

The SSCI Syndrome in Higher Education

A Local or Global Phenomenon

Chuing Prudence Chou (周祝瑛) (Ed.)



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The SSCI Syndrome in Higher Education

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The SSCI Syndrome in Higher Education

A Local or Global Phenomenon

Edited by

Chung Prudence Chou (周祝瑛)

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WHY THE SSCI SYNDROME IS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON?

Chuing Prudence Chou

A LOCAL OR GLOBAL PHENOMENON?

As a result of neoliberal ideology in the 1980s, a great deal of public investment in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and many other countries in Latin America, has consistently been allocated to the business and market sectors rather than the education sector. As a result, the practice of reducing government's role in so-called political responsibility led to the curbing of peoples' rights (Chou and Ching, 2012). Consequently, a sharp reduction in public budgets in many countries influenced not only social values and welfare system, but also educational quality. In particular, as the impact of globalization in higher education, many countries in East Asia started urging university reforms, whether in the form of mainland China's 211 project and 985 project, Korea's BK21 program, Taiwan's Five Years Five Top University Program, or Japan's National University of Administrative Corporation, all of which are responses to the process of globalization.

Along with the neo-liberal ideology which emphasizes market economy in higher education, the increasing importance of the competition in global university ranking has also influenced university autonomy, resulting in a paradigm shift in academic governance across the world. Many governments, such as those of Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Norway, Singapore, Switzerland, Taiwan, UK, etc., have introduced a range of strategies for benchmarking their leading universities to facilitate global competitiveness and international visibility. A major trend in the changing university governance is the emergence of a regulatory evaluation scheme for faculty research productivity, reflected by the striking features of the recent changing academic profile of publication norms and forms that go beyond the territories of traditional nation-states. In addition, with the world expansion of the higher education system in the last two decades, the maintenance of quality to meet the requirements for international competitiveness has become a critical issue for policy makers and universities.

In current academe, the definition of scholarship is often highly connected with academic publications (Boyer, 1990; Dirks, 1998). University rankings, public funding, and even prestige in certain discipline of studies are all interwoven with the quantity of research articles published in a certain types of journals and their

subsequent citations by later researchers (Anderson, Ronning, Vries, & Martinson, 2007; Keith, 1999).

Furthermore, the recent convenient accessibility of research references brought forth by the availability of the internet technology, has also ignited the evolution of academic work (Chambers, 2004). Instruments such as the Thomson Reuters' ISI Web of Science (WOS) website has also facilitated scholars' access to published articles of interest by replacing the conventional role of library (Thelwall, et.al., 2003).

As a result of this global context, the rise in emphasis on publications indexed in the Thomson Reuters' ISI citation database was clearly observed in Taiwan (Chou & Ching, 2012; Chu, 2009; Chen & Chien, 2009; Huang, 2004 & 2009; Kao & Pao, 2009; Chen & Qian, 2004; Thelwall, et al., 2003). The concept of publish or perish, which signals the importance of publishing research results, has also affected Taiwan's academe. In effect, academics are under pressure to publishing in peer-reviewed journals, preferably those included in the ISI citation indexes, such as the Science Citation Index (SCI), Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), or the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI). It is obvious that the number of publications indexed in the ISI citation database are critical from personal and institutional perspective, since these numbers are used as major criteria for research grant approvals, university rankings, tenure granting, rank promotion, over even government funding (Kao & Pao, 2009).

For example, since 2005, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan has introduced a series of university governance policies to enhance academic excellence in universities and has established a formal university evaluation policy to improve the competitiveness and international visibility of Taiwanese universities. In so doing, the government has legalized a clear link between evaluation results and public funding allocation. Research performance is now very much focused which is assessed mainly in terms of the number of articles published in journals indexed by SCI, SSCI, and A&HCI and in terms of citation rates and associated (such as impact) factors (Tien, 2007; Huang, Chang, & Chen, 2006). Therefore, evaluation on research performance has taken on an unprecedented quantitative dimension. Despite the efforts of concerned parties to encourage academic excellence in research, the above-mentioned quantitative evaluation indicators have led to bitter complaints from the humanities and social sciences whose research output has been devalued and ignored by the current quantitative indicators. The so-called SSCI- orientated-publication policy regardless of academic disciplines and cultural differences has aroused many controversies among higher education not only in Taiwan but also in many parts of the world.

ORIGIN OF THE ISSUE IN TAIWAN

The higher education system in Taiwan, similar to those in East Asia, has undergone an enormous transformation over the last two decades. Higher education has

interwoven its path with trends of globalization and localization, development of information communications technology, and a set of political, sociological, economic, and managerial changes. These changes altogether produce multifaceted influences on education in Taiwan.

In particular, the ideology of globalization and localization represent not only one of the driving policy agendas in Taiwan, but also the origin of higher education reforms over the last two decades in the island. Although even more importantly, it has generated a “Cross-straitization” trend relationship that seems to come between Taiwan-China, which will eventually drive education reforms to levels yet to be developed (Chou & Ching, 2012). It is also worth noting that Taiwan’s higher education overall development concurs with many countries that have also experienced great transformation owing to this globalization/localization divergence coupled with the impact of neo-liberal principles worldwide since the 1980s.

To be more specific, Taiwanese higher education was closely linked to economic development and was subject to government control before the 1980s. The government implemented rather strict control measures over both public and private institutions in terms of establishing new higher education institutes (HEIs); determining their size; appointing presidents, admissions, curriculum, and tuition. The addition of new universities was extremely limited. In 1984 when the average per capita income was only US\$4,000, Taiwan had 173,000 university students, only about 0.9 percent of the total population of 19 million (Chou & Wang, 2012). Higher education remained a means to cultivate elites in the country.

After late 1980s, the number of HEIs began to rise to meet the demands from globalization and domestic social and economic changes in Taiwan. Since the early 1990s, there was an unprecedented expansion in both in the number of HEIs and in the number of students. Consequently, the government’s public spending on higher education became relatively constrained. In order to control higher education quality, the government amended its University Law and set up the Executive Yuan Education Reform Commission (1994–1996) to launch a reform blueprint enabling universities to move down the road toward deregulation, decentralization, democracy, and internationalization. For example, the Universities Law as amended in 1994 transformed universities from being under the traditional centralized control of the Ministry of Education into more autonomous campus environments, reducing academic and administrative intervention in universities and moving toward more autonomy in terms of admissions, staffing, and tuition policies.

Meanwhile, as Taiwan’s government responded to public demands for more high schools and universities and for alleviation of the pressure for advancement, along with a demand to establish universities in local elections, by 2008 (with per capita income of US\$17,000 at the time), the number of university students had increased to 1.12 million, a 6.5-fold jump since 1984. The number of universities had increased to 148 (51 public and 97 private); adding in 15 vocational/technical colleges, the total was 163. By 2009, the total number of college and university students had reached nearly 1.34 million (including undergraduates, vocational/technical students, and

WHY THE SSCI SYNDROME IS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON?

graduate students), or 5.8 percent of Taiwan's entire population of 23 million people (MOE, 2011; Chou & Ching, 2012; Chou & Wang, 2012).

The rapid expansion of the higher education system also had some side effects, including an overly rapid upgrade of some vocational/technical colleges into universities, causing a decline in the quality of education. Although the government relaxed its controls over universities, it introduced market competition mechanisms that resulted in the uneven distribution of resources among public/private, and elite/non-elite HEIs, and causing aftereffects such as increased social stratification.

THE GLOBAL DILEMMA OF THE SSCI SYNDROME

There are primarily two reasons behind the pursuit of the world class university rankings. One is to acquire a superior position versus other higher education institutes in budgetary competition; the other is to make university more attractive to perspective students and faculty. Above all, the better faculty research performance, namely, the more publication in the above-mentioned journals, the more resources and social prestige universities will obtain in Taiwan.

One can easily relate to the global condition of the SSCI syndrome based on the insights from the case of Taiwan's academe. Examples drawn from the contributors' chapters in this book can provide evidence of the contradictions in the "indexization" of the notion of quality in universities. Some key issues which have global commonness are obvious and listed as follows:

- The implications of the hegemony of English;
- The conflict between the teaching and research roles of universities;
- The dilemmas of defining research performance outcomes and their measurement;
- The problem of research publication lacking local relevance when the priority is on high stake international journals.
- The overlooking of the value of book publication in humanities and social sciences.

In other words, the inability of Taiwanese academia to develop their own systematic knowledge required approaching major local issues. The formation of neo-academic hegemony and the further proliferation of academic factions have also become serious challenges to be confronted. Many of these dilemmas have created long lasting impacts on the nature of research which has impeded academic autonomy and university quality not limited to Taiwan. But why does this SSCI phenomenon continue to be rampant? Who contributed to this syndrome? Governments, market, or we, the academics?

LOCAL RESPONSE FOR FAIR PLAY

Unlike in Hong Kong, US and many other English-speaking societies, English is a foreign language to the majority of researchers in Taiwan. In order to participate

and survive in the international academic community, non-native English speakers need to strive for overcoming language obstacles and pros and cons in international journals. The legitimacy of English hegemony often ignores different voices from the peripheral, or non-English speaking world. This hegemony of the English language requires a different voice in paradigm shifts from local academic communities.

