

## *Forum*



# The State of the Field of Global Taiwan Studies Institutions: A Time for Optimism or Pessimism?

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**Position Paper: The State of the Field of Global Taiwan Studies  
Institutions: A Time for Optimism or Pessimism?**

*Dafydd Fell*

**Introduction: A Golden Era?**

In September 2017 we hosted the ‘Global Development of Taiwan Studies Programmes Conference’ at SOAS, University of London. The conference aimed to bring together representatives from the leading Taiwan studies programmes in Europe and North America to discuss our experiences and how to make our programmes more sustainable. Following the conference, I published an upbeat essay in the *Taiwan Sentinel* arguing that we are now experiencing a golden era of Taiwan studies (Fell, 2017). This was followed by two more *Taiwan Sentinel* pieces by Ming-yeh Rawnsley (2017) and Gunter Schubert (2017) on the Taiwan studies field.

The Taiwan centres invited to the conference were from programmes that had been active for at least five to six years. Representatives from the following programmes joined the conference: SOAS Centre of Taiwan Studies, Taiwan Studies University of Texas at Austin, French Center for the Study of Contemporary China, University of Nottingham Taiwan Studies Programme, Wiener Zentrum für Taiwanstudien Universität Wien, European Association of Taiwan Studies (EATS), Taiwan Democracy Project Stanford University, Taiwan Studies at Oxford University, University of Central Lancashire and the European Research Center on Contemporary Taiwan (ERCCT) at Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen. A number of other more established Taiwan programmes either did not accept the invitation or unfortunately had to pull out of the conference.<sup>1</sup> Two attending programmes that did not fit our selection criterion neatly were

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<sup>1</sup> Representatives from London School of Economics, Centre of Taiwan Studies Santa Barbara, and University of Ottawa all dropped out of the conference.

those at Oxford University and the University of Central Lancashire. In the former we wanted to have a case of a Taiwan programme that had been active for many years but that had become largely dormant. It should be remembered that over the last three decades numerous Taiwan programmes have emerged but later either closed or become little more than a shell. While in the latter case, we hoped that the conference discussion would prove useful to a programme that has just started covering Taiwan in the last couple of years.

We started the conference with presentations introducing the key features and overall development trajectories of each programme. The common feature for almost all Taiwan studies programmes is that they organise academic events and promote publications. Most are also quite small, often based on a single individual but with generally less than five to six core team members. Apart from the older programmes at SOAS, Santa Barbara, and Oxford, the majority of programmes were established within the last decade. In fact, quite a few are celebrating or approaching their tenth anniversary.

Unsurprisingly, however, there is a great deal of diversity in these programmes. Although many centres do offer Taiwan courses, only two of the centres at Austin and SOAS have developed comprehensive Taiwan teaching programmes. Similarly, there has been a degree of specialisation in the themes in Taiwan studies that they address. For instance, Austin and Santa Barbara have given greater attention to literature, while Tübingen, Nottingham, and SOAS have focused more on social sciences. The most specialised case is the Taiwan Democracy Program at Stanford University. Another difference has been where the programmes have been located within universities. Although most are located within Chinese or Asian studies departments, others have preferred to be part of disciplinary departments or even as stand-alone centres. There has also been some variation in the main target student groups, with many mainly offering courses at the undergraduate level, such at Austin, with others such as Vienna and SOAS concentrated at the Master level. Although programmes such as SOAS and Austin do support PhD studies on Taiwan, a distinguishing point about the Tübingen programme has been its concentration on doctoral and postdoctoral research.

### Assessing Success

In the second panel the focus shifted to how programmes assess their success. One of the most basic forms of measuring success is of course programme survival. Apart from the Oxford case that was discussed at our conference, other programmes have disappeared or become largely dormant such as at Bochum

and Cambridge.<sup>2</sup> Another common trend has been that Taiwan-focused courses have been established in a large number of European and American universities, but the majority have not been long lasting. For instance, in the United Kingdom courses with Taiwan in the title have been established at eight universities over the last 15 years, but in the 2017–2018 academic year only SOAS was still offering such courses.<sup>3</sup> In the cases of Austin and SOAS, a key measurement of success has been their ability over the last decade to offer a Taiwan studies degree and such a wide range of Taiwan-focused courses. Moreover, both have been able to maintain growing levels of student enrolment and bring in faculty from a range of regional and disciplinary departments to teach Taiwan courses. It should be noted a key difference between these two successful teaching programmes was that while SOAS Taiwan courses tend to run on an annual and permanent basis, at Austin a wider variety of courses have been offered but courses tend to run occasionally and on an irregular basis.

Since academic events are such a common feature of Taiwan programmes, these featured heavily in how colleagues assess success. Naturally there is much variety in both the number and scale of events organised and their target audiences. For instance, the SOAS programme has tended to run around 50–60 Taiwan events per year, often more than the combined total of all the other European centres. While all programmes target students and scholars, for many, the non-academic and Taiwanese community are also important audiences. This is particularly true for Taiwan centres in the U.S. or in London located in areas with large or significant Taiwanese communities. In addition to the number of events and audience sizes, a further measurement has been who the speakers are. The ability to attract key figures in the academic field and cultural and political practitioners were all cited as marks of programme success. A number of participants raised the quality of the question and answer sessions as another way of assessing how successful events have been. In fact, speakers have often commented on how much they enjoy engaging with well-informed and challenging audiences.

