

Researching and Communicating Taiwan's Cultural Diplomacy

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Taiwan Studies and post-1992 institutions in the UK

In June 2018 the University of Central Lancashire launched the Northern Institute of Taiwan Studies (NorITS), a new institute devoted to the promotion of Taiwan and Taiwan Studies in the UK, more precisely in Northern England. Although the UK is one of the pioneers with regard to Taiwan Studies in Europe, with its Centre of Taiwan Studies at SOAS, and, later on, the Taiwan Studies Programme at Nottingham University, not much has been done beyond these two high rank institutions.

This is a contradiction, considering the fact that the higher education environment in the UK is very dynamic. Indeed, the passage of the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992 allowed the emergence of new programmes of Asian and/or Chinese studies throughout the UK. The Programme of Asia Pacific Studies at UCLan is an example. With an increasing number of students enrolling in this programme, and a relatively stable rate of students interested in the Chinese language path, a fertile field presented to Taiwan Studies. Hence two Taiwan specialists in this institution decided to develop a Taiwan Studies programme. Thanks to the effort of these scholars and to the support of the School of Language and Global Studies, NorITS was established in 2018.

In this earlier stage, NorITS has extensively drawn from the University finances: two new members of staff were recruited with a permanent contract in September 2018, to reach a total of four members devoted to run NorITS, most academic activities, such as workshops, movie screenings, guest talks, roundtables, have been funded by internal funding, a new module titled Taiwan in the Asia Pacific was launched for second year students in 2018. It is clear that UCLan has invested extensively its own human and financial resources in pursuing Taiwan Studies. This is a clear counter-trend if compared to other institutes in UK and Europe, where it is more common to see patterns of reliance on funding from the Taiwanese government and institutions to sustain Taiwan related projects.

In light of the unique path developed by UCLan, in this paper we aim to discuss whether Taiwan Studies programmes should continue to rely on external funding or whether we should pursue greater commitment on hosting universities. What are the pros and cons of each approach? More generally, in the context of an academic system increasingly pressured by neoliberal logics, we ask whether it is possible to develop sustainable and long-term programmes on Taiwan Studies, considering Taiwan's weak position in the international arena.

Post 1992 Universities in the UK

In 1992, following the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), the line between the binary system of polytechnics and universities was abolished in UK. This allowed many polytechnic institutions to change their status to that of university, and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) is an example. We need to contextualise these important changes in the structure of UK Higher Education (HE) within broader neo-liberal policies introduced by Thatcher and continued throughout successive governments of New Labour and, later on, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition.

These changes have not only determined an increase in the number of universities, hence more competition, but also the need to show accountability to rising student enrolment. Hence, university

league table rank universities on the basis of a set of weighted indicators. A great ranking would translate into increases brand reputation, a better outreach for overseas students and more opportunities to succeed in research grant applications (Hunt 2016: 1192). The UK's independent league table of Universities, The Complete University Guide, recently rated UCLan as the most improved University in the UK. The improvements within this institution can be appreciated by looking at the more recent developments within its Asia Pacific Studies Programme.

The BA (Hons) in Asia Pacific Studies at the School of Language and Global Studies (Faculty of Culture and Creative Industries) at UCLan represents the largest yearly intake of students for any course across the entire University with 100 new students each year. For East Asian Studies, UCLan is ranked in the top 15 institutions in the UK and the 6th highest for student satisfaction, ahead of both Oxford and Cambridge. Following the success of the BA programme, an MA in Asia Pacific Studies and an MA in North Korean Studies were also launched this year. Both the BA and the MA programmes offer a variety of modules on Asian cultures, societies, histories, politics, international relations, economies, as well as language training in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. Clearly, UCLan has been doing much better than many of its competitors, such as SOAS and Sheffield University, in terms of student numbers. Yet, this is not the only innovative feature of the Asia Pacific Studies Programme at UCLan. This dramatic increase of student enrolment in this area, pushed the university management to invest in human resources and in institutional development to favour research-led projects.

In the last five years, a series of research institutes have been established within the School of Language and Global Studies, following top-down decisions to invest on critical areas of research. In order to capitalise on the strength of the Asia Pacific programme and to seek ways of emulating this success across the Faculty for Culture and Creative Industries (where Language and Global Studies is situated) will launch its flagship Institute for the Studies of the Asia Pacific (ISAP). Led by Dr Niki Alsford, the institute will form an umbrella for area specific institutes that includes NorITS, International Institute for Korean Studies (IKSU), Centre for Austronesian Studies (COAST), Northern England Policy Centre for the Asia Pacific (NEPCAP), and will initiate a new China Research Group (CRG), Institute for Japanese Studies (IJS) and the Institute for ASEAN Studies (IAS). Each institute has its own chair and reports directly to the Director of ISAP. Each institute/centre chair forms part of an internal steering committee. Each of the institutes operate under three pillars: Teaching; Research; and Innovation. Each of these are aligned to the TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework), REF (Research Excellence Framework), and KEF (Knowledge Exchange Framework), metric used to measure universities performances in different areas.

