What *is* driving Taiwan government for policy change in higher education after the year of 2016 – in search of egalitarianism or pursuit of academic excellence?

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ABSTRACT

Due to global influence and local demand, Taiwan's higher education system has experienced great changes in policy agenda and system reform over the past few decades. After President Tsai took the presidential office in 2016, the Ministry of Education (MOE) shifted its focus towards universities' autonomy and social responsibility, which encouraged institutions to strengthen their partnerships and collaborations with other ASEAN countries. Based on this new ideological and political paradigm shift, three key national higher education projects, including the new cycle of self-accreditation policy, higher education sprout project, and new southbound policy, were implemented. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to present the current development of these three MOE initiatives since 2016, and analyze the paradigm shift of Taiwan higher education policymaking in terms of egalitarianism. Four major findings are addressed as follows. First, policy and politics mattered in the process of educational policy shift under a doctrine of egalitarianism; second, national accreditation continued to be used by university leaders for institutional effectiveness; third, global competitiveness in Taiwan higher education is declining gradually; fourth, the loss of Chinese students was not offset by the new Southbound program.

1. Introduction

Driven by global competition and local demand, Taiwan's higher education has experienced great changes in both policy agenda and system reform over the past decade. Like most Asian nations, Taiwanese higher education was a highly state-regulated system, despite declining public funding to universities and colleges in recent years (MOE 2018). Public universities were highly regulated by the government and subject to a bureaucratic management model because the faculty members and administrative staff were governmental officials (Huang 2019). Although private universities relied heavily on tuition, they were still under government control for student enrollment, program offerings, and faculty recruitment (Huang 2013; Huang 2019). As Huang (2019) indicated, 'Taiwan is basically a nation of free market economy, with one of a few exceptions: strict regulation on tuition fees of tertiary education' (3).

In order to promote 'excellence' within Taiwan's higher education system, since 2005, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has launched various initiatives with different intended objectives (Yonezawa and Hou 2014). Nevertheless, the government started to pay attention to student learning

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outcomes and measuring the accountability of universities and colleges through an external accreditation process. In 2005, the Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), a national accreditor, was established jointly by the Ministry of Education and 153 universities and colleges to undertake the institutional and program accreditation. The approach adopted was compulsory.

Longstanding political tensions between Mainland China and Taiwan meant Chinese students were barred from obtaining degrees at Taiwanese universities and Chinese degrees and diplomas were not recognized by Taiwan's MOE after the Rule of Recognition of Chinese Diploma was first enacted in 1997 (MOE 2011; Chiang 2016). As soon as former President Ma took office in 2008, he adopted the open door policy and revised the regulation in 2011 in order to attract more Chinese students to study in Taiwan, but placed a limit on annual enrollment of 2000 (MOE 2011). To recruit more non-local students, Taiwan's government increased annual mainland enrollment to 3019 in 2015 by recognizing 155 Chinese universities, which and the student number reached the peak highest (MOE 2016; Mainland China Council 2019). Yet, the deregulation to admit Chinese student is not only in search of establishment of a stable and dynamic Taiwan–China relation, but also a solution to a shortage of local student enrollment (Chiang 2016; Zhu 2019).

Due to a growing distinct Taiwanese identity and a strong demand for social and political changes, on May 20, 2016, Dr. Tsai Ing-wen, the Chairman of the opposition party – Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected as the first female President of Taiwan and the DPP also gained a majority in the Legislative Yuan for the first time (Jhu 2016). Immediately, the new administration faced a wide range of the economic, social and political challenges. These included pension reforms, energy development, youth unemployment, cross strait relationship as well as widening gap in education inequality. As soon as the new government took office, the MOE began to shift focus to universities' autonomy and social responsibility as well as to encourage institutions to strengthen their partnerships and collaborations with the institutions in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries (MOE 2016, 2017a).

To resolve the critical issues above, three major higher education initiatives were launched by Tasi administration in 2017, including'Higher Education Sprout Project', 'New cycle of self-accreditation', and 'New Southbound policy-academia-industry program'. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to present the current development of these three MOE initiatives and discover the paradigm shift of higher education policymaking in terms of egalitarianism. The impact and implication of these initiatives on institutional governance and academic performance are discussed as a conclusion of the paper.