Taiwan studies rely on financial as well as human resources. A more common reason for programme collapse than losing funding has been where core

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2 Cambridge University once had a lecturer in Taiwan studies but this post disappeared after five years. Today there are still occasional Taiwan-related events organised by the Faculty of Asian and Middle East Studies such as their annual Chuan Lyu Lectures in Taiwan Studies series.

3 A new Taiwan course is being established at University of Central Lancashire to start in 2018–2019.

scholars leave a university. Therefore, a key measure of success has been the ability to expand the number of scholars actively involved in the Taiwan programmes. Thus, a key feature in the SOAS, Austin, and Tübingen programmes has been the ability to persuade more colleagues to get involved.

Many scholars at the conference raised outputs too as a key measure of success. In particular, promoting edited books has featured prominently for the Tübingen, Vienna, Nottingham, SOAS, and Stanford Taiwan programmes and many of these have proved invaluable for teaching courses. A niche publication line at Santa Barbara has been publishing translations of Taiwanese literature. The more recent emergence of the *IJTS* can also be seen as a result of the combined efforts of Taiwan studies scholars in both Europe and Taiwan. Since many of the programmes are trying to reach beyond immediate academic audiences, media and sometimes social media profiles, as well as Taiwan studies blogs, were raised by some scholars as important. An example of a recent development was the establishment of the blog *Taiwan Insight* based at the University of Nottingham in 2017.

### Secrets of Success

Programme directors also shared a range of ideas on how to make their programmes successful in today's competitive higher education sector. One commonly raised practice was to employ comparative approaches. First instance, at SOAS a successful comparative political course called 'Northeast Asian Politics: Japan, Korea and Taiwan' was established, using both comparative politics and political economy approaches. An advantage was that this brought in students that originally did not have an interest in Taiwan but encouraged them to compare it with Korea and Japan. The Stanford programme has also attempted to look at Taiwan comparatively, for instance in its book publication *New Challenges for Maturing Democracies in Korea and Taiwan* (Diamond & Shin, 2014). Particularly where programmes are based in China or East Asia departments, then China–Taiwan comparison has also been common. For example, China–Taiwan comparisons feature in many of the courses offered at Austin over the last decade.

Another conclusion was the importance of taking a balanced and nonpartisan approach to how institutions operate. Since Taiwan sees regular changes in ruling parties, it is necessary to avoid appearing to support one political camp or the other. Scholars from a number of programmes have faced accusations of supporting one party side or acting as government propaganda. This

has been more of a challenge to those programmes such as Stanford or SOAS that frequently host politicians and have more of the political studies focus. A key solution to this has been to make sure there is a good balance in invited speakers so that audiences are exposed to speakers from a range of political backgrounds. Although we often have the impression that the KMT is less friendly to Taiwan studies than the DPP, an interesting trend was that there was a significant expansion and creation of new programmes during the Ma era (2008–2016).

A further common secret of success was making key programme activities complementary. For instance, in those universities with Taiwan teaching programmes academic events play an important complementary role. At both Austin and SOAS, events are scheduled to benefit the courses. In other words, the event themes are closely related to what is being taught. In the case of SOAS for instance, a large proportion of events are related to politics, social issues, film, and modern history. This also means there should be a guaranteed and well-informed audience for academic events.

### **Programme Integration Experience**

On the second day the discussion moved on to another ingredient of programme success, which is the ability to integrate Taiwan studies within university structures and teaching programmes. Generally, programmes have tried to avoid the pattern seen in many Confucius institutes whereby they exist but are shunned by the university's mainstream academic units and are excluded from regular teaching.

In the cases of the teaching-focused centres at Austin and SOAS, though they offer Taiwan studies degrees, the key to the sustainability of their courses has been the extent that they are integrated within existing teaching programmes. Although the majority of the Austin courses have been housed in its Department of Asian Studies, Taiwan courses have also been offered by five other departments (history, radio/TV/film, art history, government, and Asian American studies). At SOAS the majority of Taiwan courses have been based in either the Department of Politics and International Studies or the China and Inner Asia Section of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, but regular courses have also been offered in the economics and law departments. A key reason for improved student recruitment at SOAS case has been making Taiwan-focused courses either core or compulsory modules on a range of politics, area studies, or film studies degree programmes. For example, for

students taking the MSc Politics of China it is compulsory to take the year-long module 'Taiwan's Politics and Cross-Strait Relations'.<sup>4</sup>

### Funding Issues

The final panel of the first day addressed the critical question of funding and how to make Taiwan programmes sustainable. When Taiwan studies scholars involved in programmes meet one of their most common topics of conversation tends to be funding and uncertainty over future funding. The common challenge that the majority of programmes face is how to operate with short-term funding. This is especially troublesome for centres that offer teaching programmes, as teaching requires long-term planning. Although three-year funding agreements are more common, a number of the programmes at our conference operate on the basis of one-year agreements. This can mean that there can be uncertainty at the start of each year whether courses will run or even whether the lead scholar will have a job.

The majority of programmes have relied heavily on a number of Taiwan government or semi-government bodies for funding support, in particular the Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Chiang Ching-kuo (CCK) Foundation, and Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD). There have been a number of cases in the United States where endowed posts have been created following large private donations. These have featured in Taiwan programmes at San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Brookings. Thus far such private funding has not yet featured in European Taiwan programmes. Naturally those programmes that rely on short-term funding are envious of the financial security enjoyed by those with private endowed posts. However, when we look at how visible and active programmes are, we can see that those relying on short-term funding do tend to be much more active. Whether there is a causal relationship is another matter.

