

QUALITY OF UNIVERSITIES DEPENDS ON INTELLIGENT POLICY

Do we have too many college students? Do we have too many Ph.Ds? Well, most people tend to answer 'yes' to both questions; however, Huang Jong-tsun and Yung Chaur-shin, both former Ministers of Education, beg to differ. They point out that when it comes to real figures, there are not that many in comparison with those in the first world countries. According to them, the real issue Taiwan has to face is the poor quality of the students rather than too many of them. Both experts believe that if Taiwan's government wants its universities to be competitive in a global environment, it needs to be 'hands-off' in policy-making, allowing universities to evolve on their own.

Both ministers were invited to the Forum organized by Tamkang Times as part the series on "Leaping Toward 2005—Welcoming the Arrival of the 4th Wave", in which they gave a talk on the "From the Military Strategy of the Spring & Autumn Period and the Warring State Period (770-221 B.C.) to the Competition in Higher Education—A Political Perspective." Their talk was attended by numerous eminent scholars and TKU senior faculty and staff such as Yeh Neng-zhe, the President of Aletheia University, Chang Yu-ming, the President of De Lin Institute of Technology, Feng Chao-kang, the Vice President for Academic Affairs of TKU and Dr. Flora Chang, the President of TKU, who took her graduate students on the course of "Education Policy and Leadership" along. Kao Po-yuan, the Vice President for Administrative Affairs of TKU, chaired the discussion at the end of the talk.

In the talk, Huang Jong-tsun emphasized the seriousness of the competition in higher education as a Crusade in the sense that it is a "fight" which requires a sense of mission, honor and drive to survive. In order to win this fight, a great deal of concerted effort is needed, he maintained, from the government and all of the institutions involved. He, thus

suggested the government has to adopt a more 'hands-off' style towards regulating higher education so as to facilitate more autonomy in colleges and universities. His suggestion is well grounded in his personal experience as he explained the absurdity of involving in at least 50 civil law suits from bankrupted higher education institutes after his retirement from the Ministry. He believes that it was a result of over involvement of the government, which gave those institutions the wrong impression that the government should be responsible for their mismanagement. Instead, he urged the government to be big on action rather than words. As a successful higher education is the impetus for greater competitiveness of the country on a world stage, he points out that the government can no longer afford to stay parochial in educational policy and inconsequential in action. For example, the vision of promoting National Taiwan University to the top 100 universities in the world should not stay on paper only without a back up of a genuine action plan. Furthermore, he encouraged a closer cooperation among private and state research institutes in fostering a mutual understanding of reaching a common goal. Finally, he reiterated the imperative of maintaining a thorough evaluation system to separate the chaff from the good, quality grain. Poorly run colleges and universities will be 'filtered out' in such a process.

Similarly, Yung Chaur-shin supported Huang' s view on the minimum role the government should play. He added that not only the government interfered too much, but were also inconsistent when they did. Through its contradictory policy many ill-qualified colleges have been allowed to upgrade to poorly run comprehensive universities. "It is rather unfortunate as Taiwan needs more first-class vocational and technical colleges rather than another mediocre university" , he reminded everyone. He also pointed out that parents need to understand and encourage their children to make the right choice according to their interest and ability as not everyone is suitable for academic studies at university. According to him, changing parents' minds can result in a decreased number of universities, too.

Apart from their agreement on issues of policy, both Ministers endorse the concept of “education industry” , believing in the merit of enhancing the commercial value of education. They said that as WTO put education as the fifth biggest ‘industry’ ; therefore, its uses should apply to all ages, from 18 to 80 years old and the ‘products’ it can distribute should be diverse, such as offering distance learning as a recognized, accredited program. However, both areas have not been properly dealt with in Taiwan. There are some successful examples, though. One technical university in southern Taiwan is selling dairy products from its farm and another university in the North is selling protective facemasks from its laboratory on the open market for great profit.

Finally, Huang Jong-tsun sees great future for Tamkang, expecting it to become a benchmark for all the universities in Taipei County. In the end, he reminded TKU faculty and senior administrators not to neglect the parallel importance of teaching alongside with research. “No great teachers, no great students” , as simple as that, he said.

2010/09/27