

# **A Series of Writing Assignments for Taiwanese Students**

For each of the fifteen topics below, write one essay consisting of approximately 300 words using excellent grammar and appropriate style. You may consult any data source that you want, but you may not *plagiarize* others' text. Concentrate on your content first, make an outline of the ideas you wish to express, and then write accordingly.

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## Topic #1

Choose something that might symbolize Taiwan  
and discuss its significance.

Taiwan has a long and complicated history having been ruled at first by its aboriginal people, and then later by the Chinese, the Dutch, the Spanish, and the Japanese. This makes it especially difficult to find a single symbol for the island that is not tied to one of these ruling groups or to other countries. One solution to this problem might be to choose a natural feature to symbolize the island; something which is instantly recognizable and which has changed little over the years. A good choice therefore might be Guan Yin Mountain, which combines both scenic beauty and cultural significance.

Lying to the north of the island, at the opening to the Taiwan Straits, Guan Yin Mountain stands majestically 2000 feet in height looking down at the placidly flowing waters of the Tamsui River. Millions of people have seen it over hundreds of years and have no doubt reflected on the changes that have taken place within its shadow. I have often thought how it would have looked during the 1940s with Japanese airplanes zooming low over the water, silhouetted against its broad slopes. In the 1950s, Guan Yin Mountain was the backdrop of an American movie called the "Sand Pebbles" which was filmed in part in Tamsui, across the river from the mountain.

Guan Yin Mountain gets its name from the goddess Guan Yin, whose profile

is thought to be similar to the outline of the mountain ridge. Guan Yin is a Buddhist goddess and is venerated throughout East Asia, and especially Taiwan, as a tireless spirit who bestows mercy and goodness on those around her. She is especially worshipped by sailors who take dangerous jobs on the open seas.

The strength of Guan Yin Mountain, its rich and jade-like trees and foliage, and its peaceful and nearly immortal beauty captures the essence of Taiwan—a land the Dutch called “Formosa” or beautiful island. Whatever the future of Taiwan and no matter what changes lie in store for us, there will always be Guan Yin Mountain, a sight for sore eyes and a respite for those feeling homesick for Taiwan.

## Topic #2

### How has Globalization Changed Taiwan?

Globalization is a broad process describing how that very distant and diverse parts of the world are rapidly being drawn together economically, culturally, and politically. The principal drivers of such changes are the revolutions that have been made in communications and transportation. Taiwan has played an integral part in fostering these new and exciting innovations in global interactions.

In terms of production, Taiwan has long been a leader in the manufacture of computers. This has meant the secular development of dozens of new supply chains connecting numerous workers in foreign lands – each having their own language, labor laws, and culture. Managers in Taiwan have had to adapt to this new brave world. One computer now contains the combined work of thousands of people scattered around the globe, each devoted to only a small part of the collective whole. Gone are the days that Taiwan could produce a product strictly on its own. The ubiquitous smart phones and Ipads we see everyday are again a vivid reminder of the global nature of production. Such joint production was not possible twenty years ago, but great strides in communications and transportation have allowed people in different parts of the world to work together successfully and profitably. Taiwan's business is now geared to the reality of 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization – a world drawn together by the Internet and convenient barrier-free transportation.

But, a world that is globally connected can be a world that is unstable and frightening to individual workers. Jobs that were thought to be safe and

secure can evaporate overnight in such globally competitive markets. The people of Taiwan are learning that they must be prepared to move to where the jobs are and where globalization is pushing the market. Taiwan entrepreneurs and literally hundreds of thousands of Taiwan businessmen have moved to China, embracing the irresistible force of globalization. This has brought a profound change to Taiwan society.

With the accelerating pace of change, education, work, and leisure are no longer limited by traditional borders. New and exciting goods and services are being offered each day in Taipei. Taiwan's trade and investment flows are moving instantly around the world in ever greater freedom. Travel is becoming easier with visa waivers and low budget airlines. We are only beginning to understand how these changes are affecting us psychologically and socially. But, the die is cast. There is little chance the world will change course and return to its old ways. We must prepare ourselves for a lifetime of such changes. Such is the nature of globalization.

