

## The Role of the School of Oriental and African Studies in the Development of Taiwan Studies in Europe

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### 1. From Taiwan Studies desert to global leader

Over the last seven year there has been a remarkable transformation in the state of Taiwan studies in Europe. In the late 1990s, Europe could still be categorized as a Taiwan studies desert. There were no Taiwan centred postgraduate courses or degrees. There were no regular Taiwan focused conferences or seminar series. There were no Taiwan studies academic associations or programmes. Although there was a number of Europe based scholars working on Taiwan, there were no Taiwan focused academic positions. Unsurprisingly, only a limited amount of Taiwan research was being published by Europe based scholars.<sup>1</sup>

On almost every standard European Taiwan studies lagged behind its counterparts in the United States. In the 1990s, there were at least two annual Taiwan studies conferences held in the United States that were run by institutionalized associations. The most important ones being the North American Taiwan Studies Association and the Conference Group on Taiwan Studies.<sup>2</sup> During the decade European Taiwan scholars were still far more likely to meet in these US based events than in Europe. In addition, there were also a number of Taiwan related programmes at US universities, the most active of which was the Taiwan Studies Workshop at the Fairbank Centre, Harvard University. Lastly, the leading English language book series focusing on Taiwan, New York based M.E. Sharpe *Taiwan in the Modern World* has regularly published influential volumes on Taiwan.

Nevertheless the rapid development of European Taiwan studies since 2000 has meant that the field has not only caught up with, but in some areas even surpassed its American counterparts. By 2007, at least ten European institutions offered Taiwan

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, in a four volume collection of the most influential articles on Taiwan politics, none of the articles published prior to 2000 were by Europe based writers. Instead all were from either Taiwan or United States based scholars. See: Dafydd Fell (Ed.), *Modern Politics of Taiwan* (London, Routledge, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The North American Taiwan Studies Association conference was started in the mid 1990s and has grown into the largest regular interdisciplinary Taiwan studies conference in the world (excluding Taiwan). The Conference Group on Taiwan Studies was formed even earlier, in the earlier 1990s and its meeting is held each August as a Related Groups set of panels in the prestigious American Political Science Association Conference.

centred postgraduate courses and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) had established the first postgraduate degree in Taiwan studies on offer outside of Taiwan. There is now a continent-wide Taiwan studies association with an annual conference, the European Association of Taiwan Studies conference. This is an interdisciplinary conference that is the key event in Europe's Taiwan studies calendar, where the leading Taiwan studies scholars based in Europe congregate each April. This is something that Taiwan studies in the United States have failed to achieve, as the various groups often appear to work in isolation.

Although there has also been a simultaneous growth in Chinese studies in Europe, this has not had a detrimental impact on the development of Taiwan studies programmes. Instead, there has been a huge growth in the number and scope of the Taiwan studies academic programmes throughout Europe, so that by 2007 there were over ten active Taiwan studies centres or programmes in Europe compared to less than half a dozen in the United States. These Taiwan studies programmes have concentrated mainly on organizing seminars and conferences, but also have increasingly also begun teaching projects. In addition, a number new Taiwan studies academic posts have been created in Europe, actually exceeding the number of equivalent posts in the United States. Finally, while the M.E. Sharpe Taiwan book series appears to be in decline, two Taiwan studies book series have emerged in Europe, one at Harrassowitz and one at Routledge. In short, Europe has been transformed from a Taiwan studies desert into a leading region in Taiwan research.

In this paper I outline the role that the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Taiwan Studies Programme has played in the recent development of Taiwan studies in Europe. The contribution made by SOAS in the following four areas is addressed: (1) Taiwan studies teaching, (2) Taiwan studies academic events, (3) Taiwan studies institutional cooperation, (4) Taiwan studies publications. In a mark of the important role played by SOAS in 2007 its Centre of Taiwan Studies was awarded the French Taiwanese Culture Prize for its contribution to the development of Taiwan studies in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Establishment of the SOAS Centre of Taiwan Studies

Prior to 1999, Taiwan studies remained a marginal subject on the edge of Chinese studies at SOAS. The School's journal, the *China Quarterly* did occasionally publish special editions focused on Taiwan and a number of the School's Chinese studies

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<sup>3</sup> This is a prize awarded by the French Academy of Social and Moral Sciences for works that shed light on Taiwan-Europe relations or contribute to cultural exchange between Taiwan and Europe.

