

Internationalization or Commodification?

*A Case Study of Internationalization Practices in Taiwan's Higher Education**

Dorothy I-ru Chen

National Chi Nan University

William Yat Wai Lo

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Abstract

This paper examines how commodification and consumerism have sharpened the discourse of internationalization in Taiwan's higher education. Given the strong sense of crisis over the less prestigious universities, the paper argues that internationalization only means a way to survival rather than the pursuit of excellence to these universities. This empirical finding leads us to rethink the concept of internationalization and its relevance and application in Taiwan's higher education. The paper adopts a case study approach to investigate the practices of internationalization, including program and institutional mobility, overseas networking, curriculum design, teaching and administrative support. This is followed by a discussion on the implications of these internationalization practices for sustainability and quality in higher education development.

Keywords

Internationalization; commodification; education industry; higher education; Taiwan

* Both authors contributed equally to this work.

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Introduction

Internationalization has become an important trend in higher education in different parts of the world. On the one hand, for many policy makers, university administrators and academics, internationalization of higher education is a way of enhancing national competitiveness, given that higher education is seen as a fundamental pillar of economic development in today's world. On the other hand, the internationalization process is considered as a tactic for attracting international students to study in the countries, thereby increasing their national incomes. Also importantly, owing to the demographic change, many universities in Taiwan, especially those less prestigious private institutions, see the task of recruiting more international students as the key to survive in the face of home market shrinking. Therefore, we have witnessed that those universities are keen to recruit international students, especially those from Southeast Asia and Mainland China, to fill empty university places.

This paper sets out in such a context to examine how commodification and consumerism have sharpened the discourse of internationalization in Taiwan's higher education. Given the strong sense of crisis over the less prestigious universities, the paper argues that internationalization only means a way to survival rather than the pursuit of excellence to these universities. This empirical finding leads us to rethink the concept of internationalization and its relevance and application in Taiwan's higher education. The paper adopts a case study approach to investigate the practices of internationalization, including program and institutional mobility, overseas networking, curriculum design, teaching and administrative support. This is followed by a discussion on the implications of these internationalization practices for sustainability and quality in higher education development.

Internationalism in Higher Education

The concept of internationalization has been widely used and discussed in higher education in recent years. According to Knight (2003), internationalization is "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p. 2). The definition, which is broadly cited in the research literature, indicates that "the diversity of culture" and "the sense of worldwide scope" should be adopted as core ideas driving the internationalization process and practice at both national and institutional

levels (Knight, 2003; 2004). Such a vision can be seen as a kind of internationalism in higher education that puts emphases on exchange between cultures and nations and on the pursuit of enhancing the global competence of students and staff to interact, communicate and work in a multicultural environment as well as their ability to appreciate ethnic and cultural diversity (Hunter et al, 2006; Dewey and Duff, 2009). Following such an idealistic interpretation, internationalization is a means of imposing “respect, tolerance, democratic values and an emancipatory attitude” (Stier, 2010, p. 343). In addition, idealists also stress the educational function of internationalization efforts that aims to facilitate global perspectives and intercultural understanding through multicultural and international experience, thereby stimulating dialogue and meta-reflection and enriching self-understanding among students and staff (Stier, 2010, p. 344). Therefore, from an educational perspective, internationalization of education has a goal of nurturing “planetary citizenship”, which gives an ethical basis for learners to understand their responsibilities and obligations in a world that is multicultural and interdependent (Haigh, 2008).

Nevertheless, unsurprisingly, there is a gap between ideal and reality. Indeed, in the commercialized world of higher education, economic imperative is a key factor being considered in higher education governance at both levels of national policy-making and institutional management. At national level, higher education has become a service that can be exported to increase national income within the context of a growing global higher education market (Larsen et al, 2002; OECD, 2004). From this instrumentalistic perspective, whilst traditional higher education exporters, who mainly refer to Western English-speaking countries, may see internationalization as a way of retaining their market share in international trade in higher education, newly emerging exporters are likely to view internationalization as a necessary mean to enter and develop international market. At institutional level, given the circumstance that higher education systems in many developed countries have undergone marketization and massification, there is a general phenomenon in which individual higher education institutions (HEIs) receive less public funding, but rely more on private sources of funding (Bok, 2003; Clark, 2002). Overseas students, who often are required to pay higher fees than local learners, therefore become an important and attractive financial source for many HEIs in different places. In this regard, internationalization, for policy makers and university leaders, means a process for creating an environment in which overseas consumers are willing to purchase and consume higher education service of their countries and institutions easily. Following this instrumentalistic interpretation of internationalization, the idealistic process of internationalization “is impeded by management systems that take commerce as their model” and internationalization is adjusted to be merely “about income generation for

cash-strapped higher education institutes” (Haigh, 2008, p. 427).

