Higher Education Administration in Taiwan and Singapore:

An ecological system analysis of professionalisation in research and international offices



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Abstract

Higher education administration has seen substantial development as the sector grows more embedded in the local and global society. While some professional service staff were recognised for their expanding task coverage, increasingly specialised skills, and growing professional identities, administration in the more centralised higher education systems remained unsung.

Many East and Southeast Asian higher education systems demonstrate similar traits in tight governance, policy-led development, and a strong focus on national development. In the region, Taiwan is one of the first to launch an administrator-inclusive policy in 2023. And in Singapore, university administrative offices are managed by professionals and not academic managers, showing similarity to more professionalised higher education systems like Australia, the UK, and the U.S. Despite having taken the first steps to include administration in their higher education development focus, nomenclature such as "professional service staff" remains uncommon, aligning with the shortage of recognition of their professionalism and stereotypes linking administration to bureaucracy. Higher education administration in both systems also lacks career progression and institutional support for professional development.

This study investigates the 'invisible' administrators in Taiwan and Singapore, focusing on two offices established to support the internationalisation and research excellence trends in higher education development. In total, 33 participants were interviewed from two universities in Taiwan and two universities in Singapore. The interviews and archival analysis data were analysed thematically to identify factors that influence the development of higher education administration. This study adopts an ecological-institutional perspective, viewing higher education as an ecology constantly changing with interactions of multiple stakeholders and institutions. Through a cross-case studies approach, these influencing factors were then mapped against Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model to explore the professionalisation in the higher education ecology.

This adapted ecological systems model that portrays higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore maps the institutions, including stakeholders, organisations, or mechanisms, that influence the administrators' professionalisation. The macrosystem revealed the highly

regulative legal frameworks and how higher education administrators are defined or undefined in a governed hierarchy, showing moral-based governance in Taiwan and managerialism-based governance in Singapore. The exosystem explored the universities and their management, spotting the discrepancy in institutional structures, including the lack of administration knowledge and disruptive terms of office from Taiwanese managers. In the microsystem, a positive office culture was reported in both nations, however, participants struggled with little to no attention paid to their professional development. The microsystem and the chronosystem together identified a value alignment between the administrators and what their roles demand. Strong pro-social altruism was reported throughout Taiwan and Singapore.

The professionalism that Taiwanese and Singaporean participants conveyed is highly cultural and institution-influenced. Under a centralised university management, higher education administration in Taiwan continued to reflect robust agency, even when it is often restricted by governance or managers' decisions. With institutional support, the innovation and retention rate of the administrative offices can be improved. Cultural influences occurred, for instance, while both administrators find the collective development of society/nation crucial, the Confucianism-influenced Taiwanese often prioritise it more than their career building. Singaporean administrators, on the other hand, view their personal development as an effort toward achieving broader institutional or national success. Addressing the cultural and societal factors can help better support professional development for all members and establish a higher education administration profession that fosters sustainability.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The changing higher education administration

The roles, functions, and foci of higher education have been changing. Higher education institutions such as universities are increasingly expected to develop functions outside their traditional teaching and research roles, broadening to increase the nation's competitiveness in the globalised world and/or to cultivate national talent. Funding sources have been diversified where the governments' financial support has declined since the 1980s. Universities in the U.S. turned to revenues from tuition, patents, and licensing of new technologies (Leslie & Rhoades, 1995) or became dependent on private funding (Lorenz, 2012). In Asia, universities comply with national funding projects such as the Excellence Initiative for research support (Fu et al., 2020). Universities have become more market-sensitive with increasing needs to secure incomes, and with deepening ties with multiple stakeholders, it has become more crucial for universities to address expectations from societies, governments, and other stakeholders.

As the functions, missions, and aims of universities expand, the supporting sector- administration- has accordingly broadened in services and scope to facilitate development (Gornall, 1999). Even though the literature focusing on professional service staff in universities has been expanding, empirical research remains geographically limited. Scholarly discussions developed surrounding nations where English is the main language, such as Australia (Croucher & Woelert, 2022; Mcinnis, 1998; Szekeres, 2004; Veles & Carter, 2016), the UK (Caldwell, 2022; Evans, 2008; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009; Whitchurch, 2006), and the U.S (Boyt et al., 2001; Leslie & Rhoades, 1995; Whitchurch, 2009). Other higher education entities remain scarcely explored. Higher education contexts are highly local even after decades of effort in internationalisation, and higher education administration is even more so. Even in 2024, many higher education administration roles continued to require a high command of local languages and knowledge. Positions across European and Asian universities also clearly state that they provide insufficient visa support, limiting candidates to those with national qualifications.

With observed differences rich in the local context, my interest turned to higher education administration outside the Anglo-European higher education systems. Higher education in East

and Southeast Asia carries some overlapping traits and cultural influences, as well as similarities in structure and policy development (Chan, 2013; Welch, 2020). It is thus interesting to examine whether their administrative development has continued the similarity. Higher education administration in East and Southeast Asia has seldom adopted the growing nomenclature of "professional service staff" or even "professionals." As the terminology referring to the professional administrative roles in universities has been plentiful, this study will mainly use "higher education administration" to refer to the research subject and those based in less-recognised higher education systems. When "professional service staff" is applied, it refers to the literature and practitioners based in the more researched systems, for example, Australia, Canada, the UK, and the U.S.

East Asian nations and Singapore are historically and culturally intertwined. Historically, Taiwan shares influences from governance, immigration, and culture from China and Japan (Chan & Yang, 2017). Economically, Taiwan is one of the Four Asian Tigers with Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore, sharing a similar strong growth in a planned economic approach back in the 90s. Culturally, Taiwanese education continues to be influenced heavily by Confucianism, similar to South Korea. Looking into higher education policy development, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore recorded similar timing in higher education policy toward excellence and internationalisation. Considering structural and developmental similarities, Singapore stands out as a higher education system that prioritises human resource development and managerialism more than local culture (Loke et al., 2017). This difference shows a closer approach to higher education systems in the literature. Compared to the hybrid higher education systems in East Asia that are rich in cultural influences, Singapore's emphasis and development approaches remain distinct.