courses had units that touched upon Taiwan. However, the establishment of the SOAS Taiwan Studies Programme in 1999 was a key turning point. A Director (Professor Robert Ash) and a post-doctoral researcher (Megan Greene) were appointed. Working together with other scholars at SOAS with a Taiwan research interest, initially the programme concentrated on organizing a founding conference and designing an interdisciplinary Taiwan course. Another landmark came in 2006, when the School's first Lecturer in Taiwan Studies (Dafydd Fell) was appointed. Since the founding of the programme the scope of its activities have grown rapidly, so that by the time it became the Centre of Taiwan Studies in 2006, it had become the world's leading centre of Taiwan studies outside of Taiwan.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Development of Taiwan Studies Teaching at SOAS.

The first step towards becoming a key provider of Taiwan studies teaching was the creation of the School's first Taiwan postgraduate course, *Contemporary Taiwan*. This was first offered as a postgraduate optional course in 2001-2. It was a one year interdisciplinary course that covered Taiwan's history, society, economic development and politics. The teaching was shared between staff from the history (Megan Greene), anthropology (Stuart Thompson), economics (Robert Ash) and politics (Phil Deans & Dafydd Fell) departments.

After running the *Contemporary Taiwan* course for four years we decided to expand the number of courses and create more in-depth courses. Therefore in 2005-6 the *Contemporary Taiwan* course was withdrawn and five new Taiwan courses were created. These were (1) *Government and Politics in Taiwan*, (2) *Society and Culture in Taiwan*, (3) *Modern Film from Taiwan*, (4) *Economic Development of Taiwan* (5) *Elementary Hokkien*. All are postgraduate courses, with the exception of *Modern Film from Taiwan* and *Elementary Hokkien*, which are also available to undergraduates. In the future we hope to be able to expand the number of courses and also make more courses available to undergraduates, with a course on Taiwan literature expected as the next addition to the programme.

The expansion in the number of courses enabled the School to offer the *MA in Taiwan Studies* from 2006-7, the first such postgraduate degree available outside of Taiwan.<sup>5</sup> Students on the degree should take the four core Taiwan courses, may take the *Elementary Hokkien* option (or another SOAS course) and write a dissertation on a

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<sup>4</sup> Currently twelve members of SOAS faculty contribute towards the work of the Centre of Taiwan Studies.

<sup>5</sup> In Taiwan there currently MAs in Taiwan Studies on offer at National Chengchi University and Changjung University.

Taiwan research subject. In 2006-7, we enrolled the first two students on the full MA, one from Japan and one from the United States. However, the majority of students taking our Taiwan courses tend to be on other regional or disciplinary degrees, particularly, *MA Chinese Studies*, *MSc Asian Politics*, or *MA Pacific Asian Studies*.

Thus far we have seen a great deal of variation in the sources of our student intake over the last seven years. We have had students from the UK, mainland Europe, the USA, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mainland China, South East Asia and Japan. Our students have also followed varied career paths following graduation, with some moving into the media, government service, thinktanks and also academic life. One of our objectives in offering Taiwan postgraduate courses is to encourage students to conduct further research on Taiwan in the future. There are some encouraging signs. At least three of our graduates went on to complete PhDs and are now teaching at top-ranking European institutes<sup>6</sup> and another three are conducting PhD research on Taiwan based at SOAS.<sup>7</sup>

The creation of the range of Taiwan studies courses appears to have stimulated similar developments at other European institutions. For instance, since 2005 there has been significant development in a series of in-depth Taiwan courses at Lyon, France under the direction of Professor Stephane Corcuff. In addition, a new interdisciplinary Taiwan course is due to open at the London School of Economics in 2008-9.

There is also currently discussion of the idea of a *European Taiwan studies MA* degree that would enable students to take advantage of the breadth of new Taiwan courses at various European institutions. With the broadest range of postgraduate Taiwan courses, SOAS will play a leading role if this project does come to fruition.

At the same time as the growth in the provision of Taiwan studies postgraduate courses there has been considerable growth in the number of PhD projects focusing on Taiwan related subjects at European institutions. This encouraging trend has been visible from the large number of PhD students applying to join the European Association of Taiwan Studies conference each year. With its unrivalled team of Taiwan experts, SOAS has been the leading provider of PhD supervision on Taiwan research projects. Currently there are at least fifteen doctoral students at SOAS working on Taiwan related subjects, with greatest concentration in the politics, economics, history and Chinese departments.

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<sup>6</sup> These graduates are now at Madrid, Nottingham and Leiden Universities.

