



# Relocating the education reform movement: how have universities in Taiwan experienced Neoliberalization?

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## Abstract

Based on the higher education reform experience in Taiwan, this research elucidates the conditions for the marketization of universities. It draws on critical discourse analysis to explore power relations between higher education, society, and the government and suggests that the university has always been considered a valuable resource for state development. By analyzing the heterogeneity of discourses used in official documents and the academic literature, this research identifies the social contradictions that triggered the education reform movement in the 1990s, including humanistic resistance against economic utility, educational inequality, and demand for academic autonomy. Neoliberalization in higher education is shown as a contemporary model for mobilizing academic resources in indirect but effective ways, with the aim of mapping both neoliberal practices in Taiwan and their connections with the global trend of marketizing higher education.

**Keywords** Neoliberalism · Higher education policy · University management · Marketization

## Introduction

Entanglements between universities, the state and industry are nothing new; that said, universities have developed an increasingly prominent role in economic and industrial innovation in recent years (Laird, 2020; Martin, 2003). In addition to teaching and research, the higher education mission has been extended to include a third pillar involving innovation ecology, impact, responsible research and innovation, and public engagement (Knowles & Burrows, 2014; Shore, 2020; Wright, 2016). These novel missions may sometimes conflict; for instance, public engagement versus economic value versus impact (Watermeyer, 2016). University roles, too, reveal more fundamental conflicts. Because the ultimate value of a marketizing bureaucracy is revenue generation, this goal may contradict the objective of providing educational value, whether they are “the open-ended search for deep understanding” (Nash, 2019) or the development of critical citizens and democratic public spheres (Giroux,

2016). Scholars indicate that behind the rhetoric of symbiosis, academic communities have been transformed into resources for economic development, subject to the needs of industry and the state (Shore, 2020; Wright, 2016). Under the trajectory of enterprising universities, some have attempted to restore academic autonomy by proposing a public goods model of higher education (Giroux, 2016), although the concept of public goods ought to be further elaborated (Marginson, 2016). In summary, neoliberalization has become a key issue in critical studies of university administration and knowledge governance.

Similar trajectories can be identified in Taiwan’s contemporary higher education sector. The main institutional management policies in universities, such as competitiveness, internationalization, academic excellence, entrepreneurship, industrial collaboration, markets, and accountability, are a mere application of the neoliberal discourse; meanwhile, performance indicators such as university rankings, competitive grant schemes, and fixed-term contracts, have become part of daily academic life. Owing to its diplomatic disposition, Taiwan has tended to show great enthusiasm for world-class universities and academic prestige in international higher education communities via performance evaluations (Hsieh, 2016; Song & Tai, 2007). Using the example of Taiwan’s higher education reform, this research study aims to elucidate the conditions

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in today's marketizing of universities with a focus on the unique features of neoliberalization in an island-state where a transition to democracy defined the late 1980s.

Although the frame of neoliberalization as an ideal type provides an analytical tool for interpreting and summarizing contemporary configurations of economies, societies, and politics, the term neoliberalism may still be ambiguous. Previous studies illustrate the heterogeneity and complexity of neoliberal thought inherited from its distinct philosophical and ideology-forming threads: classical liberalism, ordo-liberalism, and neoclassical economics (Gane, 2012, 2014; Mirowski, 2013). While neoliberal ideas are featured as diverse, neoliberalism as policy manifests a more contingent, contradictory and unstable nature because it must coordinate the interests of a range of groups (Larner, 2000; Peck, 2013). In order to articulate these nuances in practice, Jessop (2002) elaborates four strategic models for shifting from the Keynesian welfare state: neoliberalism, neostatism, neocorporatism, and neocommunitarianism. To convey "actually existing neoliberalization," the four variants are categorized based on the degree of competition, regulation, size of the public sector, ownership, international economic relations, and taxation. Drawing on Jessop's classification, the aim of this study is to investigate the extent of neoliberalization in Taiwan's higher education reforms.

Emphasizing the heterogeneity and complexity of neoliberalism as both ideology and policy, scholars have indicated that critical studies of neoliberalization encounter two challenges. The first is a tendency to overstate the monolithic aspects of neoliberalism as a macrostructural force or a trigger that precipitates all changes in society (Peck, 2013). The second challenge is an excessive focus on particular strategies in individual cases, which overlooks its generic, generalizable features (Peck & Tickell, 2002). The same could be said for an informed discussion on Taiwanese education reform. In the Taiwanese public media, education reforms are likely to be presented in a reductionist and simplistic way. Even academic critiques of higher education policies in Taiwan may overlook the complexity and heterogeneity of the education reforms of the 1990s (Hsieh, 2016; Shin et al., 2020; 戴伯芬 et al., 2015). These studies mainly focused on the effects of the reform rather than on the sociohistorical contexts in which the education reform movement emerged. However, as Bacevic (2019) argues, the epistemological mode of neoliberalism engenders its own social reality. In light of the above, this empirical study inquires into the extent to which the neoliberalized university can be said to exist in Taiwan. If it does exist, through what process did it develop? This study will also map both local neoliberalism, which Ball (2015) refers to as the "little neoliberalism," and its connections with the global neoliberal movement, or "big neoliberalism."