In addition, Taiwan's fairly even distribution of economic and academic resources is distinct from China and many other Asian counterparts where resources are not evenly accessible, and most higher education institutions (HEIs) lack the academic autonomy and financial resources. This is the reason why authors tend to correspond to displaying the case of Taiwan's SSCI issue to the world as an ideal testimony to observe how higher educational restructuring process can take place in response to the nature of market economy competition; and how Taiwan sets an example for its non-English speaking counterparts which have also undergone and therefore struggled with the bewildering courses of globalization and localization for the 21st century.

As Flowerdew (1999) suggested, English hegemony in scholarly publication has become rampant almost everywhere. Individual researchers should be encouraged to voice out their publication problems from the micro level. In this book, the authors attempt to relate researchers' dilemmas, strategies and impact of SSCI publications from a micro perspective, i.e., Taiwanese academic context, to the interplay between the micro and macro influences from the SSCI issue.

One typical example is that an on-line petition for collective action has been initiated by a group of Taiwanese university faculty since November, 2010. The petition intends to protest the argument with social action which calls for more diverse and reliable evaluation indicators in recognizing the research of different natures and disciplines while creating culturally responsive evaluation criteria for social sciences and humanities in academe (Chou, Lin, Chiu, 2013). With wide support from nearly three-thousand petitioners from academe, endorsement from public forums and research projects, and exposure from news and media, decision makers are petitioned to review and revise their previous higher education policy which has been criticized as favoritism of SSCI.

The book is one of the first case studies in this regard which attempts to demonstrate how the SSCI syndrome prevails based upon examples from Taiwan. It is hoped that this book will serve as a milestone to those are in the common condition and demand for more local voices heard by the international community.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

With these facts in mind, this book explores the evidence of the SSCI syndrome in Taiwan's academe. In this book, "SSCI" will refer to a general term rather than simply being the abbreviation for the name of the index.

First, Ka Ho Mok's "Promoting the global university in Taiwan: University governance reforms and academic reflections" critically examines major policies

introduced and strategies employed by the Taiwan government in improving university governance to compete with other leading higher educational institutions globally. The present chapter reports and analyzes findings generated from fieldwork conducted in Taiwan, with particular reference to examine how academics evaluate the impact of the recent university governance reforms on institutional autonomy and academic profession. The paper concludes that the academic profession in Taiwan and the rest of the Asian region is continually affected by the strong managerial governance and academics are under intensified pressure to benchmark the international practices in the race of global university ranking exercises.

Secondly, Huei Huang Wang's paper "The political economy of quantitative indexes for measuring academic performance" starts with the contextual factors behind such a divergence in measuring academic performance from political and economic perspective in Taiwan. Wang argues the rationale for a quantitative academic evaluation system lies in the need to control the restless academia in the process of rampant and factional democratization after 1990s. Compared with their counterparts in Japan and the U.S., Taiwanese academia have been characterized by factions and lacked the consensus of building systematic and integrated type of research capabilities with local and global features. Nevertheless, the peer-based review scheme or bibliometric methods, such as SSCI, for academic evaluation should not be connected with the question of how to reorient the direction of Taiwanese academic research so that they will become more relevant to solving local issues and more attractive to international audiences at the same time. The author provides a comprehensive discussion of policy debates over the measurement of academic performances in Taiwan. A cross-country comparison (between the U.S., Japan, and Taiwan) of academic governing structures and the relationship between these structures and the measurement of academic performance is also included.

Chan and Lee's "A difficult situation of higher education in Taiwan" indicates that education programs in Taiwan are inclined to be short-term-oriented thanks to the frequent political elections which thus lead to changes of administration and to vulnerability of any long-term programs. Consequently, quantitative criteria are widely employed in university faculty rank promotions, performance assessments, and in various program appraisals. However, this approach to fairness and objectivity conceals the subjective rationale of those who judge them. Today, quantifiable ranking system extends to universities as well as between countries to encourage competition. Universities which gear toward one-dimensional and single-scale ranking system undermine this aim of university diverse characteristics and educational goals. Universities nowadays adopt a solid class structure and as well as competition and elimination according to Social Darwinism. The so-called "Top performers" attract the greatest resources. This phenomenon of concentration of resources in elite groups has been radical in Taiwan and has gradually widened the social gap between classes. Higher education is making matters worse, particularly through the "Plan to Develop First-class Universities and Top-level Research Centers" (thereafter referred to as PDFURC) project, where the core philosophy

is against fairness and equity. Universities should be developed that emphasize different characteristics to replace the one-dimensional ranking structure, while providing subsidized education for disadvantaged groups could reduce the social gap. Support of academic freedom would promote a desire to pursue truth, kindness, and goodwill.

Shao-Wen Su addresses the issue “To be or not to be: Impacts of ‘I’ idolization” by conducting interviews with twenty Taiwanese faculty in humanities and social sciences, and reveals impacts of “I” Idolization in aspects such as creating academic discrimination of locality; degrading local journals and academic colony of native English-speaking countries; and accelerating academic stratification. The academic reward policy in Taiwan, following the quantitative, “point-tally” “I”-orientation evaluations, has promoted utilitarianism, academic capitalism and hierarchy that aggravate the social injustice and inequity.

This study echoes Gregory Ching’s paper on “ISI perceptions and hard facts: An empirical study from Taiwan” which provide readers with a unique outlook on how faculty and students perceived the role of ISI in Taiwan academe. The chapter concludes that the effects of the Thomson Reuters Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) are already deeply rooted in the entire Taiwan academe and its effects have caused both positive and negative implications. The most important factor in the various academic setting and activities is the *Number of publications indexed in ISI* and the *Number of publications indexed in Taiwan Citation Indexes*. While ISI still dominates the majority of the academic settings and activities, the role of *Google Scholar* and of *open access* journals is of great potential in striking a balance with the ISI dominance.

Cheng, Jacob, and Yang’s chapter “Reflections from the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) and its influence on education research in Taiwan” evaluates the quality of international journal publications and their impact on the field of education from global and local perspectives. The chapter juxtaposes the importance of the impact factor (IF) from ISI’s Journal Citation Record, the TSSCI Journal Citation Record, and Taiwan Scholars’ Evaluation Score to balance the authentic influence that SSCI journals add to the academic field of education in Taiwan. To incorporate the possible influence that all international journals have on the field of education in Taiwan, non-SSCI journals were also included and a formula created to measure their influence. The creation of a citation database for international education journals should be established specifically focused on the Taiwan context.

The privileged status of English in the international academic community seems to be impregnable and solid. Nevertheless, the majority of the Taiwanese researchers are speakers of English as a foreign language. NNES/EIL (NNES (non-native English speaking and English as an international language) scholars, are encouraged to self-align with the privileged discourse to participate in the international academic community to survive. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of hegemonic knowledge industry in English has resulted in diverse voice from the peripheral and inside

academic community which demanded respect of differences in research and publication.

Besides, Taiwan's fairly even distribution of economic and academic resources is distinct from that of China's, where resources are not as transparent and accessible. In "Problems, strategies, and impact of SSCI publication in English: Perceptions and negotiations of Taiwanese researchers," Yi-jun Liu testifies, based on her qualitative research study, that researchers who would like to minimize the non-discursive variables, such as availability of resources, but focus on language issues, the current academia of Taiwan can offer a more congruent and interesting research context.

With a strong determination to do better in these global ranking exercises, universities in Taiwan have attempted to restructure its university system and searched for new governance strategies in order to make its universities more competitive in the globalizing world.

As universities in Taiwan are increasingly subjected to the rationality of the series of interconnected discourses and practices that, in the West, have become known as 'the new higher education' (NHE), Wu and Bristow's "Perishing Confucius: An analysis of a rupture point in the discourse of Taiwanese 'new higher education'" provides a timely and interesting metaphor. In this chapter, Wu and Bristow approach the Taiwanese 3-I syndrome as a local embodiment of the NHE-driven "publish or perish" academic culture that is engulfing global academia. By comparing the discursive field of the Taiwanese higher education (HE) to its Western equivalent, the authors ask whether the existence of strong alternative discourses in Taiwan – such as those springing up around the person of Confucius as an academic role model in the Taiwanese HE sector – can act as an additional inventory of resistance that is lacking in the West but that can stop NHE becoming totalizing in Taiwan (and, potentially, East Asia)? An increased multi-way global dialogue about the NHE and its effects, such as the publish-or-perish culture, would be helpful in terms of evaluating the full weight of consequences of, as well as finding viable alternatives and mobilising more effective resistances to the 3-I phenomenon.

Chuing Prudence Chou's chapter "Has higher education lost its soul?" concludes the critique of SSCI syndrome by initiating public forums for Collective Action in Taiwan. In order to stop government agencies and academic research associations from using the SCI, SSCI, and EI as the best practice for academic research and public policy evaluation, a group of academics collectively urge colleagues to sign an on-line petition concerning the issues such as: stop using SSCI as the best practice for evaluation and funding purposes; urge government funding agencies to expand both the quantity and the variety of academic journals in the worldwide journal citation databases and give concordant weights to publications in social sciences and the humanities.

There is a need to foster a culture of social responsibility and academic professionalism and recognize the intellectual responsibility in producing culturally-

responsive research and academic practice. This requires the creation of culturally-responsive evaluation criteria for social sciences and humanities.

