To Borrow or to Mix? A Cultural Approach to Observing Taiwan's Higher Education

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Abstract.   Taiwan's higher education system has intentionally been designed to follow a Western model, and in its higher education development there are observable aspects of policies and practices that echo models from the West.   However, traditional values still play a significant role in its social and cultural development.   Beneath the surface are various unseen facets that are often less institutionalized, but are nevertheless powerful and reflect deep-rooted values of Taiwanese society that persist despite the social, political, economic and cultural changes of the past two centuries.

This paper investigates the development of the higher education system in Taiwan through a cultural lens.   In particular, it examines how culture plays a role in the system's development. Adopting a case study approach, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected administrators and academics from two elite universities in Taiwan.   The empirical data reflect the tensions inherent in the collision and assimilation of traditional Chinese and Western cultural elements. Three emerging themes fundamental to the process of higher education development in Taiwan were derived from the data analysis: (1) Chinese heritage and cultural conservation, (2) modernity and de-Sinicization, and (3) international visibility.

The study furthers our understanding of how Taiwan's higher education has undertaken cultural changes through the exhausting process of borrowing and mixing, contributing to a better understanding of East Asian higher education development from a cultural perspective.

Keywords: higher education, Taiwan, cultural approach, de-Sinicization

Introduction

East Asian higher education has made remarkable progress in both quality and quantity over the past years, and some predict that East Asian universities will soon join the distinguished league of the world's leading universities.   To others, large funding and innovative strategies are insufficient and

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can only bring East Asia so far.   Both have cited cultural values when developing their arguments. Accordingly, this paper is theoretically framed by such opposing views.   The term "twisted roots" has been used to describe the import of Western academic models that are shaped by indigenous influence in Asia (Altbach, 1989), stressing the incompatibility of Western models and traditional Asian values. Elsewhere, scholars have examined how non-Western societies learn to build modern higher education systems, and how Chinese societies in particular attempt to integrate their indigenous culture during processes of imitation and/or assimilation, with inevitable conflict between their indigenous values and the imposed Western educational values (Yang, 2016a & b).   Many years ago, Altbach (2016) presented his notion of a "glass ceiling".   He moves further recently by referring to East Asian higher education development as having "feet of clay".   Also based on cultural values, Marginson (2011) claimed that East Asian higher education systems possess unique characteristics influenced by Confucian heritage.   Others draw a link between China's current expansion in higher education and the Confucian knowledge tradition (Zha, 2011; Zha, Shi & Wang, 2015).   This paper aims to contribute to such debates using Taiwan as an example.

Taiwan has often been located within the group of rising higher education systems in East Asia. Based on its global knowledge economy capacity, Taiwan has been placed in the "highly developed knowledge economies" group alongside Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, mainland China, Macau and Singapore, wherein the gross enrolment rate in tertiary education exceeds or will soon exceed half the youth population (Marginson, 2011)[1].   The type of education prominent in this group has been shaped by Confucian values.   Yet, modern universities in these societies have been modeled after Western systems.   Underpinned by its own set of cultural values, the Western model allows little room for Confucian cultures to maneuver (Yang, 2014).   Although the higher education system in Taiwan has been heavily influenced by Western models, traditional values in the society still play a critical role in higher education development.   Within its profound social, political, economic and cultural transformations of the past two centuries, Taiwan's higher education development has readily observable aspects of its policies and practices that echo the experiences from the West, but underneath the surface various unseen facets reflect its deeply rooted values and heritage.