Before I present my main arguments, I briefly review Taiwan's modern history, highlighting two aspects: first, democratic development and social movements; and second, the development of higher education. Against this backdrop, the foundation of universities' rapid adoption of and adaptation to foreign policies is examined. In the section on methods and materials I describe how the empirical data were collected, and how the documents were analyzed. The section that presents the results and discussion begins by exploring the dominant higher education discourse in Taiwan—state development—and the changes used in the language, followed by an examination of the alternative narratives of university education. I then characterize the interdiscursivity of language during the education reform movement. The discussion section elaborates some unique features of Taiwan's neoliberalized higher education.

## Historical contexts and political configurations in Taiwan

In the first half of the twentieth century, Taiwan was a frontier territory between two Asian hegemonies—Japan and China. During the Cold War, Taiwan became a frontier against the Communist bloc. Since the late 1980s, Taiwan has undergone progressive democratization, the development of which has been considered as exemplifying what Samuel Huntington calls the "third wave of democracy" (Fell, 2018; Jacobs, 2012).

In 1895, after the First Sino-Japanese War, Qing China ceded Taiwan to Japan. In 1945, Japan unconditionally surrendered to the Allies, and Japanese rule in Taiwan came to an end. Next, the Republic of China (ROC) took over Taiwan on behalf of the Allies. Immediately after the Second World War, the Chinese Civil War between the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) and the Communist Party of China (CCP) broke out. In 1949, the CCP took over mainland China and founded the People's Republic of China (PRC), while the rest of the ROC's forces, officers, and supporters—and their families—retreated to Taiwan.

During the Chinese Civil War, the Temporary Provisions against the Communist Rebellion were legalized to circumvent the compliance with human rights that the ROC Constitution had guaranteed in 1948. The government declared Martial Law on Taiwan, based on the Temporary Provisions in 1949, which strictly limited the rights of assembly, protest, free speech, and publication; these restrictions remained in effect for 38 years. Under this authoritarian regime, higher education institutions were rigidly controlled by the state in terms of their establishment, administration, finances, personnel, curriculum, and publications (Law, 1998; Mok, 2002). As Law (1998) indicates, Taiwan suffered from a "lack of a tradition of university autonomy" until the 1990s.

Starting in the 1970s, repeated waves of democratization surged. The KMT government tried to inhibit the democratization movements by banning political journals and arresting or even executing activists. However, this suppression of domestic democratic activism drew international condemnation and led to only more intense domestic protests against KMT authoritarian rule. In 1987, four decades after the ROC established itself in Taiwan, the era of Taiwan Martial Law ended. Three years later, university students launched the Wild Lily student movement that demanded National Assembly elections and the repeal of the Temporary Provisions. Their initial petitions focused on university autonomy, including elections for student union representatives, freedom of speech, and the abolition of censorship of university presses. As a result of the student movement, the Temporary Provisions were abolished, and the entire National Assembly was re-elected in 1991, followed by constitutional reforms and the first direct presidential elections in 1996 (Jacobs, 2012; 胡慧玲, 2013). It is this democratic transition in Taiwan that is associated with the practices of political liberalism.

## Development of higher education in Taiwan

The history of higher education in Taiwan had its origins under Japanese rule and was based on colonial policy (Chan et al., 2021: Chapter. 1). In order to show the Western powers its imperial capacity, the Japanese established a state education system in Taiwan as a crucial aspect of “modernization” (Jacobs, 2012). As Green (2013) indicates, the idea of public education systems was adopted in the nineteenth century as a practical strategy for establishing a “modern nation.” Hence, the development of education policies had been rooted in the goals of national development and industrial progress. In Asia, the first successful model of modernization had been the Meiji Restoration in Japan; indeed, the establishment of the entire Taiwanese education system was intended as a copy of the Japanese modernization model (Green, 2013).

The first university in Taiwan—the Taihoku (Taipei) Imperial University—was founded in 1928. It comprised five colleges: agriculture, medicine, natural sciences, literature and politics, and engineering, and two institutes: tropical medicine and Southeast Asian studies. Educational goals, coupled with the other essential task of modernizing Taiwan—to improve public health by eradicating tropical diseases (Jacobs, 2012)—represented the Japanese Empire’s colonial interests in Southeast Asia.

