

Whispers of Friendship: A Joyful Journey in Taiwan

来自台湾的爱

A Novel By
Jon Tasai

Tanat Jaidee, an English teacher from Thailand, embarked on a Taiwan tour alongside his friend, Keng Manachai, a software developer, and Wandee, a Thai Chinese teacher. This is the tale that unfolds, showcasing their thrilling adventures and the bond of their friendship. A memorable journey of their lives

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Introduction

First and foremost, "*Whispers of Friendship: A Joyful Journey in Taiwan*" is a work of fiction. This means that all the characters, their words, and actions are imaginative and are not real. The purpose is to entertain you and make you joyful and happy, and sometimes sad. The story is about three Thais, Tanat, Keng, and Wandee in Taiwan.

I hope you have fun and enjoy reading each chapter. I have put in my best effort to make the story captivating and inspiring. I also intend it to be read like a guidebook, in case you want to visit Taiwan. If you plan to visit Taiwan, this book is for you.

The story revolves around three fictional characters: Tanat Jaidee, Keng Manachai, and Wandee Suwannarach. What are they doing in Taiwan? All of them are from Thailand. Tanat is an English teacher at a private university located on the outskirts of Bangkok. He is in his late forties. Keng Manachai, in his early thirties, works as a software developer and IT specialist at a small IT firm in Bangkok. He is still single and in search of "the right one."

Wandee Suwannarach, also known as Wandee, is a Thai Chinese teacher at a primary school in the Lak Si district of Bangkok, Thailand. She is in her late twenties and, similarly, is still single. Is she the right one for Keng? Who knows?

Tanat met Keng at Suvarnabhumi International Airport. They got along well and decided to plan their week-long holiday in Taiwan together. While having breakfast at the hotel in Taipei, they encountered Wandee. The three Thais decided to travel together and explore the beauty of Taiwan.

Taiwan, the island of freedom,
Where people can speak their minds,
And live their lives without fear,
Taiwan is a beacon of hope.

Taiwan, the island of innovation,
Where businesses thrive,
And new ideas are born,
Taiwan is a place of opportunity.

Taiwan, the island of culture,
Where people come together,
To celebrate their shared heritage,
Taiwan is a place of beauty.

Taiwan, the island of diversity,
Where people from all over the world,
Call home, Taiwan is a place of love.

I would like to end this introduction with a poem by a great Chinese poet T'ao Yuan-ming (365-427).

*We wander as beings without roots,
Like flecks of dust on a wind-blown path,
No longer our own selves.
In this world, we're brethren all,
No bloodline required to bind us.
Let's celebrate while we still can,
Gather neighbors with wine-filled cups.
Youth doesn't retrace its steps,
A day never dawns twice.
So let's not waste a moment,
For time waits not for years and months.*

Jon Tasai
June 2023

Chapter 1: A Chance Encounter at Suvarnabhumi Airport

Tanat Jaidee, an English teacher from Bangkok, Thailand, did not



think he would like the idea of taking a trip to Taiwan. He was thinking of going to South Korea or Japan. But Taiwan, after all, was not altogether a terrible choice. At least it is very close to Japan, from the map.

His original thought was clear and lucid. He preferred to be a solo, a lone traveler (no on loan). His last trip was with two other friends in Nepal for two weeks. They went to Lumbini and spent time hiking the mountains. He liked the idea of traveling and exercising at the same time.

Tanat Jaidee asked an American teacher from the same

department to join his trip to Taiwan. "It's too small and I am afraid of not being able to communicate well in Chinese," Bill Brown, an American expat teaching English in Bangkok near Khaosan Road, declined his invitation. He did so politely.

"You'll like it," Bill said with a wink.

What did Tanat look like? Tanat Jaidee had a distinguished appearance with salt-and-pepper hair, indicating his age in his late forties. He had a warm smile that reflected his friendly nature. His eyes were kind and expressive, with a hint of wisdom acquired over the years. He did not look too serious. Tanat stood at an average height, and his physique reflected a healthy lifestyle. He usually dressed in casual yet neat attire, preferring comfortable clothing suitable for travel. His wife was a science teacher at a high school in Bangkok.

Tanat decided to make a journey to Taiwan. His first time would be great, he hoped. He heard a lot about the island state from the media and news about China and Taiwan. "Will China invade Taiwan?" he kept asking himself.

Little did he know that this trip would introduce him to an unexpected friendship. There are things beyond our control. Fate often plays tricks on us humans. Tanat believed in science. His science, however, was flexible. "After all, there are more things we do not know than things that we think we know."

His plan was to fly an EVA flight on May 19th, his birthday.

On the 19th of May, he woke up early. He took a train from Nonthaburi to the airport. He reached Suvarnabhumi Airport five minutes before 8 AM. The flight was at 11.30 AM. After he got through the immigration gate, he had some time to walk around the duty free shops. He was looking for a nice place to sit and read his latest book on how the human brain works. He found a table at McDonald's and decided to order breakfast and a nice Americano, a hot cup of coffee.

As he was about to have his second sip, a young man, looking Thai, asked for a place to sit. "You may sit here," Tanat said with a smile. The man introduced himself as Keng Manachai or Keng is short.

Keng was a youthful-looking man in his early thirties. He had a well-groomed appearance, with neatly styled hair and a clean-shaven face. His eyes were bright and observant, reflecting his keen intellect. Keng had a slim build, maintaining a fit physique despite his sedentary work in the IT field. He often dressed in smart casual attire, combining fashion with comfort for his travels.

As Tanat and Keng sat together at the table, they struck up a conversation covering many topics. Tanat was intrigued by Keng's friendly demeanor and youthful energy. They exchanged stories about their previous travel experiences and discovered

shared interests in exploring new cultures and embracing adventure.

As they chatted, Tanat couldn't help but notice that Keng seemed somewhat indecisive about his upcoming trip to Taiwan. He had initially planned to go alone but felt unsure about navigating the language and cultural differences. Tanat, on the other hand, had reservations about traveling solo and was open to the idea of having a companion. The two men needed each other, it seemed.

Feeling a connection and sensing an opportunity for mutual support and camaraderie, Tanat felt he was old enough to lose face; he suggested, "Keng, why don't we combine our holidays and explore Taiwan together? We can help each other out, and it's always more fun to travel with a friend."

Keng's eyes lit up with excitement, and a smile spread across his face. He realized that traveling with Tanat would not only alleviate his concerns about the language barrier but also provide an opportunity to bond over their shared experiences. "That sounds like a great idea, Tanat!" Keng replied enthusiastically. "I've heard Taiwan is an incredible destination, and having a travel companion like you would make it even better."

With their decision made, Tanat and Keng finalized their plans for the trip. They knew that they were traveling on the same flight, and they made hotel reservations in Taipei, and started researching the best places to visit in Taiwan.

They exchanged contact information to stay connected and exchanged ideas about the attractions they were most interested in exploring.

For Tanat, the best time was the present moment. Time flies. He smiled to himself as he was sipping coffee, thinking of the poem by T'ao Yuan-ming (365-427).

In the realm of existence, we humans are akin to drifting clouds, untethered and without roots. Like tiny particles of dust carried by the whimsical wind, we find ourselves no longer our true selves, carried away by the currents of life. Here in this world, we are bound not by the ties of blood, for we are all brothers and sisters in this shared human experience. Therefore, let us rejoice while we still have the chance, gathering together our neighbors, offering them a bountiful supply of wine. For youth, that precious season of life does not come again, and each day breaks only once upon the horizon. With this awareness, let us not squander the fleeting hours, for time's unyielding passage shows no mercy. We must seize the present moment, for it is all we have, as the years and months slip away, indifferent to our desires.

Little did they know that their travel plans would take an unexpected turn when they encountered Wandee Suwannarach, a Thai Chinese teacher, during their breakfast at the hotel in Taipei. But that is a story for the next chapter of their journey in Taiwan.

Chapter 2: At Taoyuan International Airport

About four hours after leaving Thailand, the plane landed at Taoyuan International Airport.

Taoyuan International Airport, located in Dayuan District, Taoyuan City, about 40 kilometers (25 mi) west of Taipei, is the primary international airport serving Taipei, Taiwan. It holds the distinction of being the largest and busiest airport in Taiwan, with a passenger volume exceeding 45 million in 2019.



The airport comprises two passenger terminals: Terminal 1 and Terminal 2, linked by a complimentary shuttle bus service. Terminal 1, the older of the two, mainly handles domestic flights, while Terminal 2, the newer facility, primarily caters to international flights.

Travelers at Taoyuan International Airport can avail themselves of various amenities and services, such as Wi-Fi connectivity, currency exchange, duty-free shopping, dining establishments, lounges, airport hotels, and transportation options to and from the airport. A wide range of airlines, including China Airlines, EVA Air, and Cathay

Pacific, serve the airport, with several low-cost carriers offering flights to and from Taoyuan International Airport.

As a major air travel hub in Asia, Taoyuan International Airport provides a convenient and efficient experience for passengers, along with a diverse array of amenities and services.

Tanat and Keng were a bit tired. They needed to take a train to the city center.

Tanat and Kend had booked a nice hotel located at the center of Taipei. It was called Midtown Richardson Hotel. The train took them about an hour to reach the closest MRT station to the hotel. As you might have expected, the two men shared a room.

It's their first evening in Taiwan. They decided to just take it easy by walking around the city center to find a nice place to eat.

They went to a restaurant with a rooftop terrace. The views from up there were breathtaking! They enjoyed sipping beer while overlooking the city's skyline. It was a memorable experience.

Tanat took a sip of his beer, gazing out at the stunning Taipei skyline. He turned to Keng with a curious expression.

Tanat: "You know, Keng, I find it fascinating how the Chinese language is used here in Taiwan. It's different from what we're accustomed to in mainland China."

Keng nodded, his eyes scanning the city lights.

Keng: "Absolutely, Tanat. In Taiwan, they primarily use Traditional Chinese characters, whereas in mainland China, Simplified Chinese characters are more commonly used. It's intriguing how the same language can have such distinct variations."

Tanat leaned back, taking in Keng's words.

Tanat: "That's true. I've noticed that the pronunciation of some words also differs. For instance, the Mandarin accent here in Taiwan seems softer and more melodic compared to the accent we hear in Beijing."

Keng chuckled, swirling his beer in the glass.

Keng: "You're right, Tanat. The Taiwanese accent has a musical quality to it. They tend to elongate certain syllables and infuse a touch of warmth into their speech. It adds a unique charm to the language."

Curiosity sparkled in Tanat's eyes as he leaned closer.

Tanat: "I wonder how these linguistic differences came about. I mean, both mainland China and Taiwan share a rich history, but they've evolved in distinct ways."

Keng nodded thoughtfully, his gaze fixed on the distant horizon.

Keng: "It's a complex story, Tanat. After the Chinese Civil War, the Communist Party established the People's Republic of China

on the mainland, while the Republic of China retreated to Taiwan. Over time, the two regions developed their own political systems, educational curricula, and cultural identities, including variations in language."

Tanat raised an eyebrow, intrigued.

Tanat: "So, the differences in language usage are a reflection of these separate paths of development?"

Keng smiled, appreciating Tanat's insight.

Keng: "Exactly, my friend. Language is a significant aspect of culture, and as Taiwan and mainland China grew apart, their respective linguistic traditions evolved alongside their unique histories and societal influences."

The two friends fell into a momentary silence, savoring their beers and contemplating the intricate tapestry of language and culture.

Tanat: "It's remarkable how language can serve as a window into the cultural diversity and rich heritage of a place. Taiwan truly has its own distinct charm."

Keng nodded, a hint of awe in his voice.

Keng: "Indeed, Tanat. Exploring these linguistic nuances adds another layer of richness to our journey here. It's a joy to

immerse ourselves in Taiwan's vibrant tapestry of culture and language."

As the evening breeze caressed their faces, Tanat and Keng continued their conversation, reveling in the discovery of Taiwan's linguistic and cultural intricacies.

Tanat took another sip of his beer, a pensive expression on his face. He turned to Keng, eager to delve into another intriguing aspect of Taiwan.