This paper examines higher education development in Taiwan through a cultural lens.   It adopts the conflict approach to policy analysis and incorporates both macro and micro level analyses (Ball, 1994).   At the macro level, the education system, government policies and reforms concerning world-class universities are analyzed by critically interrogating some commonly-held values and assumptions.   At the micro level, it applies an interpretivist approach towards participants' perceptions and experiences in reference to policies by looking for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of their social life-world (Crotty, 2015).   It tries to pursue further

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[1] According to Marginson, Taiwan's tertiary gross enrolment rate reached 87% in 2009.

understanding of challenges to global trends in modernization of higher education in the local context (Stromquist, 2002; Wells, 2005)

Methods

This study adopts a case study approach.   The two purposively sampled cases (Punch, 2009) are elite research universities in Taiwan.   One is a comprehensive university, and the other is a technological university.   Research universities are national institutions that contribute to culture, technology, and society, and are international institutions that link to global intellectual and scientific trends (Altbach, 2011).   It is assumed that elite research universities in Taiwan are those that aspire to attain world-class status and are willing to embrace international norms in this endeavor.   Hence, the intensity of convergence and divergence in policy and practice can be readily observable through adaptation, imitation and transformation to conform to the Western model in such institutions.

In each university, interviewees include both administrators and academics.   Initial contacts were made for interview and snowball sampling (Punch, 2009) required participants to identify other interviewees.   The final sample included thirteen participants from the elite comprehensive university and seven from the elite technological university.   Many of them held administrative leadership positions in their university during the time of interview as shown in Tables 1 and 2.   To ensure their familiarity with their institution and policy, all participants had at least three years of experience in their universities.

Table 1. Participants from University A

Interviewee	Gender	Age	PhD	Discipline	Professional Rank	Administrative level
UA-1	M	70-80	Overseas	Psychology	Professor	n/a
UA-2	M	60-70	Domestic	Medicine	Professor	President
UA-3	M	60-70	Overseas	Physics	Professor	Vice President
UA-4	F	50-60	Overseas	Literature	Professor	Faculty Dean
UA-5	M	60-70	Domestic	Science	Professor	Vice President
UA-6	M	50-60	Overseas	Engineering	Professor	Associate Dean
UA-7	F	50-60	Overseas	Education	Professor	Mid-level administrator
UA-8	M	60-70	Overseas	History	Professor	Faculty Dean
UA-9	M	60-70	Domestic	Chemistry	Professor	n/a
UA-10	M	50-60	Overseas	International Studies	Professor	n/a
UA-11	M	30-40	Overseas	Policy Management	Assistant Professor	Director
UA-12	F	40-50	Overseas	Education	Professor	n/a
UA-13	M	40-50	Overseas	Engineering	Professor	Mid-level administrator

Table 2. Participants from University B

Interviewee	Gender	Age	PhD	Discipline	Professional Rank	Administrative level
UB-1	M	40-50	Domestic	Psychology	Associate Professor	n/a
UB-2	M	50-60	Overseas	Entomology	Professor	Faculty Dean
UB-3	M	50-60	Overseas	Social Science	Professor	President
UB-4	F	50-60	Overseas	Education	Professor	Administrative Dean
UB-5	M	60-70	Overseas	Science/History	Professor	n/a
UB-6	M	60-70	Domestic	Science	Assistant Professor	Mid-level administrator
UB-7	M	50-60	Overseas	Engineering	Professor	Vice President

The two primary research instruments were documentary analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The published policy documents concerning the push towards world-class university status were reviewed, including vision and mission statements, strategic plans and leaders' speeches. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a prepared list of questions. This was followed by improvised probing to elicit the perceptions and experiences of participants concerning how the notion of world-class university had been understood and implemented locally. Comparison and contrast of interview data led to aggregated themes (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p.127). The interviews were conducted in Mandarin and lasted about 60-90 minutes. With consent from the interviewees, all interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards. To compare the findings and ensure analytic relevance, cross-case analysis was adopted when analyzing the data set (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The development of higher education in Taiwan

Taiwan's existing higher education system is an amalgam of the Japanese colonial system, the Chinese system and modern university models from the West. The first university was established under the name Taihoku Imperial College in 1928 during the Japanese colonial period, and was subsequently renamed Taiwan National University in 1945 after the Second World War when Taiwan was returned to China. The Japanese system of education was replaced by the modern Chinese model, an approximation of American higher education. Taiwan's higher education system entered into another phase of reform when the Kuomintang Party retreated to Taiwan in 1949 after losing to the Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War. With respect to institutional organization, length of study, curriculum, degree structures and graduation requirements, the system has since been modelled after the American model (Yang, 2016a). Until the termination of martial law in 1987, Taiwan's higher education began to experience a transformation along the line of decentralization.