### Topic #3

#### Why is the Population Growth Rate Falling in Taiwan?

Taiwan has joined many other developed countries of the world in experiencing a falling birthrate. For decades now, couples in Taiwan have been opting to have less children and this trend is worrying policymakers, who forecast a declining population, inadequate labor force, and heavier tax burdens on young and middle aged workers. It is difficult to point to any one factor causing this momentous change. However, one may be able to shed some light on this phenomenon by focusing on the motivations and constraints modern Taiwanese families are facing.

Without a doubt, an important reason for the decline in the birthrate is the fact that people in Taiwan are marrying at a much older age. In the past, it was not uncommon for students to marry immediately after finishing high school – particularly those who did not plan to go to college. Today, college is available for nearly everyone and therefore marriage is being postponed to accommodate this opportunity for education. There is simply no rush to get married, much less have children.

Another important reason for declining birth rates is the sheer cost of raising a child compared to the help that such children might bring the family. In the past, when Taiwan's economy was agriculturally based, a large family was needed to run the farm and secure a future for the mother and father. Structural changes to the economy have made this unnecessary. Add to this the fact that a single child places a huge strain on the family's

resources, especially if both parents are working, it is no wonder that people are choosing to limit the size of their family.

Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that in today's world of global competition – where one's job today may not be where one's job is located tomorrow – it is difficult to see the value of large families. Big families clearly make movement of the household nearly impossible. People today seek freedom to rationally adapt to the changing environment. With this in mind it is understandable that people are seeking greater flexibility in the size of their families.

## Topic #4

### What is One Thing You Would Change about Taiwan?

Nothing in Life is perfect. Most of us look at inward and wonder how we might change ourselves to improve our image and substance. The same can be said of our view of Taiwan. There are many ways in which changes to Taiwan could bring about a better living environment. If I were to choose a single aspect of Taiwan to change it would be to build more sidewalks. Such a small change would bring a tremendous sense of joy and relief to all of us who wish for a peaceful and safe place to walk. It sounds trivial, but actually I believe the issue of allocating and building broad and unobstructed sidewalks could be an important key to making life more pleasant in Taiwan.

To begin with, Taiwan has one of the highest population densities in the world – outside of Bangladesh. Taiwan is simply chock-full of people. Add to this the fact that there are more than 12 million motorcycles on the island, with millions more cars, trucks, buses, and other machines on the road, and you have a crowded competition for space. Most people, including women with baby carriages, think nothing of walking on the road for a lack of sidewalk space. And, when sidewalks do exist, they often end up being filled or encircled with motorcycles. Who can stand it?

I once was walking in Taipei and had been chased and cajoled by cars, buses, and motorcycles nearly the whole day. It was hot and I was sweating and was thoroughly exasperated. Finally, I made my way to a small sliver of sidewalk that was lined on both sides by motorcycles. My whole body

relaxed and I began to feel safe once more as I walked down this island of serenity. Surely nothing could happen to me now. Suddenly I was struck on my back leg by something hard and metallic? I wheeled around in anger and peered down. There to my surprise was a 3 year old child on a tricycle who had bumped into me. I laughed and told him in English that he was “learning how drive early in life”. He just rode off with a puzzled look on his face. Yes, sidewalks, large, unobstructed sidewalks, would be wonderful – something to share with 3 year olds on tricycles. You see humans of all ages need space. We just do.

## Topic #5

### Does the Steady Rise of China Pose a Threat to Taiwan ?

There simply isn't any question that China is a rising national power and that its leaders are seeking to spread China's influence throughout world. One can see this in China's growing military power, the often bellicose attitude its leaders take with respect to territorial claims, and the powerful economic leverage it wields over other countries. It is not surprising that Taiwan, which lies a mere 100 kilometers off the coast of China, would likewise come under the influence of China's rising might. But, a rising China is unlikely to threaten the people of Taiwan. Most people appear to be unfazed by the emergence of a strong and assertive.

In the past, Taiwan could match an oft belligerent China with its own economic and military prowess. This is no longer the case in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Taiwan is finding that rapprochement with the "giant to its west" can be to its own benefit. In this sense, policymakers in Taiwan are now looking to allow Taiwan to rise along with an emergent China. As China opens its markets and liberalizes its political system, Taiwan has less to fear from a rising China. Indeed, Taiwan can be a catalyst, albeit a small one, helping China make its transition to a free and open economy and political entity.