Tanat: "You know, Keng, I've read that Taiwan has imported a significant amount of labor from various countries, including Thailand. It's fascinating how they've built such a diverse workforce here."

Keng nodded, his gaze shifting to the bustling streets below.

Keng: "Absolutely, Tanat. Taiwan's labor policies have been quite progressive, attracting workers from different nations to contribute to their growing industries. It's a testament to their openness and recognition of the value that immigrants bring."

Tanat leaned forward, intrigued by Keng's insight.

Tanat: "I've heard that the industrial sectors, like manufacturing and electronics, heavily rely on these imported laborers. They play a crucial role in Taiwan's economic development."

Keng nodded, his voice filled with admiration.

Keng: "You're right, Tanat. These workers bring their skills and expertise, filling gaps in the job market and supporting Taiwan's industries. It's a symbiotic relationship, benefiting both the country and the workers."

Curiosity gleamed in Tanat's eyes as he leaned closer.

Tanat: "I wonder how this influx of diverse cultures and backgrounds has influenced Taiwan's society. I imagine it must have created a vibrant multicultural environment."

Keng smiled, his gaze fixed on the diverse crowd passing by.

Keng: "Indeed, Tanat. Taiwan's society has become more multicultural and inclusive. The blending of different cultures has given rise to unique communities, enriching the social fabric of the country."

Tanat pondered for a moment, contemplating the impact of this cultural exchange.

Tanat: "It must be an incredible experience for these workers to immerse themselves in Taiwanese culture while also preserving their own traditions. Such interactions foster mutual understanding and appreciation."

Keng nodded, his expression thoughtful.

Keng: "Absolutely, Tanat. It's a beautiful fusion of cultures, where people from different backgrounds coexist, learn from one another, and contribute to Taiwan's dynamic society. The exchange of ideas and experiences creates a harmonious melting pot."

The two friends fell into a brief silence, absorbing the significance of Taiwan's diverse workforce and the social tapestry it has woven.

Tanat: "It's remarkable how Taiwan has embraced this international labor force, recognizing the invaluable contributions they make to the country's progress. It's a testament to their inclusive mindset."

Keng smiled, his voice tinged with appreciation.

Keng: "Indeed, Tanat. Taiwan's openness to embracing diversity and welcoming immigrants is not only economically beneficial but also reflects the kindness and hospitality that defines this beautiful island."

As the evening deepened, Tanat and Keng continued their conversation, marveling at Taiwan's ability to integrate various cultures and build a society that cherishes diversity.

Chapter 3: Breakfast at the Hotel

As Tanat and Keng enjoyed their breakfast at the hotel in Taipei, they couldn't help but overhear the conversations around them. Many guests were praising the Midtown Richardson hotel, discussing their positive experiences and mentioning the hotel's

convenient location and amenities.



"The food at this hotel is amazing," Keng remarked, taking a bite of his delicious omelet. "I can see why people are raving about it."

Tanat nodded in agreement, savoring his own plate of fresh fruit and pastries. "The reviews were right. The

breakfast spread here is fantastic. It's a great way to start our days of exploration in Taipei."

They noticed a group of travelers nearby engaged in a lively discussion about their stays at Midtown Richardson. One person mentioned how the hotel's central location in Ximending made it easy for them to explore the city's vibrant shopping and entertainment district.

"I loved the convenience of staying at Midtown Richardson," a guest exclaimed. "We were just steps away from Ximending, with all its shops, restaurants, and nightlife. It made our evenings so much more exciting!"

Ximending, often referred to as the "Harajuku of Taipei" and the "Shibuya of Taipei," is a vibrant hub that embodies Taiwan's fashion, subculture, and Japanese influence. Nestled in the northeastern part of Wanhua District in Taipei, Ximending serves as the focal point for the city's trendy clubs, pubs, and entertainment venues. It holds the prestigious title of being the most prominent consumer district in Taipei's Western District. Notably, Ximending Pedestrian Area, the largest of its kind in Taiwan, holds the distinction of being Taipei's inaugural pedestrian area.

Tanat and Keng exchanged glances, intrigued by the positive feedback they were hearing. It further confirmed that they had made a wise choice in selecting Midtown Richardson as their accommodation.

As luck would have it, Tanat and Keng found themselves exchanging glances, engrossed in their conversation about the glowing reviews of their chosen hotel. Just then, their eyes fell upon a familiar face sitting nearby. It was none other than Wandee, the friendly woman they had met during check-in at the hotel. A sense of delight washed over them as they realized they would now have the opportunity to explore Taipei together with their newfound acquaintance.

It was indeed Wandee, another guest at Midtown Richardson, who had coincidentally joined them for breakfast. A smile crossed their faces as they realized that they would now be exploring Taipei together.

"Good morning, Wandee!" Tanat greeted her warmly. "What a pleasant surprise to meet a fellow Thai here in Taipei. Would you like to join us?"

Wandee returned the smile and happily accepted the invitation. "I'd love to! It's always wonderful to connect with fellow countrymen while exploring new places. Let's make this journey even more memorable by exploring Taipei together as a trio."

As they settled into a cozy corner of the hotel's breakfast area, the three newfound companions began to introduce themselves, sharing snippets of their lives. They got on well like a house on fire.

"I'm Tanat," the friendly English teacher began, extending his hand to Wandee. "I teach English at a university back in Thailand. This trip to Taiwan is a much-needed break for me."

Wandee, with a bright smile, shook Tanat's hand. "Nice to meet you, Tanat. I'm Wandee. As you know, I am a Chinese teacher at a primary school in Bangkok. It's my first time in Taiwan, and I'm excited to explore its rich culture."

Keng, the software developer, joined in the conversation, extending his hand to both Tanat and Wandee. "I'm Keng, a

software developer in Bangkok. Like Tanat, I needed a break from work and decided to join him on this adventure. It's great to meet you both."

The atmosphere was filled with warmth and curiosity as they exchanged pleasantries, learning more about each other's interests, backgrounds, and aspirations. There was an instant connection, as if their paths had crossed for a reason, igniting a sense of camaraderie and shared excitement for the journey ahead.

With their breakfast finished and their newfound camaraderie solidified, Tanat, Keng, and Wandee eagerly set out to uncover the treasures that awaited them in Taipei. Excitement filled the air as they ventured into the bustling city, knowing that their shared experiences would only deepen their bond and create memories that would last a lifetime.

Little did they know that this chance encounter at breakfast would be the start of an extraordinary journey, where their friendship would grow stronger with each passing day, and where the wonders of Taiwan would be discovered together, hand in hand.

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Chapter 4: Exploring Shilin Night Market

Tanat, Keng, and Wandee took a taxi from the hotel to Shilin night market. It took them 45 minutes to get to the street where the market started.



At the breakfast table, they chatted and enjoyed each other's company.

Wandee, if anything, had a youthful and vibrant aura, complementing her age in her late twenties. She had smooth, radiant skin and a friendly smile that lit up her face. Her eyes were black and expressive and full of curiosity, reflecting her zest for life. Wandee's features showcased her Thai-Chinese heritage, with a combination of softness and grace. She had a petite and slender frame, and her sense of style leaned towards feminine and contemporary fashion, reflecting her vibrant personality. In short, she was good-looking with a friendly personality. Only God, perhaps, knew why she had been dumped.

the bustling streets of Taipei, Tanat and Keng decided to kickstart their adventure at the renowned Shilin Night Market.

Shilin Night Market, situated in the Shilin District of Taipei, Taiwan, is widely recognized as the biggest and most renowned night market in the country.

Tanat, Keng, and Wandee, three friends from Thailand, found themselves in Taipei, Taiwan. After a day of exploring the city, they decided to experience the vibrant atmosphere of the renowned Shilin Night Market. They hailed a taxi from their hotel, Midtown Richardson, and soon arrived at their destination.

As they stepped out of the taxi and entered the bustling market, the trio was immediately enveloped in a sensory feast. The vibrant lights, enticing aromas, and lively chatter filled the air, igniting their excitement.

Wandee: "Wow, look at all the stalls and people! It's even more bustling than I imagined."

Keng: "I've heard so much about Shilin Night Market, and it's living up to its reputation already. Let's dive right in!"

They weaved their way through the crowded alleys, their eyes drawn to the colorful array of food stalls, shops, and entertainment options.

Tanat: "First things first, let's indulge in some delicious street food. I've heard the stinky tofu here is a must-try."

Wandee: "And I can't resist getting some mouth-watering oyster omelets. The aroma is irresistible!"

They eagerly ordered their favorite dishes and found a corner to sit and enjoy their treats, savoring each bite.

Keng: "I must say, the stinky tofu is an acquired taste, but it's surprisingly delicious. I understand why it's so popular."

Wandee: "And these oyster omelets are simply divine! The flavors blend perfectly."

With satisfied appetites, they continued their exploration, browsing through the various stalls and shops that lined the streets.

Tanat: "Hey, look at these trendy clothes and accessories! I think I've found the perfect gift for my sister."

Keng: "I'm going to check out the electronics section. Maybe I'll find a cool gadget for myself."

Wandee: "I spotted some beautiful handmade crafts. They would make lovely souvenirs for friends back home."

As they meandered through the market, they stumbled upon a street performer captivating the crowd with his mesmerizing tricks.

Performer: "Ladies and gentlemen, prepare to be amazed! Witness the magic right before your eyes!"

The trio joined the captivated audience, applauding and cheering as the performer dazzled them with his skills.

Keng: "That was incredible! I've never seen such mind-boggling tricks before."

Tanat: "Indeed, it's moments like these that make traveling so memorable. We're truly experiencing the essence of this city."

With their hearts filled with joy and their spirits uplifted, they decided to end their night market adventure with some friendly competition at the game stalls.

Wandee: "Let's try our luck at the shooting game. I'm determined to win a stuffed animal!"

Keng: "Challenge accepted! May the best shooter win."

Laughter and cheers filled the air as they competed against each other, creating lasting memories and strengthening their bond.

As the night grew late and the market began to wind down, they knew their time at Shilin Night Market had come to an end.

Tanat: "What an incredible experience. The energy, the flavors, the laughter—it's a night we'll never forget."

Wandee: "Absolutely. Taiwan has shown us its vibrant spirit, and Shilin Night Market was the perfect embodiment of that."

Keng: "I couldn't have asked for better company. Tonight was an adventure filled with great food, exciting moments, and wonderful friends."

With hearts full of joy and bellies full of delicious treats, the three friends bid farewell to Shilin Night Market, cherishing the memories they had.

The night was still young.

After indulging in the vibrant atmosphere and delectable street food of Shilin Night Market, Tanat, Keng, and Wandee decided to continue their evening adventures at a nearby beer bar called Ximen Garden. Nestled not far from their hotel, Hotel Midtown Richardson Taipei, the bar offered a cozy and laid-back ambiance, perfect for unwinding and enjoying each other's company.

As they settled into their seats, the warm glow of the bar's lights enveloped them, creating an inviting atmosphere. Laughter filled the air as Tanat, Keng, and Wandee engaged in lively conversations, delving into a wide range of topics. From travel anecdotes to cultural insights, their discussions flowed effortlessly, fostering a sense of camaraderie among the trio.

Amidst the joyful banter, Wandee took on the role of a language tutor, sharing some basic Chinese expressions with Tanat and Keng. With patience and enthusiasm, she guided them through pronunciation and meanings, encouraging them to practice their newfound language skills. The bar became a classroom of sorts, where the three friends embarked on a linguistic journey, deepening their connection with the local culture.

Wandee began with a warm smile, saying, "Let's start with a simple greeting: 'How are you?' In Chinese, we say 'Ni hao ma?'"

"Nǐ hǎo ma?" repeated Tanat, carefully mimicking the tones. His effort brought a proud smile to Wandee's face.

Keng eagerly followed suit, asking, "And how do we say 'I love you' in Chinese?"

Wandee's eyes twinkled as she replied, "In Chinese, we say 'Wǒ ài nǐ.'"

"Wǒ ài nǐ," Tanat and Keng repeated in unison, their voices filled with affection and a touch of laughter.

