

Expatriate Entrepreneurs in Taiwan – Zealots of the Global Capitalism or Victims of the Flexible Lifestyle

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Abstract

This article draws on findings and summarizes the larger body of material which constituted my doctoral research project. The exploration was designed as multi-case study of the independent western expatriates living and working in Taiwan. The main focus of my investigation was to understand ways in which certain type of foreign transnationals construct, negotiate and reflect on their lives under the conditions of global post-Fordist logic. The emphasis was put on the intersection between two planes: uncertainty produced by current capitalism, and concrete subjective narratives, coming from people who shape their lives in the context of foreign culture. In order to draft a map of existing possibilities and constraints, I have gathered individual testimonies from expatriates who are on their own, other words, who are somewhere between those supported by institutions and firms (diplomats, missionaries, military, corporate expatriates et cetera) and underprivileged migrant workers. I have applied post-Fordism in a broad sense as a useful metaphor which signifies peculiar system of complex physical and mental maneuvers and place-making processes. The chaotic conditions of the post-game: lack of clear rules, provisional character of involvements, insecurity, severe competition and speed, produces pressures which encourage search for life alternatives in foreign cultures. On the basis of

empirical data, I have formulated the description of main features, which make Taiwan a very attractive place for such search. In addition, I have recognized 5 types of independent expatriates, which can serve as gravitational centers of ideal types for further developments.

Keywords: Independent Expatriates, Post-Fordist Capitalism, Global Nomads, Foreigners in Taiwan, Privileged Migrants

The notion of entrepreneur is the source code for understanding current symbolic culture of global capitalism. Entrepreneurial attitude has risen to the central mode of thinking about lifestyle, innovation, problem-solving, mobility and creativity, and peculiar kind of sensitivity to opportunities that might be waiting behind the corner. The common narratives emphasize *the eye for things* that others might overlook – the grand skill for becoming independent. Independency here mainly means working for oneself and avoiding the infamous 9-5 suffocating grid. The working world could be divided in two: these who decided to become the entrepreneurs (succeeded or burnt trying) and these who see the project as the craziness at its purest. My intention is not to argue whether becoming entrepreneur is good or bad decision. I simply want to present a certain cultural coding that supports the entrepreneurialism as growing phenomenon, and provide the empirical material that shows individual stories. My perspective lies at the crossroad between the notion of entrepreneurialism and expatriation as that unique combination enables exploration of specific interplay between conditions and agency. The main purpose of my paper is to contribute a small piece of research that reveal more about western expatriates living and working in Taiwan. Before I embark on the empirical side of the phenomenon, I am obliged to give a brief introduction to main features of the new social, technological and economic environments within which the both notions

of expatriate and entrepreneur are installed.

The main shift of the so-called new capitalist economy is the transformation from Fordism, to post-Fordism. Fordism came along with post-war economic boom in the United States, produced by heated-up industry for the II World War. The collective consumption of the surplus was possible as a result of the massive campaign promoting the *American Dream* – a lifestyle that was capable of absorbing the abundant goods, not only in the United States, but gradually on a global scale. Social values such as: continuous hard work to become a self-made man, gradual climb on the career and social ladder, a stable job for life, the nuclear family, home ownership, and the famous conformist attitude of “Keeping up with the Joneses”, constitutes the core of middle class make-up from that period (Lipietz 1992). Consequences of Fordism reached beyond the assembly lines. New large organizations based on standardized procedures and logistic planning, and governed by strict rules were born: bureaucratic state, enterprises, and the family model, which were followed by a specific socio-cultural ambient (paternalism, uniformity, stable career path, belongingness to a certain social class). In terms of work organization, Fordism is based on technology and theory, implying mechanized mass production of standardized goods by semi-skilled workers for mass market (Gilbert, Burrows, & Pollert, 1994). The form of society revolving around that specific system of production can be characterized as labor divided into fragmented tasks and controlled by hierarchical managerial experts and authorities. In addition, it is a society grounded in the middle class, which produces standardized goods and services, and then accumulates them through consumption, as Vidal (2011) noticed.

From the 1970s (with the 1973 oil crisis among other political and social events) the *American Dream*, comfortably embedded in Ford’s principles for production and Gruen’s (father of modern shopping malls) patterns of consumption (Longstreth 1997) started to crumble. Devastated

by the war, Europe and Japan had recovered and started competing with USA for global markets. Periodic crises rocked the stability of society. Industry lost its steam and profitability went down – the main concern of the world capitalist elites. The formula had to be to be drastically re-framed. First of all, as Bauman (2002) pointed out, there has been reversing of the poles in the system:

The focus in contemporary capitalism, at least in the United States, seems to have shifted from the valorization and control processes, indeed from production as a whole, to consumption. The essence of modern capitalism, at least as it is practiced by the core nations, may not be so much maximizing the exploitation of workers as the maximization of consumption, (p. 187).

The techniques of seduction have been perfected to even better entangle individual in the consumption game. New emerging conditions of an uncertain tomorrow, the futility of long term planning or saving, and blurry, disorienting definitions of the self and society facilitate the promotion of immediate satisfaction and constant gratification. Ferguson (cf. Bauman 2000) noted that, more so than by regulations and control, modern consumption is fueled by *the liberation of wishful fantasies*. This creates the situation, in which the mass market is not able to satisfy the individualized, narrow preferences of connoisseurs bored with standardized products. Large enterprises, governed by protocols and rules, could not keep up with the pace of change, thus downsizing and specialization became a new organizational paradigm. Saturated markets and fierce competition, required industries that can make rapid adjustments to production and marketing design, in order to more efficiently colonize the last previously untouched fields of potential commodification: irrationality of choices. Losing weight in terms of companies' scale meant getting more flexible, simpler, adjustable, and

quicker in answering to the changes in customers' needs as well as legal regulations. In a context of global socio-economic and political phenomenon, post-Fordism can thus serve as an umbrella term that unifies facets of neoliberalism, multicultural capitalism, globalization, and deregulation. The icon of neoliberal capitalism is the figure of flexible, open-minded, energetic and unconventional entrepreneur who skillfully navigates through vast areas of information to spot the possibilities or “problems” that can be creatively solved.