My experience studying and working in a Taiwanese university as an administrator gave rise to the focus of Taiwan as a research target. Compared to Taiwan, where Confucianism influences both higher education and the administration culture (Lin & Yang, 2019), Singapore has adopted a neoliberal management focus in its higher education and moved away from the cultural influences. Singapore has also long held a special focus on public administration and is the only one in the region where university office heads are professionals and not professors. By applying the public administration reforms stressing efficiency and corporatisation in the higher education sector (see 1.2.2 for higher education in Singapore), Singapore further

developed a unique managerial environment in higher education and was therefore selected as a comparison case.

1.2 Aims and research question

A review of the literature showed that professionalisation is one of the few academic foci on higher education administrators and not the policies or leadership. Literature has documented changes in work boundaries (Takagi, 2015; Whitchurch, 2009), identity (Caldwell, 2022; Cavazos Montemayorr et al., 2020; Lewis, 2014; Whitchurch, 2013), nomenclature (Caldwell, 2024; Sebalj et al., 2012), and the increasingly specified skills (Collinson, 2006; Dessoff, 2010), echoing the professionalisation this group has been experiencing. Despite the emergence of professional conferences and associations for specialised higher education administration disciplines like research management and international management, low visibility and recognition of the administrator in academic literature persist (Caldwell, 2022; Mcinnis, 1998; Szekeres, 2004; Whitchurch, 2006). Inductions and training programmes for the professional service staff to cultivate skills and knowledge remain inconsistent (Coomber, 2019; Lewis, 2014; Tomkinson, 1997), even when they are directly tied to the efficiency of higher education institutions. Overall, the change and professionalisation in higher education administration have been addressed but not fully explored and compared internationally. Besides lacking empirical research outside the Anglo-European contexts, Pilgrim-Brown (2023) highlighted the insufficient focus on administrators and their voices, as existing research tended to emphasise their roles and functionalities instead.

This study aims to convey the voices of the higher education administrators and explore the professionalisation they experience within centrally governed higher education systems. In Taiwan, higher education administration received little attention until 2023, when the government published the 2nd phase of Sustained Progress and Rise of Universities in Taiwan (SPROUT), which acknowledged the need for administrator development. Singaporean policy and legal systems continue to lack direct references to higher education administration. Individual voices have their constraints and may not be fully representative of the higher education ecology.

The professionalisation of professional service staff literature to date has a tendency to adopt the functionalist approach, discussing the administrators' professionalism based on the presence of features that comprise a profession (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009). However, this narrative reinforces the focus on administrators' functionalities and overlooks the roles and influences of other stakeholders in higher education and the wider society. Other literature has documented changing relationships between professionals and their professional organisations, and how the responsibilities and access control are redistributed (Muzio et al., 2011). Professional organisations increasingly influence professionals' career progression and actions, and should not be left out of the discussion. An ecological-institutional lens proposed by Suddaby and Muzio (2015) enables a comprehensive analysis of the influences from all members of the wider higher education systems.

In my view, if the university and its many stakeholders and units form a spiderweb, the administration will be there at the centre, connecting to every thread. Carving out and focusing on a single aspect of higher education administration remains difficult. A search through literature combined with observations retrieved from my years of practising as a higher education administrator generated some focus, such as professional identity, training, and related policies, but the expanded functions and changing missions of the universities blurred the boundary between the topics. When I try to focus on one, empirical and literary evidence like breadcrumbs lead me astray, sometimes crossing into other topics and academic fields.

My search turned to the stakeholders, as examining their influences share consistent missions and goals, and therefore, have a stable representation in how they shape higher education administration. I identified the main stakeholders at the national level, institutional level, and individual level, and through their interactions and influences, I observed the development of higher education administrators in a higher education ecology. At the national level, I examined the regulatory framework formed by governmental policies and legal acts; at the institutional level, higher education institutions including universities, funding agencies, and industry partners consisted of employment environment; and at individual level, administrators' experiences and daily operation constructed their identity and recognition to their profession.

Searching for the appropriate word to summarise each of their ways of influencing the administrators, and I identified "frame" from the national level, "manage" from the institutions,

and "experience" from the individuals. The research question of this thesis was then formulated as:

> How are professional administrative roles in research and international offices of universities being framed, managed, and experienced in higher education in Taiwan and Singapore?

1.3 Research Context

1.3.1 Taiwan

Recent higher education development in Taiwan

In Taiwan, one of the more recent reforms in higher education started in the 1990s, when internationalisation was introduced, and the government amended relevant laws to encourage the recruitment of international students. In 2006, the Aim for the Top University Program (ATUP) was launched, and around USD1.5 billion budget was allocated. Twelve universities were selected for funding, aiding improvement in world university rankings. The programme was a major national project focusing on research capacity, internationalisation, and building research centres. ATUP was criticised for its limited perspective on university development that largely fixated on world-class universities (Tang, 2019). The distribution of budget favoured research-intensive universities, further stratifying and enforcing hierarchy in the higher education sector (Lo & Hou, 2020). Sustained Progress and Rise of Universities in Taiwan (SPROUT), a subsequent national project in 2017, broadened to include higher education development outside research such as teaching, industry collaboration, and university social responsibility. Some scholars suggested this change of direction as egalitarianism (Lo & Hou, 2020), demonstrating a shifting expectation of universities from government and society. The focus on research remains prevalent, yet the focus on internationalisation has broadened from chasing after the world university rankings. By encouraging cooperation with local communities, SPROUT included an emphasis on local development, replacing the sole interest in international reputation.

