - Mubarakiya Souk

A traditional market is always a good place to get to know a certain group of people. From everyday objects to see the way of living seems attractive to me.

Every city has their unique way of existence. Where the old part meets the new part is the most intriguing space to explore. Being inside Mubarakiya Souk, we could still see the existence of surrounding sky scrapers. And the contrast revealed a tension between the old and the new. This is a lively city with metabolism of architectures. After all, trading is an interaction since ancient and interaction that brings people together even closer, it's already a lifestyle.



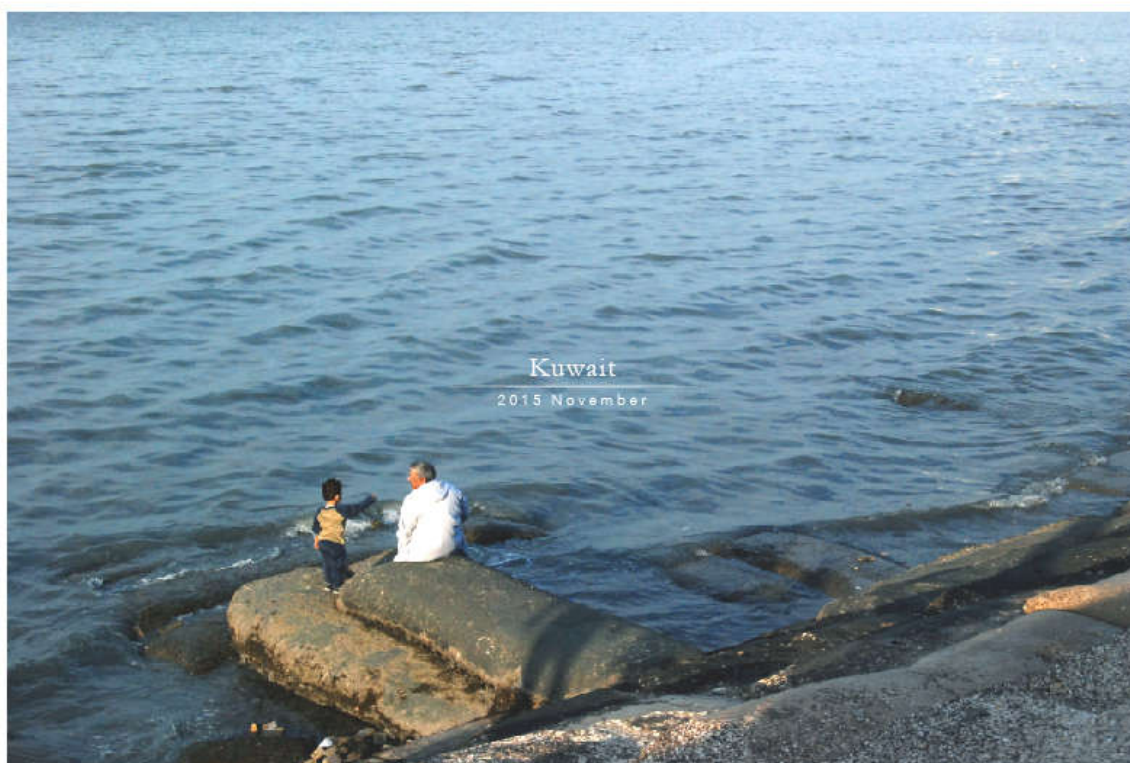
The Boat Ride

Slowly sailing out of the harbor and away from the shore, we looked back at Kuwait city under some precious twilight and found it even more attractive. With colors changing while the sun set, light-spots sparkled upon the sea surface and delivered a magic moment surround us. It seemed like we could bend over and grab a handful of lights. As the wind blowing on my skin and through my hair, I saw this as a good farewell to Kuwait.



The Grand Mosque of Kuwait

It was a full-moon night with the chandelier lighted. Under the dome that carved with the ninety-nine names of Allah, It was very quiet inside the mosque. It's so quiet that I felt everything inside me started to settle down to the places they belong as sediments in a river. There was no sound, no rush, no hustle, but prayers' voice mumbling in a very low tone like an eco going back and forth between valleys.



Inshallah

“Inshallah” in Arabic means as God’s will. What will happen will happen. To me, the people I met and the places I went were destined. To stay present, to commit, to be satisfied, to embrace, to truly love and live with out hesitation. “Inshallah.” as they always say.

As I tried to recall every moment during those days, my heart was gradually filled with satisfaction and sentiment from the love and the warmest welcome of all the Kuwaiti friends I met. It always took me a while to settle down every feeling i had during journeys and to put them into the places they belong. It’s has been a while

since leaving Kuwait, but during those separating days, the memories has been recalled over and over again to carved more deeply into my heart.

Special thanks to everyone contributed their time and efforts to this wonderful journey.

Without you, my eyes wouldn't get to see these places and my heart wouldn't get to feel these love.

2015 NTU Delegation Team for KOU Report

2015/12/14

Mechanical Engineering

Yu-Wei Li (Sarra Al-Shaour)

The stereotypes the Middle East has given others are probably a deserted environment, the rise of petroleum industry, gender inequality and the non-stop political conflicts. Most of those impressions are true. However, Kuwait does not precisely match up with those descriptions. Kuwait is one of the most well developed countries in the world. Not only has Kuwait kept the core of Islamic culture, it has also taken new strategies into its technology and turned Kuwait into a globalized stronghold.

Usually, I am very proud and grateful for the opportunity to have had the experience of living in the Middle East for a third of my life. I only got to learn Arabic after I migrated to Yemen at the age of 12. It was very difficult in the beginning, and I could not adapt to the Islamic culture and conservative living style. Therefore, I had my first cultural shock when I moved to Yemen. Even though Yemen is an Arab country as well, its living standard and political condition is very different from what Kuwait has to offer.

The motive behind my urge to enroll in this visiting program is that I would like to learn about the cultural differences between the Arabian countries, especially on the aspect of how education can affect a country's development. Most Arabs in the Middle East do not have the awareness of the importance of education. Numerous females do not have the opportunity to enter college or have a say on their future career due to the pressure the society has put upon them. However, Kuwait has the tendency of providing the best education system and living standard to its residents.

Moreover, I would like to get to know more about what Kuwaitis do during leisure time. I admire how the ladies in Kuwait seem to be living their lives to the fullest. Yet, since it is an Islamic country, have they faced any obstacles while following their dreams or doing outdoor activities? If so, how did they overcome them throughout the years? How do Kuwaiti girls dress up and follow the latest fashion trend (under Islamic rules or not)? Other than that, since I am a foodie, I love trying new food with new friends, so I wonder if there would be anything different about their food and eating habits. And last but not least, what are the things they desire to do if they had a chance to experience a completely different culture than theirs?

Before I got the interview notice, I was very nervous and worried because I started thinking what if my background is a disadvantage instead of an advantage in this case? And, what if my Arabic-speaking ability is not an outstanding skill since all the Kuwaitis are highly educated and can speak fluent English? During the interview, the interviewer also asked me what if they happened to give this opportunity to other students since I have already been to the Middle East before. I simply replied that not all Arab countries are the same. Especially we all know that Yemen is considered as a developing country, and its people's income is much below the average of other countries. This means that a large group of Yemenis are living in poverty, which Kuwait has not experienced. Besides, I would be able to provide a different viewpoint of this cultural exchange since I have lived in both regions, Taiwan and the Middle East.

When I told some of my non-Arab friends that I was going to Kuwait with the delegation team, they were surprised and said, "Is it safe to go to the Middle East now?" , " Isn't the Middle East plagued with chaos and war?", "Watch out for the bombs and explosions!" I found those reactions interesting. Kuwait is not like the major Arab countries based on the political situation. In fact, Kuwait has not gone

under any conflict for the past decade! So it is generally safe compared to other Arab countries. Furthermore, Kuwait is an Islamic country which prohibits pork, all kinds of alcohols and other items and activities that have been forbidden by the Holy Qura'an. Since I am Muslim as well, I am not unfamiliar with that. For the past four years of my stay in Taiwan, I have realized that Taiwan has such an abundant food variety, but it is not Muslim-friendly because its food culture is so attached to pork, and the number of halal restaurants is not significant, so it takes a lot of effort to maintain a proper Islamic diet.

Our flight took 9 hours to reach Dubai International Airport, and then we had to wait for three hours for transit. The flight was quite pleasant. We did not experience too much turbulence. When we first arrived at Kuwait airport, we did not feel that we have already entered a Middle Eastern country until we walked out of the airport. We arrived at 9:30 in the morning. The climate is quite dry compared to Taiwan. It was hot as the exchange students mentioned to us before we took off. Due to the desert climate, the temperature can vary tremendously between night and day. It is usually hot and sunny during the day, so we often traveled around with our shades on. Kuwait is a Gulf country, so it gets very windy and cool at night. We had to travel with a jacket in case the temperature drops too much. The air was a little stuffy because there was a lot of sand and dust.

After our arrival, the KOU staffs picked us up, and the students were separated into two buses then taken back to the dormitory. In Kuwait, it is not appropriate for male and female to sit together unless they are related or married. And when a male speaks to a female, they would keep some distance from each other based on the teaching of their Islamic culture. Even though Kuwait is such a modern and developed country, they still follow the rules of Islam very well. Some people might say it is a close-minded conduct, but I think Kuwait has shown us one side of its beauty by

preserving its religion deep inside their culture.

The female students' dorm provides their students a very spacious bedroom which has three large closets and drawers, a single bed with mattress and other beddings. Two bedrooms are connected together via a shared bathroom. There were no locks on the doors, so whenever we leave the bedroom, we will have to lock our valuable items into the closet and drawers. I assumed that it is for the convenience of the cleaning staffs to clean the rooms. Then, we had breakfast at the student's diner. The receptionist gave us meal coupons which will be collected by the diner staffs before they give us the meal. The diner staffs are all foreigners from East Asia. Apparently, Kuwait government only pays them NTD6, 000 per month, which is even lower than the basic wage in Taiwan. It is even more heartbreaking when we heard that they only got to return to their country and visit their family once in three years.

This time we did not have the opportunity to try traditional Kuwaiti food, but we tried some Lebanese and Turkish food. The first night after our arrival, the delegation team and some Taiwanese exchange students were invited to a dinner by Mr. Hsiang, Ambassador of Taiwan Representative Office in Kuwait. It was a Turkish restaurant, we had Lebanese food such as Tabbouleh, Grape leaf rolls, Jerjer leaves salad, mixed grill, Labneh and Hummus, served with pita bread. We also had some Turkish desserts such as Muhalabiyah, served with Tea or coffee with many varieties.

Next day, we went to Shuwaikh Campus to visit the BA College of KOU. The buildings were massive and well-constructed with modern designs. We got to meet the Dean of BA College Dr. Jassem Al-Mudhaf. He also invited us to spend time and have dinner at his chalet (beach house) in Bnaider. He was very kind to take all of us on a boat tour around the coast. (I still cannot believe how wealthy Kuwaitis are!) On the same day we visited the BA College, we also met the President of The Gifted Students Club. This club only consists of 20 students of BA College, and only the top students

can join the club, which is probably a method to encourage the students to study harder.