Timothy Ferris (among others), a popular author of best-selling self-help books and propagator of a peculiar lifestyle, is the embodiment of adaptability strategies himself that are fueled by flexibility, uncertainty, and speed of the system. Paradoxically, Ferris is also the maestro of escaping from this very system. His approach could be summed up as *shortcut principle*. Since there is no time for years of preparation, he advises selecting the most essential parts of the desired skill, result, or field, needed at the moment (be it opening and running a business, bodybuilding, cooking, traveling, dancing, etc.), and working on it intensively (Ferris, 2009). No more the famous “ten thousand hours” of deliberate practice to reach the expert level in competitive skill-fields. Ferris compressed that to two thousand hours, rediscovering the Pareto principle, others went further claiming that as little as twenty hours is enough to get a basic grip (Gerhard, 2012; Kaufmann, 2013). Learning languages, the essential requirement in an interconnected world, has also been squeezed time-wise. More and more self-taught polyglots, travelers, and bloggers claim to reduce the necessary time to acquire a foreign tongue at a functional level to six or even three months (examples at Tim Ferris – English Blogger 2009). These interests and concerns suggest a shift in the understanding of proficiency as well as of the role of pressing reality, demanding quick adaptation and sudden changes in directions. Ferris also promotes taking advantage of loopholes in the system: bending the law or using smart drugs to accelerate learning or body

performance, in order to achieve his goals (Ferris 2009, 2010, 2012). He heavily concentrates on creating and controlling a fully-fledged lifestyle that is based on calculation and benefits offered by the existing socio-economic system and technologies. In a sense, the method relies on 24/7 self-scanning, meticulous time-management, getting rid of all things (material things, as well as people, events, engagements, and so on) that do not contribute to the objectives. In that shape, this formula recalls Fordist principles but internalizes it into the individual. The body and certain aspects of life are then subjugated to the project of building a little stability under conditions of grand instability.

Sennet (1998) analyzed the consequences that the flexible capitalist regime brought to individual lives and the psychology of the self. A fragmented employment history composed of episodic labors highly increases the sense of losing control over life. Private ventures are also at great risk; each day and each decision is marked by stress. Everyone, every day, works on maintaining and extending the scope of action to prepare for unpredictable tomorrow. What one has done last week is of little significance; more important is the constant positioning of oneself in a network of possibilities rather than paralyzing oneself in one particular job. Age and employment seniority are not an asset and become an obstacle. Sennet wrote:

For older workers the prejudice against age sends a powerful message: as a person experience accumulates, it loses value. What an older worker has learned over the course of years about particular company or profession may get in the way of new changes dictated by superiors, (pp. 94-96).

There are no longer fixed ways of doing things nor stable areas of responsibilities – a flexible system requires even more flexible people. The strength lies in adapting to fast mutating circumstances, yet not

getting broken by them. Time has become the basic parameter of manipulation. Elasticity of the work environment is structured through the discontinuous reinvention of institutions: downsizing (euphemism for layoff), specialization of production-quick adjustment to market, and concentration without centralization promoting network morphology (Sennet 1998). In the context of individual life, flexible schedule, working at home, or when-needed, seemingly provided a greater sense of freedom from the grip of the 9-5 scheme. But in fact, the effects seems to question that benefit, since on-the-clock time and off-the-clock time merge with each other and create the effects of not really at work, not really free time. The control and power over workers in these cases, was decentralized but in a sense also better legitimizing itself, since flexible hours supposedly might beget disorder, laziness, and ineffectiveness. Virno (2004) expressed this as follows:

Since work ceases to constitute a special and separate praxis, with distinctive criteria and procedures in effect at its center, completely different from those criteria and procedures which regulate non-labor time, there is not a clean, well-defined threshold separating labor time from non-labor time, (p.209).

The core of capitalist ideology is the constant movement forward. In times of Fordism, the path of that motion was rather clearly defined in terms of individual career and future possibilities for the company. Post-Fordism preserved the need for the movement but did not offer the map of prospects. Increasingly complicated systems, suffering from crisis, severe completion, overproduction, impact on natural environment, resembles chaotic conditions of the post-game, which took place where once was a game with its upsetting and brutal but rules. Sennet's (1998) take on this is as follows:

In flexible capitalism, the disorientation entailed in moving toward uncertainty (...) in three specific ways: through ambiguous lateral moves (delusion of moving up by moving sideways), retrospective losses (lack of information makes possible only retrospective regret about decision of moving), unpredictable wage outcomes, (p. 85).

Still, the individuals have no choice but to face the risks of the decisions, because even potential losses are less frightening than the impotency of staying fixed, still, vulnerable to what the future will toss. Sennet adds:

New market conditions oblige large numbers of people to take quite demanding risks even though the gamblers know the possibilities of reward are slight, (p. 88).

I will turn here to the analysis of the new role-models that emerge from conditions of flexibility, advanced technologies and capitalistic ideology. The popular discourse intensively promotes the positive figure of a successful entrepreneur who wins over a particular segment of the market by finding a tiny niche and exploiting it as much as possible before others follow. The post-game is not about establishing and preserving the position and expertise over a certain domain. It is a Blitzkrieg, a gorilla hit in untouched, virgin, un-colonized, potential or actual product/idea/service/knowledge. One must get in and get out with as much cash as possible before the crowd follows.

Many people who previously had no chance to join, now can start their own small companies. It is especially appealing to young people, who do not have much to lose (no families to feed, no mortgage), as well as not much to invest and plenty of free time to put into the projects. Also they are more naive, have not experienced failure and dream big. Graduates, fresh out of college, have this option of whether to go to work in

somebody's company with more security but less freedom, or try to jump into the dynamic market of self-created applications, websites, services, and Internet products. In the worst case scenario, the long hours of unpaid work will be futile (but contributing to one's experience pool), optimistic outcome promises total liberation from mundane, out-of-control jobs for somebody else. The prospects are tempting, and the models of young entrepreneurs who succeeded in a short period of time are widely visible and admired. Older icons, like: Steve Jobs (Apple Computers) and Bill Gates (Microsoft) are famous worldwide. Younger ones like: Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), Larry Page, Sergey Brin (Google), and Brian Wong (the youngest entrepreneur ever receiving founding from a venture firm, KIIP) shows that it is possible for everyone. A lifestyle that reflects these ideals is far from being stable. There is no space for neither long-term planning nor a coherent psychological condition. Bipolar shifts occur in high speed fashion.

