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DOCTORAL JOURNEYS BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND TAIWAN

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Theme: Internationalisation

Introduction

Australia and Taiwan face both similar and different concerns as they sustain their national identities and the global integration of their economies and societies. PhDs can be seen as the ‘canary’ in the creative economy (Florida, 2003, 2005) ‘mine’; if a nation’s PhD programs (and its graduates) are vibrant and productive then the future economy and society looks healthy; if a nation’s PhD programs sustain a diverse number of international candidates and graduates, then its international social and economic health looks good. The converse also applies.

In this paper, we discuss the national positions of Australia and Taiwan, especially in terms of PhD education. Then we explain and explore the experiences of Deakin University Faculty of Education in Australia developing its international PhD candidature profile—especially through greater engagement with Taiwan—and Taiwanese doctoral candidates encountering and negotiating their PhDs in that Faculty. The authors write from their perspectives from each side: Evans from the Faculty and Liou from Taiwan. This article explores how some Taiwanese doctoral students studying in Australia transit from the Taiwanese system, which has absorbed strong American influences, to the Australian one, which has absorbed many British influences. Arguably, the distinctions between the PhD ‘traditions’ of these two nations are emblematic of those encountered by many foreign students (and supervisors/advisors) as they travel between the many British and US influenced university systems in the world. A particular focus is the shift between solely research-based, individually supervised PhDs and coursework-based, research-focused, committee advised programs.

The Australian context of PhDs and international PhD students

Australia has 39 universities, the largest of which has around 40,000 students and the smallest
less than 5000 students. The oldest universities were established in the 1850s and the newest established in the past decade. Two universities are small private universities (one Catholic, one secular), and there is a large publicly-funded Catholic university. All universities offer doctoral degrees, although the new small universities have tiny enrolments of less than one hundred doctoral students, whereas the larger universities have enrolments of well over one thousand. Australia has a federal system of government with six states and two territories. Most universities are established under state acts of parliament and formally report to their state’s parliament. However, the bulk of government funding to universities comes from the Australian Government, and higher education policy is deliberated and enacted principally at that level of government. In recent years, the proportions of funding those universities have derived from Australian Government sources have decreased markedly, with about 40% of all funding now coming directly from this source. Increasing proportions of funding have come from students’ fees and from non-government sources.

The Australian PhD is derived from the British PhD tradition. Candidates are normally enrolled for three to four years full-time or six to eight years part-time and are supervised by one or more academic staff through a program of scholarship and research which leads to the production of a thesis (dissertation) based on a single thesis (dissertation). There is usually no assessed coursework although there often non-assessed workshops or courses to support their candidature. The thesis, which is required to represent a significant and original contribution to knowledge, is examined by two to three disinterested experts. These are usually academics of other universities and almost always involves one or more international examiners. The Australian (and other British-derived PhD) approach differs from, for example, the US approach with substantial coursework and a dissertation that is examined by persons involved in the supervision (advising) and monitoring of the candidature. (See http://www.ddogs.edu.au for guidelines on doctoral education in Australia). Unlike the UK and USA, oral examinations (viva voce) are rare in Australia.

Currently, approximately 45 percent of doctoral students in Australia are part-time students, a majority of whom are in the increasingly popular professional fields of study (see, Barnacle & Usher, 2003; Evans, 2002; Evans, Macauley, Pearson & Tregenza, 2004). These students are typically mid-career to late-career professionals who have previously completed Masters degrees. They often undertake research that is related to their professional or workplace contexts. Not only are they part-time, but most of them are off-campus (that is, studying by distance education, external studies or extramural studies) although this is not always formally recognised in the enrolment status reported by the university. As is discussed below, these are the types of students that are common in Education—not just in Australia but internationally—and which the Deakin Education PhD is designed particularly to serve.
The numbers of PhD students in Australia grew rapidly through the early 21st century. Most recently the increase in domestic numbers has slowed somewhat, whereas the numbers of international students have increased sharply in the past decade. Table 1 shows the enrolment patterns in these respects for the years 1998 and 2004. The overall growth in doctoral enrolments during the period was 33 percent, of which domestic enrolments grew by 27 percent, whereas international enrolments grew substantially by 71 percent. The growth in the number of women (119 percent) was particularly notable, especially as in some of the originating nations there are cultural traditions, often bolstered by religious beliefs, which favour men and restrict women from such high levels of education and/or international travel to Western nations such as Australia.

Table 1 Residential status of doctoral enrolments in Australian universities 1998 and 2004

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<tr>
<td>Number of doctoral students</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>16,040</td>
<td>19,182</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12,376</td>
<td>18,503</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>28,416</td>
<td>37,685</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>13,449</td>
<td>15,335</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11,193</td>
<td>15,914</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>24,642</td>
<td>31,249</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>2,591</td>
<td>3,847</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>1,183</td>
<td>2,589</td>
<td>119%</td>
<td>3,774</td>
<td>6,436</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Department of Education, Science & Training, Australia)

Although some international students are funded on Australian government scholarships, the majority are funded from non-Australian sources, such as foreign government or employer scholarships, self-funding (including loans) and family sources. PhD students, therefore, do contribute to the revenue of Australian universities, although given the infrastructure and supervision costs, it is difficult to assess whether this is profitable, cost-recovering or loss-making in financial terms. It is arguable, however, that the intangible benefits of having international doctoral alumni are incalculable, especially in these days of international ranking tables of universities. It is also notable, that under current immigration rules, PhD graduates are valued to the extent that some international PhD students eventually obtain permanent residency visas, which typically lead to citizenship within a few years, thus boosting Australia’s research expertise after relatively little investment. In these respects, the PhD is arguably the most mutually influential award offered by Australian universities.