One funding-related issue that did feature in our discussions and is raised too in Schubert's essay (2017) is whether funding is best concentrated on more comprehensive and institutionalised programmes or distributed in smaller amounts but in a larger number of locations. There often seems to be a preference among Taiwan funders for the latter model. I agree with Schubert's argument that 'spreading out tight funds so thinly is not an effective strategy for proliferating soft power and supporting the institutionalization of Taiwan

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4 The other compulsory courses are on China's domestic and international politics.

studies'. A review of Taiwan studies projects sponsored by MoE reveals that the vast majority only ran for one term and so it is doubtful they will leave much of a legacy. The only programmes running continuously for more than two terms were SOAS, Austin, and Santa Barbara. This shows that programmes with longer time spans can have greater impact, while the widely distributed but short-term funding runs the risk of being wasted.

### Cooperation

We then went on to discuss how cooperation could be improved such as sharing speakers among other universities in order to save costs. Overall the pattern seemed to be that inter-programme cooperation was rarer than might be expected. Often cooperation with partners in Taiwan was more common than with those in the same country or continent. Partly because of EATS cooperation appears to be more prevalent in Europe. Perhaps the best example was a CCK Foundation-funded Taiwan studies lecture series involving Tübingen, Heidelberg, Edinburgh, and SOAS that ran for six years and involved not only high-profile scholars visiting multiple European Taiwan studies programmes but also featured intensive versions of SOAS Taiwan studies courses being taught at Heidelberg. Nevertheless, this project did eventually come to an end to be replaced by more informal continued cooperation. Where cooperation tends to occur, it has been more commonly on an informal basis. In the U.K., for instance, over the last few years SOAS, Nottingham, Leeds, and Oxford have successfully shared speakers. Recently one of the most exciting examples of European Taiwan studies cooperation has been a project titled 'Taiwan's Lost Commercial Cinema: Recovered and Restored' led by film scholars Chris Berry and Ming-yeh Rawnsley. This has involved film screenings and talks at a large number of European locations, including both new and established Taiwan programmes, but also places that do not have an Asian studies tradition.

In the United States programmes to a large extent appear to operate in isolation. As a European visitor to the States I have often found myself telling American colleagues about U.S. Taiwan programmes they were just not aware of. Naturally part of the reason for this is the sheer distances between locations, but more important is the lack of an effective continent-wide Taiwan Studies association.<sup>5</sup>

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5 The North American Taiwan Studies Association (NATSA) is actually much older than EATS, having been established ten years earlier. However, it does not play the same kind of unifying



However, our discussions showed that cooperation is not limited to that between other Taiwan studies programmes. Participants discussed their experiences of cooperating with other area studies or disciplinary programmes. One strategy has been to work with broad area studies groups. For instance, the American Association of Chinese Studies (AACS) has been an important platform for Taiwan studies research through its annual conference and its journal the *American Journal of Chinese Studies*. Another important actor in the U.S. has been the Conference Group on Taiwan Studies (CGOTS) at the American Association of Political Science (APSA). This has maintained Taiwan panels for 30 plus years, acted as the U.S. centre for political scientists working on Taiwan and helped maintain cooperative relations with the Taiwan-based community. In Europe, Taiwan studies appears to have moved to the margins of the continent and nationwide Chinese studies associations. For instance, few Taiwan scholars present at either the European Association of Chinese Studies (EACS) or British Association of Chinese Studies (BACS). However, within universities a fruitful cooperation method has emerged with disciplinary programmes. For instance, many programmes have worked together with film departments. At SOAS we have worked for a number of years with a Queer Asia conference. This engagement with film studies and LGBT issues has helped bring the Taiwan issue to new and wider audiences that often had not originally had an interest in Taiwan.

### Future Prospects and Challenges

In the final panel we discussed the future prospects for the field. If we compare the state of Taiwan studies today with the mid to late 1990s, then it is clear why I talked in terms of a golden era. At least in Europe, 20 years ago there were no Taiwan studies centres or courses, there were no book series, no regular conferences, and no European association to bring together scholars interested in Taiwan. For those of us that have been involved in the field for over two decades it is clear that remarkable progress has been made.

Despite our cautious optimism we agreed that there are a number of remaining challenges facing Taiwan studies programmes. One of the key challenges remains resources. Short-term funding is the mode of operation in the majority of Taiwan studies programmes, with a number operating on the basis of one-year projects. This means that the majority of Taiwan-specific posts are

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role as EATS has in Europe. This should not be seen as a critique of NATSA. In fact, when I first helped establish EATS my goal was to create a European version of NATSA.

really only suitable as entry-level posts and so the issue of job security plagues the prospects of many Taiwan studies scholars. Short-term funding also makes long-term programme planning almost impossible. This problem is especially severe for programmes that engage in Taiwan teaching as it often takes a long time for courses to be approved. Scholars working on Taiwan need to find tenured jobs in either area studies or disciplinary departments where their focus on Taiwan may be discouraged. Similarly, short-term funding often leads universities not to value such external funding projects. A further resource challenge common to many programmes is administration. While external funders tend not to wish to fund administrative staff, many universities also do not wish to devote administrative resources into less profitable niche programmes. This means that the administrative load tends to fall upon the shoulders of the actual academics, who are already stressed by their regular teaching, research, and non-Taiwan-related admin tasks.

Therefore, a major challenge for the future is how to make programmes more sustainable and less reliant on short-term funding. One solution is to seek endowed posts as seen in some U.S. cases. For others a more viable solution is making courses sustainable by improving student recruitment, something especially important in U.K. universities that rely more heavily on tuition fees as their main source of income. This will require both better external marketing but also persuading university management of the value of Taiwan studies. In terms of funding from Taiwan, the key conclusion is that it should be longer term and concentrated on more institutionalised programmes.



