

Preface

University rankings have become an increasingly important research topic in higher education studies. The prevalence of university rankings has intensified discussions about performance and competition in the higher education sector, including that of Taiwan. Rankings and the many related phenomena, like increased competition among institutions and systems, the pursuits of research excellence as well as the call for internationalisation and building world-class university, have come into the centre of discussion. This book adopts a qualitative case study approach to provide a systemic delineation and interpretation of the implications of university rankings for Taiwan's higher education. It reviews the literature on different theories concerning the global transformation of higher education, and gives basic information on higher education in Taiwan. Based on the literature reviewed, a four-dimensional framework is developed for the analysis of the ranking phenomenon in the island-state. The four dimensions are seen as making up two clusters in which the two ecological dimensions (Dimensions 1 and 2) are on one side; the two geographical dimensions (Dimensions 3 and 4) are on the other. The ecological dimensions suggest that the ranking phenomenon has caused significant influences on higher education policy, university governance and individual behaviours. Dimension 1 therefore seeks to examine how the emergence of university rankings has influenced Taiwan's higher education based on the accounts of practices and values provided by academics. Dimension 2 provides a theoretical description of how and why university rankings may be a powerful driving force transforming institutional and individual behaviours and perceptions. The geographical dimensions relate the ranking phenomenon to the international issues of higher education. Dimension 3 is concerned with the relevance of university rankings to the changing global landscape of higher education and sees university rankings as an institution that projects power in global higher education. Dimension 4 provides an in-depth exploration of the international arena of university rankings in the light of postcolonial discourse and argues that the implications of rankings can possibly bring both positive and negative consequences for the global higher education in terms of quality and diversity. These four dimensions show how the ranking phenomenon can be read and explained through theoretical lenses from ecological and geographical perspectives. In regard to ecological perspective, the empirical evidences suggest that the influence of univer-

sity rankings varies throughout the academic hierarchy in Taiwan. The theoretical analysis then illustrates the relationship between the ranking phenomenon and the power structure in academic hierarchy. As for geographical perspective, while the empirical analysis has been focused on the case of Taiwan, the theoretical analysis offers important insights to understand the changing global landscape of higher education and its implications for higher education in East Asia.



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Lo, W.Y.

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