

Quality assurance at a distance: international accreditation in Taiwan higher education

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Abstract In response to the global competitiveness in higher education, the government, in recent years, has encouraged Taiwan colleges and universities to seek international accreditation, which raises several questions, such as jurisdiction over national accreditation, a single set of standards for local and global quality assurance, demand for the mutual recognition of review outcomes, etc. With the looming pressures for change that international accreditation will likely pose on a Taiwan national framework of quality assurance, multiple impacts on institutions and national accrediting agencies in Taiwan are now beginning to be increasingly felt. Hence, this paper examines current academic international accreditation programs and institutions, recognizes Taiwan's accrediting organizations, and analyzes the challenges that institutions and national accrediting agencies are facing.

Keywords International accreditation · Quality assurance · Taiwan higher education · Accrediting agencies

Introduction

Since the 1980's, globalization and educational changes have been inextricably intertwined. Due to shrinking distances, globalization has increasingly affected politics, economic systems, and the very identities and interdependence of nation states. Moreover, globalization has come to affect the educational agendas of these states, too. Globalization influences not only teaching and learning, but also the ability of students to deal with social and cultural differences. Globalization is reshaping the core values of institutions of higher education through market influences and symbolic concerns about cultural identity. Thus, globalization presents universities and colleges with a number of challenges and

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opportunities (Ginkel 2003). In response, these institutions have developed and continue to develop numerous internationalization strategies.

According to Altbach (2004), for higher education, globalization could mean ‘the broad economic, technological, and scientific trends that directly affect higher education and are largely inevitable’, while internationalization ‘includes specific policies and programs undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions, and even individual departments to cope with or exploit globalization’ (pp. 5–6). Hence, most universities have adopted the strategies of internationalization to cope with these global issues, for instance, increasing numbers of foreign students, recruiting international scholars, supporting cross-campus research collaborations, conferencing, developing branch campuses abroad, etc. (de Wit 2002). For most non-English speaking European countries, such as the Netherlands and Finland, the curriculum has been internationalized by promoting English as the medium of instruction in order to compete with English speaking institutions in the new globalized higher education market (Wachter 2008).

Currently, globalization has introduced concerns over the efficacy of international strategies that target quality assurance and international competitiveness in higher education for both universities and states. In this context, the internationalization of higher education often implies the pursuit of an international image of quality and prestige in order to make the selected top institutions more globally competitive (Deem et al. 2008). Therefore, quality assurance mechanisms and international benchmarking, which emphasize output monitoring and measurements and systems of accountability and auditing, have become more popular worldwide (Marginson 2007). This also rationalizes the emergence of international accreditation, which, taken as a symbolic and powerful indicator, is used to prove the quality standard of local institutions in a globally competitive education market (Ewell 2008).

Concurrently, globalization has also accelerated Taiwan’s higher education moving into a new era of quality education (Mok 2003). Moreover, the past decades have witnessed an expansion of scrutiny and concern on the part of the public regarding higher education in Taiwan. Correlating quality assurance with international standards has been a specific focus. Taiwan colleges and universities have been encouraged to seek international accreditation; however, this has raised several questions concerning jurisdiction over national accreditation, a single standard for local and global quality assurance, demand for the mutual recognition of review outcomes, etc. (Ewell 2008). International accreditation will likely exert pressures to varying degrees for quality assurance reforms within the national educational framework. This is already evident both in Taiwan’s accrediting agencies and institutions of higher education. The current international accreditation of programs and institutions, a focused recognition of accrediting organizations in Taiwan, and a comprehensive analysis of the challenges that institutions and national accrediting agencies are facing is the principal focus of this paper.

Taiwan higher education moving from elite type to universal type

Over the past 10 years, higher education in Taiwan has expanded impressively, both with respect to increases in the number of institutions and to the number of enrolled students. Amid flourishing economic development, social liberalization, and democratization in the 1990s, Taiwan higher education has decentralized; the state now exerts less control, while universities continue to seek more autonomy. As of 2008, the number of higher education institutions has increased to 163, largely due to the upgrade of junior colleges to four-year

universities. Student enrollment increased 65% with a total number of 1.3 millions. University Entrance Exam admission rate is close to 97%. Net Enrollment and Gross enrollment in higher education are approximately 55.3% (693,847/1,254,395) and 78.6% (987,914/1,254,395) (Department of Higher Education 2008).