Based on the above, this paper is informed by the following three research questions:

1. How were three major higher education initiatives developed in Taiwan since 2016?
2. What was driving the paradigm shift of higher education policymaking under egalitarianism?
3. How would the new policy be implicated in Taiwanese higher education and impact institutional governance and academic performance?

2. Higher education governance in Asia and policy change under neoliberalism

The relationship between higher education and government has always been connected. Traditionally, the high level of state regulation over higher education is the common governance model in countries, particular in Asia. As Shin pointed out, 'this is particularly true for the stated-centered governance of East Asia' (2018a, 11), which responds to the argument by Van Vught and de Boer (2015) that 'state plays a pivotal role in establishing frameworks, objectives, and priorities' (38). Originating from the doctrine of economic efficiency and profit-maximization in the 1980s, the main conceptual idea of neoliberalism is being applied to higher education in order to enhance competitiveness and accountability. At the same time, it has been acted as 'the rule for social and political order' in many nations (Oleksenko, Molodychenko, and Shcherbakova 2018,

115). In the late 1990s, neoliberalism with an emphasis on 'marketization, privatization, deregulation with competition as a key characteristic' in higher education has been implemented in national agendas of Asia. Influenced by the new public management theory, several governance reforms were initiated, such as cuts in public funding, incorporation of national universities, competitions for national funding, etc. (Davies and Bansel 2007; Saunders 2010; Shin 2018b). Policy makers interpret neoliberalism as 'decreased regulations, increased accountability and more academic autonomy' (Shin 2018a, 7). Scott (2017) identified the changing role of states in a neoliberal turn, a shift from the a traditional notion of post-war 'welfare state' with an emphasis on public good to serve as 'regulator' and 'customer' of higher education. All in all, Olssen and Peters (2007) argued that 'for neoliberal perspectives, the end goals of freedom, choice, consumer sovereignty, competition and individual initiative, as well as those of compliance and obedience, must be constructions of the state acting now in its positive role through the development of the techniques of auditing, accounting and management' (315).

The rise of neoliberalism, multilevel governance and glonacal approaches have garnered more and more attention, leading to a higher level of engagement of varying higher education stakeholders in policy making (Marginson 2011; Fumasoli 2015). Over recent decades, higher education remains 'at the one and the same time, global, national and local' dimensions (Marginson, Kaur, and Sawir 2011, 3). With the increase in global talent mobility, higher education systems, institutions, and educational policy makers are supposed to interact within *Glonacal* dimension severely (Marginson 2011). According to Marginson (2011), the institution itself is a local organization, compared with national dimension referring to national culture, polity and polices. Reliance on the level of support from national government, institutions will likely develop or falter at the global context. Nowadays, institutions are learning to integrate and balance the needs of varying stakeholders, including local students, national governments, and global markets, comprising the three dimensions into a 'glonacal' sphere of higher education (Lo 2014). Driven by the glonacal governance approach, the government would lean towards widening participation with varying stakeholders in the process of policy making, particularly academics and market. The model of 'triangle of coordination' developed by Burton Clark (1983) has illustrated the relationship and interactions among three major stakeholders – *state, market and academic oligarchy*. Seemingly, Dobbins, Knill, and Vogtle (2011) and Darryl and Mok (2019) explained university governance as 'interrelated process of control, coordination, and the allocation of autonomy between the state, professoriate, and university management' (3), which would exhibit in three typologies proposed by Clark. However, states and academics still have considerable institutional decision making power, as opposed to other actors in the multilevel governance model (Van Vught and Westerheijden 1994; Shin 2018b; Darryl and Mok 2019).

3. Taiwan higher education-development, context, and doctrine of 'egalitarianism'

The Taiwan higher education system features a dual-track system of universities alongside polytechnics. General universities and colleges fall in the category of university system; in contrast, the polytechnics system includes technological universities and colleges and junior technological colleges. The Department of Higher Education and Department of Vocational Education under Ministry of Education (MOE) are in charge of each system respectively (MOE 2019b).

Five developmental stages and context

Taiwan's higher education governance has been strongly influenced by Western, Chinese and Japanese systems. The modernization of Taiwan's higher education started during the colonial period and later underwent a five-stage transformation, including colonial period (Japanese rule), state control and educational reform (from 1950 to 1985), expansion and deregulation era (1986–2005), excellence and quality assurance (2005–2016) golden age, as well as equity and social responsibility as current stage (2016 to present) (Cheng 2011; Huang 2013, 2019).