After World War II, Taiwan’s higher education system continued to grow until 1973. New universities and colleges were intended to cultivate professional manpower for the state and to train bureaucratic staff for government offices.

From 1973 to 1984, the state ceased the accreditation of private universities and colleges and exercised caution in establishing new public universities or colleges. Nevertheless, the transition to the high-tech industry led the state to relax its restrictions on licensing new universities and colleges after 1985. By the time of the education reform demonstrations in 1994, Taiwan had more than 20 universities, 30 colleges, and 70 junior colleges (Indicators of Science and Technology, Taiwan, 2015).

After Taiwan’s Martial Law ended, along with the democratization movements, a range of social movements also sprang up that were concerned with labor laws, women’s rights, the rights of indigenous people, living justice, peasants’ rights, the environment, consumers’ rights, disability rights, students’ rights, and education reforms (Fell, 2018; 王金壽 et al., 2011; 胡慧玲, 2013). In addition to the Wild Lily student movement and the petition for university autonomy and democracy, several citizen societies held a forum to discuss education reforms. Their interests focused on detailed educational affairs, including pedagogy, curriculum design, student permission, school administration, and educational budgets. In 1994, these societies, including the Humanistic Education Foundation (人本教育基金會), the Association for Teachers’ Human Rights (教師人權促進會), and the Homemakers’ United Foundation (主婦聯盟), and liberal scholars launched an education reform movement. This movement embodied a collaborative compromise between appeals for social justice as a left-wing policy on the one hand and the deregulation of education as a liberal policy on the other hand (王金壽 et al., 2011).

In response to the movement, the government established the Education Reform Commission in the same year and announced a series of education reform policies. The Education Reform Commission comprised pedagogic experts, liberal scholars, government officers, school principals, university deans, and relevant citizen societies, representing different or even contradictory ideologies and interests. The domain of the Education Reform Commission covered primary education, secondary education, and higher education.

In the case of higher education, three policies of the announced reforms stand out. The first policy was to massify higher education by converting colleges into universities and transforming vocational colleges into colleges, which was one of the leading petitions of the education reform movement. These changes were approved by the Education Reform Commission. In 2000, the number of universities in Taiwan reached 53, and the number of colleges had increased to 74, while the number of junior colleges had fallen to 23 (Indicators of Science and Technology, Taiwan, 2015). Notably, most of the colleges that were promoted to universities by this policy were private institutions. The ratio of public to private higher education institutions shifted from 0.81 in 1990 to 0.52 in 2010 (Indicators of Science and

Technology, Taiwan, 2015). From this trend can be concluded that the massification of higher education in Taiwan has partially been achieved by privatization (Chiang, 2013; Pretzer-Lin, 2015).

The second policy, in response to the demand for university democracy, empowered universities to gain more autonomy over finances, personnel matters, and curricula. The revised Universal Act enabled higher education institutions to organize their university funding and faculty councils for dealing with financial and personnel affairs (Mok, 2002). The third policy was the establishment of performance-based resource distribution in the name of efficiency and accountability. The massification of universities, hence, catalyzed the imperative to establish a transparent and objective model for allocating educational resources, which empowered the state bureaucracy to operate funding based on performance evaluations, which was a novel model of regulating higher education. For instance, the ratio of competition-based funding in Taiwan's higher education has risen from 5 percent in 1995 to 44.6 percent in 2018 (Shin et al., 2020).

After 2000, to promote international competitiveness and academic excellence, several accreditation agencies for evaluating the quality of universities and colleges were founded, such as the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), the Institute of Engineering Education, Taiwan, and the Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA). In addition to these domestic agencies, the Ministry of Education also recognizes international accreditation agencies, including the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) (Hou, 2011; Hsieh, 2016). Nevertheless, due to intense criticism from academics, the Ministry of Education announced in 2017 that subject assessments, including the HEEACT evaluation, would henceforth, be voluntary. The model of quality assurance shifted from an external review to accredit high academic standards to self-accreditation (Chan et al., 2021: Chapter 4). While the work conditions and career paths of academics have become increasingly precarious, the combination of performance assessment and competitive funding opportunities are criticized for emphasizing the trends of neoliberalization and marketization (戴伯芬 et al., 2015).

