

375 Refocusing Embedded Agency: Internationalisation Strategies of Taiwanese Higher Education Institutions under Current Policies

Yi-Hsuan Irene Huang

University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom

Research Domains

International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

Abstract

Internationalisation has become a focus of Taiwan's higher education policies since the 2000s. While there are numerous policy reviews, the internationalisation practices in universities remain under-investigated. Therefore, this study conducts case studies at a top public university and a private university of technology in Taiwan. With a maximum variance sampling design, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of higher education internationalisation in non-Western contexts and the theorisation of the relationship between organisational status and internationalisation strategies.

Empirical data on institutional internationalisation strategies are collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation and interpreted with an institutional logics approach. Preliminary findings from a reflexive thematic analysis suggest that both cases are not solely following government policies. Instead, they demonstrate commitments to different logics in their internationalisation strategies depending on their statuses and conditions. Furthermore, a tendency towards widening structural inequalities under current policies is also revealed.

Full paper

The internationalisation of higher education (IoHE) has gained greater attention from governments and universities worldwide over decades. Nevertheless, it is not until recently that an increase in non-Western studies in this highly Western-dominant research field has been witnessed (de Wit et al., 2022; Marginson & Xu, 2022; Mittelmeier & Yang, 2022). In line with this trend, this study investigates IoHE in Taiwan.

Currently, Taiwan is implementing three higher education internationalisation policies. The *New Southbound Policy* aims to strengthen people-to-people connections with Southeast and South Asia countries and recruit students from this region. Another competitive grant, *Higher Education SPROUT Project*, supports selected universities to pursue global excellence while other HEIs focus on local development. More recently, *the Programme on Bilingual Education for Students in College* was launched in 2021 to improve Taiwanese students' English proficiency and elevate Taiwan's global competitiveness by promoting English-medium instruction courses in universities.

While there are numerous policy reviews (e.g., Hou & Hill, 2021; Hou et al., 2020), the actual situation in universities is overlooked[YHIH1]. Therefore, this study looks into the internationalisation strategies of Taiwanese higher education institutions (HEIs). More specifically, it aims to answer the following questions: (1) How is higher education internationalisation conceptualised within HEIs in Taiwan? (2) What strategies for internationalisation are prioritised by different HEIs? (3) In what ways do the policy contexts inform the internationalisation strategies of different HEIs?

To answer these questions, a qualitative multiple-case study design was employed. Following a maximum variation sampling approach, a public top-ranked university and a private university of technology are selected as cases. These cases represent the elite sector and the mass 'demand-absorbing' sector of Taiwan's higher education system, respectively (Hou & Lu, 2023; Marginson, 2016). With this case selection approach, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between organisational status and internationalisation strategies, which remains under-theorised (Buckner, 2022).

Empirical data on institutional internationalisation strategies are mainly collected through semi-structured interviews with senior leaders and academic staff in the two cases. Documents regarding government policies and institutional strategies, such as official press releases and annual plans, are also collected to further contextualise interview data. In total, 27 interview transcripts and 136 documents have been included for analysis.

The theoretical frameworks applied to interpret these data are Brankovic's (2018) concept of organisational status and Thornton et al.'s (2012) institutional logic approach. According to Brankovic (2018), organisational status comprises three elements: categories, affiliations, and intermediaries. *Categories* refer to socially constructed classifications of HEIs, such as public- or private-operated and research- or teaching-focused. Furthermore, *affiliations*, namely inter-institutional partnerships in the forms of sister schools or association memberships, are also influential. Moreover, *intermediaries* are the third parties delivering their observations of competing universities to audiences (Werron, 2015). In the contemporary global education system, university rankings are powerful intermediaries that affect organisational status.

On this conceptual basis, the institutional logics approach of Thornton et al. (2012) is applied to explain the similarities and differences in the internationalisation strategies of the two cases with different statuses. Institutional logics are "the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). Based on the relevant literature (Cai & Mountford, 2022; Qi, 2022; Thornton et al., 2012), this study identifies five logics underlying HEIs' internationalisation practices, including academic, market, managerial, state, and community logics.

