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An Epic Journey of Resilience and Courage: Ukrainian Siblings are Across the Oceans to Study in Taiwan



Anastasiia and Oleksii reflect on their journey of escaping war and leaving their homeland.

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Published 9:00 AM CST,

Wed October 11, 2023

With the assistance of the "Ukraine Project", the first of Ukrainian students arrived at National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University (NYCU) in the fall of 2022. They fled conflict zones, embarked on long journeys across the oceans, and navigated through the complexities of visas and immigration, all with the goal of

Anastasiia and Oleksii's campus life in Taiwan slowly find their rhythm

However, in less than a year, Anastasiia and Oleksii have come to appreciate the unique aspects of their new environment, and their once-tense hearts have gradually loosened.

Janet Chen, from the 2nd Division of Overseas

resuming their interrupted academic plans.

The story of Anastasiia and Oleksii, siblings from Kyiv, serves as a microcosm of the journey undertaken by Ukrainian students.

As the world witnessed, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine forced thousands of Ukrainians to disperse like dandelion seeds, seeking safety and refuge. Among them, the Palamarchuk siblings hailing from Kyiv, embarked on a journey to Taiwan, where they both enrolled as NYCU students. Anastasiia is pursuing a degree in the international health program, while Oleksii is studying information engineering.

Just a few months ago, in March 2023, as the Russian invasion intensified, the Palamarchuk family, like all Ukrainians, had to find a new balance in their disrupted daily routines. The unexpected outbreak of war led to unpredictable twists in their lives.

Twenty-three-year-old Anastasiia recalled how she had planned to complete her medical master's degree in just one more year. However, with the war escalating, her days of studying at

Student Affairs at the Guangfu Campus, has observed that Oleksii initially appeared quite nervous and had trouble conversing when he first arrived. Now, he has become much more relaxed, engaging in conversations and smiling frequently.

NYCU has made extensive arrangements to help these international students adapt to their new lives. For instance, even before their arrival in Taiwan, they can connect with senior students through online communities to discuss any academic, lifestyle, or employment-related questions.

Upon enrollment, NYCU further organizes group trips and exchange programs with other institutions, providing them with exposure to various facets of Taiwanese culture. Additionally, free Mandarin language courses are offered to enhance their communication skills.

Speaking of learning Mandarin, the lively Anastasiia chuckled and shared that she had studied Chinese for three years during high school. However, in the years of university that followed, she didn't practice it much and ended up forgetting most of it.

the university turned into a constant struggle to evade air raid alarms. Everything became uncertain—how long they would have to hide in the bomb shelter or where the next bomb might fall.

The Ukraine Project fundraised 40 million TWD to support 26 students in continuing their education

As Ukraine faced the turmoil of persecution, Taiwan, on the other side of the globe, witnessed the mobilization of various organizations and individuals determined to assist Ukraine in its time of need. More than a month after the war broke out, NYCU established the "Ukraine Project."

Through existing fundraising channels, the Spring Foundation of NCTU, and word of mouth among alumni, NYCU successfully raised 40 million New Taiwan Dollars in just a few months.

With this generous backing, NYCU extended a helping hand to Ukrainian students, covering their airfare, accommodations, and offering a monthly stipend of NT\$26,000. In the autumn of 2022, NYCU warmly welcomed a cohort of 16 Ukrainian students.

"Before coming to Taiwan, I really knew very little, and I didn't even realize that Taiwan also spoke Chinese," Anastasiia expressed with a hint of regret. To this day, she hasn't been able to converse fluently in Mandarin. In her daily life, the phrase she uses most frequently is "wǒ bù zhī dào (I don't know)" and she added with a smile, "zài yí cì (one more time)" because she often needs to ask her dance instructor to demonstrate a move again.

"The Mandarin phrase I'm most familiar with is "bù hǎo yì si (excuse me)" Oleksii admitted, followed by a self-conscious laugh. As a university student, he must attend courses taught entirely in Mandarin.

When his ears fail him, he relies on his eyes, attentively following the formulas on the blackboard. When he falls behind or doesn't understand, he turns to kind-hearted classmates for translation, saying, "Bù hǎo yì si, qǐng jiāng yí cì (Excuse me, could you please explain one more time?)".

Oleksii proudly mentions that he passed all his credits in the first semester, and he's determined to put even more effort into learning Mandarin. He expressed confidence that he'll feel more at ease in the

Tall and slender, Oleksiia explained that even though his elder sister arrived in Taiwan first, he learned about the scholarship opportunity through his high school and promptly informed his sister.