These institutional arrangements should be contextualised in the university corporate plan pushing for a creation of an environment that would enable UCLan to be located within the research-led hierarchy of universities, for instance by establishing Lancashire (cross-faculty/university wide) research centres of excellence tackling subjects that are crucial for the university and may also generate broader impact.

This promising picture, though, should be looked at in light of the HE market in the UK. Indeed, it is a reality that, although a single structure was created for universities in the UK, this did not ensure that institutions were seen as being equivalent. This means that even today there is still an informal hierarchy between post-92 universities and the 24 research-intensive Russel Group universities (Hunt 2016). Those universities that do not belong to the Russel Group, the truth is, may face significant challenges when applying for grants, due to a widespread perception that they are second class universities.

In this paper, we will explore the challenges and the opportunities that a project developed within a post-92 university may entail. In order to achieve this objective, we will take the development of

NorITS at UCLan as a case study. In the next section, we will be sharing some background information about the establishment and evolution of NorITS at UCLan.

NorITS

The increase in student enrolment in the Asia Pacific Studies programme and the relatively stable, but not increasing number of students interested in the Chinese Language pathway, the management at UCLan followed the suggestion of one academic, Dr Niki Alsford: to nurture Chinese language student enrolment, by exploiting Taiwan, an area of absence within the North of England. Coupled with that, Alsford decided that the programme should maintain its vision to concentrate on Asia Pacific Studies as opposed to East Asian Studies as a means to explore Taiwan outside of the usual China/Taiwan paradigm. To this end, Alsford through the creation of the Centre for Austronesian Studies (COAST), has moved the direction of the programme to include the studies of Pacific Islands. As part of that initiative UCLan is currently working towards to the establishment of new Msc degree in Pacific Environment and Climate Sustainability.

These ideas were first put forward in 2016 and UCLan management put their trust on this vision and, in the following years, it supported the development of human resources, teaching and academic activities, as well as institutional arrangements related to Taiwan. The first step has been to hire academic staff with an expertise in Taiwan Studies: in 2017 Dr Lara Momesso was hired, the following year, two other experts on Taiwan joined the team, Dr Adina Zemanek and Dr Ti-han Chang. With a team of four full-time permanent staff, UCLan assured stability and continuity for the field of Taiwan Studies.

Since 2017, a series of activities focused on Taiwan have been organised, including seminars, film screenings, roundtables, lectures, visit of Taiwan for the most promising students, conferences. The average costs for these activities is about GBP 30,000 (US\$ 45,000) per year.¹ Furthermore, a new module titled Taiwan in the Asia Pacific was launched for second year BA students in 2018.² Eventually, in summer 2018, NorITS was launched.³ As part of the NorITS programme and the module on Taiwan, annually a travel seminar to Taiwan is conducted. The first seminar began in April 2018 and the preparation for the second is currently underway.

It is important to acknowledge the potential that the work we have been doing may have in terms of promotion of Taiwan Studies internationally and regionally. UCLan is situated in a strategic location in the Northern part of England, surrounded by several universities with programmes and courses in Chinese and/or Asian Studies (University of Manchester, University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, University of Lancaster, Edinburgh University, Glasgow University, to mention just a

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- 1 If we also consider other features, such as regular staffing costs for the four academic positions and for one administrative support, UCLan expenses are significant. According to UCLan calculations, UCLan spent US\$ 102,083 for the academic year 2017/18, and US\$ 156,625 for the academic year 2018/19 and is planning to spend a total of US\$ 152,219 for the academic year 2019/20.
 - 2 In April 2019, 5 of these students were brought to Taiwan for an 8-day Study Seminar Trip. Clearly, this experience was a real eye-opener for the group of students who are now considering to continue their post-graduate studies in Taiwan, either in the UK or in Taiwan (for a view of their experiences, please follow NorITS website link: https://www.uclan.ac.uk/about_us/case_studies/taiwan-travel-seminar.php). We are planning to organise this activity on a regular basis.
 - 3 Located alongside NorITS, is the Centre for Austronesian Studies (COAST) and it also works in close collaboration with the newly established Centre of Migration, Diaspora and Exile (MIDEX), through the Asian diaspora and migration cluster. The main aim of these centres and research groups is to strengthen and enhance the knowledge of Taiwan along their respective academic disciplines. An important feature of NorITS is its steering committee: this consists of NorITS academic members and external honorary professors with a significant contribution to the enhancement of Taiwan studies globally. This includes Prof Michael Hsiao (Academia Sinica), Prof Thomas Gold (University of California, Berkeley), Prof Bruce Jacobs (Monash University), Prof Ann Heylen (National Taiwan Normal University), Prof Gunter Schubert (University of Tuebingen). This Steering Committee will constitute a decision making panel on future directions and developments of NorITS.