Taiwan's higher education system today is confronted by several challenges. First, a demographic change has reduced the demand for a university education. As a facet of internationalized higher education, less prestigious universities try to survive by recruiting more foreign students (Chen & Lo, 2013). In response to criticisms of adopting an excessively narrow focus on academic excellence (meaning "publish in high-ranked journals"), in 2016, the Ministry of Education launched an initiative of university social responsibility to encourage universities to build connections with communities and other social sectors. This new approach has provoked anxiety over Taiwan's decline in world university

rankings and publications (Hou et al., 2020). Additionally, the definition and criteria of university social responsibility itself are contested. As in many countries where higher education has expanded, an increase in undergraduates in Taiwan has resulted in higher unemployment rates for first-degree holders (Ho, 2015).

## Materials and methods

### Data collection

First, the rationale for the creation of the corpus of documents analyzed should be outlined. I decided to build my own corpus of documents, mainly from serial journals, for the following reasons. First, newspapers provide only short reports and limited narratives, whereas journal articles offer a relatively rich literature on educational affairs and provide detailed references. Second, while topics in newspapers are quite diverse, journals focus on more specific themes, which saves time on collecting materials that align with the research topic. Third, as a media genre, serial journals function like chronicles of the debates surrounding the policies of science governance and education management over various decades. They provide a lens through which changes in how such matters are discussed and argued may be observed. Fourth, there is good coverage in the serial journals within the National Central Library, the National Taiwan University Library, and the Academia Sinica Library. In the data archive of this project, I have also included books and official press releases. The list of documents is presented in Fig. 1.

My document analysis focuses on two spheres: government documents and academic literature. Three regular publications—the National Science Council Monthly, the Higher Education Newsletter, and the Educational Reform Newsletter—are selected to represent three government bodies: the National Science Council, the Ministry of Education, and the Education Reform Commission. The National Science Council was reorganized into the Ministry of Science and Technology in 2014. The Education Reform Commission was founded by the government in 1994 in response to the education reform demonstrations and lasted three years. In addition to regular publications, particular official documents are also considered, including the University Act and the White Paper on University Educational Policy. Within the scholarly literature, the Bulletin of Educational Research and the Journal of Education & Psychology were chosen because they represent two historical and influential academic institutes in Taiwan. The selected period of these journals was determined by their coverage across various libraries, where I sought full access to the chosen serials.

Fig. 1 Corpus of documents

<b>Serial Journal</b>		
<b>Title</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Selected Period</b>
National Science Council Monthly (1973-2002); Science Development (from 2003)	National Science Council (1959-2014); Ministry of Science and Technology (from 2014)	Vol. 1 (1973)-Vol. 29 (2001)
Higher Education Newsletter	Ministry of Education	No. 8 (1991)-No.45 (1994); No. 83 (1998)-No. 189 (2006)
Educational Reform Newsletter	Education Reform Commission (Executive Yuan) 1994-1996	No. 1 (1994)- No. 27 (1996)
Bulletin of Educational Research	Graduate Institute of Education, Taiwan Normal University	Vol. 1 (1958); Vol. 13 (1970); Vol. 20 (1978)-Vol. 49 (2003)
Journal of Education & Psychology	College of Education, National Chengchi University	Vol 1. (1977)-Vol. 27(2004)

<b>Book and Monograph</b>		
<b>Title</b>	<b>Institution of editors or authors</b>	<b>Year</b>
Higher Education	Graduate Institute of Education, Taiwan Normal University	1979
A research on improvement in promotion system of university faculty	Executive Yuan	1989
A preliminary study of higher education problems	Graduate Institute of Education, Taiwan Normal University	1992
The ideal of higher education	Graduate Institute of Education, Taiwan Normal University	1994
The reform of higher education	Graduate Institute of Education, Taiwan Normal University	1994
University's responsibility and autonomy	Graduate Institute of Education, Taiwan Normal University	1997
The massification and marketization of higher education	Institute of Education, National Chiao Tung University	2000
The marketization of higher education : a comparative study of Taiwan, Hong Kong and China	Institute of Education, National Chiao Tung University	2002

<b>Official Press</b>		
<b>Title</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Year</b>
White paper on university education policy	Ministry of Education	2001
White paper on scientific education	Ministry of Education and National Science Council	2003
University Act		1994

To some degree, the selection of books was contingent on the library collections.

The date range of the document corpus ends around the 2000s for two reasons. First, this analysis mainly focuses on an event of the education reform movement in the 1990s and the conditions which triggered it. Since the 2000s, the trajectory of discourse on university education has been relatively stable, as the education reform movement faded out. Second, after the 2000s, the grand debates in Taiwan pivot around neoliberalism, which seems to parallel the cases of many other countries around the world. Hence, I establish the 2000s as the boundary for the entry of Taiwanese higher education into the era of neoliberalism (Table 1).

