





Going Home,



International students clearly benefit the U.S. economy. But what is the future value of the education these students receive as measured by the contributions they make when they return home? *IE* spotlights three former international students who have impacted their home countries and the international community.

BY CHRISTOPHER CONNELL

Giving Back

IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS BRING MONEY into U.S. higher education institutions. In 2006–2007, for instance, the estimate was that those students spent \$14.5 billion on tuition, fees and living expenses at the campuses captured in the Institute of International Education's *Open Doors* report. It is considered a very conservative estimate of the impact that these nearly 600,000 students have on the U.S. economy. If the experts applied a multiplier—as economists and chambers of commerce often do in calculating how dollars ripple through a local economy—it would be much larger.

But there is yet a larger figure that no one has yet figured out how to calculate: What is the future value of the education that these international students receive especially as measured by the contributions they make when they return home? And, even harder, what is the value to the United States of having spawned so many future international leaders in the sciences, academe, business and government?

The State Department keeps a roster of international leaders that lists only those former international students who have risen to the highest levels of leadership in their countries. It includes King Abdullah Bin Al-Hussein of Jordan (Georgetown University), Wangari Maathai, the environmentalist and Nobel Peace Prize winner from Kenya (University of Pittsburgh), Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, president of the Philippines (Georgetown) and, of course, former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, a Ghanaian who earned degrees at both Macalester College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The list includes more than 315 presidents, prime ministers and senior cabinet officials from 105 countries who proudly claim nearly a hundred U.S. colleges and universities—from Harvard and UCLA to Grand Valley State and the Colorado School of Mines—as their alma maters. And this is only the tip of an iceberg that literally includes tens of thousands of leading men and women of science, the arts, commerce and charities the world over.

"Talk about citizen diplomacy," observes Terri E. Givens, vice provost for international programs at the University of Texas at Austin. "If we can stay competitive in higher education in attracting the top international students, those are going to be the leaders of tomorrow." The United States still draws many of the best and brightest from around the globe, but there is increasing competition from other developed countries that want those same students, and often make it easier for them to stay and work after graduation, Givens said.

Peter Briggs, director of the Office for International Students and Scholars at Michigan State University, said, "The bonds that are forged during graduate training create mutual opportunities over generations Like the balloon that can never return to its original shape once inflated, those who have trained abroad are permanently changed. The global perspective one gains from significant time abroad becomes a part of one's character."

James Skelly, the academic director for BCA (formerly Brethren Colleges Abroad), the independent operator of study abroad programs in Europe, Asia and Latin America, said that the students who come to the United States for college or advanced study benefit from the greater emphasis here on "independent individual inquiry" than is commonly found in their universities back home. "This in turn encourages innovation, entrepreneurship, and a general culture of reflective risk-taking regardless of" what field the student ends up working in, Skelly said. These students also end up with "a more nuanced perspective about the American people and U.S. policy abroad," he said.

To shed light on what studying in the United States meant for international alumni from diverse walks of life, *International Educator* interviewed three individuals who attended college or graduate school here over the past four decades: a successful Hong Kong businesswoman who became deeply involved in hospital reform and now serves on both Hong Kong's Legislative Council and the National People's Congress in Beijing; a world class geoscientist who returned to his native Taiwan late in his career to help it better understand the ocean that surrounds Taiwan; and a public administrator from Afghanistan who left an international organization to found a non-government organization that is now teaching village leaders the fundamentals of democracy and civic life.

These are their stories.

Looking for Ways to Set Off ‘Sparks’ Between Peoples and Cultures

SOPHIE LEUNG LAU YAU-FUN’S FIRST JOB after earning a bachelor’s degree from the University of Illinois was at a medical research start-up where she applied her skills in carrying out transfusion experiments. The job paid only half the going rate for a new college grad in 1969, but it was interesting and brought in enough for the newlywed to help support the family as her husband, Brian—a fellow international student from Hong Kong—went on to earn a master’s degree in engineering in Urbana-Champaign. It also whetted her interest in medicine and using technology to improve care.

The young couple eventually returned to the then-British crown colony with their Illinois degrees and an infant daughter and set about building what became the textile conglomerate Bay Apparel Ltd. and the Golden Emblem Investment Company. By the early 1980s Sophie Leung—busy businesswoman and mother of three—was also making time for a growing list of civic engagements, including serving as chairman of the board of Yan Chai Hospital.

Once a small, private convalescent hospital, Yan Chai was growing into what would become a 700-bed, public general hospital. Its growth mirrored the population boom in Hong Kong in the decades after the Second World War, which had placed heavy demands on and stirred wide dissatisfaction with Hong Kong’s disjointed health facilities.