few). Despite the presence of scholars who work on Taiwan in this region (i.e. Felicia Chan, William Heberton, Tao Wang and Christopher Payne at the University of Manchester, Chen-yu Lin at the University of Liverpool, Chia-Lin Chen at the University of Lancaster, to mention just a few), they tend to remain under the shadow of more fashionable China studies. Our aim is to create a network of cooperation and make the work of these scholars visible as Taiwan studies specialists. A first step to achieve this objective has already been done: a Research Buddy Network has been initiated by the NorITS team with the purpose of creating opportunities of exchange between scholars with a background in Asia Pacific studies and working in neighbouring academic institutions. The outreach of NorITS is not limited to its integrative activities and cooperation with other institutions in the UK. Our goal is to establish a strong network amongst areas of Europe where the field of Taiwan Studies has not reached their full potential yet, such as Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, the Czech Republic, Poland. In order to achieve this objective, NorITS will rely on its team's personal and professional network as well as the infrastructures offered by UCLan. Hence, UCLan campus in Cyprus will become another venue to promote the study of Taiwan, through the Summer School on Asia Pacific Studies, which we are planning to run on an annual basis as a cooperation between the Language Academy at UCLan and the Asia Pacific Studies Programme. Furthermore, MoU have been signed with various universities in Taiwan: National Chengchi University, National Taitung University and National Dong Hwa University (in-progress).⁴

Through activity funding, human resources hiring, teaching expansion, UCLan showed its commitment towards this project. Yet, it expected to eventually see a return. The Taiwan Representative Office in the UK has generously contributed to the success of some of the events both financially and by sending representatives to attend activities. This was looked with good eyes by UCLan management. Yet, their expectations are now for something substantial and long-term through a matching-fund project. What can the market on Taiwan Studies offer to UCLan? Is there any chance to put together the needs of Taiwan Studies, a niche field of studies, independent from yet obscured by the hegemonic field of China Studies, and those of UCLan and convert this in a win-win collaboration?

Taiwan Studies internationally and the UCLan model

In summer 2018, a few days before NorITS official launch, a group of scholars met in Tuebingen to draft the *Tuebingen Manifesto*. As the *Tuebingen Manifesto* argues, the last fifteen years have witnessed a significant development in the field of Taiwan Studies, thanks to an increase in Taiwan-related courses at universities, the establishment of new Taiwan Studies centres and projects, the establishment of regional associations of Taiwan Studies (NATSA, EATS, JAFTS), and the newly-launched International Journal of Taiwan Studies (IJTS). The encouraging feeling against these developments, though, has to face the challenges posed by a much harsher reality shaped by a lack of faculty positions and long-term funding schemes in the field of Taiwan Studies. In light of this contrasting picture, the scholars who signed the *Tuebingen Manifesto* ask the Taiwan policymakers to create an integrated public funding structure in Taiwan, a Taiwan Foundation, which would “support international universities willing to promote Taiwan Studies to establish professorships, employ contracted faculty members, and appoint visiting professors to advance teaching and research on Taiwan (first funding branch). It would initiate fellowship programs for graduate and postdoctoral studies, as well as fellowships for field research (second funding branch). Finally, it would support special projects to promote Taiwan Studies, such as lecture series, workshops and conferences, and cultural events (third funding branch)” (Schubert 2018: 3).

⁴ UCLan postgraduate degrees (particularly the MA in Asia Pacific Studies, the MA in North Korean Studies, and the upcoming Msc in Pacific Environment and Climate Sustainability, a cooperation between the School of Language and Global Studies, the School of Community, Health and Midwifery and the School of Forensic and Applied Sciences all at UCLan) will offer the opportunity to have double degrees with these sister universities.

The *Tuebingen Manifesto* was also shared a few months after, in September 2018, during the World Congress of Taiwan Studies held at Academia Sinica in Taipei. In this occasion, there was a general agreement with the main points of the *Tuebingen Manifesto*. Yet, during the conference, participants also acknowledged an important challenge, namely the difficulty for Taiwan specialists to search for long-term funding schemes and permanent positions in academic institutions: in fact, genuine faculty positions for Taiwan scholars outside Taiwan are almost non-existent, and most academics have to eventually sell themselves in the market as experts on China and Asia, rather than on Taiwan.