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ENDORSEMENTS

As Taiwan's higher education system, similar to that of some other countries, has been recently devastated by the SSCI-based quantitative evaluations of academic performance in terms of its adverse impacts on the balances between teaching vs. research; qualitative vs. quantitative evaluations; globally oriented, English vs. locally oriented, non-English publications; and publications in academic journals vs. books, *The SSCI Syndrome in Higher Education* is a long overdue study that offers a systematic, comprehensive coverage of the above-mentioned SSCI syndrome on the dynamics of Taiwan's academe. This book definitely helps fill an important gap in the literature on Taiwan's higher education system.

Tsung Chi
Professor of Politics, Occidental College

Prudence Chou's book addresses an academy on crisis caused by the ceaseless hype over university rankings. It further confirms that who comes out on top depends on who is doing the ranking. To save the heart and soul out of the Taiwanese academy, this book makes a cogent argument for culturally-responsive research in the social sciences and humanities.

Gerard A. Postiglione
Professor and Head, Division of Policy, Administration and
Social Sciences Director, Wah Ching Center of Research on Education in China,
The University of Hong Kong

A spectre is haunting almost all universities in the world, including Taiwan—the spectre of “indexization.” Academics, particularly social scientists are panting from the pressure of globally spread neoliberal ideology and market-based principles. Collegiality on campus in the good old days has declined, and managerialism gained power instead. Competitive funding and university rankings are excessively emphasized, and research results are required to be internationalized, i.e., published in English. Although this book is a case study of so-called SSCI syndrome in Taiwan, the problems and challenges as well as prescription contained here are common to all academics, especially those in the non-English speaking countries positioned as “peripheral.”

Yutaka Otsuka
Professor of Hiroshima University,
President of Japan Comparative Education Society

ENDORSEMENTS

The danger with SSCI syndrome is that it encourages social studies in nonwestern societies to dissociate themselves from local contexts, reflecting a particular view of what is claimed to be ‘universal’ that is informed only by the Western (especially English-speaking) world. It raises the question of what counts as ‘scholarship’ and defines what knowledge is and who may claim competence in it. This volume serves us well as a timely reminder of such a great danger.

Rui Yang

Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong

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As global competition from the world-class university rankings intensifies, more and more governments adopt university evaluation policies to enhance university quality. The use of SSCI index as one of the major academic performance indicators has not only increased the unequal distribution of resources between science and social sciences, but also widens the gap between research and society. My colleague, Professor Kai Ming Cheng from The University of Hong Kong, once indicated that Taiwan's academics in humanities and social sciences used to be the most vibrant group in the greater China area, who actively engaged in public policies and social issues for the betterment of Taiwanese people and society. But nowadays, young academics choose to stay in their study rooms to "produce" more SSCI papers at the expense of social relevancy in order to meet the requirement of evaluation criteria set by university and government. Today, academics in humanities and social sciences have refrained from assuming public intellectual roles, and their research topics have become deviant from local needs and book-writing has been no longer a priority due to the demand for publishing international journal articles. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy has been impeded thanks to the hegemony of publication and citations in SSCI journals.

For years, there have been calls from Taiwan to compile works of preceding issues to serve as collective efforts and testimony of the ongoing struggle and protest among academics in humanities and social sciences. I would like to give special thanks to all contributors in this book, and professors Tsung Chi, Ting -Ming Lai, Chilik Yu, Wu- Tien Wu, Kwang-Kuo Hwang, and Yun- Ru Chiu. My assistants, Pei-lun Lee and Kuo-Hui Fu, who have constantly devoted their insightful and assistance with the book project over the past years. Professor Allan Pitman and Mr. Michel Lokhorst have provided timely review comments to make this book possible. Above all, the unconditioned support and love from my family, Dr. Ying-yu, Hao, and Ying Chen and Chou Wan have helped me to break through all challenges in editing this book. Colleagues from the Department of Education at National Chengchi University (NCCU), Taiwan and University of Miami, US, provided me with generous information and support in the course of writing. The financial support from Fulbright Foundation and NCCU also deserves a special recognition.

ChuIng Prudence Chou (周祝瑛)
Akita, Japan
July 7, 2013

KA HO MOK

PROMOTING THE GLOBAL UNIVERSITY IN TAIWAN

*University Governance Reforms and Academic Reflections*¹

INTRODUCTION

The quest for “world-class universities” and the global university ranking have become increasingly prominent agendas affecting the way universities are governed. In order to better position universities in the globalized world, many national governments, policy makers, analysts of higher education across different parts of the globe have devoted far more attention, resources and energies to search for new governance and strategies in promoting university research with the intention to rank higher in the global university league tables (Mok and Wei, 2008). Realizing the importance of research and development in the knowledge-based economy, Mohrman, Ma and Baker (2008) have rightly argued that an Emerging Global Model (EGM) is developing in response to the growing pressures for the global competitiveness of universities across the world. As Altbach (2007, 3) has rightly suggested, “research universities have emerged on the policy agenda in many developing countries, especially larger nations that seek to compete Check quote in the global knowledge economy”. This article discusses how the Taiwan government has reformed its higher education governance and management style and what major strategies have been adopted to enhance its higher education’s global competitiveness. The first part of the article briefly presents a policy context for higher education reforms in Taiwan. The second part examines major reform strategies along the lines of incorporation/corporatization implemented in recent years, as well as discussing major strategies in promoting research excellence adopted by the Taiwan government. The third part presents academics’ critical evaluations and reflections on recent university governance reforms in Taiwan. The final part of the article compares the Taiwan experience with other Asian university systems dealing with similar challenges.

THE QUEST FOR WORLD-CLASS STATUS AND UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE REFORM

Economic, social and political developments in East Asian societies, as in other parts of the globe, have been increasingly influenced by the growing impact of globalization (Mok and James, 2005). No matter how we assess the impact of globalization, no one can deny that globalization is creating new potentials and

limits in education (Marginson, 1999). Hence modern governments have attempted to look beyond their national boundaries to identify good practices in improving the university governance (Crossley and Watson, 2003). With the strong intention to enhance their national competitiveness in the global market place, governments in different parts of the world have started comprehensive reviews of their higher education systems and made attempts to transform higher education governance and management styles. Realizing that the conventional model of 'state-oriented' and 'highly centralized' approaches may not be effective enough in governing higher education, many governments have tried to 'incorporate' or have introduced 'corporatization' and 'privatization' measures to run their state/national universities, believing that these transformations will make national universities more flexible and responsive to rapid socio-economic changes (Mok and Oba, 2007).

Intending to create more quality education for their citizens with only limited financial means, a growing number of national governments have started to change their paradigm of governance by adopting the doctrine of monetarism to replace Keynesianism (known as statist options) (Apple, 2000). Instead of being closely directed by the Ministry of Education or equivalent government administrative bodies, state universities in Asia are now required to become more proactive and dynamic in looking for their own financial resources. Like their Australian and British counterparts, universities in Asia are now under constant pressure to become more 'entrepreneurial' and to look for alternative funding sources from the market, strengthening their partnerships with industry and business (Mok, 2006; Marginson & Considine, 2000). In recent years, governments in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and Mainland China have started to review their education systems and different reform measures have been introduced to improve the overall education quality in order to enhance their competitiveness in the globalizing economy context (Mok, 2006; Welch, 2007; Morshidi, 2008).

The adoption of corporatization, incorporation and privatization in managing the university sector is part of the reinventing government project, especially when ideas and practices of neo-liberalism are becoming globally influential (Levidow, 2002; Marginson, 1997). Similar to many western countries, public management in many Asian states has been increasingly influenced by the ideas and practices of neo-liberalism, thus private sector management models are introduced to transform the way the public sector is managed and public services are delivered (Cheung, 2008). Trying to embrace the ideas and practices of neo-liberalism, the introduction of market forces and strategies in governing higher education, revitalizing the role of family and individuals and involving the private sector and other non-state actors in education delivery are becoming increasingly popular not only in Taiwan (Mok, 2006a; Tai, 2002; Song and Tai, 2006) but also in other parts of Asia (Mok, 2008; Morshidi and Abdul, 2008). This article sets out in this wider context of political economy to examine what major strategies that the Taiwan government has adopted in promoting better university governance. Let us now briefly discuss the policy context for higher education reforms in Taiwan.

THE CONTEXT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS IN TAIWAN

Prior to the reforms in the last two decades, Taiwan used to adopt a highly centralized system in governing its higher education system, because education was employed as an instrument to promote the official ideologies and maintain the political influence of the ruling party (Mok, 2000, Mok and Chan, 2008). Realizing the centralized governance model was no longer appropriate in running higher education, especially when the Taiwan society has to confront the increasingly competitive global world, the government in Taiwan has begun to search for new university governance and look for new management strategies to make its higher education system more responsive and efficient in addressing the ever changing world. It is against this context that higher education governance in Taiwan has been going through processes of decentralization, privatization, and corporatization, particularly as the Taiwan government is particularly concerned with how to run its higher education system in a more efficient and effective way (Mok, 2006a, Mok and Chan, 2008). With a strong conviction to promote her international competitiveness in the knowledge-based economy, the Taiwan government has also adhered to the ideas of neo-liberalism and adopted market-oriented practices and strategies to run its higher education system in a more efficient and effective manner.