These quantitative increases demonstrate emphatically that higher education in Taiwan has transformed from an elite type educational system into a universal type educational system. Furthermore, it is clearly evident that the system is moving towards openness and autonomy, and from a monolithic model to a model that takes into account pluralistic needs. In response to both regional and global competitiveness in higher education, the Taiwan government has opted to reform its higher education systems, with a particular focus on provision, regulation and financing (Mok 2000). In addition, several key internationalizing initiatives have been launched by the Ministry of Education and are under way in Taiwan universities. These include recruiting international students and faculty and imposing a strong demand for the seeking of international recognition in quality. Thus, Taiwan universities and colleges have been strongly encouraged to sharpen their global competitive edge.

Thus, the greatest challenges for Taiwan's higher educational system are now two-fold: quality assurance and international competitiveness in the globalized society.

National quality assurance framework in Taiwan higher education

As higher education has quantitatively expanded, the public's desire to maintain and increase both "quantity" and "quality" has placed tremendous pressure on the government. Apart from encouraging institutions to conduct assessments on their own, a few professional associations such as Chinese Management Association, Chemical Society, and the Physical Association of the Republic of China were chartered by the Ministry of Education to exercise program-based academic assessments beginning in the 1980's. In the 1990s, the government, having been continuously pressured by the public, began implementing a wide-range of comprehensive institutional evaluations with the goal of establishing a non-governmental professional evaluation agency whose purpose was to conduct evaluations of higher education institutions. In 1994, Legislative Yuan passed "University law" which stated clearly that the national government is entitled to university evaluation in order to assure higher education quality. Up to present, three independent evaluation agencies officially chartered by the Ministry of Education have begun to assess three different types of Taiwan higher education institutions, including four-year comprehensive colleges and universities, universities of science and technology and technical colleges.

Starting in 2002, the evaluation of technical colleges was conducted by National Yunlin University of Science & Technology. A total number of forty institutions are scheduled to be reviewed within 4 years. Reviewers evaluate both administrative support and academic performance of an institution in a two-day on-site visit. There are four types of assessment outcome ranks (Technological & Vocational Educational Newsletter 2007).

The other one is Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA). Established in 2003, TWAEA, both the first non-profit evaluation agency jointly founded by senior members of the academia and business sectors, has assessed 38 universities of science and technology and technical colleges since 2004 (TWAEA 2008). In order to "oversee current assessment mechanisms, enhance teaching assessments, maintain teaching quality and periodically conduct administrative assessment" based on the 2005 Revised University Law, another professional organization jointly endowed by the Ministry of

Education and 153 colleges and universities, the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) was established.

Generally speaking, Taiwan government assessments of universities and colleges had only been conducted in an evaluative mode until the HEEACT was established. “Evaluation” clearly “focuses more on how successfully the institution is achieving its goals and objectives” (National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation 2007, p. 4). Evaluation agencies evaluate results in terms of the same set of criteria; this produces intense competition among all evaluated institutions and programs.

The HEEACT adopted the American accreditation model, featuring peer reviews, on-site visits and self-enhancement, each of which are added values that supersede the evaluative mode. According to CHEA, “accreditation” means “a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to examine colleges, universities and programs for the purposes of quality assurance and quality improvement” (CHEA 2008, p. 12). In other words, accreditation “is a voluntary process of approval of an institution or program by an accrediting agency or body” according to its own mission and goal. (WASC 2008). In 2006, HEEACT began a five-year, program-based, nation-wide, modified accreditation of over seventy-six four-year comprehensive institutions, including military and police academies. Participation is mandatory (shown in Table 1).

Table 1 Comparison among three quality assurance agencies by background and accreditation status

	HEEACT	TWAEA	NYUST
Background			
Starting year	2006	2004	2002
Type	Non profit foundation	Non profit foundation	Higher education institution
Governance	15 board members	15 board members	Research center (6 staff)
Funding	Ministry of education	Ministry of education	Ministry of education
Content of quality assurance			
Nature	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Unit	Program	Institutional/program	Institutional/program
Scope	76 4-year comprehensive colleges and universities	38 universities of science and Technology	40 technical colleges (including 2 and 5 year junior colleges)
Process	Self evaluation/peer review	Self evaluation/peer review	Self evaluation/peer review
Standards	5 criteria	5 items in institutional evaluation and 8 items in program evaluation	5 items in institutional evaluation and 8 items in program evaluation
Review cycle	5 years	4 years	4 years
Outcome	1. Accredited 2. Accredited conditionally 3. denial	Rank 1–4: Rank 1: above 80 points Rank 2: 70–80 Rank 3: 60–70 Rank: below 60	Rank 1–4: Rank 1: above 80 points Rank 2: 70–80 Rank 3: 60–70 Rank: below 60
Implication	Governmental funding/enrollment approved	Governmental funding/enrollment approved	Governmental funding/enrollment approved