One can see that cooperation in the form of ECFA, where both scholarly and cultural exchanges can promote a win-win solution to cross-Straits relations. Taiwan has opened its economy to visits by mainlanders eager to see more of an island so long closed off to them. Sea links, air links, and

communications links have demonstrated a Taiwan will to compromise in its own interest. Taiwan farmers have scored success in selling their fruit in mainland markets, something which bodes well for the future. Schools in Taiwan are anxious to open their classrooms to mainland students who potentially number in the millions.

These opportunities are a welcome sight for people living in Taiwan. Much has changed over twenty years. Much is left to be done, though. Peaceful cooperation is the best path for cross-Straits relations. By following such a path all will be better off in the future.

## Topic #6

### What Common Cultural Aspects Do the People of Taiwan and China Share ?

The people of Taiwan and China share many cultural institutions and practices. This is because most of the island's population can trace their roots to major migrations that took place from China to Taiwan, both in the seventeenth century and the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. These immigrants brought with them many customs, but most important was their language. The Chinese written language represents a bridge between Taiwan and all other aspects of historical Chinese culture. The Chinese people place great emphasis on their written language – so much so that they have a special art called calligraphy, which has advanced over the ages to the point of becoming itself a highly prized art form. The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw momentous changes to written Chinese with the introduction through several stages of simplified characters on the mainland. Nevertheless, a strong connection anchored in written Chinese continues to exist between the people of Taiwan and China.

Another important aspect we could mention is the fact that the extended family remains the center of Taiwanese society, just as it does for Chinese elsewhere. Taiwanese take seriously the Confucian admonition for children to obey their parents with filial piety and for adults to care for their parents in old age. Such large communal families require that each member of the household be willing to compromise and see that the family remains intact

and running smoothly. This is in contrast with western families, which often tend to emphasize freedom of action, self-reliance, and individualism. Religion also forms a strong cultural tie across the Taiwan Straits. Religion in Taiwan is roughly separated equally into Buddhism and Taoism, with each having about 8 million followers on the island. Both of these religions spread from China to Taiwan hundreds of years ago. There is now active cultural exchanges that take place between religious believers in Taiwan and China. Taoism, which is especially popular in Taiwan, is traced directly to the writings of two Chinese philosophers, Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. Religion is therefore an important cultural aspect shared between Taiwan and China.

Finally, Taiwan shares a rich tradition of serving Chinese food, although it may be prepared somewhat differently. Throughout the island one can find noodles and rice as the main staple, just as on the mainland. People in Taiwan like to spice up their foods with garlic and hot peppers, something which is very common in China. Nearly everything sold in stores and restaurants in Taiwan can be found in China, but the manner of preparation and the service provided can often be quite different. People in Taiwan have become used to eating Chinese food and it is unlikely that this will change anytime in the future.

## Topic #7

### How do Taiwan boys and girls think differently?

In the past, the values and behavior of boys and girls in Taiwan were mainly formed at an early childhood age within the family. Any significant difference in the thinking of boys and girls in Taiwan that existed could be traced to the instruction that children received at home with regard to their role in life. Everyday household experiences for kids in Taiwan, through viewing mother, father and siblings, provided a rich source of information shaping the thinking and personalities of children here. Unfortunately, this tradition is slowly being undermined by the new social media which all too often emphasizes uniformity of values and behavior.

Traditionally, for girls, the emphasis was often centered on learning how to dress, how to be polite and mannerly, as well as how to acquire extracurricular skills such as playing the piano, learning to paint well, or learning foreign languages. Boys appeared to be more interested in playing sports, participating in online games (sometimes very aggressive games), and handling motorcycles. Today, girls typically get together in small groups of three or four, while boys like to take part in groups of eight or even ten. It is not clear why that this phenomenon is so popular.

Girls in Taiwan today are usually less assertive than boys and are shy when it comes to discussing their desires and inner thoughts; boys tend to be more open and are at times even brash or precocious. However, recently there has been a strong convergence in behavior and values for boys and girls in Taiwan. Some of this may be due to the rising influence of media in the lives of young people, where there is enormous pressure to be

glamorous, even among men. Boys often spend the same amount of time and money on their hair as do girls. Recent TV shows have centered on Korean superstars; individuals who feel it is not only acceptable for men to wear makeup, but it is rapidly becoming an absolute necessity to paint one's face. Girls have similar pressure to be razor thin, white skinned, and large-eyed, none of which is even possible for the vast majority of students.