In the last few decades, Taiwan has gone through significant changes which resulted from the country's democratization and economic reforms (Lo and Weng, 2005). In order to position its universities higher in the global university rankings, the government in Taiwan has attempted to assert its international status through introducing different reform strategies to drive universities in Taiwan to perform better in research (Chen and Lo, 2007). Realizing the important role of higher education in enhancing global competitiveness, the Taiwan government has tried to concentrate funding on a selected few universities in order to turn them into leading research / academic institutions which could compete globally (Deem, Mok and Lucas, 2008). Having briefly outlined the context for higher education reforms in Taiwan, let us now focus on the major university reform strategies.

UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE CHANGE AND MANAGEMENT REFORM

Since the late 1980s, the number of private higher education institutions in Taiwan had increased tremendously while the number of public institutions grew steadily for the last decade. The official statistics indicate that the private higher education sector has grown sevenfold since the 1950s in Taiwan (MOE, Taiwan, 2001). As stipulated in the *Overall Proposal on Education* in 1994 and the *White Paper for University Education* in 2001, the Taiwan government openly recognized the importance of the private sector in providing higher education (Council on Education Reform, Executive Yuan, 1995a; 1995b; MOE, Taiwan, 2001). In 1999, among 88 universities and colleges, 46 were private institutions while 42 were public institutions (Lo and Tai, 2003, Table 8.3). Since then, the provision of the private sector has exceeded that

of the public sector in higher education. The significant increase in private higher education in Taiwan clearly shows that the changing role of the Taiwanese state has transformed from a higher education 'provider' to become a 'facilitator' (Lo and Tai, 2003). Other than provision, the private sector has also expanded its role in university administration and curriculum design. For university administration, the *Private Education Institutes Law and Implementation Plan of Cooperation between Social Organizations and Educational Institutes* have granted autonomy to private institutions, particularly in school management, by strengthening the role and authority of the directors' board. For curriculum design, the participation of the private sector exists in the form of cooperation between the academia and the industry. Given the growing globalization impact, Taiwan has been aware of the importance of maintaining an adequate supply of quality manpower in the knowledge-based economy era; the Taiwan government has therefore tried various ways to strengthen the links between university education and the labour market (MOE, Taiwan, 2003a). To assure that university graduates meet market needs, the MOE encourages higher education institutions to foster closer connections with industry. With the same scheme in place, the employers have the opportunities to engage with academics from universities in the design of curricula and courses in order to assure that what the students learn would cater for the labour market needs (Lu, 2004, 6-7).

Prior to 1994, the government was the primary funding source of all national universities. Similar to China, the Taiwan government also tried to diversify financing channels to finance its higher education system by replacing the *Public Budget System* with the new *University Fund System*. Under the new system, the national universities are allowed to keep surpluses, hence giving the incentives for the universities to diversify their sources of income through actively applying research grants. Furthermore, the MOE allows 30 per cent of flexibility on public universities' tuition charges. With the introduction of these measures, the Taiwan government hopes to make the national universities more financially independent in a longer term. Nowadays, tuition fees and research grants have contributed a more significant proportion to the national universities' revenue than in the past. In addition, the government once attempted to turn the status of all national universities into 'administrative legal bodies' by introducing university incorporation plans with intention to give national universities a high degree of flexibility and autonomy in their operation and development through empowering them to enjoy more fiscal autonomy and flexibilities in generating revenues (MOE, Taiwan, 2001; 2003b; Lo and Tai, 2003). However, such an attempt has encountered difficulty and now the Taiwan government has tried to find ways to enhance institutional autonomy of universities.

To encourage private universities to compete with national universities on the same ground, the Taiwan government has adopted a new funding policy in the higher education sector by cutting about 20 to 25 per cent of the state financial resources originally attributed to national universities to offer financial support to private

universities based upon a merit and competitive basis. In line of this policy, 20 per cent of the regular income of the private universities has been supported by the MOE since the 1999-2000 academic year (MOE, Taiwan, 2001). The implementation of this funding policy has held private universities accountable to the Ministry of Education and the general public would expect more from private universities and for them to perform better when public money is used to support their activities (Lo and Tai, 2003, 147). In addition, the government also slightly loosened the restrictions on tuition fees by adopting the 'user-pay' principle in order to facilitate universities to get additional revenues to finance their academic programmes and research initiatives (Mok and Lo, 2002). All these measures aim to correct the previous imbalance of funding and promote a competitive culture between public and private higher education institutions for fostering better performance.

In the last few years, public universities in Taiwan have been experiencing significant governance and management changes. In line with the spirit and practices of corporatization and incorporation, the universities and colleges have been granted more autonomy by releasing certain legal restrictions on university governance. The revision of the University Law in 2005 is a good example of the deregulation in higher education governance. Regarding personnel management, the appointment of university presidents had to go through two stages (one university level; one MOE level) in the past. Nonetheless, the newly revised University Law stipulates that presidents of national universities are appointed by a selection committee which consists of members from the universities, external parties and officials of MOE (Article 8), indicating a simplification of the appointment procedures. In addition, the restrictions on the nationality have been removed. Notionally, universities are allowed to appoint overseas scholars to be presidents and other senior positions are allowed to be filled by top talents through worldwide search (see Article 8 and 13). In short, such a legal amendment has facilitated universities in recruiting academic leaders through world-wide search.

Furthermore, universities are given more autonomy in finance. Currently, terms and conditions of university staff are standardized. According to Article 19 of the University Law, 'universities may add rights and obligations of teachers in the academic rules and formulate separate stipulations for the suspension or refusal of reengagement of teachers upon requirements of academic research and development, which shall be implemented and provided in the contracts after being approved by the academic affairs meeting'. This means that universities have more flexibility to adjust the terms and conditions, and therefore the structure of the salary of university staff can become more flexible and performance-based in the future. In other words, universities can use the salary adjustment as a way to reward or punish the staff. The revised University Law also allows universities to develop a more flexible organizational structure. Article 6, for example, allows universities to establish inter-institutional systems and research centres. It authorizes the universities themselves to set the regulations on the organization and operation of the inter-institutional institutes. Moreover, Article 11 provides universities with the autonomy to establish

their colleges or independent graduate schools, while colleges can establish their departments or graduate schools. Universities are also authorized to offer inter-department, inter-institute or inter-institutional qualifications. All these measures show an important step towards university autonomy as well as inter-institutional collaboration and integration. Putting the above changes into perspective, we can see that the revised University Law has indeed changed the university governance from a 'centralized' to a more 'decentralized' and 'corporate' model in Taiwan.

MAJOR STRATEGIES PROMOTING 'WORLD-CLASS UNIVERSITY'

In addition to university governance reform and management changes discussed above, the Taiwan government has realized that globalization has intensified the competition among higher education institutions in a worldwide sense. After a careful assessment, the Taiwan government recognizes that overseas competition, especially competition from mainland China, would become a major challenge to Taiwan's universities because of the technological advancement and rapid flow of human capital in the global age (Huang, 2001, 171-73; Lu, 2002). After Taiwan's accession to the World Trade Organization, overseas universities are allowed to expand their recruitment of Taiwan's students through educational agencies, distance learning, and two track or dual-credit systems. In order to enhance the global competitiveness of universities in Taiwan against the highly competitive world, the Taiwan government began to call for the pursuit of academic excellence of universities in the late 1990s (Lo and Weng, 2005).

In order to enhance the global ranking of universities in Taiwan, the Taiwan government has set a target in 2004 to have at least one local university be ranked among the top 100 universities within the next decade, and at least 15 key departments or cross-university research centers will become the top in Asia within the next five years (Lu, 2004: 9). Intending to improve the quality of university standards, pursuing academic excellence and focusing universities' efforts on developing a selected few areas has become the policy adopted by the government to boost the research profile of universities in Taiwan. In 1998, the MOE and the National Science Council (NSC) jointly launched the Program for Promoting Academic Excellence of Universities (Academic Excellence Program), which primarily aims at improving universities' infrastructure and invigorating research (MOE, Taiwan, 2000). This Program supports four research fields, including humanities and social sciences, life sciences, natural sciences, and engineering and applied sciences. Each research field has a focus of investigation:

1. For humanities and social sciences, the Academic Excellence Program requests research projects to utilize local research materials for arguing against or elaborating theories from the West;
2. For life sciences, the Academic Excellence Program stresses the importance of human physiology and development of biotechnology;

3. For natural sciences, the Academic Excellence Program focuses on atmospheric sciences, materials sciences and earth sciences and expects these disciplines to be recognized internationally as of leading status;
4. For engineering and applied sciences, the Academic Excellence Program highlights the importance of the applied studies of networking technologies, wireless communication technologies and optics and photonics (MOE, Taiwan, 2000).