<sup>7</sup> One in the politics Department, one in the Economics Department and one in the History Department.

The final Taiwan teaching project that SOAS is conducting is the *European Taiwan Studies Teaching Programme*. This is a collaborative project between SOAS, Heidelberg, Tübingen and Edinburgh Universities to develop Taiwan studies in Europe. The programme has two major components. Firstly, outstanding Taiwanese scholars are invited to give lectures and short intensive courses at the four participating universities. The first installment of this programme came in the summer of 2007 when Professors Mei Chia-ling (National Taiwan University) and Chang Lung-chih (Academia Sinica) visited Europe. At SOAS this was conducted in the form of the *First SOAS Taiwan Studies Summer School* on July 12-13, 2007. This involved short courses on Taiwan literature and history and a research training session for postgraduate students conducting research on Taiwan. In order to generate wider interest, this summer school was open to postgraduate students from any UK institution and in the future we plan to make it also available to French based students too. The second component involves staff from the SOAS Taiwan studies team visiting the participating German universities to teach intensive courses on Taiwan. Thus in 2008 Professor Robert Ash will travel to Germany to teach on Taiwan's economic development.

#### 4. Taiwan studies academic events

Along with teaching, the second priority for the School's Taiwan Programme has been organizing Taiwan academic events. These can be divided into four major categories: (1) Regular term-time Centre of Taiwan Studies Seminars (2) Policy relevant roundtables, (3) International collaborative Taiwan conferences, (4) European Association of Taiwan Studies conferences.

4.1. Centre of Taiwan Studies Seminar Series. Since 2003 the Programme has tended to run at least four-five Taiwan seminars per term. These are mainly small-scale seminars lasting between an hour and a half and two hours. They are an opportunity for established and new Taiwan scholars to present their research to the broad London based Taiwan studies community. Over the last five year these seminars have been invaluable for Europe based PhD students working on Taiwan to give presentations on their research and gain feedback from their peers.

4.2. Policy relevant Roundtables. In addition to the more academic focused seminar series we also run regular policy relevant events for a broader audience that tend to attract attention from the media and diplomatic circles. For instance we have held a series of roundtables on Taiwan's elections, in which members of the European election observer group report on their visits to Taiwan.

4.3. International Taiwan studies conferences. Since 2000 we have organized six international Taiwan studies conferences. These events have a number of features in common. Firstly, we attempt to co-organize these with other leading Taiwan studies centres. For instance, in 2005 we ran a conference on the First Chen Shui-bian Administration in conjunction with the Harvard Workshop on Taiwan Studies. Secondly, we attempt to get a balance between Europe, US and Taiwan based scholars in each of these events. Thirdly, these conferences are usually small scale invitation only events that are focused around a central theme, with the objective of producing a book or journal special edition publication. Below in Table 1, I have listed the six international conferences organized to date. The table reveals the range of themes that our conferences have addressed. Although the majority of the conferences have focused on Taiwan's history, economics and politics, the most recent conference on Culture and the State in Taiwan reflects our attempt to broaden our research scope.

Table 1: SOAS International Taiwan studies conferences 2000-2008

Year	Conference Title	Areas Represented	Collaborative Institution	Publication Project
2000	<i>Taiwan as a Development Model for the Twenty-first Century</i>	Europe, Taiwan, United States		Completed
2002	<i>The Political Economy of the Republic of China</i>	Europe, Taiwan, United States		Pending
2005	<i>First Chen Shui-bian Administration</i>	Europe, Taiwan, United States	Harvard	In production
2005	<i>Taiwan's Political Parties</i>	Europe, Taiwan, United States	Chungcheng	Completed
2007	<i>Taiwan's Democracy and Future: Economic and Political Challenges</i>	Europe, Taiwan, United States	Georgia Tech	Pending
2008	<i>Culture and the State in Taiwan</i>	Europe, Taiwan,	Chengda, Tsinghua,	Under discussion

		United States		
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4.4. Perhaps the project that the Centre of Taiwan Studies is most proud of is its creation of a European Association of Taiwan Studies (EATS) and its annual conference. Although this project had been discussed for a number of years it did not get off the ground until 2004.

The first conference was held in London in March 2004. This has now become an annual event that is the most important date in the European Taiwan studies calendar. These are large scale events with between 35 and 40 conference papers presented and can attract audiences of two hundred. The conference offers new and established Taiwan scholars the opportunity to meet in Europe, present their own research and learn about their peers Taiwan research and teaching projects. Each spring at the EATS conference, much of the discussion regarding continent-wide Taiwan studies collaboration takes place.