Charting the early development of Taiwanese higher education, the first modern university, 'Taihoku Imperial University' was established by the Japanese colonial government in 1928 (National Taiwan University 2019). After Taiwan was handed over to the Nationalist government of China Kuomintang (KMT) party in 1945, 'Taihoku Imperial University' was formally transferred to Chinese administration and renamed as 'National Taiwan University'. However, the KMT government did not expand the higher education system until the 1980s. By 1979, the total number of universities was only 26 along with 76 junior colleges (Department of Statistics 2019a).

In the 1980s, the KMT government adopted an open policy to encourage the establishment of private universities. This approach was particularly evident in 1989 when the government announced that an increase of universities and colleges had become the national agenda (Huang 2019). This indicates that Taiwan's higher education system would gradually move from elite to massification. When the University Act was passed in 1994, the number of universities almost doubled. The 1990s was the key period when Taiwanese higher education expanded rapidly and flourished. The total number of universities and colleges increased to 164 and gross enrollment rate increased to 35. 4% (Department of Statistics 2019a). Yet, a call for 'institutional autonomy', 'academic freedom', 'shared governance' by faculty members was also getting more and more attention, in which higher education providers wished to bring democracy into organizational reform and institutional management (Chang 1987; Chan, 2010; Huang 2013, 2019).

A move for deregulation policy started to liberate state control after the 1990s (Cheng 2011). In response to both regional and global competitiveness in higher education, the Taiwan government was opted to reform its higher education systems, with a particular focus on deregulation as well as accountability (Mok 2000; Hou et al. 2018). In addition, several key internationalizing initiatives launched by the MOE and were under way in Taiwanese universities. These include executing excellence initiatives, recruiting international students and faculty, supporting English taught programs, deepening collaborations with foreign universities, imposing a strong demand for the seeking of international recognition in global rankings, etc. (Hou 2011).

Due to globalization, massification and privatization in higher education, Taiwan was moving toward the path of excellence and era of quality assurance in the early twenty-first century. As Lo indicated, 'the quest for building world-class universities has become a trend of higher education development in several East Asian countries where the massification of higher education has been accomplished' (2014, p. 24). In general, the period from 2005 to 2016 could be depicted as a 'quality and excellence' Golden Age when Taiwanese universities faced severe competition for Excellence Initiatives and underwent external review (from 2005 to 2016). On one hand, accountability based accreditation aimed at developing university features and strengths; on the other hand, universities were encouraged to pursue academic excellence globally (Lo and Hou 2019).

Doctrine of 'egalitarianism' and challenges

The 10-year implementation of national excellence initiatives and quality policy led by the former government has brought severe criticism, such as over concentration on world-class university building, increasing inequality among higher education institutions, stricter governmental control. (Hou 2012; Mok, 2016). In addition, university administrators and faculty members complained strongly about workloads and red tape derived from accrediting agencies (Hou et al. 2018).

With the DDP Party's emphasis on 'universal human rights, transitional justice and constitutional reforms', the Tsai administration believed that 'all citizens are treated equally regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity and religion' (DPP 2019, 1). In particular, 'the facilitation of the Taiwan identity awakening' and 'the liberation of mind from the past authoritarian control' are urgent tasks (Wang 2013, 1). The doctrine of 'egalitarianism', which emphasizes people should be treated equally regardless of social class, ethnicity, gender, etc., exactly corresponds to the DPP political vision (Zha 2013).

Conversely, the egalitarian concept was used for new educational policy making since President Tasi election in 2016. First of all, the selection and concentration funding schemes by the former KMT

government in the support of world-class universities building has been overruled. The debating issue of either elitism or egalitarianism has led to the emergence of 'Higher Education Sprout project', which was regarded as a reflection of extremist elitism and obsessive pursuit of global rankings. Secondly, Taiwan's universities were given more autonomy with a new cycle of self-accreditation policy in 2017 (HEEACT 2018, 2020a).

