

Contemporary Trends in East Asian Higher Education: Dispositions of International Students in a Taiwan University", submitted to Higher Education and accepted

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Introduction

The cross-border mobility of international students has been a constant of higher education for centuries. Yet within recent years the phenomenal growth with respect to the number of participants involved has heightened a renewed interest for the international dimension of higher education as noted by curricular offerings, expanded support services, and the open recruitment of international students (Larsen, Momii, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2004). Historically students migrated internationally to be associated with world renowned scholars or to further a disciplinary knowledge base; in the contemporary era they are more likely to study in the global arena for advancement of degrees, diplomas, or certification. The term diploma disease, coined by Dore (1976) signifies the phenomena of cross-border mobility; Dore argues that the sheer magnitude of students traveling internationally in the pursuit of advanced degrees, diplomas, or certifications has shifted the purpose and direction of tertiary education.

International education has been a major growth industry globally over the past 30 years. Since 1995, the total number of international students has almost doubled and has reached 2.7 million globally (OECD, 2006). Correspondingly the demand for global cross-border education is forecasted to increase from 1.8 million international students in 2000 to 7.2

million in 2025 (Bohm, Meares, & Pearce, 2002). Analysts predict that 70 percent of the demand will be generated from the Asia Pacific region (Olsen, 2003). The rising population of international students worldwide has become a market place supported by academic institutions, government agencies, private corporations, and entrepreneurs motivated by the financial profit of cross-border mobility (Altbach, 2003). In response many nations have shifted their foreign student policies from an aid approach to a trade rationale (Smart & Ang, 1993). Thus, signaling that the cross-border mobility of students is a commodity of free trade rather than a public responsibility (Kirp, 2003).

Global patterns of the cross-border mobility of students encompass a complex, contradictory, and expansive discourse shaped by the discussions, policy issues, and mission statements of individual universities as well as the themes of education policy and global trade within the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (van der Wende, 2001). On the world stage cross-border mobility is defined as a borderless asset of the global education industry; as well as significant element contributing to the transition of university operations to a market-oriented approach (Kwiek, 2005). While universities worldwide recruit international students as a source of revenue, scholars like Dore (1976) continue to associate tertiary education with broader and deeper meanings. Education, says Dore, is not a commercial endeavor defined by time or space but rather the harmonious development of the physical, mental, moral, and social dimensions of life necessary for engagement with opportunities to gain both knowledge and wisdom.

Historically international students selected North American or Western European countries as their study destinations (Zachrisson, 2001). The twenty-first century trends, however, include south-to-south and north-to-south student migrations; the contemporary cross-border mobility of students crisscrosses the globe in all directions, bringing

increasing numbers of diverse people together in institutions of higher education. These global trends are examined in terms of push-pull factors that encourage students to study in particular nations and universities (Tim Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Push factors are defined as elements of a source country that initiate students' decisions to pursue international study. Pull factors are the characteristics of a host country that attract international students. Subsequent pull factors are linked to students' decisions to study at a particular institution in host nations; these factors typically include the institutional reputation for quality, market profile, range of courses, alliances or coalitions, teaching programs, staff expertise, degree of innovation, use of information technology, resources, size of the alumni base, as well as promotion and marketing efforts (Tim Mazzarol, 1998). Inevitably some factors are inherent to either a source or host nation while others are represented by students themselves.

In an attempt to attract the growing number of prospective international students, individual institutions and national governments are keen to differentiate themselves from competitors via the development and implementation of targeted recruitment strategies to expand new or established markets. Nations that traditionally sent large numbers of students abroad, such as Singapore, are becoming successful international student destinations via the offering of Western-style degree programs at a low expense. The example of Singapore represents a contemporary trend among nations that recognize incoming international students as a valuable source of foreign exchange revenue; to the extent that many of the respective university systems are dedicated to the design and institutionalization of degree programs in English (Chan & Ng, 2008).

In the twenty-first century international student mobility crisscrosses the globe in all directions, bringing increasing numbers of diverse people together in institutions of higher education. This trend challenges the recognition of North American and Western European

nations as the premiere destinations for international students (Zachrisson, 2001). That said, the number of international students in the United States has recently risen, yet, faster growth has been documented in many newly recognized competitor nations (Olsen, 2003). While the nation of China, for example sends a substantial number of students abroad, it has also increased incoming international student enrollments from fewer than 45 000 in 1999 to more than 141 000 in 2005 (McCormack, 2007). Similar patterns are evident in the nations of Japan, South Korea, India, Malaysia, Thailand, and Taiwan.

Until recently the patterns of cross-mobility in Taiwan reflected traditional trends; large numbers of university students from Taiwan studied in the United States and Britain while very few incoming international students chose the island nation as a destination. In recent years the influx of international students in Taiwan has increased significantly. In 2007 the total number of international students in Taiwan rose from 17 742 to 21 005 (Ko, 2008). International students from Vietnam comprised the largest group, followed by students from Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan and the United States. The total number of international students in Taiwan from North, Central and South America increased 208 percent from 2001 to 2005. Increases of 95 and 75 percent respectively for European and Asian students were also reported for the same period. Some scholars attribute the rising numbers of incoming international students to the global popularity of Mandarin studies, the growing reputation of Taiwan universities as world class institutions that attract promising international students, and the availability of international student scholarships administered through the Taiwan Ministry of Education and associated universities (Ko, 2008).

The entity of Taiwan institutions of higher education, as both mediators and reactors of the increasing influx of international students is a critical area of debate and investigation. Yet to date empirical studies examining the push-pull factors within the Taiwan context are

limited. In response the following article details an empirical study conducted during the 2007 – 2008 academic year to examine the push-pull factors influencing international students' choice to study in Taipei Taiwan at the National Chengchi University (NCCU). To begin, the theoretical framework of the study is defined. Next, a description of the research setting is provided which leads into an outline of the methodological framework of the study followed by analyses of findings. The discussion of results situates implications within both the dominant paradigms of cross-border mobility of students and an East Asian exemplar. Findings are offered as a point of reference for contemporary visions of the internationalization of higher education in the age of globalization.

Literature review

The examination of globalization and internationalization as distinct processes is essential for serious scholarship addressing contemporary trends in higher education. Globalization is a multifaceted phenomenon enveloped by economic, social, political and cultural dimensions that melds 21st century higher education to international endeavors. The impact of globalization poses challenges to the role of nations as the sole providers of higher education and to academic communities as the primary voice for education decision-making. Processes of globalization within university settings transcend the integration of research, the use of English as the language of academia, the expanding international market for scholars, the growth of multinational publishing, and reliance on information technology (Altbach, 2003).

