

## **Tom Baxter - Taiwan, summer 2015**

On 20<sup>th</sup> June 2015, I was lucky enough to travel to the beautiful island of Taiwan to embark on a semi-intensive language course in modern Chinese for two months. Obviously, this was immediately an appealing prospect in terms of the development of my language skills, but I could never have imagined how rewarding and challenging my time away could be.

First of all, culturally, it was fascinating to meet Taiwanese and other foreign students of Chinese as I began to understand and enjoy the idiosyncrasies of their respective heritages. This was undeniably useful for me as a student of Chinese, as I feel it is a language that deeply reflects the culture of its people through its turn of phrase.

Secondly, we were given the opportunity to explore Taiwan with great freedom when we weren't studying and on the weekends. The more I explored the capital city of Taipei and its surrounding areas, the more I saw Taiwan as a truly diverse country in many respects. This idea was cemented by the occasional typhoon that swept the island and the odd earthquake, just for good measure!

Finally, my Chinese evidently came on leaps and bounds after a fantastic grounding of first year study at Cambridge. Over the two months, I was able to venture far beyond my familiar vocabulary and grammatical structures and immerse myself in the phrases, word choice and intonation of Chinese speakers. Thanks to this trip, I now feel comfortable beginning a conversation in Mandarin and communicating with people with confidence in a variety of situations. Furthermore, I no longer hesitate as much when I forget a word (a completely normal occurrence for linguists), as my exposure in Taiwan has given me the confidence and vocabulary to explain my meaning in a different way.

Thanks to support from Pembroke, I was able to enjoy a trip that did nothing but inspire me, strengthen me and impassion me with regards to my degree subject.