



# International Benchmarking with the Best Universities: Policy and Practice in Mainland China and Taiwan

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With a strong conviction to enhance their global competitiveness, governments across different parts of the world have tried various means to promote the ranking of their universities in the global university leagues. With a strong determination to do better in such global ranking exercises, universities in mainland China and Taiwan have attempted to restructure their university systems and have searched for new governance strategies in order to make their universities more competitive in the global world. This article critically examines major policies introduced and strategies employed by governments in mainland China and Taiwan in benchmarking their universities internationally with world-class universities.

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## Introduction

The quest for a ‘world-class university’ and the global university rankings have become increasingly prominent agendas affecting the way universities are governed.<sup>1</sup> In order to better position universities in the globalized world, many national governments, policy makers and analysts of higher education across different parts of the globe have devoted far more attention, resources and energies to search for new governance and strategies in promoting university research with intention to rank higher in the global university league tables. As Altbach (2007, 3) has rightly suggested, ‘research universities have emerged on the policy agenda in many developing countries, especially larger nations that seek to compare in the global knowledge economy’. It is against the wider policy context outlined above that this article sets out to critically examine how and what major strategies governments in China and Taiwan have adopted in transforming their higher education systems to become globally competitive. More specifically, this article discusses how governments



in mainland China and Taiwan have responded by reforming their higher education governance and management styles and introducing new policies to enhance the global competitiveness of their higher education systems. The first part of the article will provide a brief policy context for higher education reforms in China and Taiwan. The second part of the article focuses on major strategies adopted by these Asian governments in internationalizing and international benchmarking their universities with global partners. The third part will focus on how and what major strategies that major universities in these two Chinese societies have employed to better position their universities in the global world.

### **The Context for Higher Education Reforms in China and Taiwan**

Prior to the reforms in the last two decades, both mainland China and Taiwan used to adopt a highly centralized system in governing their higher education systems because education was employed as an instrument to promote official ideologies and maintain the political influence of the ruling party (Mok, 2000, 2005a). Realizing the centralized governance model is appropriate in running higher education, especially when these two Chinese societies have to confront the increasingly competitive global world, the governments in China and Taiwan have begun to search for new university governance and look for new management strategies to make their systems more responsive and efficient in addressing the ever-changing world. It is against this context that higher education governance in China and Taiwan has been going through processes of decentralization, privatization, mercerization and corporatization, particularly when both the Chinese and the Taiwanese governments are particularly concerned with how to run their higher education systems in a more efficient and effective way (Mok, 2006, 2007). With a strong conviction to promote their international competitiveness in the knowledge-based economy, both governments in China and Taiwan have also adhered to the ideas of neo-liberalism and adopted market-oriented practices and strategies to run their higher education systems in a more efficient and effective manner.

In the last few decades, Taiwan has gone through significant changes resulting from the democratization and economic reforms in the last few decades (Lo and Weng, 2005). Similarly, mainland China has also experienced tremendous social and political transformations since economic reforms were started in the late 1970s (Tang and Holzner, 2007). As a late developer in higher education, the Chinese government has been particularly active in turning a number of its major universities into world-class universities by strengthening their research capacity and postgraduate education (Ngok and Guo, 2007). Likewise, the government in Taiwan has attempted to assert its

international status through better positioning of its universities in the global ranking exercises (Chen and Lo, 2007). Realizing the important role of higher education in enhancing global competitiveness, both the Chinese and Taiwan governments have tried to concentrate funding on a selected few universities in order to turn them into leading research/academic institutions which could complete globally (Deem *et al.*, 2008). Having briefly outlined the context for higher education reforms in China and Taiwan, let us now focus on the major university reform strategies.