The role of hospital board members traditionally was to raise funds and leave management to the hospital physicians. But Sophie Leung became a forceful advocate for shaking up hospital management and improving patient care. She convinced the ministry of health to assign her a staff assistant and prepared a critique of the way the hospital was being run. Her analysis anticipated some of the changes recommended by an efficiency expert brought in by the government, and she wound up serving for a dozen years on the Hospital Authority created in 1990 to manage 40 Hong Kong hospitals—half of them, like Yan Chai, brought under public control for the first time. Leung also pressed for open wards and more humane treatment of psychiatric patients.

Challenge the medical establishment in Hong Kong was in keeping with the character of a woman whose first foray into business came at age 15 when she took over the commercial correspondence for her father’s struggling fabric factory and, using English skills she was learning in school, helped land new customers in England and Cyprus.

Both successful capitalists and committed residents of Hong Kong, Sophie and Brian Leung gave no thought of leaving as the 1996 transfer of sovereignty to the communist People’s Republic of China approached. There was a lot of uncertainty back then about the future, she said, “but Hong Kong people are very bold people, very adventurous in many ways. We decided to stick it out with the rest of Hong Kong to see how it goes.”



▲ **Sophie Leung Lau Yau-fun,**
B.A., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (1969)

They did more than stick it out. In 1997 she was elected to the Hong Kong legislative council, and in 2002 became a deputy of the National People’s Congress in Beijing as well. She recently was re-elected to a second five-year term. Her husband, in addition to business duties, chairs the Hong Kong Football Association.

Sophie Leung was born in Macau and endured hardships as a young child who spent several years in a Guangdong Province village on the mainland. She remembers vividly being placed as an unlettered 9-year-old in a kindergarten class, unable even to speak the local dialect of Chinese. “I was sitting at the very back of the class in a chair I could hardly fit my bottom into,” she said. After a few months, she was placed in third grade, and she wound up skipping several more before heading to the United States for college in 1965. By then, an older brother was already embarked on earning a Ph.D. in physics at the University of Chicago.

Although she had not taken algebra or geometry in high school, she wound up majoring in math and science at the University of Illinois. She is a loyal supporter of her alma mater. An endowed scholarship in the Department of Computer and Electrical Engineering bears the Leungs’ name. She hosts numerous University of Illinois alumni events in Hong Kong, and serves as a primary contact for the University in realms of government, education and industry in Hong Kong. The university bestowed its highest honor

for alumni, The Madhuri and Jagdish N. Sheth International Alumni Award for Exceptional Achievement, on her in May 2006.

Today she is involved in education reform in Hong Kong, especially efforts to provide more opportunities for students who do not fare well in a system that is geared to the needs of the brightest. “I find so many young people are totally lost in the current education system,” not just in Hong Kong or China, but the world over, she said. “We pour a lot of resources into education reform, but we don’t seem to save any more students from losing their way. Maybe we have not found the right DNA for education reform yet.”

Leung, in a telephone interview, said she brings “a new voice, a pragmatic one” to the National People’s Congress and tries in all her activities to help the people of Hong Kong and rest of China understand the importance of globalization and “connecting with the rest of the world.”

Even back in her student days at the University of Illinois, she would read Chinese literature for insights into what Chinese people thought and how they lived their lives. She was less concerned about the political situation in China under Mao Zedong because she believed “nothing lasts” and she was convinced that China was simply “too massive” to be an isolated, one-party state like the former Soviet Union Russia or Cuba. “No one can continuously block out information or block it completely away from the rest of the world or from free thinking,” she said. Much has changed in China in the past decade, especially with the embrace of free markets. Leung said this has happened “faster than I anticipated.”

Asked to explain her loyalty to the University of Illinois, Leung spoke of her attachment to the school and to the Midwest (“the Midwest people are very genuine”) and said she is still amazed at the quality of the flagship Illinois university. “We felt very attached to it. Some might say because we started our family there, we had our first child there, but it’s not that way. It’s because I respect it as an educational institution and one of the very best of its kind, and it’s sustainability to remain that. That’s what I respect it for.”

She now sees herself “as a bridge between the University of Illinois and this part of the world I would like (the university) to expand its wings a little bit further out so that others can feel its strength and its beauty as well.” Perhaps it could help bring knowledge of the life sciences—one of its strengths—to China and its 1.3 billion people, she suggested.