Anxiety stems from a lack of control over outcomes and the future. The possibility of creating something from thin air and establishing oneself, not after decades of monotonous jobs and bit-by-bit savings, but in several months or years, comes along with an absolute inability to predict the results of one's actions. The root of lifestyle based on entrepreneurial mindset lies in financial freedom achieved through passive income (regular income with little effort) that enables one to escape from a corporate job and live an exciting life of travel, learning, and perfecting one's body and mind. Ferris (2009) wrote:

Options – the ability to choose – are real power. This book is all about how to see and create those options with the least effort and cost. It just so happens, paradoxically, that you can make more money – a lot more money – by doing half of what you are doing now, (p.23)

Ferris is aware that the model of a planned, linear life from the Fordist era is gone. Now there is the new game (or post-game). The updated trick is to embrace the uncertainty and risk and find that unique, short-lived yet extremely fruitful business idea that will catapult one's lifestyle to a radically different level. The previous fixed time-line of phases in life advocated working for years, saving up, retiring, and eventually enjoying free time with the help of accumulated resources. Ferris proposes a series of small retirements on the way since the future is unpredictable. Making abundant income is not about money itself as it was before. Ferris as an entrepreneur himself confessed that he has nothing against making money but recognizes the healthy limits. Social media seems to emphasize the success stories of individuals who drop out from the rigid and uncertain system of employment and develop their own recipes for the still uncertain but flexible life of private small-business owners, writers of monetized on-line websites or blogs, mobile translators, designers, artists, etc. As Sennet (1998) observed:

Failure is a great modern taboo. Popular literature is full of recipes how to succeed, but largely silent about how to cope with failure, (p. 118).

Any attempts of philosophizing human life come with risk of being merely an abstract endeavor, due to the fact that if anything considers everybody therefore nobody in detail. To avoid that, I have decided to apply a certain theoretical proposition to my analyzing the concrete manifestations of human lives lived in a concrete physical, socio-economic, and cultural environment.

I have chosen entrepreneurial expatriates who live in Taiwan. It was a promising choice for that matter, since they are seedlings in a foreign soil. They face challenges, experience the differences, and struggle with aspects of life that, to a native resident in a certain culture and society,

are invisible. That specific situation enables closer investigation of individual's strategies, motivations, and goals, because they seem to be more pronounced. That is similar to the *doxic social reality* whose seemingly self-evident and obvious presence becomes less natural in times of crisis and emergency. The peculiar character of Western expatriates in Taiwan lies in the fact that they are both the beneficiaries and victims of the existing global system. Their confrontations with the unknown produce a "personal crisis", which enables looking under the surface of the obvious.

Independent expatriates are just a fraction of the mobile subjects on the global scene. There are business people, corporate expatriates, scientists, artists, diplomats, charity and religious workers, military personnel, journalists, writers, and photographers – individuals that have their own character and dynamics. In general, their mobility and engagements in a cosmopolitan lifestyle are driven by profit-gain motives (economic, cultural, social and political) and advantages of international opportunities in a global scale. They benefit from modern infrastructure and technologies by having access to them and possess the necessary capital to do so, as many authors suggested (Ong, 1999, Benson & O'Reilly, 2009, Croucher, 2012). In contrast, less privileged, unskilled migrants seeking employment, like displaced refugees, move in a very different fashion and face challenging political, economic, and social realities. There are other cases, of Westerners mostly, who, inspired by romanticized images of exotic places in less-developed countries with pleasant weather and access to certain forms of entertainment and spiritual practices, have decided to find fulfillment by dropping out from the regime of the liberal marketplace. Some of them gave up the stability, income, and position they had in Western societies and chose semi-nomadic, alternative lifestyles based on seasonal stays in various locations (Ibiza, Varanasi, Bali, Ko Pangan, etc.). D'Andrea (2007) in his study of transnational countercultures calls such people

expressive expatriates and investigates how they integrate economy, leisure, mobility, and spirituality by traveling; teaching yoga, wellness, massage, and healing; or attending rave parties.

Considering existing literature on a wide range of relevant issues, independent expatriates in Taiwan appear to share certain characteristics with mobile subjects elsewhere. Some of them, for example, came to Taiwan as corporate expatriates then decided to stay on their own. Some are quite mobile, wandering within South East Asia while maintaining a base in Taiwan. Some have a very entrepreneurial mindset and continued to seek new niches and business opportunities. In short, the richness of motivations and lifestyles is the main key for understanding and grasping these varied experiences.

Taiwan is not a popular destination on the global map of places to go. The island does not hold a clear image in the catalog of global routes. In fact, most Westerners are surprised by the reality in Taiwan, since, as I learned, they have little preconceptions about it before arriving. Taiwan as a notion (a place to go to, a place to live) often appears in people's lives more as an accident, as a surprise, as an astonishment. In the last two decades, Taiwan has been trying to win over the mass social imaginary by installing itself strong as a beautiful, interesting place full of opportunities. These policies brought about some results. Increasing number of Chinese language centers attracts growing numbers of Mandarin learners, and English schools call for native teachers. There are other areas in which there is a growing transnational flow of people, such as within corporate businesses and cultural or scientific institutions, but my focus is on independently motivated transnational individuals from the West.

I have selected 14 cases of entrepreneurial expatriates which represent broad variety of individual stories. I have conducted extended in-depth interviews with them and long-term observations of expat community,

mostly in Taipei city. I have sought certain re-emerging patterns in their narratives to determine the specific nature of the matrix of Taiwanese culture, society and economy that encourages the entrepreneurial ambitions. I have conducted research by using a qualitative, interpretative method, in the sense proposed by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. In essence, qualitative research offers the best opportunity to explore expatriates' lives and experiences through everyday interactions and interpretations. During the research, new ideas and phenomena appeared therefore, I maintained an openness to nuances and a flexibility to situations. The approach that I have implemented relates to the concept of progressive focusing (Huberman & Miles, 1983; Stake, 1994), which can be characterized as the researcher's attempt to be acquainted with the complexities of the problem before going to the field, but not overly restricted by its plan.

Despite certain privileges that some expats can enjoy in Taiwan (specific social, symbolic status) they share the uncertain quality of life full of rapid turns. Most of them had ups and downs on the way. An initial period of hardship related to adaptation (a process which in fact never ends) was followed by improvements: getting better jobs, relocating to more convenient locations, learning the language, and setting up socially and professionally. However, the relative stability proves to be very superficial and temporary. The socioeconomic reality in Taiwan requires constant attention and monitoring of the surrounding situation, since there might be a problem lurking around the corner. In other words, living and working in Taiwan as an independent expatriate is characterized by a dynamic process of changes. Unpredictability of the future (professional, personal, etc.) is not characteristic only of Taiwan but it is global. It comes with the logic of post-Fordist principles of fragmentation, temporality of employment and a capitalist need for mobility and constant change. However, independent expatriates learn to

navigate through rough waters using the specific geographies of opportunities they found in Taiwan.