Low birth was the other serious concern in Taiwan higher education during Ma's administration. According to the MOE, higher education enrollment is expected to drop from 273,000 in 2015 to 158,000 by 2028 (MOE 2018). This drastic decline would not only lead to a closure of 20–40 universities within 5 years, especially small and private colleges in the rural area, but also devastate Taiwan's economic growth (Hsueh 2018). Moreover, owing to Tasi Administration's antagonistic attitude toward Chinese government's 'One China Policy', the MOE did not encourage academic exchange and collaboration between Taiwan's universities and Chinese universities (Hsueh 2018; Huang 2019). The above policies resulted in the decreasing number of Chinese students enrolled in Taiwan's universities from 2835 in 2017 to 2140 in 2018 significantly (Department of Statistics 2019d). In order to offset the shrinking number of Mainland China students, the Tsai administration introduced the New Southbound Policy (NSP), aiming at strengthening Taiwan's relationships with the 10 ASEAN countries, six states in South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan), Australia, and New Zealand instead as well as to attract more foreign students to study in Taiwan (MOE 2019b).

4. Research methods

The study adopted a qualitative document analysis approach to examine the reform of Taiwan's higher education system, higher education policy making and change, as well as the implication to universities. In addition, the impact of key higher education initiatives was compared and emerging challenges universities faced were presented. English and Chinese documents from the governments were collected and analyzed, including educational laws, policy documents, HEEACT annual reports, accreditation handbook (Table 1). Document analysis is an approach used to gather and review the content of existing written documentation related to the study in order to extract pieces of information in a rigorous and systematic manner (Institute of Development Study 2013).

5. Analysis of three new initiatives after 2016 – Higher Education Sprout Project self-accreditation, and New Southbound policy

Higher Education Sprout Project – from academic excellence to social equity

Over the past decade, the term 'world-class,' which relates to how a university develops its capacity to compete in the global higher education marketplace, has been used widely. Many scholars have stated that world-class universities should exhibit qualities such as excellence in research and teaching, excellent professors, talented students, academic freedom, favorable governance, adequate facilities, sufficient funding, and an international outlook. Further, they all should be, without

Table 1. List of documents collected.

Governmental laws	Governmental policy documents
1. 2005 Revised University Act	1. Higher Education Sprout Project
2. Revised Rule of Recognition of Chinese Diploma	2. New Southbound Policy
3. Regulations Regarding International Students Undertaking Studies in Taiwan	3. The New Southbound Talent development program
4. International Students Undertaking Studies in Taiwan	4. HEEACT Accreditation Handbook
5. MOE Self-Accreditation regulation	5. Development Plan for World Class Universities and Research Centers of Excellence
6. HEEACT Regulations Governing the Recognition of Self-Accreditation	6. Teaching Excellence Initiative
	7. Excellence Initiative for Technological University Paradigms
	8. HEEACT Annual Report

exception, research universities (De Maret 2007; Feng 2007; Altbach 2007; Salmi 2009). This fad for 'building world-class universities' and 'pursuit of excellence' also impacted Taiwan higher education enormously (Yonezawa and Hou 2014).

In 2002, Taiwan's Higher Education Macro Planning Commission (HEMPC), founded by the government, was commissioned to promote excellence within Taiwan's higher education system. To reach this goal, in 2003 HEMPC proposed a national plan to assist a number of selected universities and research centers via concentrated investment. By the '*selection and concentration' policy*, the Ministry of Education launched three main Excellence projects based on the mission and objectives, including *the Development Plan for World Class Universities and Research Centers of Excellence (2005–2016), the Teaching Excellence Initiative (2005–2016), and the Technological University Paradigms* (2013) (Department of Higher Education 2011; Hou, Ince, and Chiang 2012). According to the MOE (2018), 12 research universities, accounting for 7.3 percent of all Taiwanese higher education institutions, were granted support from the Development Plan for World Class Universities and Research Centers of Excellence, with a total of US$330 million per year, compared with 31–33 teaching excellence recipients being awarded US$53million, and 12 Academia-Industry Collaboration Paradigm institutions with US$34million. Over the past 10 years, it can be seen that the Taiwanese government allocated the most resources on selected research institutions, with 85 percent of the total budget aimed at building several world-class research universities.

With a new focus on university social responsibility and equity in higher education accessibility, in the early 2017, the Tsai administration launched the new initiative called 'Higher Education Sprout Project'. The 5-year Project is expected to cultivate a variety of high-quality talents at all levels and help the university develop its features and competitiveness. In order to achieve the above objectives, the universities are encouraged to engage local community closely in addition to global outreach. Different from the previous 2 cycles of excellence initiatives for the few selected universities, the Project awarded a total of 156 institutions with an egalitarian approach. It means that all types of higher education providers are eligible for the government funding grants. It is expected to accomplish the following four goals – implementing teaching innovation, developing universities features and uniqueness, improving public goods, and fulfilling social responsibilities (MOE 2017a). Likewise, the Project attempts to strike a well-balanced emphasis on student teaching quality and research outputs.