Encouraged by their progress, Wandee moved on to another essential phrase. "Now, let's learn to say 'Thank you.' In Chinese, we say 'Xièxiè.'"

"Xièxiè," the friends echoed, gratitude resonating in their voices.

Eager to share more, Wandee taught them how to introduce themselves. "To say 'My name is Wandee' in Chinese, we say 'Wǒ jiào Wandee.'"

"Wǒ jiào Wandee," they repeated, carefully pronouncing each syllable. The characters for their names appeared on a small piece of paper, beautifully written in Chinese calligraphy by Mei-Ling earlier.

As the conversation continued, their pronunciation improved, and the Chinese characters came to life before their eyes. They marveled at the beauty and depth of the language, feeling a deeper connection to the culture surrounding them.

With each phrase learned, their bonds with the local community strengthened. The bar resonated with the harmony of different languages, as Wandee, Tanat, and Keng embraced the opportunity to learn and communicate in Chinese. The characters on the paper seemed to dance, carrying the essence of their new friendships and the shared joy of cultural exchange.

The café, once a place of relaxation, had transformed into a classroom brimming with laughter, discovery, and friendship. And as they continued their language lessons, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingled with the sounds of new words, bridging the gap between cultures and creating lasting memories.

In that moment, surrounded by the warmth of newfound knowledge, the three friends realized that language held the power to unite hearts and dissolve barriers. And as they ventured further into the tapestry of Taiwan, they carried the seeds of

these linguistic connections, nurturing them along their journey of exploration and cultural immersion.

Sipping on their refreshing beverages, they exchanged phrases and words, delighting in their progress and celebrating small victories. The bar echoed with laughter and the occasional sound of clinking glasses, a testament to the bond that had formed between these newfound friends.

In the cozy ambiance of Ximen Garden, time seemed to stand still. Their conversations flowed seamlessly, creating a sense of unity and shared experiences. As the night wore on, their friendship grew stronger, anchored by their mutual curiosity and genuine interest in one another's lives.

With each Chinese expression learned, the barriers of language and culture melted away, paving the way for deeper connections and a richer understanding of one another. It was a testament to the power of travel and the beauty of human connections forged in unexpected places.

As the evening came to a close, and the night settled in, they bid farewell to Ximen Garden, their hearts filled with gratitude for the

moments shared. They strolled back to Hotel Midtown Richardson Taipei, relishing in the memories created and the promising adventures that lay ahead.

The time they spent together at the beer bar would become a cherished chapter in their journey through Taipei, an unforgettable memory that would forever be etched in their minds. It served as a testament to the joy of exploration, the beauty of friendship, and the serendipitous encounters that make travel so undeniably magical.

Chapter 5: A Serene Morning at Lungshan Temple

In the bustling breakfast restaurant of Hotel Midtown Richardson



Taipei, a delightful scene unfolded as a diverse array of hotel guests gathered to savor their morning meals. The air was filled with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee, the tantalizing scent of

warm pastries, and the lively chatter of eager travelers from near and far.

Wandee told Tanat and Keng that she was not going to be with them, she went shopping on her own. She would travel to the outskirts of Taipei to visit Linda Wong, her Taiwanese friend.

As they sat around the table, savoring their breakfast at the hotel, Wandee's eyes sparkled with excitement as she began to share her knowledge about Taiwanese cuisine, particularly the famous

bubble tea. With a cup of the refreshing beverage in hand, she couldn't help but delve into the fascinating world of Taiwanese food.

"Wandee, you've mentioned bubble tea before, but I'd love to know more about it," Keng said, leaning forward with genuine curiosity.

Wandee grinned, delighted to have the opportunity to introduce her Thai friends to this beloved Taiwanese specialty. "Bubble tea, or 'boba' as it's sometimes called, is a unique beverage that combines tea with milk or fruit flavors and is served with chewy tapioca pearls. It's incredibly popular here in Taiwan, and you can find it in various flavors and combinations."

Tanat's eyes widened with intrigue. "That sounds interesting! We have tea in Thailand too, but I've never heard of adding chewy pearls to it. How did bubble tea become so popular in Taiwan?"

Wandee took a sip of her own bubble tea, savoring the sweet and creamy flavors before continuing. "Legend has it that bubble tea was invented in Taiwan in the 1980s. It started with just tea and tapioca pearls, but over time, creative minds added milk, fruit

flavors, and even different toppings like grass jelly or pudding. Today, you can find countless variations, and it has become a cultural phenomenon here."

Keng nodded in fascination. "I can see why it's so popular. It's not just a drink; it's an experience. I'm eager to try different flavors and see what combinations I enjoy the most."

Wandee smiled, appreciating her friends' enthusiasm. "You'll have plenty of opportunities to explore Taiwanese cuisine further. From night markets with their mouthwatering street food to traditional dishes like beef noodle soup and stinky tofu, Taiwan has so much to offer in terms of gastronomic delights."

Tanat joined the conversation, reminiscing about their own rich Thai cuisine. "Indeed, Wandee. Thailand is famous for its vibrant street food culture too. From pad Thai and green curry to the aromatic tom yum soup, our flavors are bold and unique. I'm excited to discover the distinctive tastes of Taiwanese dishes."

As their breakfast plates emptied and the conversation flowed, the trio found themselves immersed in a delightful exchange of culinary experiences. They exchanged stories,

recommendations, and even discussed the similarities and differences between Thai and Taiwanese cuisine, creating a bond that transcended borders and deepened their appreciation for the diverse world of food.

Their shared enthusiasm for discovering new flavors and cultural experiences created an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation. With each passing moment, the prospect of exploring the vibrant food scenes of both Thailand and Taiwan grew more enticing, promising a journey of culinary exploration and unforgettable taste sensations.

They spent an hour having breakfast. Then they went up to their room. Wande had a room on her own. Tanat and Keng shared the room.

The duo, Tanat and Keng, were excited to visit Lungshan Temple. As the sun rose, Tanat and Keng sought solace at Lungshan Temple.

The ancient temple's peaceful ambiance captivated their hearts as they immersed themselves in the mesmerizing rituals and intricate architecture.

They met a wise old monk who shared inspiring stories of compassion and spiritual growth.

Wandering through the serene halls of Lungshan Temple, Tanat and Keng marveled at the beautiful architecture and the tranquility that enveloped the sacred space. As they soaked in the atmosphere, a gentle voice caught their attention.

Monk: "Welcome, my friends. May peace and blessings be upon you. I see the curiosity in your eyes. Is there something you seek?"

Tanat: "We are in awe of this magnificent temple. Its beauty and serenity have touched our souls. We are honored to be here."

Keng: "Indeed, we are humbled by the rich history and spiritual significance of this place. We've come to seek solace and wisdom."

The monk smiled warmly, sensing the genuine sincerity in their words.

Monk: "This temple has witnessed the passage of time and the resilience of the human spirit. It holds stories of compassion and devotion. Let me share one such tale with you."

Tanat and Keng listened attentively as the old monk began his story, his voice carrying the weight of wisdom accumulated over the years.

Monk: "Long ago, there was a poor widow who lived near this temple. Despite her poverty, she possessed a heart full of kindness and generosity. Every day, she would visit the temple and offer what little she had—a single grain of rice."

Keng: "A single grain of rice? How could such a small offering make a difference?"

Monk: "Ah, my dear friend, it is not the size of the gift that matters, but the intention and purity of the heart. The widow's humble act of giving reflected her compassion and selflessness."

Tanat: "But did her small offering make any impact?"

Monk: "Indeed, it did. The temple caretaker, moved by her unwavering devotion, shared her story with others. Inspired by her selflessness, more people began to offer their own humble contributions. Soon, the small grain of rice transformed into a bountiful supply to feed the needy."

Keng: "That's truly remarkable. It shows how even the smallest acts of kindness can create a ripple of compassion."

Monk: "Precisely. In our journey through life, it is not the grand gestures that define our character but the everyday moments of kindness and empathy. It is in those moments that we can make a true difference."

Tanat: "Thank you for sharing this beautiful story with us, venerable monk. It reminds us of the power of compassion and the importance of giving."

Monk: "You are most welcome, my friends. Remember, as you continue your path, let compassion guide your actions and let wisdom illuminate your hearts."

Feeling a sense of tranquility and gratitude, Tanat and Keng offered a respectful bow to the old monk before continuing their exploration of the temple. They found solace in the quiet corners, reflecting on the lessons learned from the story and the presence of the monk.

Tanat: "This encounter has truly enriched our journey. It reminds me of the significance of our actions, no matter how small."

Keng: "Indeed, compassion and kindness are universal languages that transcend barriers and bring us closer to one another. Let us carry this wisdom with us and continue to grow."

On the wall inside the temple, there was a painting of a majestic pavilion on the hill. The monk asked Tanat and Keng to guess what the real meaning of the painting was. The duo said they had no idea. The monk read the poem accompanying the painting to them:

*In a distant place stands a tall pavilion,
Rising one hundred feet above the ground,
It gazes upon the vast wilderness from all sides.
At dusk, it welcomes the weary clouds,*

And in the morning, it hosts the birds in flight.

*From its vantage point, one can witness
The majestic mountains and rolling hills,
While the wide plains stretch far and wide.
Many have coveted this grand structure,
Those with ambitious dreams and desires,
But in the end, they all fade away,
Returning to the hills of the north.*

*The mighty pines, once standing tall,
Have been felled by the hands of men.
Tombs, both humble and lofty, dot the landscape,
While the abandoned house remains ownerless.
Where have the wandering souls gone,
Lost in the ruins and forgotten?*

*Glory may seem desirable and admirable,
Yet it carries its own share of sorrow and pity.*

The monk also explained that the poet T'ao Yuan-ming (365-427) is renowned as the supreme exponent of the idyllic genre. Hailing from Kiukiang, a province in Kiangsi, he briefly served as a

magistrate for a mere two days. Choosing to resign rather than bow down before a superior for a meager five measures of rice, T'ao prioritized his integrity over worldly gains. Living through the turbulent era of the Tsin dynasty, he personally witnessed the atrocities of war, which instilled in him a deep yearning for a tranquil and harmonious existence.

With renewed spirits and a deeper appreciation for the power of compassion, Tanat and Keng left Lungshan Temple, ready to embrace the world with open hearts and minds.

Unaware of what lay ahead, the trio had yet to comprehend that their encounter with the wise old monk and their adventures in Taiwan marked the initial steps of a profound and life-altering odyssey that would leave an indelible imprint on their very beings.

Chapter 6: Unearthing History at Bopiliao Historical Block

Curiosity led Tanat, Wandee, and Keng to the Bopiliao Historical Block, a hidden gem tucked away in the heart of Taipei. As they entered the narrow lanes of the historical block, the scent of



incense and the echoes of their footsteps guided them through the labyrinth of old merchant houses and traditional tea shops. Each step seemed to transport them back in time,

immersing them in the rich history of Taiwan.

The vibrant colors of the traditional buildings and the intricate architectural details caught their eyes, capturing their imaginations. They marveled at the skill and craftsmanship that had gone into preserving this piece of living history.

"Look at the elaborate carvings on these doors," Wandee exclaimed, her eyes sparkling with awe. "It's incredible how these buildings have stood the test of time."

Keng nodded in agreement, his voice filled with admiration. "The preservation efforts here are truly commendable. It's a testament to the value placed on heritage and culture."

As they continued their exploration, their path crossed with a passionate local historian named Mr. Lin. With his weathered face and eyes full of wisdom, he greeted them warmly, sensing their genuine interest in the neighborhood's history.

"Welcome, my friends," Mr. Lin said with a smile. "Allow me to be your guide and share the tales of Bopiliao Historical Block."

Eagerly, they followed Mr. Lin as he led them through the winding streets, his voice resonating with the passion of a storyteller. With each step, he painted vivid pictures of the bustling merchants, the flourishing tea trade, and the whispers of secret societies that once thrived within these walls.

"The history of this place is like a tapestry woven with threads of resilience, ambition, and community," Mr. Lin began. "In the late Qing Dynasty, Bopiliao served as a hub for merchants and craftsmen, contributing to the economic prosperity of the region."