## University Governance Change and Management Reform

### China

Openly recognizing that dependence on the state alone would not meet the pressing demands for higher education, the Chinese government has attempted to diversify educational provision and financing by adopting a policy of decentralization in order to share the financial burden for higher education financing with local governments. As early in 1985, the promulgation of the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party of China on the Reform of the Educational System* marked the beginning of diversifying educational services, allowing and encouraging the non-state sector to establish and run educational institutions (Hawkins, 2000; Chan and Ngok, 2001). The *Outline for Education Reform and Development in China* (Outline) in 1993 clearly stated that the government support non-state actor to run schools (CPCCC, 1993). The retreat of the central government in terms of education financing has created more room for local governments in general and other non-state actors in particular to play an increasingly important role in education provision and financing. Against this context, non-state or people-run (*minban*) organizations have contributed significantly to meet the growing higher education demands, thereby leading to the emergence of *minban* (people-run) schools. In 2003, there were 1279 non-state/private higher education institutions (MOE, China, 2006).

To enable the sustainable growth of education, the diversification of financing channels is considered as one of the possible ways to achieve such a policy goal. The central government has decentralized its authorities of education governance to local governments, hence shifting parts of its financial burdens to local governments and non-state sectors/actors. Adopting a 'user-pay' principle, students have to pay tuition fee since the late 1980s and thereafter tuition fees and student fees have constituted increasingly important parts of revenue for many higher education institutions. The growth of non-state educational expenditure within 10 years (from 333 million *yuan* in 1993 to 17 billion *yuan* in 2002) has clearly indicated such trends. In terms of provision,



*minban* institutions have now captured almost 8.3% of regular higher education and adult learning.<sup>2</sup> Since there is a growing demand for higher education in mainland China, mobilizing various kinds of social investment through the diversification of educational provision and funding is becoming more popular.

Moreover, the changes in human resource management practices have also significantly impacted on higher education governance and management in China. In the past, the employment practices in China were characterized by centralized labour allocation, resulting in life tenure and low labour mobility. The removal of this 'iron rice bowl employment system' has created more flexibility in the labour market. Employers hence become an important stakeholder of higher education and students would tend to choose those subjects with high market demand. Since student choices of universities and academic programmes would certainly affect the student intakes for any academic institutions, higher education institutions (especially for *minban* institutions) are confronted with the rise of 'consumerism' and the challenges resulting from the commodification/commercialization of higher education (Ngok, 2002). The growing influence of the market forces has inevitably intensified inter-university competition. Owing to the opening of the labour market, higher education institutions have to compete for quality teaching staff as well as professors with good reputation. Similarly, with the emergence of internal market in student admissions and government grants, universities are now under pressure to compete for quality students and government funding in order to maintain their national ranking and global competitiveness.

## Taiwan

Since the late 1980s, the number of private higher education institutions in Taiwan has increased tremendously, whereas the number of public institutions has grown steadily for the last decade. The official statistics indicates that the private higher education sector has grown sevenfold since the 1950s in Taiwan (MOE, Taiwan, 2001). As stipulated in the *Overall Proposal on Education* in 1994 and the *White Paper for University Education* in 2001, the Taiwan government openly recognized the importance of the private sector in providing higher education (Council on Education Reform, Executive Yuan, 1995a, b; MOE, Taiwan, 2001). In 1999, among 88 universities and colleges, 46 were private institutions, whereas 42 were public institutions (Lo and Tai, 2003, Table 8.3). Since then, the provision of the private sector has exceeded that of the public sector in higher education. The significant increase in private higher education in Taiwan clearly shows the changing role of the Taiwanese state has transformed from a higher education 'provider' to become a 'facilitator' (Lo and Tai, 2003). Other than provision, the private sector has

also expanded its role in university administration and curriculum design. For university administration, the *Private Education Institutes Law* and *Implementation Plan of Cooperation between Social Organizations and Educational Institutes* have granted autonomy to private institutions, particularly in school management, by strengthening the role and authorities of the directors' board. For curriculum design, the participation of the private sector exists in the form of cooperation between academia and industry. Given the growing globalization impact, Taiwan has been aware of the importance of maintaining an adequate supply of quality manpower in the knowledge-based economy era; the Taiwan government has therefore tried various ways to strengthen the links between university education and the labour market (MOE, Taiwan, 2003a). To ensure that university graduates meet the market's needs, the MOE launched a programme called *Last Mile Plan*, whereby encourages higher education institutions to foster closer connections with industry. With the same scheme in place, employers have the opportunity to engage with academics from universities in the design of curricula and courses in order to ensure what the students learn would cater for the labour market needs (Lu, 2004, 6–7).