The project is divided into two parts. The first part is to improve university education comprehensively as well as to promote higher education diversification as so to secure students' right to education. The second part called '*Global Taiwan*' aims at facilitating universities to the sphere of excellence and building leading research centers (MOE 2017b). Initially, all institutions are funded with a total of US 326.7million each year, including two subsections, US 20.6 million at 'University Social Responsibility' program (USR) US 20.6 million and US 23.97 million at 'Support for underprivileged students' program respectively; the second part allocated US 182.19 million for 4 selected research universities only and 24 research centers. Four selected universities were selected for part two: National Taiwan University, National Cheng Kung University, National Chiao Tung University, National Tsing Hua University (MOE 2017b; Huang 2019). Compared with more than 85% of the funding allocated at 12 research universities and research centers from 2005 to 2016, there is only 35.8% distributed at 24 research-oriented institutions (Hou, Ince, and Chiang 2012; Huang 2019). In particular, the funding for National Taiwan University has been dropped drastically from US 100 million in the previous excellence initiative to 56.7 million in the Higher Education Sprout Project, with a reduction rate of 56%.

New self-accreditation policy – from state controlled to market-driven

After initial cycles of program and institutional accreditation were undertaken, several major concerns about the HEEACT's accreditation were addressed, such as the increased workloads, lower

engagement of faculty members, lack of confidence on the reviewers' professionalism (Noda et al. 2018; Hou et al. 2018). A call for state deregulation and institutional empowerment was getting stronger and stronger. Therefore, a new practice of external quality assurance, called 'self-accreditation', was proposed by the MOE. 'Self-accreditation' is, 'a process or status that implies a degree of autonomy, on the part of an institution or individual, to make decisions about academic offerings or learning' (INQAAHE 2019). Derived from accreditation, it is defined as the status accorded to a mature institution conducting its internal quality assurance activities and which is exempted from the process of external accreditation. A self-accrediting institution is fully authorized to invite its review panel to inspect institutional or programme quality. With greater familiarity with the specific nature of the institution itself, ideally, self-accreditation can lead institutions to a more informed process of self-improvement (Sanyal and Martin 2007; Kinser 2011; Hou et al. 2018). Up to present day, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Australia and Taiwan have implemented this approach.

The 2012 MOE self-accreditation policy, however, conducted as a pilot study, identified a limited number of institutions as eligible for self-accreditation status. The two goals of the MOE self-accreditation policy are to deregulate the national higher education system and to enhance autonomy over institutional governance and management. In general, applicants for self-accrediting status engage a two-stage review and approval process. In the first stage, the applicant is required to submit a proposal and related evidence demonstrating capacity to conduct an external review process. The proposal is then reviewed by the Accreditation Recognition Committee, organized by the MOE. In addition, the applicants are required to comply with the following eight standards (MOE 2013; Hou et al. 2018). The second stage focuses on the quality assurance implementation undertaken by self-accrediting institutions and the reviews outcomes and related documents should be submitted to HEEACT for approval. With HEEACT's approval, the MOE allows self-accrediting institutions to publish their programme review decisions on their official website (Chen and Hou 2016; Hou et al. 2018; HEEACT 2018).

In early 2017, the Tsai Administration announced a new quality assurance policy, indicating that programme accreditation would change from a compulsory orientation to a voluntary approach. In particular, the self-accrediting policy has likewise evolved to a new phase of development. Eligibility for self-accrediting institutional status was opened to all Taiwan higher education providers. This means that all institutions are eligible to undertake self-accreditation programme reviews if capable of doing so according to 2017 new quality policy. Yet, as a protection mechanism, HEEACT still sets a minimum standard of at least an 80% pass rate of the previous cycle HEEACT programme accreditation for the applicants in order to ensure that the university has sufficient capability to execute self-accreditation activities (HEEACT 2018, 2020a). Surprisingly, only 18 institutions applied for the recognition of self-accreditation up to present in comparison with 60 in the first cycle in 2012. Furthermore, several top research universities chose to apply for HEEACT's accreditation voluntarily, which meant that they gave up their self-accreditation status. Either each alternative will be funded partially by the government (HEEACT 2019).