In addition, the MOE and NSC also formed a panel, consisting of eminent local and overseas academics, charged with selecting research projects for support by the program. In the first round of the Academic Excellence Program, a total of 261 research project applications were submitted. After rigorous review, a total amount of NT\$ 4.3 billion were allocated to fund 19 projects, three of which were offered conditionally. The first round of the Program was completed in 2004. To further develop a high quality research culture in Taiwan, the second round of the Program was launched in 2000 until 2006. There were 148 research project applications in this round and twelve projects were granted with a total amount of NT\$ 2.1 billion. With a rigorous selection process in place, only 6.1 percent of research project applications were selected to be supported in the first round of the program (excluding the three conditional offers), while 8 percent of applications were funded in the second round. The funded rate of humanities and social sciences projects was even lower (3.2 percent for the second round). Most of the funding went to public institutions, while only two research projects jointly submitted by public and private institutions were funded (MOE, Taiwan, 2003a). After reviewing the various rounds of implementation, the government considers the Academic Excellence Program successful in allowing effective integration of resources to foster cooperation and exchange between outstanding institutions and talented researchers, and boosting research capacity (NSC, 2005). Hence, the Taiwan government has become even more committed to investing in key research areas in order to better place universities of Taiwan in the global map.

In addition to the Academic Excellence Program discussed above, another initiative entitled the Program for Improving University Fundamental Education (Fundamental Education Program) under the Academic Excellence Program was implemented in 2001 to enhance the level of university's foundation and general studies (Lu, 2004, 8). Applications for this program would be divided into five groups, namely, humanities and social sciences, life sciences, natural sciences, engineering and applied sciences. In the first round of the Fundamental Education Program, 112 institutions submitted 432 applications, of which 192 projects from 92 institutions were selected to be funded. In terms of funding, 55.9 per cent of the fund was granted to public institutions, while 44.1 per cent of the fund was allocated to private institutions (MOE, Taiwan, 2004). The MOE has planned to allocate NT\$ 1.8 billion for the second round of the Program. When putting the above discussion together, we can easily find that both the governments in China mainland and

Taiwan have recognized the importance of enhancing the global competitiveness of their universities and various reform strategies have been introduced to enable their universities to rank higher in the global ranking exercises.

We have just reviewed the major reform strategies adopted by the Taiwan government in promoting better governance and internationally competitive performance of universities in Taiwan. The following part critically examines how academics evaluate the impact of the above reforms on the academic community in Taiwan. By adopting a purposive sampling method, the author, in collaboration with colleagues working in selected universities in Taiwan, successfully approached a total of 150 academics working in different universities in Taiwan. All the respondents came from national universities and they serve in different academic disciplines and occupy different academic ranks. After sending out the questionnaires to the respondents identified for the research, we received 113 completed questionnaires for a success rate of around 75.3%. Some of the respondents were selected from national universities in Taipei area, while the rest of them were identified from the middle part and southern parts of Taiwan.¹ Since the present study has adopted a qualitative methodological approach, the sample size is bound to be small (Denscombe, 2007) and the author has no intention to make any claims that the survey findings would represent all academics in Taiwan. Instead, this article offers some useful perspectives generated from the present survey, together with observations based upon field interviews, in analyzing how academics respond to and evaluate the impact of recent higher education reforms in Taiwan.

EVALUATING UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE CHANGE: ACADEMIC REFLECTIONS

In the survey, we asked the respondents to comment on the impact of incorporation on university governance, especially assessing how the corporatization of national universities has affected institutional autonomy and individual autonomy. The following discusses how academics assess incorporation's benefits to university governance, the impact of university governance reforms on institutional and individual autonomy, and their evaluations of state control over higher education.

Assessing Incorporation's Benefits to University Governance

The following figures indicate that most respondents have assessed the incorporation of national universities quite positively. When being asked to comment on whether the incorporation strategies have benefited the university sector, about 37% of the respondents believe such reform initiatives have benefited the whole university sector, while 35.4% and 11.5% of the respondents hold a more neutral stand or disagreement towards the incorporation reform measures (see Figure 1). When being asked to assess how far the incorporation measures have benefited national universities, around 40% of the respondents see such move as positive, while 46% and 9.7% of the respondents take a more neutral or disagreeing stands respectively

to the same question (see Figure 2). When being asked to comment on whether the same reform strategies have brought benefits to private universities, around 44% of the respondents see private universities have benefited, while about 37% and 17% of them choose a more neutral or disagreeing stands when assessing the impact (see Figure 3).

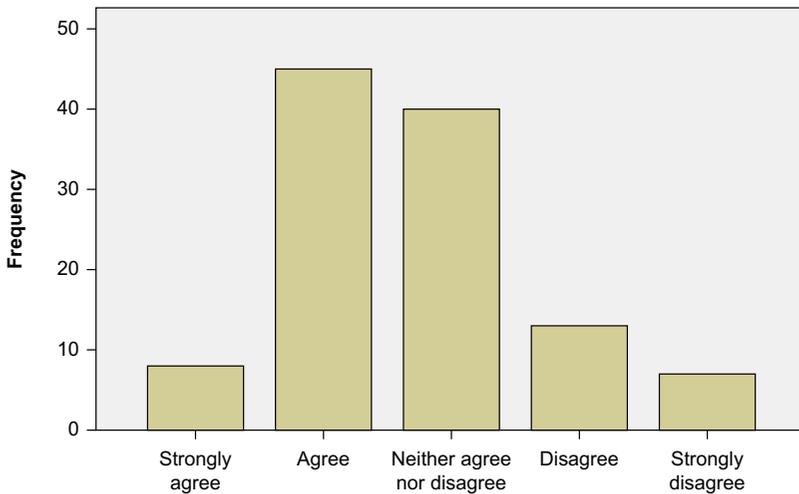


Figure 1. Incorporation benefits the whole HE sector.

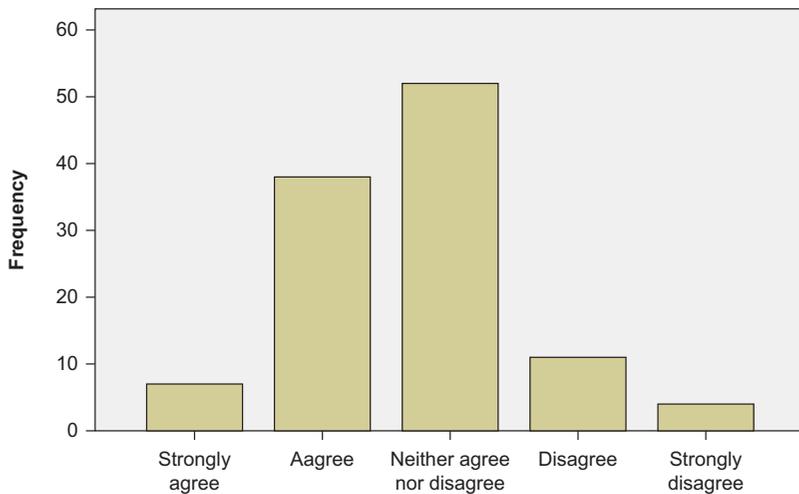


Figure 2. Incorporation benefits national universities.

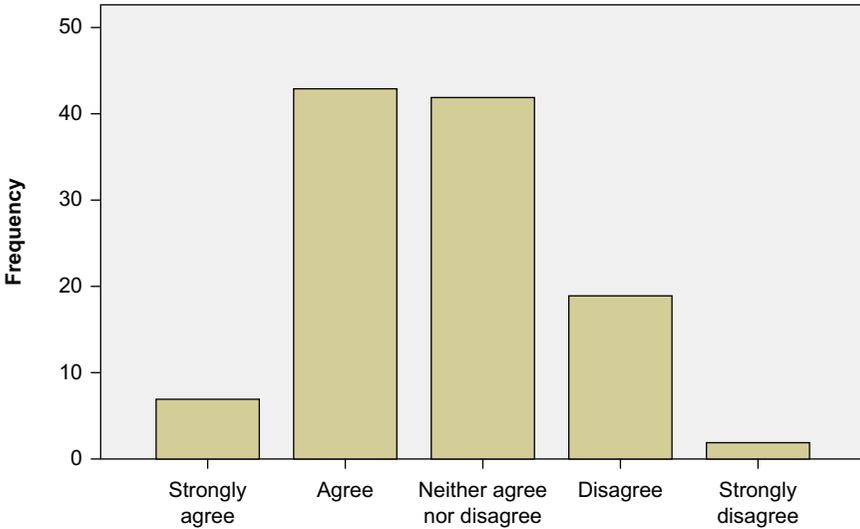


Figure 3. Incorporation benefits private universities.

In addition to the questions related to whether incorporation reform strategies have benefited the university sector, we asked the respondents to assess how far the same reform measures have improved the financial situation and efficiency in university governance. Figure 4 and 5 clearly show about 35% of the respondents consider the incorporation reform measures have improved the financial situation and 70% of them believe the same reform strategies have enhanced the efficiency of governance of national universities. But one point we have to note is that a number of respondents do not consider incorporation strategies would have improved the financial situation of national universities (see Figure 4). Such responses can be easily understood particularly when national universities have been under pressure to generate non-state financial sources through transforming themselves into enterprise universities or entrepreneurial university as Marginson and Considine (2000) and Mok (2005) suggested.

Unlike the old days when the state paid all the bills of national universities, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan has reformed such financial arrangements and now national universities have to compete with both national and private universities. Instead of guaranteed block grant offered by the state, national private universities now have to rely more on competitive grants or commercial / private financial resources in order to sustain their development plans (Song and Tai, 2007). It is against such a background that only less than half of the respondents show their support for the incorporation of national universities, while about 50% of the respondents do not support or take a neutral stand when being asked whether they support the reform or not (see Figure 6).