Kuwait University encourages its students to develop different potentials and skills. Besides that, they provide them a broader international view. They provide many scholarships to International students, and encourage female students to study dentistry and engineering. It was very surprising that 75% of the students in the Department of Engineering and Petroleum were female. The Dean of the College explained that because most of the male Kuwaiti students tend to finish their studies abroad such as the United States of America, Canada, or other European countries. Furthermore, He said their engineering students can work as project supervisors, consulting engineers, researchers, project managers...etc. Therefore, it is not uncommon in Kuwait to see female engineers to work at a construction site, either. On the contrary, the number of male students still surpasses the number of female students in NTU engineering departments by 90%.

Similar to Taiwan's College preferences, College of Dentistry is the highest rank of all colleges besides College of Medicine and College of Engineering and Petroleum. Each year only 20 students will be accepted in this college, and each student has their own dental workshop provided with two Dental Assistances. Kuwaiti students are mostly accepted in order to ensure their rights and interests before other nationalities.

On our last day in Kuwait, we had a very packed schedule. First, we went to Esraa's house to have breakfast. I was blown away by the magnificence of her house, and the lovely stories Munira told us about her family. Then, Dalal and Lulu took us on a road trip and boat tour around Kuwait City. We did not get to enter the Kuwait Tower because it has been under maintenance for the past couple of years and still counting. I will have to admit that I was kind of disappointed.

Even though I have lived in the Middle East before, Kuwait has impressed me on

so many aspects. Kuwait is a very wealthy country, economical-wise and cultural-wise. Its people receive better government benefits than most of the European countries that value social welfare. They are not demanded to work since their government will provide them their needs including their residence. Each year's National day, the government will give away KD1, 000 (About NTD 100,000) to every citizen. Kuwaitis are provided with health insurance, and they also receive great medical care. The cost of gasoline is unbelievably low, so are the car prices. Therefore, Every Kuwaiti family has more than one car. In fact, some said every Kuwaiti has his/her own car! Some might think Arab girls are always restricted and aren't allowed to go anywhere. However, a good example is, once Kuwaiti girls get their driving license at the age of 18, they are allowed to drive on their own to college, work, malls and any other places. And Most of their car types are 4x4 such as Jeep, Land cruiser, Range Rover...etc. which is not widespread in Taiwan.

Most of the Kuwaiti girls love to dress up every day as if they were going to a fashion show. Kuwaiti girls are very friendly and outgoing. During their leisure time, other than doing some shopping at the mall or having afternoon teas with their friends, some of them would participate in professional horse-riding competitions, travel around the world and experience different cultures, enroll in youth volunteer forum, own a personal fashion line, have a Youtube channel or even work part-time as a professional photographer. They had shown me so much ambition and aspiration than I have ever imagined of ordinary Arab girls.

Finally, I would like to thank the following members for their kind hospitality and great company. They made us feel so welcomed, showed us so much love and kindness, and given us their time and patience to introduce us details of KOU and Kuwait City:

Dr. Husain Al-Ansary, President of KOU

Dr. Jassem Al-Mudhaf, Dean of Business Administration College of KOU

Dr. Abdulraheem Deyab, President of KOU Student Affairs Office

Dr. Husain Al-Khaiat, Dean of Engineering and Petroleum College

Dr. Fawaz Al-Enezy, Dean of Computer College of KOU

Mr. Hsiang, Ambassador of Taiwan Representative Office in Kuwait

Mr. Saeed Lee, Vice Counsel of Taiwan Representative Office in Kuwait

Mr. Mohammed Al-ejayan, Ms. Mariam Al-jeean, Ms. Esraa Al-sabti, Ms. Munira Al-Mudhaf (Staff members of KOU)

Ms. Sara Al-shawaf, Ms. Lulu Al-khattaf, Mr. Ali Dashti (Undergraduates of KOU)

Ms. Dalal Al-Sanea (Graduate Student of KOU)

Furthermore, special thanks to the following members for all the time and effort they have put into this cultural exchange trip. If it weren't them, I believe we would not have had such a pleasant trip:

Ms. Shu-Ying Chang, Vice President for NTU International Affairs Office

Ms. Chia-Hui Chen, Deputy Vice President of NTU Student Affairs Office

Mr. Jyh-Ping Hsu, Professor of NTU Chemical Engineering department

Mr. Chun-Tai Shi, Manager of Student Affairs Office

Ms. Che-Wei Chang, Director of Global Alliances of International Affairs Office

Also, many thanks the following members of the crew, the other 11 members of NTU delegation team. Not only have they shown me a new point of view of NTU students (with full extent of surprises and astonishments), but they have also given me a great opportunity to share with them this wonderful experience together:

Mr. Che-Wei Chang

Ms. Kai-Yu Song

Mr. Chun-Shan Hsu

Ms. I-An Su

Mr. Yao-Yu Chiang

Ms. Hsuan-Chu Chen

Mr. Kuang-Ming Shang

Ms. Man-Chuan Lin

Mr. Tai-Hsiang Chen

Ms. Hsin-Pei Fu

Mr. Yu-Min Lin

2nd NTU - KU, 2015.11.20-29

Su I An

Part 1. Kuwait University

Kuwait University (KU) is similar to National Taiwan University (NTU) in many ways: beautiful campus, good reputation, and best students / professors / faculties in the country. We have visited three of KU's four campus: Shuwaikh Campus, Khaldiya Campus, & Keifan Campus. All three campuses shared same features: grandiose



department buildings, spacious campus area, and pleasant learning environment.

(Shuwaikh Campus of Kuwait University)

Before my visit to KU, I imagined the appearance of KU must differ tremendously from that of NTU. And I was totally wrong.

My first good impression on KU was the day when we visited the Dean of the College of Business Administration (BA). Dr. Jassem Al Mudhaf was a friendly and enthusiastic person. He showed us the BA college – energetic, international, and multi-dimensional. Through his speech and a half-hour inside-the-college tour, I

found that students in BA are actively involved in both academic and extracurricular activities. Posters about various kinds of activities were posted: exchange programs,



interdisciplinary classes, cross-club competitions, and off-campus internship opportunities. I remembered the Dr. Mudhaf mentioned that he tried hard to connect BA students with all possible resources. Therefore, BA students are encouraged to pursue their dreams, with full support from the college.

(Our meeting with Dr. Jassem Al Mudhaf, Dean of the College of BA)

My second positive impression on KU came from the talk with Dr. Husain al Ansary, principal of KU. We were treated nicely in a sophisticatedly-decorated meeting room with Dr. Ansary. He politely asked twelve of us to introduce ourselves and he took notes attentively during our self-introductions. I was very surprised by Dr. Ansary's respectfulness and vision when he replied seriously about my self-introduction. After I shared my interdisciplinary experiences in law



(undergraduate) and psychology (graduate), he kindly said that he wanted to share my experience with the Dean of Law School of KU. He was sincere to learn new experiences from newcomers and guests. I think his learning attitude was very humble and I was very touched. I think him as a good leader with vision.

(Our meeting with Dr. Husain al Ansary, principal of Kuwait University)

My third nice impression on KU originated from our meeting with Prof. Husain Al-Khalat, Dean of College of Engineer and Petroleum. He invited us to have a Q/A session with him in the ground floor of their college building. We were welcomed to ask all questions. I was surprised to learn some interesting facts: (1) Engineers enjoy high prestige in Kuwait, no matter what your sub-domain is. No difference between a civil engineer or a petroleum engineer. (2) Female engineering students outperformed than their male counterparts. And there are approximately even numbers of both male and female students in the college. (3) Engineering students enjoy fruitful interdisciplinary programs, including general teaching programs, and cross-college programs such as law classes. Prof. Al-Khalat also mentioned that they are now learning new techniques which are not related to petroleum engineering. Because they know that one day they will run out of petroleum, they need to be prepared for a brand new way of living. For example, seawater desalination is one of the major problems they are working on. And they may start cooperating with other countries for food supply problems since Kuwait is in the desert area.



(Our meeting with Prof. Husain Al-Khalat, Dean of College of Engineer and Petroleum)

My forth delightful impression on KU came from out visit to KU's dental clinic. I was stunned by the clinic's environment – clean, accommodating, and comfortable. KU's dental department, ranked as students' top priority in Kuwait (even ranked higher than medical department), only recruit 20-30 students per year. Therefore, the best students deserve the best resources. These dental students enjoy a luxurious learning environment. Each student has their internship in KU's dental clinic with their own two assistants' help. They have the lowest student/faculty ratio (0.5-1). They don't have to worry about their tuition and health-insurance-related issues because it's all free in Kuwait. And students have a whole team to do their back-scene jobs such as hygiene clearing works. They are paid well, have regular working schedules, and have satisfying living quality when they are dentists.



(Dental clinic of Kuwait University)

My fifth enchanted impression on KU was when we had a meeting with Professor. Dr. Pierr Morro, chairperson of the pharmacy department. This meeting gave me a glimpse of Kuwait's medical system. On one hand, Kuwait has a better medical working system than Taiwan. Because the country is wealthy, Kuwaiti citizens enjoy free medical cares. They don't need to worry about economic issues. Kuwaiti government offers medical services not only to Kuwaitis but also to citizens from neighboring countries and foreign workers/labors (though not free). Doctors and other professions who work in the medical system have better living and working quality than those in Taiwan. As the medical pioneer in the Gulf countries, Kuwait offer medical teaching program to countries in need. Students and doctors participate in and learn from these international teaching programs and bring back knowledge to schools and hospitals. On the other hand, I think Taiwan's medical students and doctors are comparatively more active and have more learning motives. Because Kuwaiti life style is relatively less competitive and hustle-and bustle than Taiwan's, Kuwaiti youngsters are less academic-oriented and less achievement-oriented. Medical students and doctors in Kuwait seem to be less diligent than Taiwan's.