The Taiwanese context, PhD programs and international students
The population in Taiwan was 3.12 million in 1905 and 23 million in 2008. It is slightly more than the population of Australia (22 million). Nowadays Taiwan has 95 universities, including 41 public universities that are fully funded by government and 54 private universities that are partially subsidized by government funding. All universities offer doctoral degrees in some disciplines. In addition to universities, there are 52 tertiary institutes of technology admitting students for bachelor and Master degrees. Most of the tertiary institutes of technology were transformed from Junior college after the restriction of establishing colleges and universities was lifted in 1996.

The number of domestic doctoral students grew rapidly in recent years, especially after 1990. The number of doctoral students in 2007 almost doubled that of 2000 (Table 1). The number of female PhD students has grown rapidly, although they are still outnumbered by male doctoral students. This is partly caused by Taiwan’s graduate schools being predominantly in the male-dominated natural sciences and technologies.

Table 1: The growth of domestic doctoral students in Taiwan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3,725</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>4,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>12,325</td>
<td>3,637</td>
<td>15,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>23,044</td>
<td>8,663</td>
<td>31,707</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Ministry of Education, Taiwan)

On the distribution of research fields, about 70% of domestic doctoral students were studying technology and science. 15% of them studied social sciences, and the rest studied humanities. The distribution of the disciplines has been consistent in the past 20 years (Table 2), which has reflected a strong demand of high-technology manpower of the nation’s economic development.

On the distribution of research fields, about 70% of domestic doctoral students were studying technology and science. 15% of them studied social sciences, and the rest studied humanities.

The distribution of the disciplines has been consistent in the past 20 years (Table 2), which has reflected a strong demand of high-technology manpower of the nation’s economic development.

Table 2: The distribution of doctoral students’ research fields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Science &amp; technology</th>
<th>Social science</th>
<th>Humanities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>71.30%</td>
<td>14.85%</td>
<td>13.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>69.22%</td>
<td>15.65%</td>
<td>15.13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Ministry of Education, Taiwan)

Due to the complicated historical development and political relations between Taiwan and China, it is not easy for Taiwan to earn an official membership on formal world political organizations, such as the UN. For increasing non-official international interactions between Taiwan and other nations, the Taiwanese government found that promoting Taiwanese education to students in other countries an effective approach. However, language is one of the major issues that challenge this policy. The official language in Taiwan is Chinese Mandarin and English is a foreign language. Although Taiwanese Ministry of Education encourages teachers to use English in teaching postgraduate courses, the availability of these courses is still far below satisfactory level for foreign students to do postgraduate degree studies, unless they are coming to Taiwan to learn Chinese Mandarin or to do research on Chinese history. It is not difficult to assume that the growth of international doctoral students in Taiwan is rather restricted.

Although Mandarin has become a popular foreign language in many countries since last decade, the different writing system between Taiwan and China has made the situation even more difficult for Taiwan. However, the government’s and tertiary institutes’ efforts were not in vain. There were 5259 foreign students studying degree programs (including bachelor and postgraduate degrees), 10177 foreign students studying Mandarin language programs in Taiwan in 2007, which was three times the number of such students in 1995.

Conversely, studying postgraduate degrees in outside of Taiwan was greatly encouraged and it was regarded as a highly rewarding investment for personal as well as national development. The number of Taiwanese students going abroad for advanced studies increased steadily as Taiwan’s economy grew from 1988 to 2002 (Table 4). The trend decreased by about 20% in 2003, which caused the government to provide more scholarships and low interest PhD study

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4 [http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/B0013/overview05-1.xls](http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/B0013/overview05-1.xls)
6 The writing style used in Taiwan is traditional Chinese, while China is using simplified writing style.
loan (under the policy of ‘Internationalising Higher Education’)\(^7\). The number of students going abroad for further study reached a new historical record in year 2006 – 37171 students went abroad in that year, although it reduced somewhat in 2007.

English speaking countries are among students’ top preferences. Over half of the students chose to go to English speaking countries. The most popular destination is the USA (Table 4), which was followed by the UK. Australia, and sometimes Canada, is the third most popular country for further study. In 2007, 2507 Taiwanese students were enrolled in Australia.

**Table 4: The number of Taiwanese students going abroad for further studies\(^8\)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>8178</td>
<td>6382</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>21434</td>
<td>12936</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>1508</td>
<td>1671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>24751</td>
<td>10679</td>
<td>5131</td>
<td>2972</td>
<td>2610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>31907</td>
<td>15547</td>
<td>8567</td>
<td>2104</td>
<td>2583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>32991</td>
<td>13767</td>
<td>9548</td>
<td>2984</td>
<td>2433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>26318</td>
<td>10324</td>
<td>6662</td>
<td>2823</td>
<td>1813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>37171</td>
<td>16451</td>
<td>9653</td>
<td>2862</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>33021</td>
<td>14916</td>
<td>7132</td>
<td>2570</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Deakin University PhD program in Education and its international focus

PhD programs have been offered in Education at Deakin University since the late 1970s. There are currently about 140 doctoral students enrolled, about 85% are off-campus and part-time and many candidates live overseas. Most doctoral candidates in the education and training sector come to their studies as busy mid-career professionals who work full time and are often researching their own workplaces as part of their doctoral studies. Clearly, this contrasts with the experience in Taiwan where both off-campus and part-time study are eschewed in favour of on-campus full-time study.

Due to the substantial part-time and off-campus nature of the Education PhD candidates a considerable amount of online and other forms of support, such as Summer Schools (at the University in Geelong, Australia) and Winter Schools (held in New Zealand where about 25 candidates reside) was developed within the Education PhD program. The Internet is used extensively—listservs, webpages, etc—to promote opportunities for networking with peers and supervisors at both the social and academic level. An online seminar program called Doctoral

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\(^7\) [http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/6/3/2/n1242331.htm](http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/6/3/2/n1242331.htm)

\(^8\) Including undergraduate and postgraduate studies.
Studies in Education (DSE) was launched in 2002. The online seminar program was designed to support the candidate/supervisor relationship whilst at the same time ensuring that all candidates have access to the best possible practice for the research training aspect of their candidature (see, for further discussion, Davis, Evans & Hickey, 2006; Evans, 2007).

