

THE EVOLUTION OF UNIVERSITIES AS ORGANIZATIONS AND TKU

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Dr. Kao Po-yuan, the Vice President for Administrative Affairs discussed the changing roles of the university in American society in the last five decades or so at the conference. According to the paper he was reading ("The Study of Colleges and Universities as Organizations" appearing in the Sociology of Higher Education, 2007), he draws parallels between these changes and those of TKU. Only through such a comparison and retrospection, can TKU outgrow itself to reach further highs, he contends.

At first, Dr. Kao points out that historically the organizational structure of universities generally reflects the social demands, elitism, power structure, and struggles of various interest groups of their times. These factors, some are external, such as the environment, and some are internal, such as the changes occurring in the institution itself, have continuously pushed the universities towards changes. In particular, in recent years, due to the process of globalization, most universities throughout the world have been experiencing an isomorphism, contributed by the desire of synchronizing their syllabi, expertise, research interests, degrees awarded, and core education values with those of other universities in order to compete better. Such a global environment has shaped how universities of today are organized or will be organized in the near future.

In studying these transient organizational structures, it becomes clear how the field of higher education has borrowed concepts regarding organizations developed elsewhere such as sociology, anthropology, political science, information technology, business and management theory to develop its models of organization or function. Some of the organizational models emerged from these various frameworks that are seen applied to and operated by TKU, for example, are the collegial model in the academic units, the

bureaucratic model in the administrative units, and the political model in the higher up leadership level. Another model that is in the making is the entrepreneurial model that will integrate the above three models by requiring each unit in the organization to become an independent cost center that actively supplies services to other units rather than simply carry out tasks passively given by other units. In other words, the organization of the university will resemble that of an enterprise with the only difference being the contents of business.

Certainly these models seen in the past 50 years or more are not sequential with one replacing the other. Some of them run concurrently, or the transition is gradual with the residue of old models always palpable. Despite changes, slow or fast, certain core values of education do not alter, Dr. Kao asserts. He reckons that treating knowledge as commodity is the current dominant trend in higher education, yet, universities and colleges still differ from other profit-making organizations—they are responsible for preserving the cultural life of a society which in turn is crucial to the healthy survival of a nation. This mission remains unchanged.

Following this understanding, Dr. Kao describes how the paper he is referring to divides higher education in the US into two main stages before 1995, and these two stages coincide with the development seen in Taiwan for the similar period of time. The first stage is from 1950 to 1964 when the resources for universities and colleges were increasing rapidly but steadily and were also largely predictable in the US. There was strong public sentiment and public policy support for higher education at this time. In Taiwan, similarly, higher education was strongly supported by the government. Even private universities received public funding, but far less than those that went to public ones. This unequal distribution of educational resources was attributable to private universities' heavy reliance on their tuition for funding. Such inequity forced private universities, like Tamkang, to expand student recruitment. This policy of

high enrollment to some extent has stayed with TKU to present.

The second stage spanning the years 1972 to 1995, when a more open, fragmented and competitive era emerged. At the start of the period, thanks to the amendments introduced by US authorities, unprecedented numbers of community colleges and proprietary institutions joined the industry. With this addition, institutions were forced to adopt a more market oriented attitude to attract their clientele. In the 80' s, the competitive spirit was further fueled by additional pressure for equality and quality for resources and education in the middle of an economic recession. At this time in Taiwan, the government was also engaged in changing its higher education market by encouraging institutions to enhance their quality. Against this backdrop, Tamkang was upgraded from a college to a university in 1980 and continued to expand into a full-fledge comprehensive university by 1996. This period is also known as the "Second Wave" of Tamkang (1980–1996), when the quality of the institution was emphasized. The concept of TQM (Total Quality Management) was introduced and implemented in both teaching and administrative arenas. This implementation ensured TKU a smooth expansion despite not having received very much overt government support. Traditionally, Dr. Kao points out, Taiwanese government has always favored public national universities who receive heavy subsidies that are not always in proportion with their performance. In other words, TKU had to work with limits.

Dr. Kao also mentioned another period covering from 1995 to 2005 in the US and Taiwan. Huge changes occurred during this time such as the demand for diversity, revolutions in information technology, concerns for academic quality and economic productivity, and expansion of globalization. With continued resource constraints, these changes generated a more turbulent, unpredictable and opportunistic market, requiring institutions to adopt adaptive, contextual and entrepreneurial models to cope with competition. In parallel, higher education in Taiwan was facing similar challenges. With the rapid expansion of colleges and universities green-lighted by the

government, resources distribution became even more tilted. Since funding mostly went to the already good institutions, an M shape of distribution emerged. In order to counter such distribution, TKU was spurred to enter its “Third Wave” of changes (1996 to 2005) guided by a philosophy that incorporates globalization, information-driven, and future-oriented thinking. Under this, TKU sought aggressively to improve its academic and research quality through investing both in the software and hardware of the university. The “software” referred to the digital facilities, while the “hardware” meant a state-of-the-art library, a spacious gym, an indoor swimming pool and the office building for foreign languages and literature departments. In 2005 with the addition of a new campus, Lanyang, the university entered its “Fourth Wave,” bracing itself for further challenges in the future.

To rise up to these challenges, Dr. Kao proposes the following five strategies, which are also the maxims for the “House of Quality” touted by the President, Dr. Flora Chang:

1. Promoting excellent teaching. Many “Excellent Teaching Projects,” according to Dr. Kao are already underway in various disciplines and have met with success.
2. Enhancing and renovating teaching aids such as digital technologies.
3. Establishing diverse networks on the Internet. Take advantage of existing alumni network to promote a word-of-mouth marketing for TKU.
4. Strengthening cooperation with the government, free enterprise and other international alliances to build interdependent and continuous collaboration.
5. Operating a entrepreneurial organizational model that is based on positive learning, communication, and cooperation. This model will facilitate a more flexible, efficient, quality, and proactive organizational culture.

Like the author of the paper Dr. Kao was quoting, Dr. Kao sees that there are at least four future models TKU can adapt in an increasing volatile industry. The first one is the virtual model which is ideal for TKU’s

cyber campus. The second is the entrepreneurial model that accommodates inter-disciplinary collaboration and cross-organizational joint ventures. The third is the cross-national networks model to deal with collaboration with other universities or sister universities in loose and free alliances, as mentioned by Dr. Dai already in his speech on Wikinomics. The last model can be regarded as a new network of individuals loosely organized as civil society. Through blogs or other tools provided by the Internet, without any direct sponsorship from colleges and universities, individuals learn and research on complex societal problems and issues.

With the goal of building a “House of Quality” realized through the implementation of the five strategies mentioned above, Dr. Kao added that for TKU to successfully maneuver in its “Fourth Wave,” TKU requires precise execution. For instance, each strategy demands sub-strategies that are orchestrated with well-planned short-term, interim, and long-term targets. Dr. Kao urges his colleagues to put in their concerted efforts to enhance TKU advantage in future competition. Only by positioning TKU at the most cutting-edge spot in the industry can the university guarantee its growth and continuous survival. To survive successfully, TKU, at the same time, will not forget its soul and social obligation. With this attitude, we are ready to take on the challenges presented in the Fourth Wave that will lay a solid foundation for the university’ s Fifth Wave that is waiting just around the corner. (~Ying-hsueh Hu)