During the research, I have encountered many style-profiles that represent possible scenarios of expat life in Taiwan. As I stated, I have followed expatriates, who craft their lives on their own, without institutional support enjoyed by their corporate or diplomatic counterparts. I argue that such self-directed individuals, found in Taiwan their own way to manage the tensions and uncertainty of global post-Fordist social and economic reality. To better grasp the character of the lived-life stories, I have categorized them into 5 gravitational centers. The styles I present obviously do not exhaust the entire spectrum of expat experiences in Taiwan and, in fact, constitute only a part of the overall phenomenon. Nonetheless, they exist and cover large scope of cases of independent transnationals living in Taiwan. Each of them comprises cases that reflect the very nature of the type. The cases within given category shares certain characteristics with each other in addition to being unique. I have chosen them to present the lifestyles with possible clarity and coherence, although their narratives can be read through different lenses. The types I describe are arbitrary, but I am convinced that they need to be distinguished and addressed through analysis, since they tend to be easily observable and strongly represented in the broader expats' geographies in Taiwan. Now, I will present the characteristics of the cases along with the examples of subjective narratives provided by the studied individuals.

Business Entrepreneurs – in the land of the blind the one-eyed is king (Jonas)

The first type, I term *Business Entrepreneurs*, as there are several kinds of Westerner entrepreneurial individuals operating in Taiwan. In

general, they are small scale players that utilize their knowledge and skills gained in Taiwan and elsewhere to find promising business opportunities, but, typically, they learn by doing. The main characteristics of them are: clear motivation to get engaged in a hopefully profitable venture, and constant attentiveness to dynamics of the local market. It is often expressed through a dozen different business ideas, although most of them are short-lived. Nonetheless, some of them are at least seriously researched and finally one or two are put into practice. Business entrepreneurs are aware of the cultural and social leverage at their disposal. In other words; they implement a certain gap between their home culture and market, and Taiwan's to cash in on the difference or to create a specific aura around their product or service. They tend to be very active and attentive in locating niches on the local market, as the market is dynamic and customers' tastes change. They constantly monitor newly emerging possibilities, and due to their highly adaptability they can quickly answer to them.

Peter (from Hungary, physicist 33y old, 5y in Taiwan) decided to continue his stay in Taiwan, despite his problems with jobs at the labs; he actively developed his social circles and engaged himself in broader non-scientific related activities:

During last 2 years I started couple of projects on the side, and I got more invested in Taiwan, building my local network, Taiwanese, foreigners, entrepreneurs, clever people, and companies. When I got fired, my friend from US on that day sent me a message saying: "congratulations, now you are free. Why don't you come to Saint Petersburg Florida to we can create position for you for physics, entrepreneurialship and creativity. Just come here, it is going to be awesome". And I really felt it would be awesome. It would have been like once in a lifetime opportunity. But I turned it down because I feel that as I see Taiwan it has a real potential to be

something really big in a very near future and I really want to be here doing it. Taiwan can be really big in terms of power house of entrepreneurial ship and creativity that can be globally competitive.

Peter has developed his way in connecting his science background and laboratory experiences with the need of becoming independent from rigid and limiting realities of science labs in Taiwan:

I feel that XXI century is about using, like I have a lot of experience about start-ups. In a last couple of years I tried to apply some ideas into physics and ... there should be a lot of opportunities in this kind of things.... I want basically build up my own laboratory to build up my things, I don't get fired from there, I can do my stuff without worrying about publications to be successful, getting out of this pressure of academia...like in America and UK they spend so much money on equipment, here Taiwanese build up these things for others that don't have that much money. So I feel there is a potential to start a lot of research here.

Claudia (from South Africa, 35y old, 7 y in Taiwan), has a background in performance art and theater. It took her several years but eventually she made a jump and started to run her own educational theater in Taiwan:

Eventually, I started doing educational theater programs. I was reaching the end of creative capacities in teaching carrier, was teaching junior high I was becoming more and more and more frustrated with Taiwan and with educational, hierarchical system in which students are not encouraged to think outside the box.... I used my time as with the kids as a research period so I thought junior high school every Friday night for 2,5h. I would set topics that were what I would be eventually doing with the theater...such

things as: what is your ideal lifestyle, what is your idea for education, what do you think of systematization of things, and the papers I got back from kids were just absolutely revolutionary.

After being rejected by official institutions she has learnt the way around them not by challenging the already existing schools' curriculum but rather proposing her program as something complementary and additional. This flexibility proved to be a key for getting into schools but only by finding and convincing the appropriate gatekeeper:

...We couldn't believe that happened. In a matter of weeks we did presentations for the whole bureau of Taipei City, and junior high, senior high, chancellor, officials, section managers, section leaders all that crowd. They loved it. We had a private audience with Director of Taipei City...we had stacks of presentations, crew that were trained as actors and facilitators...training process was 3months. We went through 5 specific topics: cyber bullying which in Taiwan is pretty big, safe dating, shameful family secrets, self-confidence, integrity and friendships, this all came up through the research....and the end we got unofficial letter of support. We call it letter of endorsement but government will not call it that, because they never endorse anybody.... our material was sent in paper and online to every school in Taipei.

Claudia also engaged herself in another venture, that is originally beyond her comfort zone but she learnt on the way and developed small but steady group of customers. She also found the niche and took a chance to provide for it:

It's basically using whole unprocessed food and turning them into go-mei creation and I am not talking about salads...we are talking

about lasagnas, pizzas and fettuccine dishes, using just vegetables, raw cheeses, raw chocolate. From July last year till now, we had 8 raw food workshops. I work with raw food nutrition expert from Czech Republic...she came over and my idea was that sometimes Taipei feels so claustrophobic and boring so let's see what can we find and that's unusual and people don't know about.

Jonas (from Germany, 45y old, 13y in Taiwan) had decided to quit his stable but unsatisfying job at the government institution, and develop his own business ideas:

...My idea was never to import wines but rather to develop wine culture here because wines here still have this elitist touch. It's only for the rich and glamorous. And that's not what it is in Europe...My concept was and still is, but I didn't find a proper venue, for wine tasting...it is about enjoying and learning a bit about wines.

Another idea was related to introducing properly made Spanish tortilla to Taiwanese market:

me and my girlfriend were giving away samples of Spanish potato omelet, Spanish tortilla but it has nothing to do with Mexican tortilla. It is maybe the most popular Spanish dish all over the world although it hardly has any competition in Taipei

Despite food, Jonas also created another project based on his observations, deep knowledge of several languages and Taiwanese culture:

...we have been working on is T-shirt design. T-shirts that are funny,

bilingual, satirical, making fun of certain things (p. 6)... T-shirt idea wasn't actually my idea in the sense that, I designed for myself to make people laugh. But feedback was so strong, people were taking picture with me on the street, asking where they can buy it....it takes longer than I thought but we want to find also good English name fast....in creative business you cannot just decide I wanna design 25 T-shirt today....I did intensive market research and I haven't seen anything resembling my T-Shirt.... I do think that is a market for this.