The off-campus and part-time nature of the PhD program means that the program can cater for candidates enrolled and working anywhere in the world, irrespective of whether they are Australians or not. However, the demand from international students is typically for an on-campus experience for all or part of their candidature. Additionally, by the early 2000s the introduction of the Research Training Scheme (see Evans, Evans & Marsh, 2008) saw new strictures and a decline in government support for domestic PhD places. This led the (then) Faculty of Education to embark on a process of increasing its international PhD numbers, partly in anticipation of the decline in domestic places, but also to boost on-campus candidates and to do so in a way which enhanced the international diversity of the student body and, thereby, enhance the international influence of the Faculty through its doctoral graduates.

The journey to Taiwan

Terry Evans’s first professional visit in June 2002 was due to several factors. In response to the aforementioned needs to increase international PhD enrolments in Education mainly to help sustain the Faculty’s doctoral program as Government funding for domestic places reduced. It was also seen that broadening the range of overseas students in the Faculty would strengthen its diversity and add to its vitality for both staff and postgraduate (and even undergraduate) students. This first visit was supported by the advice and contacts of the University’s international office which had identified the positive encouragement the Taiwan government was giving to international postgraduate study. Contacts were made with selected local agents in Taipei, Kaohsiung and Tainan, and with IDP (the Australian universities’ international agency). The agents used local advertising and communications to publicise presentations on the doctoral program and the other postgraduate coursework. Such visits were repeated about twice per year (often alongside other activities in Taiwan) until 2007. By 2005, a cohort of about six to eight Taiwanese students was enrolled (including one with Australian citizenship) some of whom studied on-campus for their entire program, although others spent part of their time in Taiwan, partly to do fieldwork and/or to write their theses and return to work.

During this period the University sent a delegation to Taiwan to visit government departments, universities and colleges, and Australian government agencies in Taiwan. The intention was to share information, glean advice and to publicise the University. A reception was held in Taipei in late 2004 to which agents, alumni, and key people in education were invited to meet the members of the delegation. The University also retained a consultant with long experience in
Taiwan to assist in the development of the University’s profile and recruitment from Taiwan.

During this period, the Education Faculty of the National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) approached the faculty of Education at Deakin University to form an alliance to support staff and students interactions between the two institutions. Part of this led to the establishment of a research symposium held biennially and hosted alternately at the universities. Due to emerging links between NTNU and the Faculty of Education at the University of Macau, the third symposium was held in late 2007 in Macau. Doctoral students were encouraged to attend and participate in the symposia, as were Deakin Education PhD alumni. Iris Liou attended all three symposia. Almost all the Deakin staff who attended the first symposium in Taipei had never visited Taiwan. A study tour was arranged for them after the symposium where they visited schools and colleges, and sampled some of Taiwan’s natural, cultural and Aboriginal qualities.

The meetings in Taiwan with prospective students showed that there was a keen interest in doctorates from people who held Masters degrees, often from overseas, who wished to further their careers, especially in higher education. Frequently, the attendees were not wishing or qualified to undertake PhDs in Education, but were interested in PhDs in other disciplines at Deakin, or even in Australia in general. It was all part of their consideration of a doctoral journey to Australia. Although some attendees had excellent English, others had a level of English competence which was insufficient to have a discussion on the day without the help of a Mandarin speaking staff member at the agency. For some, English was going to be ‘a bridge to far’ on their journey and they went no further, for others attendance at Deakin’s English language centre was another stop on their doctoral journey. Helping people understand the nature and substance of their prospective doctoral journeys was a very important part of the reason for the journey to Taiwan.

**The journey from Taiwan**

According to the regulation set by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan, holding postgraduate degrees in related fields is the basic qualification to teach in universities and tertiary institutes. To improve the quality of higher education, the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), funded by the MOE and tertiary institutions in Taiwan, from 2006 commissioned institutional and academic assessments. The teaching academics’ educational backgrounds and research performance are critical to the assessment results. As a consequence, a great demand for teaching academics with PhD degrees was generated among those tertiary institutes that were transformed from junior colleges. Table 5 shows that the majority of the teaching academics in the private tertiary institutes of

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technology used to be teachers with Master’s degrees. The percentage of academics with PhD degree in private technology institutes was below 20% by the year 2000. The percentage was increased to 40% in 2007. For securing the teaching job, also for improving personal research competence in this fast changing environment, studying for a PhD degree has become necessary for tertiary teaching academics with Masters’ degree.\(^\text{10}\)

**Table 5: The percentage of teaching academics with PhD in universities and tertiary institutes of technology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>University Public</th>
<th>University Private</th>
<th>Tertiary institutes of Technology Public</th>
<th>Tertiary institutes of Technology Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>62.</td>
<td>41.</td>
<td>35.</td>
<td>13.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>63.</td>
<td>36.</td>
<td>43.</td>
<td>19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>75.</td>
<td>48.</td>
<td>59.</td>
<td>34.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>79.</td>
<td>54.</td>
<td>66.</td>
<td>40.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3: The percentage of teaching academics with PhD in tertiary institutes**

When considering going abroad for PhD study, budget concerns and distance are two major factors that influence the decision-making process. As discussed in previous sections, although the USA remains the most popular destination for Taiwanese students for studying abroad, there are increasing students choosing to go to other English speaking countries. Australia is more affordable than going to the USA in terms of tuition fees. When compared with the UK, Australia is much closer to Taiwan in terms of geographic distance. Furthermore, international research students’ children are fully funded by Australian government for education when they are staying in Australia with their parent(s). Australia is reputed to be active and creative in

\(^{10}\) [http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/B0013/overview12.xls](http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/B0013/overview12.xls)
academic activities. Putting all these factors together, Australia has emerged as an attractive place for Taiwanese doctoral students.