Anastasiia mentioned that their parents were initially influenced by information they found on the internet and were concerned about Taiwan's political instability. However, she realized that the ongoing conflict was even more perilous.

Anastasiia courageously applied for a short-term research grant from the Academia Sinica for three months before turning her attention to applying for the Ukraine Project after arriving in Taiwan.



Ukrainian students interact with the participating alumni, business representatives, and teachers at an appreciation banquet for the Ukraine Project.

The Arduous Journey of Oleksiia to Study in Taiwan

In contrast to Anastasiia, who swiftly obtained her entry permit to Poland in just four days, Oleksiia encountered a more

upcoming semester. Anastasiia: Taiwan's learning environment is friendly and warm. Anastasiia, who had previously studied in Ukraine, has her observations about studying in Taiwan. She points out that the academic culture at the Bohomolets National Medical University where she studied is quite different from that in Taiwan.

In Taiwan, the primary mode of teaching is lectures, with students mostly listening, which makes her feel like she's back in high school. In Ukraine, students are expected to do thorough preparation before class, and professors often engage in discussions, ask questions, and delve into case studies during lectures. This stark difference results in much quieter classrooms in Taiwan.

Anastasiia recalls complaining about the high stress levels when she first started university in Ukraine, feeling the need to do a lot of reading and preparation, she eventually adapted.

Now, she finds herself in a situation where she must adapt once again, and she muses, "Maybe it's not a matter of good or bad... but just a necessity to adapt."

Outside the classroom, Anastasiia finds a profound sense of

arduous journey, enduring an almost two-week wait.

Oleksii clarified that he needed to complete high school first to meet the eligibility requirements for the scholarship at NYCU. It was summer by then, and the war situation had intensified.

Despite his elder sister's presence in Taiwan since April, offering remote guidance on the necessary documents and navigating the application process, he was still quite nervous.

Oleksii's journey in late August 2022 was unforgettable. He arrived at the Ukrainian-Polish border by train, where customs officers thoroughly searched his belongings, inspecting every item of clothing. They repeatedly asked him, "Why are you leaving the country?"

Oleksii thought they might not believe he was only 16 years old and suspected he was violating the prohibition on leaving the country for those over 18 years old. "I was genuinely scared at that moment. It was my first trip abroad, my first long-distance journey without family, and my first time speaking English," he recalled.

Experiencing the oppressive atmosphere of

security in Taiwan's friendliness and warmth, which pleasantly surprises her. "I don't even need to be particularly mindful of my belongings when I go out. On the streets, if someone accidentally steps on your foot, a simple 'sorry' suffices, and it's all okay.

In Ukraine, it's different; such incidents often lead to arguments," Anastasiia explained. Thanks to the social stability in Taiwan, her parents have been increasingly reassured about their children's safety.

Undoubtedly, the monthly allowance of over NT\$20,000 provided by NYCU is also a significant source of security. Both siblings mention that many Ukrainian students make an effort to save money, whether it's to send back home or for future preparations.

Oleksii even uses the term "a considerable amount" to describe this money, saying, "With this money, I feel like I can do anything." Apart from spending the most on meals, during their four-plus months here, he has also purchased a pair of sneakers, gone on trips, and even gone hiking with his sister.

Looking ahead, the siblings may have different perspectives on their future. With his background in engineering, Oleksii seems to have a clear

war, Oleksi, a young teenager, understood the unimaginable stress behind it.

After an arduous four-hour ordeal with customs, Oleksi finally set foot on Polish soil to attend to the necessary arrangements for his journey to Taiwan. During the waiting period for his documents, in an effort to save money, he sought refuge with a godfather living in the Czech Republic, staying there for over a week before returning to Poland to collect his documents. Following that, he took a flight to Istanbul, Turkey, where he had a layover, before ultimately heading to Taiwan, landing at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport.

path, while Anastasiia is still shaping her career plans. Like many Ukrainians who have left their homeland, they will inevitably face uncertainties. However, with the experience of successful overseas study, they should approach future challenges with greater courage and confidence.



Anastasiia and Oleksi gradually adapt to life and studies in Taiwan

Related Image(s) :



Ukrainian Siblings



Appreciation banquet for the Ukraine Project.



Anastasiia and Oleksi



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