With the proliferation of cell phone cameras and Facebook, students are spending more and more time trying to establish themselves as beautiful, mysterious, or iconic, taking pictures and posting alluring, photo-shopped snaps of themselves. All this comes at the expense of seeing the world in realistic terms, especially when it comes to their work at school and their relations at home. The impact of media and its distortions of real life, is continuing to play out, but one thing that is becoming all too apparent in Taiwan is that both girls and boys are beginning to look and act alike. One wonders if this is really a good trend.

## Topic #8

Are you satisfied with the secondary educational system in Taiwan? Explain.

All systems created by mortals can stand some improvement, so it would probably be unreasonable if we did not acknowledge at least some areas in which Taiwan's secondary educational system could improve. In that sense, no one should be satisfied with high school. But, alterations in a system that has developed and evolved over many years ought to come slowly and thoughtfully. Much of Taiwan's educational system has been a success and secondary education here is even emulated in other parts of the world. Rash and sudden changes in Taiwan's system are likely to make things worse overall. Since one could choose numerous items to discuss and space is limited, I will confine myself to what I believe are the most important items in need of some bright and innovative thinking.

First, students today have become laden down each day with innumerable tests. Naturally, students need to be tested to confirm that they have retained the materials being taught. Testing done in the right proportion, which complements both presentation and application of knowledge, is essential. However, schools often use these tests as a means of browbeating the students into learning, rather than allowing tests to be an indicator of one's progress. As with any form of stimulus, testing loses its potency to energize students when done too often. Time spent memorizing material for exams, quizzes, and tests often robs one of time devoted to understanding how knowledge can be created, expanded, and applied in

fruitful ways.

Second, the long hours of schooling in high school often devolve into tedium and boredom. Many of the students hardly have time to rest since there is always the constant threat of a test being given and bad grades being earned. The human mind naturally rebels against such a strict and unchanging regime. Being forced to work so tenaciously in high school leads many students to become lost in the freedom they experience in college. Just at the time when students begin to choose their future profession – during their university life – they are given almost complete freedom over their lives, something they have never felt before. The typical response is to experiment with life outside the classroom, ending in low motivation and poor grades in college. Students in their final year of high school should be given greater freedom over their life in order to better prepare them for the responsibilities they face when entering university.

Finally, high school needs to offer instruction in the new and exciting technologies that are emerging. The old reading, writing, and arithmetic which forms the basis of a good education can no longer prepare one for a world of 4-G communications and highly technical software. Learning free and open source graphical and practical software can enhance one's marketability, especially for those students who may not be interested in spending four years in college. For those who wish to go to university, such technical tools can clearly improve one's performance in class. High school needs to embrace technology, to empower students and teachers and to help them face tomorrow's formidable challenges.

## Topic #9

### Why is it important to get a college degree?

Statistics have shown rather conclusively that people who go to college tend to have higher *lifetime* incomes than those who don't. This is a statistical average and therefore says nothing about any particular individual's chances for success. There are indeed many people who do not go to college but who nevertheless prove to be successful in life. It is also true that college has become more expensive and that this (along with any interest) must be deducted from lifetime income to arrive at an accurate estimate of the opportunity cost of not going to school. The trend is towards a growing importance of college to the financial well-being of individuals. Most people would probably agree that knowledge is power and that going to university can provide one with all sorts of new and useful knowledge.

The university is typically the first place where students begin to think for themselves and to acquire maturity. They become more responsible during these years. There is a yawning gap between the values and behavior of seniors on campus and those of the freshman class. However, many students lack work experience, which is also an important means of gaining a sense of responsibility and maturity. Those students who make the all important transition to responsible adulthood often go on to take responsible and well-paying jobs in society.

The university does not typically prepare students for specific jobs. Instead, the university provides an environment where students may get a broad and balanced education. However, it is up to the student to gain important marketable skills while at college. These marketable skills include such

things as a knowledge of computer processing, business essentials, foreign language skills, and specialized knowledge of their own particular major. Student who graduate from college are expected to be leaders and not followers. They are expected to be creative and insightful. Skills such as this come from having to overcome a variety of problems and circumstances that are commonly found on campus and in coursework. This is another reason why college is important.