**Doctoral students in transition**

Due to the Taiwanese education system being strongly influenced by the USA, doctoral programs are constituted by course work and research. A student, even in doctoral program, is required to take compulsory courses and each course has an instructor who gives the student a pre-determined reading list. Each course usually ends with an examination or term papers that are graded according to whether the students have satisfied the criteria. By doing coursework, students’ roles tend to be confined, reactive and stable. Students attend classes and submit term papers as instructed. The freedom for students to choose what they want to study is restricted by the curriculum. On the other hand, attending classes provides a natural environment to form a sense of community among the students. It helps to reduce the sense of isolation and anxiety that students experience on the doctoral journey. Students have a common and general base of knowledge and skills that they may need for doing independent study for their degree papers. Students also have better opportunity to know more about the academics in the faculty during the time taking their taught courses. It gives the advisers and students more time and opportunities to understand each other and find a suitable counterpart in doing degree papers.

Transiting from a (US-style) coursework-based, committee advised program to a (UK/Australian style) research-based, individually supervised program involves both risks and benefits. Taiwanese students often find it difficult in the beginning in Australian PhD programs. Often those who cope best either had some experiences study in a similar system, such as in the UK or New Zealand, or have some personal predilections which help them cope with the new educational environments. Whether a foreign student survives well in a supervisory system relies not only on personal efforts, but also on whether the transitional process has been understood and institutional helps are provided to those who are in transition.

**Reflections on undertaking a doctorate in Australia**

Being a research student, their knowledge is constructed through discussion and debate with their supervisors—in sharp contrast to receiving the guidance from their instructors when they take coursework and conducting their research following the advising committee’s advice. Research students must learn to search for research questions independently and learn to lead the research agenda. They enjoy greater freedom in doing the research work, yet at the price of facing a sense of uncertainty along the research journey.
Managing the relations with supervisor is another task that Taiwanese students will have to learn. They need to learn to take the action to manage their supervisors in their busy teaching and researching schedules, rather than passively waiting for supervisor’s advice to move the research forwards. That is particularly difficult to students growing up in Confucius heritage, where students were educated to respect the teachers, including their knowledge and their timetables, rather than manage them or try to engage them in supervising the research progress.

Being independent in conducting research is a precondition to be a scholar. PhD students need to be independents since the beginning of searching for original and meaningful research topics, along the way of choosing the research method to answer the research questions, conducting the field works and trying to solve the problems emerged in the process of collecting data, making sense of the data analysis, writing up the thesis, and waiting for external examiners’ review comments. The process of PhD students’ candidature can be seen as a model of the daily life of a future scholar. The Faculty of Education in Deakin University has also made every effort to provide sufficient resources to support PhD candidates to be a member of their specific research field too. PhD candidates were encouraged to present their research works with the Faculty’s funding policy, which enabled students to enter into their academic community at an early stage of their research career.

**Reflections on providing doctorates for Taiwanese students**

It took substantial investment of time and resources in order to recruit doctoral students from Taiwan. It was important to understand the local policies (on education, international study etc), the geo-politics and where Australia fitted therein, and the local educational and cultural circumstances. The recruitment of students from Taiwan is typically undertaken through agents. These are usually small private companies who deal with a selection of overseas institutions and providers. They rely on commissions for their income which usually take the form of a percentage of the first year’s tuition fee. Sometimes they charge applicants a service fee for processing an application to a university. They provide advice to enquirers about any of the institutions or providers with which they work, so part of the reason for visiting agents was to establish the profile of the doctoral program in Education, and to further the Deakin University’s profile, too. (Generally the agents were visited twice per year by a representative of the University’s international office, and remained in email and phone contact, too). It was recognised that regular visits were important not only to sustain the relationship, but also to support the agents in the recruitment of doctoral students which is much more complicated and specific that recruiting, for example, undergraduate accounting students. In effect, the agents needed to understand what an Australian PhD program was like and, especially in US-influenced Taiwan, how it differed from a US PhD program.
Part of this support for recruitment was based on providing information sessions at the agents’ offices, usually at evenings or weekends so that working people could attend. These sessions were followed by what were called ‘interviews’ by the agents with the enquirers, although they might best be described as individual consultations. At his point the enquirer typically provided copies of their qualifications and discussed their proposed topic and circumstances. For those who eventually applied and were accepted into the program, this was the beginning of their journey to Deakin. The personal encounter with a staff member conversant with the requirements and procedures for undertaking a doctorate was probably crucial in some cases for someone deciding to apply and, if successful, enrol. It can be an anxious journey to make, but if there is some friendly personal contact with the distant, strange place, this may help alleviate the anxiety.

The building of other links in Taiwan was important to establishing the profile of the Faculty of Education and working with NTNU was very useful in this regard. The research symposia were successful as events in themselves, but they did not (or have not to date) sparked the joint projects and collaborations between staff that all parties were hoping. Although there were some general interests in each other’s work, there was not a fusion of particular interests leading to research and scholarly collaboration. There was a significant benefit that arose from the Deakin staff visiting Taiwan. Their journeys to Taiwan left them with understandings and positive memories which assisted their supervision of doctoral students, and to a positive view about doctoral students from Taiwan in general. This helped make the journey for the students easier, too, when staff members engaged them in conversation about their visit to Taiwan.

**Conclusion: issues, questions, research**

International students always face the challenge of getting used to a new educational system, and many Australian universities have endeavoured to ease this challenge. The Deakin University, for example, has taken some measures to help its doctoral students keep the progress of their study moving forwards. However, these mechanisms may not be sufficient to bridge their transitional gap. To name one example, the half-year review, asking the students and their supervisors to review the progress of the thesis every six months, is basically reactive to the problems accumulated in this period of time. A more positive measure would be to prevent these problems from occurring when the students start their doctoral study. For Asian students who are used to course-oriented programs, a useful design would be to ask them to take a short course emphasizing research design and collegial interaction. Such a course need not be graded, but can be considered compulsory if the students are to move further to write their dissertation. In brief, courses should be arranged for students who are accustomed to take
courses if they are to transit to a supervisory system.

