

## Making room for foreign professors

April 15, 2012 The China Post By Daniel J. Bauer

Celebrity business leader and Acer Group founder Stan Shih weighed in recently with a response to the concern of Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam about brain drain and laws that restrict the recruitment of foreign nationals in Taiwan. At the moment, less than 1% of Taiwan's workforce is foreign.

Shih said the benefits of foreign talent in Taiwan's business world could be worth up to 1,000 times the cost. He wants the Council of Labor Affairs to cook up new recipes to attract "international talent" in a variety of fields (CP 4-8-12 p. 12).

News stories like that do not generally push me into deeper thought. I've never been a businessman or, heaven help us, a CEO. In fact, I feel like the 90 pound weakling on the beach in the old comic book ads when business issues stick their heads in my face.

Just yesterday, however, I sat in a hall with three hundred colleagues and heard our university president make a dramatic call for more "internationalization" on our campus. A key part of preparing students to compete in today's world, he argued, is attracting more foreign students and hiring more "international" talent.

As if by accident, the speaker who followed him on the stage was a colleague and personal friend of mine, a priest ("shen-fu") from Poland who was recently promoted to the office of university vice-president. (My university has three vice-presidents, each with clearly different spheres of influence.) So, I thought, there we have it: internationalization before our own eyes.

Our president hopes that soon more and more foreigners with sparkling Ph.Ds after their names will find full time positions among us.

Some of what follows may appear to be an exercise in crepe-hanging. I do not mean it to be. There are however important hurdles to get over if Taiwan's universities are to be widely populated with professors from abroad.

Unless foreign colleagues enjoy the blessings of a local spouse or family connections, are in the thick of a love affair with Mandarin or Taiwanese language, or for some reason are deeply committed to our local people, it is hard to imagine most of them will feel forever happy in our academic world.

It is challenging enough to live one's life as a stranger in a strange land, let alone face (in my view) unwise

and unreasonable regulations for academic promotion within six years (or else lose your job). At the same time, many new faculty additions at schools like mine find it neither palatable nor easy to agree to added duties in night departments or special programs. Like their local colleagues, with or without sterling Mandarin, these "lao wai" must also co-administer departments on time-consuming committees.

I am able to tap into a God-fatherliness that is rooted in my calling and spiritual life. I don't mind then being an all but surrogate parent for a number of my students. But many European and American colleagues chomp at the bit when weekend time or hours useful for research during the week are snatched from their hands in exchange for mandatory service as counselors, pushing and pulling young people into adulthood. I do not know, but suspect that local colleagues may feel less stressed than "lao wai" when cast into roles that are more personal than academic. Soft and not so soft demands to be something akin to pinch-hit moms and dads and baby-sitters can grate particularly on foreign faculty members.

Fairness dictates that all members of a university community carry their own weight. I am not asking for privileges for foreign faculty members. Thousands of Taiwanese citizens are walking our local streets with hard-earned doctorates to their credit, but they are unable to land teaching jobs, largely because of our shrinking student population and hiring freezes across the land. Who has the stomach for a grand scale recruiting of fresh new foreigners?

Like my university president (and, I suspect, Mr. Shih of Acer), I too want our students to be more exposed than ever to that big world off campus. At the same time, I believe we have a few more miles to go on this question before we can sleep. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

## **Talking Point**

- 1) Do you find "foreign professors" rather much the same as your teachers who are Taiwanese / Chinese, or somewhat different? How are they the same, or how different?
- 2) Foreign students are more common now at Fu Jen and gradually foreign professors may grow in number. Do you have any especially interesting experience with foreigners at Fu Jen?
- 3) The writer in some ways suggests in this column that Taiwanese college students are 'mature' or 'not mature' in different ways than foreign students may be. This may demand more patience or 'fatherly' or 'motherly' care from professors. Do you ever get the feeling that some of your teachers in a way are another Mom or Dad for you? Describe this feeling.