

Honor the Memory of Dr. John N. Hawkins (1944-2020)

Chuing Prudence Chou (周祝瑛)

Professor, National Chengchi University (NCCU)

In recent years, growing animosity between China and the United States not only caused economic hardships, but also affected cultural, educational, and scholarly exchanges between both countries. In particular, research resources and educational programs between US and Chinese universities began to dwindle. Nevertheless, the United States is still a leading country in education where China studies emerged relatively early. Since the 1980s, when China allowed her citizens to study abroad, tens of thousands of students and visiting scholars from China enrolled into prestigious universities in the United States for academic knowledge and exchange. Many of them later remained in the US and continued to study China, thus helping the discipline flourish. Those who promoted this trend of moving to the United States to study China were US-based professors who were advising Chinese students in the United States. US universities have provided rigorous training, which promoted the Western tradition of engaging in Socratic dialogue between students and teachers, and training students to be sensitive to research questions, social construction, and research methodology (informed by the professor's concern with changes in our world). All of these endeavors enabled Ph.D. students, who also work as research assistants or tutors, to acquire better problem solving and independent learning skills. Although some US experts on China furnished keen insights on other developing countries, US scholarship on China was often marred by myth and prejudice. Some scholars even equated Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), with Western left-wing movements. Nonetheless, some scholars studied China objectively and neutrally, along with some solid knowledge about Taiwan via their constant advisor-advisee relationship with Taiwanese students in the US. One such scholar is Professor John N. Hawkins (1944–2020) from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). A well-known and well-mannered sinologist, Dr. Hawkins served as the director of International Studies and Overseas Programs (ISOP) at UCLA and engaged in long-term efforts to boost academic exchange between the United States and East Asian countries, such as China, Japan, and South Korea. In the mid-1980s, he began supervising and assisting countless international students and visiting scholars from China and Taiwan. He provided guidance on issues related to cross-strait relations, education, and social change in a global context. After his retirement, he promoted various academic exchanges with Asian countries/areas, such as Taiwan and Japan, through the East–West Center at the University of Hawaii. His life bears testament to warming China–US–Taiwan relations over the past few decades.

The young Hawkins's life was full of extraordinary encounters in China. During the early period of the Cultural Revolution, he visited many cities in China and witnessed the social movement in full swing. As a foreigner, he encountered obstacles on the way home and was even forced to chant "Long live Chairman Mao" on his homebound train. After returning to the United States, he was subject to a surprise check by security personnel, and his passport was seized. Later, Professor Hawkins furthered his studies at Vanderbilt University and completed a doctoral dissertation on China while being detained in the United States. In 1974, two years before the end of the Cultural Revolution, he published his first book "Mao Tse-tung and Education: His Thoughts and Teachings" (1974, Shoe String Pr Inc.), the cover being a group photo that he took with Mao Zedong himself. What made it such a valuable book was it being one of the very first in the United States on how Chinese leaders educated people with regard to Communist thought. In addition, Hawkins also continued to conduct research on education and social changes in China. He strived to expand and strengthen exchange programs between US higher education and various institutions in East Asian countries while working at UCLA. In addition, he also served as a well-known chief editor of the Comparative Education Review in the United States. During his more than 30 years of teaching at UCLA, he mentored countless students and scholars from all around the world, who then went on to serve in various academic and governmental positions across the globe. In doing so, Professor Hawkins was instrumental in UCLA becoming a crucial scholarly hub for US research on education in China, Taiwan and other East Asian countries.