Source: by author

Over 800 reviewers from universities and industries are recommended by 47 Program Planning Committees formed by the Board to conduct evaluations (HEEACT 2009b). The accreditation standards developed by the HEEACT are as follows: 1. goals, features, and self-enhancement mechanisms, 2. curriculum design and teaching, 3. learning and student affairs, 4. research and professional performance, 5. performance of graduates. There are three review outcomes of accreditation including “accredited”, “conditionally accredited” and “denial”. Those with a status of “conditionally accredited” or “denial” are supposed to be reviewed again 1 year later to check if all major problems mentioned in the final accreditation report have been solved during the year. Currently, four rounds of accreditations have been conducted, and the results of the first three and a half rounds have been released.

According to the review outcomes of the past 4 years, among the total of 1587 programs, the average rate for accredited status is 83.21%, for conditionally accredited 14.03%, and for denied 2.69% (see Table 2). The accredited programs in the fall semester of 2008 outnumbered the other six reviews. The pass rate dropped a little bit in the spring of 2009 because some newly established universities didn't offer relevant programs based on their missions and goals. Thus, it is evident that these figures demonstrate that Taiwan institutions are becoming more and more acquainted with the HEEACT accreditation model, and that they are aiming at self-enhancement, and learning ways to prepare faculty for participation.

To sum up, though a decentralized system quality assurance for higher education institutions was only established with the formation of the HEEACT in 2005; the government still plays an indirect role and indeed, influences all higher education institutions through the funding of allocation policies and total enrollment controls based on review outcomes. If a program fails to pass the accreditation for two consecutive years, the MOE requests the university terminate its enrollment and operation (HEEACT 2009b). Looking at institutions prior to review and after being accredited, there is no difference in that curriculum reform, faculty hiring and resource allocation are still determined with complete academic autonomy. On the other hand, it can't be denied that most institutions wisely chose to close unaccredited programs based on the HEEACT accreditation final

Table 2 Number and percent of programs by status

Review status		Number of programs	Accredited		Accredited conditionally		Denial	
			Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2006	Fall semester	362	279	77	71	19.6	11	3
	Spring semester	242	159	65.7	55	22.7	27	11.6
2007	Fall semester	265 (458*)	386*	84.3	65*	14.2	7*	1.5
	Spring semester	231 (418*)	376*	90	42*	10	0	0
2008	Spring semester	231 (418*)	376*	90	42*	10	0	0
	Fall semester	266 (455*)	425	93.41	30	6.59	0	0
2009	Spring	222 (378*)	336	88.89	42	11.11	0	0
Total		1587		83.21		14.03		2.69

Source: Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan (2010). 2009 Annual report. Unpublished. Taipei: Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan

* They are classes

report. Administrators at higher education institutions realize that a pass in the evaluation exercise is vital for the survival of an institution.

This situation clearly represents a dilemma called “the principal-agent problem”. That the responsibility of the delegated accrediting body ensures the government’s wishes is a fact even though they may have its own agenda and mission. (Hawkins et al. 2006; Ewell 2008). A consequence is decentralization of the system, which conflicts with a centralized state control. In turn, discussions have initiated over the most effective ways to make the decentralized quality assurance system more professional and at the same time more independent.

Duplication of national quality assurance in higher education

Entering the new era of quality assurance in 2005, some voices regarding integration or acquisition of various accreditations from colleges and universities began to be heard. Four types of accreditation, operating simultaneously, have created a new synthesis in quality assurance.

1. Institutional accreditation is an accreditation of higher education institutions in general. This means all professional specialties within a higher education institution are accredited. An example is the 5-year cycle MOE institutional accreditation.
2. Specialized accreditation is an accreditation of distinct professional programs, not a general accreditation of all specialties as in institutional accreditation. Specific programs and departments are targeted, such as chemistry education, engineering education, teacher education, and general education.
3. National accreditation is an accreditation of higher education institutions within a country, for instance, the five-year cycle HEEACT program-based accreditation, the five-year 50 Billion-Research Program for Developing First-class University & Top Research Centers, and the Teaching Excellence Program.
4. International accreditation is an accreditation whereby higher education institutions pass accreditation of specific professional programs in a foreign accrediting agency like AACSB International accrediting Taiwan business programs.