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DOCTORAL JOURNEYS BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND TAIWAN

Third International Conference on Postgraduate Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang 16–17 December 2008

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Theme: Internationalisation

Introduction

Australia and Taiwan face both similar and different concerns as they sustain their national identities and the global integration of their economies and societies. PhDs can be seen as the ‘canary’ in the creative economy (Florida, 2003, 2005) ‘mine’; if a nation’s PhD programs (and its graduates) are vibrant and productive then the future economy and society looks healthy; if a nation’s PhD programs sustain a diverse number of international candidates and graduates, then its international social and economic health looks good. The converse also applies.

In this paper, we discuss the national positions of Australia and Taiwan, especially in terms of PhD education. Then we explain and explore the experiences of Deakin University Faculty of Education in Australia developing its international PhD candidature profile—especially through greater engagement with Taiwan—and Taiwanese doctoral candidates encountering and negotiating their PhDs in that Faculty. The authors write from their perspectives from each side: Evans from the Faculty and Liou from Taiwan. This article explores how some Taiwanese doctoral students studying in Australia transit from the Taiwanese system, which has absorbed strong American influences, to the Australian one, which has absorbed many British influences. Arguably, the distinctions between the PhD ‘traditions’ of these two nations are emblematic of those encountered by many foreign students (and supervisors/advisors) as they travel between the many British and US influenced university systems in the world. A particular focus is the shift between solely research-based, individually supervised PhDs and coursework-based, research-focused, committee advised programs.

The Australian context of PhDs and international PhD students

Australia has 39 universities, the largest of which has around 40,000 students and the smallest
less than 5000 students. The oldest universities were established in the 1850s and the newest established in the past decade. Two universities are small private universities (one Catholic, one secular), and there is a large publicly-funded Catholic university. All universities offer doctoral degrees, although the new small universities have tiny enrolments of less than one hundred doctoral students, whereas the larger universities have enrolments of well over one thousand. Australia has a federal system of government with six states and two territories. Most universities are established under state acts of parliament and formally report to their state’s parliament. However, the bulk of government funding to universities comes from the Australian Government, and higher education policy is deliberated and enacted principally at that level of government. In recent years, the proportions of funding those universities have derived from Australian Government sources have decreased markedly, with about 40% of all funding now coming directly from this source. Increasing proportions of funding have come from students’ fees and from non-government sources.

The Australian PhD is derived from the British PhD tradition. Candidates are normally enrolled for three to four years full-time or six to eight years part-time and are supervised by one or more academic staff through a program of scholarship and research which leads to the production of a thesis (dissertation) based on a single thesis (dissertation). There is usually no assessed coursework although there often non-assessed workshops or courses to support their candidature. The thesis, which is required to represent a significant and original contribution to knowledge, is examined by two to three disinterested experts. These are usually academics of other universities and almost always involves one or more international examiners. The Australian (and other British-derived PhD) approach differs from, for example, the US approach with substantial coursework and a dissertation that is examined by persons involved in the supervision (advising) and monitoring of the candidature. (See http://www.ddogs.edu.au for guidelines on doctoral education in Australia). Unlike the UK and USA, oral examinations (viva voce) are rare in Australia.

Currently, approximately 45 percent of doctoral students in Australia are part-time students, a majority of whom are in the increasingly popular professional fields of study (see, Barnacle & Usher, 2003; Evans, 2002; Evans, Macauley, Pearson & Tregenza, 2004). These students are typically mid-career to late-career professionals who have previously completed Masters degrees. They often undertake research that is related to their professional or workplace contexts. Not only are they part-time, but most of them are off-campus (that is, studying by distance education, external studies or extramural studies) although this is not always formally recognised in the enrolment status reported by the university. As is discussed below, these are the types of students that are common in Education—not just in Australia but internationally—and which the Deakin Education PhD is designed particularly to serve.
The numbers of PhD students in Australia grew rapidly through the early 21st century. Most recently the increase in domestic numbers has slowed somewhat, whereas the numbers of international students have increased sharply in the past decade. Table 1 shows the enrolment patterns in these respects for the years 1998 and 2004. The overall growth in doctoral enrolments during the period was 33 percent, of which domestic enrolments grew by 27 percent, whereas international enrolments grew substantially by 71 percent. The growth in the number of women (119 percent) was particularly notable, especially as in some of the originating nations there are cultural traditions, often bolstered by religious beliefs, which favour men and restrict women from such high levels of education and/or international travel to Western nations such as Australia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of doctoral students</th>
<th>Male 1998</th>
<th>Male 2004</th>
<th>% change</th>
<th>Female 1998</th>
<th>Female 2004</th>
<th>% change</th>
<th>Total 1998</th>
<th>Total 2004</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>13,449</td>
<td>15,335</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11,193</td>
<td>15,914</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>24,642</td>
<td>31,249</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>2,591</td>
<td>3,847</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>1,183</td>
<td>2,589</td>
<td>119%</td>
<td>3,774</td>
<td>6,436</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Department of Education, Science & Training, Australia)

Although some international students are funded on Australian government scholarships, the majority are funded from non-Australian sources, such as foreign government or employer scholarships, self-funding (including loans) and family sources. PhD students, therefore, do contribute to the revenue of Australian universities, although given the infrastructure and supervision costs, it is difficult to assess whether this is profitable, cost-recovering or loss-making in financial terms. It is arguable, however, that the intangible benefits of having international doctoral alumni are incalculable, especially in these days of international ranking tables of universities. It is also notable, that under current immigration rules, PhD graduates are valued to the extent that some international PhD students eventually obtain permanent residency visas, which typically lead to citizenship within a few years, thus boosting Australia’s research expertise after relatively little investment. In these respects, the PhD is arguably the most mutually influential award offered by Australian universities.