Educators – priority is to make things happen and teach people how to do it (Jeremy)

The second type of independent expatriates in Taiwan I categorized as *Educators*. I define them as foreign transnationals who live in Taiwan and are involved in a wide range of activities associated with teaching, taking part in educational events and leading workshops. These individuals are often present in academic circles, pursue their advanced degree or/and conduct research on a variety of topics concerning Taiwan: language, culture and society. These active and motivated expatriates manage several different projects to compose their income sources and develop personal interests, similarly to their small-business counterparts. They also operate in a way based on fishing out opportunities and strategic small moves from one project-engagement to another, since long-term, single employment is not accessible for them or do not provide sufficient financial backing. Often these active individuals went through the grind: struggling in the beginning, setting up but getting fed up with their job and eventually developing their own ideas and projects to counterbalance poor job opportunities.

Clair (from Canada, 45y old, 14y in Taiwan) tried her best to leave

teaching kids and move to something new. She used her part-time work at the Cities – adult school aiming at affluent middle aged Taiwanese who wanted to improve their English abilities, to finally get full time position there, and also co-manage the school. Apart from that school she got another opportunity:

Friend of mine asked me: hey Kaohsiung City government has this...for 2009 world games and they need some commissioners for their, they called it: “Bilingual Living Environment Commission” ...what we were doing was to get ready the city for a world games and other international events... So I did English in the morning and in the evening and in the afternoon I did a government stuff: editing, going to meetings, naming streets, checking street signs, MRT just opened so we checked English information there, maps, all English facilities, English at High-Speed railway, stuff like that.

In the same time Clair got involved in several other project related to publishing and education:

I had a newspaper editing, for last 10 years for the government and teach senior citizens for the government. I do some teaching projects for them. I wrote 3 guidebooks for city of Kaohsiung. This guidebook that I just finished is about Hakka people and their history...I directed some shows in English for the university, and I also have been doing theater directing shows and being in shows, playing, 9 or 10 shows. I directed 2 shows at the university. I also would do recordings for the city government, promotional videos and TV shows.

Jeremy (from South Africa, 51y old, 15y in Taiwan) had run the English newspaper for three years but was cut off due to financial reason,

which as Jeremy learned later on, was just an excuse. Nevertheless he was doing radio shows as well but it also did not last long. He managed to save up and bought himself a movie camera, which was a major step toward going back to his professional field:

I equipped myself to do on the side what I really like which is making films. So I did that. And so in that time I was editing magazine I started to do little projects...some of them I generated myself for instance I would go to school and I would say how about I will make a recruiting video for the new teachers, (p.3)... we launched a radio programs... it was broadcasting in Tao-Yuan area.

After 12 years, he found a job that is in unison with his interests and provided fulfillment:

I started in American School 2 years ago I was a video production specialist. I was shooting all school events, dramas, plays, music; school has a very full program. Sometimes it feels that is an art school, it is amazing. I have a little studio I have a good equipment, I feel I am respected for what I do, I have good rapport with students and I really do what I love. I work with film and video, working with people, teaching them how to do stuff and see the results.

Kasia (from Poland, 34y old, 11y in Taiwan), after several years of teaching English decided to enroll for a PhD program at local university. Her inspiration came from her trip to Borneo and she decided to pursue the degree in Anthropology. Later, she got involved in other research projects in Taiwan:

It was 2007 when I moved here and in 2008 in March I applied for

PhD program in Qing-Hua University (國立清華大) in Anthropology Institute...last year my advisor has invited me to one project which is in the south of Taiwan with Paiwan tribe (排灣) so I have to go there very often...so the things I am doing now are studying, writing my research proposal, I just finished my qualifiers....

Artists – I am very lucky that I do what I do, which doesn't mean it's easy (Antonio)

This third distinguishable category covers transnational expatriates who live specific lifestyles in Taiwan, commonly define themselves and are defined by others as *Artists*. The main shared feature is that they practice a variety of arts for a living, and for them artistic expression is of autotelic value. In Taiwan, they found niches in which they can produce art and make a living in that way within certain standards expected by them. This was impossible for them in their home countries. Nonetheless, Taiwanese socio-economic reality posts some requirements and thresholds which need to be negotiated and confronted by artist-expats. What they have in common with other types of expatriates discussed in this research is their specific attentiveness, flexibility, networking and multitasking. Similar to entrepreneurial and educational circles, the fragmentation and uncertainty is part of everyday life also for artists. The fact that art is less profitable financially therefore requires diversified streams of income.

Luis (from Colombia, 35y old, 4y in Taiwan) had traveled intensively in Asia and anchored in India, Japan before arriving to Taiwan. In each country he studied traditional music and learned the local instrument: shamisen in Japan (三味弦), tabla in India, and Gu-qin (古琴) in Taiwan. Letter from a friend brought him from India to Taipei where he started developing his music:

I tried different things, for example I tried to play tabla outside in Dan-Shui park. Sometimes I got money for my lunch, that was good but always police came and took me off, but sometimes it was really good...I was still doing experimental concerts in art gallery sometimes for 10 people, 15 people, small things. But I was already tired about electronics. I was not really composing. Just when I saw opportunity I played but I wasn't too much into experimental music but I met a lot of people in that area in Taiwan. There are not many but I met some. I did some projects with them. Like with Klaus a saxophone player. We played together like for almost 1,5 year. We did like 6-7 concerts in Taipei. We recorded a lot of things. I also had an opportunity to do two projects with Ren-Lai, one was a CD with one composer from Costa Rica and me, another CD was a world music of Taiwan...which was very good experience to meet each other, many good bands, play music here. And of course at the time I was also interested in studying traditional music. That is the main point about music. I do projects and things but I want to learn a traditional music of where I am.

Antonio (from Italy, 34y old, 8y in Taiwan) was a professional basketball player, but due to injuries he had changed his field. Basketball took him to USA and Dance Theater brought him to Taiwan:

I am an artist in dance and theater, and because of my background I need to practice, because I didn't get a training when I was young, I need to spend a lot of time just physically training, with people which usually are much younger than me and I don't think I could do that in Italy just because, I know little about arts in Italy, and I'm not sure that school in Italy would accept that I take classes with people that are like half my age. Because I didn't take these classes when I was 16, so I want to take it now. On top of that there is an

issue of being non-famous, non-rich artist, and trying to support yourself, while you try to practice and do what you want to do. And this is possible here because, even that Taipei is getting very expensive very quickly, is still cheaper than any other city in the West... I also have a part time job to make sure that I can pay the bills at the end of the day. For example if I am in US and just have part time job I am not sure I could do what I do.