Hence, to a certain extent, an institution will likely be reviewed more than twice by different types of accreditations within a whole year. In order to eliminate the duplication among various accrediting agencies and to lessen the institutional burden, in 2006, the MOE set a statute for four types of the programs accredited to be exempt from the five-year cycle HEEACT programmatic accreditation. At present, the MOE is planning to integrate forty-three varying university evaluations into twenty-one.

Exemptions from HEEACT accreditation

According to the exemption provisions of the MOE in 2006, four types of programs would qualify for different reasons for exemption from the HEEACT accreditation process. As to the first type of the programs including those accredited internationally by Association to Advanced Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International), the MOE provisions attempt to encourage more and more programs and institutions to seek international accreditation. For the other two types, involving the programs which have gained the accredited status by Chemical Society in Taiwan locally and accredited by Institute of

Engineering Education (IEET Taiwan) or remain in the process of application, the intention is to eliminate accreditation duplication. In contrast, the purpose of the last group exemption of all programs or fields of Taiwan literature and Taiwan studies, which have been accredited by National Taiwan Normal University chartered by MOE in 2006, is to support national policy, which promotes the programs of Taiwan literature, humanity and language on campuses. However, the program evaluation will be integrated into the 2nd cycle HEEACT accreditation of 2011 (Table 3).

The fact is that all of the above four accreditors above have implemented distinct specialized accreditations. Three of them are national agencies including Chemical Society in Taiwan, Institute of Engineering Education Taiwan, and National Taiwan Normal University, which operates nationally. The other international agency is AACSB International. Three national accrediting agencies all chartered by the MOE conduct compulsory program evaluations along with AACSB International accreditation, which is applied by Taiwan universities voluntarily. Early in 2003, AACSB International started its accreditation in Taiwan as compared with IEET and CST in 2004 and NTNU in 2006. By 2008, more than 1600 programs have been reviewed by the HEEACT in contrast with 249 engineering programs accredited by IEET, 67 business programs by AACSB International and 25 programs in chemistry by Chemical Society in Taiwan. In addition, there are 28 programs of Taiwan literature and studies that are completely exempt from the HEEACT accreditation.

International accreditation in Taiwan quality assurance system

In order to strengthen the international outlook and global competitiveness of Taiwan colleges and universities, the MOE internationalizes Taiwan's higher education with four policies. First, in 2002, the MOE launched the "Enhancing Global Competitiveness Plan" aimed at fostering international exchange activities to improve international competitiveness of institutions. Second, increasing the number of foreign students studying in Taiwan has been made priority of the MOE since August 2003. Higher education Institutions offer scholarships and English taught courses in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs to achieve this objective. Third, the MOE encourages Taiwan students to study abroad by launching the "Study Abroad Loan Program" in 2004. In addition, the MOE expanded Taiwan Culture Research Program in scale with foreign academic institutes to attract attention to the academic stage globally (MOE 2007). Therefore, based on the policies above, and to facilitate various types of cross-campus academic collaborative activities

Table 3 Exemption from HEEACT accreditation by type and number

	IEET	CST	NTNU	AACSB
Year starting accrediting	2004	2004	2006	2003
Type	Specialized versus national	Specialized versus national	Specialized versus national	Specialized versus international
Program	Engineering	Chemistry	Taiwan culture and humanity	Business
Number	249	25	28	67

Source: by author

with foreign universities, several Taiwan universities make the great effort to promote their global ranks and/or to seek international accreditation.

Upon entering the twenty-first century, the internationalization trend of college rankings began to develop. Shanghai Jiao Tong University of Mainland China published the first global ranking of universities in June 2003: “Academic Ranking of World Universities”, also known as ARWU. The ranking makes use of internationally recognized academic performance and achievement indicators in rating 1,000 universities worldwide. Indeed, the release of this ranking caused widespread concern and discussions in the international community and in Taiwan as well (Hou 2009; Hou and Morse 2009).

