SINGAPORE

Singapore - From Concrete Jungle to Garden City to City in a Garden

SOUTH KOREA

South Korea - The Fastest Shrinking Country in the World

INDIA

Traffic system in India

TAIWAN

Taiwan - Vulnerable but prepared

asiamagazine

BY CHALMERS STUDENTS IN ASIA

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20 year
Anniversary

WELCOME!

In your hand you are holding the latest issue of Asia Magazine, a joint effort carried out by Chalmers students in Asia. The magazine is meant to be informative and entertaining regarding current topics of Asia as well as a source of inspiration for students curious about exchange studies. With this dynamic region in focus, it features articles on cultural, political, economical and social subjects. The magazine is coordinated and compiled by students at the Chalmers International Taiwan Office.

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CITO - Chalmers International Taiwan Office

Cover photo by Ella Sibbmark

CITO WHAT?

Chalmers International Taiwan Office, CITO, was opened in March 2003 and is the result of a bilateral exchange agreement between National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, NYCU, and Chalmers University of Technology. CITO is strategically located at NYCU, near the Hsinchu Science Park.

CITO WHY?

The main purposes of CITO are:

- To increase awareness about the development of East Asia, with focus on Taiwan, at Chalmers
- To support mobility of students and staff between NYCU and Chalmers
- To enhance the visibility of Chalmers in Taiwan and in the neighbouring region
- To act as a hub at NYCU for Chalmers students in East Asia
- To further develop Chalmers' cooperation with Swedish companies in Taiwan and Asia

CITO CONTACT!

Looking for internship, master's thesis or other co-operations in Asia? Or do you just want to say hello? Don't hesitate to contact us!

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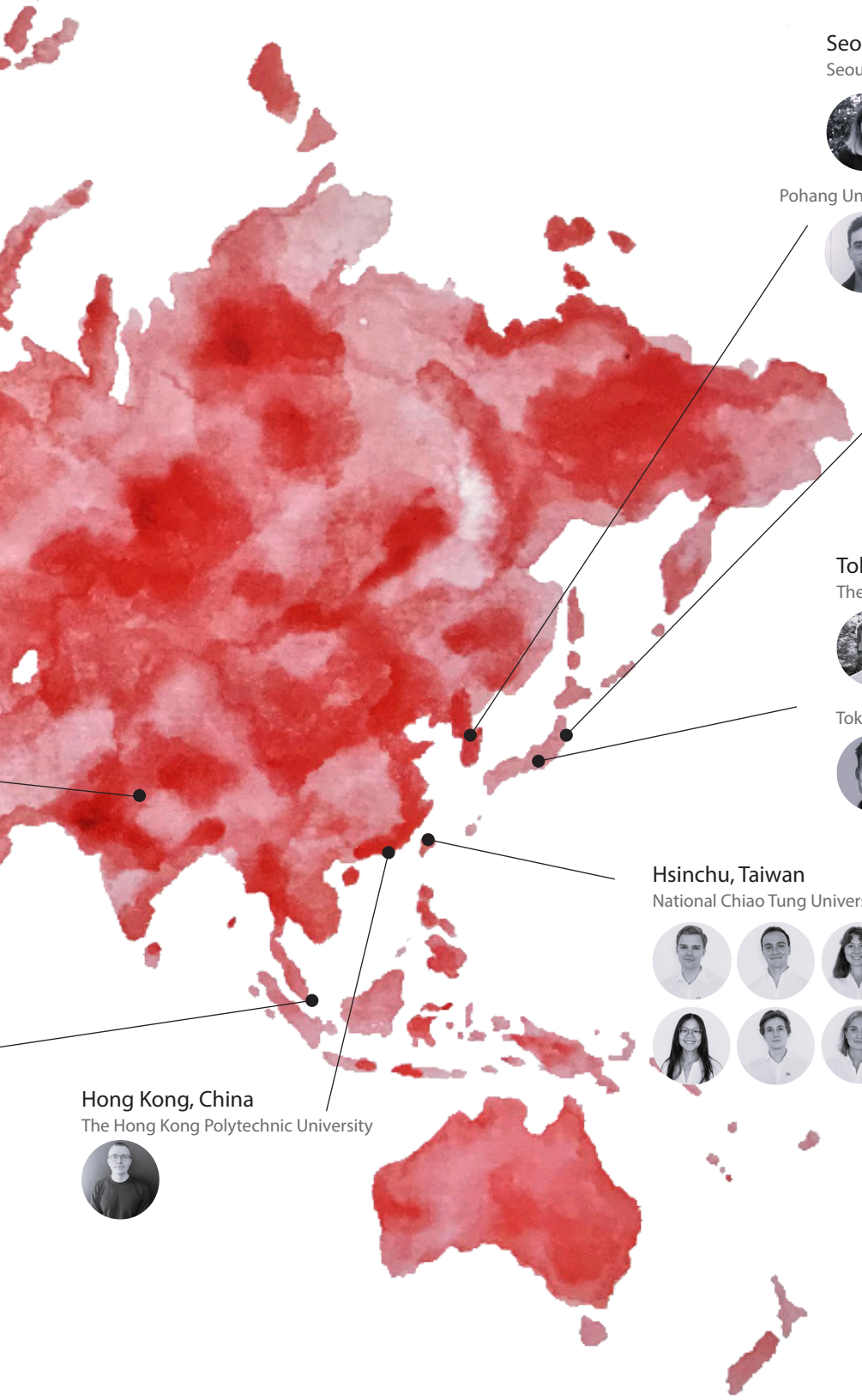
CHALMERS IN ASIA

Studying at Chalmers does not limit you to Gothenburg, Sweden. Through many exchange programmes Chalmers students are given the opportunity to study at a range of Asian universities. Likewise, students from many different countries are invited to study at Chalmers in Sweden.

Delhi, Indina
Indian Institute of Technology

Singapore
National University of Singapore



Seoul, South Korea
Seoul National University

Pohang University of Science and Technolog

Sendai, Japan
Tohoku University

Tokyo, Japan
The University of Tokyo

Tokyo Institute of Technology

Hsinchu, Taiwan
National Chiao Tung University

Hong Kong, China
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

CONTENTS

5 Editor's Letter
Ella Sibbmark

6 Chalmers, Sweden
Chalmers International Taiwan Office – 20 years
Jörgen Sjöberg

8 Singapore
From Concrete Jungle to Garden City to City in a Garden
Saskia Gedin

10 India
Traffic system in India
Antonia Wise

12 Japan
Moomin - the Finnish character that conquered Japan
Viktor Lidman

14 Singapore
Challenges in eating healthy in Singapore
Pauline Nässlander

16 Taiwan
Taiwan - vulnerable but prepared
Tomas Thure

18 Hong Kong
Student life in Hong Kong
Philip Axentjärn

20 Taiwan
The stunning east side of Taiwan
Molly Ingman

22 South Korea
South Korea - The Fastest Shrinking Country in the World
Filip Nilsson

24 Japan
Japanese lab culture – The experience of a Swedish architecture student
Carl Johansson

26 Asia Photos

36 South Korea
The never ending hiking shoes on Seoul's Sunday subways
Melker Veltman

38 South Korea
A Swedish student exploring the Korean kitchen
Emma Frisk

40 Taiwan
TSMC's impact on Taiwan
Tamás Nagy

42 Japan
Orienteering Competition at Fuji-san
Jonas Lauri

44 Japan
Commuting by foot or bicycle in Senda
Gustav Juhlin Onbeck

46 Singapore
Difference in study culture: Sweden vs Singapore
Jamie Santos

48 Japan
Japan- High-tech country but not in everyday tasks
Alexandra Chau

50 Japan
"All things are so very uncertain, and that's exactly what makes me feel reassured."
Taavi Antoniazzi

52 South Korea
Are Koreans wizards?
Thien Nguyen

54 Hong Kong
The hidden system that brings Hong
Axel Brobäck

Editor's Letter

2023/01/05

Dear reader,

Last summer, it was far from certain that this issue would be produced. There were still a lot of pandemic regulations, and some students did not know until July whether their exchange would be possible. I was one of them. With high uncertainty I continued to prepare for the exchange by booking flights, taking vaccines and filling out several forms. Most of the previous asian exchanges had been cancelled due to Covid-19, and the magazine was forced to be put on hold for two years due to the lockdown. But we are now back. Therefore, I can proudly present to you: the issue no 35!

In here you can find a wide range of different topics. Are you interested in student life? We've got you covered. Jamie compares her experiences from studying in three countries and Carl describes the differences while studying architecture

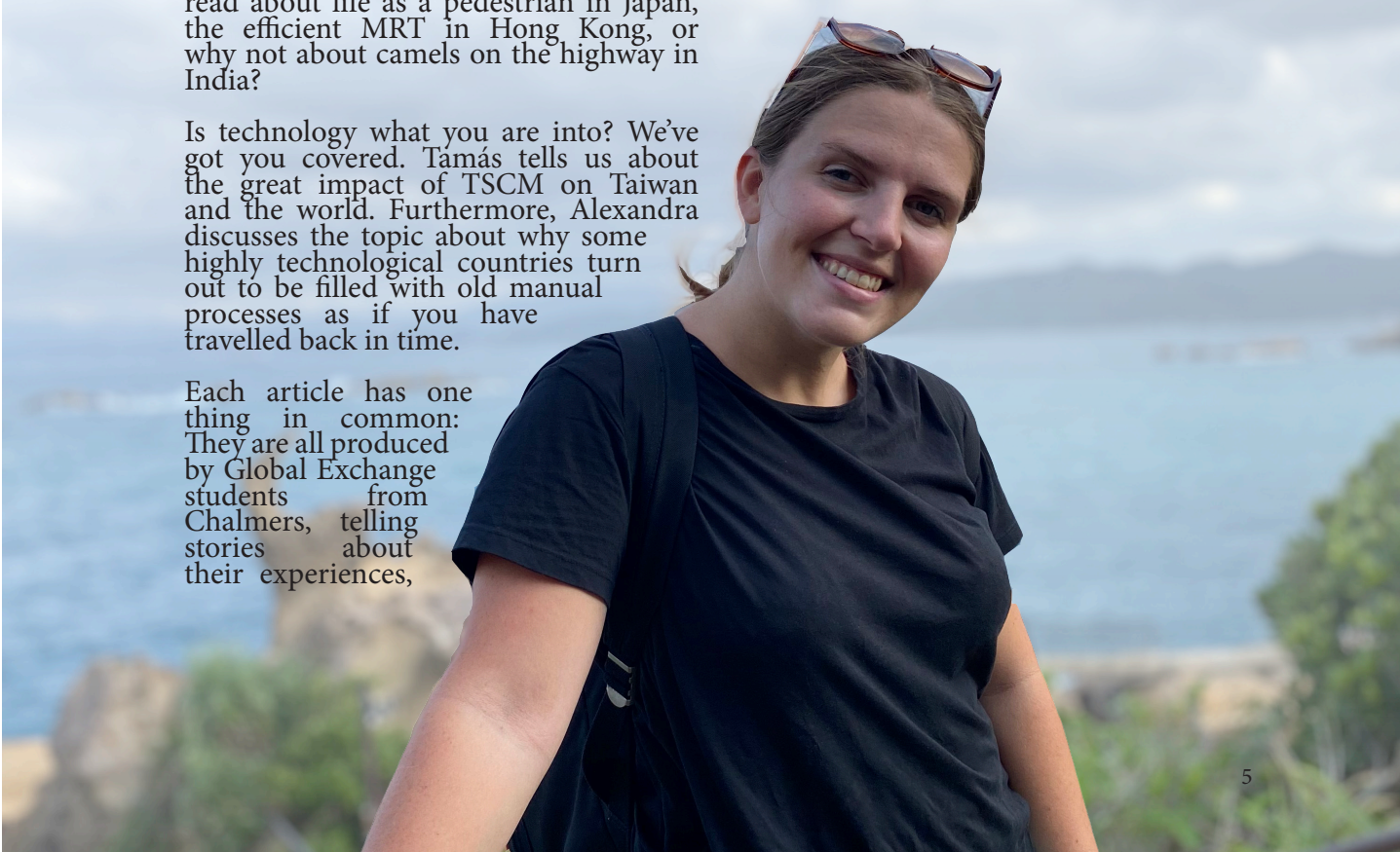
Are you wondering what a traffic situation far from the Swedish one could look like? We've got you covered. You can read about life as a pedestrian in Japan, the efficient MRT in Hong Kong, or why not about camels on the highway in India?