She said the university built an impressive collection of Asian antiques in part by starting with some “humble” pieces that she loaned 20 years ago. She sees that as a model for other collaborations, “people coming to work together from different cultures collection, and sparking off something new.” That is how and why she got so deeply involved in community work. “I decided my own background was not enough to enrich me, so maybe I needed to poke into other people’s backgrounds and learn from them,” she said. “The same is true for a nation of people. That is my firm belief.”



▲ **Mohammad Nasib,**
Slippery Rock University, B.A. (1992)

A Passion for Public Service Leads Back to Afghanistan

IN 1989, as the Soviet Union finally ended its occupation of Afghanistan after ten years of brutal warfare, the first of some 50 promising young Afghan students were brought to the United States to finish their college education or pursue graduate degrees. They were called Weber Scholars, after Del Weber, then-Chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, whose campus had long standing ties with Afghanistan and Kabul University. During its three years of existence, the scholarships were funded jointly by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the more than dozen institutions across the United States that agreed to host the Weber Scholars. Mohammad Nasib, who had been living with his family as refugees in Pakistan, was one of those young Afghan scholars, and he wound up at Slippery Rock University outside Pittsburgh.

Today Nasib is the celebrated founder and managing director of the Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan (WADAN), a nongovernmental organization with offices in a more than a dozen Afghan cities and towns that helps teach tribal leaders and students about building a democracy. WADAN and its founder have received several awards, including one of the 2005 Democracy Awards presented at a U.S. Senate ceremony by the National Endowment for Democracy. In May 2006, by decree of President Hamid Karzai, WADAN received one of the country’s highest honors, the Honorable Ghazi Mir Masjadi Khan Medal, for its grassroots de-

mocracy work. That medal was presented to Nasib by the former king, Mohammad Zahir Shah, in a ceremony in Kabul.

And that fall, Nasib was feted at his alma mater, Slippery Rock, which bestowed on the 1992 graduate its first Distinguished International Alumni Award. Nasib, who once dreamed of studying medicine, found his true calling in public administration. His career has included stints working for the United Nations and the UN Development Program before he started WADAN in 2002 after U.S. and allied forces ousted the Taliban.

Nasib was born in 1965 in Kodikhel village in Shirzad district—near Tora Bora—in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, along the border with Pakistan. His father was a farmer and village leader who fled the country in 1979 soon after communists came to power. Living as refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan, the son finished high school and was working initially as an accountant and later as a coordinator for a Belgian aid organization called SOS/PG. Belgium. He also worked as a part-time English instructor at an International Rescue Committee school where he himself had been among the first graduates. Two decades later he can remember the TOEFL score that qualified him for the Weber scholarship: 547.

The 24-year-old at first found it hard going when thrust onto an American campus. "When the professors distributed their syllabus, I thought, 'Oh, God, how will I be able to do all these?'"

he recalled. The diligent, studious Nasib left nothing to chance. "I initially did not understand the accents of some of my professors so I used to record their lectures. ... I would listen to them not only once, maybe two or three times sometimes." He also sought out professors during their office hours, and made a habit of reading ahead in the textbooks. "That's how I proceeded," he said. "In a little while I was adjusted."

Nasib graduated in December 1992 *summa cum laude* with a bachelor of science in public administration and international comparative politics. Apart from one B, his grades were straight As. Nasib drank up knowledge outside the classroom, too, volunteering with Kids That Care, a charity started by a political science professor, Alice Kaiser-Drobney. "I was inspired by that work as well as by an internship I did with Evans City borough, a small municipality 20 miles outside Slippery Rock.

Pamela J. Frigot, now the director of International Services at Slippery Rock, was Nasib's adviser. She recalls him as "very dedicated, very serious. He wanted to make the most of the opportunities that were presented to him." She also described Nasib as "truly a remarkable man, extremely modest, but well deserving of every honor he's gotten." Larry Cobb, a retired professor of public administration who supervised Nasib's internship in Evans City, said, "He was quite a student, but also had a practical bent. He did an incredibly fine job interning with the borough manager."

After graduation Nasib returned home to rejoin his family—he and wife Jamila now have five children—and wound up working on education efforts for the U.N. Drug Control Program. "Initially we worked across the border from Pakistan, but in 1997 I went and worked in Nangarhar province, my home province." He fled the country in late 2000 after receiving death threats and was granted political asylum in the United States.