## Analytical framework

This research draws on the critical discourse analysis developed by Fairclough to investigate changes in culture, society, and politics through analyzing the use of language

(Fairclough, 1993, 2001, 2012). The theoretical principle of critical discourse analysis is to take language as “a site of struggle” over power, where the practices of language reflect the dialectical relations between social structures and agents. The aim of critical discourse analysis is to investigate how texts represent, as well as construct, social worlds and to study social transformations through an analysis of the structure of language.

In the frame of critical discourse analysis, what does the word “discourse” really mean? Fairclough’s conception has two definitions: the abstract, uncountable one and the countable one. “Discourse” as a general, uncountable noun means the use of language as social practice, whereas discourse as a countable noun represents a particular way to signify experience based on a specific conception (Fairclough, 1993). According to Fairclough (2012), the meaning of discourse(s) is composed of imaginaries: a representation of and belief in how the world works and how things should be. Discourses as imaginaries can be materialized if the ways in

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Book and Monograph		
Title	Institution of editors or authors	Year
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A research on improvement in promotion system of university faculty	Executive Yuan	1989
A preliminary study of higher education problems	Graduate Institute of Education, Taiwan Normal University	1992
The ideal of higher education	Graduate Institute of Education, Taiwan Normal University	1994
The reform of higher education	Graduate Institute of Education, Taiwan Normal University	1994
University's responsibility and autonomy	Graduate Institute of Education, Taiwan Normal University	1997
The massification and marketization of higher education	Institute of Education, National Chiao Tung University	2000
The marketization of higher education: a comparative study of Taiwan, Hong Kong and China	Institute of Education, National Chiao Tung University	2002
Official Press		
Title	Institution	Year
White paper on university education policy	Ministry of Education	2001
White paper on scientific education	Ministry of Education and National Science Council	2003
University Act		1994

which people identify, act, and interact are based on these imaginaries.

Following this understanding of discourse(s), the next important concept in this analytic frame is genre: a specific way of using language in a particular social activity (Fairclough, 1993, 2012). The semiotic aspect of different discourses varies, resulting in differing genres of structuring texts. However, not all language practices are purely generated by one genre, especially in cases where a dominant discourse is spreading into other fields, which results in the interdiscursivity of language. Hence, the selection of different genres or styles in language reflects how social structures influence agents' ways of incorporating different genres to produce a text (Fairclough, 2012; Fairclough et al., 2004). In this way, interdiscursive analysis plays a central role in delineating the changing states of social structures and the dynamic interactions between various ideologies, that is, the changes from text to context.

### The main motif of national development and its shift in languages

Overall, the dominant narrative of the university's role derives from the frame of linear national development and human capital theory. When the main themes of state development are consistently reproduced over decades either through official narratives or through the academic literature, minor changes ensue within the narrative of the state's progress. One modification is a shift from the use of a patriotic tone to economic language. Another is an expansion in the objects of concern. The original role of the university in Taiwan was to train quality staff. Over time, it has gradually come to be expected that the university directly contributes to national progress by conducting more research or even through collaborations with industry.

"*The Scientific Development and Policy in Our Country*" is the first example of language which demonstrates this account of national development in the 1970s. This is the first article in the first volume of *National Science Council Monthly*, published in 1973. The article was presented in a patriotic tone, beginning with a historical review of the events the late nineteenth century when China faced a series of diplomatic frustrations:

In discussing the current condition of our science, we should begin decades ago. In the late period of the Qing Dynasty, we started to encounter the West and were several times beaten. ... We used to think that their strength was based only on modern weapons. Hence, we purchased their fleets and factories ... We were not willing to learn science. (p. 5)

This statement traces scientific development in Taiwan traced back to the history of China. The following section listed numerous scholars who had studied abroad and brought scientific knowledge back by establishing disciplines in domestic universities. It then enumerated academic disciplines whose work was "internationally prestigious," giving emphasis to the international dimension of academic accomplishments. The rhetorical use of "our country" throughout the article showed, on the one hand, patriotic passion and pride in academic achievements, but avoided the complicated politics between Taiwan (Republic of China, ROC) and China (the People's Republic of China, PRC). Hence, the purpose of scientific development was to make "our country"—which had inherited these unhappy stories from China but nevertheless existed independently as Taiwan—prestigious again. The term "our country" always implies the existence of foreign, "other" countries; hence, international prestige and national strength are two sides of the same coin. This enthusiasm for international recognition may reflect the fact that in 1971 the ROC government had just lost its seat in the United Nations.

