



Transforming the quality assurance framework for Taiwanese higher education: A glonacal context

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Abstract

In an interconnected world, higher education systems, the institutions that comprise them, educational policy makers, quality assurance agencies are all supposed to interact simultaneously in a global, national, and local, or glonacal, context. Like some other Asian nations, Taiwan has been developing its glonacal quality assurance framework. At the same time, it attempted to give more institutional autonomy to universities by awarding them a self-accreditation status. The main purpose of the paper is to examine transformation of QA systems in Taiwan's higher education under the glonacal context and to analyze the new development of self-accreditation.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, all Asian nations have developed their own quality assurance system by setting up a national accreditor whose principal role is to accredit local tertiary education institutions and academic programs. Prior to the establishment of their current national accreditor, local accreditors had emerged in some Asian countries, such as the Japan University Accreditation Association, founded in 1947, the Shanghai Education Evaluation Institute in 1996, and the Institute of Engineering Education Taiwan in 2003.

In response to the growing globalization of higher education, some Asian nations started to welcome international accreditors, particularly U.S. accreditors, to provide cross-border quality assurance services for local institutions (Ewell, 2008; Hopper, 2007). This led to a demand by the government and higher education institutions for international accreditation to be integrated into the national quality assurance framework (Stella, 2010; Woodhouse, 2010). The emergence of three types of accreditors, at local, national and global levels, meant that a “glonacal” quality assurance system was implicitly formed in some countries, including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia and Taiwan (see Jarvis, 2014a; Wang, 2014; Yat Wai Lo, 2014). Some Asian nations with developing higher education systems as well as a young quality assurance agency, such as in Cambodia and Vietnam, have remained in the “non-glonacal” framework of quality assurance.

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A decentralized system of quality assurance framework in Taiwanese higher education did not exist until a national accreditor, the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) was established in 2005 with funds from the government and 153 colleges and universities (HEEACT, 2012). Prior to the establishment of HEEACT, several self-funded local accreditors had been founded, including Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA), Taiwan Medical Accreditation Council (TMAC), Taiwan Nursing Accreditation Council (TNAC), the Institute of Engineering Education Taiwan (IEET). In order to strengthen the international outlook and global competitiveness of Taiwan's colleges and universities, the MOE has internationalized Taiwan's higher education with several policies, including encouraging universities to seek international accreditation. Since then, Taiwan has been developing its glonacal quality assurance framework, like some Asian nations.

In 2013, the MOE launched a new policy of self-accreditation, which aimed at enhancing institutional autonomy as well as promoting an institution's internal quality mechanism. 34 recipients of Taiwan's Teaching and Research Excellent Programs have been invited to take part in the new initiative. Hence, the main purpose of the paper is to examine transformation of QA systems in Taiwan's higher education under the glonacal context and to analyze the new development of self-accreditation.

2. Asia glonacal QA systems and emergence of international accreditors

Throughout the centuries, "higher education has remained at the one and the same time, global, national and local. From its beginning, the university was always rooted in local settings, while at the same time it connected to a larger international field of knowledge" (Marginson, Kaur, & Sawir, 2011, p. 5). At a time when the world is getting flatter, higher education systems, the institutions that comprise them, and educational policy makers, are all supposed to interact simultaneously in the global, national, and local contexts. Simon Marginson, a prominent Australian scholar, called this higher education phenomenon in the 21st century the "Glonacal" era (Marginson, 2011). According to Marginson (2011), the institution itself as a local organization, needs to respond to national policies in culture, politics and economics. With governmental support, local institutions will be able to develop their competitiveness successfully at the global context. Institutions are learning to integrate and balance the needs of varying stakeholders, including local students, national governments, and the global market, into the three dimensions of a "glonacal" area of higher education, in which "activity in each one of the global, national, and local dimension can affect activities in the others" (p. 14).

Asian higher education systems responded in various ways to *glonacal* trends including: growing social demand, privatization, accountability, marketization and economic growth. This response included the development of external quality assurance systems at the national level (Matrin & Stella, 2007). As higher education institutions in Asia are going from local to global, they expect to be assessed beyond their national authority for graduate mobility and degree recognition. Within the global context, quality assurance services in Asia started to develop internationally in response to this pressure, leading to the emergence of international accreditors, particularly professional accreditors (Ewell, 2008; Hou et al., 2013). The number of professional accreditors, in fields such as business, engineering, medicine, nursing, architecture, and education, has increased rapidly due to the international mobility of graduates (Woodhouse, 2010). Recently, these professional accreditors, especially U.S. business and engineering program accreditors, have begun to accredit academic programs not only in the United States but also abroad. For the purposes of increasing reputation and safeguarding enrollment, Asian institutions prefer to get international recognition rather than national and local accreditations. At the same time, some Asian countries, such as Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, continue to encourage local institutions to seek international accreditation in order to enhance academic competitiveness globally. Hayward (2001) pointed out the popularity of American accreditors: "Some foreign colleges and universities want U.S. accreditation because it is, at least at the moment, 'the gold standard' in many areas of higher education" (p. 6). Ewell (2008) responded that "U.S. accreditation may provide an additional cachet in a competitive local market especially for private institutions" (p. 153). Obviously, international accreditation is being sought by more and more institutions abroad as higher education globalizes in a very competitive manner (Hou, 2011; Morse, 2008). Therefore, no matter whether international accreditation is pursued by institutions voluntarily or under pressure from governments, it is likely to introduce "a commercial dimension to accreditation practices and the desire for institutions or providers to have as many accreditation labels or stars as possible" (Knight, 2005, p. 2).

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