In response to the quest for a world-class university, the Taiwan government launched the Five-year 50 Billion Program for Developing First-class University and Top Research Centers in 2005. The program aims to develop at least one university as one of the world’s top 100 universities in 5 years and at least fifteen key departments or cross-university research centers as the top in Asia in 10 years (Lo 2008). Eleven research universities were selected to be funded in 2007 compared with twelve in the first cycle of year 2005–2006. Besides, this, the Taiwan government commissioned the HEEACT to develop a global ranking entitled “Performance Ranking of Scientific Papers for World Universities” and has published the outcomes since 2007. According to HEEACT 2009 global rankings, there are seven Taiwan universities in the top 500, including National Taiwan University (102), National Cheng Kung University (307), National Tsing Hua University (347), National Chiao Tung University (456), Chang Gung University (479), National Central University (483) and National Yang Ming University (493), as compared to five in 2008 (HEEACT 2009a).

Unlike rankings or league tables, international accreditation programs and institutions didn’t draw much national attention until the HEEACT accreditation of 2006. The main reason for this is that governmental policy did not encourage universities to participate with funding, as did the Five-year 50 Billion Program and the Teaching Excellence Program. However, in 2000 and 2001, there were still a number of institutions working toward international accreditation and the promotion of more opportunities for international academic activities with foreign universities. By 2009, four business schools in Taiwan Universities, including Fu Jen Catholic University, National Sun Yat Shen University, National Chiao Tung University, and National Chengchi University gained AACSB’s International Accreditation. Furthermore, national accrediting organizations in Taiwan, have also begun to establish partnerships with foreign agencies and to participate in international organizations and networks of quality assurance in higher education. These include APQN (HEEACT), INQAAHE (HEEACT), Washington Accord (IEET), NCF-MEA (Taiwan Medical Association Council), and others.

Internationalization and U.S. accreditation in Taiwan higher education

With more than 80 institutional and programmatic accreditation agencies that recognize postsecondary education in developing nations, the U.S. has become a nation that is a substantial exporter of quality assurance (CHEA 2008). According to CHEA, 40 accrediting agencies were active in 52 countries in 2006–2007, accrediting 385 non-U.S. institutions and programs compared with the lower number of 364 in the U.S. Ewell (2008) clearly pointed out, “U.S. accreditation may provide an additional cachet in a competitive local market especially for private institutions” (p. 153). Hayward (2001) also stated, “Some foreign colleges and universities want U.S. accreditation because it is, at least at the

moment, “the gold standard” in many areas of higher education.” Obviously, American accreditation, which offers a “nongovernmental, mission-oriented model, with trained and impartial evaluators and applied to both public and private institutions”, is sought by more and more institutions abroad as higher education globalizes (Morse 2008). The fact that institutions in South America, Asia, Eastern Europe, are encouraged by governments to seek international accreditation, particularly from the U.S. has, indeed, contributed to the prosperity of U.S. accreditation worldwide.

In the late 90s, American accrediting programmatic organizations began approaching Taiwan higher education institutions for non-U.S. program accreditation. Until 2002, just two business schools of Fu Jen Catholic University and National Sun Yat Shen University had embarked on international programmatic accreditation, which was recommended by their foreign counterparts in order to develop a basis of mutual understanding of the quality of degrees granted by each other. AACSB International, “a specialized, non-governmental organization” devoted to the advancement of higher education in business administration and management, became the first international accrediting organization accrediting business programs in Taiwan (AACSB International 2009). Following Fu Jen Catholic University and National Sun Yat Shen University, School of Management of National Chiao Tung University, and College of Commerce of National Chengchi University also gained AACSB’s International Accreditation in 2007. Now, seventeen public and private institutions have become members of AACSB International and are committed to the accreditation process.

Currently, some Taiwan universities have also started to pursue American institutional accreditation. The Middle States commission on Higher education (MSCHE), an American institutional accreditor, which began a pilot project accrediting non-U.S. institutions in 2002, accepted Ming Chuan University’s application in 2006 and announced its receipt of official notification as a candidate for MSCHE accreditation in 2008. Ming Chuan University’s candidacy embarked on other discussions over institutional exemption from the HEEACT accreditation.