Taiwan's higher education has a long and persisting tradition in Confucianism, scholars still "serve this job with the Confucianist value of 'the world is for the public' (天下為公) as a buffer

zone to mediate complex interests and objectives" (Chan & Yang, 2017, p. 1864). The altruistic spirit and dedication in the higher education sector have long been in strong emphasis. Considering its small size which is similar to Belgium, Taiwan has a high density of 126 universities. Taiwan's higher education also echoes the broader East Asia with a deep governmental involvement. From democratisation in the 1980s to the launching of national funding projects in the 2000s, governmental policies significantly direct development in the higher education sector. In 2012, the Ministry of Education published the Regulation on Merging of National Universities, further allowing the government to enforce its decision power on higher education institutions. The act restated control of higher education from the government in Taiwan and a hierarchical relationship between universities and the government.

Higher education administration in Taiwan

The Taiwanese government's policies actively shape university administration. One specific case took place in 2015, when many Offices of Institutional Research were established in universities in response to Ministry of Education's advocacy for institutional research in order to integrate resources and strategy planning (Lee & Fwu, 2017). Most universities also established project-based offices responsible for national higher education development projects, showing a close relationship between governmental suggestions and university structures. In practice, the governance and structural design of higher education administration in Taiwan does not stop at the institutional level but is extended to the national level.

Despite the rich literature on higher education national projects, specific research on administrators remained out of scope in academic debates. The few papers on higher education administration in Taiwan tend to be governance-focused, analysing policies or project experience sharing. Lin's research (2016) addresses the shift in university administrators' job coverage and mindsets, identifying deficiencies in training and support mechanisms, but the research subject remains broad, with no specification of which type of higher education administrators, and the paper's focus remains institutional. In recent years, a topic emerged from Taiwanese literature exploring the practices and effects of institutional researchers (Lee & Fwu, 2017). Lin et al. (2019) discusses how institutional research can contribute to administrative performance evaluation systems in universities. However, the

literature has limited connections to the broader discussion in professional services and often overlooked the higher education administrator.

1.3.2 Singapore

Recent higher education development in Singapore

Singapore has one of the best-performing higher education systems in Asia. Its leading university, the National University of Singapore, moved from the 34th place in The Times World University Ranking in 2010 to the 17th place in 2025. Its reform in higher education started in the 1990s when the government established a fund to diversify the funding sources of universities. Since 1995, the nation has undergone an administrative reform of its public services by launching the Public Service 21 (PS21) initiative, aiming to "strengthen and enhance the efficiency and leadership capacity of the civil service bureaucracy" (Cheung, 2005, p. 265). PS21 focused on four reforming aspects: staff well-being, quality service, work improvement, and organisational review (Lee & Gopinathan, 2013, p.121). An interesting part of the PS21 was that besides systematic and organisational approaches, it also aimed to change the implementors' mindset and motivate them to provide more efficient and better services to the public (Common, 1999) or to the academics in the higher education context.

The national focus on public service brought a series of reviews to higher education institutions. The evaluation introduced new management models and, aligning with neoliberalism, a focus on efficiency in Singaporean universities. In the 2000s, the notion of "World Class University" caught the government's attention. Universities were required to adopt a market-sensitive approach that is believed to enhance the quality of leaders, academics, and administrators. The corporate-like management style and focus of universities remain iconic in Singapore, and prompt the description of education institutions as the "Entrepreneurial Universities" (Mok, 2012).

Higher education in Singapore has been praised by many as a "success" with its highly ranked universities. At the same time, the emphasis on performance and professional management also has its weaknesses. Faculty members pointed out an increasing difficulty in maintaining a work-life balance due to the heavy workload (Chou, 2021). Working toward the national development goals also creates debates between governmental needs and academic freedom in

research. The global Academic Freedom Index (AFI) rates Singapore's academic freedom between 2014-2024 at 0.42, close to Thailand (0.46) and Iraq (0.41) and much lower than liberal higher education systems like Japan (0.76) and Taiwan (0.83). Scholars from arts and humanities fields especially reported facing the pervasively monitored academic environment, where research topics judged misaligned with governmental instructions risk being advised against publication or media release (George et al., 2022).

Higher education administration in Singapore

The trend of separating functions -- leaving university administration to the administrators and teaching to the academics in Singapore -- was recorded as early as 1980, and the government has been encouraging a managerial governance style for the nation's higher education over a collegial style in which the consensus from academics forms decisions. This tendency continued in a series of university reviews beginning in the 2000s, leading to reforms in governance and budgeting that were described as a "centralised decentralisation" (Lee & Gopinathan, 2013). These reforms further shaped the administrative and managerial models in the higher education sector. Focusing on efficiency and cost-effectiveness, Singaporean universities applied business models in organisational excellence, and while decision and managerial powers shifted, an increase in the number of non-academic staff and their workload was noted (Lee & Gopinathan, 2013). Amongst Asian nations, Singapore is the only one currently where university administrative offices are managed by professionals rather than academic administrators.

Even with a stronger focus on a dedicated higher education administration, a dichotomy between academics and non-academics remained prevalent. With decisions affecting scholars made by management, "the bureaucratic practice has undoubtedly caused some resentment among staff members" (Selvaratnam, 1994, p. 74). Lee and Gopinathan (2013) also commented that "redistribution of power within universities skewed towards university administrators at the expense of academics in basic units" (p. 130). The responses from the academics echoed some East Asian literature, suggesting how the administrative roles promoted the marketisation of higher education (Mok & Nelson, 2013). The discussion revealed confusion in the usage of "administrators", whether the term addresses senior management roles or officers in administrative offices was not clarified. While

professionalisation seems to be largely led by policies, the responses and adaptations from the institutions, other members in universities, or even the administrators themselves are not addressed positively.

1.3.3 Research and international officers

Challenges for some specific roles within higher education administration are captured more in the literature, such as for research officers (Derrick & Nickson, 2014; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009; Schuetzenmeister, 2010), faculty developers (Cavazos Montemayorr et al., 2020; Puhr, 2024), and institution researchers (Fu et al., 2021; Lee & Fwu, 2017; Lin et al., 2019). Considering the substantial influences of national policies and higher education projects, this study examines the research and international offices, as the establishment and expansion of these offices closely follow recent higher education policy development: research excellence and internationalisation.