Prior to 1994, the government was the primary funding source of all national universities. Similar to China, the Taiwan government also tried to diversify financing channels to finance its higher education system by replacing the *Public Budget System* with the new *University Fund System*. Under the new system, the national universities are allowed to keep the surplus, hence giving incentives for the universities to diversify their sources of income through actively applying research grants. Furthermore, the MOE allows 30% of flexibility on public universities' tuition charges. With the introduction of these measures, the Taiwan government hopes to make the national universities more financially independent in the longer term. Nowadays, tuition fees and research grants have contributed a more significant proportion to the national universities' revenue. In addition, the government once attempted to turn the status of all national universities into 'administrative legal bodies' by introducing university incorporation plans with intention to give national universities a high degree of flexibility and autonomy in their operation and development through empowering them to enjoy more fiscal autonomy and flexibilities in generating revenues (MOE, Taiwan, 2001, 2003b; Lo and Tai, 2003). To encourage private universities to compete with national universities on the same ground, the Taiwan government has adopted a new funding policy in the higher education sector by cutting about 20–25% of the state financial resources originally attributed to national universities to offer financial support to private universities based upon a merit and competitive basis. In line with this policy, 20% of the regular income of the private universities has been supported by the MOE since the 1999–2000 academic year (MOE, Taiwan, 2001). The implementation of this funding policy has held private universities



accountable to the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the general public would expect more from private universities to perform better when public money is used to support their activities (Lo and Tai, 2003, 147). In addition, the government also slightly loosened the restrictions on tuition fees by adopting the 'user-pay' principle in order to facilitate universities to get additional revenues to finance their academic programmes and research initiatives (Mok and Lo, 2002). All these measures aim to correct the previous imbalance of funding and promote a competitive culture between public and private higher education institutions for fostering better performance.

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

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

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

## **Questing for the 'World-Class Status': Government Responses and Policy Change**

### **China**

Since the 1990s, the Chinese government has tactically prioritized education as one of key items in its policy agenda of national development. According to Zheng and Zhao (2004), the economic reform and open door policy started since the late 1970s have provided China a comparatively strong base in terms of finance and technology for further development of higher education (Zheng and Zhao, 2004). Alongside with the mega trend of integration with the global community, China has actively engaged in various sorts of international organizations, attempting to be involved in more international collaboration and exchange. Fostering more international exchange and cooperation, the Chinese government has devised various means to promote the internationalization of higher education in order to benchmark with the best universities overseas (Yang, 2002). It is recognized that the ultimate goal of internationalization of higher education is to enhance the quality of higher education to the world standard; an increasing number of Chinese academics, administrators and specialists has set off to overseas exchange and academic visits.

Realizing the reality that higher education in China had missed opportunities for development in the last few decades, not many universities in China mainland are able to complete globally at the current state. With a strong conviction to benchmark with the global university league, the Chinese government is determined to concentrate its limited resources to identify a few top universities for boosting their research profile and academic standard. To achieve this goal, the Chinese government introduced two major policies in the quest for world-class universities, namely Project 211 and Project 985, in the pursuit of world-class universities in the late 1990s (Mok, 2005a; Mohrman *et al.*, 2008). Project 211 is the Chinese government's endeavour to enhance the quality of education and research in China's higher education since the 1990s. Project 211, which was first mentioned in the Outline of 1993, was formally promulgated in 1995 by the State Education Commission (SEC, now the



Ministry of Education, MOE). It primarily aimed at strengthening about 100 higher education institutions and key disciplinary areas as a national priority for the 21st century. Generally speaking, Project 211 consists of three major components:

1. Improving the overall institutional capacity by expanding the number of scholars and teaching with those who have high academic attainments and prestige, as well as enhancing the infrastructure and facilities indispensable for teaching and research.
2. Developing key disciplines which are considered to be necessary to social and economic development, scientific and technological advancement, and national defence.
3. Strengthening the networking of and collaboration between higher education institutions through the development of the Chinese Education and Research Network (CERNET), the Library and Documentation Support System (LDSS) and the Modern Equipment and Facilities Sharing System (MEFSS).