Similar to other China experts of the baby boomer generation, Professor Hawkins was born in the mid-1940s and grew up in the United States during the 1960 Civil Rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement. Having experienced the Cultural Revolution firsthand, he dissuaded doctoral students who were determined to go to China for fieldwork when the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests occurred. Professor Hawkins also assisted numerous Chinese students in completing their studies and finding employment, including persuading some Taiwanese advisees not to conduct any field study in China during that time. In other words, Professor Hawkins also paid great attention to the development of Taiwan, with an emphasis on cross-strait educational exchange. For example, he vigorously promoted one of the largest publishing houses, such as Palgrave Macmillian, in the United States to publish books on Taiwan education and her reform policies in the global era, pioneering a rare and unique example in the western world. Hawkins never advocated for comparative studies between China and Taiwan which, in his mind, are not comparable in many ways. Despite this, Hawkins promoted an overall better

understanding of Taiwan studies as he viewed Taiwan as a distinctive place culturally and educationally among greater Chinese societies. He earnestly admitted the neglect of Taiwan studies in international (especially US-based) scholarship on other Chinese societies, which predominantly focused on the mainland. In doing so, Hawkins sought to foster international cooperation in scholarship on Taiwan to strengthen the island's academic visibility. His efforts reminded the world that scholarship must be attuned and empathetic to issues outside the mainstream. This political even-handedness is rare among most China experts, which is worth mentioning. Hawkins worked tirelessly even after his retirement. He visited central Taiwan yearly to attend and host educational leadership training seminars, while inviting Taiwanese scholars to participate in many international research projects.

According to research by the author and by Professor Harry Harding of the University of Virginia, US-based research on China is related not only to general trends but also to the research focus of China experts. In general terms, Chinese studies developed in the following phases (Chou, 1994; Harding, 1994; Hawkins, 2015):

1. In the 1960s, US-based research moved away from conventional sinology and toward Chinese Studies focusing on the Chinese Communist Party and its governance.
2. In the 1970s, US scholars adopted various perspectives in critical theory to analyze political changes in China.
3. In the 1980s, US researchers were allowed to enter China to conduct fieldwork because of the formal establishment of China–United States relations.
4. From the 1990s to early 2000s, US scholars began to research China's drastic economic growth and social transformation with support from the influx of Chinese students studying in the United States keen to both countries culturally and academically.
5. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the US government readjusted funding allocation away from research on East Asia to research on the Middle East. Furthermore, developments in US–China relations informed a shift toward studying economics and higher education exchanges rather than political studies of China. In addition, Taiwan studies began to take place with a more active and visible role via program establishment at several leading universities in an attempt to distinguish itself from being overshadowed by Chinese studies in the US and the rest of the western

world (Jerzewski & Hashmi, 2021/4/19).

At present, most China experts from the post-World War II period have retired or passed away. The passing of Professor John N. Hawkins of UCLA in June of 2020 is indeed a great loss for the US academe. Nonetheless, like many of his contemporaries, Hawkins left us with his exemplary scholarly accomplishments and with many students that he nurtured, who are today flourishing in China, Taiwan, the United States, and beyond.

As the Chinese proverb says, “With the sages long gone, their paragons of erudition remain” (哲人日已遠，典型在夙昔), Hawkins will be remembered and loved.

Reference

- Chou, Chuing P. (1994). *A report of Chinese studies in the US*. Unpublished government report. Taiwan.
- Harding, Harry (1994). *The evolution of American scholarship on contemporary China*. In Shambaugh, D. (ed.), *American studies of contemporary China*. N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe. 14-42.
- Hawkins, John, N. (2015). *A conversation with the author*.
- Jerzewski, Marcin & Hashmi, Sana (2021, April 19). *Time to take Taiwan studies beyond America*. The Diplomat. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/time-to-take-taiwan-studies-beyond-america/>

Appendix A. Hawkins' profile

Education

B.A. with Honors in Asian Studies at the University of Hawaii

M.A. in East Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia

Ph.D. in East Asian Studies and Comparative Education from Vanderbilt University, George Peabody College

Research interests

Education and social change in East Asian countries, rural education, policy studies, and his last research project on contesting globalization and Internationalization of higher education with professor Deane E. Neubauer and Ka Ho Mok.

(For more information, please visit at <https://www.international.ucla.edu/institute/hawkins>.)