### Response 1

*Gunter Schubert*

In a precursor to his position paper, published in the 24 October 2017 issue of the *Taiwan Sentinel*, Dafydd Fell suggested that we are in a ‘Golden Age of Taiwan Studies’. Looking back at the institutionalisation of the field during the last decade, with three regionally organised Taiwan studies associations (EATS, NATSA, JATS), numerous Taiwan studies centres in Europe and the U.S., various course programmes, a biannually held World Congress of Taiwan Studies and a new *IJTS*, Fell’s statement seems to have been built on solid ground. He pointed out at the time that ‘developing Taiwan studies abroad is not easy and that there have been many unsuccessful cases’—cases where money was not

spent effectively or in a sustainable fashion. Responding to his piece, I agreed with Fell's overall assessment but pointed to a number of pitfalls that hamper the field's further development. Most importantly, I emphasised that the generation of Taiwan scholars which built the field over the last 10–15 years were not recruited as Taiwan scholars by their respective university departments, and in many cases were not recruited as regular faculty at all. The 'Golden Age of Taiwan Studies', I argued, was actually shaped by a 'Golden Generation of Taiwan Scholars' who either conducted their Taiwan-related work on top of other academic obligations or who were lucky enough to be funded by third-party money, mostly granted by Taiwan or by private donors.

In fact, institutionally funded faculty positions for Taiwan scholars are urgently needed so that students can be systematically educated and talented researchers actually have job prospects once they decide to dedicate their careers to the study of Taiwan. Another problem is the short-term nature of programme funding coming from Taiwan and, related to this, the distribution of that funding, which is less oriented towards long-term programme sustainability than towards a logic of 'spreading out evenly across the board'. Dafydd Fell mentions all this in his position paper.

So how should we deal with these problems? First, I think it is necessary to incentivise university authorities to invest in Taiwan programmes and faculty positions. The Korea Foundation has long demonstrated how that can be done, having created a public diplomacy organisation that has supported the establishment of more than 130 professorships worldwide to promote Korean studies. This astonishing level of success has been achieved by using different funding schemes which make the hosting universities stakeholders with an interest in keeping these positions once the seed funding runs out. For instance, the Korea Foundation sets up non-tenure track or tenure track positions for several years, which shall be covered by university budgets after this period. Recruited scholars are faculty members with all rights, giving them more agency within the university system than any third-party-funded guest professor would ever be granted. Once such a position has been created and filled out competently and successfully, with student numbers rising and international recognition coming in, university leaders would find it hard to withdraw from a long-term commitment. Taiwan could learn a lot from the Korea Foundation model and urgently needs a similar institution!

Second, Taiwan's donor institutions, most notably the Ministry of Education, must rethink their funding strategy. As Fell also mentions in his piece, to this very day, Taiwanese government money is mostly project-based, short-term, spread across the globe and, most critically, not systematically assessed in terms of effectiveness and sustainability. Strategic project allocation and

funding is an important component of ‘soft power proliferation’ but Taiwan does not have a consistent strategy here. Limited financial resources should be concentrated where they produce multiplier effects in terms of the regional and global outreach of Taiwan studies. ‘Spending deep’ is more important than ‘spending broad’. This does not mean that funding should always go into the same hands; but it should go to people and institutions with a long-term commitment to and a proven-track record in developing the Taiwan studies field.

On a different note concerning future prospects and challenges, there is an important new development which the field should observe with attention: Taiwan studies are gaining steam in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), too. Although there is a good deal of ideology-driven research going on in many new Taiwan research centres at Chinese universities, young Chinese students are increasingly showing an interest in the study of Taiwan—most often, but not only, those who have spent time on the island as an exchange student or a visitor. To engage these students and thus bring the international field of Taiwan studies closer to the PRC academia, against all the odds, is a thrilling new challenge for those of us who want to promote the field.



### Response 2

*Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang*

Dafydd Fell’s position paper covers the issues discussed at the ‘Global Development of Taiwan Studies Conference’, held at SOAS in September 2017, with great clarity and admirable exhaustiveness. My response here will be more personal, mainly focusing on my own takeaway from the conference, as well as some new findings in recent months. The first sobering realisation after the two-day discussion was that, as Dafydd laconically stated, most of the Taiwan studies programmes are ‘quite small, often based on a single individual but with generally less than five to six core team members’. As the sole person in charge of the Taiwan Studies Program at UT Austin since 2009, I have constantly felt the pressure of limited resources. From time to time I cannot but wonder if this very demanding undertaking that has consumed so much of my academic time in the last ten years is ultimately worthwhile. Has the UT programme really created some meaningful legacy?

Comparing notes with other conference participants, it dawned on me that a potential contribution of the Taiwan Studies Program at UT could be

its successful experimentation with a model of course development. Throughout the decade, we have offered 34 Taiwan-focused courses, which include five courses at graduate level and 29 at undergraduate level, on 20 different topics. The courses are taught by faculty from six departments housed in three different colleges, with an average of 23 students per class enrolled in the undergraduate course and six in the graduate seminars. Just think about this: approximately 700 students have now taken semester-long courses on Taiwan, and studied some aspects of its history, society, and culture in a systematic manner. It is bound to create some lasting impact. Also, speaking of the course instructors, the experience could have easily enhanced their knowledge and research interests in Taiwan. At least two professors at UT actually conceived new book projects during this process. Was there anything special we have done to make this happen?