Is technology what you are into? We've got you covered. Tamás tells us about the great impact of TSCM on Taiwan and the world. Furthermore, Alexandra discusses the topic about why some highly technological countries turn out to be filled with old manual processes as if you have travelled back in time.

Each article has one thing in common: They are all produced by Global Exchange students from Chalmers, telling stories about their experiences, insights and findings. I hope you will find the readings interesting as well as entertaining. If you are a student considering an exchange in Asia, my wish is for you to get a more clear view of what a year in Asia might look like. For me personally, it has been great. I have gotten the opportunity to explore Taiwan's fantastic mountainous nature, a totally different food and study culture, and I have also gained a lot of new friends. Hopefully you will all take the chance to do this once in a lifetime experience that Chalmers is offering. But for now, enjoy your reading!

Kindly,

Ella Sibbmark
Editor in Chief 2022/23



Chalmers International Taiwan Office – 20 years

For 20 years Chalmers and NYCU (formerly NCTU) has been involved in a collaborative effort which, among other things, includes student driven offices. With exceptions during the pandemic, CITO has been operating since 2003. How did it all start?

Three years earlier, in 2000, I was attached to a strategy project for internationalization at Chalmers. We explored cooperation opportunities in North America, Europe and East Asia. We Chalmers should set up offices in these three regions. The ideas we later abandoned, but at that time, it was becoming increasingly clear that several economies in Eastern Asia were developing to world leading positions, often based on strong universities. We thought groups of Chalmers graduates need to have deeper insights in this development. So, instead of opening a formal representation in Asia, we decided to set up a student-run office, as a platform for students to gain experience from a suitable place in Asia.

Once the conceptual framework was defined, we needed to have a partner university that would understand and support our idea. Coming to NCTU in Hsinchu, we were warmly received by a management that immediately understood what we intended to do and was willing to support the intention. NCTU also wanted to set up a similar

scheme for their students.

The first group of students were well prepared, having received some language training and, also, a purpose designed course in Easter Asian economy at Stockholm School of Economics. A first student arrived already in autumn 2002, with a mission to investigate the conditions. In January 2003 the rest of the team arrived. Against all expectations, the first team managed to set up the office in just a bit more than two months. On March 27th 2003, NCTU's and Chalmers' presidents could inaugurate the office.

In a way, the initiative was based on a number of circumstances that, almost by chance, led to the idea. It was easy to come to an agreement with NCTU; mutual understanding and trust were built in almost no time. During all the 20 years I have had the privilege to supervise the program. I have, in particular, enjoyed the contact with staff at NCTU/NYCU and with the groups of students who have managed the office, explored the region, and sent valuable reports.

WORDS AND PHOTO
Jörgen Sjöberg
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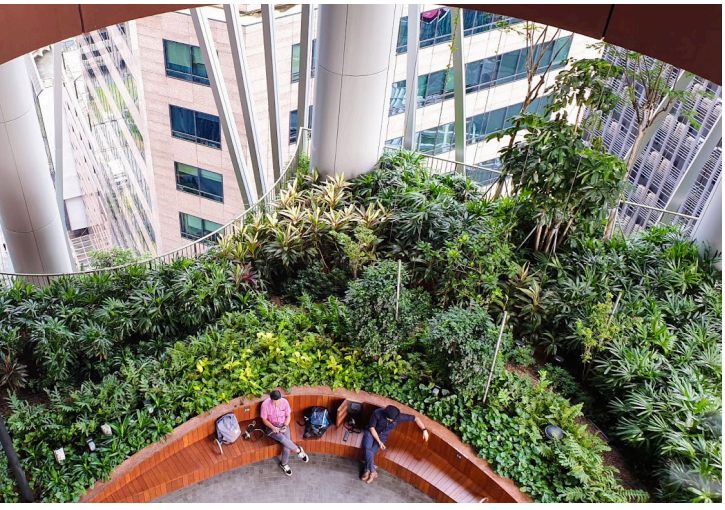
Singapore - From Concrete Jungle to Garden City to City in a Garden

Having travelled to many big cities in the world, the expression of the city of Singapore truly stands out as something unique. This is due to the exceptionally built environment where 200 metres tall concrete skyscrapers seemingly live in symbiosis with nature. In some cases, it looks as though the buildings were put there merely as a stand for plants to grow on and in other cases, the buildings have been constructed with hollowed out pockets where greenery suddenly flourishes 50 metres off the ground. Furthermore, the four lane streets that move throughout the city are always followed by trees and green patches, which make the highly trafficked motorways feel more like pleasant small scale roads. It all comes together very nicely and oftentimes seemingly organic looking as though the city was built carefully around and together with the existing nature. However, that is not exactly the case.

Singapore was once a dirty, polluted concrete jungle as a result of the need to quickly expand the built environment due to the rapid population growth in the mid 1900's. It was not until a political initiative was announced in 1967 by the prime minister Lee Kuan Yew that Singapore was for the first time envisioned to be turned into a clean, lush "Garden City". The objective was to mitigate the harsh concrete built environment and to improve the quality of life in the city. It was also envisaged that the presence of ample greenery and the clean environment would radiate that Singapore was a well-organised country and thus a good destination for tourists and foreign investments. Evidently, it was a successful initiative that truly distinguished Singapore from other places and made the city well known worldwide as a green, litter free place.



The 1967's Garden City initiative had cleaned up the streets and plastered Singapore with greenery for an aesthetically pleasing look that was a great selling point for the city. It was a step in the right direction but it could be seen as merely a shallow way to cover up the environmental destruction that a dense urban city entails. What started out as the vision of the Garden City has in later years evolved into the vision of a "City in a Garden". The flip of words put more emphasis on the garden rather than the city. Furthermore, the new plan has a more sustainable focus of conserving the natural heritage, involving the community and utilising the greenery for its functional purposes of reducing carbon dioxide emissions and preserving the local biodiversity.

In the spirit of the City in a Garden vision, some new buildings are using green facades as a way to cool down the buildings. They will then require less energy to be used for air conditioning systems in order to maintain a pleasant indoor temperature in the tropical climate. Covering a facade or roof with greenery as opposed to leaving the concrete exposed is said to reduce the surface temperature by half. Not only does the green facades obtain that desirable visual look from the initial vision of the Garden City, they also serve a great function.

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TRAFFIC SYSTEM IN INDIA

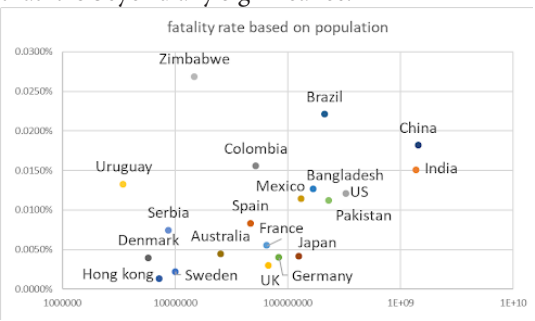
The traffic diversity consists of at most 5 types of vehicles on the roads in most countries: cars, motorbikes, lorries, buses and bicycles. In India and many other developing countries the types are never ending: cars, motorbikes, lorries, buses, bicycles, horse carts, tuk-tuks, mini lorries, manual three-wheelers, people pushing carts, scooters, tractors and the list goes on. If you can think of a way of transport you will find it on the Indian roads. I've even seen camels on the motorway.

Now take this diversity and mix it with the two types of traffic settings: The countries that follow lane discipline and the ones that have chaotic nature. The traffic settings correlate strongly with the diversity of vehicle types on the roads. Having many types of sizes of vehicles helps to fill the gaps of the non existent lanes in a chaotic nature type country.

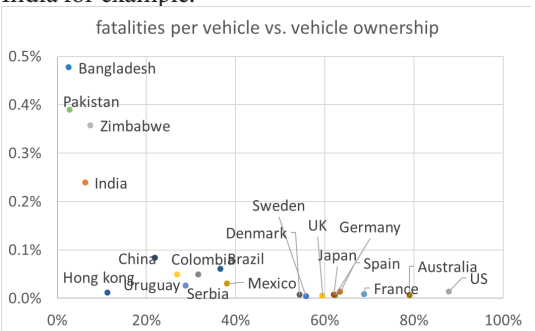
One can always ask why do they just not keep in the lanes then? It is not that easy. For example, We had a guest lecture where the speaker asked us students the questions "Do you stop at a red light?" In a class of 70 only 2 hands were raised, mine and one other. He asked again if everyone had answered the question, but no more hands were raised. His answer: "We Indians simply do not like to follow rules".

And this is the hard truth, it is integrated deep in the culture. Naturally with the extremely large population you have to start breaking the rules if some people do it, otherwise only the rule breakers win. So the solution: everyone becomes a rule breaker so the rule becomes invalid. It is a vicious circle that is very hard to break. This chaotic nature of traffic has very high risks and unfortunately a very high death count. But you have to look at the values in a fair way. And unfortunately that just makes the data worse.

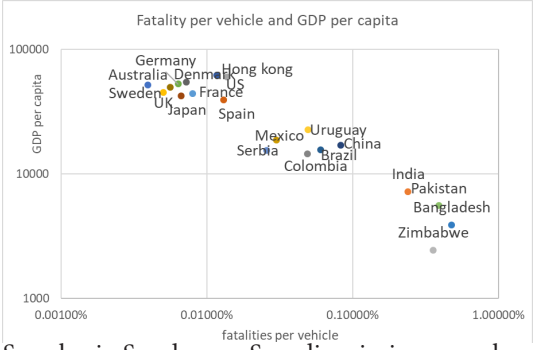
The fatality rate on roads based on their population is in India 0.015% whereas in Sweden it is 0.0022%. The USA is at 0.012% which would mean that the probability of dying in a car crash in the US is almost the same as in India. This data is so skewed that it is beyond any significance.



88% of Americans own a motor driven vehicle, and 56% of Swedes, but only 6% of Indians do. So choosing the right data when comparing them is crucial to understand the situation. The fatalities per vehicle in the USA is 0.014% and 0.004% in Sweden, but India has 0.24%. When comparing with other countries in the same traffic situation, the countries are similar to their peers. Pakistan and Bangladesh are actually doing far worse than India for example.



Is this a fair comparison? No, not really. There are many factors that goes into these death rates, not only traffic structure such as vehicle diversity, and rule obedience but also car and road quality. And here comes the unfairness of reality. 90% of road accidents happen in low and middle income countries. As all things, road fatality depends on money. Higher GDP equals less road accidents.