Anna (from Norway, 51y old, 15y in Taiwan) has spent in-and-out last 3 decades in Taiwan doing variety of jobs and projects related to theater, photography, journalism and acting:

I was so happy and we did this beautiful play....and there was this Taiwanese man Ba Gou-Guan a light designer. He was very shy, didn't speak much English, he was 32 that time I was 37....I really wanted to change my life. And then he said: I have a theater, do you want to come and be my actress? Because I had acting experience, when I was younger, I was drama teacher, I had a theater. I came to Taiwan and stayed with Alex again. But I didn't know am I in love with Alex or with Gou-Guan or what. Then I found out I was in love with the theater.

Bohemian Entrepreneurs – the way I am making my living now is completely out of the system. There is no framework for it. We create our destiny, (Jack).

The fourth type brings several characteristic features which already appeared in other categories, together. *Bohemian entrepreneurs* bridge different areas: small scale business ventures, alternative practices and art. I define them as individuals who are deeply involved in non-

conventional healing techniques, spiritualities, body trainings such yoga or tai-qi (among others), progressive art forms (experimental music, dance, etc.). At the same time, they monetize their interests and sustain themselves financially through these practices. Often the lines between businesses, alternative lifestyles and art are blurred and compose rather holistic manifestations of one's life than separate areas typically referred to as: work and leisure. Bohemian entrepreneurs present a variety of life stories and different dynamics, but they all share the feature of revolving around broadly defined non-mainstream (uncommonly practiced) ways of thinking, perceiving and definitions of the world.

Jack (from UK, 48y old, 13y in Taiwan), came to Taiwan for a year to study Chinese in late 80`. Then he went back to UK and worked in finances for 10 years. He gradually grew tired with the frantic life in London and came back to Taiwan. He became deeply interested in therapeutic work healing and shamanism:

I got involved in something called clean language. It comes from New Zealand guy David Growth who works with metaphors. I worked with him when I took a year off in 1987 I also got trained in hypnotherapy. I was a busy boy....When I was back in Taiwan I picked up on his work again. David was very interested in looking in how therapists communicate with clients. Therapists often take a client's language and change it. If you say: I am scared, therapists take that and translate it into the language that they understand. He changes the information. So David noticed that there was a mismatch. He basically came up with the set of very simple questions to elicit information given....it was a very elegant and powerful system. He was basically doing a shamanism.

Gradually his interests became his way of life. He started educating himself in shamanic tradition of the Amazon:

...somebody contacted me on Facebook. Couse I thought I got a Master and here I am teaching little kids so what I am doing here, what am I doing in Taiwan? So this person contacted me, he was living in Tainan. I looked at his interests on Facebook, there was shamanism and ayahuaska. I've read about ayahuaska 20 years before but I thought I'm not going to Amazon, why I need to go to Amazon to get high? Forget it. So I sent him message about so what about ayahuaska and he replied: we can do the same thing here. The same week there was a guy doing PhD, we had lunch, finished the lunch, it was a normal conversation and he said wait a moment I have a present for you. And he pulled out this bottle of brown liquid. He said it's ayahuaska. So that sealed my faith, couse twice in one week I got this info, what you gonna do...

Jack started organizing his own healing retreats and turning them into his own business:

The intensity of ceremonies increased from once a month to 3,4 times a month. We just run a 7 days retreat, and it was very successful with 20 some people. It was fantastic. Very good feedbacks. We had 4 ceremonies and a lot of teaching. And there people were asking to take them to the Amazon...You can brew it yourself, few people did small ceremonies but that's all...Many shamans are crappy businessmen. Just because you are a shaman it doesn't mean you don't need business skills. I have diverse connections, people sponsor me to go and do ceremony in US or UK. I am compelled to do this. Once you know you cannot un-know. When you see people are getting benefits from it, makes you want to do it

Julia (from USA, 49y old, 27y in Taiwan) got involved in facilitation training that later on help her with her teachings and community work

revolving around permaculture and sustainable farming:

I worked in the area called facilitation as a facilitator. I did training here, but the group was an American group. So it was very cross cultural....it sat a base, helped me to become a teacher for permaculture, to use that. As a teacher I am not lecturer so much, more facilitator of learning.

Julia openly spoke about the financial aspect of her services and teaching set-ups:

all earnings for teachers, teachers have a vote and part of this has to go back to supporting permaculture and people who wants to support permaculture. So they have to have a plan for how do to that, so they we go and teach. So actually, truly it is sustainable enterprise. Money is rarely the issue. And if somebody has not enough money for us to come we do sponsorships, scholarships or half or whatever and also different forms of payment. We know that we need to have minimum 20 people to make sure that food, teachers all is paid for...

Logan (from USA, 38y old, 11 y in Taiwan) after years of intense English teaching jobs went into restaurant business which crashed. He decided to change his approach. Soon after he started translating work of five elements Chinese medicine master, got more into music and started training to become teacher of Pilates:

There a work that I am doing with music....I teach it in a way that is completely unconventional. Guitar I don't teach guitar I teach the music coming up from internal experiences that arises, I teach a rhythm in term how to connect internal sensations with his body,

training in intrinsic way....

Logan met a Pilate's teacher who introduced him to the practice:

After 30 min of him showing me what he is doing I was amazed. I just found out that he is one of these most respected teachers of Pilates in all Asia. It happened to meet this guy, he was on my path as I moved away from martial arts for certain personal and spiritual reasons and looking for way to continue in that general direction with somebody who is more in line with my values. We headed off and became best friends. I have a strong personal connection with his family, teaching and studying music now. I am in the process of taking his Pilates teacher training courses. He had lot ideas of potential business that we wanna do together.

Economic Expatriates – economic prosperity in Taiwan is only for Taiwanese alone, and just few foreigners (Jabbar)

The last but not least type of expatriate' lives and experiences, I recognized under the name of *Economic Expatriates*. In this category I present two cases which reveal certain characteristics of that type in Taiwan. I define them as Western expatriates that came to Taiwan primarily driven by financial motivation. As this could be true about some cases in other categories I discussed, economic expats manifest a deep, pressing necessity for making money, as they were balancing on the edge of marginalized existences and poverty in their home countries. Importantly, the presented cases hold peculiar space as they do not neatly fit into the stereotypical but desired image of foreigner in Taiwan. Other types of expatriates might have a variety of factors playing a role. In this

category, economics is a primary motivator and, because of specific profile of these expatriates, they have to stretch harder to succeed. They came to Taiwan with the hope of making a decent living, not propelled by cultural or artistic interests. Similar to other expat-types, they had scarce knowledge prior to their arrival about Taiwanese society and culture but heard some rumors about its promising economic opportunities (teaching English).