More specifically, there are three tasks in Project 211. Firstly, top priority was given to intensively finance Peking University and Tsinghua University in order to facilitate these two universities into approaching a higher level of world standard and eventually become world-class institutions. Secondly, through provision of additional funding, 25 key universities were selected for upgrading to their quality of teaching and research activities in key disciplines. Thirdly, further efforts would be made to enhance around 300 key disciplines in different institutions (MOE, China, 2005). After introducing the 211 Project, the Chinese government invested around 10.9 billion *yuan* during the period of 1996–2000 (National Planning Commission *et al.*, 2005). In terms of achievements, although only less than 10% of higher education institutions benefited from the Project, these universities offered a high percentage of student enrollments, and captured most of the research funding and equipment in the country. The implementation of the Project has also brought a significant growth in enrollment rate at various levels (i.e., undergraduate: 61%; master's degree: 108%; doctoral degree: 101%), while the number of teachers with doctoral degrees and publications has significantly increased by 109% and 94%, respectively, during the same period (National Planning Commission *et al.*, 2005). These figures have indicated that Project 211, as the first key national initiative in promoting universities with world-class standard, has contributed significantly to the quality enhancement of higher education in China.

The promulgation of Project 985 marked a second step of quality enhancement of higher education in China. In 1998, the former President Jiang Zemin made a speech on the 100th anniversary of Peking University, in which he addressed the need of establishing world-class universities in China.

The MOE thereby worked out the *Action Plan of Education Promotion for the 21st Century* (Action Plan), which stresses that, within the first two decades of the 21st century, some Chinese universities and key areas of study shall reach a world-class level and be internationally recognized. Such measures were put together as Project 985. At the early stage of implementing Project 985, the two top universities in China, Peking University and Tsinghua University, were again selected to be intensively funded by the central authority. In accordance with the Action Plan, the two universities would be allocated a special budget of 1.8 billion *yuan* for enhancing their teaching and research activities. In 1999, seven more universities were selected by the MOE to join in the collaborative projects with local authorities. Subsequently, more and more institutions have been encouraged and supported to enhance their quality in research and teaching with the goal to become world-class or world-renowned universities. By 2003, universities listed in Project 985 have increased to 34 institutions (Huang, 2005). Project 985 has started its further stage (2004–2007) since 2004, which focused on the improvement of university management and evaluation system. With emphasis on building a stronger team of management as well as teaching through worldwide recruitment, Project 985 attempts to enhance the effectiveness of the existing laboratories, research centres and facilities through restructuring and establishing a coordinating mechanism. Finally, the Project proposes to strengthen international cooperation among institutions through various exchange activities (MOE and MOF, 2005).

## Taiwan

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

According to Executive Yuan's objectives set out in 2004, the Taiwan government is particularly keen to have at least one local university ranked among the top 100 universities within the next decade, and at least 15 key departments or cross-university research centres will become the top in Asia



within the next 5 years (Lu, 2004, 9). In order to improve the quality of university standards, pursuing academic excellence and focusing universities' efforts on developing a selected few areas have become the policies adopted by the government to boost the research profile of universities in Taiwan. In 1998, the MOE and the National Science Council (NSC) jointly launched the Programme for Promoting Academic Excellence of Universities (Academic Excellence Programme), primarily aimed at improving universities' infrastructure and invigorating research (MOE, Taiwan, 2000). This Programme supports four research fields, including humanities and social sciences, life sciences, natural sciences, and engineering and applied sciences. Each research field has a focus of investigation:

1. For humanities and social sciences, the Academic Excellence Programme requests that research projects utilize local research materials for arguing against or elaborating theories from the West.
2. For life sciences, the Academic Excellence Programme stresses the importance of human physiology and development of biotechnology.
3. For natural sciences, the Academic Excellence Programme focuses on atmospheric sciences, materials sciences and earth sciences and expects these disciplines to be recognized internationally as of leading status.
4. For engineering and applied sciences, the Academic Excellence Programme highlights the importance of the applied studies of networking technologies, wireless communication technologies, and optics and photonics (MOE, Taiwan, 2000).