The Taiwanese context, PhD programs and international students
The population in Taiwan was 3.12 million in 1905 and 23 million in 2008. It is slightly more than the population of Australia (22 million). Nowadays Taiwan has 95 universities, including 41 public universities that are fully funded by government and 54 private universities that are partially subsidized by government funding. All universities offer doctoral degrees in some disciplines. In addition to universities, there are 52 tertiary institutes of technology admitting students for bachelor and Master degrees. Most of the tertiary institutes of technology were transformed from Junior college after the restriction of establishing colleges and universities was lifted in 1996.

The number of domestic doctoral students grew rapidly in recent years, especially after 1990. The number of doctoral students in 2007 almost doubled that of 2000 (Table 1). The number of female PhD students has grown rapidly, although they are still outnumbered by male doctoral students. This is partly caused by Taiwan’s graduate schools being predominantly in the male-dominated natural sciences and technologies.

Table 1: The growth of domestic doctoral students in Taiwan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3,725</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>4,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>12,325</td>
<td>3637</td>
<td>15,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>23,044</td>
<td>8663</td>
<td>31,707</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Ministry of Education, Taiwan)

On the distribution of research fields, about 70% of domestic doctoral students were studying technology and science. 15% of them studied social sciences, and the rest studied humanities. The distribution of the disciplines has been consistent in the past 20 years (Table 2), which has reflected a strong demand of high-technology manpower of the nation’s economic development.

On the distribution of research fields, about 70% of domestic doctoral students were studying technology and science. 15% of them studied social sciences, and the rest studied humanities.

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The distribution of the disciplines has been consistent in the past 20 years (Table 2)\(^4\), which has reflected a strong demand of high-technology manpower of the nation’s economic development.

**Table 2: The distribution of doctoral students’ research fields**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Science &amp; technology</th>
<th>Social science</th>
<th>Humanities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>71.30%</td>
<td>14.85%</td>
<td>13.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>69.22%</td>
<td>15.65%</td>
<td>15.13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Ministry of Education, Taiwan)

Due to the complicated historical development and political relations between Taiwan and China, it is not easy for Taiwan to earn an official membership on formal world political organizations, such as the UN. For increasing non-official international interactions between Taiwan and other nations, the Taiwanese government found that promoting Taiwanese education to students in other countries an effective approach. However, language is one of the major issues that challenge this policy. The official language in Taiwan is Chinese Mandarin and English is a foreign language. Although Taiwanese Ministry of Education encourages teachers to use English in teaching postgraduate courses, the availability of these courses is still far below satisfactory level for foreign students to do postgraduate degree studies, unless they are coming to Taiwan to learn Chinese Mandarin or to do research on Chinese history\(^5\). It is not difficult to assume that the growth of international doctoral students in Taiwan is rather restricted.

Although Mandarin has become a popular foreign language in many countries since last decade, the different writing system\(^6\) between Taiwan and China has made the situation even more difficult for Taiwan. However, the government’s and tertiary institutes’ efforts were not in vain. There were 5259 foreign students studying degree programs (including bachelor and postgraduate degrees), 10177 foreign students studying Mandarin language programs in Taiwan in 2007, which was three times the number of such students in 1995.

Conversely, studying postgraduate degrees in outside of Taiwan was greatly encouraged and it was regarded as a highly rewarding investment for personal as well as national development. The number of Taiwanese students going abroad for advanced studies increased steadily as Taiwan’s economy grew from 1988 to 2002 (Table 4). The trend decreased by about 20% in 2003, which caused the government to provide more scholarships and low interest PhD study

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\(^4\) [http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/B0013/overview05-1.xls](http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/B0013/overview05-1.xls)


\(^6\) The writing style used in Taiwan is traditional Chinese, while China is using simplified writing style.
loan (under the policy of ‘Internationalising Higher Education’)\(^7\). The number of students going abroad for further study reached a new historical record in year 2006 – 37171 students went abroad in that year, although it reduced somewhat in 2007.

English speaking countries are among students’ top preferences. Over half of the students chose to go to English speaking countries. The most popular destination is the USA (Table 4), which was followed by the UK. Australia, and sometimes Canada, is the third most popular country for further study. In 2007, 2507 Taiwanese students were enrolled in Australia.

**Table 4: The number of Taiwanese students going abroad for further studies\(^8\)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>8178</td>
<td>6382</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>21434</td>
<td>12936</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>1508</td>
<td>1671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>24751</td>
<td>10679</td>
<td>5131</td>
<td>2972</td>
<td>2610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>31907</td>
<td>15547</td>
<td>8567</td>
<td>2104</td>
<td>2583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>32991</td>
<td>13767</td>
<td>9548</td>
<td>2984</td>
<td>2433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>26318</td>
<td>10324</td>
<td>6662</td>
<td>2823</td>
<td>1813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>37171</td>
<td>16451</td>
<td>9653</td>
<td>2862</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>33021</td>
<td>14916</td>
<td>7132</td>
<td>2570</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Deakin University PhD program in Education and its international focus**

PhD programs have been offered in Education at Deakin University since the late 1970s. There are currently about 140 doctoral students enrolled, about 85% are off-campus and part-time and many candidates live overseas. Most doctoral candidates in the education and training sector come to their studies as busy mid-career professionals who work full time and are often researching their own workplaces as part of their doctoral studies. Clearly, this contrasts with the experience in Taiwan where both off-campus and part-time study are eschewed in favour of on-campus full-time study.

Due to the substantial part-time and off-campus nature of the Education PhD candidates a considerable amount of online and other forms of support, such as Summer Schools (at the University in Geelong, Australia) and Winter Schools (held in New Zealand where about 25 candidates reside) was developed within the Education PhD program. The Internet is used extensively—listservs, webpages, etc—to promote opportunities for networking with peers and supervisors at both the social and academic level. An online seminar program called Doctoral

\(^7\) [http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/6/3/2/n1242331.htm](http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/6/3/2/n1242331.htm)

\(^8\) Including undergraduate and postgraduate studies.
Studies in Education (DSE) was launched in 2002. The online seminar program was designed to support the candidate/supervisor relationship whilst at the same time ensuring that all candidates have access to the best possible practice for the research training aspect of their candidature (see, for further discussion, Davis, Evans & Hickey, 2006; Evans, 2007).