More specifically, while *academic* logic values organisational reputation and professional norms (Grossi et al., 2020), *market* logic leads universities to make commercial-based decisions in order to elevate their competitive position in higher education markets. Another logic, *managerial* logic, shapes internal hierarchical decision-making structures and accountability systems to maximise organisational efficiency. Furthermore, *state* logic reflects the role of governments and universities in redistributing resources and providing high-quality education as public goods (McMullin & Skelcher, 2018). Lastly, *community* logic is reflected in the reciprocal relationships that universities build with local and global communities in their internationalisation practices (Qi, 2022).

Through these theoretical lenses, this ongoing project reveals that while both cases follow government policies closely, their embedded agency is demonstrated in their internationalisation strategies. In other words, they commit to different logics depending on their statuses and conditions. Furthermore, based on the interviewees' reflections, this study draws attention to structural inequalities under Taiwan's current internationalisation approach. Suggestions for the government and HEIs are made in order to enable a more egalitarian future.

References

- Brankovic, J. (2018). The status games they play: Unpacking the dynamics of organisational status competition in higher education. *Higher Education*, 75(4), 695-709. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-01>
- Buckner, E. (2022). Embracing the global: the role of ranking, research mandate, and sector in the internationalisation of higher education. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 52(2), 232-249.
- Cai, Y., & Mountford, N. (2022). Institutional logics analysis in higher education research. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(8), 1627-1651. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.1946032>
- de Wit, H., Minaeva, E., & Wang, L. (2022). International student recruitment and mobility in Non-Anglophone countries: Theories, themes, and patterns. Routledge.
- Grossi, G., Dobija, D., & Strzelczyk, W. (2020). The impact of competing institutional pressures and logics on the use of performance measurement in hybrid universities. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 43(4), 818-844. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2019.1684328>
- Hou, A. Y.-C., & Hill, C. (2021). What are the challenges for building world class universities in Taiwan? Assessing Taiwan's excellence initiatives since 2005. In *Higher education in Taiwan: Global, political and social challenges and future trends* (pp. 83-101). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4554-2>
- Hou, A. Y. C., Hill, C., Hu, Z., & Lin, L. (2022). What is driving Taiwan government for policy change in higher education after the year of 2016—in search of egalitarianism or pursuit of academic excellence? *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(2), 338-351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1744126>
- Hou, A. Y. C., & Lu, I.-J. G. (2023). Private Higher Education in Taiwan. *International Higher Education*, 114, 38-39. <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ihe/article/view/16439>
- Marginson, S. (2016). The worldwide trend to high participation higher education: Dynamics of social stratification in inclusive systems. *Higher Education*, 72(4), 413-434. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0016-x>
- Marginson, S., & Xu, X. (2022). 'The ensemble of diverse music': Internationalization strategies and endogenous agendas. In S. Marginson & X. Xu (Eds.), *Changing higher education in East Asia* (pp. 1-30).
- McMullin, C., & Skelcher, C. (2018). The impact of societal-level institutional logics on hybridity: Evidence from nonprofit organizations in England and France. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 29(5), 911-924. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-9996-8>
- Mittelmeier, J., & Yang, Y. (2022). The role of internationalisation in 40 years of higher education research: Major themes from Higher Education Research & Development (1982–2020). *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(1), 75-91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.2002272>
- Qi, J. (2022). China's international higher education policies 2010–2019: Multiple logics and HEI responses. *Higher Education*, 83(3), 695-710. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00695-7>
- Thornton, P. H., & Ocasio, W. (1999). Institutional logics and the historical contingency of power in organizations: Executive succession in the higher education publishing industry, 1958–1990. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105(3), 801-843. <https://doi.org/10.1086/210361>
- Thornton, P. H., Ocasio, W., & Lounsbury, M. (2012). The institutional logics perspective: A new approach to culture, structure, and process. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199601936.001.0001>
- Werron, T. (2015). Why do we believe in competition? A historical-sociological view of competition as an institutionalized modern imaginary. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, 16(2), 186-210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1600910X.2015.1049190>