In addition, the MOE and NSC also formed a panel, consisting of eminent local and overseas academics to charge with selecting research projects for support by the programme. In the first round of the Academic Excellence Programme, a total of 261 research project applications were submitted. After rigorous review, a total amount of NT\$ 4.3 billion were allocated to fund 19 projects and three of which were offered conditionally. The first round of the Programme was completed in 2004. To further develop a high-quality research culture in Taiwan, the second round of the Programme was launched in 2000 until 2006. There were 148 research project applications in this round and 12 projects were granted with a total amount of NT\$ 2.1 billion. With a rigorous selection process in place, only 6.13% of research project applications were selected to be supported in the first round of the programme (excluding the three conditional offers), while 8.1% of applications were funded in the second round. The funded rate of humanities and social sciences projects was even lower (i.e., 15.55% for the first round and 3.29% for the second round). Most of the funding went to public institutions, while only two research projects jointly submitted by public and private institutions were funded (MOE, Taiwan, 2003a). After reviewing the various rounds of implementation, the

government considers the Academic Excellence Programme successful in allowing effective integration of resources to foster cooperation and exchange between outstanding institutions and talented researchers, and boosting research capacity (NSC, 2005). Hence, the Taiwan government has become even committed to invest in key research areas in order to better place universities of Taiwan in the global map.

In addition to the Academic Excellence Programme discussed above, another initiative entitled the Programme for Improving University Fundamental Education (Fundamental Education Programme) under the Academic Excellence Programme has been implemented since 2001 to enhance the level of university's foundation and general studies (Lu, 2004, 8). Applications for this programme would be divided into five groups, namely humanities and social sciences, life sciences, natural sciences, engineering and applied sciences, and institutional integration. In the first round of the Fundamental Education Programme, 112 institutions submitted 432 applications, of which 192 projects from 92 institutions were selected to be funded. In terms of funding, 55.9% of the fund was granted to public institutions, while 44.1% of the fund was allocated to private institutions (MOE, Taiwan, 2004). The MOE has planned to allocate NT\$ 1.8 billion for the second round of the programme. When putting the above discussion together, we can easily find that both the governments in China mainland and Taiwan have recognized the importance to enhance the global competitiveness of their universities and various reform strategies have been introduced to enable their universities to rank higher in the global ranking exercises.

## **Questing for the 'World-Class Status': University Responses and Coping Strategies**

### **China**

In addition to the strategies adopted by these two Asian governments in the quest for world-class universities, higher education institutions in both societies are becoming increasingly keen in internationalizing their teaching and research programmes. In the last few years, the principal author of this article, Ka Ho Mok, has been involved in various kinds of academic exchange and international advisory work for selected higher education institutions in China mainland and Taiwan. Being invited as one of the international consultants, the principal author of this paper got a number of opportunities to interact with colleagues from Zhejiang University, ranked in the Top Three in China's university league. With a strong conviction to develop Zhejiang University as one of the leading universities in the world, the senior management of Zhejiang University has tried different strategies to better position the University in the



global ranking exercise. For example, Zhejiang University has joined the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN), a global research network to promote international research collaboration. In 2007, the College of Education of Zhejiang University participated in the 'Ideas and Universities' virtual seminar series organized by the WUN; faculty members and students actively participated in the seminar series despite the fact that all seminars were conducted in late evening from either 9:00 pm or 10:00 pm because of the time difference between partnering institutions in the USA and the UK (WUN, 2007). Similarly, Nanjing University has also joined the WUN and also sent delegates from China to participate and present at the WUN conference organized in London in November 2007 in order to make the University more visible in the international academic community (WUN, 2007). Enhancing the international outlook of their faculty members, both Zhejiang University and Nanjing University have sent their faculty members for overseas academic exchanges by capitalizing the collaborative projects associated with WUN.