In line with its political democratization, higher education in Taiwan has moved towards the pursuit of academic freedom and autonomy.   From the 1950s-1980s, universities in Taiwan were part of a governmental body and were under direct bureaucratic control.   There was a major educational reform in 1994, which is considered an indirect result of political liberalization since the late 1980s.   In 1995, when a high-level advisory board to the Executive Yuan was established, the board advised that the higher education sector be free from political constraints (Chan & Chan, 2015).   Aligned with the need for a more skilled workforce during the transformation of Taiwan's economy from agricultural to labor-intensive and subsequently to a technology and knowledge-oriented economy, the Ministry of Education has allowed the private sector to engage in this development, leading to an expansion of private higher education institutions (Mok, 2000).   In 2016, there were 158 higher education institutions in Taiwan, with 126 universities (48 public and 78 private), 19 independent colleges and 13 junior colleges, enrolling a total of 1,309,441 students[2] (Ministry of Education, 2017b, 2017c), with 48,096 full-time teachers (Ministry of Education, 2016).

In response to the quest for world-class status, the Ministry of Education first provided funding of NTD50 billion to support the "Developing International First-Class Universities and Top Research Center Plan" from 2006-2010 (Hou, 2011).   The plan was followed by the "Stepping Towards Premier University Plan" in which NTD10 billion per year was allocated from 2011 to 2015 to support a select number of top universities[3] in becoming world-class universities (Kuo, 2015).   With ongoing funding and support from the government, the pursuit of achieving world-class status in global rankings continues to make progress.   However, considering its achievements of the past decades, Taiwan's higher education has been underestimated and under-recognized by the international community.   The four flagship universities[4] have not made significant breakthroughs, at least as reflected in the three major world rankings (see Appendix 1).   Efforts do not seem to have had the positive impact that was expected.   Nevertheless, to secure quality further, the most recent five years initiative with additional funding of NTD60 billion, entitled the "Higher Education Sprout Project", was launched in 2017.   The project is centered around four major aims: to implement teaching innovation, to promote social awareness and responsibility, to establish specialization and to elevate public access to higher education.   In comparison to previous plans aiming to support the universities in raising their global profile, this is a more comprehensive and balanced plan that incorporates the government's aspiration to support the higher education system in achieving high quality in research and teaching.   It is supposed to be a vehicle to support Taiwan's higher education institutions in attaining world-class status.

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[2] 1,015,398 undergraduate students, 169,538 Master's students, 28,821 Doctoral candidates and 95,684 junior college students
[3] Eleven public universities and one private university were selected.
[4] National Taiwan Universities, National Tsing Hua University National Chiao Tung University and National Cheng Kung University

When observing the development of the higher education system in Taiwan, two major aspects stand out.   First, the system has been built with continuous budgetary plans, clear objectives and steady enrolment rate.   Government policies to support the development of the higher education system have been sustained and consistent.   Gross enrolment rate was 83.99% in 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2017c).   As for teachers' qualifications, according to the Office of Statistics, 75.24% of faculty members in universities and independent colleges possess a doctoral degree or equivalent (Ministry of Education, 2016)[5].   In the pursuit of global standards, publishing in SSCI journals is counted as one of the core indicators to appraise a researcher's performance, determining recruitment and promotion, grants and awards, the level of salary, national research project proposal acceptance, as well as resource allocation (Liu, 2014).   Second, the democratic political environment in Taiwan allows a relatively high degree of academic freedom at the system level.   Engraved in the constitution, the University Law was first promulgated in 1948 (Ministry of Education, 2017a).   As part of the reform in 1994, the University Law was amended together with the Teacher Law and Private Education Law to empower academics and administrators with greater autonomy (Mok, 2000).   The coexistence of a democratic environment and consistent development is rare and enviable among most non-Western societies.