"When I got my asylum I went back to Pakistan and worked for the UN Development Program, but in Pakistan, not in Afghanistan, because my life was in danger during the Taliban. Then 9/11 happened and the whole thing changed," he said. He returned to Afghanistan after the installation of Hamid Karzai as president. He first worked for the World Bank, but soon decided he could do more good by creating a grassroots organization to work on civic education, peace building and democracy education as well as drug treatment and rehabilitation and reducing the demand for poppy growing.

Today WADAN has a staff of 300, a budget of \$2 million and offices in 13 locations. "We started very small and then we grew up," he said. "We educate local leaders in the villages who are the most important people because these are the people who are trusted by their constituencies in those villages."

"Most of these people are illiterate, so you really have to have a one-to-one interaction with them," he said. "Our trainers are going and talking and interacting with them intensively for three days, and then asking these local leaders to train their constituents, in their villages and community centers and the mosques—everywhere they can."

"Mostly people welcomed us because those trainers are most-

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Chao-Shing Lee atop a mountain in east Taiwan with 16 students to watch a dynamite blast after midnight as part of a study to learn more about the forces still pushing up Taiwan's relatively young mountains.



ly from those areas and those are people that are trusted by the community,” Nasib said. “Sometimes people get a little bit uneasy about the word ‘democracy,’ because it had negative connotations in Afghanistan. They think democracy (means) unlimited freedom and sometimes they think democracy is a threat to religious values. And this was compounded by the communists, who were also calling themselves democrats.” But village leaders warmed up to what WADAN’s trainers were teaching.

Nasib goes back and forth between Afghanistan and Fremont, California, where his family lives. His two eldest children are in college; they spent last summer as WADAN volunteers in Afghanistan.

To grow the organization’s capacity, WADAN has sent several young Afghans to study in the United States, including Ahmad Javid, a sophomore majoring in business management and political science at Slippery Rock. The university is also providing tuition relief.

Javid—he prefers to be called by that name—is the only Afghan now attending Slippery Rock, and he is constantly reminded what a large swath Nasib cut as an undergraduate. “He’s an extraordinary individual. I have no words to describe him,” said Javid. He is certain of one thing: “Upon my graduation, I would like to get back to my country and just help in the rebuilding process, help my people.”

That is a goal Nasib holds out for his own children as well. The war in Afghanistan is now in its seventh year and the situation on the ground has recently become more dangerous. Nasib remains upbeat. “Overall I am optimistic that if we are determined to work with each other and try to understand each other, we can find common solutions to some of these problems, in Afghanistan as well as around the world. It needs cooperation and coordination and understanding of each other’s culture and respect for each other.”

He is confident that WADAN will be part of the solution, far into the future, “beyond my lifetime. I want this organization to be there for as long as it’s needed.”

▲ Chao-Shing Lee, Ph.D.

Texas A&M University, Marine Geophysics (1983)

Making Up for the Missed Years Back Home in Taiwan

IN ANCIENT ROME, earthquakes were regarded as a sign of the gods’ disfavor with the ruler or a portent of worse things to come. But when a deadly temblor shook Taiwan in the middle of the night on September 21, 1999, marine geophysicist Chao-Shing Lee read a very different message in the movement of the island’s tectonic plates.

Lee had only recently returned to his native land after more than two decades of study, research and achievement with universities and scientific institutes in the United States and Australia. The huge Chi-Chi earthquake—7.6 on the Richter scale—claimed 2,400 lives and destroyed tens of thousands of homes. “It was a shock to me, of course,” he recalled. But it also convinced the scientist that “this is the place I need to stay. This is my time to give back.”

Lee earned a bachelor of science degree in oceanography in 1968 at the University of Chinese Culture and landed a position as a research assistant at the oceanographic institute at National Taiwan University. Oceanographic study in Taiwan was in its infancy and that job “really opened my eyes.”

It also opened doors, for American marine scientists were conducting research in the waters off Taiwan and inviting staff from the fledgling institute to accompany them aboard their research vessels. Lee spent a year in West Germany on a fellowship and in 1976 moved with his wife and two young children to pursue graduate studies at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, part of the University of California, San Diego, in La Jolla, California, and then at Texas A&M University, where he received a Ph.D. in marine geophysics in 1983.

While there are no sea breezes in College Station, Lee speaks warmly about both his U.S. alma maters. Scripps had been coordinat-

ing a Deep Sea Drilling Program, but when Lee's mentor and the project shifted to Texas A&M, so did the young marine scientist from Taiwan. From Texas the Ocean Drilling Program dispatched scientific teams on research vessels to every ocean on the planet to drill more than 2,000 holes deep into the Earth's crust.