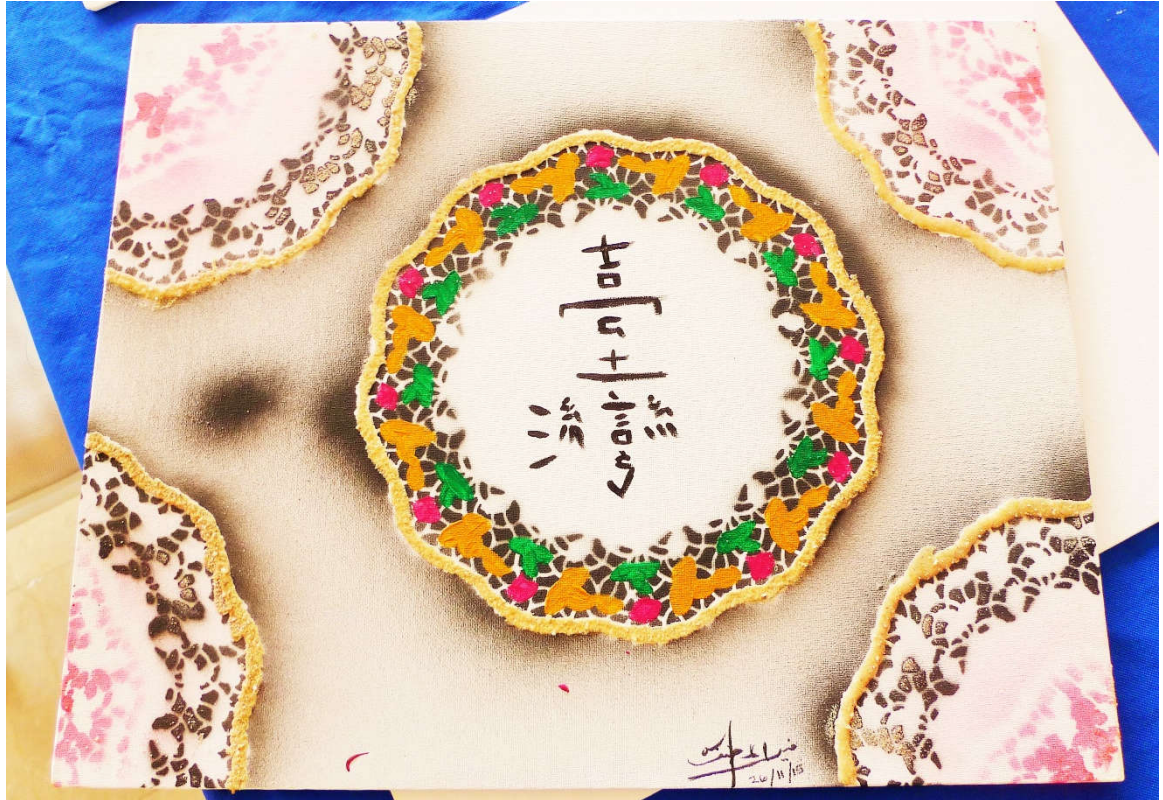


(Our meeting with Dr. Pieer Morro, chairperson of the pharmacy department)

My overall impression on Kuwait University was pretty nice. We were treated friendly and comfortably. Faculties and students are more than welcome to answer our questions and tour-guided us. Some of my prejudices were broken during the KU visit. And I want to discuss two of my discoveries:

First, the gender-inequality issue. Explicitly, I noticed that female students' dressing styles ranged greatly. Most (I think over half) female students were dressed with their beautiful head-coverings (hijab) and with all-kinds of clothing (mostly long-sleeved). Some female students dressed in traditional Islamic clothing (burqa) without their masks. Rare female students were dressed in both traditional Islamic clothing (burqa) and with their masks (niqab). Few female students were dressed exactly like us – free style, even with short-sleeved T-shirts. According to female students in KU, compare to other Islamic countries, though Kuwaiti women observe Islamic rules, they enjoy a broad range of flexibility of their clothing, and other crucial living rights, such as: obligated education, freedom of movement, and freedom of driving. Female students are not bounded by their gender. They are encouraged to become engineers, dentists, doctors, CEOs, even diplomats of Kuwait. We met a girl

from BA College's honor club – a club which only recruits the best 12 students of BA College. She was very proud to introduce her experience in the club (their super strict selection criterion!) and her experience in the college. I didn't see and hear any gender



bias experience from her, nor from other Kuwaitis. It seemed that gender inequality issue is not now an issue for KU's female students.

(A painting by staff of student affairs of Kuwait University in a cultural painting workshop)

Second is the minority group issue, including the Bedouins, foreigners, LGBTQ students, and married students. For the Bedouins, national policies seem to be nice to them. Similar to Taiwan's aboriginal-related policies, Bedouins are privileged in some ways to be protected. For example, their traditional living styles are encouraged to be preserved. Bedouins students are encouraged to enter top universities in Kuwait by some preferential policies. Foreigners are well-treated by KU and Kuwaiti government as well. For example, there are now (2015-2016) almost 20 Taiwanese

exchange students in Kuwait. Because Kuwaiti government are now promoting international exchange programs among students, foreign students were offered scholarship (tuition, accommodation, foods, allowances all included). English-lecturing classes are offered to long-term students (not for exchange students). As for the married students, unlike Taiwan, there's a higher percentage of married students in KU. Though most female students are encouraged to get married after their undergraduate/college degree, some female students are married during or before their undergraduate/college degree. So there are a certain degree of drop rate among female students in KU. It's a matter of rejoice that married students are not discriminated in KU. Last but not least are the LGBTQ students, they are not allowed to walk out of the closets neither in KU nor in Kuwait. Since Quran forbids LGBTQ behaviors/groups, LGBTQ students/groups are not allowed to disclose their sexual-orientations or they're even deemed nonexistent. A KU student told us that now the society are more tolerant to LGBTQ groups. A person seems to be okay to reveal his/her sexual-orientation (little secret) to his/her friends/families. But still, to public is unallowable, unimaginable, and unforgivable.

From my perspective, KU seems to be a free and open-minded university to me.



The leaders (the principal, the deans, and the chairperson) we met were happy to take our questions and advices. I think KU is now eager to learn and borrow experiences from top universities and is eager to be one. Due to many differences between KU & NTU (i.e., locations, climates, natural resources, values, specialties, knowledge domains, cultures, cultural circles) that each other can learn from and exchange from, I think it's necessary and beneficial for both KU & NTU to keep on this valuable academic relationship and friendship.

(NTU delegation team and KU hosting staff/students in National Bank of
Kuwait)

Part 2. Beyond Kuwait University

Needless to say, Kuwait and Taiwan are two very different countries. The representative color of Kuwait is yellow (the desert) and blue (the sky, the sea), the representative color of Taiwan is green (the forests) and blue (the sea). Kuwait is an Islamic country; and Taiwanese believe in multiple religious systems. However, Kuwait and Taiwan are very alike also. Kuwait is one of the smallest but richest countries in the Gulf area. It's tightly connected to its threatening neighbor – Iraq. Because of petroleum, it turned from a mini fishing state to one of the most significant petroleum exporting countries. Taiwan, an island located in the middle of the most populated East-Asian area. Surrounded by sea, Taiwan is rich in natural resources but is lack of petroleum so is highly depending on Kuwait's supply. Taiwan used to be a farming and light industrial country, but now that Taiwan is famous for its high-tech industries. Taiwan is in a complicated relationship with its biggest political threats – China.



(Camels in the desert)

It was interesting that when we visited Kuwait National Museum, showing traditional Kuwaiti lives and daily commodities, some of Taiwanese professors discovered that traditional Kuwaiti lives were very similar to Taiwan's. But after petroleum was discovered, Kuwaiti's lives were dramatically changed. Exporting petroleum makes Kuwait one of the most prosperous countries in the world. Kuwaiti government established one of the best public welfare systems in the world: All education in Kuwait is free. Medical cares in Kuwait are free. After students graduate from college, they got free funds even assigned jobs from Kuwait government. However, when I asked some Kuwaiti students/school staffs that what their life goals/dreams are, they seldom think about it, or they seldom think about it seriously. Only one girl said that she wanted to be a diplomat in the near future. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, I think though Kuwaiti's are satisfied in their biological, safety, love/belonging, and self-esteem needs, they rarely think about their own self-actualizations. Female students/staffs love fashion, food, and make-ups. Their value highly emphasizes/depends on their families – mostly their families are

big. Most Kuwaitis are family-oriented, collectivism, prosocial people. They love their families. Their familial lives compose a major part of their lives. But they are not selfish at all. During our visits, they treated us like sisters and brothers. Some of them even shared the deepest secrets with us. They are kind, simple, innocent, and optimistic people to me. I've never seen a rich country's people like this.

(Date palm seller in the market)

Another point I wanted to mention is the war. Both Kuwait and Taiwan are countries devastated by wars. However, I saw both countries' resilience recovered from the wars. When we visited the National Bank of Kuwait, we could sense the

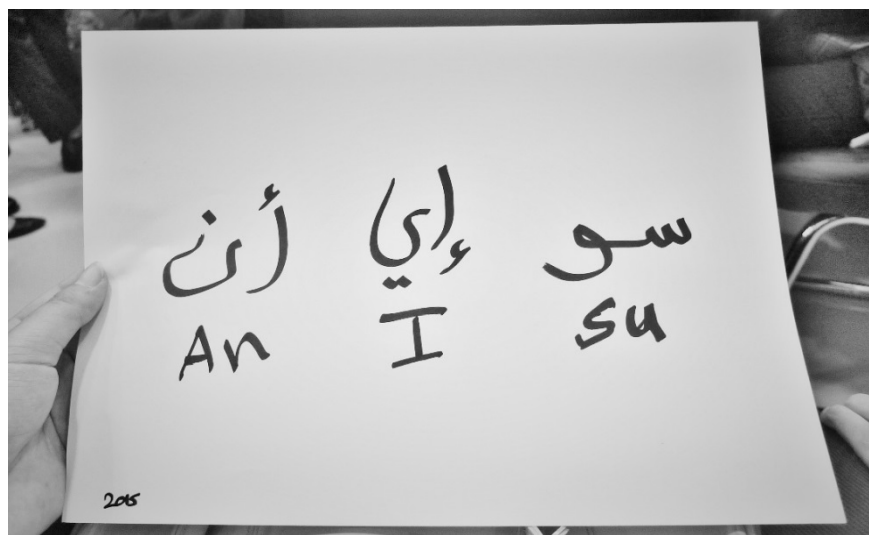


negative effects of the Gulf Wars on Kuwait. The bad times of the wars were vividly replayed in front of us. But I rarely heard Kuwaitis talked out the wars even during our Q/A sessions. For two decades, historic wounds passed over for them. Kuwait seems to be a small but strong country to me.

I saw, heard, learned, and experienced significantly during this Kuwaiti delegation trip. To me, Kuwait and Kuwaiti people I know are home-like and family-like. Kuwait is warm (literally!) and sweet (literally!) to me. Before my visit to Kuwait, I knew nothing about Kuwait, Kuwaiti culture, and knew only a little about

the Islamic culture. Ignorance breeds misunderstanding, contempt, and indifference. I'm glad I can know more about the missing/neglected (Islamic/Arabic/Kuwaiti) world in my life map. After I came back from Kuwait, I noticed more about Islamic/Middle-East-related news/culture unconsciously. I can tell the details of geographic knowledge of the Arabic Peninsula. Even I can defend for Islamic cultures when having conversation about terrorism/IS with family and friends. Though this is only the start, it's so important for me that I'm finally getting to know/learn/sense/care for this country/culture/area/history. Thanks for giving me the chance to be the delegate to visit KU. I am willing to share my discoveries before/during/after the visit. My acknowledgments goes to my dearest eleven NTU delegates (Girls: Veronika Song, Sandy Lin, Sarra Li, Abby Fu, & Jun Chen; Boys: Vic Chiang, Allen Shang, Teddy Chen, DoJohn Chang, Yu-Min Lin, & Sam Hsu), professors who came with us (Prof. Chang, Shu-Ying (Luisa), Prof. Hsu, Jyh-Ping, & Prof. Chen, Chia-Hui (Cheryl)), my newly-met Kuwaiti friends (Girls: Mariam Aljeean, Lulwa Alkhattaf (Lulu), Sarah(?), Munirah(?), Esraa Alsabti, Dalal Al-Sanea; Boys: Ali Dashti, Mohammed S. Alejayan), & dear people who facilitated this visit (Bless Shih, Linda Chang, Saeed Lee and his wife, and so many people). If this Kuwaiti trip is a dream, then I wish I will never wake up.