Economic power is the basis of society and national defense. Economic power is based on science and technology ... The aims of our scientific development are gradually to make our academia independent and to provide sufficient talents for national progress. (p. 6)

The above statement suggests that the purpose of knowledge was utilitarian, a means to achieve economic power, sovereign status, and national strength. This idea of science reconfirmed the principle of practicality: only scientific practices with the potential for practical application were considered valuable, and those without the potential for contributing to Taiwan's national development in the foreseeable future were excluded. In this way, both science and knowledge were very function-oriented and were part of a comprehensive roadmap for national development and progress. This utilitarian view also provided the government the mandate to harness science and govern researchers. Noticeably, the article often used the term "quality manpower," while avoiding the word "knowledge" altogether. This implies that, unlike today, the central concern before the 1980s was to nurture human capital in the service of development, but not knowledge or research in and of themselves.

During the 1980s, the state development-based discourse was reproduced both in official narratives and academic papers. However, the language used shifted from patriotic to economic priorities. In the name of economic growth and social needs, demands emerged for evaluating higher education. Through discussions about what the university could do for the state, a set of desirable academic practices was

formalized. As a result of these new standards, academic practice gradually became an object of state power.

An example that demonstrates these changes in the narrative is the article “An investigation of higher education evaluation in the Republic of China” from 1983. This article was published in the *Bulletin of Educational Research* which was administered by the National Taiwan Normal University to report academic accounts of university management.

The rapid expansion of higher education has contributed to the development of the economy, society and culture, the cultivation of experts, and the education of young people. However, there are also some problems:

- An issue of imbalance between the demand and supply of manpower. There are two sorts of imbalance: undersupply and oversupply. The case of oversupply on the manpower market leads to problems of unemployment or underemployment. This is a waste of educational investment ... Another situation is undersupply. According to the predictions of the Council for Economic Planning and Development, the situation of undersupply might affect some engineering fields in the coming years. This situation will impede national development.
- The issue of faculty quality ... The quality of teachers directly decides the result of education ... Some studies show that (1) curricula may not fit actual needs but are adapted to faculty expertise ... (4) Faculty’s passion for research is insufficient. (5) The criteria for hiring and evaluating academic staff are too loose ... The current quality of staff should be improved. (p. 257)

This quotation suggests that the central concern of higher education is still the economy, even though academic affairs had been presented in the language of business and management since the 1980s, with references to the supply and demand curve and to investment, rather than national reputation. The phrase “actual needs” raises the question of whose needs. With reference to the statement, “curricula had to be reformed in response to changing social needs and economic structure” (p. 227), these needs may not be students’ needs, but rather those of the economy. In addition, research performance and evaluation had become issues. All these concerns indicated that the state of university education had come to be regarded as problematic in terms of national development and economic growth; thus, novel social identities and relationships for scholars emerged.

## Alternative narratives: university autonomy, social justice, and humanistic notions

Within the national development-based narrative, the purpose of university education is external: it contributes to the state by providing either quality staff or relevant knowledge. There are, however, alternative imaginaries about what an ideal university should be. A narrative based on the notion of university autonomy emphasizes that the university should not work merely as a device of the government. This narrative is based on a spirit of humanism that considers humanity itself to be its own purpose. Hence, educational practices should not be in the service of the state. A narrative based on social justice describes relations between the state and individuals in a contrasting way and asks how the state influences personal socioeconomic status via the education system. These three narratives had coexisted in academia and paralleled the hegemonic interpretation as minority viewpoints until the end of the 1980s. When social movements flourished in the late 1980s and early 1990s, these minority viewpoints gained strength and led to the education reform movement.

Even if the university has been seen from the standpoint of national development-based narratives as an official apparatus for state progress, scholars, as a body, may construct their own viewpoints that differ from the dominant narrative. For example, the National Taiwan Normal University was founded in 1946 for training secondary teachers. This university is, therefore, function-oriented and subordinate to the government. Nevertheless, the staff might not consider themselves as mere functionaries of an official apparatus. An intention to understand their narratives informs the preface of the first volume of the *Bulletin of Educational Research* published in 1958, “The research purpose of this institute.” This article sought to clarify the position and mission of its home institute, the Graduate Institute of Education. The preface began by outlining the history of European universities from the end of the Middle Ages, with an emphasis on the nature of a university as being “a group of academics.” It argued that the role of the university had been, and should continue to be, distinct from other education levels, such as primary and secondary education, and that its most distinct role should be academic research. This narrative underscored higher education’s academic identity by elevating the role of research and the production of knowledge.

According to this account, the purpose of research was seen as follows:

Academic research is for the sake of academic research ... For sure, the results of academic research may sometimes benefit people, but in the process of pure academic research pragmatic values do not matter. Improvements in technology derive from academic



research, but we cannot say that academic research equals the improvements in technology (p. 1).

