

International Multiple Degrees: Mission, Infrastructure and Challenges

Da Hsuan Feng
Senior Executive Vice President
National Cheng Kung University

馮達旋

國立成功大學

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Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to thank the organizers of this conference from National Cheng-Chi University (國立政治大學) for its invitation to be one of the panel speakers of this issue.

Ever since I parachuted into NCKU eight months ago, I do not believe that there has been a single working day that would go by where at least someone not mentioned to me, or discussed with me, about how NCKU must be “globalized.”

Quite by serendipity, just yesterday, I received an email from my good friend, a distinguished alumnus of NCKU and Senior Program Manager of US’ National Science Foundation Dr. Ken Chong (張建平) an NSF Tokyo Regional Office report, basically stating that there is now an aggressive Japanese national policy to “internationalize” Japanese universities.

I took a look at what was reported and I realized that much of the report was about dual degrees (undergraduate and graduate) between Japanese universities and North American and European universities. By the way, “Europe” of course includes United Kingdom, whose 120 higher education institutions are very interested, in fact quite aggressive, in establishing close relations with Asia’s elite universities.

Similar and proactive efforts are on going in South Korea and Mainland China (985 and 211 projects.) Of course, our neighbors, Singapore and Hong Kong are known to be exceedingly proactive in this effort. For example there is a joint LLM or Master of Law program between Singapore's NUS and NYU Law Schools.

What seems to be common in all these programs is that the dual degrees are almost always between an Asian university and a university in either North American or European universities.

Let me give you a couple of sample data points which I was able to accumulate in the past months about NCKU.

First, I learned that my doctorate alma mater, the University of Minnesota, is discussing a dual engineering degree program with NCKU's EE department.

Second, we have a dual degree program with Polytechnic University in Brooklyn, New York.

Third, one of my former neighboring university in Texas, Texas Tech University, has just completed establishing a dual degree program with NCKU's engineering school.

Fourth, there is now a 2-3 degree program between NCKU and Case Western Reserve University and last I heard, 2 students from NCKU are studying at that university. Also, as far as I know, no students from Case Western Reserve University come to NCKU.

Fifth, we have just entered into a dual degree agreement with the University of Milano in Italy.

Sixth, we have just completed, just as several other universities in Taiwan, a dual degree program with Temple University in Philadelphia.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, NCKU is not an exception either. All our counterparts are from North America and Europe.

It seems to me that I as a senior administrator of NCKU, I need to ask three questions.

- (1) Is there a policy within NCKU to target ONLY North American and European universities as dual degree partners?
- (2) Do dual degree programs constitute an important and fundamental component of NCKU's globalization mission?
- (3) Should we confine our dual degree programs only to North American and European universities?

Answer to question 1: This is an easy question to answer and it is 非也, or not at all. As far as I can surmise, there is no "policy" *per se* within NCKU which states that NCKU intends only to work with universities in North America and Europe. By the same token, there is no evidence as far as I can tell that only universities in those two regions want to work with NCKU. I suspect this is generically true for all universities within Taiwan. To be frank, for NCKU at least, the real reason is because all the dual degree programs were usually initiated by NCKU faculty members, as they should be. The genesis was usually research centric. Hence, since a large fraction of our faculty received their graduate education from North American universities, and a smaller number from European universities, it is no wonder that their global connections are usually with these two regions of the world. For example, our interaction with Texas Tech University is primarily instigated by a very distinguished faculty member in that university who happens to be an NCKU alumnus. The same is true with Polytechnic University, whose former President David Chang is also an alumnus. I dare say that if we do not have such inside champions, our interactions with these universities would in all likely not happen.

Answer to question 2: This is a harder question. It is hard at various levels and some are already discussed at length in this conference.

- First is economics. Can our students and can NCKU afford to have such programs? For example, we all know that price-tag in private universities and out-of-state tuition of state universities in North American are beyond reach to most Taiwan students and their families. Even with a drop of 15% in the currency exchange between NTD and USD, the price tag is still a tall barrier. So, it doesn't matter how intellectually exciting is the program, if we cannot find a way to alleviate the economic burden on the students and/or on the universities, I believe that there are significant challenges for such programs to grow in a robust manner. If these challenges are so

overwhelming, then we probably should not expect that the programs can fulfill the “globalization” mission.