The tension between instrumentalism and idealism (on different ideologies of internationalization, see Stier, 2004; 2010) is used as an analytical framework in this paper to examine national policies on and institutional implementation of internationalization of higher education in Taiwan. Our findings suggest that while policy makers and university management have put an emphasis on the instrumentalistic perspective on internationalization process, some elements of internationalism, which are idealistic but essential, are overlooked in the process of policy making and implementation.

The Study

Data and information on government policy for this article are mostly taken from published documents. To look into the impacts of internationalized and marketized model of university governance in individual private HEIs, the authors were also in contact with seven staff members in two private universities (University A and B) located in the Southern part of Taiwan. These two universities were selected because both of them were science and technology (sci-tech) universities which mainly provide programs in the fields of sciences and engineering. These fields are popular subjects with international students. University A is a HEI which was recently upgraded from a technical college to a university. It is keen to recruit overseas students, especially from Vietnam. Hence, it has developed a Vietnamese version of its homepage. University B is a relatively well established private university, and thus does not face a serious difficulty in recruiting local students. Nonetheless, it is still interested in increasing its number of international students.

The teaching staff were invited to participate in this study because they had the experience of teaching international students and/or of coordinating related projects in the universities. The administrators interviewed were those who were in charge of the international offices. The transcripts were analyzed and coded by common themes. Some typical quotations were used to illustrate points made in the text. While the quotations indicate which university they are from and their roles in the universities, the names of the respondents were anonymous.

The Changing Policy on Higher Education Industry in Taiwan

Internationalization has not drawn much attention from leaders of government and HEIs in Taiwan until the early 2000s. In 2002, the Ministry of Education (MOE) started to realize the importance of internationalization to the development of Taiwan’s higher education and thus promulgated a blueprint document titled the Initiative for the Enhancement of Universities’ Competitiveness, in which promoting

the use of English in teaching and intensifying collaboration with foreign universities through joint degree offering and offshore delivery of degree programs are seen as useful strategies to internationalize Taiwan's higher education. The ministry hence launched the Plan on Promoting Internationalization of Teaching in Higher Education Institutions in 2002, which was renamed and expanded to the Plan on Promoting Internationalization in Higher Education Institutions in 2004. Meanwhile, the Executive Yuan included recruiting foreign students as an item in the National Development Plan in 2004.

To attract more international students studying in Taiwan, scholarship programs, like the Taiwan Scholarship Program and the Ministry of Education Mandarin Enrichment Scholarship Program, were launched during this period. Such a policy goal of internationalizing Taiwan's higher education was reiterated in the Blueprint for Education (2009-2012). In 2010, the Executive Yuan made higher education as one of the top ten service industries in and a major export of Taiwan. In addition to putting emphasis on using English in teaching, promoting Chinese learning and providing a friendly learning environment for overseas students, deepening connection with Southeast Asia was highlighted to be a key strategy in the blueprint. This has shown that Southeast Asian countries have become the major target export markets of Taiwan's higher education. In this regard, the MOE promulgated the Study-in-Taiwan Enhancement Program, which aims to increase the number of non-local students from 40,000 to 150,000 by 2020. To achieve this goal, the Taiwanese government has allocated NT\$ 56.8 millions to provide an English speaking environment and to strengthen marketing activities abroad. It is estimated that the investment will bring NT\$ 25.7 billion value of production by 2014 (MOE, 2011c). Meanwhile, Mainland China is considered as another important export market, given that the mainland-Taiwan relationship has been gradually improved since the Kuomintang (KMT) returned to power in 2008 and the interactions and exchanges across the Taiwan Strait have been significantly increased. In 2010, two important related policies were launched. The first is the recognition of degrees offered by 41 HEIs in Mainland China. The second is that 2,000 universities places in Taiwan are opened up for students from the mainland, despite the limitations on their access to job opportunities and student welfare (Chan, 2011). This policy is implemented on a quota share basis, on which private universities assume 1,523 of these 2,000 places, and public universities receive the rest (477). In terms of the types of HEIs, sci-tech universities assume 877 places, while comprehensive universities receive the rest (1,361).

