Chapter 13

Globalization and the Issue of Academic Publishing (the SSCI and the SCI)

In 2003, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan adopted international publication indicators such as the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), the Science Citation Index (SCI), and the Engineering Index (EI) as the standards for evaluating the performance of academics. The SSCI, the SCI, and the EI are citation index databases owned by Thomson Reuters, a for-profit private company in the United States. These standards have long been recognized by major Western English-speaking universities such as in Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. It was hoped that by promoting these standards, the overall competitiveness of higher-education institutions (HEIs) in Taiwan would be enhanced. The primary performance evaluation process involves counting the actual number of faculty publications in these three databases to determine the final rankings of each college and university. The academic faculties in higher-education institutions in Taiwan receive pressure to publish internationally in order to acquire SSCI, SCI and EI points.

In 2005, the MOE launched a Creating Top-Notch Universities with NT$50 Billion over 5 Years program (five-year-five-billion plan) (approximately US$1.56 billion; first named, a Plan to Develop First-Class Universities and Top-level Research Centers [PDFURC]) with the goal of enhancing the competitiveness of universities, and it has continued its sponsorship of the program for the second round that begins in 2011 (Central News Agency 2010). This program, based on a highly competitive scheme, allocates funds and resources to National Taiwan University
(NTU), National Tsing Hua University (NTHU), National Chiao Tung University (NCTU), National Cheng Kung University (NCKU), National Cheng-chi University (NCCU), and other key national universities, with a greater focus on the natural sciences such as engineering and medical science. In effect, these universities (except the only one focused on the social sciences, NCCU, which received the least amount of funding) have rich research facilities, receive financial assistance, and have equipment resources. In addition, in order to increase the effectiveness of domestic universities and bring them into the global academic network, through competition for resources based on objective academic outputs such as appraisal methods, a published paper in the SSCI, the SCI, the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI) is the standard assessment criteria for academic research.

At the same time, since 2005, the MOE has initiated both the Program for Promoting Academic Excellence in Universities (PPAE) and the Aiming for the Top University and Elite Research Center Development Plan (ATU Plan), and also established a formal university evaluation policy, with a view to improving the competitive strength and international visibility of Taiwan’s universities. Evaluation has thus taken on a highly quantitative dimension. Research performance is chiefly assessed in terms of the number of articles that scholars publish in SCI-, SSCI- and A&HCI-indexed journals, citation rates, and the associated impact factors, as the basis for a variety of programs that support and fund scholarly research.

These assessment standards have led Taiwan’s scholars to focus on publishing in international journals. Academics prefer journals that are published in English instead of Chinese, and they choose subjects in line with what international journals prefer (Chen and Qian 2004). In 2008, as a direct response to these new policies, NCCU, in Taipei, set up an ATU office fully devoted to the development of certain selected key subject areas and the promotion of quality research. Yet despite the best efforts of all concerned to encourage academic excellence, the highly quantitative evaluation indicators have had some negative effects. Publication expectations are not uniform across all disciplines, for instance. Moreover, the distinctive characteristics of particular academic subjects have been largely ignored, and there have been instances of bitterness in certain departments whose staff felt they had been subjected to unfair competition. It has also been pointed out that the goal for such evaluation is to improve the quality of research; however, the nature of the subject and the impact of the social and cultural context must also be taken into account. In evaluating scholarship based on SSCI and SCI academic publication evaluative criteria, more than a single set of standards should be applied to highlight the strengths and weakness of published scholarly work.