"Think about it: to drill a hole into the ocean and understand the geological evolution, the volcanoes, the hot springs That's why I describe myself as really lucky to have those kind of big opportunities. I would never have been able to receive that back home in Taiwan, where we were just beginning to study marine science," said Lee.

"All the U.S. institutions provided lots of opportunity and opened my mind, allowed me to do more independent thinking. That affected my character and the work I'm doing now," said Lee. In 2005 Lee became the tenth recipient of the Texas A&M University Outstanding International Alumnus Award. The Lees' third child was born in College Station, which adds to his fondness for his years as an Aggie. "College Station is quite a good study area," he said, and "the football at Texas A&M is quite exciting."

After a year of postdoctoral work, Lee moved to Australia where he led the offshore geophysical mapping of Australia's continental shelf and represented Australia in launching a widening array of cooperative research projects with China, the Philippines and other countries in Southeast Asia. On three occasions he received distinguished achievement awards from Canberra for contributions to these scientific exchanges.

But in 1998, the 50-year-old scientist decided it was time to return home and devote the next phase of his career to helping expand Taiwan's capacity in geophysics. He and his wife made this journey alone; their three children had grown to adulthood in Australia and elected to stay there. One is pharmacist, another an accountant and the third a heart doctor.

When Lee's cellphone rang for this interview, the scientist was at a rest stop in the mountains of east Taiwan with 16 students en route to watch a dynamite blast after midnight as part of a study to learn more about the forces still pushing up Taiwan's relatively young mountains. In all, some 300 professors and students were making the trek to watch from a safe distance the blast of 3½ tons of dynamite.

Moreover, the seismic activity was being monitored by 200 seismometers across the island, 10 in the ocean, and 50 more on the Chinese mainland. It was just the latest in a string of blasts as part of an international study called TAIGER—the Taiwan Integrated Geodynamics Research project—that may help reveal where earthquakes are more likely to occur and help the scientists precisely map the mountains' contour miles beneath the ocean bed.



WEB EXTRA!

Follow the journey of another extraordinary former international student, Isabelle Magnin, a 1999 graduate of San Diego State University who connects international business with international development to make a difference worldwide from her native country of Switzerland at www.nafsa.org/webextra.

Lee said that back in his student days, "plate tectonics did not exist in Taiwan. There was no such talk in the geoscientific community at that time. Now I'm taking my students up into the mountain and trying to explain to them how the crust was formed, how mountain was built up. This is very exciting."

Upon his return a decade ago, Lee joined the faculty of the National Taiwan Ocean University and later served as dean. From 2002 to 2006 he was also the science adviser to the President of Taiwan. He used his influence in that position to "try to change the thinking of Taiwan."

Taiwan, which is about the size of Maryland and Delaware, lies off the coast of China's Fujian province. It was to Taiwan that General Chiang Kai-shek and his defeated Kuomintang army retreated after their defeat by Mao

Zedong and his communist forces in 1949. The People's Republic of China maintains that Taiwan is part of its territory. The PRC replaced Taiwan as China's sole representative at the United Nations in 1971, and President Richard M. Nixon's visit to China in 1972 eventually led to U.S. recognition of the government in Beijing and the end of official ties with Taiwan. However, the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act authorized quasi-diplomatic relations and arm sales to Taiwan.

Taiwan has prospered by embracing democracy and free markets. Lee has sought to turn his country's gaze from the mainland to the ocean that surrounds Taiwan.

"Taiwan is an ocean-state country. Taiwan is surrounded by the ocean. In the past, or in the past government, their thinking, their eyes only focused on the mainland," he said. "Not much effort (was put) into the ocean. In fact, the ocean is very, very important for Taiwan" as a future source of energy, fisheries and other resources. The big earthquake in 1999 showed the importance of understanding "our geohazards," said Lee.

Lee recently turned 60 and there is mandatory retirement at 65 in Taiwan, even for star professors. His wife Chin-Chi is studying at a Bible college and thinking of missionary work, perhaps in Australia or the Philippines. "Several years ago she told me that in the first 30-some years of our marriage, she always followed me no matter where I go, to U.S., to Australia and now back to Taiwan. She said that after I retire, I have to go with her to help spread the gospel."

But for now, it's full speed ahead with Lee's efforts to understand the forces that shake the earth. Lee tells colleagues he missed 22 years while off studying and working in the U.S. and Australia, "so now I try to compensate, to make it up."

IE

CHRISTOPHER CONNELL is a veteran Washington, D.C. journalist and former assistant bureau chief of the Associated Press.