Jabbar (from Ghana, 41y old, 18y in Taiwan) left Ghana in the early 90` and was looking for his own place to settle and work. Friend in Jordan recommended him Taiwan as a place where he could make good money from teaching English:

Hard life pushes you to extreme...I knew that I have to be around for a while to see if I can get used to it. I tried to get used to it. I needed to rise above it otherwise I was going to die, die out. I thought that I am going to be around, I am gonna study it and see how this is going to be, how all this will end up. So ended up being in Taiwan, getting married, having family...I got a job, even the job I was doing back then it was illegal

Jabbar, together with his Taiwanese spouse had opened English cram school but due to lack of experience and fierce competition they did not success. Their marriage suffered and ended up in divorce. He struggles to get by still teaching English:

Teaching in Taiwan is not as it used to be any more. Maybe it is due to low birth rate in Taiwan. Before you go around and you see teachers being wanted but it is not anymore. I am not sure that it is due of more foreigners...or more more schools are closing down and opportunities are becoming less. These are reasons...I teach in couple schools, I combine hours. Sometimes you get one school and

you teach only in one school but this opportunity is no more. Now what I do right now I mostly substitute for teachers who left town and actually I do more substitutive teaching than full time teaching.

Youssef (from Morroco, 45y old, 15y in Taiwan) decided to move to Europe but it did not work out. Nor it did with Australia, so he went to Asia instead trying to anchor himself in Hong-Kong and Korea. He ended up in Taiwan:

I came here, worked, studied Chinese for 2months and gave up cause it was too expensive, then I had to fix my ID. Then I went to factory. I worked there for 1year 6 months to get and ID...You have no job you look for anything to sign a contract. So they accepted me for 1year, 6months. That time I didn't speak English...no Chinese, just Moroccan and French. After maybe 1year I got a chance to work as an English teacher. It was very easy to teach English in 1997, anyone could teach, you know. So I started to take some hours, few hours. Because I used to work part time in factory still, from 8 to 1pm and from 2 to 5pm, each hour 69NT\$, that time. When you teach English you get 600NT\$.

Youssef got also another employments but his visa problem was pressing:

I found a job in a house. Like they have a company, their house is also a company, leather jackets, so I had to clean leather jackets, clean tables, wash clothes, do everything, take students to school. I was crying I didn't know what to do that time. After that she told me, you know, some neighbors they saw you, maybe they will call police so I quitted that job. They paid me ok, I got some money...
...I met one girl asked her to borrow me some money, ok she lend

me, so I paid for school for the second semester. I studied bo-po-mo-fo again. Because they changed the time of classes so I couldn't work. I went for basic level again. That was for 4 months. That time I met somebody who could find a contract in factory. You have to pay him and he will help you to find a job in factory. Like an agent but not Taiwanese, he is from Jordan. So we had to pay him maybe 3-4 guys and he took us to the factory.

During working in factory Youssef had learned English to sufficient level to get first some additional English teaching hours and occasionally he was getting some modeling offers. He managed to fix his papers and eventually decided to open the business:

After teaching full time I started going to the gym, I had a lot of money so wanted to build my body, body, body. And I did modeling job. So I have been on TV a lot, with Giordano, Uniqlo...a lot of brands here in Taiwan. It wasn't easy, you have a lot of competition, especially if you don't have a language. I need to work hard to get that. So I was dating the same girl that helped me but at the end we broke up. Then I had to find something else for myself. The company kept doing it (taxes) with me for 7 years, and then you get Permanent Residency. I got it. After 7 years I kept teaching, teaching and at the end I opened this restaurant last year.

Except the above 5 ideal types of expatriate entrepreneurs I also have identified a number of features that are central to expats' geographies. All of them, in practice, are intertwined with each other.

The first one can be called *convenience and space*. It refers to the mental landscape of regulations and the morphology of Taiwanese society, economy, and culture. Many of the expatriates talked about specific spaces — the freedom to pursue what they want. They use

different vocabularies to express this, but many of them refer to aspects of life that could be boiled down to the notion of social cohesion. In the context of expatriates' lives in Taiwan, partial liberation from social cohesion proves to be a central factor in extending one's scope of action. In other words, the Taiwanese social rules, obligations, and patterns of conduct, the holistic cultural and social guidebook, applies differently to wai-guo ren (外國人) – western foreigners. That gives them a quite extraordinary place within the whole social context. It does not mean that expats are entirely free from the certain social, behavioral expectations that Taiwanese have toward them, but it does mean that some issues that Taiwanese face among each other are not necessarily relevant or applicable to expats. Most of the expats I investigated are not married to Taiwanese and do not have families in Taiwan, although Taiwanese partners are common. As they function in this specific space, they can maneuver more freely and make more bold decisions about their lives, since there are no people around who expect them to do the “right thing” and stay on the beaten path. In addition, the regulatory system is viewed as less obstructive of creative initiatives than in Europe or the United States, for instance. This is a subjective comparison that several expatriates voiced, not an objective analysis; however, it encourages some of individuals to try to open and run their own small-scale business ventures. In fact, obtaining APRC status (Alien Permanent Resident Certificate) along with an open work permit, was commonly referred to as a turning point and liberation from job-visa constraints. Several of the expats after receiving their APRC card, decided to engage in independent work-projects. Others, opened their own businesses and obtained business visas.