Research management grew as research in universities was highlighted and as the universities needed to ensure productivity and budget (Miller, 1995). Discussions regarding research management were then connected to professionalisation, capturing the changes and development (Santos et al., 2021). Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2009) argued that the gradually increased emphasis on corporate managerialism sped development, and the requirements of research management skills seem to influence the qualifications of research administrators. Empirical evidence repeatedly confirms that research managers in universities tend to possess, on average, higher academic qualifications, such as doctoral degrees (Collinson, 2006; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009; Santos et al., 2021; Whitchurch, 2009) and develop "semi-academic functions" (Schuetzenmeister, 2010) that are discipline-specific (Collinson, 2006), marking an obvious dedication to skills beyond clerical work. Szekeres (2011) illustrated the hybrid view of research administrators, being simultaneously the crossover between the academics and administration but also the representatives of the institutional bureaucracy.

Despite the attention in academic literature, research on research administrators, rather than their senior management or operations is still scant (Collinson, 2006; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009; Mcinnis, 1998; Whitchurch, 2006). It is also noted that literature outside the

UK, the US, Australia, and some European countries on these administrators remains limited, further revealing how the research on administration still centres around countries with a European-based tradition.

On the contrary, the management of international officers, senior international officers (SIOs), has been a popular research topic, especially in the United States. Despite misaligned titles between institutions, positions of senior international officers started to emerge and increase in the 1990s due to the diversification of internationalisation (Deschamps & Lee, 2015). The SIOs often have higher academic qualifications and often come from a more academic background. Some universities only consider professors as candidates for the post (Diemer et al., 2017). However, even at the management level, it was noted that the job did not usually come with training. Some SIOs acquire related knowledge by attending conferences and seeking help from professional organisations, and others learn "the field of international education on the job" (Tran et al., 2020, p. 138).

Unlike research managers, profession or professionalisation is not yet a central topic in the international officer literature, even when topics such as skill development and work coverage expansion overlap with the discussions of professionalisation. The existing international officer literature leaned toward detailing guidelines and implementations in practice rather than theoretical exploration. The content focused heavily on the functionalities and management of international projects (Dessoff, 2010; Diemer et al., 2017; Henderson et al., 2017). The voice of this group of professional staff remains to be heard.

Lacking academic papers and media appearances, it proved difficult to collect information directly about research and international offices in Taiwan. Gathered from my past professional knowledge, related information in policies, and a search through university webpages, both research and international offices are administrative units whose importance has grown comparatively recently. In Taiwan, research and international administration expanded in the 2000s, aligning with the national higher education funding projects. The roles of research and international managers require diverse professional skills, at times overlapping academic knowledge compared to other offices such as the registrar or the finance office. Research and international offices face a similar dilemma in their speedy development: a lack

of visibility, a blurring task coverage that can be highly project-based, and a heavy responsibility with direct association in universities' development.

The distribution of administrators within universities marked a bigger change than the overall growth in administrator numbers. Research and international offices were established later than standard university administration offices such as registrar, student affairs, and accounting, but have expanded. Taking the National Taiwan University (NTU) as an example, the national university with the largest number of administration members kept consistent and transparent statistics since the 1980s. Its Office of Research data entered record in 1998 as the Research and Development Committee with 49 employees and grew to 64 in 2022. The Office of International Affairs of NTU did not leave a record before 2007, and its members grew from 15 to 55 in 2022. Some more integrated offices also expanded massively, for example, the offices for vice presidents grew from 0 to 3, and the staff assigned to it evolved to 35. It is clear that the organisational structure and missions have been changing, and the administration offices have been expanding to such development.

While Singaporean universities have a shorter history, a more complete administrative structure has been established since the beginning. Since their founding in the early 1900s, Taiwanese universities have experienced multiple expansions, and administrative offices such as research and international offices were not added until the 1990s. In the public record of national universities, the early establishment of research management units can be traced back to the 80s in National Cheng Kung University. Research and International offices formally joined the level 1 administrative offices in most universities only in the mid-1990s. In Taiwan, most international offices started under research offices as an English-speaking support unit for academic exchanges. Supported by national higher education projects focusing on excellence, research and international offices in Taiwan and Singapore grew in size and work coverage. By 2020, research and international offices in Taiwanese and Singaporean universities has already been independent offices that sit at the same level in institutional structures as the Registrar, Office of Student Affairs, and Office of General Affairs.

Some differences between Taiwan and Singapore are worth noting. In Singaporean offices, the working language is English, while in Taiwanese offices, Mandarin is the working language for research offices, but international officers use both Mandarin and English. Singaporean offices

are managed by professionals, whose industry backgrounds varied but have not attained tenure track experiences, with related academic managers assigned to higher-ranked positions such as Vice Presidents. Heads of offices in Taiwan are academics, whose terms of office often follow the President of the university. More details of a comparison between the individual universities are included in 3.1.4 Sampling and recruitment.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis begins by examining the phenomenon of professionalisation in higher education administration through an ecological-institutional lens. Chapter 2 draws on literature from the sociology of profession, higher education, professional service staff, organisation studies, and developmental psychology to establish the scope of profession, professionalism, and professional. Examining topics related to professionalisation from professional identity to the space, agency, and boundary in the Third Space provide a foundation for discussions in this study. A theoretical framework is built on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems with an ecological-institutional lens. Adapted to explore the development of a profession, the ecological systems are repopulated with relevant stakeholders and institutions to reflect an initial investigation through the literature.

Chapter 3 outlines research design, research stages, data collection, and data analysis. This methodology chapter introduces how the study combines a cross-case studies approach with ecological systems to analyse key themes across four different universities. The research includes document analysis, a questionnaire, and interviews. While document analysis provides perspectives from national and institutional level stakeholders, the questionnaire and interviews capture responses and actions from individual administrators. Themes generated by both inductive coding and deductive coding are mapped onto each ecological system for analysis. The findings are presented according to each ecological system.

