

Taiwan Higher Education at the Crossroads: Its Implication for China

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Introduction

Since the 1980s, the education systems of Europe, and North and South America have faced a revolution, initiated by the adoption of neo-liberal free market economic policies and a consequent deregulation of education (Giroux, 2002; Dale, 2001). This has variously been realized through the restructuring and deregulation of public education, undertaken to increase the relative autonomy and responsibility of individual institutions, accountability and efficiency. Under these regimes institutions are expected to become more competitive, creating a competitive education market system. Under the impress of international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) these neoliberal policies result in increasing private investment for education and supervising higher education institutions (HEIs) through the norms of more standardized and transparent accountability (Chou, 2005).

Under neo-liberal policies universities have shifted from norms of traditional state-control to those of state-supervision. Government' s

role of initiating rules and regulations for HEIs now consists largely of specifying HEI funding standards. Market-oriented higher education is increasingly focused on issues of “competition” and “deregulation” including: developing performance-based funding schemes, increasing competition for faculty and student accountability, relocating social resources between HEIs, encouraging self-fundraising by universities, setting up more private institutions, and raising tuition fees. The policy sector holds that adopting market-oriented policies elevates the competitiveness of universities, induces cost-effective behaviour among HEI’ s, and increases efficiency for better education quality. These actions, it is held, improve autonomy within universities, and in the long run, can increase student awareness of their rights as consumers of an educational product.

The following discussion embraces Taiwanese and Chinese higher education reforms since 1990s, as they have strong cultural similarities and are responding to common domestic and foreign trends in the region. Their attempts to upgrade the world-class universities in each country are also controversial, due to the perceived influence of a strong neo-liberal ideology.

Higher Education in Taiwan

After the lifting of martial law in 1987, higher education in Taiwan entered a stage of dramatic growth, part of a remarkable social and economic transformation. The number of universities and colleges expanded two- to three-fold over the past decade. Increasingly numbers of

government supported students were viewed as a public sector burden. Successive governments introduced market-oriented reforms to relieve government budgetary pressures and grant the HEI' s greater autonomy. Inspired by Japanese education reforms in the 1980s, the Taiwanese government set up an Executive Yuan Educational Reform Committee (1994-96), amended The University Acts in 1994, revised them in 2005 based on deregulation, and pushed institutional administrative funds onto public universities (1996) to increase efficiency. These measures sought to introduce market dynamics into Taiwanese higher education.

Higher Education in China

China also underwent a dramatic change as a result of implementing a market economy and open-door policy in the early 1990s. To respond to the demands of rapid economic growth (averaging 8% GDP growth per annum over two decades) as well as international competition, Chinese higher education changes included: rapid expansion of enrolments, structural reforms, deregulation, privatization and quality improvement (Huang, 2005; Min, 2005).

Traditionally focusing on elite education, the Chinese government has shifted its attention to the improvement of education quality at the primary and secondary levels. Simultaneously massive restructuring of HEI' s took pace in an effort to increase shared responsibilities and relocate powers to the provincial and local levels. While funding from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and other central government agencies remains the main source of financing for universities and colleges, massive higher education enrolments in higher education and continued

marketization have led to calls for more deregulation and social responsiveness within HEIs.

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