These policy initiatives demonstrate the keen intention of the Taiwanese government to export Taiwan's higher education through recruiting more overseas

students to study in the island-state. Table 1 shows that the number of non-local students in Taiwan has consistently increased over the past few years. It is noteworthy that the number of non-local students enrolled in a degree program has significantly increased from 3,935 in 2006 to 10,059 in 2011. Vietnam is the biggest exporting countries of the non-local students in Taiwan, followed by Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, USA, Thailand, India, Mongolia and Gambia (MOE, 2011c).

Table 1: Non-local students in Taiwan (2006 – 2011)

Academic year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total number	26,488	30,150	33,065	39,042	44,776	55,463

Source: MOE (2011a).

The emphasis on recruiting international students can be understood as a response to the global trends toward internationalization of higher education. Over the past years, the process of integrating an international dimension into different aspects of higher education has been commonly seen and adopted by various countries as a way to enhance their higher education quality, thereby increasing their competitiveness (Hawkins, 2008; Lo, 2009). This explains why internationalization has been used as a key indicator in measuring and evaluating university performance in Taiwan (HEEACT, 2012).¹ Nevertheless, a situation of oversupply of higher education should not be neglected when discussing the recent call for expanding the population of non-local overseas students. Like many other newly industrialized societies, Taiwan experienced rapid growth of higher education during the 1990s (Schofer and Meyer, 2005). In 1990, there were only 46 HEIs enrolling 239,082 students (Wang, 2003). The number of HEI has increased to 163, which enroll 1,352,084 students, in 2011. However, the size of school-age population has significantly dropped during the same period. For example, the size of 18-21 age group was 1,484,364 in 1990, but has declined to 1,294,620 in 2011 (MOE, 2011a). The demographic change suggests that there is a decrease in demand for higher education. As a consequence, we have witnessed a rapid increase of acceptance rate for universities in the last decade (Table 2), and a significant increase of unoccupied university places (Table 3).

Table 2: University acceptance rate in Taiwan (2001 – 2011)

(%)

Academic year Acceptance rate through	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
	Joint Entrance Examination For Universities	61.35	80.41	83.22	87.05	89.08	90.93	96.28	97.10	97.14	94.87
Multi-channel Admission System	-	65.63	62.33	67.02	66.89	68.59	74.20	73.18	75.48	76.31	77.37

Source: MOE (2011a).

Table 3: Vacancy rate for undergraduate programs in Taiwan (2005 – 2011)

	University places			Vacancy rate (%)		
	Total	Public	private	Total	Public	Private
2005	370,481	74,004	296,477	14.73	6.79	16.71
2006	367,140	73,766	293,374	15.45	6.08	17.81
2007	358,405	73,467	284,938	16.51	6.39	19.12
2008	349,053	73,102	275,951	17.02	5.46	20.09
2009	335,827	70,591	265,236	20.55	5.72	24.49
2010	332,650	70,128	262,522	18.49	6.00	21.82
2011	328,358	69,027	259,331	16.64	5.37	19.64

Source: MOE (2011a).

In response to the phenomenon, the MOE has stopped further expansion of university education since 2009. It requires universities to cut their extra places on their programs, if the enrollment rate of individual programs is below 70%. In 2011, the MOE allows HEIs to recruit non-local students to fill the empty university places, which are originally planned for local students. Obviously, growing vacancy rate put pressures on HEIs, especially the private ones, to develop marketing and student recruitment strategies. This provides a strong rationale for recruiting non-local students. Indeed, the allocation of the quota share on students from the Chinese mainland shows the government's intention of using exporting higher education as a way to respond the oversupply of higher education and the associated difficulties faced by private sci-tech universities.

On this basis, we argue that the discourse of internationalization of higher education, particularly in the lower tiers of the higher education system, is overshadowed by consideration for survival.

Universities' Responses

Considering the fact that internationalization determines their survival, it is not surprising that some universities have become much more active in recruiting non-local students. Their strategy is to enter a new market as early as possible. And, Mainland China is often seen as a market with fewer entry barriers owing to the similar language and cultural context. Therefore, some universities have made attempts to enter China, even before the government has loosened its restrictions on recruiting students from the mainland. As the director of international office of University A illustrated:

Some universities even took action faster than the MOE. They might even ignore the MOE if they were told by the ministry not to take action... Although the MOE might cut the funding for these universities, they would not care. This is because the money does not mean a lot to them... (In return), individual universities may have 1,500 students² from the Chinese mainland in one summer session. (Interview A1)

Meanwhile, universities are keen to recruit students from Southeast Asia. For example, University A has set up an office in Vietnam and sent a full-time teaching staff from Taiwan to run programs there. These tactics are taken by several private sci-tech universities to enter markets in Southeast Asia.