The second factor is the *security cushion*. The importance of English related jobs lies in the fact that they provide a financial back-up in case independent projects do not turn out as successful as wished. English teaching as an aspect of living and working in Taiwan is of great

significance and, in fact is a key to reveal the strategies that independent expatriates develop while on the island. However, my intension is to liberate the discussion from the simplistic “Western English teacher in Asia” framework. I recognize the phenomenon of English teaching as central to the economic sustainability of expats in Taiwan. The existing opportunities in that context cannot be overlooked, since almost all expatriates I investigated incorporated or still incorporate teaching English as a substantial income source. Many of them worked full time as English teachers but quit, when they managed to establish alternative ways of financing themselves. Several expats expressed their dislike of the job characterized by temporality, lack of perspective, and poor personal development prospects. However, they all talked about unusual financial benefits and the ease of performing it. Ambiguous character of teaching jobs provides a comfortable trap that enslaves many expats in Taiwan, since, after several years, return options to their home countries became very hard, and Taiwan gives them no choice but teaching English. It’s important to add that none of the expatriates I talked to, had professional linguistic or educational training, when they started teaching. They learned it in the process, by doing, and some of them became good teachers (according to their self-evaluation). I have observed that teaching English in Taiwan is perceived by expats as unsatisfying and a dead-end job, but it offers something quite unusual and hard to find in the West: a supportive cushion. It is always there when needed. More driven expatriates try to jump outside the box and follow their interests or passions, but they are aware that, if something goes wrong, they still have a safe landing. They can retreat to teaching English, restore their capacities (financial, psychological) and try again. That security takes away tons of stress, which typically comes along with entrepreneurial attempts. In other words, the cost of failure in the West seems to be larger, a fact that might influence the decision about taking a risk. On the other hand, the status of an English teacher, as attractive as it is, confines the

scope of action and social circles and imposes a specific set of stereotypes upon the expat. Western English teachers are often perceived as unreliable party-animals, who cannot find employment back home and come to Asia to enjoy their elevated social status and income. Therefore, those who value self-realization and desire, for instance, to impress a Taiwanese partner, face the necessity of getting away from that image. Not being an English teacher provides distinction from other expats and adds more character and charisma to one's individual status. In short, English teaching opportunities for Western expatriates appear as a double-edged sword. They are used as a solid starting point and security ground for other engagements but also carry a risk of getting locked inside.

The third feature is the *capital interchangeability*. Lan (2011) has already argued, that linguistic capital (English) translates into symbolic and economic capital. Linguistic capital is ascribed to Westerners automatically on the basis of appearance — those who neatly fit into the image of Western native English speakers — are given the assumed skill set. Many expats cash in on that mechanism, despite a lack of credentials and experience. They all presented a certain amount of openness and flexibility to new tasks and skills required at any given moment. Their previous experiences in Taiwan seemed to equip them with a peculiar mindset that promoted a readiness for taking on challenges to re-frame one's tool-set ad-hoc to fit into emerging opportunities. The narratives collected here also suggest that specific symbolic capital – being perceived as the representative member of the Western hemisphere – does increase attention received from curious Taiwanese, and thus might enlarge the amount of possibilities. That has proven to be an important factor, especially when conducting business or working as an artist or educator. That leads in turn to the next significant feature that determines expatriates' lives in Taiwan.

The fourth feature is the *emergence of the Taiwanese middle/upper*

middle class. The most important points here are certain cosmopolitan, artistic, and bohemian aspirations audible within these classes in terms of interests, fashion, leisure, and lifestyles. Most of the expatriates who engage in their own small business ventures, educational programs, and workshops recognize that existing demand and try to address that. Most of expats that I researched, are clearly aiming at a variety of niches in the local market. The members of the Taiwanese middle and upper middle class have disposable income, which partly is used to flaunt their status through their consumption choices. Many of them have traveled or lived temporarily abroad and have a good command of the English language. In Taiwan, they seek goods and experiences that would fit their cosmopolitan profile. In other words, they are more interested in fishing out unique products (for instance, homemade food, crafted clothes, or art objects) and exotic experiences. Their choices can range from a trivial visit to Italian, Moroccan or Indian restaurants, through attending yoga classes, tango lessons, wine tasting, DIY workshops, world music concerts, to more extreme activities, participating in shamanic and healing retreats in the mountains. These people constitute a group, maybe not large in number but stable and devoted, which shares the openness and attentiveness toward novelties. In a sense, they are receivers of what these particular expats have to offer.

The fifth feature can be termed *domesticated exoticism*. It has to do with the vistas of imaginary and ideological components that are present in the West and determine perceptions and expectations toward imagined others. Members of Western societies are prone to many kinds of biased representations of foreign cultures and places through books, movies, and the mass media. In general, the existing discourse on Asian cultures and people would suggest certain adjectives (among others) producing an idealized version of them as exotic, mysterious, submissive, effeminate, collective, and conservative. Westerners on the other hand tend to be typically portrayed as rational, dominating, masculine, individual and

progressive – features that presumably provide certain advantages. Western expatriates often subconsciously carry these sets of stereotypes, when coming to Asian countries. Taiwan, as a less known destination, is subjected to rather general stereotypes about Asians in general, although the last two decades slightly changed that and produced a set of stereotypes concerning Taiwanese alone, as increasing numbers of transnationals visit and now live on the island. Some of the foreign nationals decided to stay because of their interests in local culture, language, etc. In fact, the confrontation with differences, the unknown, the surprise, and the mystery, plays a certain role in the creation of the attraction, as many of the expatriates I talked to, confessed. This is true for many other destinations in the Far East that are referred to by transnational expatriates as extremely exotic and exciting. However, Taiwan's culture, socio-economic formation, and natural environment also offer a sense of convenience and safety that is rather scarce in other places (with the exception of Japan). In this regard, convenience and safety can be understood as predictable and familiar. This involves (contrastingly to the West) an uncommonly high level of public safety, transportation system (buses, trains, high-speed rail), and the relatively small size of Taiwan. On the one hand, Taiwan, accepted as a part of the developed world, offers all of the things that Western countries offer (especially, Taipei and its global-city ambitions), often more. On the other hand, Taiwan is still a “foreign” place, with its culture, diverse yet compact natural landscapes, cuisines, languages, and ways of life that provide a high level of excitement and difference.

I argue that, for independent expatriates, Taiwan is one of these places that maintain a very attractive balance between modern, familiar, convenient, natural, unknown, and the engaging. In a sense, this peculiar dichotomy is significant in times of post-Fordist mobilities, flexibility, and insecurity, since too much familiarity and safety means boredom,

while too much foreignness and difference can bring about the anxiety. My analysis was framed by the manifestations of certain current life conditions that can be seen as the consequences of post-Fordism. I have observed and described various coping strategies-quick learning and “un-learning” of skills, working on short, parallel projects that independent expatriates use to adapt to Taiwan and which are in unison with global tendencies. Taiwan with its specific features provides the context in which these lifestyles and objectives are more “possible,” therefore the island became a destination, where expats craft niche spaces and find partial liberation from the economic and social tensions of the West. However, independent expatriates, despite the benefits they enjoy in Taiwan, endure a greater uncertainty that comes with living in a foreign culture and society. Working in a variety of contexts in the local economy, navigating through complex regulatory and cultural mazes and negotiating one’s position without the safety net provided by their home country requires strong motivation and a unique mindset.

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