Tanat listened intently, captivated by the fascinating stories that unfolded before him. He couldn't help but imagine the lively scenes that once graced these streets, filled with the sounds of haggling merchants and the aroma of freshly brewed tea.

Wandee's eyes widened as Mr. Lin recounted tales of secret gatherings and the political movements that took place within these very walls. "It's remarkable to think that such significant events were happening right here, hidden from the prying eyes of the outside world," she remarked.

Keng nodded, his mind racing with the weight of the history they were unearthing. "This place holds so many layers of stories, each brick and stone carrying a piece of the past. It's humbling to stand amidst it all."

As the afternoon sun cast its golden glow upon the historical block, Mr. Lin bid them farewell, leaving them with a deeper

appreciation for the historical significance of Bopiliao. The trio continued to wander through the alleys, their hearts filled with a sense of wonder and gratitude for the opportunity to experience Taiwan's rich heritage firsthand.

They paused at a traditional tea shop nestled in the heart of the historical block. Sitting around a low table, they sipped fragrant oolong tea and reflected on the stories they had heard.

"This experience has been truly eye-opening," Tanat mused, his voice tinged with reverence. "It reminds me of the importance of preserving our history and cherishing the stories that shaped our present."

Wandee nodded, her gaze fixed on the teacup in her hands. "Indeed, the past has so much to teach us. It connects us to our roots and gives us a deeper understanding of who we are."

Keng raised his cup, a gesture of

unity. "Let's carry these stories with us as we continue our journey. Let's honor the past and embrace the present,

appreciating the tapestry of cultures that make Taiwan so remarkable."

As the sun began its descent, casting long shadows over the historical block, Tanat, Wandee, and Keng left Bopiliao with their hearts filled with newfound knowledge and a renewed sense of curiosity. They walked side by side, their steps echoing with the weight of history, ready to uncover more treasures on their joyful journey through Taiwan.

With the echoes of history still resonating in their hearts, Tanat, Wandee, and Keng bid farewell to the enchanting Bopiliao Historical Block. Eager to continue their exploration of Taipei's cultural treasures, they embarked on a journey towards their next destination—the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall.

Choosing to embrace the city's vibrant energy, they decided to take a leisurely stroll towards the memorial hall. The sun bathed the streets in a warm glow as they weaved through the bustling cityscape, immersing themselves in the sights and sounds of Taipei.

As the three friends strolled along the path leading to Chiang

Kai-shek Memorial Hall, they could feel the weight of history and the spirit of Taiwan's resilience in the air. The sun's warmth embraced them, but the anticipation of a coffee break lured them to a quaint café nestled nearby—Taipei Best Coffee.

Entering the café, they were greeted by the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and the hum of friendly chatter. Finding a cozy corner, they settled into plush chairs, ready to savor their momentary escape from the bustling city. With steaming cups in hand, they delved into a captivating conversation about the attitudes of Taiwanese people toward mainland China, guided by the recent findings of the Pew Research Center survey.

Tanat, always curious about the intricacies of international relations, initiated the discussion. "The Pew Research Center survey sheds light on the intriguing dynamics between Taiwan, the United States, and mainland China. It seems that the Taiwanese public holds a distinct preference for closer ties with the U.S."

Keng, his eyes bright with interest, nodded in agreement. "Yes, Tanat, it's remarkable to see such a significant margin of

favorability towards the U.S. compared to mainland China. I wonder what factors contribute to this disparity."

Wandee, her artistic sensibilities drawn to the nuances of human perception, added, "The survey suggests that while there is cautious support for increased economic ties with mainland China, the enthusiasm for closer relations with the U.S. is palpable. I wonder how political and national identity play into these sentiments."

Tanat took a thoughtful sip of his coffee, contemplating Wandee's question. "Indeed, Wandee. It appears that political affiliations and national identity have a significant impact on people's attitudes. Supporters of the Democratic Progressive Party seem to lean towards stronger ties with the U.S., emphasizing a distinct Taiwanese national identity. On the other hand, the Kuomintang supporters, who favor closer relations with the mainland, exhibit a preference for mainland China."

Keng, always attuned to the nuances of societal dynamics, interjected, "It's important to remember that not everyone aligns strictly with these political parties. Many Taiwanese individuals find themselves somewhere in between, without a strong

allegiance. And interestingly, this group seems to exhibit stronger positive feelings towards the U.S. than mainland China."

Engrossed in their discussion, they savored their coffees, allowing the flavors to mingle with their thoughts. Tanat continued, "Generational differences also seem to play a role. Younger Taiwanese individuals appear more inclined towards the U.S., perhaps reflecting changing perspectives and evolving values."

Wandee nodded, her eyes sparkling with intrigue. "Yes, the survey reveals the complexity of Taiwanese sentiments. It's not merely a matter of political affiliations or national identity. There are personal sentiments, generational shifts, and other factors at play."

Their conversation wove through the intricacies of Taiwanese attitudes towards mainland China and the United States, enveloping them in a tapestry of cultural, political, and historical dimensions. Each sip of coffee fueled their curiosity, drawing them deeper into the labyrinth of international relations.

As the afternoon sun gently waned, casting a warm glow through the café's windows, the three friends realized that their time at Taipei Best Coffee had become more than just a respite. It had become a gateway to understanding Taiwan's complex relationship with the world—an exploration that went beyond the realms of mere conversation.

With a newfound appreciation for the intertwined nature of politics, history, and personal perspectives, they bid farewell to the café, carrying with them a renewed sense of curiosity and an eagerness to delve further into the captivating stories of Taiwan. Little did they know that their café conversation would mark the beginning of a profound journey, one that would forever shape their understanding of the world and their place within it.

Chapter 7: Reflections at Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall

At Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, Tanat, Wandee and Keng

were amazed at the grandeur of the memorial dedicated to the visionary leader.



“What do we know about this memorial?” asked Tanat.

Ken answered: “According to the website, the National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall! is a big deal in Taipei, serving as a national monument, a landmark, and a must-visit spot for tourists like us. It was built to honor Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the former President of the Republic of China.”

As they stood before the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, a sense of reverence washed over Tanat, Wandee, and Keng. The significance of this historic monument was not lost on them, and

they eagerly awaited the local tour guide who would unveil its captivating history.

Moments later, a knowledgeable tour guide approached them, a warm smile adorning her face. Her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm as she began to paint a vivid picture of the memorial hall's historical background.

"Welcome to the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall," she began, her voice carrying a tone of respect. "This magnificent structure was built as a tribute to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the former President of the Republic of China."

The tour guide continued, her words flowing like a river of knowledge. She shared the story of Chiang Kai-shek, a visionary leader who played a pivotal role in shaping Taiwan's destiny. She spoke of his unwavering determination, his leadership during times of turbulence, and his commitment to democracy and progress.

"The construction of this memorial hall began in 1976, just a few years after Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's passing," the tour

guide explained. "It took four years to complete this monumental structure, which stands as a testament to his enduring legacy."

As the tour guide led them through the memorial hall, they marveled at its architectural splendor. The majestic white walls, intricate carvings, and meticulously landscaped gardens created an atmosphere of tranquility and respect.

"The design of the memorial hall is deeply symbolic," the tour guide elaborated. "The blue roof represents the color of heaven, symbolizing Chiang Kai-shek's lofty ideals and aspirations. The white walls signify purity and righteousness, reflecting his unwavering dedication to his country and its people."

Walking through the expansive hall, they were captivated by the exhibits that showcased Chiang Kai-shek's life and accomplishments. They saw photographs capturing key moments in his political career, glimpses into his personal life, and artifacts that spoke of his leadership.

But it was the grand statue of Chiang Kai-shek, sitting stoically at the center of the main hall, that left them awestruck. Towering

above them, it embodied the strength and conviction of a man who had left an indelible mark on Taiwan's history.

As the tour came to an end, the three Thais couldn't help but feel a deep sense of admiration and respect for the legacy of Chiang Kai-shek. The tour guide's passionate storytelling had brought the history of the memorial hall to life, instilling in them a profound appreciation for the struggles and triumphs of Taiwan.

As they stepped out of the memorial hall, their hearts filled with a newfound understanding of the nation they were exploring. Tanat, Wandee, and Keng carried with them not only the memories of this monumental visit but also a deeper connection to Taiwan's past and its remarkable journey towards the future.

Expressing their gratitude, they thanked the tour guide for the enlightening experience and exchanged contact details. Filled with genuine warmth, Tanat extended an invitation to the kind tour guide, inviting them to visit Thailand in the near future, promising a warm welcome and a chance to experience the rich culture and hospitality of his homeland.

As they strolled towards the souvenir shop, their eyes were

drawn to Mei-Ling, a skilled calligrapher engrossed in creating intricate artwork inspired by Chiang Kai-shek's speeches at National Chung Hsing University (NCHU). Intrigued by her talent, Wandee and Keng approached Mei-Ling, their fascination evident on their faces. Tanat, equally captivated, joined them in admiring her work.

Wandee: Wow, your calligraphy is absolutely stunning! The way you bring these words to life is incredible.

Mei-Ling smiled warmly, appreciating their kind words.

Mei-Ling: Thank you so much! I'm glad you appreciate it. Calligraphy is not just a skill, but an art form that carries the essence of our culture and history.

Keng: It's truly remarkable how you can express such depth and beauty through each stroke. Can you tell us more about the art of calligraphy?

Mei-Ling: Of course! Calligraphy holds a significant place in Chinese culture. It's not just about writing characters; it's about capturing the spirit and energy of the words themselves. Each

brushstroke is carefully crafted to convey meaning and emotion. It requires patience, precision, and a deep understanding of the art form.

Tanat: That's fascinating! I'd love to learn more about it. Could you perhaps share a bit about the history and techniques involved?

Mei-Ling: Certainly! Calligraphy has a long history dating back thousands of years. It has been revered as one of the highest forms of art and a means of self-expression. The techniques involve mastering the different brushstrokes, understanding the balance and rhythm of the characters, and having a strong foundation in traditional Chinese characters.

Wandee: It sounds both challenging and rewarding. Can you show us how it's done? Maybe you could create something for us?

Mei-Ling nodded, excited to share her passion with them.

Mei-Ling: I'd be delighted to. How about I create a lucky word for each of you? It will bring you good fortune and serve as a beautiful memento of your time here in Taiwan.

With eager anticipation, Tanat, Keng, and Wandee watched as Mei-Ling dipped her brush into the ink and began to delicately craft their personalized calligraphy pieces. As she expertly moved her hand across the paper, she explained the meaning behind each character and its symbolic significance.

Mei-Ling: This word represents luck and prosperity. May it bring you abundance and happiness on your journey.

The visitors were in awe as they received their unique calligraphy pieces, cherishing the thoughtfulness and artistry behind them.

Tanat: Thank you, Mei-Ling. This will be a special keepsake from our time here in Taiwan.

Keng: Your talent is truly inspiring. We are grateful to have crossed paths with you.

Wandee: Your passion for calligraphy shines through your work. It's been a pleasure learning from you.

The encounter with Mei-Ling not only deepened their appreciation for the art of calligraphy but also left a lasting impression on their hearts, reminding them of the beauty and significance of preserving traditional arts and crafts.

Mei-Ling's dedication and artistic passion left a lasting impression on them.

Chapter 8: A Tea Adventure at Maokong Tea Garden

Escaping the city's hustle and bustle, Tanat, Keng, and Wandee found themselves surrounded by lush greenery at Maokong Tea Garden.



Let's just pause for a few minutes. Do you still remember the three characters in this story?

"Whispers of Friendship: A Joyful Journey in

Taiwan" introduces three dynamic characters who embark on an unforgettable adventure. Tanat Jaidee, an English teacher in his late forties, exudes curiosity and a thirst for exploration. Keng Manachai, a driven software developer in his early thirties, dreams of propelling Thailand to technological greatness. Wandee Suwannarach, a young and vibrant Thai Chinese teacher, adds a touch of warmth and sociability to the group. Together, these three friends delve into the enchanting world of Taiwan, where their friendship deepens, and they encounter

thrilling experiences that celebrate the power of camaraderie and the transformative nature of shared journeys.