2015.12.14 Su I An @ Taipei



KUWAIT VISIT PERSONAL REFLECTION

Abby Fu B01302243

The Middle East is a mysterious, unfamiliar region of the world, mainly because it seems so distant from our everyday lives in Taiwan. It is also a region that's closely watched and hotly debated by the rest of the world, but I think it's because not many people have had the chance to really get to know it from perspectives other than the media. (And we can all imagine how biased or inaccurate the media can be). It was only when I studied the country of Kuwait in a semester-long project in my "Globalization 101" elective course last semester did I become intrigued with the country and this region. For example, you may have thought that the country that uses Twitter the most would be some English-speaking developed country located in Europe or the Americas, but it's actually Kuwait. It was through this project that I started to become interested in Kuwait, and had the idea of applying for this visit as a part of the student delegation of NTU.

It is hard to think of any striking similarities between Taiwan and Kuwait at first, because our geographic environment, culture, history, religion, form of government and politics, and lifestyles seems to be completely different. Taiwan's blessed with very diverse natural environments and plentiful rain while Kuwait is made up of mainly desert and seldom rains. Even though we're technically on the same continent (Asia), the culture of West Asia and East Asia are not alike. To my surprise, I found that Kuwait and Taiwan actually have numerous similarities during this trip. Despite the two countries' small size, the people are full of enthusiasm and hospitality. Everywhere we went, we were received with genuine smiles and kindness! Our new

Kuwaiti friends welcomed us into their school and home like long-time friends, and it was really heartwarming to me that they opened up to us in a short period of a week.

Another thing that I discovered Taiwan and Kuwait had in common is its history and current relations with one of its neighboring countries. I'd like to think that Iraq is to Kuwait almost like what China means for Taiwan. My impression of Kuwait's relations with Iraq was that the Kuwaiti people were weary of this particular neighbor, mainly because of the destruction and chaos brought by the Iraqi Invasion in 1991. From our visit to the Othman House museum to the museum of the National Kuwait Bank, we saw many footages and heard many stories concerning the invasion in 1991, and it was clear that the Kuwaiti people did not easily forget the violent event. We cannot imagine what it was like during the invasion. My classmate Yen-Ting, who's currently exchanging in Kuwait University, told me that some of the roads and highways in Kuwait are still under construction because almost everything was destroyed in the 1991 invasion. Up until 2004, Iraq still claimed historic rights to Kuwait. For Taiwan, this scenario does not sound unfamiliar; even to this day, China is still looking for opportunities to reclaim Taiwan. The sizes and international status of Iraq and China are huge in comparison to those of Kuwait and Taiwan. There are still many Taiwanese people that are uneasy about the possibility of a future invasion from China.

However, both Taiwan and Kuwait have some "advantages" over their powerful neighbors, and one of them is the extent of freedom we enjoy. On our visit to the Othman House, I questioned one of the Kuwaiti students, Sarah, on the differences between Kuwait and other countries in the region. She replied that, in her opinion, Kuwait is more "open-minded" and enjoy more "freedom" than some countries in the

Middle East, which are more conservative or seemingly stricter on some rules. While writing weekly essays on Kuwait last semester, I have come across many articles and readings that claims Kuwait is perhaps the country in the Middle East that is the most “Westernized” and “free”. Taiwan is also known for its freedom of expression and young democracy. I think that this is a very important and valuable trait, because in this era of globalization, we cannot close our doors to what’s going on outside our borders. Being open-minded and open to diversity and changes will enable us to adapt quickly to the global environment.

This brings me to reflect on the two areas that I had mentioned that I wanted to focus on before the trip: politics and gender. As a student of international relations division of political science, I am fascinated with the political environment of different countries. Like I mentioned above, Kuwait is known for its freedom in the Middle East region. It is thought of as having a “partially democratic authoritarian government”¹, and it is more politically stable than most countries of the region. When I asked some Kuwaitis about their thoughts on politics, they mainly gave very vague answers. It seems that politics is still thought of as a “men’s thing” and not often discussed among women. I did get to meet Lulu, a political science major in Kuwait University who aspires to be a diplomat someday, but unfortunately I did not get much chance to ask her about her opinion on politics and international relations. I had been curious about the extent of Kuwait’s freedom of expression and power of government, because while doing my mid-term report for my class, I had come across some astounding news that some Kuwaitis have been put in jails for Tweets considered to be “insulting the emir”² and “calling for regime change”, “insulting to a

¹ <http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/spring06/eisa/politics.html>

² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22841172>

brotherly country and endangering diplomatic ties” with Saudi Arabia (one of Kuwait’s long-time allies)³. Even though Kuwait is closer to democracy than most countries in the Middle East, it seems as if there was still many restrictions, especially when it’s concerned with politics or religion. However, I am not able to offer any first-hand observations concerning this particular phenomenon as I did not have the chance to ask about it during the trip.

Concerning gender, I was very fortunate to have had the chance to hear their own opinions and thoughts concerning rights of women, the controversy around veiling and wearing the hijab, and restrictions on dating and marriage. There are two things are essential to take into consideration before we form any judgements or conclusions. First, the topic of gender is not simply just about gender in Kuwait, but a topic that’s highly associated with the Islamic religion and culture. A lot of the supposed “oppression” and “inequality” towards Islamic women are actually, to them, a form of protection for women and also their way of showing respect and faith to Allah. During this trip, it was not surprising that we attracted glances and stares from people on the street (which are mostly men), and at first it was a very uncomfortable experience to me. However, women would receive similar treatments in other parts of the world as well, especially suggestive or malicious looks. With the hijab and veil, however, women may not have to endure “being looked at” by men. So, I did see their point of view, even though I admit that I would still prefer not to cover my hair and face. Second, it differs with each individual. I observed this to be true. While we did see some Islamic women wearing the veil on the streets, others wore colorful hijabs that were kind of like fashion statements, and Munira did not wear either. They do not

³ <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwaiti-jailed-4-years-over-saudi-insult-tweets-1.1625371>

view these so-called restrictions as downgrading to women, because they have their own choice in whether or not they decide to wear the black robes, the hijab, or the veil. It was the same with dating and marriage; it differs from person to person. While there are arranged marriages, there are still many people that marry for love. Sarah stresses that love is an important element of element, so they do marry because of love.

One particular thing I found to be very cool is that if a boy is interested in a girl, the proper way is to go to the girl's house to ask for the consent of the girl's parents and propose with the intend of marriage! I had a really hard time believing that, because this did not occur often in Taiwan, Canada, US, or any of the other countries that I've lived in! Sarah explains that it's also for the women's protection, because boys "play around a lot", so by the marriageable age, they will "be mature enough to deal with matters of love". As foreign as it seems to us, it does make sense in a way.

Now, Kuwait is not just meaningless dot on the world map for me anymore. When I hear or see "Kuwait", I think of the new Kuwaiti friends we have acquainted with, the delicious food we enjoyed, the breathtaking scenery we saw, and the newly acquired knowledge we have concerning this country and region.

Kuwait Experience

Hsuan-Chu, Chen 陳宣竹 Public Health

Our first afternoon in Kuwait, we participated in an Islamic cultural party. During the party, I had my first step to look into Islamic culture and Kuwait culture. We tried some local desserts, drank Arabic coffee, and drew henna on hands. The group, who held the party, also came to us to exchange the concept of Islam religion. A girl came to me and said that, “You know that how the world think about us and Islam. ISIS and terrorists. But that’s not true. Therefore we hold this party to let you guys know what is the truth.” Her words touched me. And I think that’s the reason that we join the trip and come to Kuwait. We are here to know more about Islamic culture and how Kuwait is.

The days in Kuwait are a very special part in my life. Kuwait is an extraordinary country. Kuwaitis are so friendly and warm-hearted. Life style in Kuwait, slow but kindly, is so different with life style in Taiwan. A week experience of Kuwait let us take a look of how Kuwait is, and make us love this country and these people.

The most special experience in the trip is that the difference between gender and the way two genders interact with each other.

Most of the time, male and female are separate. While visiting the school, we had passed by some classroom that there are only boys or girls. When we visiting some places, at first we were separate into two cars by gender. In Kuwait, it’s very common and necessary. But for us, it’s totally another world. We also found that the female school staffs and students who companied us these days are more lively and

outgoing while only girls around. At that time, they would talk a lot about their one life and have a deep conversation with us. How they performed was very different with boys around.

Another thing that I couldn't imagine was that girls' dorm set a curfew for girls. Girls have to go back to dorm before 9:30 pm and have to sign in to make sure everyone is in dorm. The reason is for girl's safety. For boys, they don't have restriction for when to go back to dorm. Dormitory curfew also exists in Taiwan but for me, it was my first time to have a curfew that is different by gender. Although perhaps girls wouldn't go out at night, the curfew still gave us a gender inequality feeling. At 9:30 pm, we went to counter to sign, and we saw all the girls came to sign, too. At that time, I felt very weird but lucky to have this chance to experience this.

Kuwaitis are extremely hospitable and warm-hearted. In Taiwan we used to treat friends to go to restaurant and have a dinner together. But in Kuwait, people will invite you to their house to pay a visit! This time we went to the chalet of Dr. Jassim Al Mudhaf's, the dean of Business Administration College. We have a great time there, played with the kids, went on the yacht, watched the kites, played billiard, played the cards and had dinner together. At that night, we chatted a lot with Dean and his family. Girls also visited a staff's house. She invited us to her house and we had breakfast together. After the breakfast we chatted a lot about everyone's life. The visiting to their houses was the most wonderful part in our staying in Kuwait. Their warm welcome and hospitality surprised us and are the most unforgettable part in the trip.

While chatting with the Kuwait girls, we asked about what will they do in the weekends or holiday. I am wondering that what would they do if they have free time. The answer is that they usually go to shopping. We had a visit to the Avenue Mall. In weekends, the mall full of people, everyone come out for shopping. It's a very special life style to me. And we also talked about how they start to have a relationship with other. The process is very strict. Before people get together, even when they are not familiar with each other, a boy should ask the girl's father to accept his request to try to get along with the girl. After the father says okay, they can try to dating and chatting. If the relationship is good and want to go to next step, then the boy should request again to ask for the father's agreement. Normally, a girl and a boy can't go outside together even they are friends. Another thing we asked is how they think about gay and lesbian. They laughed after we asked and said in a obscure way, "We will know, when we saw them. But we won't talk about it." At first, I thought it would be a difficult issue to discuss about in Kuwait, and I thought people wouldn't like to talk about it. But to my surprise our friends shared what they thought to us, let us knew how the people thinking there.

They also took us to experience some Islamic culture, such as visiting Othman Museum, the Grand Mosque, Sadu House, Kuwait National Museum, National Bank and so on. From these visiting, we knew Kuwait history, how was the life based on fishing, how their life changed after discover the oil. We also had a chance to dress on their traditional clothes while we visited the Computing Science and Engineering College. We wore their traditional wedding clothes, and learned how to sing the blessing songs. Most of us even bought the traditional clothes in the market. We wore them to the Grand Mosque. The Grand Mosque is an amazing place, quiet but full of power. We had a great time there, to experience the peaceful feeling.