Despite that many universities in Taiwan want to recruit more international students, some of them are not capable to so do because of their size and resource. For instance, international office is a key unit facilitating internationalization in many Taiwanese universities. Thus, to better coordinate the initiatives and efforts within the institutions, many universities have upgraded their international office to be a university-level unit. Yet, it is reported that many international offices are understaffed, and many of their staff members, especially those of private sci-tech universities, do not have relevant skills, such as those in language and career counseling, to provide satisfactory support to international students and to promote internationalization on campus (Su, 2007; Yuan 2009).

Our visits somewhat prove these critics. In fact, the international offices of both universities we visited face the problem of understaffing. As reported, there are only three full-time staff members in the international office of University A, and there are five in that of University B. Therefore, the director of international office of University B said:

The turnover rate in this office is very high... We have had seven directors in five years. The office has been upgraded (to be a university-level unit) for around a year only... I

am already the third head. (Interview B1)

This director of the office further points out that he has to seek help from volunteers to proofread English documents published by his office. In fact, in accordance with our respondents, both Universities A and B rely heavily on volunteers to provide support services, like Chinese learning course, to international students. Therefore, the universities actively recruit local students to serve as volunteers providing support to their overseas fellow students. From an educational perspective, this is an effective way of facilitating interactions between local and international students, thereby promoting cultural exchange (also see Yuan, 2009). However, it is reasonable to say that cost is an issue being considered by management of the universities.

Furthermore, as said, international office plays an important role in the process of internationalization in these universities. This can be seen as a way of responding the trend of professionalization in which issues of internationalization are more likely to be handled by professional administrators (Stensaker et al, 2008, pp. 6-7). This however makes internationalization become an administrator-led initiative that may affect the academic autonomy in the universities. As explained by a teaching staff who serves as the coordinator for offshore programs in University A, academic departments were not involved and consulted, when the university was negotiating with its Vietnamese partnering institutions. Teaching staff from the departments are hired as part-time staff, who are paid on an hourly basis, to deliver the courses. In this regard, he noted that issues concerning internationalization have been increasingly formalized and centralized in his institution (Stensaker et al, 2008, p. 7). He remarked:

The president of the university is totally in charge of the issues of internationalization. This centralized approach can make things simple. In fact, we do not care about the finance. The budget is not an issue for us. It is the thing that the university management needs to deal with. Right? But, when the program comes to implementation phase, it should be led by teaching staff. Educational issues should be handled by teaching staff. (Interview A2)

Indeed, all teaching staff interviewed noted that they tend to follow the instructions from the administrative units and do not dare to complain, as they understand that it is not easy to find a teaching job in the university sector in today's Taiwan. This finding shows how internationalization is implemented in an administrator-led manner.

The situation reported above has exemplified the gap between policy at government level and practice at university level. It demonstrates that some Taiwanese universities are less capable to receive more overseas students, despite the launching of the government's "open-door" policy. In this practical context, we have seen that some core ideas of internationalism in higher education have twisted in practice. This issue will be further illustrated in the following sections.

Major Findings

In consideration of the tension between idealism and instrumentalism in the process of internationalization and based on the data collected from the interviews, the following sections present major findings.

Struggling for Funding

The relatively low cost of living and studying in Taiwan is the reason why many students from Southeast Asia choose the island as a study abroad destination. Moreover, as said, the Taiwanese government has offered various scholarships to non-local students. Students of Chinese ethnicity can even enjoy tuition waivers initiated by the Taiwanese government. Nevertheless, owing to their self-financing nature, private universities still need to rely on students' tuition fee to operate their programs. A staff member from University B illustrated:

We applied for running offshore programs in Vietnam. And, the proposal has been approved by the MOE. However, there is a problem that students who are interested in the programs cannot afford the tuition fee. Hence, we are not able to run the program in these years. (Interview B2)

In response to the issue, University B has utilized the opportunities provide by the International Cooperation and Development Fund (TaiwanICDF), which serves the goal of expanding Taiwan's diplomatic space. In fact, many recipients of TaiwanICDF are from the countries that have diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Therefore:

(University B) cooperate(s) with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Our focus is countries in Central America and Africa... (They are) our diplomatic allies. The living standard in these countries is low. Therefore, we need to collaborate with the MOFA, which not only offer scholarship but also support the daily living expenses of the students. (Interview B1)