The morning sun cast a warm glow as Tanat, Keng, and Wandee gathered in the quaint tea house, ready to embark on their tea-tasting journey. Their excitement was palpable as they awaited the arrival of Wei-Li, the esteemed tea master who would guide them through this enchanting experience.

Wei-Li entered the tea house, his serene presence immediately captivating the group. Dressed in traditional attire, he greeted them with a warm smile and a bow, inviting them to take a seat around a low tea table adorned with delicate tea sets and a range of aromatic teas.

With gentle gestures, Wei-Li began to introduce the rich tea culture of Taiwan, sharing fascinating insights into its history and significance. He explained that tea has been cultivated in Taiwan for centuries, and its unique geography and climate make it ideal for producing high-quality teas.

As they sipped their first cup, the fragrant aroma enveloped their senses, and the taste danced on their tongues. Wei-Li guided

them through the art of tea appreciation, emphasizing the importance of mindfulness in every sip.

"Tea is not merely a beverage, but a profound experience," Wei-Li explained, his voice resonating with wisdom. "In Taiwan, tea is considered a pathway to tranquility and self-reflection. Each cup invites us to be present in the moment, to savor the subtle flavors, and to cultivate a sense of inner peace."

Enthralled by Wei-Li's words, the three friends embraced the teachings, sipping their teas with newfound awareness. Tanat, known for his keen observation, noted the intricate brewing techniques employed by Wei-Li, carefully pouring water at specific temperatures and steeping the tea leaves for precise durations.

Keng, always the inquisitive one, asked about the different types of tea grown in Taiwan. Wei-Li gladly shared his knowledge, explaining the distinctions between oolong, black, green, and herbal teas. He described the intricate process of tea cultivation, from the handpicking of tea leaves to their withering, rolling, oxidation, and final drying.

Wandee, captivated by the spiritual aspect of tea, eagerly inquired about tea ceremonies. Wei-Li graciously obliged, offering a demonstration of a traditional Taiwanese tea ceremony. The rhythmic movements, the delicate pouring, and the harmonious silence created an ambiance of reverence and unity.

As the tea tasting continued, the friends marveled at the nuances of each cup, exploring the intricate flavors and aromas that lingered on their palates. They discovered the delicate floral notes of the high mountain oolong, the bold richness of the black tea, the refreshing grassiness of the green tea, and the soothing herbal infusions that calmed their spirits.

Throughout the session, the characters engaged in lively conversations, sharing their thoughts and impressions. They found themselves immersed in not only the world of tea but also in deepening their bond as friends.

At the end of the tea-tasting journey, as they savored the last sips, a sense of serenity washed over them. They were grateful for this experience that had opened their hearts and minds to the beauty of tea and the art of mindfulness.

With a newfound appreciation for the tea culture of Taiwan, Tanat, Keng, and Wandee realized that their journey went beyond mere exploration. It was about immersing themselves in the essence of a place, embracing its traditions, and allowing the experiences to shape their souls.

As they bid farewell to Wei-Li, they carried with them the wisdom gained from the tea-tasting journey. Inspired by the deep-rooted tea culture of Taiwan, they vowed to bring this newfound mindfulness and appreciation to their lives back in Thailand, to share the joy of tea with their loved ones, and

to contribute to the growth of Thailand's own tea-drinking culture.

The tea-tasting experience became a significant chapter in their shared adventure, a memory they would forever cherish—a reminder of the power of friendship, exploration, and the transformative nature of embracing new cultures and traditions.

Not far from the serene Maokong Tea Garden, Tanat, Keng, and Wandee found themselves immersed in a lively visit to the nearby zoo. Excitement filled the air as they strolled through the

well-maintained paths, observing the diverse array of animals that called the zoo their home.

Tanat's eyes sparkled with childlike wonder as he watched the graceful movements of the giraffes and the playful antics of the monkeys. The zoo, for him, was a place of awe and appreciation for the beauty of nature's creations. He found solace in observing these majestic creatures up close, learning about their habitats and behaviors.

Wandee, on the other hand, had mixed emotions about the idea of animals being confined in enclosures. As an advocate for animal rights and preservation, she couldn't help but question the ethics of keeping animals in captivity. She pondered whether the zoo truly served the purpose of conservation or if it simply perpetuated a cycle of confinement and separation from their natural environments.

Engrossed in their discussions, the three friends found themselves at a crossroad of opinions. Tanat, although appreciating the opportunity to observe and learn about animals, couldn't help but understand Wandee's concerns. He wondered if there were alternative ways to promote conservation without

compromising the well-being and freedom of these sentient beings.

Keng, known for his logical thinking, proposed a middle ground. He suggested that responsible zoos should prioritize education and conservation efforts, emphasizing the importance of raising awareness about endangered species and their habitats. By creating immersive and educational experiences, zoos could inspire visitors to take action and support conservation initiatives.

Their conversations evolved, and they delved deeper into the question of whether animals possessed consciousness and were sentient beings capable of experiencing emotions and forming social connections. Tanat, with his empathetic nature, believed that animals had a profound inner world, capable of feeling joy, fear, and pain. Wandee shared this belief, highlighting the growing body of scientific evidence that supported the sentience of animals.

As they continued their exploration of the zoo, the friends made a conscious effort to engage with the exhibits that focused on conservation efforts, habitat preservation, and rehabilitation programs. They sought solace in knowing that some zoos played

an active role in protecting endangered species and reintroducing them into their natural habitats.

Their visit to the zoo became more than just a casual outing. It became an opportunity for introspection, reflection, and a deeper understanding of the delicate balance between human interactions and the welfare of animals. They left the zoo with a shared commitment to supporting organizations that prioritize ethical practices and contribute to the conservation of wildlife.

Tanat, Keng, and Wandee's discussions continued long after they exited the zoo. Their differing perspectives enriched their friendship, enabling them to challenge their own beliefs and grow as individuals. They realized that their journey in Taiwan extended beyond the thrill of exploration; it was a journey of self-discovery and an opportunity to explore complex issues that shaped their worldview.

As the day drew to a close, the three friends retreated to a nearby café, sipping their tea and engaging in heartfelt conversations about the interconnectedness of all living beings and the responsibilities humanity holds in safeguarding our planet. Their visit to the zoo had ignited a desire within them to

make a difference, to advocate for a world where the harmony between humans and animals was at the forefront of collective consciousness.

United in their determination, they vowed to continue their quest for knowledge, understanding, and meaningful action. Their journey in Taiwan had taken them to new heights, not only in terms of exploration and adventure but also in their personal growth and their unwavering commitment to creating a better world for all beings, both human and animal.

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Chapter 9: Taipei 101

As the sun began to rise, Tanat, Keng, and Wandee were already up and filled with excitement for their day ahead. Their plan was to visit the iconic skyscraper Taipei 101, a symbol of Taiwan's modernity and architectural prowess. Gathering at the hotel's breakfast area, they savored their morning meal while engaging in lively discussions about various topics that captured their interest.

Wandee, sipping her tea, brought up the topic of noodles. "Have you both tried Taiwanese noodles? They are renowned for their rich flavors and diverse varieties. From beef noodle soup to dan zai noodles, Taiwan offers a culinary delight for noodle enthusiasts."

Keng, intrigued by the mention of noodles, nodded in agreement. "I've heard that beef noodle soup is a signature dish here. I'm eager to taste it and experience the unique Taiwanese twist on this beloved comfort food."

Tanat, savoring a bite of his breakfast, added, "Noodles hold a special place in Thai cuisine too. From Pad Thai to Boat Noodles, our culinary traditions are deeply rooted in noodle dishes. I'm

excited to compare the flavors and techniques with Taiwanese noodles."

Their conversation effortlessly shifted to their shared love for noodles, as they exchanged stories of their favorite noodle dishes back in Thailand. Wande, with her expertise, provided insights into the different noodle varieties and recommended must-try noodle spots in Taipei.

With each passing moment, their anticipation for the day's



exploration grew, fueled not only by the prospect of witnessing the grandeur of Taipei 101 but also by the promise of indulging in a culinary adventure through the world of

noodles.

Unbeknownst to them, the day that lay before them held a plethora of awe-inspiring sights, a deep dive into the local

culture, and a culinary experience that would forever be etched in their hearts and palates.

If you come to visit Taipei, you should not miss an opportunity to take photos with this skyscraper - Taipei 101.

Taipei 101 is a skyscraper in Taipei, Taiwan. It was the tallest building in the world from 2004 to 2009, when it was surpassed by the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. Taipei 101 is 508 meters (1,667 feet) tall and has 101 floors. It is used for offices, shopping, and a viewing platform.

The building was designed by C.Y. Lee & Partners and is named after its address, No. 101, Xinyi Road, Taipei. Taipei 101 is a LEED Platinum certified building, which means it meets the highest standards of environmental sustainability.

The building has a number of features that make it unique, including a tuned mass damper, which helps to reduce sway in the event of an earthquake or strong wind. Taipei 101 also has a sky garden on the 89th floor, which offers stunning views of Taipei.

Taipei 101 is a popular tourist destination and is a must-see for anyone visiting Taipei. The building is open to the public and offers a number of tours, including a visit to the sky garden.

Many tourists would come to Si Si Nan Cun village, also known as 四四南村 in Mandarin to take photographs of the skyscraper - the unique destination in Taiwan.

Si Si Nan Cun holds a special place in the hearts of locals and visitors alike. This charming village is known for its vibrant atmosphere, artistic spirit, and rich cultural heritage. As you wander through its lively streets, you'll be captivated by the delightful blend of tradition and modernity.

This hidden gem offers a wonderful glimpse into Taiwan's past and present. The village showcases traditional architecture, beautifully preserved old houses, and narrow alleyways brimming with nostalgic charm. You'll feel as if you've stepped back in time while exploring its quaint lanes.

But don't be fooled by its vintage appearance! Si Si Nan Cun is also a hub of creativity and contemporary art. The village has become a haven for local artists, who have transformed its walls

into vibrant canvases. Admire the colorful murals and street art that adorn the buildings, adding a playful touch to the village's character.

As visitors meander through the village, they'll encounter a plethora of boutiques, cafes, and artisanal shops. Indulge in some retail therapy and discover unique handmade crafts, stylish fashion, and local delicacies. The village is renowned for its eclectic mix of traditional and trendy offerings, making it a paradise for shoppers and food enthusiasts alike.

Si Si Nan Cun also hosts various cultural events and festivals throughout the year. From traditional performances to contemporary art exhibitions, there's always something exciting happening. Immerse yourself in the festive ambiance and embrace the vibrant energy of the village.

The friendly locals of Si Si Nan Cun are known for their warm hospitality. Strike up a conversation, learn about their stories, and gain insights into their way of life. They will gladly share their passion for the village and offer recommendations for hidden gems you shouldn't miss.

Tanat, Wandee, and Keng eagerly embarked on an adventure to explore the historic village of Si Si Nan Cun, nestled just south of Taipei 101. As they followed the tips they had gathered, they were filled with anticipation for a day filled with discovery, conversation, and enjoyment.

Si Si Nan Cun was a treasure trove of old townhouses that had been lovingly preserved and restored. The trio first made their way to the village's museum, immersing themselves in the captivating tale of its history. They marveled at the artifacts, read the carefully preserved historical documents, and felt a deep connection to the stories that unfolded before their eyes.

"It's truly remarkable to witness the living history of this village," Wandee exclaimed, her eyes sparkling with fascination. "The exhibits breathe life into the past, allowing us to glimpse the vibrant lives of those who came before us."

Keng nodded in agreement. "Absolutely. It's astonishing to witness the evolution of this place and the resilience of its people throughout the years."

With their minds enriched by the museum's insights, they continued their exploration of the narrow lanes, meandering through the maze-like streets adorned with well-preserved old townhouses. The intricate wooden carvings and traditional architectural designs left them in awe.

Tanat's eyes lit up as he pointed to a particularly elaborate carving. "Each townhouse seems to hold its own unique story, etched in the craftsmanship of these incredible carvings."