Generally speaking, these Taiwan institutions, first and foremost, agreed that U.S. accreditation made it easier to attract students and faculty, to develop joint degree programs, and to compete with local institutions. The greatest benefit is that the focus on self-enhancement has helped them to develop a continuous self-evaluation mechanism, and to implement outcomes based on mission-oriented goals set internally. Their strengths and weaknesses can also be determined easily through the process of internal and external quality assurance. According to Dr. Ming-Hsien Yang, former Dean of Management School of Fu Jen Catholic University, “AACSB International’s accreditation did help the school to develop the academic cooperation with foreign universities and to benefit greatly its graduates in the international job market” (personal interview, Feb. 9, 2009).

However, several problems still challenged institutions both in the process of application and after being accredited. The first was integrating international standards into local contexts including models of governance, qualification of faculty and staff, resource allocation, etc. In addition, these problems even challenged public universities more. The staff and faculty in Taiwan public universities who have the qualifications of governmental officers are reluctant to change. This may hamper the reform of governance structure necessary to meet international accreditation requirements. With an independent governing board, however, private institutions have difficulties in having sufficient resources to reduce faculty teaching loads and to increase student-support services to meet the standards of international accrediting agencies. In addition, communicating in fluent English with visiting team members is another big challenge for all senior administrators, faculty, staff

and students. The translation of materials into English required for accreditation also causes problems and requires much additional work, both in the process of application and in maintenance work.

International recognition of accrediting organizations

As more and more institutions seek international accreditation, local institutional and programmatic accrediting agencies, which implement accrediting tasks domestically, are attempting to establish partnerships with foreign accrediting organizations in order to gain international recognition by participating in an international network of quality assurance in higher education.

Taiwan Medical Accreditation Council (TMAC) was the first Taiwan accrediting agency to gain international recognition. In 2002, Taiwan Medical Accreditation Council (TMAC), reviewed by the National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation (NCFMEA), was considered the “comparability Taiwan’s standards to the standards used to evaluate programs leading to the M.D. degree in the United States” (TMAC 2002). This is a milestone that initiated a review of professional accreditation in Taiwan and brought Taiwan to an international level. In addition, the Washington Accord signatories supported IEET as a Provisional Signatory of the Accord at the 2005 IEM Meetings. In 2007, IEET became a formal signatory of the Accord (IEET 2009). In order to establish international relationships, the HEEACT applied for memberships to international quality assurance organizations. In October and December of 2007, the HEEACT granted memberships to International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), and the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) respectively (HEEACT 2009b).

Challenges for international accreditation in Taiwan higher education

Both Taiwan universities and accrediting organizations have been attempting to participate actively in the world of globalized higher education by internationalizing themselves. It is clearly foreseen that there will be more and more international accrediting agencies from both the U.S. and Europe coming to provide their services in Taiwan. The fact is that although Taiwan universities have been encouraged by the government to participate, they, quite on their own, actually want international accreditation in order to enhance their competitiveness. However, the decentralized frameworks for quality assurance and accreditation in Taiwan, thus far, cannot be applied to providers outside the national education system. In fact, Taiwan’s government is just now ascertaining the necessity of having regulatory systems and out-of-country providers such as AACSB International registered and evaluated. A concern is that Taiwan accrediting organizations do not now have capacities to accredit programs or institutions abroad; furthermore, due to globalized competition and in order to attract more students domestically and from abroad, institutions are working hard to earn the accreditation of international accrediting agencies, but, as yet, none of the agencies is recognized by the MOE. This is providing a loophole that “permits bona fide and rogue foreign providers to avoid compliance with national regulations in many countries and makes monitoring their activities difficult” (Altbach & Knight 2007). Consequently, numerous questions are being raised as follows:

Do criteria or conditions depend on whether providers are part of and recognized by a national education system in their home countries? Do different rules apply if the provider is for-profit or non-profit, private or public, an institution or a company? What rules apply to companies that establish institutions in foreign countries and have no home-based presence? How do regulators track all the partnerships between local and foreign institutions or companies? (Altbach & Knight 2007)

The internationalization of higher education on the part of Taiwan's government has not only drawn the local academic community's attention, but has also manifested a new concern over the issue of a "new colonialism" (Lo 2008). To a certain extent, international accreditation can be considered to be "cultural imperialism" and as such, raises the serious issue of national jurisdiction over higher education, particularly in institutional accreditation. This growing concern is especially ironic, considering the fact that local universities and accrediting organizations are applying international standards of accreditation and recognition in the national context (Morse 2008; Ewell 2008). Quality control in Taiwan with regard to higher education, it can easily be argued, is seemingly threatened by Anglo-Saxon standards and practices, and some might even say domination.