However, respondents from both Universities A and B reflected that private

universities are in a disadvantaged position in the competition for overseas students with public universities. For example, University A needed to change their partnering institutions in Vietnam because these institutions received better offers of collaboration from public universities in Taiwan. Meanwhile, private universities are competing for students with public universities in the market. As a result, a respondent believed that the Taiwanese government needs to provide an overall strategy for exporting higher education services, or even make restrictions on public universities to recruit students from low-income countries. He added:

If a national university goes to recruit students in Vietnam, my university will naturally not be able to enroll students in the country. Students in Vietnam are not stupid. If they could choose to study in a national university, why do they want to study in a private institution? (Interview A2)

In fact, he reported that it is seldom that overseas students study in his university in recent years because his university does not have the resources to provide tuition fee waiver and scholarship to international students. Thus, he said:

100-200 (overseas) students may not mean a lot to national universities... but, for private universities, 200 means much more than 200. (Interview A2)

This dialogue illustrates that economic imperative has substantially influenced their attitude towards the implementation of internationalization in their institutions. With regard to this mentality of staff from private universities towards internationalization, we turn to look into how teaching quality is affected in the universities.

Tailor-made Teaching or Lack of Exchange

According to a survey funded by the MOE (Yuan, 2009), programs in engineering, and business and finance are popular subjects among international students studying in Taiwan. These are popular subjects in many of the targeting countries because they meet the economic needs of these societies. Moreover, these subjects are less related to cultural and linguistic context, and these programs provided in Taiwan are often more advanced than those provided in the targeting countries. Therefore, University B decided to focus on promoting their mechanical engineering programs in its recruitment of international students. Nonetheless, a lower operating cost again is an issue that drives universities to focus on these subjects. A respondent from University A explained how the courses on business and finance provided by his university are

run in Vietnam:

We run our branch in Vietnam like a cramming school. What we need are a teacher and a microphone. We do not need any laboratory facilities. Right? A notebook computer works. (Interview A2)

Despite the lack of facilities and equipments, the survey mentioned above reports that international students are generally satisfied with the overall teaching quality in Taiwanese universities, while they are less satisfied with the low level of satisfaction in the quality and quantity of courses taught in English (Yuan, 2009).

To encourage universities to provide more courses taught in English, the MOE has provides incentives to universities and teachers. For example, the number of courses taught is incorporated as a criterion in institutional evaluation (HEEACT, 2012). Meanwhile, allowance is provided to reward teaching members who are willing to teach in English. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, our visits reflect that many teaching staff do not prefer to teach in English, not only because of their English proficiency, but also that of local students. Then, separating international students from local students is adopted as a way to deal with the problem. Classes are tailor-made for international students, in which English is used as the medium of instruction. This teaching method is commonly used not only in Universities A and B, but also other universities in Taiwan (see Yuan, 2009).

From a practical perspective, this arrangement is less cost-effective, as the universities need to arrange special classes for international students which are usually run in a small group. More importantly, it is obvious that the distinct mode of teaching would undermine the exchange of ideas between local and international students, which is a key objective of internationalization (on objectives of internationalization, see Knight, 2004). In fact, as shown in the survey data and our visits, the provision of Chinese courses is inadequate in many universities (Yuan, 2009). Even though international students are willing to learn Chinese, it is not easy for them to access to free Chinese language courses in their universities due to lack of resources. According to the MOE's data, only 34 universities in Taiwan provide Chinese learning programs or set up Chinese language centers for international students, and only four private sci-tech universities provide these support services (MOE, 2011d). This leads us to reflect on whether the current exercise of internationalization in Taiwanese is really internationalization.

Is This Really Internationalization?

Our respondents noted that international students studying in their universities have

good career prospects if they decide to return to their home countries. Indeed, Taiwan plays a leading role in many hi-tech industries, like semi-conductor industry, and its companies have established close partnership with brand leaders in the industry in the USA, Japan and Europe (Chung, et al, 2004). This advantage makes Taiwan's education in technology-related subjects more advanced than its neighboring countries. This becomes a competitive edge that Taiwanese universities, especially sci-tech universities, may use to attract overseas students. To utilize this advantage, the MOE has revised its regulations on restricting overseas students to stay in Taiwan after they have completed their study. Under the new arrangement, international students are allowed to stay on and work as interns for a year after graduation (MOE, 2011b). A respondent from University B also said that, as requested by the international students, his university is trying hard to secure internship opportunities for them (Interview B3). These requests and responses substantially reflect the instrumental approach and mentality taken by organizational actors in the process of internationalization in Taiwan's higher education.