So why is Sweden or Scandinavia in general so good? We have the money to have good roads and good cars, we generally follow the rules and also we have had time. Sweden started vision zero for road safety in 1997. That is saying we were already in 1997 aiming to do the best in the world regarding traffic safety.

We are trying to compare two settings that have had a huge difference in time to implement a safe traffic system. India is still a developing country and it is growing faster than any other country. Compared to Sweden that had its major growth in the late 19th century, more than 100 years ago.

This does not mean that all countries should become car dependent countries. All countries should adopt a public transport system instead of designing for cars. And this is actually what India is trying to do. In 2017 India made a new strategy for all cities to follow; Moving people, not only vehicles. They are building metroes and implementing bus routes as well as keeping the three-wheelers to take people the last mile to their destination. In theory this is the most environmentally friendly solution and also the most efficient.

You just wait and you will see.

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MOOMIN

- the Finnish character that conquered Japan

Moomin, Tove Jansson's beloved character, is a staple in a lot of Scandinavian people's childhood. Created in 1947, through books, comics, and tv-series Moomin has not only survived, but prospered over the last half century. Even though this is the case in Sweden and Scandinavia, I was thoroughly surprised when I saw the character on a shampoo bottle in a Japanese department store. Then I saw it on a mobile commercial in the metro, then a pop-up store in one of the larger subway stations in Tokyo, then I found out about the theme park… Moomin seemed to be pretty popular here.

What I thought was only a Scandinavian staple is actually a very popular character on this side of the globe as well. Nowadays Moomin has the same brand recognition as Pokémon in Japan! In a ranking of awareness for classical and international characters, Moomin came in joint third place. The only characters beating it were Hello Kitty and Winnie the Pooh. Moomin beat characters such as Harry Potter and Mickey Mouse. The fact that Moomin is popular in Japan should perhaps not surprise anyone that has seen the tv-series from 1990 as this series was animated by a Japanese studio, Telescreen. This was the third Moomin anime but the previous two series (1969 and 1972) only aired in Japan.

So why is this character so popular in Japan? Well, there is not a clear answer. Some speculate that it is simply because it is a cute character and say the stereotypical trope that a lot of Japanese like cute or "kawaii" things. This is probably not the full truth which can perhaps be seen in the fact that the most popular characters aren't actually the Moomin Troll, they are Little My and Snufkin. Other theories of its popularity are that the deeper meanings and motives in the books resonate with both younger and older generations and it is therefore enjoyable for many. Something that of course also has had an impact is the fact that the first book was released in 1947 and continuously from that point, books, picture books, comics, and tv-series have been created. This has led to both multi-generational and multi-media exposure.

If I take a step back and look at my experience here, Japan has resonated with my "Scandinavian self" in a lot of ways. Perhaps it is as simple that the other way holds true as well, that Japanese feel a connection with Scandinavia. Maybe it is these cultural similarities and connections that make Moomin resonate with all of us (or maybe I'm looking too deep down the rabbit hole, who knows!).

It is hard to tell why Moomin is so popular in Japan, perhaps its launch in Japan in the 60s was just a stroke of luck, maybe its deeper themes resonate with a lot of people of different ages or maybe it's just that the characters are cute and loveable. It is probably a combination of a lot of different things, but one thing is sure, Moomin is here to stay.

I will leave you with some words from the author herself, Tove Jansson, and maybe, just maybe, she had the best idea of why Moomin is so popular on opposite sides of the world.

Hongo Tech Garage is a base for ideas to be tested. The facilities offer fast Wi-Fi, professional software, cloud computing resources, lots of whiteboards and manufacturing machines such as 3D printers, laser cutters, drills, benders, soldering

irons etcetera. This somewhat geeky base even provides free drinks. The main purpose of the Tech Garage is not to create companies, rather letting students test their theories. You learn from failure is a common belief in the startup scene and the garage is built upon that philosophy. Students have a chance to test, reject, improve and further develop their ideas. Perhaps it will result in something great, perhaps it won't. Either way, it is a learning experience. The Hongo Tech Garage further offers acceleration programs and mentoring support from successful entrepreneurs and professors for those students who wish to take their ideas further. Nevertheless, the foremost purpose of the Tech Garage is being a place where young, tech-savvy and entrepreneurial students can flourish.

If students get so far as to starting a company, the next step is often to search for funding. At this stage, the University can be of assistance as well. University of Tokyo Edge Capital, UTEC for short, is a seed/early stage venture capital firm. UTEC has strong relations with University of Tokyo, and it is students from this school who mainly have received funding. However, UTEC is affiliated with several universities, mainly in Japan and USA. The firm introduces themselves as technology focused, several of the employees having a background in research at University of Tokyo. UTEC has operated funds totaling 30 billion yen (about 265 million USD), investing in over 70 companies. Of these 70 companies, nine went public and eight were acquired in M&A transactions. Hence, they have contributed to several successes of former University of Tokyo students.

Entrepreneur Dojo is a university-wide 6-month educational program. The aim of the program is to teach students how to create startups, write a business plan, build an entrepreneurial team and work with the venture capital community. The program is three-phased, the first phase focusing on lectures and development of business ideas. Thereafter the focus is seminars and writing of business plans. The third phase consists of mentoring as the students continue to work on their ideas. The finale of the program is a business plan competition where all teams present their work. From 2005 to 2016, a total of 2839 students have been enrolled, from PhD students to undergrads, majoring in everything from engineering to psychology. After the program, UTEC is ready to offer initial capital if the business plan developed by a student team is feasible enough.

Despite Japan not being a particularly entrepreneurial country, there have been some successful startups. SCHAFT, a robotics company that emerged from University of Tokyo, won the DARPA challenge in 2013 and was later bought by Google. PeptiDream, a bio venture company, and Euglena, a biotech company, started their days incubated at University of Tokyo and are today listed at Tokyo Stock Exchange. All three of these companies are quite famous in Japan and in their specific field. Considering the efforts University of Tokyo are putting into promoting startups, stories like these are likely to occur more frequently in the future and perhaps entrepreneurship, startup and unicorn will be titles sought out for even in Japan.

Dear Japanese children,

I hope you will like and enjoy this book. My country Finland and Japan are geographically very far apart. But I don't think the worlds of the stories are that far apart, nor are they different. Come on, jump in! Welcome to my picture book world!

Tove with all my heart*

WORDS AND PHOTO
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CHALLENGES IN EATING HEALTHY IN Singapore

Renowned for its delicious varieties of seafood dishes and affordable hawker centres which offers a wide range of dishes all in one place, Singapore is truly a great place to eat out in as a tourist. The hawker culture makes it possible to eat out every day without burning a hole in your wallet which is great for someone who wants to try out every dish on their vacation and save time in the process. But for a local or someone living here for a longer time period, is this really the healthiest eating habit one can adapt even though it is convenient?

The foods found in hawker centres, food courts and canteens, while probably healthier than other fast-food options such as McDonald's or similar, include lots of carbs without nutrients like the very common white rice and noodles. This food is also often fried or in other ways contain large amounts of salt and oils and rarely includes any vegetables. This isn't the sort of food that can be eaten daily if one would like to eat healthy. When I first arrived in Singapore the hawker culture suited me perfectly. I did not have any time to even think about cooking with everything going on being a new exchange student in a foreign country, and the availability to a variety of lunch and dinner options at an affordable price was more than convenient. After a few weeks or a month though, I started to feel sick of this sort of food and craved home cooked, healthier meals even though I've never been much of a cook. This was when I realised that there are actually some obstacles to overcome if you want to eat less hawker foods and healthier.

Firstly, far from everyone I have talked to in Singapore has access to a kitchen and can cook at home. Since I am an exchanger, I have mostly interacted with other exchangers who often live on campus or rent a room in someone's apartment. The people living at campus report that they have little to no possibilities of cooking and it is very common for them to have a meal plan where dinner and breakfast is included. They then end up eating out at least once a day for lunch if not more often. The ones who rent a room sometimes have the possibility to use the apartment owner's kitchen but most of the people I have talked to are not allowed to use the kitchen for more than making a sandwich and therefore have to eat out for all meals daily.

Secondly, even if you do cook your dinners at home, the Swedish culture of bringing your leftovers to work (or campus in my case) the next day to heat up does not work here. There are no microwaves on all of campus but there are a lot of canteens which everyone goes to for lunch. I realised that whenever I was on campus over

lunch, I would probably end up eating at these canteens anyways.

Thirdly, there is a general perception among exchangers that cooking at home is actually more expensive than buying all your meals at hawker centres since a first glance at some of the food prices in the grocery store tends to give you this impression. After reading up on it I found that this is a myth and that it is completely possible to cook nice meals at home for less then you spend in canteens, but it is not an unfounded concern as the prices in the grocery stores are quite high and starting to cook at home requires you to by a lot of basic goods which is not that cheap. Also lots of vegetables and fruits can be quite pricey which can make cooking a healthy meal at home expensive and honestly I have not checked my expenses carefully enough to be able to deny or confirm the claim that cooking at home is not more expensive than eating out.

Lastly, a somewhat different issue when trying to eat healthier in Singapore is the constant accessibility to cheap sweet beverages such as fruit juices (which more often than not contain large amounts of added sugar in them), bubble tea and kopi (which is coffee with condensed milk and lots of sugar). You might think that at least these are easy to avoid, just don't drink it right? But this can be hard to avoid as well. Not only is it difficult to refrain from buying it when there is a juice stand right next to you as soon as you get the craving, it is also very easy to fall into the trap of just getting a drink to your food at a canteen and you end up increasing your sugar intake at almost every meal eaten out.

WORDS AND PHOTO
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Currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Biomedical engineering

Taiwan - vulnerable but prepared

Before coming to Taiwan for my exchange studies, I had heard that the country is prone to earthquakes and that I should expect to experience it during my year here. What I had not anticipated was how soon I would experience a major one. Less than two weeks after leaving my quarantine hotel, the earthquake struck.

It was a regular day and I was about to leave my dormitory on the 9th floor for an afternoon lecture. As I was walking in the hallway towards the elevator, something did not feel right. The first seconds were quite confusing. I remember thinking; am I going insane or is the entire floor actually moving? After realising what was going on, I reached for my phone to try to record the intense rumbling and shaking. The turmoil continued for well over half a minute before slowly dying out. After that, everything was back to normal. Strangely, people on the streets were minding their usual business and the professor barely mentioned what had just happened.

Although I was excited to have experienced my first earthquake, I was also curious about the aftermath. After reading the news during the following days, I was surprised by how minimal the damage and casualties turned out to be. The quake left one person dead and 179 injured. Only a few buildings and bridges collapsed throughout the country. This made me wonder; how do they do it? How are buildings and infrastructure so well adjusted to deal with the constant threat of disastrous earthquakes?

First of all, the Taiwanese are quite used to powerful earthquakes. Several disasters have struck the country in the past. The most recent one occurred in 1999, which left over two thousand people dead and an estimated one hundred thousand homeless. Subsequent investigations showed that many buildings had major flaws and lacked the necessary stability to withstand intense shaking. To prevent future catastrophes, the government took large measures when it came to stricter building regulations and improved emergency preparedness. An annual national disaster pre-

vention day was also established. On this day, all citizens get alarms and messages on their phones, warning about a massive earthquake and following tsunamis. Both nation-wide and local disaster drills are conducted. Many schools also conduct drills on this day to reassess their safety measures.