Turns out that the strategies adopted by the Taiwan programme at UT aren't feasible everywhere. Not in the United Kingdom, for instance, where it takes a long time to get new courses officially approved, and once approved, they are expected to be offered regularly for a long period of time. By contrast, it is relatively easy to propose new course topics at North American universities without making them permanent fixtures of the catalogue. A niche course like one on Taiwan can be viewed a nice enrichment of the instructor's portfolio. The students have the extra incentive to take it to fulfil various kinds of elective requirements. At UT, the Taiwan course is often taught as a 'Writing Component' course or carries a 'Global Culture' flag.

I was therefore enthused by the prospect of exporting our model to other North American universities. But then came another shocking discovery.

A roundtable at the 2018 Annual NATSA Conference, which was held in Austin on 24–26 May, was dedicated to 'Teaching Taiwan'. And lo and behold, the NATSA Taiwan Syllabus Project<sup>6</sup> identified as many as 101 courses with at least one third of Taiwan-related course contents as being currently taught in 50 North American higher education institutions! Pleasantly surprised, I was at the same time overtaken by a sense of disbelief. As an old-timer, I certainly did not have the impression that Taiwan was taught at American colleagues at such high frequency ten or 15 years ago. Tipped off by Dafydd's remark that 'in the United Kingdom courses with Taiwan in the title have been established at eight universities over the last 15 years, but in 2017–2018 only SOAS was still offering such courses', I am keen to find out whether this extraordinary proliferation of Taiwan courses in American universities is a temporary phenomenon

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6 For more information on Taiwan Syllabus Project, see <https://taiwansyllabusprojectnatsa.wordpress.com>.

or a lasting trend. More specifically, assuming there has been a dramatic surge, how has it been coinciding with the funding initiatives launched by governmental and semi-governmental agencies in Taiwan since the late 2000s?

My attempt at answering these questions isn't immediately successful. As the NATSA project has been focusing on collecting syllabi and analysing the institutional, disciplinary, and geographical distributions of the Taiwan courses, statistics on the dates of these courses' first introduction and the frequency in which they are taught aren't yet available; but they can be easily obtained in the future. Based on these data, we should be able to consider more accurately a critical issue raised in Dafydd's position paper: the relative merits of different types of funding. As Dafydd observes, a positive correlation seems to exist between multiple funding cycles and the greater impact those Taiwan programmes receiving such support are able to deliver. Yet, could ripple effects created by short-term, widely distributed funding also be potentially beneficial?

Most importantly, however, I believe that it is not just the funding, but also the timing that can ultimately explain the euphoric sentiment that some of us are feeling about Taiwan studies at this juncture. Taiwan's soft-power reach in the West has converged with, and in turn helped to bolster, a new stage of maturation of Taiwan studies as an intellectual field. Aside from what has been discussed above, the launching of the *IJTS* and the impressive success of this year's 2018 NATSA conference, with its rich and diversified high-quality panels, are undoubtedly further signs of the field's advancement to maturity.

A call-for-paper announcement from the newest Taiwan Studies Program in the United States, founded in 2016 at the University of Washington, Seattle,<sup>7</sup> states that it is organising a workshop called 'Global Island: Taiwan and the World', to be held in October 2018, that will 'imagine[s] Taiwan within new spatial and chronological contexts, and reorient[s] Taiwan studies away from traditional imaginations of Taiwan as limited to comparatives or cross-straits relations'. The dozen topics proposed for the workshop resonate at once with the significantly transformed social dynamics in Taiwan of the new century and with cutting-edge theoretical insights in the social sciences and humanities. The ambitious proclamation of new visions, new perspectives, and new methodologies signals the coming of age of a new generation of scholars. It is

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7 According to its website (<https://jsis.washington.edu/taiwan>), the incarnation of this programme was the result of 'a recent major grant and a generous gift from an anonymous donor'. In other words, it represents an ideal combination of two major types of funding discussed in Dafydd's position paper.

also heralding a lively proliferation and diversification of intellectual positions in the field. I therefore concur with Dafydd's optimistic view on the arrival of a 'golden era' for Taiwan studies in the West, which is particularly heart-warming at a time when Taiwan itself is facing severe challenges on many fronts.



### Response 3

*Lev Nachman*

As a second-year PhD student, I selfishly hope we are not yet in the golden age of Taiwan studies. But, as Professor Fell's position paper convincingly argues, now is comparatively the best time to be doing Taiwan studies. There are two points I would like him to address further, both of which revolve around how Taiwan studies sees itself within academia.

As Professor Fell points out, cooperation with other disciplines is key to Taiwan studies' success. Working with other regional or disciplinary departments not only cuts costs, but also helps us reach a wider audience and gain legitimacy as a field. Building relationships across academia is important, but one relationship feels like the elephant in the room: our relationship with China studies. I think a fundamental question we should reflect on is the goal of Taiwan studies. Is it to frame Taiwan as its own, unique region? Or, is it to situate Taiwan within the greater China studies umbrella? It could be both. No matter what we answer, however, an unfortunate number of geopolitical controversies await us. Framing Taiwan as its own unique region is inherently political and from my experience can isolate us from China scholars. On the other hand, framing Taiwan as a subset of China studies is equally political and can make Taiwan scholars feel marginalised. Professor Fell notes the importance of Taiwan studies programmes remaining nonpartisan in terms of domestic blue-green politics, but another political challenge is how to remain neutral in the seemingly lose-lose situation of Taiwan versus China studies. Many of us (myself included) use a strategically ambiguous approach in describing what exactly we mean by Taiwan studies in order to not isolate any other subfields or scholars. This strategy works for now, but in the long term we need to have some difficult conversations about how to present ourselves as a field.