The off-campus and part-time nature of the PhD program means that the program can cater for candidates enrolled and working anywhere in the world, irrespective of whether they are Australians or not. However, the demand from international students is typically for an on-campus experience for all or part of their candidature. Additionally, by the early 2000s the introduction of the Research Training Scheme (see Evans, Evans & Marsh, 2008) saw new strictures and a decline in government support for domestic PhD places. This led the (then) Faculty of Education to embark on a process of increasing its international PhD numbers, partly in anticipation of the decline in domestic places, but also to boost on-campus candidates and to do so in a way which enhanced the international diversity of the student body and, thereby, enhance the international influence of the Faculty through its doctoral graduates.

The journey to Taiwan

Terry Evans’s first professional visit in June 2002 was due to several factors. In response to the aforementioned needs to increase international PhD enrolments in Education mainly to help sustain the Faculty’s doctoral program as Government funding for domestic places reduced. It was also seen that broadening the range of overseas students in the Faculty would strengthen its diversity and add to its vitality for both staff and postgraduate (and even undergraduate) students. This first visit was supported by the advice and contacts of the University’s international office which had identified the positive encouragement the Taiwan government was giving to international postgraduate study. Contacts were made with selected local agents in Taipei, Kaohsiung and Tainan, and with IDP (the Australian universities’ international agency). The agents used local advertising and communications to publicise presentations on the doctoral program and the other postgraduate coursework. Such visits were repeated about twice per year (often alongside other activities in Taiwan) until 2007. By 2005, a cohort of about six to eight Taiwanese students was enrolled (including one with Australian citizenship) some of whom studied on-campus for their entire program, although others spent part of their time in Taiwan, partly to do fieldwork and/or to write their theses and return to work.

During this period the University sent a delegation to Taiwan to visit government departments, universities and colleges, and Australian government agencies in Taiwan. The intention was to share information, glean advice and to publicise the University. A reception was held in Taipei in late 2004 to which agents, alumni, and key people in education were invited to meet the members of the delegation. The University also retained a consultant with long experience in
Taiwan to assist in the development of the University’s profile and recruitment from Taiwan.

During this period, the Education Faculty of the National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) approached the faculty of Education at Deakin University to form an alliance to support staff and students interactions between the two institutions. Part of this led to the establishment of a research symposium held biennially and hosted alternately at the universities. Due to emerging links between NTNU and the Faculty of Education at the University of Macau, the third symposium was held in late 2007 in Macau. Doctoral students were encouraged to attend and participate in the symposia, as were Deakin Education PhD alumni. Iris Liou attended all three symposia. Almost all the Deakin staff who attended the first symposium in Taipei had never visited Taiwan. A study tour was arranged for them after the symposium where they visited schools and colleges, and sampled some of Taiwan’s natural, cultural and Aboriginal qualities.

The meetings in Taiwan with prospective students showed that there was a keen interest in doctorates from people who held Masters degrees, often from overseas, who wished to further their careers, especially in higher education. Frequently, the attendees were not wishing or qualified to undertake PhDs in Education, but were interested in PhDs in other disciplines at Deakin, or even in Australia in general. It was all part of their consideration of a doctoral journey to Australia. Although some attendees had excellent English, others had a level of English competence which was insufficient to have a discussion on the day without the help of a Mandarin speaking staff member at the agency. For some, English was going to be ‘a bridge to far’ on their journey and they went no further, for others attendance at Deakin’s English language centre was another stop on their doctoral journey. Helping people understand the nature and substance of their prospective doctoral journeys was a very important part of the reason for the journey to Taiwan.

The journey from Taiwan

According to the regulation set by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan, holding postgraduate degrees in related fields is the basic qualification to teach in universities and tertiary institutes. To improve the quality of higher education, the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), funded by the MOE and tertiary institutions in Taiwan, from 2006 commissioned institutional and academic assessments. The teaching academics’ educational backgrounds and research performance are critical to the assessment results. As a consequence, a great demand for teaching academics with PhD degrees was generated among those tertiary institutes that were transformed from junior colleges. Table 5 shows that the majority of the teaching academics in the private tertiary institutes of

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technology used to be teachers with Master’s degrees. The percentage of academics with PhD degree in private technology institutes was below 20% by the year 2000. The percentage was increased to 40% in 2007. For securing the teaching job, also for improving personal research competence in this fast changing environment, studying for a PhD degree has become necessary for tertiary teaching academics with Masters’ degree. 

Table 5: The percentage of teaching academics with PhD in universities and tertiary institutes of technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>University Public</th>
<th>University Private</th>
<th>Tertiary institutes of Technology Public</th>
<th>Tertiary institutes of Technology Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>62.</td>
<td>41.</td>
<td>35.</td>
<td>13.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>63.</td>
<td>36.</td>
<td>43.</td>
<td>19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>75.</td>
<td>48.</td>
<td>59.</td>
<td>34.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>79.</td>
<td>54.</td>
<td>66.</td>
<td>40.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: The percentage of teaching academics with PhD in tertiary institutes

When considering going abroad for PhD study, budget concerns and distance are two major factors that influence the decision-making process. As discussed in previous sections, although the USA remains the most popular destination for Taiwanese students for studying abroad, there are increasing students choosing to go to other English speaking countries. Australia is more affordable than going to the USA in terms of tuition fees. When compared with the UK, Australia is much closer to Taiwan in terms of geographic distance. Furthermore, international research students’ children are fully funded by Australian government for education when they are staying in Australia with their parent(s). Australia is reputed to be active and creative in

\[\text{http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/B0013/overview12.xls}\]
academic activities. Putting all these factors together, Australia has emerged as an attractive place for Taiwanese doctoral students.