The most excited part was that we went to see camels! When people mentioned Middle East, we always think of camels and desert. Therefore, a chance to see the camels and desert was the most wonderful part for me. We drove pretty far to the camels and desert. There are more than 20 camels staying in the pens, and we fed them with bread and touch them. The most popular thing to do in Kuwait is selfie, so we didn't forget to selfie with the camels. The camels brayed together just like symphony played there. Having a chance to get close to the camels and visited desert is the part that I love most in our trip.

We visited some colleges and different campus. We can find out that Kuwait University is very different with National Taiwan University. We saw lots of operating tables for each dentistry students, a room for honorable students to study and discuss, and so on. We also visited their lab and did some operating. After communication with president and deans of colleges, we know that Kuwait University and National Taiwan University focus on different fields, and put resources in different area. Although two schools have different amount of resources, there still exists lots of space that two schools can cooperate with. As my major, public health, it's a new field in Kuwait University. Field works are an important part in public health practice, therefore I think school and school cooperate will be a great opportunity for students and teachers. Visiting the schools let us know more about Kuwait University and think of what can our school do in the future. The little pity is that we seldom have chance to interact with Kuwait University students. If possible, it will be a really great chance to let two school students get to know each other deeper.

The most important things I learned are the Islamic culture. In Taiwan we seldom have chance to know well about Islamic culture. National Taiwan University has more interaction with Middle East countries' university and the relationship with Kuwait University seems to be closer, so nowadays in NTU we are discussing about praying room and Halal Foods in school. Therefore, this time I tried to learn more about Islamic culture. NTU don't have as much space as Kuwait University, so if we want to set up prayer room, we have to consider pray time in daytime and the rule of pray. For the pray time, although there is 5 fixed time in a day, they don't have to pray at that moment. Believers can pray before next pray time. It's very useful information for us because we don't have much space to built prayer room. I bring this message back to Taiwan, and hope that in the future our school can be more friendly to Mussulman.

I very much benefited from our trip to Kuwait. No matter the gender issue, life style, school and house visiting and sightseeing, all gave me a lot of reward. This time, I also learned a lot of Islamic culture, and hope that we can have some influence in our school.

2015 NTU DELEGATION TEAM TO KU

2015.11.21 - 11.28

B01401123 林祐民 Yu-Min, Lin



Fig. 2015 NTU delegation team to KU

It was my honor to be selected as a member of 2015 NTU delegation team to Kuwait University. Following paragraphs are my personal thoughts after this time visiting Kuwait and Kuwait University. It only represents my personal opinions from limited time in this country, will certainly include my own subjective explanations and judgments, and might not be accurately reflecting the truth about this beautiful and lovely country. Still hope it will be helpful for you reading this.

1. Kuwait University (KU)

Kuwait University is one of the best university in Kuwait, composed of 11 colleges, with about the same size of students (40,000 for KU and 35,000 for NTU) as well as academic staffs (1,500 for KU and 1,700 full-time for NTU) with NTU. However, 38,000 out of 40,000 students in KU are undergraduates. KU has similar semesters with NTU, and most of its students are local Kuwaiti. Among international students, the majority will be Egyptian. KU has multiple campuses and students may take free school bus for commuting, or most local Kuwaiti students have their own cars. Parking seems not to be a big problem as there are many parking spaces in the campus.

Currently NTU and National Chengchi University (NCCU) have language exchange programs with KU and, each year, will send students here to study Arabic. Students will be in KU for one year, while they can only take courses at the language center. No exchange students program between two schools is established yet.

Formal visiting schedule

In cooperation with KU, this time we visited KU College of Business Administration, College of Engineering and Petroleum, College of Computer Science and Engineering, College of Medicine, and College of Dentistry. We had great time having conversations with President of KU and Deans from different colleges. It's so nice to see both NTU and KU have high motivation and expectations for further cooperation. However, judging from limited observations, facilities in campus, classrooms, or labs are probably not superior to those in NTU from my personal opinion. Also students' activities and clubs are limited to academic ones.

Meeting foreign students studying in KU

We met two Germany students doing exchange program at KU in our dorm. They were both from the University of Mannheim, and to our surprise, they also

mentioned several of friends, all from the elite colleges in Europe. They came to KU because they wanted to know more about the Middle East and Arabic world (probably due to geographic proximity), and among limited choices including Turkish, they finally chose Kuwait. Also Kuwait may be the only few countries being relatively more friendly with Western culture. They mentioned that although most of the KU professors as well as students can speak English, courses are mostly taught in Arabic and students choose to respond in Arabic, causing inconvenience to international students, which similarly happens in NTU. Also exchange students can hardly find extracurricular activities or entertainments in Kuwait, which might be concerns for students planning to study here. On the other hand, international students in dormitory have free coupons for breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the student cafeteria nearby the dorm. It doesn't taste perfect, but it's free and relatively convenient for students.



Fig. We taught German students how to play Mahjong in dormitory

2. Impression of Kuwait

Kuwait benefits a lot from its oil production, especially when considering its relatively small population number (excluding foreign workers). Local Kuwaiti people enjoy free welfare sponsored by government, for example, when going to college, they don't have pay for tuition, they earn money instead (200KD per month, equals to NTD 20,000). About 75% college graduate take the job offer from public sectors with handsome salaries.

On the plus side, they focus their time and love on what really deserves it; they spend time with friends and family, and never shy to show the hospitality and love. I believe it is partially reflected on how we were well-received after landing in Kuwait. Ali, Lulu, and all the receiving staffs were receiving us with sincerest welcome. I love the malls, markets, and all the places we visited. I love and miss the time when we always did selfies at every spot. I love, most importantly, the hospitality and approachability of the people and the land. They never hesitated to answer and satisfy our curiosity. And also the night at the beach house, when we were invited by Dean of College of BA to his private beach house for the last and wonderful night. It was a villa far from the city center, while all his family would gather together there on weekends. Probably because most of the children and grandchildren in his family were taught in American schools, they were totally not afraid or being nervous to talk and play with us. We got along with everyone so well like we had known each other since we were born. When we jumped with kids on the trampoline, when we saw their carefree smiles, when Dean always asked 'DO YOU LIKE THIS?' and we always yelled 'YES!' as if we were talking with people at the other side of the sea, when we were treated with the sincerest heart beside the Persian Gulf, we felt like we were already part of the family.



Fig. The wonderful night at the beach house



Fig. Dojong (our member, in the middle) was leading the dance

Back to the petroleum and welfare issue, on the other side, I feel there are still many serious social and educational issues to solve in Kuwait. Certainly these are just my personal doubts that are not answered yet, do not mean any judgment for Kuwait or its government. I list out some here for future NTU delegation to further dig into: What's the next step for Kuwait considering its current dependence on petroleum economy? Is it appropriate for such huge proportion of teenagers to get their jobs in public sectors immediately after graduation? And how do people think about the huge gap between the rich, local Kuwaiti, and the poor, mostly migrant workers? If possible, we would definitely learn more by listening to the youth in KU: what are their interests? What are their career plans? How do they think about the education in KU? From my observation by limited time in Kuwait, it still rests on its abundant oil reserves and does not have a clear and comprehensive strategy to leverage on its advantages. It is understandable as local Kuwaiti control most of the wealth and resources, and enjoy their handsome welfare for free. Teenagers do not have much financial stress, which might become poison if they lost the motivation in pursuing excellence. Nonetheless, a less competitive atmosphere might also allow kids to find their true passion, as we saw Ali enjoys photography after changing his college majors several times, and Lulu is like a superwomen being a horse rider, a debater, a youtuber, a traveler, and the one who accompany us all these days. It's nice to see them enjoy their work a lot. Last but not least, I cannot over emphasize the feeling when we were treated as real friends, as part of the family. I envy how they pay most of their time with friends and family, how they treat themselves with relaxing coffee, desserts, and simple chatting with buddies, and how they are never stingy with their love, never clumsy to give out love and to let it come in.

I am afraid if we have lost such ability.

3. Recommendations for future NTU-KU visiting program

Ten days are a perfect length for a student visiting program in KU. Receiving staffs and students are all generous and welcoming. If this visiting program can continue, I would suggest for more interaction with students in KU. We may still have three to four staffs accompanying us, like Ali, Mariam, and Lulu this year, but we can also meet more students in KU, whether in their class or in an easy, relaxed session-like manner. (If we can meet students from different backgrounds when we visit each college, it will be perfect.) Experiences regarding culture or education in KU will be even more valuable from a student's perspective for us. Similarly I believe our delegation can also bring different perspectives or share our experience in NTU with them, so both of us can benefit a lot from each other.

Last but not least, thank both NTU and KU for giving me this chance, and thank 鈞太 and Nawah for all the efforts arranging all of this. Thank all my dearest friends in Kuwait, Ali, Lulu, Mariam, Mohammed, Esraa, Jasem, Awan, Dalah, and all of you for your sincerest welcome, so we could see and enjoy the best part of Kuwait. I would say food and view in Kuwait was amazing, but you were definitely the best part of the trip. Thank Michael for being the best tour guide for us. Wish you all the good in the future. Thank all my partners in the delegation team for taking care of me and having fun during the precious escape from my schoolwork. Kuwait is a wonderful place and hope I will have chance to visit all of you in the future. En sha lah.



Photo credit to: Ali Dashti, edited by Sarra

A city called paradise

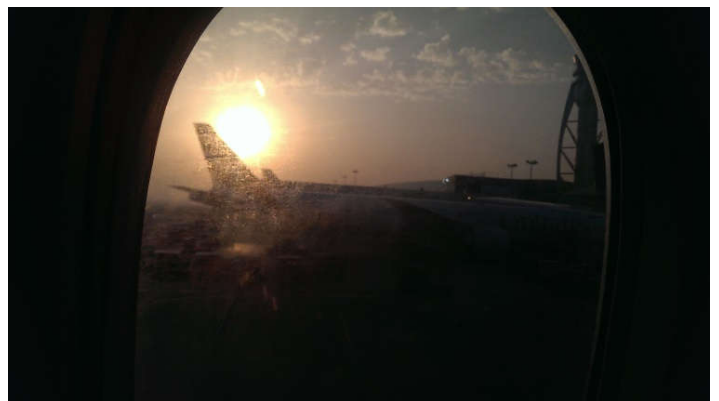
National Taiwan University Delegation in Kuwait
2015.11.21-28

B01612003 Chun-Shan, Hsu



1. Engraved on heart

During the flight back to Taiwan, I was so content and satisfied about this amazing journey. Drenching in the feeling of delightful, having delicious meals supplied by Emirate, enjoy the view of sunshine combined with clouds, the visiting seemed like yesterday.



Actually, it was my first time to go to West Asia. Before the visiting, the most

interesting question that attracted me was their biological issue in Kuwait. Since I major entomology in National Taiwan University, I'd like to concern the crops issue. As we know, their country belongs to dry climate and dessert. Besides the difficulty of drought, they still have to deal with the problem of pest if they want to grow their own crops. With the using of pesticides, the less of the production because of the weather, will increase their amount of use in pesticide to prevent from more cost and waste in pest. Which will lead to a huge latent hazard, the pests will develop their resistance to the specific pesticide. When I was a junior in NTU, I joined the laboratory of integrated pesticide management and having researches on insecticide resistance.