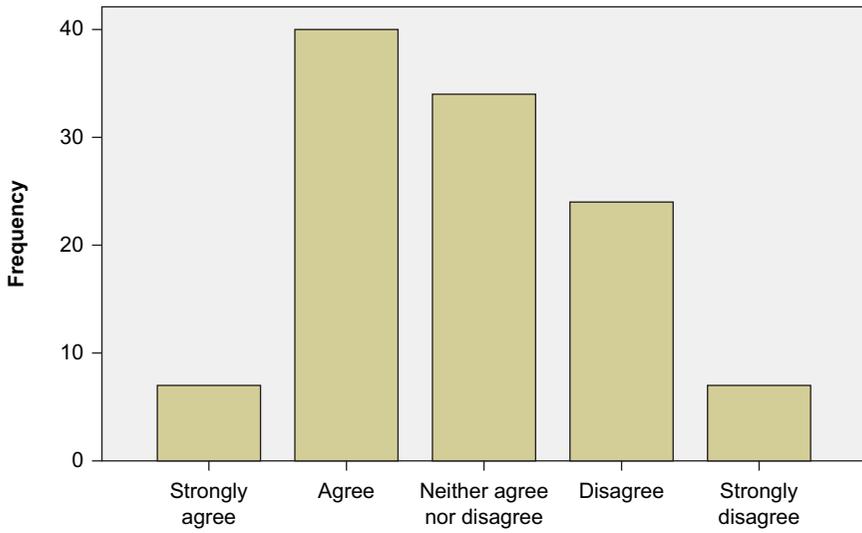


Figure 4. Incorporation improve financial situation of national universities.

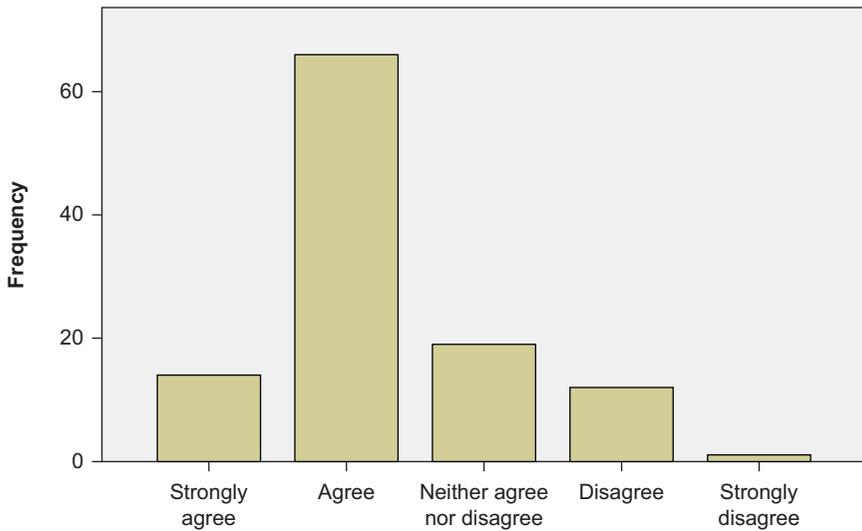


Figure 5. Incorporation improve efficiency of national universities.

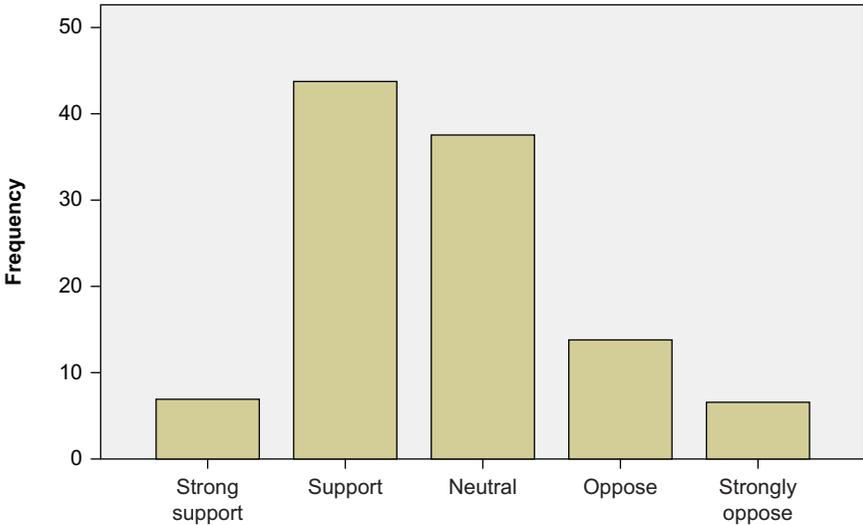


Figure 6. Support to the incorporation of national universities.

Assessing Incorporation and Academic Autonomy

Central to the incorporation reform strategies is to empower universities to become more autonomous, responsive and proactive in tackling rapid social, economic and political changes. In the present survey, we therefore asked the respondents to comment on whether the corporatization of national universities has enhanced institutional autonomy and individual autonomy. When answering the questions, more than 71.7 % of the respondents consider such reform strategies have enhanced institutional autonomy but only 37% consider such reform strategies have enhanced individual autonomy. Contrarily, around 54% of them adopt a more neutral or disapproving stands when assessing the impact of incorporation measures on individual autonomy (Figures 7 & 8).

Such findings are similar to my recent research conducted in Singapore and Malaysia regarding academic autonomy and recent university governance reforms in these Asian societies. Rather than feeling ‘empowered’ or ‘emancipated’, many academics in Singapore and Malaysia consider the kind of ‘autonomy’ granted by the state is never a ‘free gift’ because the education ministries would not accept ‘academic autonomy without responsibility’. When the Asian states have tried to give more autonomy to senior university management, they have expected the universities would produce better performance (Mok, 2008; Moshidi, 2008). Hence, decentralization taking place in the university sector against the context of governance reforms should not be interpreted as an entire withdrawal of state control. When national universities are now given more discretion, they are urged

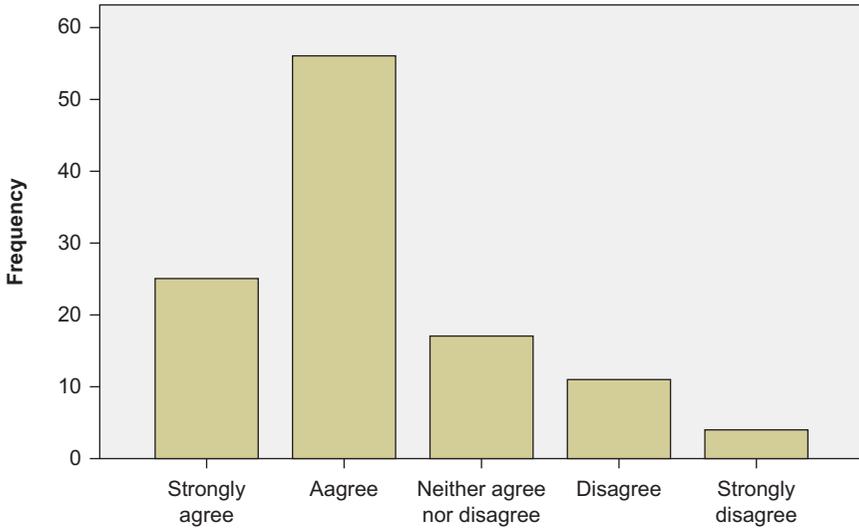


Figure 7. Incorporation increases institutional autonomy.

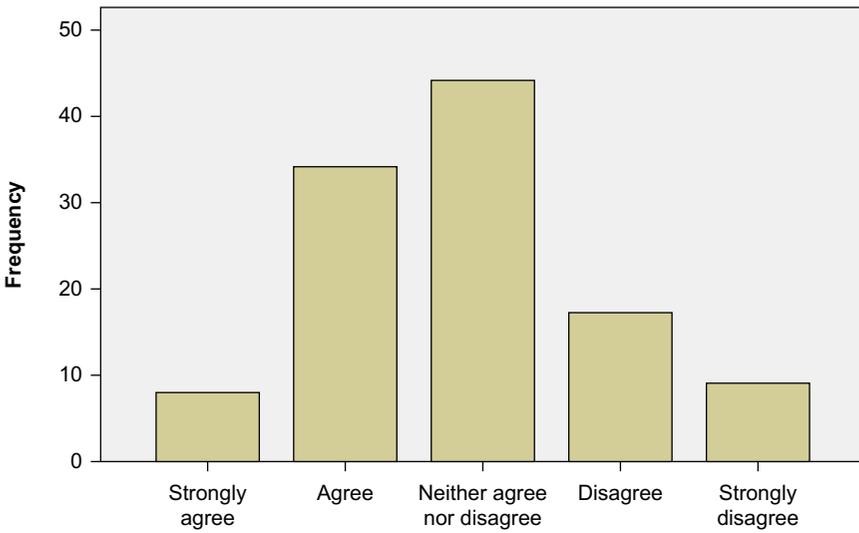


Figure 8. Incorporation increases individual autonomy.

to excel by showing evidence in performance. In this regard, accountability is a concept integral to the university governance reform in Taiwan. Therefore, the majority of respondents (70%) consider incorporation reform strategies have made national universities more accountable (Figure 9). Having financial consequences, national universities have no alternative but to follow government directions in improving their performance in order to secure additional state funding to sustain their academic development plans.