However, it is argued that good career prospects do not necessarily mean good learning experience. According to our respondents, international students hope to have more interactions with local students. Yet, as explained, local and international students study in separate classes. In many occasions, local students avoid to interact with international students because of their English proficiency or shyness. They would take the courses taught in English, only if they cannot find an alternative from those taught in Chinese. Besides, there is lack of opportunities for local and international students to interact and communicate in their daily life. For example, local and international students are arranged to live in different floors of residence halls. The reason for such an arrangement is that there were conflicts on daily life between local and international students who have very different backgrounds and lifestyles, and the university received complaints from both sides on these issues. As an administrator illustrated, while drinking and partying are seen by international students as important parts of social life on campus, these activities usually are prohibited on Taiwan's campuses and are not welcomed by local students. To make the administration of the residence halls easier, they decided to separate their living space in the residence halls.

We consider this in-real-life experience as good evidence on how educational elements are eroded in the trends of professionalization and centralization of issues concerning internationalization. To a certain extent, an instrumentalistic approach to internationalization is constructive in terms of assuring the financial and administrative sustainability of the crossing border activities and programs (Stensaker et al, 2008). However, we argue that cost-effectiveness and administrative

convenience should not dominate the discourse on internationalization of higher education. Bringing the educational perspective back to the internationalization process is essential to sharpening the overview of practices, and formulating specific aspects of internationalization. To illustrate the relevance and importance of internationalization to local learners, one of our respondents further links this issue with the background of their local students, and the disparity between North and South in Taiwan. He illustrated:

Almost one third of University A's income comes from student loan. What does it mean? (It means) many of our students are from families with low socioeconomic status... (Internationalization) programs will be a good stimulation (of cultural exchange) for local students... Most of our students are from remote rural areas.³ They do not have many opportunities to meet foreigners. Learning together with foreign students would mean a lot to them. (Interview A2)

This remark is important in terms of putting a query about the optimistic prospect of a strong connection between local communities and the global knowledge network (Albtach, 2007), and demonstrating a hypothesis of inequality (Cantwell and Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009), in which non-prestigious universities and their staff and students are under threat of marginalisation in the process of internationalization. The present study responds to the discussion of the above concepts by looking into empirical evidences of how internationalization strategies are founded and sharpened on a commercial basis.

Concluding Observations

This paper deals with the issues of internationalization of higher education based on the tension between different interpretations of internationalism in higher education. Also importantly, by examining the Taiwanese government's changing policy on higher education industry, we have illustrated how these institutional behaviors are linked to the commodification and export of higher education services on a commercial basis. The issues revealed in our discussion show the complexities of the interplay between national policy-making and institutional needs, and between idealistic and pragmatic considerations in the implementation of internationalization process. For instance, given that internationalization is taken as a core part of national strategies of higher education development, asking for more inputs from the government is a simple solution to the problem of lack of resources. However, as the internationalization strategies at the national level are set on a commercial basis, many internationalization activities, especially those of private sci-tech universities,

can only be operated in a commercial mode. This observation not only reiterates the analysis of how national strategies can sharpen institutional configurations (Graf, 2009; Ek et al, 2011), but also demonstrates how the essential parts of internationalization have been phased out in the national policy-making and institutional configurations. The situation is more complex if we incorporate organizational actors' attitudes toward these policies and configurations. Our fieldwork reflects that while many teaching staff are aware of the importance of idealistic and educational dimensions of internationalization (Stier, 2010), they simultaneously accept that recruiting overseas students is an effective way to respond the oversupply of higher education in Taiwan. They hence tend to compromise on the idealistic interpretation of internationalism. When all the ideals set in the internationalism have been erased in the implementation process, internationalization will become a mere slogan used to present commercial and market-oriented cross-border educational activities. Most of the opinions and evidences revealed in this paper mournfully depict that commodification can be said to characterize the internationalization process in the lower tier of Taiwan's higher education sector so far.

Notes

1. The MOE commissioned the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), a statutory body, to evaluate the performance of universities in Taiwan on both program and institutional bases since 2006.
2. Here the respondent referred to short-term exchange students from the Chinese mainland.
3. There are regional disparities in Taiwan. In general, the urban north is wealthier than the rural south.

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