Lots of restrictions and requirements when constructing new buildings have also been implemented. Older buildings for example need to pass inspections regularly to detect degradation and damage to the structure. When it comes to earthquake adaptations in Taiwanese architecture, the skyscraper Taipei 101 in the capital city acts as a stunning example. The former world's tallest building stands at an incredible 508 metres. With this height, providing the building with enough stability is a tough challenge, and a clever piece of engineering was needed to solve it. Between the 87th and 92nd floor, a massive 660 metric ton steel ball is installed. It acts as a damper that absorbs a big portion of the building's horizontal movement. This prevents the building from swaying in heavy winds or during earthquakes. This is only one example of how smart solutions are implemented in buildings throughout the island.

After having witnessed and read about Taiwan's preparedness for earthquakes, I now understand why everyone seemed unbothered by the earthquake. Thanks to clever engineering and regulations, Taiwan undoubtedly serves as a good example of how a nation can combat natural disasters and protect its inhabitants. During the next eventual earthquake, I too will feel safe wherever I might be; on the ground, in my dormitory or on the top of a skyscraper.

WORDS AND PHOTO
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Student life in Hong Kong

Before I came to Hong Kong for my exchange semester, there were a lot of thoughts that crossed my mind. Everything from how the study pace will be, the workload differentiating from Sweden, the teaching and so on - a lot of questions regarding school in general.

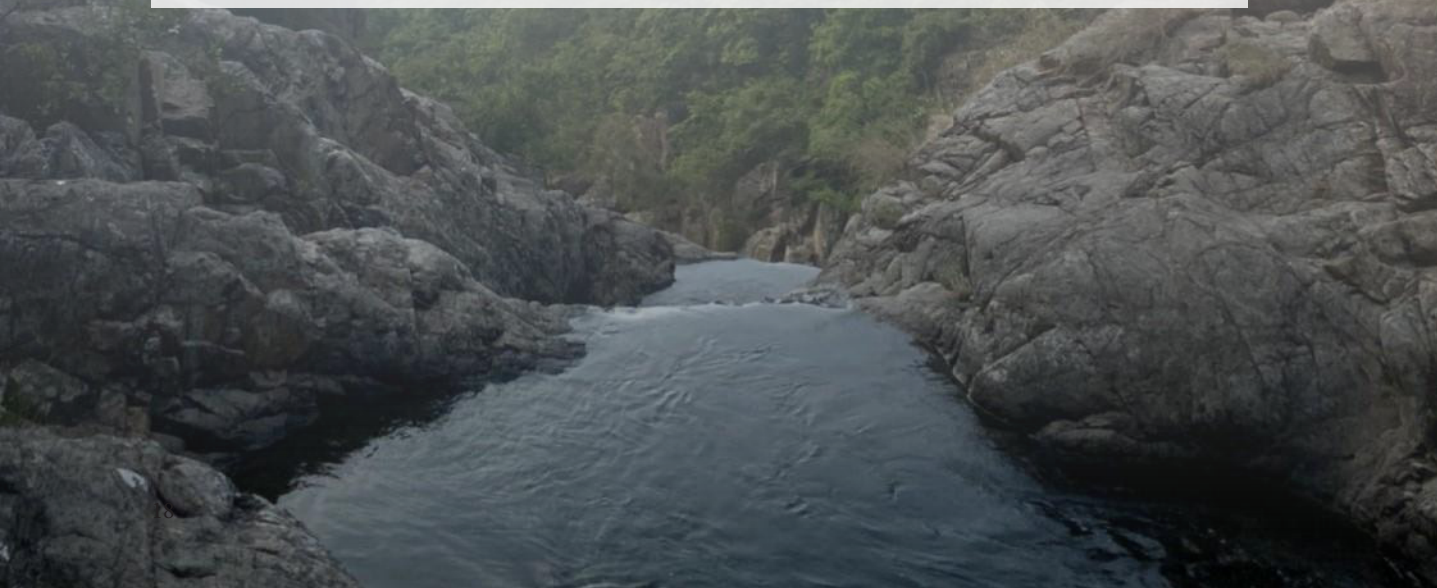
One thing I hadn't put much thought into was how the student life would be. How would I be spending my time outside of school?

On my very first day of checking into the dormitory, these thoughts and questions were put to rest. I was instantly met by so many friendly strangers, that I can now gladly call friends for life. We all set out as a group to discover what one can do in Hong Kong, as a first-comer and as a student. Since most students have a set budget, it can be hard in an expensive city like Hong Kong to find out what to do for exploration and fun, without spending your entire budget at once. Thankfully, being a student at a university like Hong Kong Polytechnic, comes with its perks. Some of them include free access to the gym and sports halls, where one can play tennis, basketball, badminton or any other sport one might have the liking for. Another benefit is the access to both the campus pool and the pool located at the dormitory. These became a great way to make new friends and to spend quality time off from your studies, which don't even cost a penny.

Despite what one may perceive Hong Kong to look like - filled with giant skyscrapers, I can say from experience it has a lot more beautiful scenery than you would expect. Hong Kong's nature is truly some of the best I have ever had the chance to witness. You might ask, wouldn't it be such a long trip to find the nature scenes of Hong Kong? Actually, it's within just a grasp! Just 30 minutes of local commute (by buses or the trains) one is met by the most stunning trails that lead to jaw dropping views.

The nature trails of Hong Kong is one where a lot of my friends and I have spent a lot of time exploring. Some must-do hikes for nature enthusiasts include Ng Tung Chai waterfalls - a stunning hike in the mountains where one can take a well deserved bath in the waterfalls after breaking a sweat from the tough, but enjoyable elevation track. Another must-do hike is the Man Cheung Po Infinity Pool trail. This trail, although quite difficult, takes you up to the natural infinity pools located in Tai O.

When it comes to food there are alternatives that can go easy on a student's wallet, it's not all cup noodles. One of the go-to places I have found



"Another must-go place is this old, worn down place called Mr Wongs. Even though it may not look like much, it is one of the best places to visit"

is a traditional Chinese takeaway place where we would go at least 3-4 times per week. Min Ban, Hung Hom or more commonly known as "25" by the University's exchange students. They offer a variety of different dishes, swapped on a daily basis. You can pick two dishes of your liking for 25 HKD (hence the nickname), paired with rice.

Another must-go place is this old, worn down place called Mr Wongs. Even though it may not look like much, it is one of the best places to visit - offering an all-you-can-eat and drink for only 80 HKD. This became a staple during my time here. Not just for that part, but also for the atmosphere and the character that is Mr. Wong. He is the super friendly owner of the restaurant that you'll find chatting and joking with all the exchange students who visit.

All in all, my experience in Hong Kong has been truly remarkable. More than just a world financial centre, Hong Kong is filled with unexpectedly amazing places and nature, outstanding food for all budgets, and many wonderful people that's allowed me to make life-long friends. I'm sure I'll be back sooner than later! For anyone that is looking to do their exchange semester abroad, I highly recommend that you do it here, in Hong Kong.

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THE STUNNING EAST SIDE OF TAIWAN

I came to Taiwan two months ago without ever having ridden a motorcycle before. Now I was in a country where I didn't understand the language of the road signs, with a newly bought motorcycle I didn't know if I could ride. Ahead of me was a journey of almost 800 km on the abandoned roads that winded along the east coast of Taiwan. A trip where I learned how to ride a motorcycle on the edge of a cliff with dramatic mountains on my left and on my right, the Pacific ocean, vast without an ending. How did I end up here?

"The stunning east side of Taiwan" is the title of an article that swept by when I was doing research before my exchange to Taiwan. It's an article I forgot the content of, but a title that stayed with me. There the seed was sown that I wanted to experience the East Coast for real, not just through the window of a car or bus. What means of transportation could be better than a motorcycle that are the most common means of transportation for Taiwan's cities?

To ride a motorcycle in Taiwan, you must have a driver's license. The day before the driver's license test, I called a friend. He took me to a parking lot where I got to try riding a motorcycle for the first time. After a few jerky starts and wobbly maneuvers, I started to get a handle of how to drive and felt ready for tomorrow's driver's test.

Getting a motorcycle license in Taiwan consists of two parts. The theory part with a lesson followed by a theory test. After passing the theory test, the driving test is carried out in a regulated area by driving through an obstacle course. After two approved parts, I left the "Motor Vehicles Office" with the driver's license in hand and my sights set on the southernmost parts of Taiwan. Where I, even before the test, had agreed with a salesman to buy his motorcycle that same evening if I passed the driver's license test.

After a quick motorcycle purchase, my 800km adventure began and I had my first encounter with busy roads in Taiwan. The roads that showed and taught me how life works in that country that was still new to me. In Taiwan, motorcycles are not

allowed on the major free-ways. This, together with the fact that I always chose the smallest roads, led me to places you only see if you are there with an errand or goal.

A large part of the road went along the wild sea, but I also got to see small communities, mountain villages that tourists don't see. I got to see the curiosity in the eyes of the children who had never before seen a person without an Asian origin in real life. I drove over mountain passes, up and down slippery roads with waterfalls and rivers roaring right by the side of the road. Far up in the mountains I passed distant mountain temples where I was met by people worshiping the gods of Buddhism. I drove on narrow dirt roads between fields where the local population of the village was helping to harvest the autumn ears of corn. I also got to experience the typhoon season in Taiwan. The sky that one moment is postcard-perfect suddenly turns tar-black and the rain is horizontal with the wind blowing in from the sea. With every muscle on full tension, the strong gusts of wind that tried to throw the motorcycle off balance were parried.

Traveling through a country on a motorcycle brings you closer to the people, the real life and culture that goes on behind the scenes created by tourism. After this adventure, I feel that I have come closer to this country and gained a greater understanding of my surroundings. Before I came to Taiwan, I skimmed an article with the title "The stunning east side of Taiwan". It's an article I don't remember the content of, but I've now created my own story to the title.

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South Korea - The Fastest Shrinking Country in the World

As I took an evening stroll through Hongdae on my first day in South Korea, it was full of couples holding hands and wearing trendy, matching clothes. The place seemed alive. At that point it was hard to imagine I was in the country with the fastest declining population in the world. But as I reached my university town Pohang, a city of half a million people located on the other side of the country, it painted a different picture altogether. Heading down to the markets and streets, you're met with a sea of ajjima (old ladies) and there's not a young person to be seen. Of course, a vast difference is expected between the capital and a small city, but that got me thinking. Is there more to this than what meets the eye?

The truth is that Korea is one of the countries in the world facing a huge shift in their demographic. Currently, they have the lowest fertility rate in the world, with on average 0.8 children per woman. Right now, their population is 52 million, but this number is expected to decrease to a mere 38 million by 2070 if this trend continues. At the same time, the Korean median age is expected to shift from 43 to 62 and the proportion of the elderly is expected to reach one quarter of the total population.

So why is that? A major contributor to such a drastic decline in fertility is proposed to be the deteriorating economic circumstances of young adults. For example, Korea experienced a substantial increase in precarious work (e.g. nonstandard jobs) after the financial crisis of the late 1990s. Moreso, the skyrocketing housing prices, especially in Seoul's metropolitan areas where the majority of the population is concentrated, have also been identified as a major barrier to young people forming families. The average price of an 84 sq. metre home (a popular size in Korea) is expected to be more than 1 billion won (7.8 MSEK), and an apartment goes for even more.

In addition, it's too hard for young Koreans to meet the tough demands of their work life while simultaneously raising a family. Heading into the job market they are met with increasing qualification requirements and sometimes even additional exams. A survey from 2017 reported that 80% of Koreans aged 19 to 34 have experienced exhaustion due to stress and fears of the future. On top of this, taking a career-break to care for a child might result in a large lifestyle change, where parents are worried about having to give up their job.