In fact, these challenges are a part of the impact globalization is having on Taiwan society. The Taiwan government believes that a prominence of higher education certainly increases economic strengths and increases Taiwan's international influence. Undoubtedly, the more the Taiwan government concerns itself with maintaining Taiwan's competitive edge in regional and global markets by adopting Anglo-Saxon rules governing the quality of Taiwan higher education, the more opportunities international accreditors will find for their services here. Thus, these problems, including the international recognition of local accrediting agencies, the recognition of foreign accrediting agencies in Taiwan, the convergence of international and national standards of accreditation, the emergence of accreditation mills and the use of English, will continue to challenge Taiwan higher education into the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

Globalization does indeed worry Taiwan higher education institutions and the government deeply. Over the last decade, Taiwan has quickly responded to globalization due to its geographic, political and economic concerns. As Taiwan President Ma publicly stated, "If the government and education authorities fail to make significant changes in improving higher education quality, our prestigious teachers and talented students will migrate en masse to foreign universities, making it more difficult for us to upgrade the country's international competitiveness" (Central New Agency 2009). In response to an echo from the public, the Taiwan government has, as of late, paid much more attention to this crucial issue. In 2008, all Taiwan accrediting agencies including HEEACT, TWAEA, NYUST, and other programmatic accrediting agencies such as the Institute of Engineering Education Taiwan (IEET), the Taiwan Medical Association Council, the Taiwan Nursing Accreditation Council, and the Chemical Society in Taiwan, were jointly discussing the integration and allocation of higher education evaluation tasks in Taiwan. A central idea was to create a coordinating organization for the purpose of serving as a primary national voice with the expressed responsibility of presenting evaluation results to the public, and of assuring standards of quality for local as well as foreign accrediting agencies. This was

fully accepted in the forum and supported by the MOE as well (Forum on the Collaborations among University Evaluation Agencies 2008).

Based on a national consensus and learning experience from Europe and America, the Ministry of Education assembled a task force of “Local and International Accreditors’ Recognition” that consists of eleven university presidents and higher education professors. On Dec. 28, 2009, this task force published regulations and provisions supporting the legitimacy of the MOE and, in so doing, gave recognition to local and international accreditors. Moreover, the formation of the “Provisions of Local and International Accreditors’ Recognition” task force has meant that those who have been accredited or who are planning to implement programs or institution accreditation in Taiwan, whether domestic or international, are supposed to apply for the MOE recognition voluntarily (MOE 2009). Up to the present, two local accreditors are under review, but none of international accreditors have applied for recognition. Though the system for quality management of international accreditation is being built in Taiwan, several problems remain. One enormous challenge is whether the members of the task force have sufficient international QA experience and qualifications to enable them to recognize these international accreditors while reviewing self-study reports and conducting on-site visits. The significance of this issue has also led to a consequence of whether international accreditors are willing or not to apply for the MOE recognition voluntarily. If not, then what rules might be necessarily adopted to oversee a voluntary participation?

President of the HEEACT, Roger C.Y. Chen recently indicated that, “It is time to consider organizing an independent and professional institute such as CHEA or Germany Accreditation Council in Taiwan to integrate all evaluation resources, to define the basic requirements of the evaluation process, and to take care that any national accreditation is carried out on the basis of reliable, transparent and internationally recognized criteria.” In this way, the HEEACT is certainly expected to make significant contributions and to fulfill a pioneering role in the coordination of quality assurance and accreditation in Taiwan higher education (Forum on the Collaborations among University Evaluation Agencies 2008).

Concurrently, international accreditation is being pursued in many Asian nations such as Mainland China, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Japan, just as in Taiwan, this process has begun to challenge their national quality assurance systems of higher education, too. Most of these nations do not have clear policies or standards that serve to assess the quality of international accreditors, yet, the Taiwan experience will definitely inspire them to think deeply and make their own ways according to local/global concerns and their impact on higher education development.

International accreditation, in recent years, has become a discernible trend, both with accrediting bodies and academic institutions, yet is the development of an international scheme for national quality assurance possible with regard to higher education in Taiwan? There are no simple answers to this question so far, but the new initiatives for mutual recognition of accreditation processes and decisions among quality assurance agencies in European countries, especially in the regulated professions, could be one of several good experiences learned by Taiwan as well as by the other Asian nations (ECA 2008).

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