Another issue within Taiwan–China studies dynamics is how other China scholars approach Taiwan studies. I do not think it is controversial to say that many within the China studies field do not have a vested interest in the growth

of Taiwan studies. For some, topics within Taiwan studies are either less important or not important at all compared to topics within China studies. For others, creating a separate subfield for Taiwan studies is unnecessary. Instead, we should just go through preexisting funded China studies departments. Others simply do not take 'Taiwan studies' as a topic seriously. This issue is not unique to our field; Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibetan studies deal with this same fundamental issue of relation to greater China studies.

Other China scholar's perception of Taiwan studies is important to the second key issue I want to raise: the next generation of Taiwan scholars. From my own experience, established China scholars consistently discourage graduate students from pursuing Taiwan studies. Most of the time, their advice is well intentioned; from their perspective, our odds of publication, future employment, funding, fellowships, and so forth, all go up if we focus on China, not Taiwan. Combined with the general ambivalence or dismissiveness of many China scholars towards Taiwan studies, focusing on Taiwan as a graduate student is presented to us as either a risky endeavour or, as one advisor of mine put it, 'career suicide'. As graduate students, we face the challenge of picking a research topic that is both true to our passion and will create the path to a future in academia. Ideally, we can have both, but given the current state of the field, many of us understandably opt for pragmatic research that leads to a future career. For us Taiwan studies grad students, that often means forgoing the Taiwan studies aspect of our research to focus more on China. Even though many of us feel equally passionate about topics within China as we do Taiwan, the pressure we feel to prioritise China over Taiwan makes the prospects of seriously engaging with Taiwan bleak. Again, the most common solution we are told is to be strategically ambiguous about how we market ourselves. Or, we should simply accept that we have to market ourselves as China scholars for the sake of our careers. I know this is prudent advice for now, but it does not help our field in the long term. I know funding and programming, two of the key issues that Professor Fell raises, are more urgent but in thinking about the longevity of the field, recruiting and mentoring graduate students should be a part of the conversation.

It is important to note, as Professor Fell does in his position piece, that many China studies institutions have in fact been friendly to Taiwan studies, such as the American Association of Chinese Studies. Other non-China studies institutions have also created platforms for Taiwan studies to grow and gain exposure. I recognise there are plenty of academic organisations, both China-centred and non-regionally focused, who do care about our field and want to see it grow. Other developing fields, such as Hong Kong studies, face many of the same growing pains. I think it would be in our best interest to also reach



out to fields in similar predicaments, especially those under the 'greater China' umbrella, for cooperation and coordination on programming.

Taiwan studies needs a better marketing strategy. Although funding will forever be the biggest challenge, how we present ourselves as a field and as scholars individually has a big impact on whether or not we can grow. I think we are most certainly in the best age of Taiwan studies in recent history, but there is still plenty of room to improve. I look forward to this conversation continuing into the future as more people within academia see how much potential Taiwan studies has as a field.



#### **Response 4**

*Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley*

Dr. Dafydd Fell's position paper begins a valuable discussion for all academic colleagues and institutions with a vested interest in the future of Taiwan studies. He summarises the current experience of Taiwan studies programmes and centres in Europe and the U.S. and explains the reasons for their success and, in some cases, their closure. He also notes the common challenges most, if not all, directors of these programmes face. I agree with Fell completely and would suggest that the progress of Taiwan studies depends on more than just good management of courses and programmes. In addition to the kind of commitment and enthusiasm that Fell shows routinely in his own leadership of Taiwan studies at SOAS, we also need to consider the diversifying income streams and the position of Taiwan studies—globally, but also within academic disciplines.

The main source of income for EATS is the CCK Foundation, but the Association has also benefited from the support of other organisations, especially the TFD and Taiwan's Representative Offices throughout Europe. It is pleasing to report that, year on year, the growth in membership means that the annual membership fee is also fast becoming a valuable source of revenue. EATS's constitution prevents the Association, a registered charity in Germany, from making any profit. This means EATS can reinvest any surplus it generates after organising its annual conference back into the Taiwan studies community. This investment helps nurture the next generation of scholars through the EATS Young Scholar Award and the Library Research Grant. We also appreciate MoFA's recent support for a new Taiwan Studies Dissertation Award. There can be no better use of our funds than the capacity to encourage and assist our

junior colleagues, many of whom are undertaking innovative research that will advance the field in exciting ways.

Therefore, the challenge for EATS is how to sustain and grow its own funding to continue fostering talent and facilitating research—which means attracting more members to the Association—while also encouraging colleagues to diversify their own research income sources. To this end, it seems a sound rationale to call for further strengthening, or even formalising, links between EATS and various Taiwan studies programmes and centres throughout Europe for mutual benefit. Moreover, the EATS annual conference should be an ideal setting for formal and informal discussion among researchers from different disciplines about their work that may lead to new projects and funding applications; and these projects should move beyond the usual suspects—the “Taiwan “Big Five”” as identified by Gunter Schubert (2017)<sup>8</sup>—and think about applying for funds from the ESRC, the European Union, the British Academy, and so forth.

At the same time, there is an argument for the regional associations—EATS, NATSA, JATS—to collaborate more strategically to explore opportunities for more mainstream research funding. The World Congress of Taiwan Studies is the best place to begin these discussions, and perhaps there needs to be a formal space available at that gathering to discuss these very questions.