In order to benchmark with global universities, the senior management of Zhejiang University has set up an international advisory committee to advise the President how to better position the University in the global ranking exercise. The principal author of this article was appointed as one of these members, having chances to visit the University to interact with colleagues from different ranks to discuss how to enhance the University's ranking in the global university leagues. By inviting distinguished professors to join the international advisory committee, coupled with partnering with top universities overseas in co-organizing international conferences, the senior management of Zhejiang University strongly believes it would help promote the University as not only a leading university in mainland China but also a world renowned university. Similarly, the College of Government and Public Affairs at Zhongshan University in Gunagzhou, China, have been actively attempting to raise the international research profile in the last few years. The College has proactively collaborated with overseas institutions in co-organizing international conferences and symposia to promote its areas of research excellence. Most recently, the College has launched a new Social Welfare and Social Policy Research Institute to map out medium and long term of research development. After interviewing Professor King Lun Ngok, Director of the Research Institute, we realize how keen Zhongshan University is in establishing the designated research area as nationally and internationally recognized area of research excellence since the University administration has no ceiling cap for research investment in making the newly launched centre a major success in the near future (Interview with Ngok, May 2008). Being a Visiting Professor at the University of Bristol, Professor Ngok has attempted to develop closer links between the University of Bristol and Zhongshan University. According to Ngok, internationalization is one of the major drives for promoting Zhongshan

University as a leading university in China. In its launch conference, Ngok invited the very top and prominent professors not only from China mainland but also from outside to raise the profile of the new research institute (Interview with Ngok, May 2008).

These examples are not unique to Zhejiang University in Hangzhou and Zhongshan University in Guangzhou; universities from Beijing and Shanghai are also very keen to strengthen their research and education programmes through partnering the best in the world. For instance, Social Development and Public Policy Research Institute at Beijing Normal University (BNU) is particularly keen to establish an international research collaboration with leading academic institutions overseas by setting a joint-research centre in public policy research. The Department of Social Work and Social Administration at the University of Hong Kong invited a delegation from BNU to Hong Kong to discuss international research collaboration, with particular focus on policy research. Throughout the process of discussion, we were hugely impressed by the strong determination and resourceful allocation of research grant in supporting such a research initiative. Mapping out the strategic research direction, the senior management of BNU has no financial difficulty to invest in such a research development project (Field Observation, October 2007). Similarly, College of Social Development and Social Policy at Fudan University has launched its international programme taught in English on subject matters related to social policy and social work. Partnering with the University of Hong Kong, Fudan University has developed joint-academic programme in Social Work profession. During the principal author's recent visit to this College at Fudan, he learned from the Associate Dean of the College that Fudan University is particularly keen to engage in deep collaboration with overseas institutions by launching joint programmes (Field Observation, March 2008). All in all, the examples outlined above have clearly demonstrated the strong determination of universities in China to reach out to the international academic community by internationalizing their research and teaching programmes and international benchmarking with the very best in order to excel themselves to be part of the selected few.

## **Taiwan**

Similar to the vision and strategies adopted by major universities in China mainland, higher education institutions in Taiwan have been very keen to internationalize their teaching and research programmes. When the principal author of this article was serving as the Founding Director of the Centre of East Asian Studies at the University of Bristol from 2005 to 2007, he received many delegates from China and Taiwan for academic visits and exchange. Realizing the importance of internationalization of higher education curricula



in China and Taiwan, the Centre of East Asian Studies at Bristol University has co-organized international summer schools with institutions from China and Taiwan in order to provide a platform engaging Asian students in appreciating cross-cultural studies in the UK. The College of Humanities of National Chi Nan University (NCNU) is particularly keen to send students to the Bristol summer school. With special financial support offered by the College of Humanities at NCNU, more students from Taiwan could enjoy experiential learning in the UK (CEAS, 2006, 2007). The Department of Social Work at National Taiwan University (NTU) has also been actively promoting international placement to enhance students' international outlook and enrich their overseas learning experiences. Most recently, the principal author of this article has been appointed by the President of NTU as one of the panel members of the International Advisory team to review the academic and research programmes offered by NTU. During his recent academic visit to NTU, the principal author got the chance to meet the senior management, faculty members and students of NTU. Through reviewing the Department of Social Work in terms of its strategic vision and development strategies, student and staff feedback on research and learning experiences, as well as its facilities, the author got to know how keen the department has been in terms of the internationalization agenda. Aligning with the vision and mission of the university and the faculty in internationalization, the department has made concerted efforts to engage with overseas leading universities in co-organizing international conferences, joint-research projects and other overseas internship/ placement. Professor Lillian Wang, Head of the Social Work Department at NTU, openly told the panel members that the Department is serious benchmarking with top universities in Hong Kong, the USA and the UK. In the last five years, the department has engaged in co-organizing international symposia or conferences with overseas partners, sending out staff and students for international exchange and inviting speakers all over the world to give seminars at NTU (Field observation, June 2008).