New Southbound policy

With the emerging markets in ASEAN and South Asian countries, as an important member of the Asia-Pacific region, whose economy is closely bound with these countries, Taiwan has expanded relations with these countries members in the realms of technology, tourism, education, labor, culture since 2000. To make the most of the cooperation and integration, the Tsai government set forth the 'New Southbound Policy Promotion Plan' in 2017. According to Executive Yuan (2016), 'The New Southbound Policy is a major element in Taiwan's external economic strategy that calls for developing comprehensive, mutually beneficial relations with countries in the ASEAN and South Asia, Australia and New Zealand. It aims to create a new model of economic development and help drive regional growth and prosperity by pursuing bilateral exchanges and cooperation' (1). There are four main tasks in the policy, including promoting economic

collaboration, conducting talent exchange, sharing resources, and forging regional links (Executive Yuan 2016).

Under the 'New Southbound Policy', the MOE also proposed 'The New Southbound Talent Development Program' in order to foster bilateral exchange and mutual resources sharing with ASEAN and South Asian countries. There are three parts in this program, *Market, Pipeline, and Platform* (MOE 2019b). The first part is about talent cultivation for second-generation immigrants to gain greater Southeast Asian language skills and internship experience; for Taiwanese university teachers and students to have deeper understanding of Southeast Asian languages, cultures and industries; and to offer ASEAN students' professional and Mandarin language training. Second, in order to encourage talent exchange, scholarship and financial aid is increased for those who are willing to do the exchange. In addition, the two initiatives above created a communication platform among countries to promote greater future cooperation and interaction.

The total funding for The New Southbound Talent Development Program is about US 129 million starting from 2017 to 2020. According to the funding allocation, the main focus of 'The New Southbound Talent Development Program' is in the *Market* part, with about US 25 million out of the total 32 million in 2017 (MOE 2016). To be more specific, the main focus of the *Market* part is to offer the academia-industry cooperation courses in order to cultivate talents and fulfill industrial needs, with US 7 million in 2017, US 14 million in 2018, and US 22 million in 2019 respectively (MOE 2016). In the 2017 academic year, there have been 74 academia-industry cooperation programs with 2,494 students enrolled (Department of Statistics 2019c). In the first semester of the 2018 academic year, there have been 86 academia-industry cooperation programs with 3,158 students enrolled, which has already surpassed the number of programs and students of the previous academic year (MOE 2019a).

Since 2011, the former government relaxed the restrictions of academic qualifications and first allowed Mainland China students to study in Taiwan. The number of students from Mainland China to Taiwan had been growing steadily, from 12,155 students in 2011–41,951 students in 2015 (Department of Statistics 2019b). In the year of 2016, the growth rate of Mainland China students has been falling from 26% in 2015–0.1% in 2016 (Department of Education Statistic 2019a). Up to 2018, the total number of Main China students has been dropped to 29,603 (Mainland Affairs Council 2019). One of main objectives of the New Southbound Policy is to compensate the loss of Mainland China students in Taiwan. According to the MOE, the number of the students from ASEAN and South Asia has grown from 37,299 in 2017–51,970 in 2018, with a 39% growth rate (Department of Statistics 2019d).

The New Southbound Policy did attract more and more ASEAN students to study in Taiwan, especially students from Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia, but it created problems of quality in these transnational programs due to this open door policy (Xu and Li 2018). In addition, there is a confusing boundary and definition between working and internship from participating universities' perspectives. Several cases have shown that some foreign students admitted to the academia-industry programs ended up working at factories instead of studying anything at school (Li 2018; Wu 2018). The unintended consequences might result in more worries and mistrust on quality of Taiwan higher education domestically and internationally.