Wandee nodded, a sense of wonder in her voice. "It's like stepping into a time capsule, where the essence of this place is frozen in time."

Their senses awakened, they followed the tantalizing aroma of freshly brewed coffee to a cozy café nestled within the village. Sitting at a table, they relished their drinks and savored a delightful meal, immersing themselves in the café's charming atmosphere.

Keng leaned back in his chair, a contented smile gracing his face. "This café is a hidden gem. A place where time slows down, allowing us to truly appreciate the moment."

Tanat nodded, his taste buds dancing with delight. "And the flavors! Each bite feels like a symphony of tastes, perfectly complementing the ambiance of this village."

Enchanted by the village's allure, they couldn't resist exploring the boutique shops scattered along the streets. They found themselves surrounded by unique crafts and traditional souvenirs, their hearts fluttering with excitement.

Wandee carefully examined a beautifully crafted piece and couldn't help but express her admiration. "These handmade items are truly extraordinary. Each one carries the soul of this village, and I simply can't resist taking a piece of it back home with me."

Tanat joined her in admiration, his eyes gleaming with appreciation. "It's remarkable how these items preserve the culture and artistry of this place. Owning one of these treasures feels like owning a part of its rich history."

As they continued their journey through the village, the sound of music and laughter led them to a vibrant public square. Local

artists showcased their talents, filling the air with melodies and traditional dances that spoke volumes of the village's cultural heritage.

Keng clapped along to the rhythm, his face beaming with delight. "This unexpected performance is a testament to the living traditions of this village. It's a celebration of its past and a gift to the present."

Wandee's eyes sparkled as she absorbed the energy of the performance. "The passion and enthusiasm of these performers are contagious. It's as if they have breathed new life into the ancient stones of Si Si Nan Cun."

As the day neared its end, Tanat, Wandee, and Keng took a leisurely stroll through the village, relishing the

peaceful ambiance and serenity that enveloped them. Their footsteps echoed on the village paths, carrying with them the discussions they had shared throughout the day.

Tanat gazed towards Taipei 101, its towering presence visible from the village. "Isn't it remarkable how we can witness the

grandeur of Taipei 101 from this humble village? It serves as a reminder of the beauty and contrasts of this city."

Wandee nodded, her voice filled with wonder. "Indeed, it's a testament to the harmony between tradition and modernity that exists in Taiwan. Si Si Nan Cun offers us a glimpse into the past, while Taipei 101 stands tall as a symbol of progress."

With hearts full of cherished memories and a deeper appreciation for the cultural richness that Si Si Nan Cun had bestowed upon them, Tanat, Wandee, and Keng bid farewell to the enchanting village. Their shared experiences had not only brought them closer as friends but had also enriched their understanding of Taiwan's history and cultural heritage.

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Chapter 10: Nostalgia and Inspiration at Jiufen Old Street

Jiufen Old Street transported Tanat and Keng back in time with



its traditional architecture and nostalgic atmosphere.

They stumbled upon a small cafe owned by an aspiring writer named Ming-Hui. Over cups of aromatic tea and plates

of local delicacies, Ming-Hui shared his struggles and dreams, inspiring Tanat and Keng to embrace their own passion.

As Tanat, Keng, and Wandee boarded the bus from Taipei to Jiufen, they were filled with excitement for the adventures that awaited them. The scenic journey took them through picturesque landscapes, winding roads, and quaint villages. Along the way, they had the chance to engage in conversations with the locals, immersing themselves in the culture and stories of the region.

As the bus made a stop at a small village, the trio stepped off to stretch their legs and explore. They found themselves drawn to a local food stall, enticed by the delicious aroma wafting through the air. The owner, a friendly elderly woman, greeted them warmly.

Elderly Woman: Welcome, welcome! Are you travelers passing through?

Tanat: Yes, we're from Thailand, and we're on our way to Jiufen Old Street. We heard it's a fascinating place to visit.

Elderly Woman: Ah, Jiufen is indeed a special gem. You'll find enchanting streets, delicious food, and breathtaking views there. But don't forget to savor the beauty along the journey as well.

Keng: We absolutely will! We've been enjoying the scenic landscapes and the hospitality of the people we've met.

Elderly Woman: That's wonderful to hear. Our village may be small, but it holds many stories. Would you like to hear one?

Wandee: We would love to! Please share a story with us.

The elderly woman settled comfortably on a wooden stool and began weaving her tale, captivating her audience with her words.

Elderly Woman: Long ago, this village was a bustling mining town. It was filled with lively miners seeking fortune in the hills. But as time passed, the mines closed, and the village became quiet. However, the spirit of the people remained resilient.

Tanat: It's fascinating to hear about the history of this place. How did the village transform into what it is today?

Elderly Woman: After the mines closed, the locals embraced their cultural heritage and began showcasing their traditions to visitors. Slowly, the village gained popularity as a charming stop along the way to Jiufen. Today, we continue to share our stories, traditions, and local delicacies with travelers like you.

Keng: That's incredible! It shows the strength and adaptability of the community. We're grateful to experience the richness of your culture.

With newfound appreciation for the village and its people, the trio bid farewell to the elderly woman and resumed their journey. Along the way, they encountered more locals, each with their own stories and insights. They soaked up the wisdom and warmth shared by the people they met, creating lasting memories of their 30-hour adventure to Jiufen.

As they finally arrived at Jiufen Old Street, they were greeted by the vibrant atmosphere, lantern-lit alleys, and the hustle and bustle of the market. The trio knew their journey had only just begun, and they eagerly immersed themselves in the charm and magic of Jiufen, grateful for the encounters and stories that had enriched their travel experience.

Chapter 11: Taipei Confucius Temple

One afternoon, the three Thais, Tanat, Keng, and Wandee went to a temple called the Taipei Confucius Temple.



Tanat, Keng, and Wandee sat outside the café, enjoying their conversation in the presence of the majestic Confucius Temple in Taipei. As they sipped their drinks, their discussion naturally shifted to the profound teachings of Confucius

and his influential book, the Analects.

Tanat glanced at the temple, appreciating the historical significance of the ancient text.

Tanat: "The Analects of Confucius has left an indelible mark on Chinese philosophy and culture. It's fascinating how a book written thousands of years ago continues to shape East Asian thought and values."

Wandee nodded, her eyes shining with interest.

Wandee: "Absolutely, Tanat. Confucius believed that the moral development of individuals, particularly leaders, is vital for the well-being of a country. His teachings emphasize the importance of virtues like respect, devotion, and responsibility."

Keng chimed in, reflecting on the relevance of Confucius' teachings in modern society.

Keng: "It's remarkable how Confucius emphasized the concept of 'ren' as a path to virtue. 'Ren' encourages individuals to show respect and devotion to their parents and older siblings, fostering harmonious relationships within families and society."

Tanat leaned forward, intrigued by the notion of reconciling personal desires through rituals and proper behavior.

Tanat: "I find it fascinating that Confucius believed in finding a balance between personal desires and societal responsibilities. By practicing rituals and proper behavior, individuals could demonstrate respect for others and fulfill their roles in society. It's a beautiful concept."

Wandee nodded, her eyes reflecting her deep appreciation for Confucius' teachings.

Wandee: "Indeed, Tanat. Confucius believed that by cultivating virtue and embodying these values, individuals could contribute to the harmony and well-being of society as a whole. It's a philosophy that encourages personal growth and social cohesion."

The three friends fell into a brief silence, absorbing the wisdom of Confucius and the profound impact of his teachings.

Keng broke the silence, his voice filled with admiration.

Keng: "The enduring influence of the Analects is a testament to its timeless wisdom. Even today, its teachings continue to guide

individuals in their pursuit of personal growth and ethical conduct."

Tanat nodded, his thoughts aligning with Keng's sentiments.

Tanat: "Indeed, Keng. The Analects serve as a moral compass, reminding us of the importance of respect, responsibility, and harmony. It's a treasure of wisdom that transcends time."

As the friends continued their conversation, their words echoed in the presence of the Confucius Temple, a fitting tribute to the enduring legacy of Confucius and the profound impact of his teachings.

Inside the serene Confucius Temple, Tanat, Keng, and Wandee immersed themselves in the history and culture surrounding the evolution of Chinese characters. As they explored the temple's exhibits, their curiosity piqued, leading to an engaging conversation about the transformation of characters from pictorial representations to the intricate forms we recognize today.

Tanat pointed at a display showcasing the ancient pictorial origins of Chinese characters.

Tanat: "Look at these ancient pictograms, Keng and Wandee. It's incredible how the Chinese characters we know today evolved from these simple pictures."

Wandee studied the exhibit with a keen interest, marveling at the visual connection between the ancient drawings and the characters they represented.

Wandee: "It's fascinating, Tanat. These pictograms were inspired by nature and everyday objects. Take the character for 'fish,' for example. Its original form looked like a simple drawing of a fish. It's amazing how it transformed into the character we use today."

Keng nodded, intrigued by the historical progression of Chinese characters.

Keng: "Yes, the evolution from pictograms to more abstract characters is a testament to the ingenuity of the ancient Chinese. Over time, these symbols became stylized and simplified, making them easier to write and recognize."

Tanat's eyes gleamed with curiosity as he leaned in closer to a display explaining the transformation.

Tanat: "I wonder how these pictograms transitioned into more complex characters. How did the original images become the intricate strokes we see today?"

Keng smiled, eager to share his knowledge.

Keng: "It's a gradual process, Tanat. Over centuries, the characters evolved through different stages. From the pictograms, they transformed into ideograms, which represent abstract ideas or concepts. These ideograms were combined with phonetic elements, leading to the creation of more sophisticated characters."

Wandee nodded, her interest deepening.

Wandee: "That's right. The combination of pictorial elements and phonetic components allowed for a greater range of meanings and possibilities. It enabled the Chinese language to express a rich tapestry of ideas and concepts."

Tanat's fascination grew as he absorbed the information.

Tanat: "So, these characters hold both visual and phonetic components, creating a complex system that conveys meaning and pronunciation. It's truly remarkable."

As they continued to explore the exhibits and delve deeper into the evolution of Chinese characters, Tanat, Keng, and Wandee couldn't help but feel a profound respect for the intricate language system that has endured for centuries. With each stroke and symbol, they discovered a deeper appreciation for the rich cultural heritage embedded within the characters, a testament to the remarkable journey of human expression and communication.

Regrettably, Wandee's time in Taiwan was limited, as she had to catch an early morning flight back to Thailand the next day. The news brought a tinge of sadness to the hearts of Tanat, Keng, and Wandee, who had formed a strong bond during their adventures together. They had shared laughter, exchanged stories, and experienced the beauty of Taiwan as a trio. The realization that their journey would soon come to an end left them with mixed emotions—grateful for the memories they had

created, yet saddened by the imminent departure of their dear friend.

Chapter 12: On a Speed Train to Taichung

As Tanat and Keng sat down for breakfast at the hotel, the absence of Wandee weighed heavily on Keng's heart. The empty chair beside them served as a constant reminder of the vibrant energy and infectious laughter that she brought to their adventures. As they sipped their coffee and savored their food, a sense of longing lingered in the air.



Keng couldn't help but express his feelings to Tanat, a friend who had become like family during their time together. He sighed softly, his gaze distant. "You know, Tanat, I miss Wandee deeply. Her presence added so much joy and warmth

to our journey. It feels incomplete without her."

As Tanat sensed Keng's longing for Wandee, he decided to step in and offer his support. With a warm smile, he suggested, "Keng, why don't you send Wandee a message? Let her know how much you miss her and that you'd like to keep in touch. Who knows, maybe this distance will only strengthen the bond between you two."

Keng looked up at Tanat, appreciating his friend's thoughtful suggestion. "You think so, Tanat? I mean, Wandee is amazing, and I can't deny that there's something special between us. But with her leaving so soon, I didn't want to burden her with my feelings."

Tanat's eyes sparkled with understanding. "Keng, my friend, don't let fear hold you back. Sometimes, life surprises us in the most unexpected ways. If there's a connection between you and Wandee, it's worth exploring. Love knows no boundaries, and even distance can't diminish true feelings."