Waiting for transfer to Kuwait in Dubai airport, I was shocked by the magnificent scale of the shopping mall. The duty-free shops were so many that my friends and I forgot our tiredness and fired up our shopping soul. There were so many races of people, including different cultures and religions. People with different skin colors and outfits were buying things, bargaining, eating, and chatting with each other.

2. International Situations

In the future, one day, their most valuable resource, which is the fuel, will be used out. What is their next move in the economic progress? Will they focus on electronic mechanism just like Taiwan and other East Asia countries, or they will mimic to be a financial district just like the Wall Street or Abu Dhabi?

Besides the academic part, the culture, demographic structure, average salary, cuisine, religion, and gender relations are new knowledge that I treasure a lot. I felt that I was just like a sponge, kept absorbing new things, amazing unknowns.

At the first night in Kuwait, after we put our luggage in our dormitory, we joined a dinner party in a Turkey restaurant which was famous with its Lebanese cuisine.



There are so many middle-east cuisines that can perfectly fuse with each other and supply a more interesting life style for local Kuwait people. Here you can easily taste so many different kinds of food from many other countries, which makes me think to a financial phenomenon. Because Kuwait is in the top ten of the petroleum exporting countries, their people average GDP is so high that can't help but keep attracting people from other countries leaving their own and work in Kuwait. Although they are paid far less than local Kuwaitis, the money is still much higher than their salaries if they work in their homeland. So many overseas immigrations leads to so many people will lean on their home food to recall their country. With the fact of many foreign labors, it's not hard to realize that public buildings, highways, and constructions are built by them. The bottom jobs such as gardeners, unskilled labors, cleaners, and drivers are their main choice.

I still remember the night after we ate the delicious traditional roast fish in Mubarakiya Souk, we decided to go to a shisha store to have a drink. With only two dinar, we got into a taxi, which is driven by a Bengali. We had a deep chat with him. He was married and his family members were still in Bengal. He loves his wife, a lot. He wants his children to take education to have a good career and avoid from the

pathetic life he had. Far away from the home country, every twice a year he will return to Bengal. He cannot go back too often because it's hard for him to afford the plane ticket. Rather than spending the money on the returning, tuition for his kids sounds more attractive. Compared to the local Kuwaitis, the government compromised that they will get a fine job if they successfully graduated from the college.



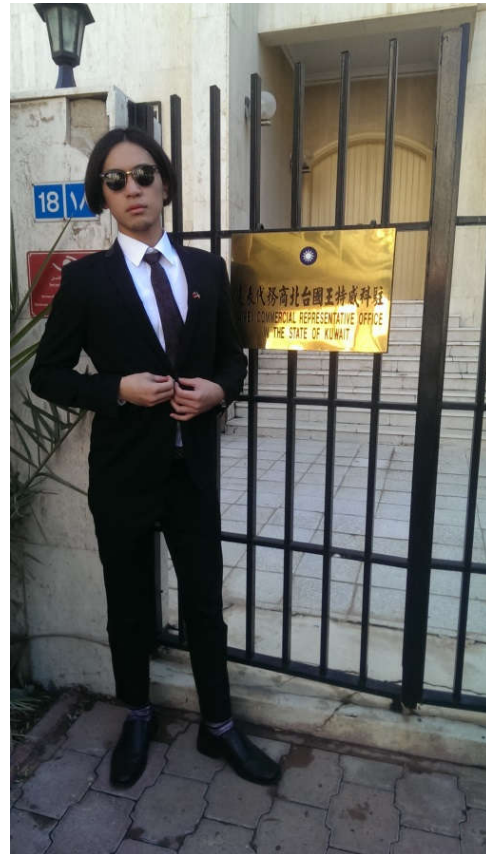
This time I was happy to be one of the members in the delegation visiting Kuwait University, the top priority for the high school students in Kuwait, ranks number one just like NTU in Taiwan. Kuwait University was established in 1966, which vision was to provide a global vision, advancing education, and qualified human resources. We visited college of Law, Science, Medicine, Engineering and Petroleum, Dentistry, and Computer Science and Engineering. Each college has their own characteristics and specialties. Having conversations with each dean of the college, really enhance my vision about their political and economic thoughts. The laws here sometimes are influenced by their religion. Their life science is not as popularized as we have in Taiwan. The fee of seeing doctors is completely afforded by the government. The college of Engineering and Petroleum is no doubt to be the most popular department in the KU. We even joined a enterprise awards ceremony. In the dentist clinic for interns, I discovered that some jobs such as modeling the dentures and making braces were done by some foreign labors.



After asking the guide, he said that their students would learn these skills of course, but that won't be their main part of the job. By the way, if they successfully get the license from government, which only need to work for two years in local hospitals or clinics, they can choose to go aboard to chase higher payment. The operating hours for one day is only about 6 hours in Kuwait, which is far less than doctors in Taiwan. There was also one interesting phenomenon in the Kuwait University. The ratio between two genders is a huge difference. You may guess that the gender inequality will reduce the resources for female, which will lead to the fact of few girls in the university. Exactly the opposite, the number of ladies are far more than boys in the Kuwait University. The government provides good rewards for militaries and polices. So men in Kuwait do not have to focus on academics to exchange for a high quality of life.

I still remembered the day we visit Taipei Commercial Representative Office in the State of Kuwait. The ambassador told us the diplomatic issues Taiwan facing, including economic oppression. Even in our national day, October tenth, we had to

celebrate subdued, could not formally invite other representative offices to join together. Despite this, I was glad to know that there were still lots of foreign people participated in the ceremony, as friends. Since we both know the suppression came from China, the ambassador then encourage us. The delegation could some how represent Taiwan and show our academic successes and advantages. They would know there is still one advanced country in East Asia, full of passion, courage, global perspectives, named Taiwan.



3. Contemplation

Here in Kuwait, I experienced a lot of cool things. We had a yard party in the dean's villa, which was just beside the coast. Outside of the mansion, you can hear the breathing of the sea. Dr. Jassim Al Mudhaf, the dean, drove a tractor to pull one of his ships into the sea and invited us to onboard, starting a special journey. Felt the sea breeze across my face, gently sank my foot into the sea water, and laying down on the cushion with eyes closed enjoy the moment. The chalet was so huge that the dean's kids even have a motor to ride in order to short the time of moving from place to place.



In Mubarakiya Souk, I bought some local decorations and traditional snacks, dates. In the avenue mall, I was shocked that palm trees were planted inside the building. It was easy to get lost in the mall because it was so huge. Inside the mall, the embassy counselor Mr. Lee treated our delegation to a famous Turkish dessert shop. Last day in Kuwait, some local students in KU took us to the aquarium to see a ship that was years ago, used to transfer water from other countries to Kuwait. Then we visited to a harbor together, they even bought us a local Kuwaiti meal before boarding. On the ship, far away from the coast, I realized that how beautiful this city was. Drowning in the sun set; felt the euphoria being tidal wave. The Kuwait Tower shined brightly in the dark; we turned up the speaker on the ship and sang with the melody. I was glad to be chosen as one of the delegation team, truly grateful.



I defiantly will miss Kuwait. The friends I met, the food I tasted, the landscapes I saw, the relationships I had, the knowledge I learned, the selfies we took, and the dream I dreamed.

2015 NTU DELEGATION TEAM TO KU

Vic Chiang

This trip to Kuwait was a mind-blowing journey. I was totally indulged with the majestic beauty of the great Islamic culture: mosaic art on the walls, golden dome of the Grand Mosque, infiltrating calls to prayers, beautiful Arabic calligraphy, and men in their thawbs sitting beside the alleys, blowing smoke rings from the shisha..... This was not the first time I visited an Islamic country, half a year ago I was in Morocco, watching people strolling into the busy streets. Everything is so similar, and yet so different at the same time.

Kuwait is not an old country. It gained independence since 1961, and with its resourceful storage of oil, it soon became one of the region's most prosperous country. As a visitor in Kuwait, it's not hard to notice the pride of the Gulf Countries in the Kuwaiti people. Walking in downtown Kuwait City, I felt safe and secure, and a leisure vibe could be sensed in every corner of the city. Unlike Taiwan, Kuwait was not yet fully infiltrated by the global chain stores. There was only one McDonald to be seen, and I finally got a chance for a small escape from the bombardment of the omnipresent 7-11, Family Mart and Hi-Life in Taiwan.

Kuwait is not a popular tourist destination. Before I went there, I didn't have much information about this country. However, the absence of foreign tourists also eliminated some of the obstacles for me to really see the spirits of the people in Kuwait. Of course, one week is never enough for understanding a country, but I still got some basic notions and hints to dig out more untold stories about Kuwait. It is like

playing a puzzle game. With the completion of the outer frame, the rest of the puzzles will be left for me to finish with care, and deeper contemplation.

The happiest thing I had encountered in this journey was the Kuwaiti friends from KU who had been accompanying us throughout our stay in Kuwait. Their hospitality amazed me. They not only generously offered us information about Kuwait's history, political system, society and so on, but also showed us around the famous tourist spots in the city, bargaining the best price for us in the local shops. I feel that there is a certain element in these people that you just can't help liking them. They didn't appear to be the tour guides who simply just took us around because when we were having fun from the schedules they arranged for us; they looked like they were enjoying the time even more than us.

And of course, as a delegation team of this bilateral school visiting program, we got a chance to closely look at Kuwait's university educational system. Except for the warm welcomes from the deans of KU's various colleges, it was a surprise for me that in most colleges there are much more female students than the male students. Especially in the College of Engineering and Petroleum, 70% of the students are female. As I was wondering why such phenomenon exists in Kuwait, the dean told us that it's because most male students can get the support from their families and study abroad, while girls would often stay in the country.

Maybe this kind of gender inequality is not a surprise but a commonly accepted fact in Islamic countries. During our visit in the colleges, we also noticed that there are classes that only open to girls, and normally female and male students have class separately. Indeed, this is a strange thing for us to see, but I can't stop wondering,

what would these Kuwaiti female students feel, if one day they could come studying in Taiwan? Likewise, what will Taiwanese female students feel if they could study in KU? Thinking upon this, I start to understand the need of further cooperation between the two universities in promoting the exchange programs. After all, if understanding each other is the first step to build up a friendship, than Taiwan and Kuwait still have a great room for improvement.

Currently, Kuwait University offers scholarship to Taiwanese students each year to study Arabic, but limitations still hold strong on these students' studying plans. Except for Arabic class, they cannot take other class offered in the university. However, since the Taiwanese students might only be able to meet non-local students in the Arabic class, a more comprehensive bilateral exchange program will be a greater chance of cultural exchange between Taiwanese and Kuwaiti students.

Like I mentioned above, one can only get a tint of how things are going in a foreign country within a week. In Taiwan, people have limited notions about the Middle East, and thus creating a large psychological distance that's even longer than the physical distance between Taiwan and Kuwait. Many of our questions are related to the Islamic religion, which are hard, sometimes awkward, to ask our Kuwaiti friends. In regard to this obstacle, we were lucky to have these Taiwanese exchange students in Kuwait who offered us their first hand observation of the Kuwaiti society. With their thoughts, I started to put everything I had seen in Kuwait into a bigger picture.

