

## Retaining foreign students' talent

By Chuing Prudence Chou 周祝瑛 /

Sat, Jun 23, 2018 - Page 8

---

At a get-together meal for graduating students a few days ago, I had a chat with a US student who finished his doctorate in Taiwan earlier this year.

He talked about how, during his six years of study in Taiwan, which included writing five books in Chinese and English and publishing a dozen international theses, he has, together with some friends, established the South China Sea Think Tank and the Asia-Pacific Policy Research Association and launched the Taiwan No. 1 Web site.

These initiatives have all helped draw attention to Taiwan's special characteristics and some of the important issues that it faces.

Considering how deeply this US citizen has become involved with Taiwan, his experience of searching for a job after getting his doctorate gives cause for worry, and it reflects the weak position in which Taiwan finds itself with respect to retaining highly talented people.

According to statistics published by the Ministry of Education, as of last year there were nearly 118,000 overseas students in Taiwan's universities and colleges, of whom 47 percent, or more than 55,000, were studying for degrees — mostly for a master's or doctorate — at the nation's top universities.

Over the past few years, the government has announced a points system for foreign students to stay and work in the nation after graduation and refined the threshold for employing them.

However, there are still obstacles in their way.

On the one hand, university student numbers are beginning to fall and will continue to do so because of the nation's falling birthrate. This is making universities more cautious about the amount of new personnel they can recruit.

At the same time, big companies and other employers in the private sector offer exceedingly low salaries when seeking to recruit highly qualified people. Salary offers might even fail to compete with China.

These factors make it very hard for these outstandingly talented foreigners, who have received Taiwanese scholarships and been diligently trained by top universities, to work and give back to Taiwanese society.

This inability to effectively retain talent makes it impossible for the nation to cash in on a "brain

gain,” while allowing neighboring countries, especially China, to pick up the ready-made talent that it has painstakingly cultivated.

The average age of professors in Taiwan is also rising. In this academic year, 54 percent of professors are over the age of 50. This means that in five to 10 years’ time academic institutions will be hit by a wave of retirement, as about a third of the nation’s professors depart from academia.

As a result, gaps in succession will appear in the specialized fields of many senior professors at top universities, and their international academic networks might fall apart.

To resolve this problem, Taiwan’s universities and research establishments, including Academia Sinica, should move quickly to expand their recruitment of highly qualified personnel, giving special consideration to those who have received doctoral training at local universities.

These outstanding foreign scholars who know, love and identify with Taiwan should be included in the ranks of those whose talent we actively seek to retain, so that these young and fresh academic troops have the opportunity to collaborate with Taiwanese teachers, build a new Taiwanese academic culture and establish mutually beneficial networks.

These people could take on the task of teaching university classes in English and broadening Taiwanese students’ international perspectives.

They could also help the Taiwanese government and universities by raising Taiwan’s profile around the world and even expanding overseas markets for the business sector, thereby creating more win-win opportunities.

The final point is that when government agencies are seeking to recruit international talent, they must take note of those talented people from overseas who are taking up degree or non-degree courses in Taiwan.

For example, a few months ago a certain department concerned with foreign relations was seeking to recruit translators, but it only stipulated that applicants must have an overseas academic record, while sadly overlooking people in Taiwan who have rich international translation abilities and a good knowledge of the Chinese language.

All this shows that Taiwan needs to broaden its range for attracting and retaining talent, so that the considerable number of foreign citizens who have received scholarships from Taiwan and benefited from its higher education, and who have grown to love Taiwan, can have a chance to give back to Taiwanese society.

*Chuing Prudence Chou is a professor at National Chengchi University’s Department of Education.*

Translated by Julian Clegg

---

Published on **Taipei Times** :

<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2018/06/23/2003695364>

Copyright © 1999-2018 **The Taipei Times**. All rights reserved.