Encouraged by Tanat's words, Keng took a deep breath and reached for his phone. He composed a heartfelt message to Wandee, expressing his appreciation for their time together and

his desire to keep their connection alive. With a mix of anticipation and nervousness, he pressed the send button, knowing that fate would unfold in its own mysterious way.

Tanat watched Keng with a mixture of pride and genuine affection. He had taken on the role of a supportive big brother, guiding his friend through the realm of love and possibilities. He silently hoped that this message would be the beginning of a beautiful love story between Keng and Wandee.

Tanat told Keng to speed up their breakfast time. They had a train to catch and a long way to travel. They had a plan to visit Taichung.

The Thais or Thai people know something about Taiwan, especially Taichung and they pronounce it as “Tai-Song”. Many Thais come to work in Taiwan and the relationship between Taiwan and Thailand has been cordial and positive.

Taichung, situated in the western region of central Taiwan, is an urban hub known for its industrial significance. It serves as a starting point for discovering the mountainous interior of the island, which includes picturesque spots like Sun Moon Lake,

renowned for activities such as boating and hiking. Within the lively city center, visitors can explore various museums, temples, and the intricately designed Taichung Station, which stands as a historical landmark from the Japanese colonial era (1895-1945).

From Taipei, you can take a speed train to Taichung in less than an hour. The actual distance is about 170 kilometers.

The Taiwan High-Speed Rail (THSR) is a cutting-edge railway system that spans approximately 350 kilometers along the scenic west coast of Taiwan. It connects the bustling capital city of Taipei in the north to the vibrant southern city of Kaohsiung. With its sleek trains and advanced infrastructure, the THSR offers travelers a fast and efficient mode of transportation, allowing them to traverse the distance between these two major cities with ease.

Excitement filled the air as Tanat and Keng prepared for their journey from Taipei to Taichung aboard the Taiwan High-Speed Rail. They arrived at the futuristic train station, mesmerized by the sleek design and modern amenities that surrounded them. The station buzzed with activity as passengers eagerly awaited

their trains, their eyes fixed on the digital display boards indicating departure times and platforms.

As they stepped onto the platform, a sense of anticipation washed over them. They marveled at the state-of-the-art high-speed train that arrived with a gentle hum, its sleek exterior reflecting the sunlight. Finding their designated seats, they settled in and watched as the train departed the station, smoothly gliding along the tracks.

Inside the spacious and comfortable cabin, Tanat and Keng marveled at the panoramic windows that offered breathtaking views of the passing landscapes. The train whisked them away at incredible speeds, effortlessly navigating the distance between Taipei and Taichung. The smooth ride and minimal vibrations made their journey a truly enjoyable experience.

As they gazed out the window, they were captivated by the changing scenery. Rolling hills, picturesque countryside, and bustling towns passed by in a blur. The train zipped through tunnels and crossed towering bridges, providing a unique perspective of Taiwan's diverse landscapes.

During the journey, they couldn't help but strike up conversations with fellow travelers. They exchanged stories, recommendations, and experiences, forming connections that transcended the confines of the train. It was an opportunity to learn about different cultures, share travel tips, and forge new friendships.

As the train approached Taichung, Tanat and Keng gathered their belongings, bidding farewell to their newfound acquaintances. They stepped off the train, feeling invigorated and grateful for the seamless travel experience provided by the Taiwan High-Speed Rail. Their adventure in Taichung awaited, but they carried with them the memories of their exhilarating journey on the high-speed train.

The Taiwan High-Speed Rail not only transported Tanat and Keng swiftly from Taipei to Taichung, but it also became an integral part of their travel experience. It showcased Taiwan's commitment to innovation, efficiency, and connectivity, leaving them with a deep appreciation for the country's modern infrastructure and seamless transportation network.

At the HSR station in Taichung, Tanat and Keng sat at a cafe inside the station. Their appointment with Prof Li was at 11.30

AM. So they had plenty of time. Sitting and relaxing at a nice cafe was nothing but heaven on earth.

Taichung in National Chung Hsing University was their destination. It's not too far from the speed train station. To get from the Taichung High-Speed Rail Station to National Chung Hsing University in Taichung, you have a few transportation options. Firstly, you can take taxis. They are readily available outside the High-Speed Rail Station. You can easily find a taxi stand where you can queue up and take a taxi directly to National Chung Hsing University. Make sure to inform the taxi driver of your destination.

You can take a bus. There are several bus routes that connect the Taichung High-Speed Rail Station to National Chung Hsing University. Look for buses that have routes passing through the university or ask for assistance at the information counter at the station. Check the bus schedules and routes beforehand to ensure you board the correct bus.

Chapter 13: National Chung Hsing University

Tanat and Keng sat across from each other at a cozy café in Taichung, sipping their coffees as they delved into a conversation about AI and XAI. Tanat leaned forward, his eyes brimming with curiosity.



National Chung Hsing University (NCHU), located in Taichung, Taiwan, is a prestigious national university. Originally established as the Advanced Academy of Agronomy and Forestry in 1919, it was later renamed NCHU in 1956. Renowned for its research excellence, NCHU ranks among the top 100 universities in

Asia.

NCHU offers a diverse range of undergraduate and graduate programs spanning fields such as agriculture, engineering, science, medicine, and the humanities. With a strong emphasis on research, the university's faculty members have made significant contributions across various disciplines. NCHU is also home to several state-of-the-art research centers and institutes,

specializing in areas like environmental science, biotechnology, and materials science.

NCHU attracts a considerable number of international students and boasts a robust international exchange program. Collaborating with over 200 universities worldwide, the university provides a plethora of programs tailored for international students.

As a vibrant and dynamic institution, NCHU provides an ideal environment for studying and conducting research. It enjoys a stellar academic reputation, offering students ample opportunities for growth and learning.

Tanat: "Keng, I've been hearing a lot about AI lately, but I'm still trying to grasp its concept fully. Could you help me understand what AI is and how it works?"

Keng nodded, taking a moment to gather his thoughts before responding.

Keng: "Certainly, Tanat. AI, or Artificial Intelligence, refers to the development of computer systems or machines that can perform tasks requiring human-like intelligence. These tasks include understanding language, recognizing patterns, making decisions, and solving complex problems."

Tanat listened intently, nodding along.

Tanat: "So, AI is essentially teaching computers to think and make decisions like humans?"

Keng smiled, appreciating Tanat's simplification.

Keng: "Exactly, Tanat. AI systems are designed to process and analyze vast amounts of data using techniques like machine learning and deep learning. By doing so, they can learn, reason, and make intelligent decisions or predictions."

Tanat leaned back, taking in the information.

Tanat: "That sounds remarkable. But I've also heard that one challenge with AI is its lack of transparency. What exactly does that mean?"

Keng's expression turned thoughtful as he considered the best way to explain.

Keng: "You're right, Tanat. AI algorithms often work as 'black boxes,' making decisions without providing clear explanations for how or why they reached those conclusions. This lack of interpretability can be problematic, especially in critical applications where people's lives or well-being are at stake."

Tanat's brows furrowed, intrigued by this limitation.

Tanat: "So, how do we overcome this challenge and make AI more transparent?"

Keng leaned forward, eager to share his knowledge.

Keng: "That's where Explainable AI, or XAI, comes into play. XAI aims to design AI systems that provide transparent and interpretable explanations for their decisions or actions. It focuses on understanding the underlying mechanisms and reasoning processes of AI models, making their behavior more understandable to humans."

Tanat nodded, absorbing the concept.

Tanat: "That sounds crucial, especially when AI is used in critical fields like healthcare or finance. How do we achieve this explainability in AI?"

Keng listed off some methods, illustrating each with examples.

Keng: "There are various approaches to achieving explainability in AI. Rule-based systems use explicit rules to make decisions, making it easier to understand how and why a particular decision was reached. Model transparency techniques, like decision trees or linear models, offer insights into the decision-making process."

Keng paused briefly, organizing his thoughts.

Keng: "Local explanations focus on explaining individual predictions or decisions by identifying the input features that influenced the outcome the most. Example-based explanations provide instances or examples that showcase how the AI system made similar decisions in the past. And visual explanations use

visualizations to present the inner workings of AI models in a more accessible and interpretable way."

Tanat's eyes widened with each explanation, realizing the depth of XAI's significance.

Tanat: "I see. So, explainable AI not only helps build trust in AI systems but also allows users to understand and detect biases or ethical issues. It sounds like a crucial field to ensure AI is used responsibly."

Keng nodded, his voice filled with agreement.

Keng: "Indeed, Tanat. XAI plays a vital role in creating AI systems that are transparent, accountable, and understandable to humans. It enables us to harness the power of AI while maintaining control and trust in its applications."

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Chapter 14: Bonds That Transcend Borders

Tanat Jaidee and Dr Li, aged 45, unmarried and active. She was a language professor at the College of Liberal Arts, and spent time talking about what is good and not so good - issues of morality and democracy.



Under the shade of a sprawling tree on the university campus, Tanat Jaidee engaged in a thought-provoking conversation with Dr. Li, a respected language professor at the College of Liberal Arts. The warm

breeze rustled through the leaves, adding a serene backdrop to their deep discussion.

Dr. Li, a knowledgeable and passionate scholar, began the conversation by delving into the complex relationship between morality and democracy. She spoke of the importance of moral

values as the foundation for a strong and just society, emphasizing that a true democracy should be built upon ethical principles that prioritize the well-being of its citizens.

Tanat listened intently, his eyes reflecting genuine interest. He shared his perspective, drawing from his experiences and observations in Thailand. He acknowledged the ongoing struggle to strike a balance between individual freedom and social responsibility, recognizing that the pursuit of democracy must be accompanied by a moral compass to guide its course.

As their conversation progressed, their focus shifted to the relationships between Thailand, Taiwan, and China. Dr. Li, being an expert in cross-cultural studies, shed light on the historical and geopolitical dynamics that shape these connections. She emphasized the delicate dance between sovereignty, economic interests, and cultural identity that nations navigate in their interactions.

Tanat, intrigued by the complexities of international relations, eagerly absorbed Dr. Li's insights. He expressed his curiosity about Taiwan's unique position, existing as a self-governed entity while facing diplomatic challenges with China. They discussed

the importance of fostering open dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect among nations with differing ideologies and aspirations.

The conversation delved deeper into the cultural exchange and cooperation between Thailand and Taiwan. They explored the shared traditions, language, and historical influences that have shaped the connections between the two nations. Both Tanat and Dr. Li agreed on the significance of nurturing these relationships, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other's cultures.

As the sun began its descent, casting a warm glow on their faces, Tanat and Dr. Li concluded their discussion. Their exchange of ideas had broadened their perspectives and sparked a desire for continued exploration and dialogue.

Tanat extended his gratitude to Dr. Li, acknowledging the profound impact of their conversation. "Dr. Li, your insights have provided me with a deeper understanding of the intricate connections between morality, democracy, and international relations. I am inspired to continue exploring these topics and engaging in conversations that bridge cultural divides."

Dr. Li smiled warmly, appreciating Tanat's genuine interest and eagerness to delve into these complex issues. "Tanat, it has been a pleasure discussing these matters with you. The pursuit of knowledge and understanding is a lifelong journey, and I have no doubt that you will continue to contribute to these important conversations."

As they bid farewell, their minds brimming with new ideas and perspectives, Tanat and Dr. Li parted ways. Their conversation had sparked a desire to seek truth, navigate moral dilemmas, and promote harmonious relationships among nations. Inspired and invigorated, they carried their newfound insights with them, ready to make a positive impact in their respective spheres and contribute to a world marked by empathy, understanding, and cooperation.

While Tanat was visiting the College of Liberal arts, Keng, a software developer, was invited to visit the College of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. He was given an opportunity to talk to Prof Tsai.

Keng's visit to the College of Electrical Engineering and

Computer Science at NCHU was filled with anticipation. As he entered the campus, he was welcomed by Professor Tsai, a respected figure in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) research. Keng admired Professor Tsai's expertise and was eager to engage in a discussion about their shared interests.