Each conference is co-organized by SOAS and another Taiwan studies centre. The second conference, in 2005 was co-organized with the Taiwan Research Institute in Bochum, Germany, the third conference was run in 2006 with the French Taiwan Studies Research Group in Paris, in 2007 it was co-organized with the Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, Stockholm University, Sweden. In 2008 it will be co-organized with Charles University and the European office of the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation in Prague, Czech Republic. The aim of holding the conference in a different country each year and working together with local Taiwan studies centres is to promote the development of Taiwan studies in other European countries. Thus we are especially pleased to see how the French Taiwan studies research group has developed following the experience of running the 2006 Paris conference. Since 2006 there have been an increasing number of Taiwan research seminars held in Marseilles, Paris and Lyon and also the establishment of new Taiwan courses in Lyon and Paris. Moreover, the growth in interest in Taiwan studies in Eastern Europe explains the decision to hold the 2008 conference in Prague. Information and most past papers can be found at the EATS pages of the SOAS Taiwan Studies website.

Over time EATS has developed from a conference solely administered by SOAS into a highly institutionalized association. In the 2006 conference in Paris an executive board was elected and a constitution was ratified by the assembly. Now the preparations for the conferences are conducted by the elected board. Moreover, the selection of accepted papers is also conducted through a secret ballot of the executive board members.

The next two tables give a picture both of the development of EATS but also European Taiwan studies. Table 2 shows the number of abstracts received and accepted in each of the five EATS conferences. The steady growth in the number of submitted abstracts shows not only that awareness of the EATS conference is on the rise but also reflects the increasing numbers of researchers that are conducting both doctoral and post-doctoral research on Taiwan. Up to the present we have managed to maintain a rough 50:50 balance in the numbers of PhD students and faculty members presenting papers at the conferences. Therefore over time the event has become an invaluable arena for new and upcoming researchers to develop their research projects on Taiwan.

Nevertheless we have only gradually raised the numbers of accepted papers. This is partly due to funding constraints but also in order to maintain high standards in the quality of accepted papers. The quality of research presented is reflected in the fact that already three publication projects have been completed from EATS conferences and numerous individual EATS papers have been later published in revised form in journals and edited volumes.

With the rise in the number of postgraduate Taiwan studies courses in Europe there has been a corresponding increase in the number of Masters dissertations written on Taiwan. In order to support these students' research EATS established a Master student's panel in the 2007 conference. This enables Master students to gain valuable feedback on how to develop their research projects from the leading European Taiwan studies scholars.

Table 2 EATS Abstracts Received and Accepted

EATS Conference	Number of Abstract Submissions	Number of Accepted Papers
2004 London	50	33
2005 Bochum	103	35
2006 Paris	88	32
2007 Stockholm	108	36
2008 Prague	150	42

Table 3: Origin of EATS Accepted Papers

	UK	FR	GER	BEL/ NED	SCA	S.EU	E.EUR	TAI	OTH
2004	16	4	8	1	4	0	0	0	1
2005	13	5	6	1	2	2	1	2	3
2006	12	5	4	1	3	1	1	3	1
2007	16	3	1	6	0	2	5	1	1
2008	12	7	6	0	0	2	4	8	3

Next Table 3 gives a picture of the regional development of European Taiwan studies by showing the institutional location of accepted abstracts from the first five EATS conferences. Firstly, we can see that the UK remains the country, with the most researchers working on Taiwan. In fact, there is a disparity between the number of UK submissions and accepted papers, making it comparatively difficult for UK scholars to join the conference. On average about 65% of abstract submissions come from UK institutions, while UK submissions usually only make up about 40% of accepted papers. Secondly, we can see that Taiwan studies remains strong in a number of core countries, particularly where we previously held the conference in France and Germany. We also can note a growth in interest in Taiwan in Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland and the Czech Republic. The relatively small number of Taiwan and US based scholars joining the conference may seem surprising to readers. This is partly due to the long-standing EATS objective of giving priority to submissions from Europe based scholars in order to stimulate Taiwan studies throughout the continent.