6. Implication of policy shifts in Taiwan higher education and conclusion

Political factor mattered in the process of educational policy shift

Based on document analysis of the three major higher education initiatives above, it was found that the nation-state is still playing a key role in policy shifts over Taiwan's higher education development and institutional governance under the doctrine of neoliberalism with an egalitarian approach (Shin 2018a; Chan, Yang, and Liu 2018). On one hand, deregulation over institutional governance was used a political tool to reflect a call of autonomy from universities (Chan 2010); on the other hand,

redistribution of educational resources would be meant to respond to social justice and reexamining accountability of higher education providers. This engagement was largely irrespective of the type of policy change in place: striking a balance between the pursuit of building world-class universities and enhancement of university social responsibility and local engagement; from a selection and concentration-based funding scheme to an egalitarian approach; and further from accountability to autonomy. As Lo (2019) argued, 'on this basis, it is suggested that the reorientation reveals an attempt to balance the external/global trends and requirements (which are revealed by the world-class movement) and the internal/local pressures (which are institutionalized by democratic elements in higher education governance)' (4). Concerns remain that policy connected strongly to local politics, to some extent could destroy the sustainable development of education when the new administration took office.

National accreditation continued to be used by university leaders for institutional effectiveness

Overall, the three initiatives attempt to empower institutions in terms of internal quality assurance capacity, features identification, and internationalization, but several concerns were addressed. Originally, the concept of the new cycle self- accreditation policy which focuses on deregulation from national accreditation, and quality culture building on campuses, was highly esteemed by universities and colleges (HEEACT 2018). Surprisingly, many universities and colleges, especially, research universities, chose national accreditation instead of self-accreditation after considering administrative workloads, accountability, and financial support from government, which is one of the unexpected consequences in the policy. As one University president claimed, 'I do not think my university has sufficient capacity to conduct an external review by ourselves. Besides, HEEACT accreditation would facilitate my administrative teams to undergo organizational reform, program restructure, and pedagogical innovation because it is an external review done by a third party' (Huang 2019). Obviously, the struggle between autonomy and accountability indeed pressured Taiwan university leaders to learn how to strike a balance between an external intervention and effective governance internally.

Global competitiveness is declining gradually

Following 'selection and concentration' policy prior to 2016, it was found that Taiwan has successfully established a few top ranked universities with a significant increase in research outputs(Fu, Baker, and Zhang 2018) Yet, the Taiwanese case also demonstrated that the worries about inequality turned into realities in Taiwan society. On the other hand, Taiwan's experience shows that controversy over 'using rankings' or 'not using rankings' to build up world-class universities still exists between institutions and the government. As Salmi (2015) stated, 'The focus on world-class universities is likely to further promote elitism. In the search for academic excellence, top universities are very selective, which bears the risk of keeping away talented students from families with low-cultural capital' (18).

When the Tsai administration initiated a more egalitarian approach, with the Higher Education Sprout Project, Taiwan's academics expressed another concerns over whether the global competitiveness of Taiwan's top research universities would be gradually eroded. Seemingly, these concerns are coming to fruition. According to WOS and Scopus database, the number of the papers published by four selected Taiwan universities- National Taiwan University, National Cheng Kung University, National Chiao Tung University, National Tsing Hua University dropped drastically from 2015 to 2018, and the same over all Taiwan's universities. In particular, the total of the publications at National Taiwan University from 2015 to 2018 dropped with a loss of more than 400 papers (Table 2).

Nevertheless, building world-class universities remains necessary if Taiwan's government is to continue its impressive economic progress and global influence. The importance of human resource development must be stressed in world-class universities if they are to achieve excellent research

Table 2. Number of publications of Taiwan's Universities by WOS and SCOPUS.

Database	WOS				SCOPUS			
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2015	2016	2017	2018
National Chiao Tung University	1585	1574	1469	1449 (−136)	1598	1610	1514	1424 (−174)
National Cheng Kung University	2506	2491	2319	2233 (−273)	2671	2565	2407	2315 (−264)
National Tsing Hua University	1714	1674	1572	1512 (−202)	1787	1785	1668	1651 (−136)
National Taiwan University	5055	4740	4679	4620 (−435)	5319	5042	4981	4868 (−451)
Average on four institutions	2715	2620	2510	2454 (−261)	2668	2567	2466	2565
In Total (all Taiwan's universities)	27,074	26,902	25,663	—–—	28,989	28,502	27,137	—–—

Source: authors.

performance. When the Tasi administration reorients the focus of previous excellence initiatives, the path to establishing world-class universities would likely be more and more far away from Taiwan higher education.