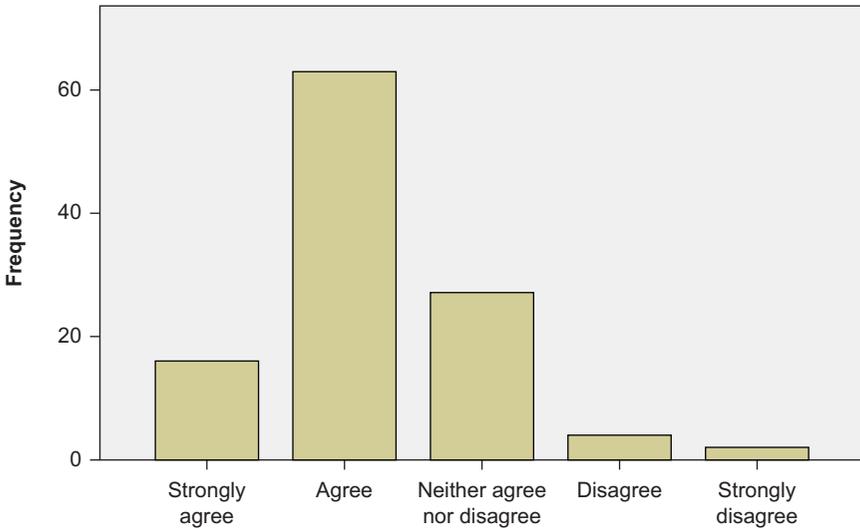


Figure 9. Incorporation increases accountability.

The introduction of more market forces and marketlike strategies in transforming the university sector in Taiwan has inevitably politicized the whole university sector. Since the senior university management is now under increasing pressures to better position their institutions in both local and global university ranking exercises, all universities on the island state are under constant pressures to quest for academic excellence. The assertion of authority in the international academic community certainly requires additional financial resources. It is against such a competitive environment that the incorporation movement has politicized national universities, especially when the appointments of university presidents and other major senior appointments are subject to open elections. One of the major criteria of such appointments is closely related to how extensive are the social networks and official links that the appointees could offer. Instead of considering the academic standing of the appointees, university administration is becoming far more politicized in Taiwan. In addition, academics generally feel that university governance has become more politicized because of keener competition to bid for government funding support

(Field interviews conducted in Taiwan, 2007 and 2008). Such observations are supported by the present survey when the respondents were asked to assess the impact of incorporation (see Figure 10).

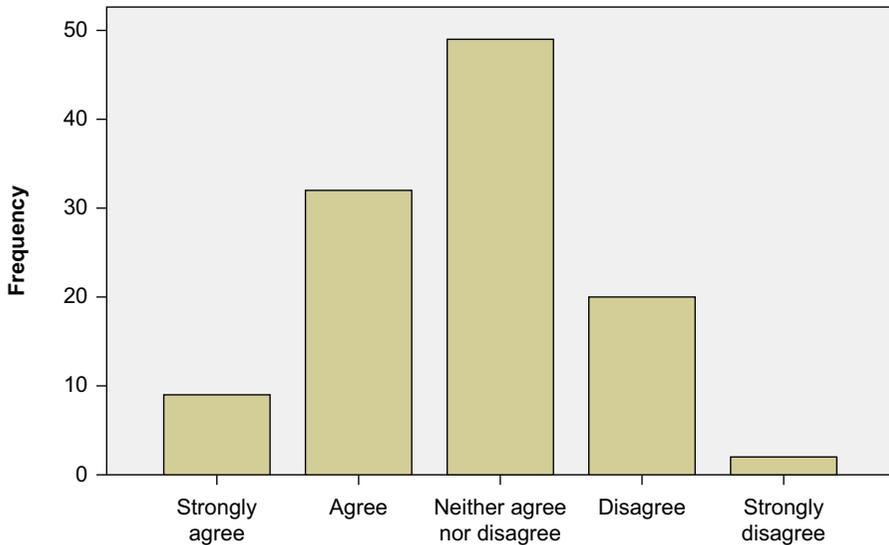


Figure 10: Incorporation politicizes university administration.

After asking the respondents to assess the impact of incorporation on university governance and institutional / individual autonomy, we went on asking how they assess the extent of state control over universities. Figure 11 clearly shows 52.2% of the respondents consider the state still tightly controls over national universities, while more than 36% of them find the state control a fair one. Such findings are consistent to the previous discussion related to the pressures imposed on universities / academics to uphold excellence in research and academic matters. When being asked to evaluate the degree of state control over private universities, around 40% of the respondents see the state control too tight, while 42.5% consider such a control is fair (Figure 12).

When assessing the degree of state control, most of the academics interviewed in the present study consider the Ministry of Education has no longer adopted a micro control over university governance. Nonetheless, they do not feel being ‘emancipated’ from control because of the heightened expectations for performance and immense pressure for quality assurance and evaluation. In order to promote higher academic quality of its higher education systems, the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) was established and commissioned by

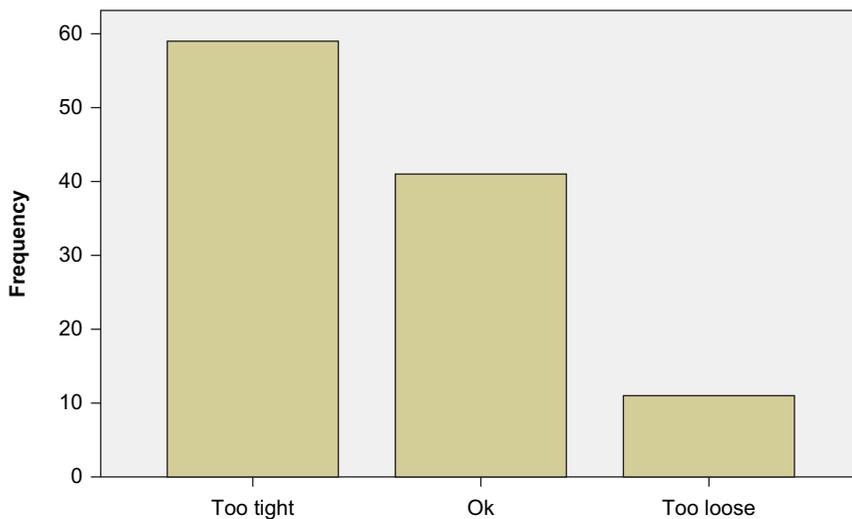


Figure 11: Degree of MOE's control over national universities.

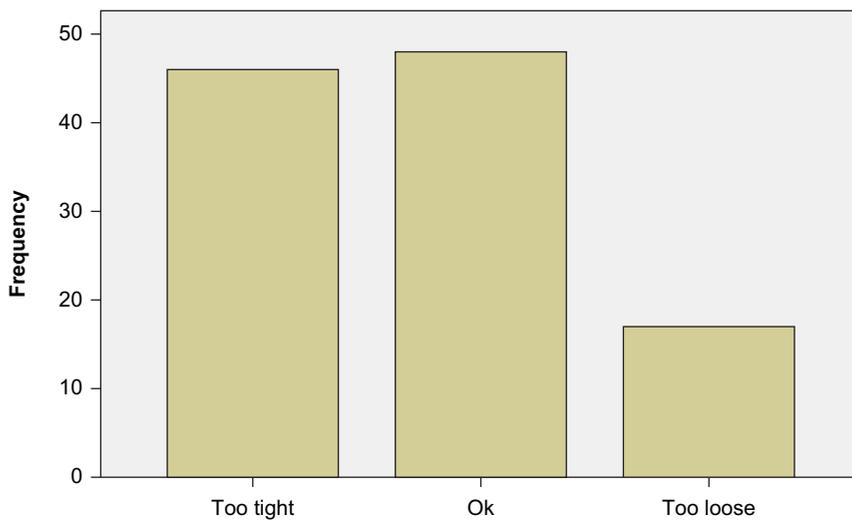


Figure 12: Degree of MOE's control over private universities.

the Ministry of Education to conduct nation-wide university programme evaluation and to prepare the groundwork for promoting a research ranking of universities. The evaluation was started and it will last for a five-year cycle; around 78 comprehensive universities and over 2000 programmes will be reviewed. Meanwhile, the MOE also commissioned the Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA), a non-profit organization jointly founded by senior members of the academia and business sectors, to conduct evaluations of higher education institutions at both institutional and programme level. With such these evaluation systems in place, academics in Taiwan feel being pressured to produce better results in teaching and research. Not surprisingly, many academics see that the state reasserts its control over the university sector through the implementation of far more stringent evaluation / review exercises and re-regulation and recentralization is commonly felt by academics in Taiwan (Tai, 2002; Lo and Tai, 2003; Chan and Lo, 2007).