Findings

Even though the rise of East Asian universities has potentially changed the global higher education landscape, East Asian universities continue to look to their elite Western (usually American) counterparts for policy standards, policy innovations, and solutions to developmental problems (Teichler, 2009; Yang, 2013).   Taiwan is not an exception.   The society has steadily maintained its performance in higher education development, but it has not been able to achieve significant breakthroughs in performance compared to East Asian counterparts such as Hong Kong and Singapore. Taiwan's higher education system began with an altered university model that is based on the Western (European-North American) prototype.   The system has been continuously amended over time.   At an institutional level, the system seems to be well established in terms of its enrolment rate, teacher qualifications and coherent academic governance.   However, society still has the arduous task to integrate local values and heritage into the established structural setting.

Chinese heritage and cultural conservation

Taiwan is host to unique and ongoing cultural development.   Unlike its motherland that went through the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and rejected its own traditions, Taiwan has continuously

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[5] 32.95% of them are full professors, 38.66% are associate professors and 28.39% are assistant professors (Ministry of Education, 2017b).

preserved Chinese heritage and values.   This serves as a strong cultural advantage over other Chinese societies in East Asia.   In November 1966, Chiang Kai-Shek, the leader of Kuomintang party, initiated the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement on the anniversary of Sun-Yat-Sen's 101th birthday, and in response to the rising tide of the Cultural Revolution of the Communist Party in China. It was the Kuomintang's first structured plan for Chinese cultural advancement and outreach on the island.   The movement intended to affirm and restore Chinese culture, and represents a governmental attempt to solve the problem of modernizing China while still preserving the country's traditions (Guy, 2005; Tozer, 1970; Wachman, 1994).

In response to the cultural movement, the Ministry of Education supported a meeting at which 300 academic groups made suggestions for the implementation of the movement in schools and universities (Tozer, 1970).   Improving educational standards with an emphasis on Confucian principles, especially the Four Social Controls and Eight Virtues,[6] and reissuing selected Chinese classic literature to promote Chinese culture overseas were among the major goals of this movement (Guy, 2005).   Interestingly, this Cultural Renaissance Movement was declared a few months after the Cultural Revolution on the Mainland.   While Taiwanese society, which had been detached from its homeland, put tremendous effort towards restoring Chinese culture, mainland Chinese society was in the process of eliminating traditional elements from society at large.

Higher education is deeply rooted in culture (Yang, 2015).   When asked about the development of the higher education system in Taiwan, nearly all respondents emphasized an association between the higher education system and Chinese cultural heritage, and particularly Confucian values.   One regarded Taiwanese cultural heritage as a major factor that contributes to the ongoing development of the higher education system.   He explained:

> In general, the foundation of the higher education system in Taiwan is very solid.   The whole of academia has been continuously developed.   Comparing to China, we did not go through the Cultural Revolution, hence there was no disruption of our cultural development.   You can see that various cultural values, especially Confucian values, are embedded with solid ground in our society.   This helps us with the overall development of the higher education system in the long run. (UA-8)

Although possessing cultural advantages in comparison with other Chinese societies, a number of participants showed their frustrations due to the incompatibility between East Asian and Western cultural values (UA-1, UA-2, UA-4, UB-1, UB-4).   There are positive distinctions and dynamisms of East Asian and Western dichotomy.   Yet, several issues concerning the integration of the existing Anglo-Saxon model (Mora, 2001) with traditional beliefs and values remain unsolved.   A number of participants demonstrated their frustrations when the two values did not align.   This has long been a concern (Altbach, 1989).   The collision between the two traditions forms the most fundamental

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[6] The Four Social Controls refer to propriety, rectitude, honesty and sense of shame.   The Eight Virtues refer to loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, love, faithfulness, justice, harmony and peace (Guy, 2005).

cultural tension (Yang, 2016a).   Specifically, there are conflicts when combining Western and Confucian values (UA-1, UA-4, UA-6).   The interviewees' responses echo Yang's (2015) claim that cultural clashes are a lingering specter that has been haunting East Asian societies for over a century. The collision forms the most fundamental cultural condition of contemporary universities, as illustrated by a senior scholar who compared Taiwan with other Sinic societies.