University life also broadens one's perspective. For many this may seem like an easy thing to acquire, but in fact it takes the pluralism and diversity of a college campus to force students to question their traditional ways of doing things. Students in university meet a wide range of people and experience a variety of new ideas and lifestyles. Encounters such as these helps to build confidence and beliefs that stay with one over the course of one's life. Thus, the university can often be an important springboard to a newer and richer life.

## Topic #10

### How Has Social Media Affected Your Life?

Taken together, social media is the collection of digital applications we use to connect to the internet and which allow us to communicate with each other conveniently and expeditiously. Through the use of social media, we share conversations, bits of writing, music, photos, and even videos. There are now dozens of types of social media that have become popular; scores are used by millions of people every day. Social media has become as familiar to us today as mailing a letter was in the past, or watching a TV program, or calling up a friend on the telephone. It is difficult to remember a time when there wasn't an internet, with email, Youtube, and Facebook. Since most people are familiar with the positive aspects of social media, I will sadly concentrate on some less desirable aspects.

Social media has profoundly changed our lives in many ways we don't always recognize. For example, we now live in a world where detailed information about ourselves is recorded and placed up on the internet for all to see. In the past, anonymity was virtually guaranteed because people have only two eyes and only so much time to go searching for these in the library. Today, search engines can easily fan through billions of pages in a few moments looking for any mention of you, your name, your ID number, etc. Remember that picture someone took of you standing on your head in the middle of the street wearing only your underwear. Well, it's on the internet now and will remain there forever. Indeed, it has probably been copied thousands of times, photo-shopped, and uploaded over and over

again for all to see, including your future employer – in ten years. This is the scary aspect of social media. It is so terribly public that we begin to feel uncomfortable about our loss of privacy.

Social media is also changing the way in which school is taught. Schools must change since social media is competing with the school for the attention of students. Recent surveys of university students indicate that students are spending up to 2 hours per night on social media of some kind. This leaves little time to study or prepare for work. In addition, it is quite common for students use social media to prepare reports. This has become known as “cut and paste” your homework. Never has so much been done to such little effect. Not only is this blatant plagiarism, but students are completely oblivious to the fact that they are learning nothing by engaging in this kind of behavior.

Finally, social media is often manipulated by those seeking to create social disorder. Since the internet is generally not subject to any standards, millions of people can be fooled by propaganda and incitements to riot. We saw this in the Middle East recently when a trailer from a video (not the movie itself) about Mohammad was posted on Youtube. For weeks there was no reaction, but then suddenly thousands of Muslims rose up in protest over what they viewed was an insult to their religious leader. People actually lost their lives because of a video posted on social media. Naturally, some Middle Eastern leaders called for the passage of laws against religious blasphemy. Thankfully these calls have remained unanswered. A free and open internet remains our only hope of combating scurrilous rumors and videos made in bad taste.

## Topic #11

### Why Are Houses So Expensive in the Taipei Area?

Like all products, houses respond to supply and demand. If the price of houses in Taipei are high by historical standards, then it is because there is a strong demand relative to the supply of new housing. But, this is something that is more or less obvious to observers everywhere. Can't something more precise be said about the price of houses in Taipei?

The price of a house in Taipei, as in other places in Taiwan, uses a measure of area called a "ping". Roughly speaking a ping is slightly less than 36 square feet. The average price in Taipei in April was around \$800,000 NT dollars per ping. This works out to be about \$22,000 NT per square foot (or about \$740 USD per square foot). Of course, some of this price is embedded in the cost of the land, sidewalks, as well as the communal space that is shared with one's neighbors, the terrace on the outside of the house, and the elevators and offices that are used by management. In the US in 2011 the average house price per square foot (not counting the cost of additional land making up the yard) was only about \$130 USD or about 18% of the price of housing in Taipei. Even in Manhattan, the average price of a house was about \$1000 USD per square foot. Taipei is quickly gaining on New York. It is easily double the price of housing in San Francisco.

Housing prices react to borrowing costs. The interest rate that one must pay on the money one borrows to buy a house is called the mortgage rate. Taiwan has extremely low mortgage rates, in the range of 2-3%. This has encouraged many people to borrow money at low rates and purchase

second or even third houses as investments. If these mortgage rates begin to rise and housing prices start to fall, then there will be a mad rush to sell one's second and third homes. The bubble will burst and houses will become a burden on the economy, just as they were in the US recently.