**Doctoral students in transition**

Due to the Taiwanese education system being strongly influenced by the USA, doctoral programs are constituted by coursework and research. A student, even in doctoral program, is required to take compulsory courses and each course has an instructor who gives the student a pre-determined reading list. Each course usually ends with an examination or term papers that are graded according to whether the students have satisfied the criteria. By doing coursework, students’ roles tend to be confined, reactive and stable. Students attend classes and submit term papers as instructed. The freedom for students to choose what they want to study is restricted by the curriculum. On the other hand, attending classes provides a natural environment to form a sense of community among the students. It helps to reduce the sense of isolation and anxiety that students experience on the doctoral journey. Students have a common and general base of knowledge and skills that they may need for doing independent study for their degree papers. Students also have better opportunity to know more about the academics in the faculty during the time taking their taught courses. It gives the advisers and students more time and opportunities to understand each other and find a suitable counterpart in doing degree papers.

Transiting from a (US-style) coursework-based, committee advised program to a (UK/Australian style) research-based, individually supervised program involves both risks and benefits. Taiwanese students often find it difficult in the beginning in Australian PhD programs. Often those who cope best either had some experiences study in a similar system, such as in the UK or New Zealand, or have some personal predilections which help them cope with the new educational environments. Whether a foreign student survives well in a supervisory system relies not only on personal efforts, but also on whether the transitional process has been understood and institutional helps are provided to those who are in transition.

**Reflections on undertaking a doctorate in Australia**

Being a research student, their knowledge is constructed through discussion and debate with their supervisors—in sharp contrast to receiving the guidance from their instructors when they take coursework and conducting their research following the advising committee’s advice. Research students must learn to search for research questions independently and learn to lead the research agenda. They enjoy greater freedom in doing the research work, yet at the price of facing a sense of uncertainty along the research journey.
Managing the relations with supervisor is another task that Taiwanese students will have to learn. They need to learn to take the action to manage their supervisors in their busy teaching and researching schedules, rather than passively waiting for supervisor’s advice to move the research forwards. That is particularly difficult to students growing up in Confucius heritage, where students were educated to respect the teachers, including their knowledge and their timetables, rather than manage them or try to engage them in supervising the research progress.

Being independent in conducting research is a precondition to be a scholar. PhD students need to be independents since the beginning of searching for original and meaningful research topics, along the way of choosing the research method to answer the research questions, conducting the field works and trying to solve the problems emerged in the process of collecting data, making sense of the data analysis, writing up the thesis, and waiting for external examiners’ review comments. The process of PhD students’ candidature can be seen as a model of the daily life of a future scholar. The Faculty of Education in Deakin University has also made every effort to provide sufficient resources to support PhD candidates to be a member of their specific research field too. PhD candidates were encouraged to present their research works with the Faculty’s funding policy, which enabled students to enter into their academic community at an early stage of their research career.

**Reflections on providing doctorates for Taiwanese students**

It took substantial investment of time and resources in order to recruit doctoral students from Taiwan. It was important to understand the local policies (on education, international study etc), the geo-politics and where Australia fitted therein, and the local educational and cultural circumstances. The recruitment of students from Taiwan is typically undertaken through agents. These are usually small private companies who deal with a selection of overseas institutions and providers. They rely on commissions for their income which usually take the form of a percentage of the first year’s tuition fee. Sometimes they charge applicants a service fee for processing an application to a university. They provide advice to enquirers about any of the institutions or providers with which they work, so part of the reason for visiting agents was to establish the profile of the doctoral program in Education, and to further the Deakin University’s profile, too. (Generally the agents were visited twice per year by a representative of the University’s international office, and remained in email and phone contact, too). It was recognised that regular visits were important not only to sustain the relationship, but also to support the agents in the recruitment of doctoral students which is much more complicated and specific that recruiting, for example, undergraduate accounting students. In effect, the agents needed to understand what an Australian PhD program was like and, especially in US-influenced Taiwan, how it differed from a US PhD program.
Part of this support for recruitment was based on providing information sessions at the agents’ offices, usually at evenings or weekends so that working people could attend. These sessions were followed by what were called ‘interviews’ by the agents with the enquirers, although they might best be described as individual consultations. At his point the enquirer typically provided copies of their qualifications and discussed their proposed topic and circumstances. For those who eventually applied and were accepted into the program, this was the beginning of their journey to Deakin. The personal encounter with a staff member conversant with the requirements and procedures for undertaking a doctorate was probably crucial in some cases for someone deciding to apply and, if successful, enrol. It can be an anxious journey to make, but if there is some friendly personal contact with the distant, strange place, this may help alleviate the anxiety.

The building of other links in Taiwan was important to establishing the profile of the Faculty of Education and working with NTNU was very useful in this regard. The research symposia were successful as events in themselves, but they did not (or have not to date) sparked the joint projects and collaborations between staff that all parties were hoping. Although there were some general interests in each other’s work, there was not a fusion of particular interests leading to research and scholarly collaboration. There was a significant benefit that arose from the Deakin staff visiting Taiwan. Their journeys to Taiwan left them with understandings and positive memories which assisted their supervision of doctoral students, and to a positive view about doctoral students from Taiwan in general. This helped make the journey for the students easier, too, when staff members engaged them in conversation about their visit to Taiwan.

Conclusion: issues, questions, research

International students always face the challenge of getting used to a new educational system, and many Australian universities have endeavoured to ease this challenge. The Deakin University, for example, has taken some measures to help its doctoral students keep the progress of their study moving forwards. However, these mechanisms may not be sufficient to bridge their transitional gap. To name one example, the half-year review, asking the students and their supervisors to review the progress of the thesis every six months, is basically reactive to the problems accumulated in this period of time. A more positive measure would be to prevent these problems from occurring when the students start their doctoral study. For Asian students who are used to course-oriented programs, a useful design would be to ask them to take a short course emphasizing research design and collegial interaction. Such a course need not be graded, but can be considered compulsory if the students are to move further to write their dissertation. In brief, courses should be arranged for students who are accustomed to take
courses if they are to transit to a supervisory system.

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