The loss of Chinese students was not offset by the new Southbound program

A further concern regarding quality derives from the New Southbound policy, which allowed low end institutions to enroll ASEAN students to study in the academia-industry programs without a clear admission policy (Li 2018; Wu 2018). An issue between quality and quantity over ASEAN students studying in the collaborative program arouse severe discussions in Taiwan' Society. The worries about teaching quality and student' right to be educated in these programs have been quickly widespread. To resolve it, the MOE commissioned HEEACT to evaluate and inspect all international programs of industry-academia collaboration with the following four standards: (1) student

Table 3. Comparison among three MOE initiatives.

	Higher Education Sprout Project	Self-accreditation	New Southbound policy (academia-industry programs)
Year launched	2005/2016	2012/2017	2011/2016
Previous project/ focus	Three excellence initiatives	Compulsory program accreditation	Attracting Mainland Chinese students
New focus	1.Teaching quality and learning outcomes focused 2.University social responsibility 3.Global competitiveness	1. Autonomy 2. internal quality assurance	1. Strengthening partnership with the ASEAN universities 2. Offset the declining local student enrollment and Chinese students
Funding	Part I: US 326.7million each year Part II: US 182.19 million	Recognition fees (US 650 per program) funded by government since 2017	Academia-industry programs: US 7 million in 2017 US 14 million in 2018 US 22 million in 2019
Number of participating institutions	Part 1: 156 Part 2: global Taiwan(top ranked institutions) – 4 global Taiwan (research center) – 24	18	2017 fall:37 programs 2018 spring: 37 programs 2018 fall: 86 programs
Impacts/challenges	1. Funding scheme shifts from con in a wider dispersion approach 2. Decreasing research outputs	1. Insufficient governmental funding 2. More efforts invested 3. Several self-accrediting institutions chose HEEACT program accreditation	1. A major proportion of the participating institutions are low end entry technical colleges 2. Quality of education is declining
Governance model shift	1. From Selection and concentration to egalitarianism 2. State control	1. From external review to empowerment of university's IQA office 2. Market-oriented and academic self-governance modes 3. State control remained	1. From pro Chinese policy to new southbound focused program 2. State control

Source: Authors.

enrollment, school attendance and life care; (2) Curriculum planning and implementation; (3) Qualification of teachers; (4) Internship and part-time job (HEEACT 2020b).

Initially, the government would expect that the New Southbound policy could resolve the issue of a great loss in Mainland China students coming to Taiwan. In reality, the ASEAN students would not be able to make the less competitive colleges revived, and vice versa (Table 3). According to MOE, there remained 43 institutions with a less than 80% rate of student enrollment in 2019 and 3 institutions were ended up with a closure; one in the year of 2018, and two in 2019 respectively (United News 2019; MOE 2020).

7. Conclusion

Following political, social and economic concerns, the Tsai Administration launched three new national initiatives in Taiwan higher education. Under concepts of 'egalitarianism', 'institutional autonomy', and 'antagonism toward one China policy' these projects, Taiwan' institutions were encouraged to enhance accessibility for underprivileged students; engage at local community level; build a culture of quality; as well as strengthen partnerships with ASEAN institutions. Thus the new directions derived from a shift of political power concluded 'the relevance of local politics to higher education policymaking' (Lo 2019, 4).

When neoliberalism sees privatization, marketization and competition as the defining characteristics of accountability, it is argued that policy-led reforms would contribute to institutional performance 'through efficiency of decision-making, performance-based management, and efficiency of resource use' (Shin and Kim 2018, 237). Due to a paradox between in search of egalitarianism or pursuit of academic excellence, this ideology may not be fully supported by Taiwan case. Although neoliberal theorists advocated the use of crises and criticism in public to impose new policies, unintended consequences from declining institutional performances, opposite reactions and negative outcomes created the complexity of the situation, which led to more concerns about the appropriateness and adequacy of policy change at that time.

However, in the views of policy makers, policy change is the normal way to respond public concerns in a democratic society. Although higher education policy design, making and change by Tsai administration attempted to move towards a hybrid approach from the state control mode solely, some unexpected consequences and impacts in Taiwan higher education appeared. The state control model continued to dominate the process of policy shift and affected university governance under the three key national initiatives (Chan 2010; Lo and Hou 2019). Market-oriented and academic self-governance modes were applied for the compensation of the negative impacts derived from egalitarianism when policy makers were questioned about the reform, but it remained very challenging for the Taiwanese government to strike a balance between combating inequality, and pursuing academic excellence and quality assurance.

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