

Conversations with Academics

◀—SECRETS OF—▶  
PROMISING PHD SCHOLARS  
REVEALED!



Catheryn Khoo-Lattimore, PhD

**Conversations with Academics**

**Secrets of  
Promising PhD Scholars  
Revealed!**

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## Chapter 5

### The Thai Computer Scientist



Name : Chutisant Kerdvibulvech  
PhD Status : Enrolled in 2007, Graduated in 2009  
PhD is from : Keio University, Japan  
PhD Thesis : Vision-based Framework for Hand  
Motion Capturing of Guitar Players

**Area(s) of Research**

Computer Science, Computer Engineering.

**Significant Awards & Achievement**

- Full and unconditional scholarship from Keio University (Fujiwara Foundation), 2007-2009
- PhD research was awarded the Keio Leading-edge Laboratory of Science and Technology
- Second Best Presenter Award from International Workshop on Electronic & Information Engineering at Xian Jiaotong University, China, 2008
- Researcher of CREST, the world's first technology to display 3D contents into free space, at Japan's National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation in Tokyo (2008-2009) - this research project was broadcast on NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) TV Program in Japan and also on National Geographic TV Program throughout the world.
- Talk in IEEE Virtual Reality International Conference (VRIC) was translated simultaneously from English into French.

**Publications**

Chutisant presented at fourteen international conferences and published four journal articles during his relatively short doctoral candidature of 2.5 years

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## The Conversation

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**1. Why did you take up the PhD?**

It is true that a PhD cannot guarantee the maximization of my success, but at least it guarantees the minimization of my failure. I know the most successful people do not necessarily hold a PhD but it is also undeniable that a PhD can open much more opportunities for my prosperity and my success. I believe that education is the best insurance policy to prepare young men and women for whatever happens in the future. In a globalized world where jobs can be shipped wherever there is an internet connection, education is a prerequisite for success. The higher education you receive, the higher success you will gain

**2. Were you on a PhD scholarship? If so, how did you find out about the scholarship?**

I received a scholarship from Fujiwara Foundation of Keio University for my Master's degree and my PhD. My scholarship really covered everything during my life in Japan. There was no condition attached to the offer. During my last undergraduate year in Thailand, I knew one of my professors who graduated from Japan, and he suggested that I apply for this scholarship. I did and secured it!

**3. How did you choose the university to do your PhD in?**

I decided based on two criteria. First is the university's reputation, and the second is the supervisors.

**4. How did you choose your supervisor?**

I read tons of papers in the area I wanted to research, and I finally found out my supervisor's research, which is really interesting.

**5. Then, what happened? Did you contact him?**

So I decided to choose him as my potential supervisor. During the Keio's application process, it was a requirement to be interviewed by several committees including the potential supervisor. I talked and discussed my research interests and proposal with him via telephone and email and finally I was blessed with the opportunity to study and research with him.

**6. Did you have to work on/write the applications?**

Yes, I had to write the applications, which included everything about my educational background, my research plans and my possible future work after graduation.

**7. What inspired you to study the topic you did?**

The topics of computer vision and augmented reality have recently become more and more popular, as they are flexible for many applications in real life. So that is why I chose this research area. Anyway, when you start your PhD, one of the most difficult

tasks is to find the topic for your dissertation. But I believe, if you read a lot of papers related to your research, you will get an idea, and know if your idea is new and innovative enough. So the inspiration is inextricably linked to what you read. The more that you read, the more inspiration you will have.

**8. Did you manage to secure any research funding?**

In my case, my supervisor managed this kind of thing, and we received some quite huge funding support from Microsoft and the Japanese Government.

**9. How long did it take you to identify your research questions/problem statement?**

It took me around half a year. As I said, the best way to identify the problem statement is to read, read and read. If you do not really read the papers, you cannot really find out your new concepts, or your new ideas.

**10. How long did it take you to write the thesis? How did you do it?**

To me, it was almost all of my time during my PhD journey. I think the thesis should be constantly written all the time. And when you believe that you are almost ready for your final defense (say 6 months before defense), you just gather and integrate information, analyze and synthesize all of your ideas, algorithms and results to complete the final version of your thesis. In Japanese, they have a word, called Kaizen, which philosophically means continuous improvement. If you want to achieve your PhD

thesis, you cannot make it within one day. Rather, you have to continuously improve and develop yourself day-by-day to reach your goal.

**11. How did you prepare for your oral defense?**

Keep practicing. I practised with my senior PhD colleagues and they gave some constructive advice, which helped improve my defense. I also had many chances to present at international conferences. Although they are not exactly the same, I was trained for the defense already. I think the thing to remember is not to worry too much, and just do your best.

**12. If you have published, what were your strategies for publications?**

I had my supervisor to help me. He is much more professionally experienced than I was. I prepared my draft paper for my supervisor and give him time prior to the deadline. My supervisor's comments were undoubtedly essential and surely strengthened my paper for publications.

**13. Have you published any book chapters?**

Although I have not published book chapters, I am serving as a reviewer of book chapters on Ubiquitous Multimedia and Mobile Agents, published by IGI Global, United States. I was contacted via my email. They said they need an expert to serve as a reviewer of this book, and I said yes.