So, I call for closer work between colleagues representing the different regional associations, perhaps through the formation of research groups or clusters. International connections between researchers interested in the same issues, or in bringing to the discussion of particular subjects a variety of disciplinary approaches (not to mention the value in encouraging geographic diversity) can only enrich Taiwan studies. New technology may provide us with practical solutions to geographical barriers. For example, the webinar series developed by NATSA currently focuses on professional development. But it has potential to become an invaluable platform enabling researchers and students in different parts of the world to discuss in an informal setting their approaches and perspectives to a particular subject or theme.

The future of Taiwan studies depends on two interrelated factors: growing and diversifying our research income streams; and creating spaces for the development of international and genuinely interdisciplinary dialogue and research collaboration between colleagues. I also suggest that colleagues in Taiwan studies should be more open to the idea of comparative research and ‘relational’ conceptualisation (Shih, Harrison, Chiu, & Berry, 2018), as well

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8 The ‘Big Five’ are MoFA, MoE, MoC, CCK Foundation, and TFD.

as contributing to the work of disciplinary associations—for instance, the International Studies Association, Political Studies Association, Association for Asian Studies, International Communication Association, and so on—and participate fully in their activities. This will expose us to perspectives from outside the cocoon of Taiwan studies, while also making sure that Taiwan studies is suitably represented as a legitimate field of inquiry within the wider disciplines.



### Response 5

*Kharis Templeman*

Although Taiwan studies has expanded and matured as a field of scholarly inquiry over the past two decades, there remain serious challenges to its sustainability. Dafydd Fell has summarised these nicely: it needs more stable and long-term sources of funding, greater institutionalisation of research centres and programmes, and more Taiwan experts on university faculties to ensure it remains viable over the long term. Nevertheless, he suggests, one can speak of the current era as a ‘golden age’: the growth of Taiwan initiatives in Europe, including several budding programmes in the U.K., the development of EATS, and the successful rollout of the *IJTs* all give reason for optimism.

At the risk of sounding a dissonant note, I have to say that the view from where I sit in North America seems less encouraging than Fell’s perspective from Europe. Far from entering a ‘golden age’, Taiwan studies in the United States and Canada appears to my eye to be in long-term decline: defunct or dormant Taiwan programmes now outnumber active ones, including at prominent universities such as UCLA, USC, and Berkeley, where one would expect Taiwan programmes to be flourishing given their Pacific Rim location, the many Taiwanese-heritage students on campus, and the large Taiwanese-American communities in these metro regions.<sup>9</sup> Taiwan studies in North America had a significant head start over Europe (Ohlendorf, 2018), but the track record of recent years suggests that it has now become quite difficult to

9 I have attempted to keep track of all Taiwan programmes around the world at the CGOTS website [www.apsacgots.org/programs-and-fellowships.html](http://www.apsacgots.org/programs-and-fellowships.html).

sustain these programmes for more than a few years, even in the most promising circumstances. There are two key reasons for this trend: departure of key faculty members, and funding structure.

First, on faculty members: without someone in a tenure-track faculty position who cares about the subject, Taiwan programmes will be hard pressed to survive anywhere. It is therefore rather ominous that most of the scholars who played crucial roles in the development of Taiwan studies in North America are now nearing retirement, if they have not already done so—and they are by and large not being replaced on university faculties. In political science, the field I know best, this pattern is *not* for the most part related to the decline of area studies within the disciplines—many departments still prioritise having a China scholar on the faculty, even as they may discount deep regional expertise as a whole. The problem for the field is, instead, that Taiwan expertise is simply much rarer among the younger generations of China experts, whose ranks now include many PRC nationals, and who in graduate school usually skip Taiwan and head straight for mainland China for training and research. Crucially, these new hires have in many cases succeeded senior faculty who *did* have an abiding interest in Taiwan, either because they did language training or fieldwork there, as Tom Gold has noted,<sup>10</sup> or because they were ROC nationals and maintained connections to family and friends back home. As these transitions have occurred, then, there are fewer and fewer faculty members in tenure-track positions who are motivated to support Taiwan initiatives, which then tend to wither away.

Second, on funding structure: while Taiwan has long valued and provided financial support for academic programmes abroad, that funding is spread too thin to support a critical mass of Taiwan scholars by itself. Grants to Taiwan studies programmes in North America are parcelled out inefficiently, in dribs and drabs across many institutions and individuals. Almost all of this funding ultimately comes from the Taiwan government,<sup>11</sup> but it is channelled through at least five separate agencies (see footnote 8), and it tends to go to small-scale projects that emphasise concrete programmatic outputs (events, classes,

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10 See Tom Gold's response to Gunther Schubert (2018) in the inaugural issue of this journal.

11 The notable exceptions include privately endowed chairs in Taiwan studies at UC Santa Barbara, UC San Diego, University of Ottawa, and a recently created position at the University of Washington (Seattle). Nevertheless, as Fell points out, having an endowed chair of Taiwan studies does not guarantee a vibrant Taiwan studies programme; much depends on who holds the chair, which in turn depends on the preferences of the faculty hiring committee and the department in which it is located.

workshops, book projects, etc.) that can be realised in a short period of time (usually no more than a year). Moreover, these grants are distributed across an eclectic array of colleges, universities, think tanks, and other organisations throughout the country without following any discernible strategic plan: each consulate is incentivised to cultivate programmes only within its own jurisdiction, even if they duplicate existing initiatives somewhere else or have no long-term impact on the field. This approach might be adequate if there were plenty of resources to go around, but in practice no one programme receives enough support to do much institution-building.

