



Way to go for international recognition

Michel THERON

如果要找幫助成大醫學院成為國際學府的幫手，黎煥耀教授實驗室的研究員Theron先生可說是編者在構想搜尋時的意外收穫。他是法國人，但在英國念了兩個碩士學位，之後隨著女友到台灣來工作。他在大學做為外國學生或外籍雇員的經驗豐富又鮮活。文章裡應編者提出的經驗和意見，讓我們瞭解到成大醫學院在提升到國際學府的路上應該加油的方向。Michel的英文正確流利，曾經在英文台北時報上發表投書。請讀者細細品嚐。

—編者 謝奇璋

The Taiwanese education officials and Taiwanese universities are recently advocating their wish to gain international recognition for their education and research facilities. Such recognition usually goes hand-in-hand with a raised interest from foreign students and academics. A win-win situation. Indeed, when a national university is capable of attracting many foreign students (who usually provide significant extra financial incomes to the institution in comparison to national students), it



has the ability to choose the ones it considers the brightest, so not only to increase its success rate but also to create a diverse pool of graduate students that could become part of its workforce. Diversity is often seen as the key to face a dynamic, fast-changing research world, a work environment amongst the most competitive on the planet. Visiting academics, short-term exchange postdoctoral scientists, but also long-term academics of foreign origin employed by national universities,

Way to go for international recognition

contribute to increase the quality and creativity of the work carried out in an institution's laboratories, eventually rising the number of international publications and the international status of the university.

Thus the question: are Taiwanese universities ready to support an influx of foreign students and academics? From my experience, not quite yet. Unfortunately, most major obstacles are independent from their control. From the point of view of students, the existence of quotas limiting the amount of foreign students (10% at NCKU, when British universities welcome more than 60% of their postgraduate students from foreign countries), the absence of scholarships to entice high-flyer students to join Taiwanese universities (such financial support is available to foreigners even in famous universities such as Cambridge, Oxford, MIT, Harvard, etc.) and the language barrier do not work in favor of Taiwan. As for

researchers, the list of problems is more extensive: lower wages than western countries; high taxes (up to 20% for short stay); smaller funding for research and high cost of consumables for scientific research due to the many intermediates (some of them clearly unnecessary) to obtain them; lack of non-faculty positions (that offer more independence and better salary than a postdoctoral fellowship and but less responsibility and pressure than a junior faculty spot); excessive paperwork to be completed, and consequent delays, to obtain a work permit revocable at any time by the police; absence of clear guidelines and a central administration to provide assistance with Taiwanese laws and regulations; etc. On many of these points, it seems difficult for universities in Taiwan to compete with other foreign institutions. So how could a university like NCKU become more attractive to international researchers and students? One way

Way to go for international recognition

would be to provide services to students and researchers that facilitate their stay. The creation of a friendly, hassle-free work environment.

Who has not had trouble as a freshman to find a decent place to live during the academic year? Who has not spend days walking along the many corridors of the administrative building to complete their registration as an employee of a university? If NCKU can make it easy for everyone to come to this campus (not only foreigners but also nationals), it will increase the rate of exchanges and visits from outsiders, thus transforming its environment into a multinational, multicultural melting pot than can only promote individual achievements. In order to achieve this, the university must restructure some of its offices to create single specialized units able to provide the necessary services to staffs and students, e.g.: an international cooperation center for the collaboration with other

universities (to facilitate exchanges), a student office for everything that students may require (from course registration to fees payment), an employee office to assist staff with administrative task, etc., all of these central units acting as gateways to the many other offices that compose the university's administration. However, the key to a successful reorganization is the people that will staff such units. They must be well-informed, highly competent team workers with a clear altruistic sense, i.e. the will to help. And that's exactly where NCKU might have an advantage.

Let me explain of a personal experience. The first day I walked in the NCKU Medical College, I was due to my future boss, Professor Lei Huan-Yao, in his office, and had no intention to be late for this first contact. Not stressed by nature, I did not panic when I first faced the Chinese-only listing of the different departments of the College, but I knew that I would

Way to go for international recognition

probably have to resort to using a phone to call Prof. Lei for help. A rather embarrassing situation that never happened since it only took an instant for a member of staff passing by to realize that I could not understand the sign. And before I could say anything, she quickly asked me in good English whom I wanted to visit. Many opportunities have risen since when I have had to rely on my colleagues to give me that kind of help with the university's administration and other local administrative offices. It has thus occurred to me that paperwork in a language you understand is not as important as people willing to help you deal with it. This clearly does not only apply to foreigners in Taiwan, but also to nationals. Nonetheless, such experiences might be very stressful, if not utterly intimidating, for foreigners

not as daring as I am. Removing such obstacles may take time and efforts, but is essential for the school to become an international campus.

International recognition is bound to a university's ability to seduce others. If this university has to rely on its own employees' altruism to create a comfortable work environment that will attract high flyers from all over the world, then the NCKU is sitting on a gold mine, waiting to be exploited.