**14. Do you know how they found you?**

I guess they must have found me from my website and my published papers.

**15. Did you network during your PhD years? If so, where and how did you network?**

My network came from the fact that I usually went to international conferences in many countries. And I can meet various researchers and professors in different parts of the world, from Santiago to Xian, from Paris to Tokyo. So we can share our mutual knowledge, our research interest and our new ideas. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the world is fundamentally linked, we can share knowledge together and benefit one another. When a professor from Harvard or Keio proposes a new research idea, it pushes others to innovate. When a professor in Thailand can collaborate with colleagues at Stanford or Oxford, all of us are enriched. And I believe that is good not only for collaborators of a specific research, but for all of us.

**16. So what did you do exactly?**

During any conference, after each presentation, if I was interested in the presenter's work, I would ask the presenter questions. Also during the coffee break, I would approach people and ask more about their research, their academic lifestyle or even general questions. From my own experience, I am always happy when I have many researchers talk to me during conferences. The conversation topics do not have to be only

research but anything such as your culture, your future job and your academic lifestyle.

I still remember that during one of my conference trips in France, I was approached by a PhD student from France. He not only asked me about my research but also my PhD lifestyle, as the Japanese style is quite different from that of the French. So we shared and learned from our different perspectives of studying for a PhD, our different ways of thinking, and also our different cultures. These kinds of topics made me feel relaxed in our conversation and helped me to network smoothly. Sometimes talking about research alone is not so helpful for networking. Also, do not forget to bring your business cards when attending a conference.

**17. What were the biggest challenges you had throughout your PhD journey?**

I believe that the biggest challenge for me was how to say to myself not to lose HOPE during the PhD journey. I think the reason why most of those who give up on their PhD study is not because they are not well-qualified, but because they lose their hope and their motivation. It is my fundamental belief that the PhD journey has never been one of shortcuts. It is not the path for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of having a fancy resume. Rather, it is hard work and the challenge lies in motivating oneself throughout the candidature so as not to lose hope and give up. I guess there is a reason why a PhD is the highest form of degree one can attain in education.

**18. Did you ever think of giving up?**

I can say 'no', but it is not because I did not face any problems during my PhD. In fact, I did face many problems as others have I am sure. However, I have never run away from those problems. I worked my best and fought my hardest. This effort made the impossible possible. I am a never-give-up person and I think that has probably made me stand out from the crowd.

**19. How did you motivate yourself?**

When I was in tough times, I usually told myself that there are so many people who have had much more difficult times than me. You know some people who are not able to hear anything, some who cannot speak or even see anything. But they still can fight for their life. When you are stuck in a bad situation, look to see people who are more unfortunate than you and you will be thankful of what you have. Then, during good times, observe people who are doing better to motivate yourself to attain or do the same.

Interestingly, when I was in tough times while pursuing my PhD, I always made a phone call to my father. He made me see that he is a type of never-give-up person, and I am his son, so I must be the same. And it really helped me a lot in not losing hope throughout my PhD journey. My debt to him is beyond measure. I love him so much, indeed.

**20. For you personally, what are the consequences of having completed the doctoral programme?**

The first thing, which cannot be denied is knowledge, deep technical knowledge in my field. But more importantly, the process of the PhD has trained me to become a hard worker, a systematic problem solver and an unyielding hoper. The PhD has also given me a unique status, and at the same time unique responsibilities. This is my privilege, and my burden.

**21. During your PhD years, what was your typical work week like?**

I personally prefer working at night. I started working in the afternoon until the early morning. I researched every weekday as well as on Saturdays. On Sunday, I love to travel across Japan, a country of rich culture, deep traditions and natural beauty.

**22. If there is ONE thing PhD scholars should not do, what would that be?**

I think it is to make your relationship with your supervisor bad. There is no doubt that a supervisor is very important for one's PhD life. When you disagree with your supervisor, you need to talk openly but compromisingly, frankly but respectfully, and then try to find a common ground.

**23. Did you receive any other non-academic assistance throughout the PhD?**

My family has played a very important role in my life, as well as during my PhD journey. I can say that I would not be standing

here today without the unyielding support of my family, especially my father. He has been an inspiration throughout my life.

**24. What do you think are things PhD scholars should absolutely do?**

I think PhD scholars should be well-scheduled and self-disciplined. They should set deadlines for themselves, deadlines for manuscript submission to journals and conferences, and then keep working hard to complete them before the deadlines.

## Chutisant's Specific Secrets

1. Know who your supporters are and look to them during tough times. Build your support system.
2. The more you read, the quicker you'll arrive at your research problem(s).
3. Write continuously.
4. You should talk to and maintain an open and honest relationship with your supervisors, particularly when disagreements arise.
5. Talk about things outside research when networking.
6. Set self-imposed deadlines for yourself.

## Catheryn's Call to Action

Given the independent nature of the PhD degree, you need to be disciplined or the PhD will not get done. When you're doing a PhD, there are no set timelines. Therefore, it is up to you to set your own. Also, break up a project or task into smaller parts and set deadlines for each of the small parts rather than setting one deadline for an entire project.

### What do you want to get done by the end of next month?

- by -----
- by -----
- by -----
- by -----

Check the boxes once you've achieved the task. Continue to do this all the time throughout your PhD.