There has also been a substantial immigration of people from the south of Taiwan to the north of Taiwan. News reports have claimed that 2000-3000 people move to Taoyuan County each month. These people are looking for the high paying construction work that is taking place in the housing industry. When this housing bubble stops, these people are likely to lose their job and this will prove a drag on the economy. It will be interesting to see if this bubble can be deflated without causing a major recession.

## Topic #12

### Should the Government Provide More Assistance to the Poor in Taiwan?

All compassionate societies provide some form of social safety net for those who suffer misfortune or are the victims of circumstances beyond their control. Aid programs such as these are collectively known as social welfare or public assistance. The push for greater public assistance in Taiwan has been gathering steam, with the result that welfare programs have been expanding at a rapid rate in recent years. Part of this increased urgency is due to a worsening of income and wealth distributions. Another part can be attributed to the dramatic downturn in recent economic activity, as well as the spread of pervasive uncertainty in the marketplace. An increase in the percentage of elderly in the population is yet another reason why Taiwan has increased its public assistance. Finally, the rise in single parent homes, especially those having low incomes, has produced an additional burden on the state. Taiwan also has two very large programs – the national health insurance program and the national pension system – which are partly funded out of general revenues of the government and therefore can be considered a form of subsidized social insurance. These two programs are major budgetary items, requiring painful reforms in recent years.

Decisions about whether to expand the coverage of social welfare programs hinge on one's philosophy as to whether the government has a moral right to compel people to care for one another. These are questions of fairness, something for which there are significant differences of opinion. In addition

there is the question of moral hazard – a phenomenon in which greater aid may reduce the incentive for people to improve their lives through their own actions. The US has been instituting large scale welfare programs for 60 years, and yet the poverty rate in the US today is the highest it has ever been. People have begun to question the efficacy of just “throwing money at the problem”. A rational design of welfare systems, where incentives are not distorted, can be effective in reducing misery, while at the same time guiding people to take a responsible attitude towards their lives.

Taiwan currently has welfare programs covering such groups as under-privileged children, the disabled, indigenous groups, farmers, disadvantaged households, and the elderly. Its expenditures amount to roughly \$12 billion USD making it the largest category of spending in the central government’s budget – larger still than each of education, defense, or economic development spending. The rapid expansion of social insurance and the extension of public assistance to specific groups is now threatening to enlarge the deficit to unmanageable proportions. Thus, it is incumbent on the government to take great care in expanding programs for the poor so that the principle of fairness is upheld, the problem of moral hazard is not exacerbated, and the programs are properly funded. Expansion of these programs should be done slowly, over a short run period, using cost-benefit principles, while using vigilant observation and evaluation to ensure that the programs are getting the best “bang for the buck”.

### Topic #13

If given the opportunity,  
would you leave Taiwan or stay? Explain.

Each person, no matter where he or she lives, wonders at some time if their life would be better lived somewhere else. Indeed, it is a thought to which the mind irresistibly turns. I suspect it lies behind the witty riposte that “the grass is always greener on the other side”. We tend to idealize what we don’t have. Once we have something, our mind invariably strays towards that which we don’t have. Our mind is set between the reality that we have and the imagination we project. Discontent is the typical result.

A more mature perspective might be founded on the issue of whether I can accomplish what I want in my life by staying in Taiwan or by traveling somewhere else. A person who wants to own a small business need not travel to Europe to do so. Similarly, a person who wants to learn mathematics, science, or engineering need not move to the US – everything one wants can be studied in Taiwan. But, if one’s desire is to work on an enormous particle accelerator or be constantly surrounded by Nobel prize winners, then living in Taiwan will be cramped and confining.

Fortunately for most of us, the internet has made it possible to enjoy much of the outside world without ever having to leave one’s armchair. This is a major advantage of living in a globalized era. We are truly connected and all one needs to do is learn how to navigate the web to get what one wants. The internet has let all of us, even the poor, have a chance to see the farthest

reaches of our globe. It has let us expand our horizons and made travel, in some cases, irrelevant.