> Taiwan is different from Hong Kong that adopted the British system.   Singapore is similar, also a British system.   In Taiwan, very early on, although we imposed the American model, the vast majority has been created afterwards.   At that time, we adopted pretty much the Western model as those who went overseas brought back their experiences, but we also retained oriental culture on various social levels.   There were certain conflicts while we tried to conserve traditional Chinese culture.   It was an implementation of Western discipline together with the inclusion of Confucian spirit.   That is rather complicated and can't be achieved in the near future. (UA-6)

There are close alignments in Asia between universities' and governmental goals, resulting in a significant level of support from the government that only a few Western universities possess today (Jaschik, 2011).   This fundamental relationship between the government and society may hinder the growth of the system in a long run.   In other words, the reliance on government may compromise autonomy and freedom in academia.   Taiwanese educational policy is often tied to political concerns. The society is not able to act according to its wishes (UA-7).   This highly ranked administrator shared, "In many aspects of our work, the Ministry of Education manages us too much.   It is much better now that a lot of things can be more permissible.   However, we always feel that this step is still too slow.   If we had more flexibility, we could do better" (UA-2).   This strong central government has also been identified as one of the four characteristics[7] of Asian universities that embrace a Confucian model (Marginson, 2011).   Confucian society places less emphasis on university executive autonomy and the devolution of policy responsibility (Marginson, 2011).   Tension may occur in maintaining a balance between achieving government priorities and pursuing a university mission. One Faculty Dean attested to the interdependence between national universities and the government.

> Similar to 985 and 211 in China, we have "Stepping Towards Premier University Plan".   It is a five-year plan and will last until next year (2016).   Although the plan has some shortcomings, there are merits to be understood.   Considering our system, national universities depend largely on the government.   Hence, government policies are important. What we look forward to is the consistency of strategies that will significantly affect the direction of higher education development in Taiwan. (UA-4)

Taiwan's higher education has demonstrated commitment in adopting various features of Western academia.   Acknowledging academic freedom as a definitive attribute in attaining world-class status

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[7] Four common elements of a Confucian model in East Asian and Singaporean universities are (1) strong central government, (2) a reliance on tuition and on families' willingness to invest in their children's education, (3) a push toward world-class education, and (4) the use of high stakes exams in admissions (Marginson, 2011).

(Yang, 2013), the society has made significant effort to enhance academic freedom and institutional autonomy.   Although issues concerning the integration of the existing Anglo-Saxon model (Mora, 2001) with traditional values remain, most participants cherish academic freedom as a by-product of their modern democratic society.   However, a retired scholar revealed his insight concerning an unconscious concern among Taiwanese academic, that their final aim to pursuing knowledge ties closely to national pride and patriotism.   Chinese culture lacks interest in exploring the natural world leading to a unique higher education tradition which fundamentally contradicts Western thought (Yang, 2011).   Traditionally, Chinese education associates one's learning with the destiny of one's nation. Thus, revitalizing the nation through education has remained a goal of the Chinese people (Mingyuan, 2014).