The conversation flowed effortlessly as Keng and Professor Tsai delved into the fascinating world of AI research. They discussed cutting-edge advancements, the potential applications of AI in various industries, and the challenges that researchers face in harnessing its full potential. Keng was impressed by Professor Tsai's depth of knowledge and his passion for pushing the boundaries of AI.

As their discussion progressed, Keng couldn't help but express his keen interest in pursuing a doctoral degree in AI at the College of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. He spoke about his desire to contribute to the field, to be at the forefront of innovation, and to make a meaningful impact on society through his research. Professor Tsai listened attentively, recognizing Keng's enthusiasm and drive.

Impressed by Keng's dedication and passion for AI, Professor Tsai shared insights about the college's renowned research programs and the opportunities available for doctoral students. He spoke about the collaborative environment, the state-of-the-art facilities, and the valuable industry partnerships that would provide Keng with a comprehensive and immersive learning experience. Professor Tsai encouraged Keng to pursue his dream, assuring him that the college would provide the support and guidance he needed to excel in his academic journey.

As Keng absorbed the information and felt the genuine support from Professor Tsai, he became more determined than ever to join the college and pursue his doctoral degree. The prospect of being mentored by esteemed faculty members, collaborating with like-minded researchers, and contributing to groundbreaking AI research fueled his excitement.

Leaving the meeting with a sense of purpose, Keng expressed his gratitude to Professor Tsai for his time and guidance. He knew that embarking on this academic path would be challenging, but with the support and expertise of the College of

Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, he felt confident in his decision.

With renewed determination, Keng began the application process, eager to start the next chapter of his academic journey at the College of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. He knew that pursuing his doctoral degree there would not only provide him with the knowledge and skills to become a leader in AI research but also open doors to exciting opportunities and collaborations in the field.

As Keng envisioned the possibilities that lay ahead, he felt a deep sense of gratitude for the chance encounter that led him to Professor Tsai and the College of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. He knew that this was the beginning of an extraordinary chapter in his life, one that would shape his future and allow him to make a significant contribution to the world of AI research.

Immersed in the vibrant atmosphere of the NCHU campus, Tanat and Keng eagerly explored all that it had to offer. The sprawling green spaces, adorned with majestic trees, provided a serene backdrop for their day of discovery. They found themselves

captivated by the beauty of the campus, as well as the bustling bicycle lanes that intertwined with the picturesque landscape.

As they ventured further into the heart of Taichung, they were enchanted by the city's unique charm. Taichung's streets were alive with a blend of modernity and traditional influences, where historical buildings stood proudly alongside contemporary structures. The vibrant colors and lively ambiance resonated with their adventurous spirits.

The day unfolded with delightful surprises as Tanat and Keng stumbled upon quaint cafés, bustling street markets, and hidden gems tucked away in the city's alleyways. They indulged their taste buds in the local delicacies, savoring the flavors that represented the richness of Taiwanese cuisine. Each bite was a culinary adventure, immersing them in the diverse gastronomic tapestry of Taichung.

As the sun began to set, casting a warm golden hue over the city, Tanat and Keng realized that their time in Taichung had passed all too quickly. Reluctantly, they made their way back to the high-speed train station, knowing that they had to return to their hotel in Taipei.

Boarding the sleek and efficient Taiwan High-Speed Rail, they settled into their seats, reminiscing about the day's adventures. The rhythmic hum of the train filled the air as it swiftly carried them back towards Taipei. Looking out the window, they watched as the vibrant cityscape of Taichung gradually transformed into the serene countryside.

As the train glided through the night, Tanat and Keng couldn't help but feel a sense of gratitude for the experiences they had shared. The day had been filled with laughter, discovery, and a deep appreciation for the beauty of Taiwan. They marveled at how a simple journey on the high-speed train had connected them with the enchanting city of Taichung, leaving lasting impressions and cherished memories.

Arriving back in Taipei, they bid farewell to the speed train that had transported them on this unforgettable adventure. With tired yet contented smiles, they made their way to their hotel, grateful for the comfort it provided after a day of exploration.

As they settled into their beds, images of Taichung danced in their minds, intertwined with the anticipation of the new

experiences that awaited them in the coming days. The spirit of adventure burned brightly within their hearts, fueling their desire to continue exploring the wonders of Taiwan.

Sleep descended upon Tanat and Keng, their dreams filled with echoes of the vibrant city, the greenery of the NCHU campus, and the exhilarating speed of the high-speed train. Tomorrow would bring new destinations, new encounters, and new stories to be woven into the tapestry of their journey.

Chapter 15: Farewell, but Not Goodbye

The sun shone brightly on the streets of Taipei as Tanat and Keng embarked on their final day in the vibrant city - Taipei.



Tanat was thinking about Taiwan. What's in the name? He read somewhere that the International Olympic Committee decided in 1981 to call Taiwan "Chinese Taipei" instead of just Taiwan. This

decision was made to resolve a long-standing disagreement. Since then, in various sports events, including the World Baseball Classic, Taiwan is officially referred to as Chinese Taipei.

Keng was himself amazed with the technological development in Taiwan. In the serene ambiance of a hotel breakfast lounge, Keng and Tanat sat across from each other, savoring their cups of freshly brewed coffee. The morning sunlight streamed through

the windows, casting a warm glow on their faces as they engaged in a conversation that sparked their imaginations.

Keng, with a gleam in his eyes, couldn't help but be captivated by Taiwan's technological prowess. The remarkable advancements they had witnessed during their trip had left an indelible mark on his mind.

"Tanat, my friend," Keng began, his voice filled with wonderment, "have you ever seen anything like it? Taiwan's technological achievements are simply extraordinary."

Tanat, equally intrigued, nodded in agreement. "Indeed, Keng. Taiwan has carved a path of innovation that we can't ignore. It makes me ponder why Thailand hasn't reached such heights yet. We possess immense potential within our grasp."

As they sipped their coffee, Keng couldn't resist sharing his vision, his voice filled with determination. "Just imagine, Tanat, if we could establish world-class manufacturing facilities in Thailand, akin to those in Taiwan. We could become a beacon in the global tech market, attracting prominent companies and creating countless job opportunities."

Tanat's eyes sparkled with enthusiasm as he caught onto Keng's infectious passion. "You're onto something remarkable, Keng. Let's channel our efforts into attracting high-tech giants to our shores. With the right investments, we can forge a path towards technological excellence."

The aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingled with their ideas, as they delved deeper into the possibilities. Keng's excitement continued to bubble forth as he spoke of Taiwan's collaborative spirit in research and development.

"We need to foster a similar culture here, Tanat," Keng exclaimed, his voice brimming with excitement. "Imagine the breakthroughs we could achieve if academia, industry, and government united their efforts. Let's establish partnerships, provide funding for R&D initiatives, and promote knowledge sharing. Together, we can transform Thailand's technological landscape."

Tanat, completely captivated by Keng's vision, nodded fervently. "Yes, Keng! By nurturing our universities and research institutions, we can cultivate a fertile ground for technological

advancements to flourish. Let's inspire our future generation to pursue STEM disciplines, equipping them with the skills to drive our nation forward."

The scent of ambition hung in the air as their discussion turned to intellectual property protection. Keng's voice took on a resolute tone, reflecting their shared determination.

"Our commitment to protecting intellectual property is paramount, Tanat," Keng emphasized. "Let us fortify our laws and enforcement mechanisms, ensuring that innovative ideas and technologies are safeguarded. By creating a climate of trust, we will attract investments and propel our tech industry to greater heights."

Their words echoed in the breakfast lounge, resonating with a shared belief in Thailand's untapped potential. As they raised their coffee cups, their eyes met, filled with unwavering determination.

"To a future where Thailand shines brightly on the global stage of technology," Keng proclaimed, his voice carrying a blend of hope and conviction.

Tanat clinked his cup against Keng's, their unity and shared aspirations ringing true. "Indeed, Keng. Together, we shall author a new chapter in Thailand's technological narrative. A chapter filled with innovation, progress, and a commitment to making our nation a beacon of technological brilliance."

With every sip of their coffee, their resolve strengthened. They were determined to forge a path that would shape the destiny of Thailand, transforming it into a technological powerhouse that could rival the best in the world.

It was a bittersweet moment, as they knew their time in this bustling metropolis was drawing to a close. Their bond had grown stronger throughout their journey, and they cherished the memories they had created together.

They decided to spend their last day exploring the lively streets of Taipei, immersing themselves in the vibrant atmosphere and the charm of the city that had welcomed them with open arms. With a map in hand and hearts full of anticipation, they set off on their adventure.

The bustling night markets, renowned for their tantalizing street food and unique shopping experiences, beckoned to them. They meandered through the colorful alleys, their senses enlivened by the aromas of sizzling delicacies and the cacophony of voices echoing in the air. Tanat and Keng indulged their taste buds, sampling a wide array of delectable treats, from steaming bowls of beef noodle soup to mouthwatering dumplings.

As they wandered through the vibrant shopping districts, their eyes widened with excitement at the sight of the eclectic array of shops and boutiques. From trendy fashion outlets to traditional handicraft stores, Taipei offered a treasure trove of choices. Tanat and Keng couldn't resist the urge to shop for unique souvenirs and stylish mementos that would forever remind them of their time in this dynamic city.

The hours flew by as they soaked in the energy of the city, but the realization that their flight departure time was nearing crept into their thoughts. With a mix of reluctance and a desire to make the most of their remaining hours, they made their way to a tranquil park to gather their thoughts.

As they sat on a bench, the warm breeze gently rustling through the leaves, Tanat turned to Keng with a nostalgic smile. "Keng, these past few days have been nothing short of incredible. We've explored the hidden gems of Taipei, savored its delectable cuisine, and immersed ourselves in the vibrant culture. It's hard to believe our time here is coming to an end."

Keng nodded, his gaze lingering on the city skyline in the distance. "You're right, Tanat. Taipei has truly captured our hearts. The bustling streets, the friendly locals, and the rich history have left an indelible mark on us. But as one chapter ends, another begins. We'll carry the spirit of Taipei with us wherever we go."

As the sun began to set, casting a golden hue across the city, they knew it was time to make their way to the airport. With heavy hearts, they hailed a taxi and embarked on the journey that would take them from Taipei back to Bangkok.

Sitting side by side in the backseat, they shared a comfortable silence, reflecting on the incredible experiences they had shared and the deep bond they had formed. The vibrant lights of the city flickered past the taxi window, as if bidding them a fond farewell.

As they arrived at the airport, Tanat and Keng exchanged a final embrace, their eyes reflecting a mix of gratitude and determination. "Until we meet again, my friend," Tanat said, his voice filled with warmth.

Keng nodded, his voice filled with a quiet resolve. "Indeed, Tanat. Our adventure doesn't end here. Let's continue to explore the world and make more unforgettable memories."

With a final wave, they walked into the bustling airport, ready to board their flight. As they passed through the security checkpoint, their hearts felt heavy, but also filled with anticipation for the journeys that awaited them in the future.

As the plane taxied down the runway, ready to take off into the night sky, Tanat and Keng leaned back in their seats, their minds flooded with the memories of Taipei. They knew that although their time in this captivating city had come to an end, their shared experiences and the lessons learned would forever remain etched in their hearts.

With the excitement of new horizons ahead, they closed their eyes, ready to embrace the adventures that awaited them beyond Taipei's borders. Their spirits soared, fueled by the friendships they had formed and the experiences they had shared. As the plane lifted into the sky, carrying them back to Bangkok, they knew that their journey was far from over.

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About the Author



Jon Tasai is a pseudonym of Janpha Thadphoothon of Dhurakij Pundit University, in Bangkok, Thailand. He is an assistant professor in ELT. His research interests vary, including L2 acquisition, creative writing, CALL (TELL), and the practice of cooperative learning. He graduated with a BA in Education (Secondary Education) from Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. He graduated with an MA in Industrial and Organizational Psychology for Thammasat University in 1999. He went to do his doctorate in the year 2001 and graduated with a doctoral degree (Ed D) in 2006. He is the co-founder of the Creative English Writing Club of Thailand (CEWCT).