Still, it is difficult to truly get the feeling of shopping in a Parisian boulangerie, sampling something tasty at Harrod's in London, or taking a stroll through Central Park in New York City. Nothing compares with standing on the Great Wall of China and surveying its majesty, or peering down into the yawning expanse of the Grand Canyon and wondering how such a thing could have been created. Perhaps this is why we have vacations. It gives us a chance to witness these things without having to bear up under the drudgery and boredom of actually living there. It makes the old saying, "Nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there", all the more meaningful.

## Topic #14

Taiwan needs more energy to grow —

how would you solve this problem?

Taiwan suffers from a lack of energy resources. It does not have any petroleum, natural gas, or coal reserves, at least of any consequence. Taiwan's hydroelectric energy was long ago tapped out and cannot be expanded further. This leaves very few choices for the island.

First, it may be possible to import greater amounts of fossil fuels from abroad and employ these more efficiently in the production of energy. Coal and natural gas imports would be the most cost effective of these resources, especially if these could be converted to energy in a clean and efficient manner. Significant technological advances would be needed for this to come to pass. In addition, conservation of demand would certainly allow existing imports of fossil fuels to be extended by reducing the amount being used.

Second, Taiwan can continue to expand its use of safe and reliable nuclear power. Nuclear power, if handled properly, can provide enormous energy in a clean and efficient way. Large scale increases in industrial production would be feasible with low priced electricity produced by nuclear power. The fact that electricity is an extremely popular energy source for all developed countries makes nuclear power an important choice for the future.

Finally, Taiwan can increase its production of energy through the burning

of biomass. This involves the use of garbage and other combustible organic material, like dead limbs and leaves, to produce heat and to generate electricity from turbines. It is true that such energy production is not particularly clean and is also somewhat more expensive than nuclear power. However, it is a renewable resource and it has the potential to produce energy on a large scale.

Some people believe that exotic renewables such as solar power and wind power can be used to produce energy for Taiwan consumers. This is certainly true in some niche applications. However, it is unlikely that solar and wind, along with other types of renewable, can supply energy on a scale that makes them a serious general source of energy in the near future. Most of these energy sources today survive on government subsidies and artificially generated public demand. A realistic view of energy production for the next twenty years will take into account the continued importance of fossil fuels, nuclear, and biomass generated energies.

## Topic #15

Discuss why pollution is a serious problem  
for people living in Taiwan?

Taiwan has one of the highest population densities in the world, ranking roughly 17<sup>th</sup> among countries in the world; it is exceeded only by Bangladesh, with all others before Taiwan being city-states such as Hong Kong and Macao. Taiwan on average has nearly 650 persons per square kilometer. The corresponding figure for the US is 34 persons per square kilometer. Taiwan is literally full of people. What is more, people in Taiwan are crowded together on only about 1/4 of the land mass of the island. This means that disposing of one's waste, or pollution, or garbage is certain to involve numerous other people, as well as oneself. Economists refer to these costs that are imposed on other people as externalities. The existence of such externalities in a densely populated country forces the people of Taiwan to seek strong environmental protection regulations. Unfortunately, Taiwan continues to lag behind in protecting and maintaining a clean and healthy environment.

According to the WHO in 2000 Taiwan was included together with China and Vietnam in having 200-230 deaths annually from urban air pollution, whereas the US was listed as having 60-100 deaths, or less than half Taiwan's number. Air pollution is especially a

problem in the island's largest city, Taipei. An important contributor to Taiwan's poor air quality is the 2-cycle motorcycles ridden in the city. There are a total of twelve million motorcycles in widespread use in Taiwan, with many of these being used in Taipei. Combined with the rising number of buses, automobiles, and trucks, air quality on the island has little chance of improving in the short run.

The current head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Taiwan has forcefully advocated imposing a carbon tax on the emissions of manufacturing firms. This tax will be phased in over a few years. Firms will be required to maintain strict records on their greenhouse gas emissions. Firms that need to exceed the limits established by the EPA will be allowed to either pay a fine or purchase carbon offsets instead.

One additional pollution problem which is plaguing Taiwan is water quality. This is especially true of southern Taiwan, where the operation of pig farmers often pollute the watershed of the water resources used by people living in Kaohsiung. The government has taken steps to improve water quality in Kaohsiung and surrounding areas. Nevertheless, most people still purchase bottled water as a substitute for tap water, which they scrupulously avoid ingesting.