> That is to say, in a first-class university, the most important aspect and basic condition is to explore the truth for the sake of exploring.   You can say that all East Asian people, in these recent years, they lack this spirit to explore the truth for the sake of exploring.   It should not be about exploring the truth to enrich the power of our society, to achieve the dream of Chinese nation, or to achieve the dream of the Chinese race.   It's not about this.   I would say the whole of Greater China still has a long way to go.   It's my personal feeling.   Hence, I feel a bit gloomy.   It's kind of helpless.   Anyway, we are moving slowly. (UA-1)

Modernity and de-Sinicization

Since cultural heritage has long been a fulcrum of Taiwanese society, embracing modernity in a manner that consequently induces de-Sinicization has raised a fundamental issue that deserves further attention.   The advent of modernity in East Asian societies in the latter half of the nineteenth century has challenged the conservation of indigenous culture.   According to Bell and Chaibong (2003), democracy is one of the basic hallmarks of modernity in a social and political system.   As evidenced by the rising economy of East Asia during the 1960s-1980s, many began to attribute the success of East Asian societies to Confucianism.   After the postcolonial era, East Asian societies openly declared allegiance to Confucian values (Bell & Chaibong, 2003).   However, when modernity began reaching East Asia, various disputes with regard to the compatibility of Eastern Confucianism and Western democracy spawned.   Some argued that Confucianism hinders democratization while others affirmed that Confucianism and democracy can be coherently articulated (Juntao, 2003).   Among these opposing ideas, Confucianism was not desirable in supporting the social and political manifestations of modernity (Bell & Chaibong, 2003).   Admittedly, it was observed that East Asians put less emphasis on infusing Confucian values while embracing modernity in the past century (Bell & Chaibong, 2003).

From the interviews, many academics treasured democracy as a measure that disassociates politics from higher education, leading to a large degree of institutional autonomy and academic freedom (UA-2, UA-3, UB-5).   One major example was the decentralization of university presidential appointments.   In 1994, the University Law stipulated that universities set up their own selecting

committees for the presidential position.   The interview with the President of University A confirmed this measure allowed academics to have far more autonomy to operate their universities.   He was the first to be elected through this amended law that endorsed autonomy at an institutional level.

> I was the first.   Previously, the committee shortlisted 2-3 candidates and the Ministry of Education made a final decision by choosing the candidate from the shortlist.   Currently, once the selecting committee decides, it's a decision.   From my case onwards, all universities follow this revised appointment procedure.   Things have changed.   We all think that we should fully respect the university's selecting committee.   Academics manage the school. We are the first one. (UA-2)

Political nuances in Taiwan exert great influence on its cultural development.   Taiwanese society underwent a major transformation through socioeconomic modernization after the repeal of martial law in 1987 (Rubinstein, 2007).   Since then, a series of political evolutions occurred, particularly the coalition of ruling and opposition parties in the parliament in 1989.   The first presidential election was then held in 1996.   It was considered a major leap to becoming a democratic society.   This political development ran parallel to the evolution of an open civil society that demonstrated a greater degree of freedom (Rubinstein, 2007).   Under the new democratic government that tries to promote the concept of "modern" Taiwan together with an ongoing political tension with its mainland, de-Sinicization has become a natural outgrowth.   In other words, de-Sinicization is intended to inhibit the psychological binding with the motherland and to foster the "new" Taiwanese cultural identity. Consequently, de-Sinicization may downplay Chinese traditions including Confucian values.   While embracing modernity, de-Sinicization is perceived as a tradeoff between traditional heritage and new Taiwanese identity (UA-8).

The majority of participants acknowledged the positive development of modern universities in Taiwan.   Success is significant at the system and institutional levels.   Yet, an experienced scholar expressed his personal view that the process was not culturally sensitive.   He raised concerns about the cultural impact of the government's impulse to de-Sinicize Taiwan from its mainland, and how returnees from the USA dominated the major educational reform in 1994.

> 1994 was a very critical year during the era of Lee Teng-hui [first elected President of Taiwan] who advocated Chinese de-Sinicization and Taiwanese localization.   It was completely ignorant of Chinese culture.   It was literally blind.   They randomly brought in Western things, resulting in tons of problems.   We adopted the idea from those who were previously educated overseas.   What they understood was rather limited.   They went to the US, studied there.   Assuming that it would fit, they then brought back the whole model.   It wasn't supposed to be that way. (UA-8)

Today, even though Confucian cultural heritage remains in the society as the way of life, its existential values are not being forged to cultivate an identity.   As reflected in the remarks above, de-Sinicization has become a hindrance to integrating local culture into the existing Western model.