In the imaginary of the university and scholarly life, researchers conducted research for “the sake of academic research.” The value of knowledge production did not need to be accredited by its potential for practical use. Whereas the state assigned the pragmatic mission of teacher training to the National Taiwan Normal University, this statement argued that the university gained legitimacy only when its focus shifted from teaching practical skills to researching educational theories. This example shows how scholars tried to exercise their academic identity through the pure pursuit of knowledge, rather than by complying with state requirements.

When the authoritarian regime was challenged by democratic movements in the 1980s, the lack of academic autonomy became problematic. For instance, in 1987, an academic paper “A study of the teacher promotion system of universities and colleges” targeted the mechanism of evaluations for faculty promotions in universities and colleges, and commented on the relations between the government and university. Its comparison with other countries (“...promotion evaluations of university faculty are managed by each university in the rest of the world,” p. 191) argued that what had been considered normal in Taiwan, represented, in fact, a bureaucracy’s “ignorance of university councils.”

Even though the paper manifested a desire for the independence of universities from the Ministry of Education’s supervision, this did not mean that individual researchers should become free of university oversight. In fact, the proposed promotion evaluation system to be carried out by each university entailed stricter performance criteria than the previous version used by the Ministry of Education. This imperative for performance evaluations echoes the views of the article, “An investigation of higher educational evaluation in the Republic of China.” The lack of both academic autonomy and high-level performance was problematic, but the plea for academic autonomy was not intended to contradict the premise of state development, which indicated the order of the discourse.

A genre of narratives based on humanistic values is represented in the academic paper “The contemporary destiny of universities in our state,” published in 1978. According to this paper, the university had three main missions: research, professional education, and liberal education. Among these, humanistic accomplishments or holistic education was the ultra-purpose of higher education. This definition broke all direct connection between the university and economic growth. In the section on professional education, the author did not concede the importance of professional education, instead criticizing it as a form of scientific “invasion” into the university space. Overall, this account cited Newman and

Spranger in presenting its concerns about personality, the liberal arts, and culture. In this imaginary of higher education, universities contribute to society by cultivating critical citizens instead of experts.

The final alternative narrative is based on social justice and the equality of educational opportunity. This narrative emerged in the late 1970s and began by asking how university student populations were to be composed. The change that this wrought provided a new lens through which universities were viewed: a mechanism for reproducing existing hierarchies, rather than promoting social mobility. Discussions of this can be found in “The relationships between major family differential factors and the opportunity of university attendance,” a paper from 1978 that uses language from the *Sociology of Education*. According to this paper,

The trend of democratic thought has gradually raised the ideal of equal educational opportunities. As a result, such equality has been seen as a kind of human right rather than a luxury for the upper classes ... Higher education is not just a means of gaining symbolic goods but for developing individuals’ intellectual abilities for the good of the country. (p. 289)

By choosing these words, the author implied that he favored equal educational opportunities. With this notion, relations between the factor of family background and access to a university education became an important topic. The expansion of higher education was put forward as a method of enhancing social equality. However, even within the narrative of social justice, the appeal for individual development still had to be justified by “devotion to the country,” evidencing the hegemony of the purpose of state development in higher education.

## Interplay of discourses during the education reform movement

At the peak of the democratization movements in Taiwan from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, established higher education systems were challenged by two ideologies: political liberalism, which was closely related to the democratization and student movements; and challenges based on social justice, fairness, and equal educational opportunities. However, these alternative narratives had not replaced the hegemonic narrative based on state development, whose assumptions were resistant to doubt; that is, narratives of academic autonomy or social justice could not exclude the discourse of state development. Furthermore, the appeal for national development and global excellence grew in influence by incorporating themes of auditing, accountability,

and value for money. Narratives during this period were characterized by interdiscursivity.

The article “Deregulation of Education: Ideal, Principle and Affairs” illustrates this interdiscursivity and provides an opportunity to observe how people interpreted the idea of “deregulation” at the time. Because some previously used educational codes had been “designed for non-educational purposes, such as implanting a preference for a specific political party, economics-centered educational policy, all kinds of cultural chauvinism, and military training,” in “a democratic and diverse society,” such codes were in this account regarded as inappropriate “interferences,” that only served to strengthen the imperative for deregulation. This statement presented the stance of political liberalism. The following quotation shows that the idea of deregulation was not entirely drawn from neoliberalism.