##### 5. Institutional Cooperation

As mentioned earlier, one of the key objectives of the SOAS Centre of Taiwan Studies is to promote institutional cooperation among Taiwan studies centres in Europe, the US and Taiwan. In addition to the collaborative international conferences and teaching projects described above, we also see scope for broader institutional collaboration. For instance, we have joined joint research projects with Taiwan's Chungcheng University (2004-5) and also Academia Sinica (2006). In 2007 SOAS signed a Memorandum of Understanding with National Taiwan University and hope to sign a similar agreement with National Chengchi University in the near future. By also incorporating our European partners in these collaborative projects, we hope to strengthen Europe's Taiwan studies environment. For instance, in 2007 we received funding from Taiwan's Ministry of Education for a project on Taiwan in the 1950s involving SOAS, Belgium's Leuven University and National Chengchi University.

Similarly we are currently working on a new project on Hokkien teaching with Heidelberg and National Taiwan University.

## 6. Promoting Taiwan Studies Publications

Our final major contribution to the development of European Taiwan studies has been in promoting publication projects. As mentioned above, one of our objectives in running Taiwan studies conferences is to lay the foundations for important publications. Below Table 4 lists the details of the four completed conference publication projects that have been directed by members of the Centre.

Table 4: Completed SOAS Taiwan studies conference publication projects

Publication Title	Publisher and date of publication	Editors	Conference
<i>Taiwan's KMT and DPP Eras: A Comparison</i>	<i>China Perspectives</i> (2004)	Dafydd Fell & Chang Bi-yu (SOAS)	2004 EATS
<i>What has Changed? Taiwan's KMT and DPP Eras in Comparative Perspective</i>	Harrasowitz (2006)	Dafydd Fell, Chang Bi-yu and Henning Klöter (Bochum)	2004/2005 EATS
<i>Inter-Party Competition in Taiwan: Two Decades of Change and Continuity</i>	<i>East Asia</i> (2006)	Dafydd Fell and Wu Chung-li (Chungcheng)	2005 Taiwanese Political Parties Conference
<i>Taiwan as a Development Model for the Twenty-first Century</i>	Routledge (2007)	Robert Ash and Megan Greene (SOAS)	2000 Taiwan as a Development Model for the Twenty-first Century

Although Europe lagged behind the US in publishing Taiwan research until the 1990s, the picture is radically different today. There are now two Taiwan studies book series based in Europe: (1) the Harrasowitz *Studia formosiana* series in Germany, (2)

Routledge *Taiwan Research series*. Already two EATS conference projects have been published in the Harrassowitz series. The new Routledge series was only approved in late 2007 and is centred on the SOAS Centre of Taiwan Studies, with Dafydd Fell as the series editor. We hope that in the future this series will be the forum for outstanding new research on Taiwan to reach a wider audience.

## 7. Future Challenges for European Taiwan Studies

Although European Taiwan studies have undoubtedly made enormous progress over the last eight years, I would like to end on a more cautious note by adding a few thoughts on some of the future challenges for the field.

A critical factor in the rapid growth in Taiwan studies has of course been the generous funding support from Taiwan, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation. Without this support much of the developments listed in this report would just not have been possible. Nevertheless, as most of these funding projects have been short-term, they have made long-term planning problematic.

The case of the Taiwan Research Institute at Bochum reveals the problems posed by short-term funding. As once the support from Taiwan dried up the Institute at Bochum gradually ceased to operate. In a short time, Bochum went from one of Europe's leading Taiwan studies centres to little more than a website. This also leads on to another serious challenge, that of staff retention. As funding is often short-term, it is hard to retain outstanding faculty members. Thus following the demise of the Bochum Institute the key members of staff were unable to find long-term positions in Europe and are now both currently teaching in Taiwan.

It is natural that the Taiwanese funders hope these projects can become self-sufficient through alternative sources of funding. For European universities this often means recruiting full fee paying overseas students. Nevertheless, attracting students to come to Europe to study Taiwan requires considerable time and marketing efforts. Thus far European universities have had more success recruiting students for PhD programmes focusing on Taiwan than MA students.

A final challenge is to raise the levels of the institutionalization of the Taiwan studies programmes. Perhaps, on this issue one of the few success stories is the institutionalization of the EATS. However, the majority of European programmes are over reliant on the efforts of one or two enthusiastic individuals. This means that once

the crucial figure leaves the university or even just goes on sabbatical, a project can collapse. For instance, once the key promoters of Taiwan studies activities at Nottingham University left the Taiwan related courses and seminars soon disappeared.

To find out more about the numerous Taiwan studies projects discussed in this report, please see our website [www.soas.ac.uk/taiwanstudies](http://www.soas.ac.uk/taiwanstudies)