First, there is a special phenomenon in Kuwait that among its 4 million habitants, only 1.3 million people are actually Kuwaiti citizens. All the others are foreign

migrant workers mostly from Bangladesh, Egypt and India. Most of them are blue labor working as taxi drivers, construction workers and so on. There is no worker's union in Kuwait, and the government has set up strict regulations for these migrant workers. It's easy for them to be deported if they have any bad records. On the other hand, although their salary might be higher than the counterpart in their home countries, it can barely support their basic needs in daily life. Take the housekeeper in the student's dorm for example, his monthly salary is 65 Kuwaiti dirham, which is about only 6,500 NTD. And of course, the social mobility is quite stagnant. Most of the students in Kuwait University are Kuwaiti people, and the rest of the foreign students are children whose parents are working in the government. It is almost impossible for migrant workers' children to get into universities.

Secondly, except for the huge disparity between rich and poor, there are also some sensitive yet significant issues that we dare not to ask the local students. That is issues about women's rights and homosexuality. In Kuwaiti society, wearing hijab is a personal choice. The main reason for girls to wear hijab is due to the tradition of their original family.

One time we visited a museum introducing the old Kuwaiti customs and society, and our tour guide was a beautiful Kuwaiti woman who didn't wear hijab. She explained to us that back in the 1960s, the Kuwaiti society was influenced by the western culture, and most of the women wore miniskirts instead of hijabs. It's only after the revival of Islamist movement that won over the heart of the Arab world starting from the 1970s that the secularism had faded away in the Kuwaiti society. When I asked our tour guide: "What's your opinion about this trend that the Kuwaiti society is becoming more conservative than the 60s?" She only replied to me:

“Sometimes people go extreme. I don’t think this is a good thing.” The other Kuwaiti students who wore hijabs were standing next to us, and the atmosphere was a bit awkward.

Last but not least, the other thing that piques my curiosity is about homosexuality in Kuwaiti society. In Islam, homosexuality is considered sinful. Even though Kuwait is already a less conservative country compared to other Middle Eastern countries, homosexuality is still a social taboo that no one would dare to discuss. One of the members from our delegation team asked the Kuwaiti students about their opinions on homosexuality. She described to me that the awkwardness took over the room immediately, and they simply replied to her that they wouldn’t talk about this. This is similar to the reaction I got from a Moroccan guy about his opinion on homosexuality. He told me that they never talked about this with friends, and if anyone came out publicly, he or she would be cut off from all their networks.

Indeed, it’s a courtesy to do as the Romans do when in Rome, however, these social taboos have formed the core reason of why people don’t understand Islamic culture well. Cultural exchange can be easy and skin-deep, if one stays in a comfort zone and dares not to focus on more sensitive yet significant issues. During my stay in Kuwait I wasn’t always at ease. Nevertheless, this discomfort plays a major role in understanding others, as well as myself; it refers to an existing discrepancy, a cognitive gap that needs to be filled in order to soothe myself. Although I don’t get answers from many questions I encountered in Kuwait, but what intrigues me to think can sharpen my mind for keeping me sensible under all kinds of situations.

On the last day of our stay, the local students took us to a small port right next to

the city center. We drove out to the sea, took off our shoes, and soaked our bare feet in the water of the Persian Gulf. It was near dusk, lights faded away, making way for our last Arabian night. This city in front of us was not old. It stood up from the ashes of the war, like a phoenix, flying up high with flames of oil. Kuwait is a modern revision of the Arabian Nights. Every night the story moves further toward the end, so as those used-up oil platforms, gradually swallowed by the sea.

However, they do want a new story. A change. They give out great amount of money to attract foreign talents to move in. From this short visit I see Kuwait as a country that heads for its turning point, even though there are still quite a lot of limitations to overcome. It is a land of chances, and I do hope that through our visit and the bondage we built between the two universities, Taiwanese people can also be exposed to these chances. It's hard to express my gratitude to be chosen as one of the delegation members of NTU, and with all the laughter along the way, it truly is an unforgettable journey that will forever perch on my mind.

2015 NTU DELEGATION TEAM TO KU

Teddy

Words are somehow not enough to describe how grateful I am for being selected as one of the delegates representing National Taiwan University to visit Kuwait University. This visit of one week to Kuwait was such an unforgettable memory, a brand new experience and a grand start of my long life relationship with the middle east.

Before going to Kuwait, all my imaginations about the country lingered around geometric corridors, endless desert and mysterious culture, and I always pictured the scene of what I had read in the old arabic stories from 1001 nights. However, all these imaginations were effaced immediately right at the moment we arrived at the Kuwait International Airport. The first sight was a shock. I saw so many shops and stores in the airport, a wide variety of different brands from various countries and so many different colors of people walking on the hallway. The atmosphere was welcoming and local people were looking at us with curious smiles. Everything was so different from what I had imagined. In the center of Kuwait city, there was no old ruined buildings where Ali Baba and forty thieves hid and no blankets flying in the sky. Instead, there were numerous modern skyscrapers which formed a glamorous skyline in the desert, and next to the cutting-edged business zone we could find the old souk (traditional market) and mosques standing coordinately. It was the first time I found such a great combination of modernity and tradition. New things never outshined old items, and old items never intended to surpass what is new. What I saw was a subtle balance between the old and new. I presumed that it had something to do with

Kuwaiti people's personality. Kuwaiti people are never afraid of accepting new things, and at the same time they respect their traditional culture, religion and wisdoms of their ancestors. The best evidence of this balance could easily be seen on the street. Men were wearing traditional white robe driving an European car and women were wearing abayas shuttling in fancy department stores. We could hardly find any contradiction or conflict between old and new. Kuwaiti people have adjusted respectively the two parallel conceptions and successfully merged them into one perfect balance in their society. This interesting phenomenon and philosophy are things I had not seen before the visit to Kuwait. In Taiwan, New things always rise too fast and they often eat up the tradition, separating people who support different sides. Normally, old things would rise again and it would fight against the new things. What is new than wanes. It repeats and repeats again all the time and it follows with distrusts between people, conflicts between cultures and instability of the society. Nevertheless, in Kuwait, there is no such stake between old and new. Contrarily, they support each other, benefiting mutually, and thus create a prosperous and open society that thrives in so many perspectives.

Thanks to the visit to Kuwait, I have experienced so many things that I had never thought of before., and lots of my perspectives have been changed or adjusted. In Kuwait, It was my first time to go to desert and to see camels run like in the video games. It was also my first time to wear traditional Arabic male clothing to pretend that I am a local Kuwaiti. Dates, shishas, mosques, Arabic coffee and so much more, all these are fantastically shown in front of my eyes, sending out the message of rich Arabic culture and civilization. Besides, what taught me the most is definitely not the museums visited, instead, I learned more from the Kuwaiti society and the interaction with local people. In taxi, we talked with the taxi driver from Bangladesh,

complaining about the expensive flight tickets. In the dormitory, we met two nice German guys and taught them how to play Mahjong, and they told us about their exchange lives in Kuwait. In the bookstore, I had a nice conversation with an Egyptian guy, asking him to help me find the postcards and Koran in French. I still remember how his eyes shined when he found that I am interested in Islamic culture and the Koran. That was the moment I discovered that Muslims are so nice and so humble that they want people to understand them more rather than judging them through the biased media or incomprehensive interpretation of information. It was thought-provoking. I started to reflect myself. Before the visit to Kuwait, I was such a prejudiced person that I always prejudged everything before I truly understand it or have access to it. I tended to believe what people said easily and never did I really think through the ideas or information thoroughly. It was such a pity. Because of my biased mindset, I may lose so many opportunities of meeting new people or new culture. Fortunately, during the visit to Kuwait, my mind was opened by the warm hospitality. I am glad to and even eager to meet everyone and to see everything. I think it was the warm characteristics of Kuwaiti people that completed the whole journey. Kuwaiti people may be one of the kindest people I have met. They treated guests as their family, welcoming us with the ultimate generosity. The dean of college of management passionately invited us to his chalet and took everyone out to the Persian Gulf with his yacht, all the way almost to Saudi Arabia. Ali led us to weave through the crowd of Souk Mubarakiya, searching for the cheapest scarves and dates for us. Mohammed and Munira enthusiastically arranged our schedule and provided us the most splendid itinerary during the stay. Mariam, Sarah, Esraa, Dalal, Lulu (the star) and all other nice people, they made our stay in Kuwait more than just a visit. Instead, it was a true exchange of friendship and mutual trust and understanding. In simply one week, we already formed a strong bond with local people like there is no

language barriers and cultural differences. Besides, with the help of our R.O.C. Deputy Counselor Mr. Saeed and the Ambassador Mr. Hsiang, we felt still like home even if we were abroad. What made me even more grateful was that I got the chance to meet all other 11 delegates, professors and teachers from National Taiwan University. As the youngest one in the team, I learnt a lot from everyone and received lots of helps from them. I felt an immense gratitude to everyone and the appreciation will definitely last long in my mind. I am so happy that all the delegates from National Taiwan University are now really good friends, since we shared the same memory, same experiences and the same understandings of a country which is quite new for Taiwanese.

The whole stay in Kuwait was a total blast, apart from the moment that I behaved a bit improperly. I felt so sorry that I tended to get nervous when I was representing National Taiwan University to meet important people. Since I did not have lots of related experiences, some abrupt words may have been blurted out by me unconsciously. It was awkward but it could be a lesson, too. I should train myself to be calmer and more elegant when facing someone important, so I would not make more jokes like this in the future and disappoint people who trust me. There is one more thing which is quite a pity for me. We 12 delegates were always separated into boy team and girl team, and we sometimes ran different schedules. I totally understood it was out of the respect to women and it is a basic politeness and habits that have already existed for long time in the area. However, as a boy, sometimes I wanted to know more about the feminine part of their culture as well. I would love to talk to girls and share ideas with them in order to understand more of their thoughts. It was a pity but it was also an encouragement for me to visit the country again. After the visit to Kuwait, I found that there are still so many things I have not seen and have

never known in my life, and I have decided to find some time in the future to revisit the Middle East.

I really want to thank Chun-Tai and all the other people who interviewed me from the Student Activity Division of National Taiwan University, for selecting me as one of the 12 delegates to Kuwait. I knew there were over 100 students who were desperately trying to get into the team, and I was just so surprised and grateful that I could be chosen even if I do not have lots of related experiences. This was really one of the best week in my entire life. I could undoubtedly say that the time we spent in Kuwait was like in heaven. In the airport, when we were saying goodbye, I cried. A part of the reasons was that I always hated to say goodbye. The other part was because that I found that I was leaving heaven, going back to Taiwan to face all the realities. I think the worst part was after the visit, the part that you made Kuwait as your second home and you always felt nostalgia of the place, never being able to go back to the normal track of the normal life before. My mind is just not willing to come back from heaven.

2015 NTU DELEGATION TEAM TO KU

DoJohn

It has been several days since I came back Taiwan from Kuwait. This trip is so abundant and meaningful that I couldn't know how to begin writing. Kuwait is a young country which proclaimed independence in 1960s. It is invaded by Iraq led by *Saddam Hussein* in 1990. By military intervention led by United States, the Iraqi occupation came to an end in 1991. The battle is known as "The Gulf War".