- Second is the deeper reason of intellectual underpinnings. I have noticed although they are not exclusive, most of our dual degree programs do have some science and technology flavor. An interesting question regarding this flavor, at least in my mind, is as follows. In the last several decades, Asian Pacific universities research capabilities and qualities in science and technology have significantly improved. By sheer accident, just yesterday, at NCKU, we heard a beautiful lecture on nearly A-Z about biomolecules by the Vice President of Academia Sinica, Academic Andrew H.-J. Wang. I dare say that the work carried out by Academic Wang and his team is as good as the best in the world. And Academic Wang is only the tip of the iceberg of the hundreds of thousands of scientists and engineers throughout Asia Pacific. While there is no doubt that one many of the leading science and technology institutions on earth are still dotting North America and Europe landscape, the absolute necessity of working with the science and technology communities in those regions are diminishing. This makes, in my opinion, the dual degrees that are science and technology based less attractive. In addition, as science and technology in Asia Pacific universities continue to improve, and surely they will in the coming years, the attractiveness will diminish further. However, I believe that dual degree programs should not be merely increasing science and technology knowledge. To me, the primary purpose of these programs is no longer simply to increase the scientific and technological knowledge, but really to increase and deepen multicultural understanding and respect between people. In the 21st century, when understanding between people is so critical for world peace, these programs should be viewed in this dimension.

Answer to Question 3: This question is, in my mind, the fundamental question. Indeed, since renaissance in the 15th century, where European universities first dominate for the first 350 years. It is very interesting that 1642, 1643 and 1644 are three very significant years. 1644 is the year China’s Qing dynasty began. 1643 is the year Isaac Newton was born and 1642 was when Galileo died. Qing Dynasty of course signaled the downturn of Asian science and technology, while Newton and Galileo signaled the rise of the Western way of intellectual growth. By the 19th century, European universities were the absolute envy of the world.

WWI and WWII in the first half of the 20th century changed all that. The devastation of Europe literally lifted the absolute best minds of Europe, and the best example was of course Albert Einstein, and “parachute them” in North America universities. Thus, within a short span of 50 years universities in that continent to be the envy of the world.

Then in the last half of the 20th century, and in the 21st century, the world “flattened,” as Tom Friedman of New York Times would say. One of the most spectacular global transformations of this flattening process, in my mind, is the rise of the Asian economy, and that is South Asia and Asia Pacific. With this rise, one of the most important spin-offs must be the rise, in quality and number, of Asian universities.

Asia universities began to raise their heads in the world of higher education. It is for this reason that I believe while we absolutely should and must continue our strong, robust and sustainable interactions with our sister universities throughout Europe and North America, we also have the duty and strong incentives today to work closely with our neighbors, from Japan to ASEAN to Australia/New Zealand.

I am especially excited that NCKU is driving the SATU, or Southeast and South Asia and Taiwan Universities President Forum. This forum could be an important platform for our Asian interactions.

Finally, as someone who parachuted into NCKU 8 months ago, I am awed by Taiwan’s transformation, intellectual and economic. I am not a political analyst, nor do I have the ability to gaze into a crystal ball, but I am sure that our interactions with Mainland China, which shares our language and culture, are entering into a new era. To this end, universities in Taiwan, who should and must be the intellectual and economic engines of Taiwan, must have a sustainable and dynamic overall strategy to face this new era. To this end, would not the issue we are talking about here of crossing geographical boundaries educational system, such as dual degrees with Mainland China, be one of the most important steps we can take?

As someone who spent nearly all his academic and corporate career in North America, and having deep connections there, and someone who maintains his deep connection to his cultural heritage, I am excited, enthusiastic and optimistic

about the transformation of Asian universities. The days where Asian universities are playing the role of “scientific catch up,” seems to me is no longer the only driving force for interactions with the outside world. It is time we take a much broader view of this interaction.

I believe that the best days of Asian universities are yet to come. One way to achieve the “best days” would be for us to work and collaborate closely with each other, leveraging our complementary intellectual and economic strengths

Thank you so much for your attention.