This is due to the lack of understanding of Taiwanese society's own fundamentals when the deeply rooted culture has been restrained and devalued (de-Sinicized).

On one hand, the encounter between Confucianism and modernity offers positive prospects for modern life in Taiwan (Huang, 2014b).   Confucianism is actively sought and articulated in modern democratic societies (Bell & Chaibong, 2003).   On the other hand, there is a justifiable concern that this ongoing de-Sinicization may marginalize the fundamental beliefs and values that are deeply rooted in the society.   In the context of higher education, a renowned scholar described sadly, "When academia does not have its own tradition, we don't know how it can be connected to our culture. This causes a so-called 'split personality'.   Culturally, it's hollow.   The system has been westernized and we all feel it's not right.   There should have been a long process of grounding and assimilating" (UA-1).

While Western universities influence the direction of change in higher education institutions in much of the world, the integration of indigenous and Western ideas of a university has rarely been achieved (Yang, 2013).   Despite being adopted into the academe for nearly a century, an assimilation of Taiwanese traditional values into the Western model remains unfinished.   Some interviewees shared their frustration about existing academic misconduct in Taiwanese academia (UA-5, UA-7).   Among an increasing number of cases of academic misconduct, academic corruption frequently appears in the global news media, undermining the standing of institutions and the academic community (Macfarlane, Zhang & Pun, 2014).   According to Lin and Wen (2007), academic misconduct in Taiwan occurred among students in cheating on tests and assignments, plagiarism and falsifying documents.   The outburst of scandals concerning academic fraud and corruption among academics went public in 2014 (Chen, 2014).   One participant interpreted the situation as below:

> SCI, SSCI, because people are fools and aspire to publish their works to the extent that they overlook ethics.   It is almost the entire Taiwanese education system that is corrupted.   Just like, they have good knowledge, hence, they continue to be promoted.   Then, they have authority, hence, they acquire many resources to buy things.   Here comes the problem, a very serious problem.   Last year, there was an explosion once.   Many professors falsified the invoices to reimburse the funding from National Science Council.   So, what can we do?   We could not bear the outcome after a thorough investigation, forcing the Supreme Court to explain that professors are not civil servants.   Therefore, the incident is not counted as corruption, period!   You see, how deteriorated the system is.   Again, blind transplant, blind learning until we don't know the core spirit of academia. (UA-6)

In this incident, the participant believed that the aspiration to acquire global presence in publications has led to the misuse of power and the manipulation of the system.   He also concluded that it was due to the blind implementation of the Western model without a thorough understanding of its core spirit.   Similar to many Western systems (Mora, 2001), academics in Taiwan are not civil servants and hence do not officially belong to a national body.   Ideally, the government wishes to establish the system with legal separation from academia to safeguard academic freedom and

institutional autonomy.   However, in practice, the system has been abused for personal benefit as described in the remarks above.   Similar frauds occurred in some other East Asian societies as revealed in Yang's (2016b) study that throughout the East Asia region, academic dishonesty has long been an issue, from students cheating to fraud by scientists.   Research shows that academic dishonesty occurred in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea, while Japan is a rare exception (Yang, 2016b).

International visibility

Since the 1970s, Taiwan has been challenged to live with the irregularities of its international status (Weng, 1984).   While Taiwan perceives itself as a society with its own independent government, the People's Republic of China regards Taiwan as an inalienable part of China.   In 1971, Taiwan lost the seat in the United Nations to the People's Republic of China.   Since then, Taiwan has not regained the status of sovereign state internationally (Law, 2004; Weng, 1984).   While Mainland China's economic heft and international influence has grown significantly, Taiwan continues to lose its international presence and diplomatic allies.   Two recent examples are the exclusion of Taiwan from participating as an observer in World Health Assembly (AFP, 2017), and an announcement by the Panamanian government that it would terminate its diplomatic ties with Taiwan in order to forge relations with China (Sui, 2017).   Over the past 18 years, Taiwan has lost a total of 14 diplomatic allies, leaving the island with only 18 allies around the world (Nguyen, 2018).   An awareness of diminishing international status was echoed in the interview with a senior scholar.