Indeed, what is missing here is not so much funding—although more would of course be nice—but strategy. If Taiwan studies is to survive as a part of the North American academy, Taiwanese funding agencies need to refocus on the long-term revitalisation of the field as a whole, rather than prioritising short-term programming. An instructive comparison is with the Korea Foundation, whose financial support has driven a rapid expansion of Korean studies in North America over the last 25 years.<sup>12</sup> As the primary source of Korean government funding, the Korea Foundation has both the mandate and resources to build Korean studies into a well-respected, viable field of academic inquiry (Armstrong, 2014). To do so, the Foundation has invested for the long term: concentrating resources on a few key Korean studies centres at research universities, prioritising graduate language and fieldwork fellowships to encourage development of deep expertise on Korea, and most crucially, funding both endowed chair and junior tenure-track faculty positions for the next generation of Korean specialists to fill once they finish their graduate training. The impact of this approach shows up in ways large and small today, from the impressive number of Korea scholars sprinkled across American universities to the increasing share of articles on Korea appearing in the flagship *Journal of Asian Studies*. I would feel a lot better about the future of Taiwan studies if Taiwan funders were to adopt elements of this model.

Lest I end on too pessimistic a note, I will close with the observation that the bulk of expertise, talent, and motivation for developing Taiwan studies today now lies in Taiwan itself—and the prospects for continued growth in the field there are quite a bit better. Those of us trying to promote the field in North America and Europe, then, should really look to increase the frequency and intensity of joint research with Taiwan-based faculty and students whenever we can. For whatever reason, sustained cross-national research collaboration

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12 See the Korea Foundation website at <https://en.kf.or.kr>.

is rare in Taiwan studies, but it should be routine: given the long-term decline in Taiwan expertise in the American academy, the survival of the field may well come to depend on stronger partnerships between Taiwan- and foreign-based scholars.



### Concluding Remarks

*Dafydd Fell*

When I first raised the idea of a two-day conference on the development of global Taiwan studies institutions, some of my colleagues were not overly enthusiastic, fearing a long weekend of managerial jargon. As it turned out we had two days of very lively and fruitful discussion. But what has been even more rewarding has been the fascinating subsequent debates on the state of the field both in the *Taiwan Sentinel* (Fell, 2017; Rawnsley, 2017; Schubert 2017) but also in this Forum. I just want to respond to a select number of my colleagues' comments.

I completely agree with Gunter Schubert's and Kharis Templeman's suggestion that we should encourage Taiwan to look at the model of the Korea Foundation. I especially like Schubert's point on the need to spend deep rather than spend broad. Although the list of Taiwan-supported projects in Europe may look impressive on paper, all too often they are cases of spending broad and leave no lasting legacy. Templeman argues that the patterns in the United States have been similar, as significant resources are being invested in Taiwan studies projects but they are based on short-term goals and too widely dispersed to allow real institution-building at any single location. His point that it's not a lack of funding but an absence of funding strategy also applies in Europe.

I also agree with Schubert that China does offer a number of potential opportunities to Taiwan studies. Over the last decade the fastest growing group of students taking Taiwan courses at my university has been from the PRC. But equally I feel there is much scope for greater cooperation with the Taiwan studies community in Japan.

I share Yvonne Chang's enthusiasm about the Taiwan Syllabus Project being led by NATSA. I hope that EATS will do something similar. Although we do not yet have the full details of the Taiwan syllabi findings, my expectation is that

the patterns are likely to be similar to those we have seen in Europe. In other words, many of the courses are likely to be isolated and not long lasting. That said, raising publicity on the availability of such courses can be extremely valuable and contribute to their sustainability.

Although Taiwan studies faces similar challenges in Europe and North America, my sense from numerous discussions in recent years has been that the mood on the two continents is rather different. Templeman and Nachman's response pieces reflect this more pessimistic outlook. It is hard to imagine a European scholar talk about the long-term decline of the field in the way we see in Templeman's piece. What is interesting is that the overall levels of Taiwan studies funding are actually much higher in North America but there is more optimism in Europe. The root cause of this goes back to the problem of funding strategies.

It is encouraging to see the creation of new Taiwan programmes such as the one at the University of Washington, as well as new ones in Paris and the University of Central Lancashire. In other words, that we are still talking about new programmes emerging rather than older ones closing down says something about the field.

A number of my colleagues touched upon strategies to survive and flourish as academics. Lev Nachman talks of a strategically ambiguous approach, while Ming-yeh Rawnsley suggests we become exposed to perspectives from outside the cocoon of Taiwan studies. On this point I am more optimistic. In order to survive academically we need to have multiple identities. Let me take my own case. I see myself as being a Taiwan studies scholar, but also, I am a political scientist who uses Taiwan as the main case for research. I teach courses on Taiwan's politics but also broadly on comparative politics of East Asia. I also see myself as a Chinese studies scholar and do not see any contradiction there. Lastly, one of the reasons I especially love being in the Taiwan studies field is that I am exposed to such a diverse range of perspectives outside of my own disciplinary field and I find this enriches my own political research.

Lastly, Nachman's essay reminds me that my own perspective of a golden era is coloured by my personal experiences. When I quit my job as a cram school (*buxiban*) teacher to start my PhD in political science in the late 1990s, none of the remarkable developments we have seen were yet on the horizon. So, for scholars of my generation, just the developments over the last 15 years are the source of enormous pride and satisfaction. But I know the way the field is viewed by current PhD students is quite different. That said, a conclusion that comes out of all the contributions to this Forum is that there is much room for improvement in our field!

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