Although Kuwait is an Asia country, the Arabic culture in Middle East, west Asia, is always full of mystery for us, Taiwanese. Based on Psychology theory, people feel afraid of something and generate dangerous imaginations because they did not understand before.. However, thanks for media propagation; people can know information all over the world without being present. There is a lot of sad news breaking people's hearts. But thanks for media; people can just know one-side information controlled by someone specific who maybe have some purposes. The news is even with hatred and defamation. Misunderstanding and negative imagination make Middle east bad reputation and people start being afraid of people with dressing veils or Muslim. I think this situation happens everywhere. The terrorism impressed them a lot. And there is even no chance to change this impression without interaction or understanding. For example, after I told my friends that I would visit Kuwait for one week, the responds are alike with minor difference. From flurried saying "You must be careful", to more flurried saying "It is danger there, why do you want to go? You have better stay Taiwan". Such comments are from everywhere. By these short conversations, we can prove that Taiwanese don't know Middle East situation much and Kuwait either. And Taiwanese are afraid of people from Islam state. To be honest,

these conversations really made me worried and disturbed on the way to airport and before boarding the aircraft. However, the excitement of explore the whole new world won; I overcame fear and being passionate and afraid of nothing anymore.

There is no diplomatic relationship between Taiwan and Kuwait. We found the Taipei Commercial Representative Office in the state of Kuwait. The counterpart unit is Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Cabinet of Kuwait. The diplomats don't have diplomatic privilege in Kuwait. It is a really hard job especially with oppression from China. The first time I met Kuwaitis was in spring 2013. I received the visiting group composed by students and professors from Kuwait University. I toured them and introduce campus of National Taiwan University. Even if we got along for just few hours, we had an initial interaction. I could feel their friendly and easy going personality. The second time we met was this spring. The same schedule as last year had been planned. But this time was planned by National Taiwan University. By this case, I had an opportunity to know them further. I brought them to a job fair and visited Taipei 101 and many other places. Hanging out with them made me start having interest in everything about this mysterious nation, including their religious devotion, life style attitude and contributions in professional field.

What is your first impression about Arabic countries? Desert? Camel? I think you are all right. The desert in Kuwait is not the desert which Taiwanese people are not familiar with. The desert in Kuwait is just like an uncultivated land but not a sand hill as known as a dune. The territory of Kuwait is 17,818 squares kilometer which is smaller than Taiwan. Kuwait has rich petroleum resource. Because of decent financial arrangement and strategy by the government, the financial status is better than other counties which produce crude oil. The influence from oil-price-dropping is less.

Kuwait is a nation bordering Arabic Gulf. In spite of bordering ocean, Kuwait is still lack of fresh water for daily life and many other resources. Therefore, Kuwait is a country which relies on international trade strongly. Arabic people are usually passionate and very willing to share. They enjoy bargain when they are doing business. However, Arabic people are face savers. They really care about their honor. For example, if you are a guest in a banquet. Normally, the appetizers are always full of table and delicious. Someone who did not have an experience to participate in Arabic banquet before or we Chinese who are used to trying our best to finish all of dishes on the table will make mistake. We might think the appetizers are all of meal and we will be full after appetizers. So when the main dish comes, we have been full already and could not eat anymore. And this is an inappropriate behavior for the host. This behavior will make the host feel shame or even angry, because they will think that whether their food is not good or delicious or not. And there is no happy ending in the banquet.

Before we started our journey, we had many pre-meetings. We discussed every situation we might meet in Kuwait. Besides normal etiquettes, weather and daily supplies, what the delegates care much is the taboos in Islam world. We did not know much about it. And taboos are the main reasons make delegates feel anxious. Like beverages with alcohol are prohibited. What is more, you could carry pork products or even something with a pig shape or image or the word pig literally. And Muslim think people's left hands are unclean, you should eat with your right hand and shake hand with the right hand definitely. You might feel nervous for these rules. But these are just general rules for everyone. There are more for women. In Koran, the female bodies are unclean. Women need to wear scarves and even veils and black gowns to cover the bodies. If a woman exposes her body, she is rude and even illegal

in some of Arabic countries like Saudi Arabic. However, Kuwait is a relatively open country in Arabic world. Be honest, it is a little surprising for us. Women in Kuwait could not wear scarves. They always wore skirts and showed their beautiful hair in public before. However, after wars, people are afraid that women would be caught because of their beauty, government ask women wear their scarves back based on safety concern. But it still depends on the tradition of every family. We were told by our local friends, the family traditions are different according the place they live in. They said people live in coastal area, they might be much opener. And people living in the desert are more conservative. But this is not totally right, it could just be a reference. However, one thing which can be confirmed is if you see a woman does not wear a scarf, the woman is not a Muslim or she is from an open family. But no matter how, even if Kuwait is an open nation, men and women are still considered separately. When we were in Kuwait, men and women would be separated in several situations, such as in a meeting and on the bus. And even taking group pictures, men and women will be asked to stand oppositely. In their concept, this is respect and protection for women. They said these rules and behaviors could avoid female from harassment.

Kuwait, a beautiful nation, is a country which many people have no chance to visit in the whole life. It is not easy to apply visa for entering Kuwait now. It is harder for young female. But it is a kingdom worth visiting. I hope I could use my eyes to make my friends to know more about this country with many misunderstandings. This journey gives me new friends, new experiences, new viewpoints and new attitude. In the middle of the trip, we met friends who had ever visit Taiwan. They told us Taiwan is really a wonderful island. But there are too many foods which Muslim could not eat in Taiwan which is known as a gourmet kingdom. It is not convenient for praying which Muslim has to do. Taiwan is not a Muslim-friendly country. There is a special

check for them who wear scarves, black gowns and veils when they pass customs. Therefore, if Taiwan could make some changes for Muslims, Taiwan will become a popular travel site in the Islam world. I think Taiwan have lone time ignore the Arabic market where is rich. It is the time to notice and cultivate. I am honor to be selected as one of the delegates to visit Kuwait. This is an amazing journey for me. This trip makes me different and broadens my horizon. There is no formal diplomatic relationship between Kuwait and Taiwan. By this visiting, I wish our behaviors in Kuwait could enhance friendship between Kuwait and Taiwan. And I could not wait for their visiting in 2016. I will try our best to receive them again. Just like they treated us in Kuwait, I hope them feel our friendly and know our culture even daily life in Taiwan. In shirt, I really appreciate people who helped me, received me and especial made this trip.

Reviews of Trip to Kuwait

Allen Shang
December, 2015

This is my very first time being at an Arabic country. When it comes to the impression of the Arabic world, first comes to my mind is the wealthy oil princes showing off with lots of gold and cars. However, this is undoubtedly the trip to break my stereotype.

At the first day, we received warm welcomes from Kuwait University personnel right after we arrived at the airport. Then we moved on to the boys dorm, that is the first time I saw the campus of Kuwait University, with the impression of a soil yellow color, from the entry to the student dorm, all rendering desert scenery. In addition, Kuwait University campus also has a feature, which possesses a big parking space. Students here, because traffic inconvenience, plus cheap oil, drive to and back from school, which leads to these interesting landscape.

Our first official trip was to meet with Dean. In this formal meeting, dean expressed a warm welcome. Head of National Taiwan University also expresses our delightfulness and eager for cooperation to each other. Later, we visited many classrooms and the student's living space. There are a few that I think are quite impressed; first of all, their elite club, that is, students with good grades can go into, a total of only 12 people, and if getting poor grades will be automatically removed. Second, we visited a classroom of the mass media. On the class all of them are veiled female students, they seemed a little bit surprised of our visit. What I can tell is that

the difference between men and women is still crystal clear. However, the teacher is more liberal, still talking and enjoying our visit.

Women are relatively weak groups, though not like Saudi Arabia, but we observed that if Kuwaiti women want to go abroad, usually need to have a father, brother, or husband's company.

In contrast, Kuwait men usually are freer and guaranteed by the State, salaries are generally higher. In this social atmosphere, an interesting phenomenon was observed that 96 % of students in the Department of Engineering at Kuwait University are female students, which is very different from in the other universities all over the world.

This is because that that local boys consider joining public as the career path, including officers, soldiers, and police. For those really wants to study engineering, the government encourages them to study abroad.

Although I come up with a number of possible reasons by observation and interviewing; but triggered my curiosity is, where are these students after graduation? What role have they played in the community?

Later, our professors seem to talk to the dean in matters of bilateral exchange students program, where we got to one of the staff offices. They give us a taste of the use of Arab spices, and we tasted the local dates. At the same time, we asked them to help us write the Arabic name of us. Also, invited by our delegation team, I tried my best to help write their name in Chinese calligraphic and new year greeting couplet.

I found, the character is the easiest way that can convey culture. Everyone has a unique emotion toward his own name, which is a symbol with himself and the links to the motherland. When we saw our name presented in a whole new way that has never been seen before, it seems that we found exotic brothers, also builds the connection with the Arabic world.

We also visited circuit lab and communication lab, in circuit lab, we can see the basic instruments such as power supplies, oscilloscopes. Under the interpretation, I learned that this laboratory has only taught the digital IC course, and somewhat a pity is that they have not actually made to circuits, but only to finish drawing the layout stage. Since there is no factory can be achieved at Kuwait; maybe there's a chance, I hope they can come to Taiwan to orders for fabrication.

Communications laboratory has a radio frequency machines, with the corresponding module and computer, which can display a variety of communication principles and circuits. Interpretation teachers are eager for us to explain the experimental equipment, shows us how to use an AM modulation of radio telephone system. From the teaching point of view, the laboratory equipment is very easy for students to use and to understand. After the meeting I also talk with two teachers, they also expressed the wish to have the opportunity to come to Department of electrical engineering at National Taiwan University to see the result of teaching and research in communications and microwave fields.

Before we meet with the Dean of the petroleum, I see entrepreneurship annual meeting poster, this brings me the curiosity that what is the innovation and

entrepreneurship atmosphere here in this university. After our asking, dean of the petroleum said that there is a university-level organization, dedicated to making simple prototypes, and as long as the staff and student can register. In addition, we are hungry to observe the Kuwait in terms of internet network performance. While all iPhone, snapchat and instagram, not off their hand, but we yet not to see their own networks development of start-up companies, not to mention some of the world's best-known Internet service, such as the Uber, not seen, it is really a pity. In these days, we can see that Kuwait's industrial development is mainly based on the oil industry, even the school direction of nurturing talents is. When Kuwait need other industrial personnel, they tend to tap foreign talent to the local service. They said Kuwait oil will not run out in 200 years, so they take this resource, in exchange for money, also, many of their relatively weak capacity can be achieved.

Kuwait specializes in the oil industry, which makes national strong. Anti-views of Taiwan, although Taiwan has no natural resources, but if we can force our nation to commit to developing in a single industry, such as IC previously, to led national economic is what we can reference Kuwait. Whether specialize in one specific field or comprehensive development is suitable for Taiwan, I believe no matter ion industry or education, is what we worth rethinking.

Besides academic visit, we also visited the great mosque and several Museums. Also, we visited Taipei Comercial Represntative Office in the Stae of Kuwait. At the end of this article, I want to thank all the people from Kuwait University, and also thank all fellow members, Bless, Linda, and professors. Without your help, we will not have such a wonderful Kuwait trip.