Assessing the Impact of International Benchmarking on the Academic Profession

In order to better position higher education in the global world, universities in Taiwan have been proactively establishing international academic links and engaging in international collaboration. When the author was serving as the Founding Director of the Centre of East Asian Studies at University of Bristol from 2005 to 2007, the author received many delegates from Taiwan for academic visits and exchange. Realizing the importance of internationalization of higher education curricula in Taiwan, the Centre of East Asian Studies at Bristol University has co-organized international summer schools with institutions from Taiwan in order to provide a platform engaging Asian students in appreciating cross-cultural studies in the UK. The College of Humanities of National Chi Nan University (NCNU) is particularly keen to send students to the Bristol summer school. With special financial support offered by the College of Humanities at NCNU, more students from Taiwan could enjoy experiential learning in the UK (CEAS, 2006; 2007). Similarly, The Department of Social Work at National Taiwan University has also been actively promoting international placement to enhance students' international outlook and enrich their overseas learning experiences. Most recently, the author of this article was appointed by the President of National Taiwan University (NTU) as one of the panel members of the International Advisory team to review the academic and research programmes offered by NTU in 2008. During his recent academic visit to NTU in 2008, the author got the chance to meet the senior management, faculty members and students of NTU. Through reviewing the Department of Social Work in terms of its strategic vision and development strategies, student and staff feedback on research and learning experiences, as well as its facilities, the author got to know how keen the department has been in terms of the internationalization agenda. Aligning with the vision and mission of the university and the faculty in internationalization, the department has made concerted efforts to engage with overseas leading universities in co-organizing international conferences, joint-

research projects and other overseas internship / placement. Professor Lillian Wang, Head of the Social Work Department at NTU, openly told the panel members that the Department is serious in benchmarking with top universities in Hong Kong, the USA and the UK. In the last five years, the department has engaged in co-organizing international symposia or conferences with overseas partners, sending out staff and students for international exchange and inviting speakers all over the world to give seminars at NTU (Field observation, June 2008).

Like the role differentiation exercise conducted among universities in Hong Kong (Mok 2005a), the Taiwan government is keen to develop a proper division of labour among universities on the island-state. It is in this context that there has been heated debate whether to stratify the university system of Taiwan into different clusters by developing a better role differentiation among the more than hundred universities (Li, 2008). In recent years, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan has conducted various kinds of academic reviews to promote universities to perform. In order to better position universities of Taiwan in the global ranking exercise, a 'Forum on Taiwan Higher Education' was organized in 2007, distinguished leaders and professors were invited to address the issues related to development plan for world-class universities and research centres of excellence. During the Forum, speakers critically examined the major challenges confronting the higher education sector in Taiwan, debating and discussing ways to promote excellent performance of universities in Taiwan (A Strategic Network Promoting for University Excellence, 2008). Having interviewed Professor Ching-Shan Wu, Executive Director of Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan, the (8381)author of this article realizes the pressures felt by academics and higher education institutions in benchmarking with the international standard by publishing in top-tiered internationally refereed journals and peer-reviewed venues (Interview with Wu, May 2008). After a close scrutiny of the international publications in SSCI, SCI and EI venues, Wu believes academics in Taiwan are lagging behind their international counterparts, and is hence proposing that more attention should be given to internationalize research outputs especially in the intensified competitive research environment (Wu, 2008; MH Huang, 2008). Meanwhile, a strategic network has been set up in Taiwan in promoting university excellence in recent years (A Strategic Network Promoting University Excellence, 2008). Having been involved in university ranking and university evaluation research in the last few years, Professor Angela Hou shared with the author that academics and higher education institutions are becoming increasingly concerned with the ranking exercises (Interview with Hou, May 2008; see also Hou, 2007).

Against a highly competitive environment, academics are under immense pressure to excel in research and international benchmarking has dominated the academic discourse in Taiwan. In the last two years, the author got a number of chances to interview academics to explore their critical reflections of the incorporation taken place in Taiwan's higher education. All the academics whom the author interviewed frankly shared with me that the pressures for research performance

have been intensified in the last few years, especially after the introduction of incorporation strategies to reform higher education in Taiwan. Although no single national university is actually incorporated to become an independent legal entity, colleagues working in national universities have felt keener competition resulting from the accountability call. Since research performance, particularly international benchmarking has become a dominant agenda shaping university performance evaluations; all the academics that the author interviewed pointed out the importance to get their works published either in nationally leading journals or internationally indexed journals. In order to enhance their global competitiveness, academics in Taiwan have tried very hard to engage in international collaborations, while academic institutions are becoming very instrumental in student and staff exchanges in order to meet the expected outcomes prescribed by the Ministry of Education in assessing university's internationalization (Mok and Chan, 2008). Against such a highly competitive environment, pressure for producing internationally recognized publications has not been felt only by junior faculty but also by established professors (Field interviews in Taiwan, 2007 and 2008). Feeling unsatisfied with the intensified pressure for research assessment, academics in Taiwan have engaged in heated debates about the assessment criteria, particularly questioning the adoption of criteria primarily dominated by an Anglo-Saxon paradigm, while Asian New Humanities Net (ANHN) was set up to organize the academic community not only to raise concerns / disagreement in relation to assessment criteria but also to unite the academic community to influence policy agendas of higher education (ANHN, 2007; Chen and Lo, 2007).

DISCUSSION: INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKING AND ACADEMIC PROFESSION

Putting the above survey findings and the field observations discussed earlier together, we can easily see the university sector in Taiwan, like its counterparts in East and Southeast Asia, has experienced accelerated tensions resulting from the conflicts between two powerful reform ideologies governing university reforms, namely state centralism (long embedded in the East) and neo-liberalism (growing in global influence). On the one hand, the Taiwan government is keen to reform its university governance in order to make universities more responsive and proactive to external changes. With a strong conviction to enhance its universities to become more globally competitive, the Taiwan government, similar to other Asian countries, has tried to adopt ideas and practices under the rubric of neo-liberalism in corporatizing and incorporating national universities. On the other hand, the Taiwan government has never attempted to let its national universities 'really go'. As Barr (1993) argued, 'using the logic of the market without actually letting the market in' has become a popular public sector management reform phenomenon globally. The incorporation of national universities in Taiwan gives rise to an interesting phenomenon in its higher education landscape: financially getting institutions more

diversified and gradually less dependent upon the sole support of the state, but these higher educational institutions have never moved away from state control.

Such a development has clearly suggested that state centralism remains as a dominant force in university governance despite the fact that the government has attempted to embrace changes in line with neo-liberalism. The present case study has demonstrated how the nation state can successfully ride over the two worlds, namely, state centralism asserting state authority in university governance and neo-liberalism making market forces and marketlike practices central in university governance. Without taking up excessive financial burdens in supporting both the national and private university sectors, the Taiwan government has tactically reduced its financial responsibilities to drive the national universities to search for funding from non-state sources. More importantly, the same reform process has also empowered the state in steering / controlling over higher education development through various kinds of quality assurance mechanisms to make sure universities would perform and quest for excellence. Adopting such reform strategies is like holding a two-edged sword in achieving the goals of the planned reforms.

When putting the present case study of Taiwan in the context of the higher education reforms in other Asian societies, we can easily find that the academic profession in Asia is under tremendous pressure to benchmark with the international practices which have been primarily dominated by Anglo-American standards. The call for internationalization of universities in general and the quest for world-class universities in particular have inevitably forced academics in Asia to follow the so-called international benchmarks. In order to position higher in the global university ranking, most of the Asian university systems have attempted to internationalize their curricula, strengthening their international academic links with top universities in the West and academics in Asia are under great pressure to publish in internationally refereed journals and venues (Mok and Wei, 2008; Deem, Mok and Lucas, 2008). It is against such a context that the academic profession in Asia has confronted with a growing trend of reduction in terms of 'academic freedom' despite many governments in the region having made attempts to decentralize responsibilities to individual universities to decide their own business. However, the drive for 'world-class university', coupled with the performance indicators and funding formula predominated by the 'international benchmarking criteria', it is not difficult to come to the conclusion that the academic profession in Asia is increasingly threatened by such global and regional trends (Mohrman, Ma, & Baker, 2008).

If we compare what happens to the changing university governance in Taiwan to recent university transformations and changing funding strategies adopted in Europe, the university restructuring that Taiwan has experienced is not entirely unique since many European universities have relied less on state funding but diversified their financial resources through other entrepreneurial activities. Performance-driven funding formulae are becoming increasingly popular and academics are pressured to perform better, especially, for example, when the European Commission is not happy with the overall performance of European universities in the global university

ranking exercises (Ben, 2008). Putting these observations together, we can argue that universities in the East have tried to learn from the West, while similar movement has also taken place in Europe.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article has critically examined policies and strategies adopted by the Taiwan government in response to the growing pressures to internationalize and internally benchmark universities with the very best across different parts of the globe. By adopting reform strategies along the lines of incorporation and corporatization, the Taiwan government intends to drive its national universities to become more responsive and proactive in tackling rapid changes generated in the globalizing world. Although some of the academics being interviewed believe the recent reform measures have improved university governance in Taiwan, many of them raise their concerns of losing autonomy instead of being empowered in the midst of incorporation of universities. How to strike a balance between academic autonomy and accountability still remains an unresolved issue that the higher education sector is facing in Taiwan, which certainly requires mutual understanding between the state and the academic community.

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