

My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

At the end of hardship comes happiness

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Silvia Dal Soglio hones her study skills in a university library in Korea

There is a Korean proverb that goes 'At the end of hardship comes happiness' and it can easily sum up my exchange experience.

When I applied for the overseas program I knew it would have been challenging. What I didn't know was how hard it would have been. I applied more than a year ago now, and little did I know of how people studied on the other side of the world: sure, I had heard of how many hours students put per day in China, but it seemed a bit unrealistic and it was happening so far away that it did not scare me.

I still remember my first-nighter at Yonsei: it was the Monday of my second week. I had two essays due for Wednesday and the daily 50-70 pages to read before classes. I hadn't been procrastinating; the issue was that I was being graded on a curve, meaning I had to be better than my classmates - well, better than some of them at least. However, something happened at around 2 am: I started to feel motivated, partially because the study room at the library was quite full, making me feel not alone in my struggle, but also because I started to see results coming. Since I had to write the best essays of my entire academic career at the quickest pace I had never experienced, my writing skills started to sharpen and I became more analytical, critical and more meticulous in developing my own position on different issues.

University life in Korea is more intense than in Ca' Foscari - not because it is more difficult, but because it is structured in four months and therefore you have to study for the exams (which are exactly when your classes end) and finish home assignments, which can be up to three or four a week. While exchange students find that the amount of books and articles we have to study for exams here at Ca' Foscari is sometimes enormous, I found that the amount of work Koreans have to do in the span of a four-month period was gigantic. But here lays one of the most important lessons Yonsei has taught me: work hard, give your best all the time and learn from your failures. You can't be on top all the time, but what you can

do is to learn where, why and how you've fallen and next time avoid it. One classmate that I had, who I respect immensely, taught me this: failure is good, it is *not* failing that means that something is wrong.

Embrace your imperfections, do not get mad at yourself and grow as a person and scholar. By failing you become aware of different ideas, opinions and beliefs; you reevaluate your standpoint and make some adjustments – meaning that you become a more complete student.

You see, Koreans give their best on a daily basis. This is part of their culture, well-grounded by Confucianism, which sees group mentality as prevailing over the individual. What surprised me the most is how every student I met felt that they were working today so as to contribute to make their nation even greater in the future: individual aspirations were always framed in a bigger picture. It follows that personal betterment is an essential trait of the Korean mindset and you will see it as a characteristic of every person, even the laziest – which, if compared to us, cannot be considered as such at all.

Deciding to go to Korea put me in a position of sink or swim – but sinking was not an option, the opportunity I had was way too big to sink and so I learnt to swim, at first weakly, but with time my pace became faster, stronger and more relaxed. I pushed my limits and learnt how far I can go. To make a long story short, I grew. And the most incredible thing is that I was growing along my classmates and new friends: when I burnt out, I had friends ready to take a break with me, to have a laugh, or go to a cafe and have one of those mugs of brownish water that they call coffee. I talked about my problems with them, about the work covered in class, of books and conferences, or of just a silly cat being cute on YouTube.

This is the most important lesson this program has taught me: no matter how different you are, no matter how different your cultures are, no matter how much of a language barrier there is, wherever you go in the world you become part of this huge family which will not only challenge the values you had given for granted for your all life, but will also make you see the world with different eyes and will wake up the curious little child that we all have inside of us who still see the world with wonder.

To never stop learning, never stop exploring and never stop living to the fullest – this is what Korea has taught me.