Chapter 4 delves into the multifaceted influences shaping the profession of higher education administration in the macrosystem. The macrosystem includes the external social actors from the higher education institutions where administrators are based. It investigates how societal values and stereotypes contribute to various interpretations of this profession. The subsequent section focuses on national influences, including legal frameworks, policies, and governance

structures that regulate and define the higher education administration profession within universities.

Chapter 5 examines the exosystem, which includes the higher education institutions, specifically universities in this study. Focusing on the organisational setting, middle and senior management, and the characteristics of administration within this context, I first examine the internal environment from the structure of an institution's perspective to its management, then look at how the administration defines itself.

Chapter 6 investigates the mesosystem, and to the administrators, this represents their immediate work environment: the office. This chapter delves into the office setting, culture, and coverage in the first part, followed by the office division, and the expansion of tasks following the recent shift of university functions, but also expectations and missions for the university administration. Following discussions on professional development, the chapter focuses on skills and provides a discussion on how the differences in skills and missions formulate distinctive identities for administrators working in research and international offices separately.

After examining on institutional level, the microsystem and chronosystem discussions join at Chapter 7 to explore the individual development. Values, beliefs, and cultural cultivations are woven into the discussions on professional identity and career actions, framing professionalisation as a continuous process through participants' understanding and recognition over time.

The discussion and conclusion are presented in Chapter 8. This chapter reviews the theoretical framework, combining literature and empirical data to assess its applicability. The discussion also compares the findings with existing literature, particularly on the concept of the Third Space professional, identifying similarities and differences to expand the discussions of boundaries and agency. The chapter concludes by answering the research questions based on the empirical findings and provides a comprehensive overview of the exploration of professionalisation within higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter delves into the related literature to explore existing discussions on the professionalisation of higher education administration. This review consisted of two major sections of literary exploration: higher education administration and professionalisation. The third section combines Suddaby and Muzio's ecological-institutional lens and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory into a theoretical framework, exploring the philosophical approach as well as implementable details.

2.1 Higher education administration

Administration has long been an embedded part of most institutions but is not often defined consistently. A search of the literature reflected a vague and mixed usage of terminology describing higher education administration. While the literature applies "managers", "professionals", or "administration", the terms do not always point to the same group but a mixture of anyone who performs administrative tasks. Whitchurch's 2009 article finds a lack of conformity when defining "administration" across Australia, the UK, and the U.S. Whitchurch has also observed that the term "administration" is associated with institutional policy and governance, and viewed as something undertaken at a higher level than "management" in the U.S., whereas in the UK administration has often been devalued as the word is used to refer to procedural and clerical tasks (Whitchurch, 2009). The difficulty in defining terminologies evidenced a lack of consensus when addressing higher education administration, and it showed the need for further clarifications and groundwork in research.

Nomenclature defining staff in higher education institutions whose main focus is not research is even more varied. Deem (1998) used "non-academic managers". Gornall (1999) suggests "new professionals" to better describe those who have "non-traditional job titles, cross-role posts and non-traditional contracts and conditions of service" in higher education (p.45). Rhoades and Sporn (2002) describe them as "support professionals" and "non-academic professionals". The academic-administration dichotomy is less popular later, and many avoided these divisional terms. As the specialisation of the occupation comes into academic discussions, more have applied a neutral "administrative" or "administrator" to refer to the group. Since the mid-2000s, "professional staff" have become more common (Sebalj et al., 2012). Teichler (2003)

defines 'higher education professionals' as "highly qualified persons in universities who are neither top managers nor in charge of the academic functions of teaching, research, etc." (p.183). As scholars shifted the terms used to refer to this group of people toward professionals, discussions evolved into the 'othering'. Through defining the professional service staff as 'non-academics', an order of the figured world of higher education was established centring around academics (Caldwell, 2024; Collinson, 2006; Dobson, 2000).

Several empirical studies highlight discrepancies in how administrators view themselves. In Australia, professional staff refer to themselves more openly as "managers", rather than modulating this via the use of the term "administration" (Whitchurch, 2006). Sebalj, Holbrook, and Bourke (2012) conveyed research of 640 research services staff from 36 Australian universities and found a preference for a surprisingly "university administrator" while "general staff" and "non-academic staff" were chosen as the least favourite, showing a preference for precise work description rather than general or divisional terms. The choice also reflected how the practitioners do not interpret the term 'administrator' with a negative connotation that has been shown in some scholarly literature, aligning with Caldwell's finding in 2024, when professional service practitioners in the UK continue to find the term 'administrator' neutral and unoffensive. The practitioners' self-recognitions differ more due to salary levels, degree levels, gender, and experiences on the job, but not between the general nomenclature. It is also interesting to note that those who entered the industry more recently prefer "professional staff", matching the rising trend in literature.

Overall, a trend of referring to the administration as "professionals" is identified in both academic and administration literature, especially in Australia, the UK, and the U.S. The terms and what defines a professional led to a deeper literature review in the sociology of professions as well as discussions on professionalisation (see section 2.2). This literature review shows that there is not yet research on the nomenclature of higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore. Lacking literature to reflect local preference and consistent working terminology, I use both "administrator" and "professional service staff" to refer to staff hired with mainly administrative responsibilities in universities, with the former one emphasising their administrative duties and the latter on further specifications and skills.

2.1.1 Manager and management in higher education administration

Within the administration sector in universities, more specialised groups of administrators can be identified. Besides the administrators whose expertise matches those in the industry such as accounting and IT, there are also research managers, international managers, librarians, student advisors, institution researchers, middle and senior management and so on. The last group especially occupies the attention of the literature (Lewis, 2014). While some literature applies the term "leadership", the word does not often include middle management roles. To refer to both as managers creates confusion in the working terminology of research or international managers, which is often an implementation-aimed administrator and not from the management level.