Being a panel member of the review team and a faculty associate dean from the University of Hong Kong, the principal author has engaged in establishing deep collaboration with NTU. In June 2008, for instance, a delegation from NTU visited HKU to sign an agreement for international collaboration and exchange (Faculty of Social Sciences, HKU, June 2008). During his recent visit to NTU, Professor Yung-Mau Chao, Dean of the College of Social Sciences, actively explored with the principal author for international collaboration in terms of co-organizing conferences and joint-publications. Having the commitment in internationalizing the research profile of its colleagues, Professor Chao has agreed to invest more in promoting research scholarship by partnering with HKU for contemporary China research, a strategic research area designated by NTU (Field observation, December 2007). Like the NTU,

the President of Tamkang University is also keen to deepen the international collaboration with overseas institutions. In 2005, a delegation led by the President of Tamkang University went to visit the University of Bristol in the UK. Serving as a coordinator for the academic visit and the former Founding Director of Centre of East Asian Studies at the University of Bristol, the delegation was well received by the Dean and Vice-Chancellor of the University. During his term at the University of Bristol, the principal author received many invitations to speak at various international conferences organized by universities in Taiwan. During his visits to various university campuses, it was apparent that one of the major areas concerning the development of international research collaboration was academic exchanges of both staff and students. For instance, Asia University, a newly founded university in the middle of Taiwan, had sent students to the international summer school at the University of Bristol; Tamkang University, to give another example, is particularly keen to deepen its relationship with the University of Hong Kong and Yonsei University in South Korea by setting up a 'Three Campus Comparative East Asian Studies Programme' for student exchange.

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



university ranking and university evaluation research in the last few years, Professor Angela Hou shared with the authors that academics and higher education institutions are becoming increasingly concerned with the ranking exercises (Interview with Hou, May 2008). Despite the controversy over the accuracy of the university ranking, university presidents and deans are particularly keen to establish international links with top universities overseas. All the examples outlined above have clearly shown how universities in Taiwan have responded proactively to the quest for world-class university status.

## Conclusion

This article has critically examined policies and strategies adopted by the governments in China mainland and Taiwan in response to the growing pressures to internationalize and internal benchmark universities with the very best across different parts of the globe. Despite the controversial debates over the definitions of 'world-class university', both the governments in China and Taiwan have adopted a more pragmatic approach to address the issue. By concentrating resources on a selected few, these governments believe they would be able to boost some universities to climb higher in the global university leagues. Although there are heated debates among academics in China and Taiwan, universities in these two Chinese societies are far more instrumental by adopting different strategies discussed above to benchmark with the best in the world (Chen and Lo, 2007; Ngok and Guo, 2007). Perhaps what has been happening in the university campuses in these two societies might reveal the 'late developer mentality'. By working extremely hard to rank higher in the global league tables, universities in China and Taiwan would consider it is the only alternative to assert their global status through various internationalization strategies. Such a 'pragmatic instrumentalism' has unquestionably overshadowed the academia in these Chinese societies. Deeper and critical reflections are really needed during the on-going 'world-class university' movement in Asia.

## Notes

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- 2 In 2003, there were 2,110 regular and adult HEIs in China, among which 175 are 'people-run'. But apart from them, 1,104 of non-state run institutions are categorized as 'other people-run higher education institution (*qita minban gaodeng jiaoyu jigou*)'.

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