> Talking about Taiwan's international presence, I feel unfortunate.   In international academia, people don't understand Taiwan.   Simply put, Taiwan's higher education is a system that has been underestimated internationally.   The US and Japan somehow have historical reasons to understand Taiwan.   European countries simply do not understand Taiwan.   Currently, when talking about East Asia, one would think of Japan, China, Hong Kong since these societies have a very natural tie with the West.   People know very little about Taiwan. (UA-9)

In light of this unfavorable international status, there is an inevitable impact derived from related economic and political tensions on higher education development.   These administrators who have been involved in international and cross-strait affairs shared their experiences.

> I think in the whole Chinese society, Taiwan has its visibility there.   However, in the whole world, let's say academic-wise, I think, we cannot deny an influence from political dimensions. Yes, there is an impact.   We have established so many things, knowing that they are obviously good.   However, I feel that, the international forces still have much impact on us. That being said, when Taiwan puts 100 % effort, the efficiency might have been deducted to 70%.   This means that although we have our potential, when people look at us, they still have other political concerns.   I feel that this is our obstacle. (UB-1)

> The truth is that because of the rise of China, the West perceives this growth as political and economic force.   Taiwanese society has its own strength yet even when we are trying, our effort has been affected by these forces.   Even under the most non-political arena, which is

about academia-related affairs, it is absolutely affected.   We often feel that the scholars in Taiwan are very competent in many academic fields, but whenever it comes to choosing representatives, we are often excluded.   It is Taiwan's predicament. (UB-5)

Conclusion

Taiwan's higher education system has progressively developed itself under the transformation of its social, political, economic and cultural environment in the past nine decades.   Its progress has demonstrated a unique coexistence of Western practices and Taiwanese traditional values.   The system has been consistently well developed institutionally after century-long borrowing from Western experiences (Hou, 2011; Yang, 2016a), manifesting from the long-standing presumption of Western primacy in academia with a particular Anglo-Saxon dominance (Altbach, 1989; Hawkins et al., 2013). However, our empirical data has uncovered an underlying motive within the society to conserve its long-cherished traditions and heritages.   Its cultural awareness has instilled and driven scholars to re-examine the system.

The challenge remains whether Taiwan will be able to integrate indigenous and Western ideas of a university in the changing international environment.   This further intensifies as the society is geared towards de-Sinicization and tends to be less aware of its own cultural roots, values and identity. In other words, the concentration of higher education development may rest on its practicality at material and institutional levels with less emphasis on the ideological aspects of the system.   In consideration of its achievement over the past decades and the challenges it faces at present, if Taiwan is ambitious in its quest for world-class status, the society needs to be conscious of both institutional elements and cultural facets of its higher education development.

Appendix

QS university rankings

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
National Taiwan University	n/a	n/a	76	70	68	76
National Tsing Hua University	n/a	n/a	167	155	151	161
National Chiao Tung University	n/a	n/a	202	182	174	207
National Cheng Kung University	n/a	n/a	232	224	241	222

TIMES higher education world university rankings

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
National Taiwan University	134	142	155	167	195	198
National Tsing Hua University	226-250	251-275	251-275	251-300	251-300	301-350
National Chiao Tung University	251-272	251-275	276-300	301-350	401-500	401-500
National Cheng Kung University	301-350	301-350	351-400	401-500	401-500	501-600

ARWU World University Rankings

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
National Taiwan University	101-150	101-150	151-200	151-200	151-200	n/a
National Tsing Hua University	201-300	201-300	201-300	301-400	301-400	n/a
National Chiao Tung University	301-400	301-400	301-400	401-500	301-400	n/a
National Cheng Kung University	301-400	201-300	301-400	401-500	301-400	n/a

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