This term “deregulation” is translated as “being discharged from regulation” or taken as another way to express “liberalization.” The term “deregulation” is borrowed from economics, and means that the prices of goods should be determined by supply and demand in free markets, without unnecessary state interference ... However, if underprivileged students are injured (by the educational market), social justice cannot tolerate it ... The deregulation of education does not aim at complete *laissez-faire*. (p. 9)

Deregulation was adopted as a means to reduce state influence, but a “*laissez-faire*” economic model or marketization was not desirable. Equal educational opportunities took priority over the deregulation of education. The language of humanistic values was interwoven into this narrative, for instance, “human dignity must be assured.” Even if the authors had been aware of economic frameworks and had adopted them conditionally into their concept of educational affairs, the neoliberal spirit still infiltrated through their arguments, such as “self-discipline” and the “efficiency of financial management.” It appears difficult to describe educational affairs without using economic terms.

This phenomenon of interdiscursivity could be identified in the University Act by comparing the two amended versions of 1982 and 1994.

Article 1 in 1982:

In accordance with the stipulations in Article 41 of the Constitution of the Republic of China, universities shall have as their objectives conducting academic research, and training and educating highly skilled people.

Article 1 in 1994:

Universities shall have as their objectives conducting academic research, training and educating highly skilled people, enhancing culture, serving society, and boosting national development.

Universities shall be guaranteed academic freedom and shall enjoy autonomy within the scope of laws and regulations.

Both the accounts of academic autonomy and state development are signified in the latter amendment, while the university mission has been enlarged.

## Peculiarities of neoliberalization of higher education in Taiwan

After the education reform movement, Taiwan became a member of the WTO in 2002 and then entered a new era of global competition. In this context, the dominant narratives of higher education shifted back to a new version of national development: the knowledge economy premised on globalization, national competitiveness, innovation, and industrial collaboration. Within this framework, the purpose of the university is mainly a matter of economic growth. When the education reform movement to further social justice faded out, the role of university evaluation was transformed into a mechanism for reconcentrating educational resources under the aegis of a meritocracy. Ever since, the landscape of higher education in Taiwan has seemed to share the pattern observed in other countries whose university systems are described as having been neoliberalized and marketized (Shin et al., 2020). However, how far can it be said that the neoliberal university actually exists in Taiwan?

In accordance with Jessop’s parameters, the higher education reforms in Taiwan have taken on market characteristics, but competition is still guided by the national strategy in support of state development. The expansion of higher education has been achieved by licensing private institutions (Chiang, 2013; Pretzer-Lin, 2015). Meanwhile, evaluating staff performance has been introduced to secure efficiency and accountability, whereby competitive principles have been adopted from the market and applied to academia (Gane, 2012). In this way, while the government has not sold off the national universities, a novel public–private partnership model has been established. All the coordination reflects an ambition to compete internationally. In Jessop’s terms, the neoliberalization of higher education in Taiwan features a mixture of economic neostatism and political liberalism (Jessop, 2002).

How has neoliberalization come to pervade Taiwan’s higher education? By analyzing the heterogeneity of the discourses presented in documents, this theoretically informed research has identified the social contradictions that sparked the education reform movement in the 1990s. These social contradictions included humanistic resistance to economic utility, educational inequality, and the demand for academic

autonomy. Along with these domestic conditions, international factors, such as the third wave of democracy and engagement in the WTO were enough to constitute the configurations associated with the formal neoliberalization of higher education in Taiwan.

How can a study of Taiwan contribute to critical studies of neoliberalism? Harvey (2005) notes the uneven geographical development of neoliberalism and divides it into several main types: established democratic states (the US and the UK), authoritarian states (China and Chile), the former Soviet states, and states suffering a debt crisis (Mexico, Argentina, and the Philippines). The case of neoliberalized higher education in Taiwan represents the model of a state in transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic political system.

This study of Taiwan's higher education system also offers a preliminary lens through which to understand tendencies in education policy or science policy among Eastern and South-East Asian countries. As Green (2013) suggests, the paradigm of state development in East Asia, established by Japan in the nineteenth century (the Meiji Restoration) and followed by other Asian states in the twentieth century, such as Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore, is characterized by state interventionism. In this development model, education systems are led by the government and made subject to the policy needs of promoting the national identity and language, developing skills for economic growth, and providing disciplined manpower for industry and the government bureaucracy. With similar centralized educational systems, even if geographical and historical contexts are not the same, a study of Taiwan's higher education could more pertinently help to interpret the tendencies in academic administration and science governance that are characteristic of Eastern and Southeast Asian states.

As Fairclough (1985) suggests, the critical objective of discourse analysis is to denaturalize the taken-for-granted background knowledge. By illustrating the implicit proposition—that national development is paramount—of the dominant discourse on university education this study grapples with the underlying local sociocultural contradictions of neoliberalization in the era of globalization. I hope this empirical study of higher education reforms in Taiwan will contribute to our understanding of neoliberal transformations.

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