In Korea, providing your children with high-level education is highly valued, yet expensive. In 2021, the average expenditure on private education was 367.000 won (2900 SEK) per month, rising by 21.5% from 2020. But surprisingly, a higher level of income correlates with fewer children, not more. Even though the Korean government implemented several programs to incentivize childbirth, the birth rates have steadily decreased. From offering 2 million won (~20 000 SEK) as one-time bonuses at birth to paying an additional 300.000 won (2500 SEK) per month until the child turns two. None of these measures have, however, been proven effective.

While Korea is still a big player on the world market, the shrinking population might become a major issue for the Korean economy. This is not detrimental yet, but it could prove to be. Hopefully, the next time I return to Korea, I'll experience more moments like that evening stroll through Hongdae.

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Japanese lab culture –
The experience of a Swedish architecture student

In most architecture schools around the globe, students are provided their own workspace in a lab where they can be inspired by each other, but also feel comfort in sharing the struggle of long hours and heavy workloads. While studying at Chalmers, the environment in the labs creates a sense of community where your friends are also in many ways your colleagues. You work in the same studios, share the same schedules and any confusions or questions are often shared as well. This was my mindset and starting point of what lab culture was like upon leaving Sweden for my semester abroad at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. Soon, however, many of my preconceived ideas of lab culture would be challenged both for the better and for the worse.

Entering my lab for the first time was like entering a library characterised by organised chaos. The walls are lined with hundreds of architecture magazines and books to read. Between them are cluttered workspaces full of equipment and personal items. The lab has windows, but they can barely be seen behind the dozens of models and drawings. Even though the Swedish labs are often more open, the lab I am assigned to here has a much cosier and more lively atmosphere with tons of functions and tools to help us with our architecture projects.

Contrary to the Swedish lab culture, each lab at Tokyo Tech has a professor in charge of it. The professor is not only the academic supervisor to the entire lab, but also their mentor and employer. Aside from their work as a professor, most are also active as architects. Several buildings on campus were designed by the professor in charge of my lab, which can also be said for almost any architecture professor at Tokyo Tech. The students of a professor's lab can intern at their respective professor's office, providing the students with tangible real life work experience before even leaving school. In my case, the professor's personal office is just across the hall from our lab, so he can follow the students' academic work as well as

their professional work for his own projects. The relationship between a student and their professor becomes very layered, since the professional relation also creates a friendship between student and teacher. This does not come without some interesting stipulations, however.

I was already aware of the deeply rooted culture of respect and hierarchy that exists in Japan, especially in workplaces. Since the Japanese lab is in many ways also a real workplace, it is no surprise that even the lab is characterised by these customs. Every morning a group of students in the lab is assigned to clean it, which also includes cleaning the professor's personal office. Coffee is also prepared each morning. The beans are grounded by hand and poured into a slow-drip coffee maker that creates a strong blend, since that is how the professor likes it. This type of social relationship is also present between the students in the lab, where the bachelor students often take care of errands such as refilling the coffee supply or doing administrational work for the lab's common functions.

The approach to the work here differs greatly from what I am used to back home. Each student does not only attend several intensive studios at once, but they also frequently team up to partake in competitions outside of their regular schoolwork. In my lab, for every competition won, the winning team purchases an expensive bottle of sake which the lab shares. Later, the bottle is displayed as a trophy. When I laid my eyes upon the twenty or so bottles displayed in my lab, I knew I was among some of the most ambitious people I had met. This incredible diligence and dedication to one's work is in many ways admirable, but the line between impressive and unhealthy is very thin as seen when students often sleep in their lab between exhausting school days or before a studio critique.

While the lab culture at Tokyo Tech is often more socially and professionally demanding than in Sweden, the incredible work ethic and dedication to your professor and fellow students creates a sense of community unlike anything I have experienced at a Swedish university. Upon arriving, it did not take long before I felt like I belonged, even though exchange students rarely visit their lab regularly. A few weeks into the semester, the lab threw a welcome party for all the new students where we enjoyed meals from our home countries and plenty of drinks. This event was attended by all the lab's students as well as our professor, where all the professional barriers were lowered for the first time. The next day, the lab was back to its busy and productive atmosphere, but the solidarity and bonds between each member of the lab consistently shines through.

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The never ending hiking shoes on Seoul's Sunday subways

Rigid, high-top hiking shoes, covered legs and arms, a cap for sun cover, and a backpack filled with homemade gimbap and makgeolli. The attire on the early subways of Sunday Seoul is strikingly coherent across ages and genders. It will protect against sprains, mosquitos, sun, cold, hunger, and thirst throughout the upcoming adventure. Everyone is joining in on the fun, and there is enough room for sure.

When thinking about it, it does not come as a surprise that hiking is such a common activity for a lot of Koreans. The country is mountainous, although most of the mountains are not enormous, making them great subjects for hiking. Regarding access, most trails can be reached by public transport which makes them accessible to everyone. Another aspect is that the weather in Korea in late summer to late spring is mild, dry, and comfortable.

So what happens after you have popped on the good old boots and headed out the door in the morning? The first stop for me as a student is

always to grab a gimbap, a snack with rice and a filling wrapped in seaweed, to bring as a snack. Then we are off to the never-ending spider web of underground transport covering all of the larger Seoul metropolitan areas. A little bit south of an hour later, daylight heats our skin again as we walk up the stairs from the subway.

From the foot of the mountain, the trail is well-marked in a steady trajectory toward the peak. It is not too difficult nor too easy for everyone to be at ease. When the natural path is too difficult, there is more often than not a staircase to enable everyone to join in with mother nature. Throughout the hike, you will overtake some people, however, the amount of elder people with what appears to be rocket fuel in the water bottles passing you will leave you reevaluating your physique as the fatigue is catching up.

After a couple of breaks along the way, you will finally reach the top. Hopefully, the skies are clear and Korea will lend you a moment of its breathtaking views over highrise buildings mixed with beautiful nature spanning across the horizon. Oh, right, the gimbap! The traditional meal could be compared to a sushi roll, with the difference that the filling could be anything ranging from tuna with mayonnaise, to spicy pork stew to tofu and cucumber. It feeds you well and enables your knees to keep the trembling away, at least most of the time during the hike down.

Back down at the foot of the mountain, you start to pass the old men having their makgeolli, a traditional rice wine, out of aluminium bowls that look like water bowls for dogs. Along with some friends, you find a table and try out their local assortment of cold and refreshing drinks to dampen your weary knees.

When you get home, you put the shoes back in your closet, where they accompany you in resting until the next Sunday, when you will do it all again.

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A Swedish student exploring the Korean kitchen

As a Swedish student, you perhaps plan and cook food boxes for the weekdays. On the weekends there will probably be something special, such as a luxury pasta, or even better, a visit to a new restaurant. Personally, I really enjoy being in the kitchen and cooking meals. I have always had a passion for food. When I heard about how difficult and expensive it is to cook in Korea, especially as an exchange student, it didn't bring me so much joy. But of course, I was curious about exploring a very unfamiliar kitchen.

My first days in South Korea, and the biggest question was, where are the big supermarkets and grocery stores? I had to give up my daily sandwich breakfast and switch it to instant noodles from the closest 7-eleven. After some research, proper grocery stores were found, but surprisingly, in South Korea the groceries are very expensive in relation to other things. For example, 1 kilo of apples cost about 80 SEK, and a litre of milk for 20 SEK. The small cultivated land areas in addition to the unfavourable weather conditions make the farming quite expensive. Imported products are also expensive since they must be shipped or flown there. The trick to find the cheapest groceries is to go to small markets hidden in the narrow alleys.

Thus, you could say that the way of eating is kind of the opposite compared to Sweden. To buy ingredients and cook a meal at home in Korea isn't usually the cheapest alternative. For about 20-40 SEK, the lunch….The lunch could be a kimbap, Korean rice roll, noodles or soup at one of the small local restaurants. Since the restaurants buy vegetables, meat and rice in great volumes, the price for a simple meal decreases. When the budget allows you to eat at restaurants every day, there are numerous opportunities to explore Korean food in 4 months, luckily.

In South Korea, everyone shares food with each other. It often becomes a small buffet on the table with soups, stews, meat, tofu, noodles, vegetables and of course, kimchi. Kimchi or fermented vegetables in general is served to all your meals at South Korean restaurants. Fermentation is a traditional and historically important cooking method in Korea. You'll instantly be addicted to these fermented vegetables, since the flavours are so enriched. The Korean fermented red chilli paste, gougjugang, is the base of most soups and stews.

However, Korean barbeque is the best example of a sharing dinner. This includes a round table with a charcoal grill in the middle, accompanied with meat, kimchi and side dishes, as doenjang, which is a fermented bean paste usually served with barbequed meat. There you cook your food together, and a feeling of community is easily created. There's no need to stress, since the pot or grill is right on your table, cooking. The cherry on the cake is the soju, a traditional Korean distilled alcoholic drink. Koreans drink soju with most of their meals and it is the most popular alcoholic beverage in South Korea. Before drinking, make a toast with your company with the small shot-glasses.

Among all this delicious bibimbap, kimbap, bulgogi, tons of kimchi and tteokbokki (spicy rice cake soup), there are also plenty of unfamiliar dishes to explore. Trying to navigate through all restaurants and menus in Korean is not always the easiest, an English menu is a lot to ask for here. Anticipating that meat will be served, surprisingly, intestines will show up on the table sometimes. Small intestine barbeque style has a long history in Korea and is still considered as a speciality if it's cooked properly. Of course, it should be accompanied with soju for best flavour.

Visiting one of the many coastal cities and eating fresh seafood is a must in Korea. Daily fresh and raw clams, crabs, eel and several types of fishes dipped in soy-sauces is a delicatesse here. Believe it or not, you will also find fresh sea cucumber, sea pineapple and living octopus on the menu.

Korean food is intensely flavoured, spicy and pungent. The variations of flavours, ingredients and ways food can be served here is a never-ending story. Beyond any doubt, the South Korean kitchen is so much more than bibimbap, kimchi and Korean barbeque as many know it for. And yes, I will definitely miss this habit of eating restaurant food daily, it is just too good to be true.v