In the literature of higher education administration professionalisation, research manager is often selected as the research subject (Collinson, 2006; Szekeres, 2011; Whitchurch, 2009). Many identified the mixture of academic and administrative skills in research management, and the hybridity has been constantly emphasised in scholarly discussions. Some other administration roles that connect the dichotomy include student advisor, a role that is assigned to both academics and administrators but is more regionally specific to the U.S. (Castiello-Gutiérrez et al., 2020), and international officers, a role whose emergence and development have been interestingly similar to research officers as the main support to university development. Henderson, Barnett, and Barrett (2017) observed that after World War II, the responsibilities of transnational education staff have expanded from partnership establishment and exchange programme operations to initiating and managing new transnational projects.

Between the project division, identity differences, and various development stages, one cannot generalise higher education administration into one category, and the multiple usages of "manager" create confusion. There is a need to look closer at the individual administrators in specific roles as new administrative roles in universities demonstrated significant differences from the traditional university administration with a crossover to academic skills and innovative capabilities. Without specifying the group in research, the terms can be confusing in the studies of administration (De Boer & Goedegebuure, 1995; Szekeres, 2004). This study therefore refers to the research subject, the research and international managers, as research and

international officers, to differentiate them from middle and senior managers whose responsibilities cover the management of employees and not only operations in offices.

2.1.2 Higher education administration in East Asia

"Many Asian states are highly interventionist" (Cheung, 2005, p. 263). East Asian governments often direct their national higher education development through governance and policies. Direct jurisdiction relationships between governments and publicly funded universities often impose governmental rules on university-level regulations in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea. These rules direct hiring packages, employing contracts, or even training availabilities and requirements. In Taiwan, administrators in a national university need to meet the requirements of civil servant guidelines. As scholars and administrators in public universities are regulated as public service officers, governmental policies and university requirements directly regulate their professional development possibilities. This further brings out the influences from the two institutions, the government and universities, that await further examination.

Kirkpatrick (2016) has suggested research on professional service staff should explore into comparison of different national contexts. Higher education administration literature and its overlapping discussion with professionalisation has concentrated on a handful of states where higher education has developed beyond the national border such as Australia, the UK, and the U.S. East Asian literature on higher education administration has been scarce and lacks discussion on professionalisation. Though a few papers address administrator burnout (Lai, 2015; Zheng & Song, 2014) or identity anxiety (Xu, 2018) in China, the discussions remain empirical and not theorised. The topic of higher education administrators is also not consistently explored in other East Asian countries, and sources in English are limited.

Instead of addressing individuals on topics such as identity, East Asian higher education literature stresses the influences of hierarchical structure (Yun, 2006), strong leadership (Takagi, 2015; Welch, 2020; Yun, 2006) and state government involvement (Mok, 2002; Welch, 2020). Research from this region often focuses more on implementation and experience sharing (Lee & Fwu, 2017; Lin et al., 2019; Lin, 2016), governance or senior management. The centralised higher education systems continue to be the centre of research focus, instead of the individuals. Chan and Yang (2017) argue that East Asian values, Confucian

Values, and Chinese intellectual traditions are still prevalent in Taiwan's higher education, and Yun further asserts that "Confucianism has prevailed in the administrative culture of East Asia" (2006, p. 496). One of the main Confucian administration features is "a sense of authority formed by the dominant power" (Yun, 2006, p. 504) and this feature is attributed to how strong leadership and structural hierarchy remain visible in East Asian administration.

However, one country in the region has been less influenced by Confucianism but instead, the neoliberal model of market-sensitive management— Singapore. Loke, Chia, and Gopinathan (2017) have examined Singapore's higher education and pointed out that, different from the past notion, the Asian values or Confucianism ethos has not been the main concern in universities in Singapore, especially when comparing to some Taiwanese universities, which "ma[d]e explicit references to Confucianism in their university charters or mission statements" (p.1896). To the Singaporean academics, Confucianism was no longer a recurring theme in higher education. With a heavy emphasis on economic development, higher education in Singapore follows a different value system that is performance and developmental-state-based (George et al., 2022).

2.2 Profession and professionalisation

The scholarly discussion regarding profession and professionalism has evolved in approaches and focus. In the sociology of professions literature, professionalisation is often described as the process of an occupation transforming into a profession (Cavar, 2021), but the discussion surrounding what makes a profession has been widely debated. In sociology, early scholars such as Weber viewed professions as a means to build status and research focused on the processes and structures (Cavar, 2021). Later discussions proposed a more class-based perspective (Khurana, 2010), with professions seen as a means toward market monopoly and power dynamics. Larson (1977) addressed professionalism as a means of social control, through professional projects and the pursuit of knowledge production.

Scholars such as Evetts (2003) suggested moving away from defining the profession and instead examining how professionalism acts as a motivator or facilitator for occupational changes or is even used by organisations to align the performances and behaviours of the employees. Recent studies have demonstrated a similar trend, focusing on the inequalities in professional practices,

elements such as gender and ethnicity are raised to examine how professions influence social interactions. Larson (2018) reflects how sociological discussions have been largely shaped by Anglo-American societal developments, often neglecting other cultural contexts and lacking a balanced observation including women and minority ethnicity groups.

Different from Larson's professional project, which suggests how occupations build themselves into professions seeking market control and/or status, and Abbott's (2005) competition theory describes the monopolistic competition between the professions, Freidson (2011) proposes how a profession and its endogenous autonomy could adopt a Third Logic, standing outside market and hierarchy. The concept coincided with the professionalisation literature in higher education professional services. Whitchurch (2015) suggested the concept of Third Space, challenging the traditional taxonomy dichotomy between academic and administration roles. In terms of governance, these roles lie between market and hierarchical governance. In terms of tasks, they perform both academic and administrative functions. The undefined "third" describes professional service staff on their work and role essence, portraying their ambiguous status in higher education institutions.