Clearly, different opinions and experiences are held by scholars depending on the country and institution they are affiliated to. Yet, UCLan clearly stands out from the above discussion in the way it approaches the development of Taiwan studies. In order to nurture teaching and research on Taiwan, a unique case in the UK and Europe, UCLan has hired four experts in the field of Taiwan Studies, as part of its permanent staff.

Considering the hardship in finding institutions that offer contracted positions to Taiwan experts, the unique case of UCLan, with NorITS, should be taken as an example to encourage HE institutions to think of Taiwan Studies in a different way, as something to invest on a long term basis, as it has the potential to bring revenues, expand knowledge, forge new teaching activities, and create impact. This countertrend may eventually turn into a model for other institutions in Europe and beyond and, possibly, will set the beginning of new evolutions for the future of Taiwan Studies as a sustainable, recognised, independent and significant field in academia.

An important issue that an HE institution such UCLan may require to be addressed is what is the scope that is imagined and required with regard to a development of Taiwan Studies. Taiwan Studies remains a niche in the academic market, often attached to a few high-ranking universities in UK and around the world. For instance, in England, currently three institutions run programmes on Taiwan Studies: the University of Nottingham (Taiwan Studies Programme), the School of Oriental and African Studies (Centre of Taiwan Studies), and Cambridge University (Lectureship in Taiwanese Studies). All these universities are located in or around the central part of the UK and offer a solid network of support to students and scholars alike within this area. Above all, all these are part of the prestigious Russell Group. Although this approach may enhance the prestige of the field of Taiwan Studies, it may also hamper new paths.

Hence, in contemporary competitive and dynamic global market it is important to be flexible and creative and take advantage of new opportunities and changes offered by an opening up of the academic world. Supporting and acknowledging the efforts made by emerging institutions, as it is the case of UCLan, may open up new opportunities to the development and outreach of Taiwan Studies in regions and areas of the world that have the potential to bring innovation, quality, as well as a new audience.

Currently, NorITS is a self-sustainable institution. Enjoying full support from the School of Language and Global Studies and the Faculty of Culture and Creative Industries, it has the potential to grow together with the other research institutes at UCLan. This is an exceptional investment in the field of Taiwan studies by a British and European institution. Clearly, the seeds for Taiwan Studies at UCLan have been sowed. Yet, the efforts that have been done so far may be wasted if we do not demonstrate a likewise engagement and acknowledgement of our activities on the side of Taiwanese funding institutions. And things may change soon, as there is internal pressure to establish a China Institute, which would probably make it impossible for the NorITS team to continue in this capacity.

Conclusions

In this paper we explored the mutual opportunities and challenges that UK HE education and Taiwan Studies offer to each other. With a student population of around 30,000, UCLan is consistently one of the top ten largest universities in England, it offers a vibrant academic environment where student number is matched with investments in research and innovation. UCLan's significant investments should be framed within a restructuring of the HE system in UK and broader neo-liberal trends affecting HE in the UK and worldwide. Taiwan Studies is an independent field of studies whose evolution has been particularly significant in the last fifteen years. This field relies significantly on the funding of the Taiwanese government and the good will of international scholars to invest their time and energy in Taiwan related teaching and research activities.

If UCLan is striving to turn into an outstanding research-led university, the field of Taiwan Studies is striving to expand its space in the international academic market. Clearly, this could be a win-win situation. If UCLan can offer all the features that a subject may need to expand (number of students, staff, events, network, institutional support), Taiwan Studies have the potential to offer a subject that is empirically, theoretically, epistemologically relevant for academic research and teaching.

This promising picture, though, seems to be hard to achieve: it seems that partner universities are selected on the basis of the informal hierarchy between post-92 institutions and the research-intensive Russell Group universities, giving preference to the latter.

In the *Tuebingen Manifesto* it is suggested to create schemes to attract universities to become stakeholders, by asking the Taiwan government to fully finance professorship schemes for a certain period, before being taken up by institutional budget. Considering the hardship in finding European institutions that offer contracted positions to Taiwan experts, we fully agree with this idea. On the other hand, in this paper we also want to shed light on different paths and possibilities, made possible by the opportunities available within specific national or institutional contexts.

This countertrend may eventually turn into a model for other institutions in Europe and beyond and, possibly, will set the beginning of a new start for the future of Taiwan Studies as a sustainable, recognised, independent and significant field in academia.

References

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