

MAYA ATAYEVA: DISSERTATIONS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Maya Atayeva, from Turkmenistan, graduated from ZJGSU Law School in 2018, and is about to head off for postgraduate studies to become an environmental expert.

‘I have always been a passionate environmentalist’, Maya says. ‘During my four years of study in Hangzhou, I participated in every possible extra-curricular activity related to the environment for example, ‘River Protection’, and I gave several speeches about the Environment and Sustainability at our English Corner’. She explains, ‘I knew that I wanted to write a dissertation in the environmental law area’.

After much consultation with her dissertation supervisor, Professor Suzannah Linton, Maya narrowed the field of possibilities down to the Amu Darya, a river running through five Central Asian countries including her homeland. According to Professor Linton, ‘this is a fascinating area, but there really are many issues arising from this shared water resource, with five countries involved, multiple treaties and many legal issues, not just treaty law or environmental law.’ The situation is further complicated, Professor Linton explained, because there are ‘new and unresolved issues of law and environment in Central Asia, and there seems to have been little scholarship that is reliable on the Amu Darya in English as well as in Russian and Turkmen, both of which Maya is fluent in.’

Within the topic ‘International Management of the Amu Darya in Central Asia’, Maya further narrowed her focus to the Rogun Dam project in Tajikistan and its impact on the regional riverine environment, particularly in terms of irrigation and desertification of neighbouring countries. She developed a hypothesis that the evolving concept of State sovereignty in transboundary water management can be applied to facilitate better management of the Amu Darya. ‘It was really really difficult’, Maya admitted. ‘But my supervisor was with me all the way and I truly loved learning about my country, my region, the great Amu Darya, the Rogun Dam, and developing skills that are actually relevant to my great passion in life’.



Maya with her dissertation supervisor

On the basis of her Law School dissertation, Maya was invited by the Ministry of Environmental Protection in Turkmenistan to submit a water preservation proposal. Maya was then offered a job with the Ministry. After careful reflection, Maya decided it would be better to develop her expertise in the theory and practice of sustainable development and environmental management, in order to make a greater impact. ‘I decided to get a proper degree in sustainability and environmental management first. In order to be able to bring about change, I need to educate myself first. I want to see the world, and how other countries manage environmental challenges’.

Maya has now been offered a place to study on the MSc Sustainability at the University of Dundee in Scotland. The University is known for its work in this area, and was so impressed with Maya’s achievements and commitment that it awarded her a Global Excellence Scholarship. Maya will be able to study fascinating courses such as Principles of Sustainability, International Law of Natural Resources and Energy, Political Economy and Climate Change, all of which are related to the work that she started with her dissertation and which directly pertain to her life plan.

While waiting to start her post-graduate degree, Maya has been volunteering in Hangzhou. She has been involved with an environmental awareness project, educating children (5-14 years old) in the field of environmental sustainability. She is also active in a local campaign called ‘Fridays for Future’, which aims to make Hangzhou more ecologically sound and to encourage preservation of the environment. Maya has also participated in several environmental development conferences, including one where she was invited by China’s ‘Environmental Hero’ Mr. Wang Can Fa.

Maya is just starting out on what will surely be a very meaningful journey, and the Law School wishes her all the very best of luck. She is excited about the future and what she can do to

improve protection of the environment and sustainable development back home in Turkmenistan. 'There is a lack of sustainable development and sound environmental management throughout all of Central Asia. My future plans include starting my own NGO, which will revolve around sustainable development, urban planning and public awareness', she explains. 'One reason why people are prone to harm the environment is lack of awareness, and that needs to be tackled'. 'My country', says Maya, 'also needs to face up to its responsibilities, particularly in relation to recycling and water management'.