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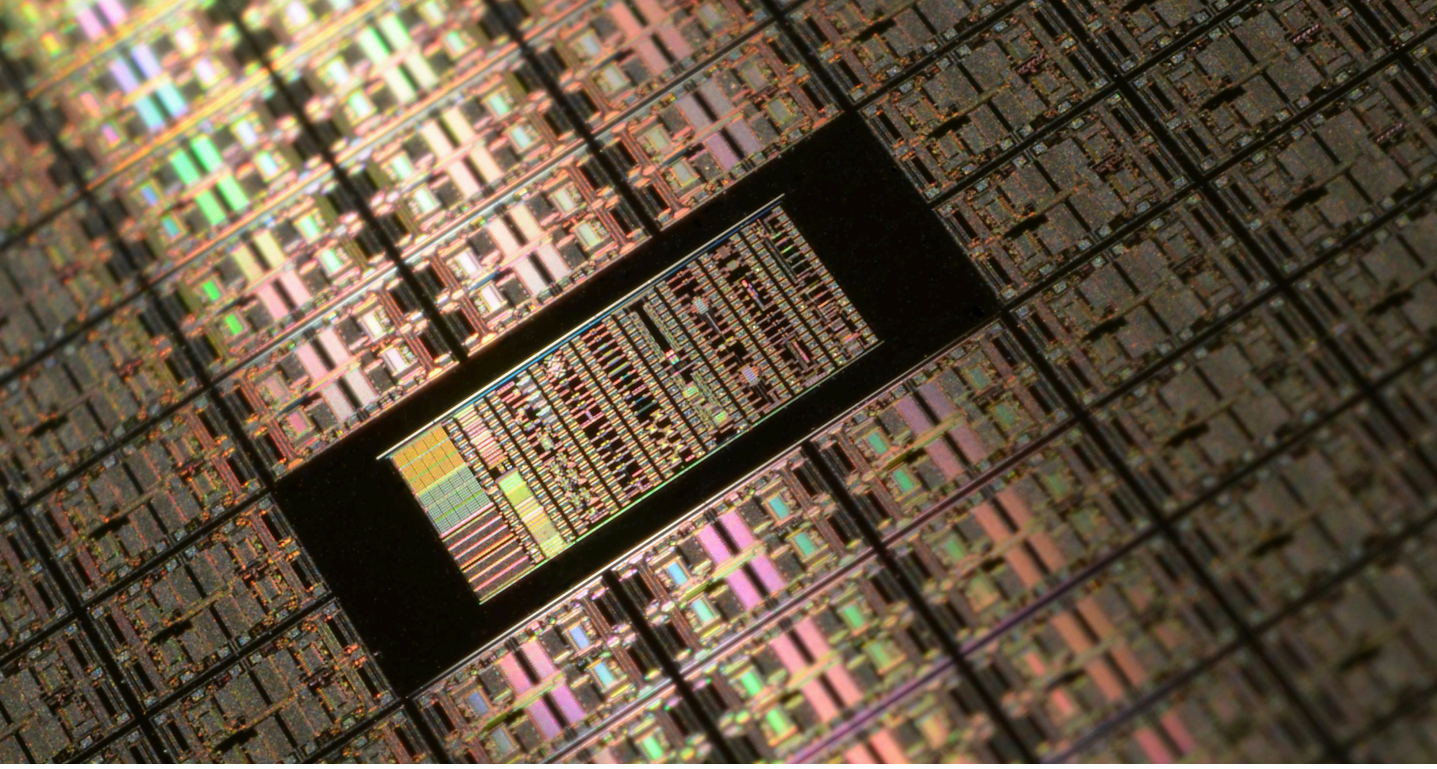
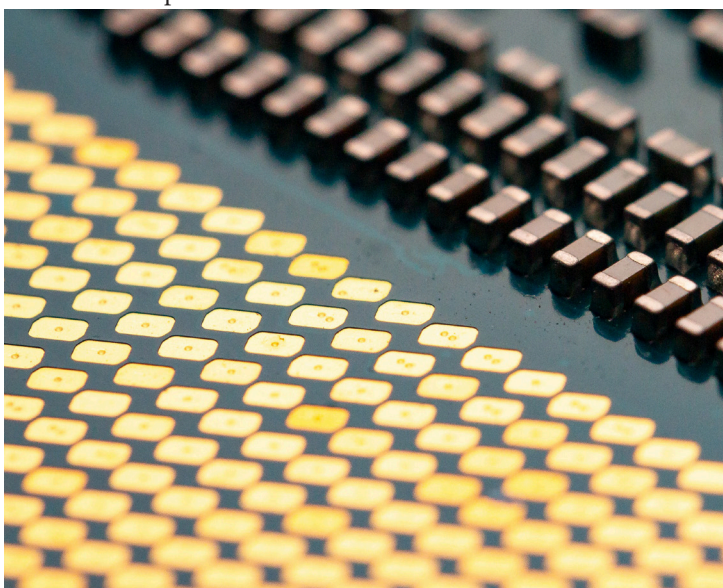
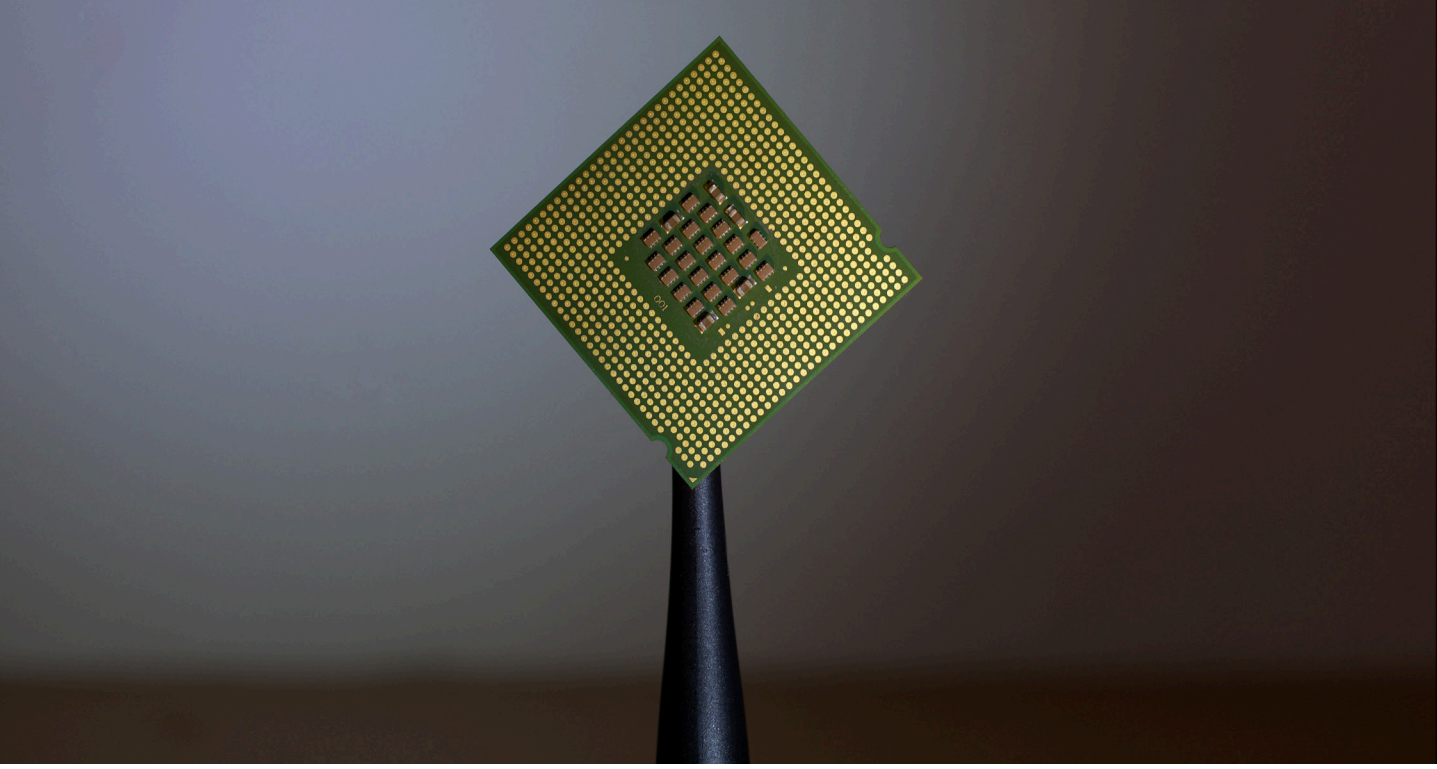


TSMC's impact on Taiwan

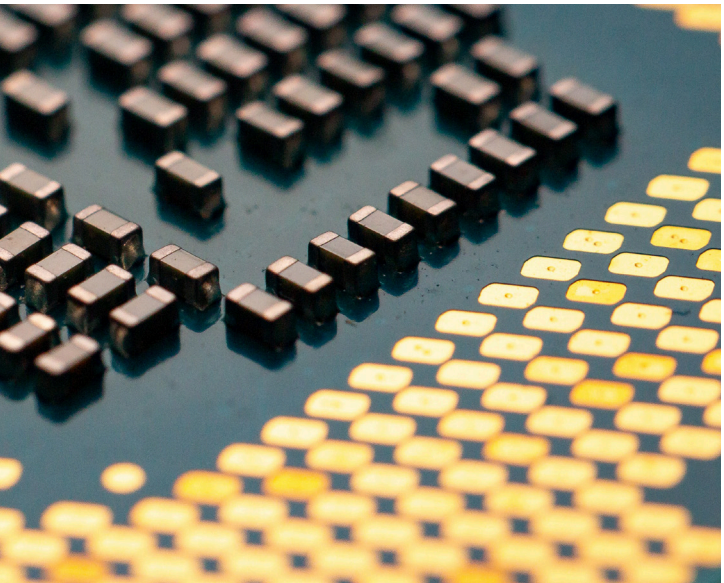
Even though TSMC's products in many ways enable our modern lifestyle, few of my friends in Sweden actually knew about the company and what they do. In Taiwan on the other hand, the situation was the total opposite. Already after my first week in school, all of my professors had mentioned the huge influence of TSMC on the Taiwanese market. It was clear to me that the company is a cornerstone in the Taiwanese economy, but it led me to think - How big is TSMC really, and what impact does the company have on Taiwan?

Before diving any deeper into the topic, let's start with the history of TSMC. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Limited was founded in 1987 by the Taiwanese-American businessman Morris Chang. At the time, TSMC introduced a new, totally unique business model that today is known as the pure play foundry model. The idea was that TSMC would only manufacture semiconductors. They would not engage in neither the design, marketing nor the distribution of the products. In this way, they could avoid competing with their customers, while also being able to direct all their resources into the development of new, more advanced production plants. Since the design and distribution is handled by other actors, it means that you will never find any of TSMC's logos on the products that they make. This could explain why relatively few people are aware of their existence and operations.





TSMC has progressed a lot since 1987 when it was founded and is today the leading manufacturer of semiconductors. Their customers consist of industry giants such as Apple, AMD and Nvidia who all have had rapidly increasing demands on semiconductors. TSMC's market share of just over 50% goes to show how large of an actor they are in the industry. Even more impressive is the fact that they produce over 90% of the most advanced chips. But how big is TSMC really and what impact does the company have on Taiwan? They employ over 65 000 people with over 90% of these employees being located in Taiwan. With a revenue of almost 57 Billion USD in 2021, they contribute to around 10% of Taiwan's total national income tax and around 6% of the country's entire economy in terms of GDP. But it doesn't end there - TSMC also creates a huge market for actors trying to supply them with the latest tools and equipment. When I visited SEMICON 2022 in Taipei, which is one of the largest global semiconductor fairs, almost every single company that I spoke to had TSMC as one of their major customers.



TSMC's impact on Taiwan is not only seen in aforementioned numbers, but also in the political power that they exert. The world's dependence on TSMC's products means that foreign countries are highly incentivised to help Taiwan in case of any aggression from sovereign forces. TSMC is often referred to as the Silicon Shield protecting Taiwan. As a tech enthusiast, it feels quite cool to study in a university which is only a short walk away from a company like this.

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Orienteering Competition at Fuji-san

When someone asks me what my hobbies are, the first answer that springs to mind is orienteering. I do call myself an orienteer and while I do not put in the time that the people at the top do, I still find the sport very fun and my main way of getting motivated for exercise. So, when I decided to go to Japan I saw no reason to stop this interest. That is why, just a week after I got to Japan, I went on a trip to the small tourist city called Kawaguchiko to run some orienteering (Lit. Kawaguchi lake). To get there, I first got to find the bus from Shinjuku station to Kawaguchiko. In Kawaguchiko I stayed at an old inn close to the station. I think one could classify the inn I stayed at as a minshuku, which is a budget version of a ryokan, which in turn is a traditional Japanese inn. In practice this meant a private tatami mat room but public restroom and bath. Not the most luxurious experience but the bath was very nice with possible views of Mt. Fuji. My transport from the inn consisted of a thirty minute bus from Kawaguchiko to the arena, no big deal. The views of the mountains on the way to the arena made the transportation go by in a flash.