2.2.1 Professionalisation and higher education administration

While administrators are called professionals, are they professionalised? What elements define a profession and differentiate professionals from administrators? In the few papers that examine the professionalisation of higher education administration, most have adopted the functionalist approach (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009; Mongeau & Hajdasinski, 2021; Szekeres, 2011). Functionalists, or trait theorists, concentrate on identifying the elements or criteria that distinguish a profession. Some commonly identified traits include: licensing, controlled access to the profession, professional associations, systematic knowledge, codes of ethics, and altruism – that a profession should actively try to serve society (Ackroyd, 2016).

In the field of higher education, professionalisation debates vary according to the subject discussed. The foci on students, institutions, or academics bring different definitions and angles to the literature (Ackroyd, 2016). The professionalisation discussions on higher education administration do not often intertwine with the sociology roots, and most papers use the term "professional" without definitions. However, in the few papers that apply the functionalist

approach (Gornitzka & Larsen, 2004; Whitchurch, 2015), many criteria for a profession are met, including the establishment of professional associations with regulated codes of ethics (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009), the equipping of its own specialised knowledge (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009; Lewis, 2014), and "attitudinal and behavioural orientation" (Evans, 2008, p. 23) to serve and contribute. The legitimation, or being recognised by societies or states, is less addressed except for Sun (2012), who urges the government in China to publish related laws to regulate higher education administrators and to provide a certifying system.

Recent literature addressed the influences of the growing management and broader application of New Public Management and identified a hybridisation in professionals (Ackroyd, 2016). With centralised management growing, professionals are often tasked with management duties. For these hybrid professionals whose work covers middle management, lateral communication, maintaining professional standards and so on, their identities are described as professional-management (Kirkpatrick, 2016). Mongeau and Hajdasinski (2021) also pointed out that in the information age, professional service-framed roles are rapidly emerging, and listed some elements to evaluate such emergence, including the maturity of job titles, training, professional groups, literature, and certifications.

From professional groups, certification providers, to standards bodies, the list of criteria also revealed another actor in professionalisation: the institutions. Weberian scholars consider the relationship mutualistic between the professions and institutions, that while professions contribute to the rationalisation of institutions, institutions also help professions with their development and legitimation (Cavar, 2021). The institutionalists' discussions in the sociology of professions further see an increase in the importance of modern organisations. Scholars agree that professions are in between modern organisations and institutions, having both properties of being designed to meet certain objectives, but also have customary forms to serve multiple purposes (Ackroyd, 2016).

To address the profession and its interactions with institutions, modern organisational institutionalism researchers started a discussion on professional service firms. Besides the autonomous professional organisations, heteronomous professional organisations have a separate managerial system and are not run purely by professionals (Hinings, 2016). Scholars also point out that professional service firms and business corporations have been adopting

each other's characteristics, logic, and structure (Suddaby & Muzio, 2015). Examining the professional organisations in management and the recent growth of transnational professional firms, professional identities in professional firms are often similar to corporate managers. Traditional professional control of access has also been transferred to institutions (Muzio et al., 2013), showing that institutionalised organisations and the changing society have altered how professionals and institutions interact.

The ecological-institutional theory of professions proposed by Suddaby and Muzio (2015). Suddaby and Muzio described an institutional environment closer to today's universities and is worth further research. The ecological-institutional theory also considers the diversity of organisations and their influences on professions, befitting the multi-faceted role universities play to their different members. When academics are viewed as professionals, a university can be a heteronomous professional service firm, yet when students are the main subject, the university can be the knowledge provider. What is the university's role when administrators are placed as professionals?

2.2.2 Professional identity and professionalism in higher education administration

Scholars such as Hall (1990) and Veles, Graham, and Ovaska (2023) emphasise that both differences and sameness unite people within an identity. But identity remains a broad concept with multiple explanations but not one united definition (Fitzgerald, 2020). Identity has been described as socially and culturally constructed (Campbell, 2000), shaped by history and institutions (Hall, 1990), and influenced by how the group of people understand themselves and what they desire to become (Melling, 2019). Brubaker and Cooper (2000) critique the generalised and ambiguous usages of "identity" and suggest three major substitutions to specify its essence: identification, self-understanding, and groupness, showing the multiple facets that are included in this much discussed concept.

Fitzgerald (2020) purposed the importance of specification regarding identity and participant scope in order to ensure relevancy and accuracy. In this study, professional identity remains essential to higher education administrators. Professional identity discussions often highlight its multi-faceted and multi-layered nature (Nkambule et al., 2024), and the scholarly research of professional service staff reflects this nature. Research recorded professional identities of

professional service staff in higher education incorporate aspects such as values derived from the role, self-positionality, and team recognition.

One practitioner from McGill, Ali, and Barton's research (2020) expressed the importance of values and self-awareness at work: "We have to know ourselves. We have to know who we are, what we are doing, why we are doing this to be effective[...]" (p. 7). From the literature, both theoretical and empirical work tend to draw a picture of changing professional identities that are tied to the interpretation of the group and recognition from others. Collinson (2006) emphasises the processual and interactional sides of occupational identity and social position. Lewis (2014) derives the concept of professional identity based on interviews with UK professionals and believes it links to a group's understanding of similarities and differences. Whitchurch (2015) examines a few different approaches to defining identity and concludes that with the Third Space professionals, identities could be "multiple, overlapping, incomplete [...] and as being constructed" (p. 113).

Administration identity was frequently connected to their professional service specialism (Rixom, 2011; Whitchurch, 2006) such as research management or finance, similar to the academic identity which builds around the disciplines. The scholarly discussions regarding professional service staff identities often identify an influence from their relationship with the academics (Caldwell, 2022; Cavazos Montemayorr et al., 2020; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009; Lewis, 2014; Whitchurch, 2008), their contribution to the work (Caldwell, 2022; Collinson, 2006), and the low recognition of their roles (Caldwell, 2024; Dobson, 2000; Melling, 2019; Szekeres, 2004).