Most of you have probably done some kind of orienteering in school, so you know the basics. However, orienteering at the highest difficulty is entirely off tracks (or at least as little on tracks as possible). There are also different distances, for example sprint (which is ran in urban terrain), middle and long distance. These competitions in particular were a middle distance race on Saturday and a long distance race on Sunday. The competitions took place at Fujiten Snow Resort, which lies about 1300 metres above sea level up along Mt. Fuji. When I finally got to the arena I was greeted by the best Mt. Fuji view of the trip. I was hyped for the competition but sadly the race on Saturday was not going to go the way I hoped. Maybe I was too excited, maybe the terrain was too

different but what is for sure is that I should have ran slower the first day. I got my money's worth of terrain though, that is for sure. On Sunday my performance was a bit better, I think I got a bit more used to the terrain. Maybe I was calmer as well. The arrangement was basically the same as a Swedish orienteering however, as the terrain was so different, it was like a new sport. That is probably why I like orienteering so much. All races are a new challenge. In the end I went home with at least one acceptable race richer but most importantly it was quite the experience.

In particular, this was a good way to naturally interact with some Japanese people. In general, what you find interesting at home will probably also be interesting if you go abroad and is the way I would advise meeting locals (provided this is something you want to do). Of course, when meeting people in Japan like this, the level of English is quite low. So if you can not speak, or maybe are scared of speaking a language you do not really know, then it can be tough. However, for me, that was a positive. It was much more natural for me to try and speak Japanese in this context. Therefore I suggest meeting people who share the same interest and not only an interest in the language, which is the case if one were to meet people through a language exchange service. Do not get me wrong though, having a language exchange partner can be very helpful. It does not have to be one or the other either. What works for you, works for you. If there is one thing I want you to take from this text it is that challenging yourself is what leads to progress. For me, going on this solo trip certainly was out of my comfort zone. There were many times where it felt like I had bitten off more than I could chew. However, that fact made it all the more rewarding when it actually happened and made this trip an experience I will treasure forever.

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Commuting by foot or bicycle in Sendai

When you arrive in Tokyo, the largest city in the world, you are immediately struck in awe by the public transportation system. It's affordable at 8-30 SEK per ticket depending on distance travelled and line used, has an incredibly tight schedule meaning almost no waiting time, and the stations are almost certainly within a reasonable distance to your location wherever you are.

This feat is unfortunately not replicated in the smaller city of Sendai. Sendai has a population of roughly 1 million people, about twice that of Gothenburg. Sendai has extensive public transportation like any major city in Japan but it simply cannot compare to Tokyo's.

The public transportation system in Sendai focuses much more on buses rather than subways like in Tokyo. Bus stops are very well-spaced for convenience sake. The downside with many bus stops is however the increased travel time. Due to the smaller population, buses are not scheduled nearly as frequently as subways making it less convenient. Japan usually prides itself on timeliness, but this is unfortunately not applicable to the bus system, traffic lights and the excess of bus stops means delays are common.

Streets in suburban areas are narrow and almost always without dedicated walkways. Motorists are of course aware of this and will usually leave sufficient space. In addition to pedestrians having to share the narrow road with cars and bikes, the roadside has utility poles

every 25 metres or so forcing pedestrians even further out into traffic. It is simply not possible to walk long distances in suburban areas without paying attention to the traffic around you and making sure to not go past a utility pole at the same time as a bus passes.

The city of Sendai is, however, not a death trap for pedestrians as it would seem. To make up for the narrow roads and cramped space, the speed limit is 30 kilometres per hour in most places and traffic lights are used at every intersection. There are traffic lights for pedestrians as well even if there is no walkway present.

An alternative to walking is to commute by bicycle. There is almost not a single dedicated bicycle road in all of Sendai as far as I have seen. Bikes are instead expected to share the road with cars and pedestrians. In the few cases where a walkway is present, a blue or green arrow might be painted on the side of the road to indicate that bikes should drive there. Most of Sendai is flat and easy and fast to traverse on bicycle. The Aobayama campus of Tohoku university is, however, located on a hill making commuting by bicycle slightly less appealing.

As an owner of a bicycle in Japan you are expected to have a dedicated bicycle insurance to cover for possible injuries or accidents. There are some rather strict rules as well regarding what you are not allowed to do while riding your bike. Using your phone while riding, carrying an umbrella, or using headphones while riding is against the law. If a police officer catches you breaking any of these laws, a fine will be dealt to you.

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DIFFERENCE IN STUDY CULTURE: SWEDEN VS SINGAPORE

In the US, there's a dish called the "turducken" that's served mostly around Thanksgiving, which was just last week here in Singapore. My educational journey has much been like a turducken, which is a chicken stuffed in a duck, stuffed in a turkey. I am an American with a bachelor's from Seattle, studying as an international master's student in Sweden, on exchange in Singapore. Having studied in these vastly different settings, I have learned a lot about study culture around the world. However, the most stark contrast has been between studying in Sweden and Singapore.

In the US, I was burnt out from school quarter after quarter because of the high emphasis on grades. When I decided to go back to school to enhance my skill set and expand my job opportunities, I reflected on my experience in school and decided that I wanted to go somewhere with a different way of life: Sweden. I heard that in Sweden, work life balance is a high priority, and upon experiencing it first hand, I can certainly confirm this.

Students in Asia have the inverse reputation: there is much more pressure on students to perform well, as their performance in school may directly dictate the schools and jobs they can access later in life. Different people I've talked to in the US and Sweden from Asia have explained to me their four hour sleep schedules, "cram schools", and more. However, seeing this period of my master's as an opportunity to also explore the world, I decided to embark on a journey to Singapore regardless. I also heard about the hawker markets, cheap dragon fruit, and all of the places to explore near Singapore such as Malaysia and Thailand. So despite the intimidating reputation of studying in Asia, I decided to make the leap.

So how has my experience stacked up to my preconceived notions of what it's like to study in these countries? I think the reality lives up to the expectations, but there are surprising benefits and drawbacks to both. In Sweden, the emphasis is on learning the material over high-stakes grading. Swedish companies seem to have a mutual understanding of the study culture and prioritise knowledge over grades when hiring. Knowing that failure of a class in Sweden doesn't mean having to spend thousands of dollars in tuition and another quarter delayed to make up the credit has made school much more enjoyable. I felt more joy in learning the material rather than trying to cram for exams, though that's still a factor in Sweden. However, one disadvantage to this method is that since a lot of the pressure is gone, there is less incentive to get everything right the first time. And since there is less emphasis on grading, sometimes I noticed people don't feel the need to go above and beyond the minimum requirements. But this may not also not necessarily be bad because it allows students to focus on content that they're really interested in and put less work into things that are merely a degree requirement.

In Singapore, the bell curve looms over students in almost every class. It means that if

you do poorly, you still have a chance of getting a better grade than expected. But on the flip side, if you do well, but much of the class also does well, your grade may be tapered down so that only a few of the students in the class get high A's. This system was used in some of my classes back home, but in Singapore, the pressure to do well feels even higher due to the smaller job market. (This may not be true, but it is my theory.) During recess week, I asked local students what they were going to do during the time off, and they laughed and said that the only option was to study. I also noticed some students on edge when it came to group projects and high stakes assignments. However, feeling the pressure around me, despite travelling to other countries during the breaks (except for reading week), I feel that I put even more effort into learning the material. Regarding which study environment will have produced the most lasting knowledge in the long run, only time will tell.

While Singapore has definitely been a more stressful experience than Sweden, I've thoroughly enjoyed my time here. And although school has dominated my schedule, I've also had the opportunity to explore not only Singapore but Taipei, Kuala Lumpur, Bali, and soon, Jakarta, and cities in Cambodia and Thailand. So in the end, I would say that the stress of the exchange has been well worth it, but I also appreciate the study environment in Sweden a little more now.

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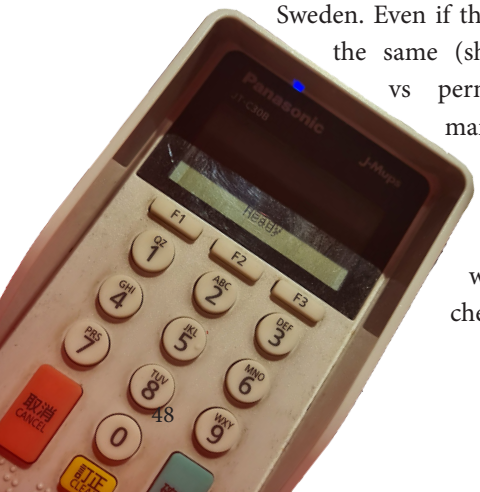
Japan-
High-tech country but not in everyday tasks

If you are like me who loves Japan and follows many Japanese-related accounts on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram to keep yourself updated in their culture, food, technology etc., then we might not have the full image of Japan. Many YouTubers have filmed the popular Japanese electronic toilets that open the lid automatically, flushes if you hover over the sensor or flushes automatically when you stand up, rinse your buttocks with a built-in bidet and so on. There are many varieties of Japanese toilets, and they continue to develop and exceed our expectations. From social media, we also get to see many fun everyday life Japanese innovations, but in reality, nobody uses those. Also, the popular Asimo robot from Honda (unfortunately, retired this year), Gatebox AI (interactive virtual character that improves mental health) or the high-speed train "Shinkansen". Don't you agree that those give off a very futuristic impression of Japan? At least, I think so. Because when I came to Japan and got to experience my first few weeks here, the futuristic impression of Japan I once had is long gone now.

The bureaucracy in Japan is really at a whole new level. I am only comparing my experience in Japan to what I have had to go through in Sweden. Even if the procedure is not the same (short-term resident vs permanent resident), many things can be said about the formalities in Japan. First of all, within 3 days upon checking-in to your designated accommodation, you have to register your residence to the ward office which involves paperwork. It also means that you have to fill in your name using Katakana and write the year in the Reiwa era, a traditional Japanese year system based on the reign of the emperor. For official documents, the Japanese year system is used, while the rest are in Western year. In Sweden, many things can be done online, and identification as well as sign can be done with the app BankID. Speaking of signing, in Japan, you need to sign documents with a Hanko seal. Hanko is a personal stamp containing your full name or last name. The latter is recommended for the reason of limited space. The use of Hanko is slowly decreasing but is said to stick around for some more years. Besides registering residency, it is mandatory to pay for three insurances. Two of them are to be paid after registering residency at the ward office, and can be done by going to an ATM. The university knows that this process can be difficult for international students and is therefore providing help in doing so. The last insurance is delivered to your mailbox, and you have to go to the bank in person to pay for it. Once again, compared to Sweden you either get the invoice in your mailbox or e-mailbox and pay it via internet bank. Any visit to a bank to pay for invoices is not required. Mobile payment is also very common nowadays and is continuing



to become more accessible. It is such a good and convenient service. Why doesn't Japan have something similar? The answer is that cash is still king in Japan. Many shops and restaurants in the bigger cities accept card payments today, but their card terminals don't have an NFC reader! In other words, I can't pay with my phone which I always do in Sweden. When was the last time I used the physical card or cash to pay for my groceries? I don't remember… I'm too used to only carrying a card holder with me, and I also haven't owned a wallet for some years now. Google, Samsung, or Apple pay is also very common in Sweden, but doesn't seem to be a thing in Japan.

I still love Japan and think it's an amazing country. But my life as a student could be so much easier and effortless if the government chose to focus on technology in everyday life. Another thing that is worth mentioning, but is not related to high technology, is that many foods can be cooked and reheated with a microwave. For example, rice, pasta, and convenience store food. The utensils are also designed to be microwaveable. Japanese are busy and work over 40 hours per week that cooking is made very simple. In this aspect, my student life is more effortless, but I prefer cooking my rice in a rice cooker.

WORDS AND PHOTO
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“All things are so very uncertain, and that’s exactly what makes me feel reassured.”

Walking out of the cooled airport in Naha is like running into a hot and humid wall. I didn’t sleep too much last night as it was my first ever in Japan after a fourteen hour long journey from Finland to Asia. The first week in Japan before my studies at Tokyo Institute of Technology start, I decide to dive into the country’s rich culture by taking a vacation in the paradise-like island of Okinawa. The stereotypes that I heard before about the public transport, that works like clockwork, turn into reality immediately when me and my two other Swedish travel companions see the monorail dressed in a Pikachu paint crawling towa rds the airport station. The journey feels like time-travel into the future while we three nordic tourists can’t stop capturing the picturesque landscape

developing between the rail until we land in the dense city blocks of Naha.

I suddenly feel bad. I realise that my efforts before the exchange may have been insufficient to get a good understanding about the country I am staying in for the next five months. My first restaurant visit for example was a little shocking when I translated the menu on one of those modern photo-to-text-apps. The only things not containing meat were some edamame and fried tofu. I shrug that thought off by just accepting that I have to adjust my diet a little. That won't be a big deal at all even if I have been a vegetarian for many years.

On the way back to the hostel we enter a little bar no bigger than a bar-table facing a tiny kitchen. We squeeze in on three of the eight chairs and are greeted with warm smiles after we explain that we made the long journey to the other side of the world to study here. No one speaks more than a few words English but that doesn't seem to bother anyone. We enjoy the local beers, eat pickled garlic from small plastic bags and gesture the word architecture to explain what we are doing with our time when we get back to the capital, which I learned is the biggest and densest metropolitan region in the world

The next stop of the little vacation is an even smaller island just a thirty minute boat ride west of Naha. Arriving in the little harbour surrounded by green mountains, the peaceful mood gets disturbed by a big military aeroplane heading west over our heads. After researching a little bit about Okinawa's history I learned about the horrendous things that happened here during the Second World War and why there still is a foreign military base on this peaceful island.

The next few days fly by in no time and I learn more and more about the peculiarities of the Japanese. We get invited to a barbecue, meat only of course, and communicate through translating apps on our phone. Vending machines with

cold refreshing drinks become part of our daily routine. People ask us if we want a group photo on top of mountains that look straight out of the movie Avatar. This must be the Japan I never knew I wanted to visit.

During the few days I got a glimpse of how my stay in Japan is going to be like. Even if I knew too little about what part of the world I came to a few days ago. And still do to be honest. Everything is very different but that is exactly why I came here, I think to myself. After all there are things that you can't read in books and have to experience yourself. Even though some things seem uncertain and strange in the beginning.

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Are Koreans wizards?

Close to the heart of the tiger that is Korea lies its Seoul - the roaring city that never sleeps. In the lively streets, my eyes are captivated by the locals wandering about like fashion models, and the heavenly smell of food from restaurants lurking around every corner will always allure me. The nights are at some places brighter than daylight due to the neon lights from diverse shops and restaurants, and from dazzling street performances. At first glance, I was enchanted by all the delicacies the city had to offer but the more I explored, the more I found out about the downsides to this magic show.

The past decade South Korea has become notorious for its fashion mainly due to the entertainment industry. Most of the people I see in the streets are elegantly dressed and their faces show characteristics of the typical K-Beauty standard 'everyone' is striving for. However, looking closer I noticed a majority wear clothes from cheaper brands that have a short expiry date. The clothes that are being sold on the streets are sometimes even cheaper than vegetables. The cheap price tags, the intricate design of the clothes and the desire to look like the fashionable Korean idols propels a never-ending consumption of clothes – even the strongest Seouls give in to this temptation.

Clothes are not the only thing that is widely consumed; plastics are exploited in excess. Most vegetables are wrapped in plastics. Bags, disposable items such as straws and face masks, packages and coffee cups in convenience stores are mainly supplied in plastics. When ordering take-out, sometimes I would receive a plastic bag for my plastic cups and plastic straws that are in a plastic holder – one cannot have too many plastics right? This is however mainly when buying home delivery (which they do for almost everything) or takeout; when eating at a restaurant or at a café, cutlery, plates, bowls, and glasses are reused efficiently. There are also several places providing cartons, cups and straws made of paper, which hardly affect the exquisite food taste.

Koreans are very cautious when it comes to recycling, and they separate it all based on

material. The food waste is kept at bare minimum since they seldomly discard food; the waste mainly comes from us exchange students overestimating our limits. Since one must go on a frantic long adventure to find a public trash bin and owing to the large number of disposable materials and citizens in Seoul, you might think the streets are filled with pieces of trash – but that is not the case. The only garbage on the streets are material-sorted trash gathered on piles outside some households, which are taken away daily by garbage mopeds or trucks. On Sunday mornings, empty soju and beer bottles are lined up in front of the houses for the neighbours to show off who drank the most from the previous night.

Seoul is one of the most polluted cities due to the large number of cars on the streets. People normally take the car to work or to go shopping even if it's 10 minutes by walk, and most of the cars are without passengers. The metropolitan network is constantly expanding, now covering 340 km of distance within Seoul, so an increasing number of people are taking the metro for commuting. In addition to being very convenient to get around with the metro, it brings one joy when the metro comes since it plays a nostalgic jingle. Prior to arriving here, I thought Seoul would be a city like Tokyo or New York; people being busy, constant activity, high skyscrapers, good culinary experience, and that's it. But the feeling is totally different. On top of having all the aforementioned, it feels more welcoming and including. The large number of trees scattered across the city, parks and palaces leave a cultural and esthetical imprint onto me unlike any other city I have been to and also reduces the noise and pollution from traffic.

The experiences I have had in Korea so far have been idyllic. The way they operate, their characters and how they interact with you makes you entangled in their world. Somehow, they manage to make the city seem so magical; delicious food comes quickly at restaurants, roads and buildings are rebuilt at a high pace (after the flooding) and they make the trash disappear somehow. Many acts on the magic show this city has to offer are environmentally unfriendly, but new actors emerge and make the show more sustainable and more entertaining. Despite being scientifically inclined and knowing it is mostly for show, I cannot help but believe I live in the same city as the wizards of Seoul.

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THE HIDDEN SYSTEM THAT BRINGS HONG KONG TOGETHER

Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. This group of islands holds one of the most extreme environments anywhere on earth. A vibrant city of almost 7.5 million inhabitants living in tall buildings. Below – narrow, neon-lit streets filled with markets and street food. All of this is tucked in between radical mountains and deep waters. This environment has however led to Hong Kong having to think outside the box for how to move all these people around. Above ground, buses and taxis take passengers wherever there are paved roads. Meanwhile, under the ground runs the real lifeblood of it all – the MTR.

The Mass Transit Railway, or MTR, has

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been in operation for over a hundred years. First built while Hong Kong still was a British colony to accommodate the increasing traffic as Hong Kong's economy was taking off. What we have today is an incredibly efficient network of rails that is surprisingly easy to navigate. If you were to drop me off at any random place in the city, as long as I can get to any MTR station I will be able to find my way back home. Even after just a few weeks of living here, you learn to navigate the whole system with nothing but the maps displayed at every station and train.

The MTR is not only easy to navigate, but it is also accessible for people with various impairments. Textured pavement helps guide the blind, and elevators as well as wide entrances make it easier for strollers and wheelchairs. However, the most creative and unique solution of all might be the various distinct color schemes for each station. All stations are furnished with colored tiles in various beautiful patterns, each station with its own unique color scheme. This makes it so that just by looking out the window, you can learn to memorize which station is which without having to read a single sign.

Many of the successes from the MTR also carry over to other places. Most stores and restaurants accept payment by the same card as used for the MTR, the octopus card. Once you get used to this, it is incredibly easy to pay everywhere octopus is used. Whether you wish to do so using your physical card or your phone, the payment is registered nearly instantaneously. I was also very surprised to find out that the metro in the capital of the country I'm from, Stockholm, is operated by the same corporation.

No matter where you find yourself within Hong Kong, as long as you are in time to catch the last train you can count on reliably being brought to where you need to go. During the time I've had the pleasure of using the MTR, I've gotten to see how a transit system really looks when it's done well. It's amazing to see the wonders one of the best transit systems in the world can do for bringing together people living far between. Different parts of this otherwise difficult to traverse territory all get brought together by this system of railways where they all can come together. Next time I'm back in Hong Kong, I know I can count on the MTR to bring me wherever I need to go.

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Want to study in Asia?

CHALMERS INTERNATIONAL TAIWAN OFFICE

Part of the Global Exchange Programme

Over the recent decades the economies of East Asia have shown a remarkable development. China and Japan are two of the world's largest economies and many more show great promise. The region is vibrant, interesting, dynamic and somewhat challenging. Among those with a background in technical education professional contacts and cooperations with this region will continue to increase. Considering this, Chalmers has developed a unique exchange programme, based in Taiwan, giving students an opportunity to study in and gain experience from these economies.

The programme is called The Asia Programme and is located at the National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University (NYCU). The university is among the foremost technical universities in Taiwan and is especially profiled towards electrical engineering and information technology. However, in collaboration with the neighbouring National Tsing Hua University, the exchange programme covers all engineering programmes at Chalmers. Courses held in both English and Mandarin Chinese can be chosen.

Contents of The Asia Programme

- Intensive course in Mandarin, 4 weeks in July to August at NYCU in Hsinchu, Taiwan
- Full academic year of engineering or architectural studies at NYCU
- Maintenance of the Chalmers International Taiwan Office at NYCU
- Company visits throughout East Asia

Students of Chalmers operate the Chalmers International Taiwan Office (CITO). The operations of CITO include arranging events of representation for Taiwanese students at NYCU as well as visiting companies and representing Chalmers throughout East Asia.

HOW TO APPLY FOR WORLD WIDE

You apply for nomination to NYCU and all of the other universities in Asia through the MoveOn-portal before the 2:nd of December 2023. Attach a motivational cover letter in Swedish with your application. If you are student of Architecture or Architecture and Technology you also need to submit an additional portfolio. Choose two universities but do not forget to find courses that match you master programme and check these with the coordinator of your master programme.

Main Requirements for World Wide

- You have reached your third year of studies at an engineering or architecture programme.
- You have the minimum grade point average of 3.7 credits.
- You have finished at least 60 hp by the first of December.

The selection of students to be nominated for the universities within the World Wide programme is based on the grade point average and study pace of the applying students. The motivational cover letter is used to distinguish between students with the same average grade. In February you are informed whether or not you have been nominated for a university. If you are not nominated you still have a chance to study abroad by applying to the second selection for the universities that still have vacancies to fill.

Asia Magazine aims to be entertaining and informative regarding current topics of Asia as well as a source of inspiration for students curious about exchange studies. The magazine is a joint effort of Chalmers students in Asia.

Chalmers International Taiwan Office is the result of a bilateral exchange between Chalmers University of Technology and National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University in Taiwan. The office is operated by Chalmers students and acts as a hub between Chalmers and East Asia.

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