To understand the identity of higher education administration, one cannot ignore the role of the institution. In Whitchurch's work (2008), she identified that across institutions, professional identities can be different. For institutions undergoing changes to catch up with modern university expectations, there tend to be more cross-boundary and unbounded professionals, showing a connection between institution positioning and the administrators' identities and understanding of their jobs. Rixom (2011) has agreed that knowing the relationship between different identities is relevant if the administrators seek "to influence institutional priorities" (p.26), showing a possibility that there can be a mutually influential relationship between

administration and institution instead of a top-down power relationship that is depicted in the Asian literature (Mok & Nelson, 2013; Poole, 2016).

Professional identity also appears to be influenced by professionalism and professionality. Evans (2008) defines professionality as a person's ideological, attitudinal, intellectual, and epistemological stance related to their profession. Professionalism contains a wider spectrum of influences from professional culture, professional identities, and institutional influences. It can be shaped by plural professionalities. To explore the topic of professionalisation, this study focused on two aspects: professional identity and professionalism. While professional identity describes the personal perspective of their roles and profession, observation of professionalism explores how higher education administrators interpret the essence, culture, and codes of conduct of their profession.

2.3 Third Space Professionals in higher education

Whitchurch adapts the Third Space concept in the higher education context to capture the increasingly intermingling academic and administration domains on missions and tasks (Whitchurch, 2006, 2009, 2015, 2023). Depending on the professional service staff's identities and utilisation, boundaries in their working environment are reinterpreted toward their projects instead of simply specialism-based. Whitchurch (2008) examined the changing identities of administrators in universities in the UK and lays out a typology of professional identities in spaces, knowledge, relationships, and legitimacies. These aspects of identities combined can be used to identify the bounded, unbounded, cross-boundary, and blended professionals (Whitchurch, 2013). While bounded professionals work within the defined field of higher education administration, cross-boundary professionals and blended professionals exhibit flexibility to move across the academic and administrative domains, focusing on institutional development above the individual projects they work on.

Examining the relationships and space in institutions, Whitchurch (2015) further identifies three Third Spaces based on institutional characteristics and employees' responses into integrated, semi-autonomous, and independent. The integrated space accommodates a mixture of academic and administrative activities, and Third Space professionals develop based on their expertise, sometimes outside the higher education institutions. Semi-autonomous and

independent spaces provide less recognition and opportunities for the Third Space professionals. In semi-autonomous space, partial support toward professional development can be found, and it remains dependent on funding and institutional policies. In independent space, regulations confine professionals in their roles. It relies on individual professionals and their agency to create the independent space for Third Space activities "under the radar". This categorisation includes consideration of institutional structure, governance, the institutions' connection to other sectors, as well as the members' relationship with the institutions and their actions. The wide coverage reflects an ecological examination of the broader environment higher education administrators situate in.

Hall (2022) cross-examines Third Space and formal institutional frames and raises the concern that despite the self-recognition of the emerging Third Space professionals, their professional careers can be disrupted due to the lack of space in organisational structures. Agency proves to be crucial in the discussion of the professionalism of Third Space professionals, as recent developments have demonstrated that better navigating through the plurality of Third Space takes more than working in Third Space (Whitchurch, 2023). The scholarly discussions recorded how Third Space professionals demonstrated agency to interact, transform, and sometimes innovate their working environment, in order to support their professionalisation.

2.4 Theoretical framework

2.4.1 Philosophical stance

To accommodate and present the different perspectives and living experiences that can contradict values, identities, and order of things, it will be partial to claim what was right, what was wrong, or simply what was closer to "the truth". The judgement of what was true and what was not indicates that certain perspectives prevail over others, and the sense of judgement can be dangerous in qualitative research on topics such as identity and experiences when a researcher tries to apply or claim a singular set of perspectives as a standard. Therefore, I explore how this phenomenon is formed, following social constructionists such as Burr. Burr (2015) suggested to challenge doctrine knowledge critically and consider historical and cultural implications. Adopting a constructionist's angle also prompts me to explore "how social realities are produced, assembled, and maintained" (Silverman, 2014, p. 24). Valuing the interpretations and meanings of the participants, while being reflexive of my own positionality.

Much research in higher education also adopts a similar school of thought. Considering how today's higher education has been further integrated into society and is often expected to uphold expectations from multiple actors and stakeholders, it is not appropriate to study the sector alone without considering the influences from other agents in society and its ecological system. This study includes considerations of social, economic, developmental, and historical influences as it views higher education and the members within it being constructed by experiences, history, cultural elements in the society, and the relations and interactions between each influencing element.

Some schools of thought also contribute to the ontological development of this study. For example, Pierre Bourdieu considered the way to avoid objectifying participants was not to view the world in one presupposed way. Describing their experiences has to be done by also examining the hidden social conditions and the participants' understanding of the "order of things" and further exploring which historical details, social relations, and other influences have shaped and formed their recognitions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2008). The undefined perspective and the exploration of one's knowing or unknown understanding of the world are considered useful in this research. The concept of field, "constructed against the temptations of realist thinking" (Bourdieu, 2019, p. 200) helps form a lens used to view higher education and higher education administration without pre-suppositions. "One of the advantages of thinking in terms of fields is precisely that this allows us to construct reality in its historical detail while at the same time allowing us to discover its invariants and derive its transhistorical laws of operation" (Bourdieu, 2019, p.192). The field is a lens of thought, providing a flexible enough space to observe its homologies, hierarchy, double logic, the agents (both individuals and institutions), and the relations between the abstract or concrete elements in the realm of higher education administration.

2.4.2 An ecological-institutional view on the higher education administration profession

Despite the distinct features of some empirical applications, field as a theory remains broad and cannot always provide a precise answer to the research question, but applying it as one of the founding lenses can leave space for flexibility and changes, and therefore suits the complex and widely-impacted higher education environment.

Viewing higher education as a field provides the chance to examine its interaction and impacts with other fields such as politics and society, while leaving the relation but not a direct governance over a sub-field: higher education administration. The two each have their own regulations, recognition, and emphasis, yet can be linked in some common features such as altruism, service attitude, and developmental goals. This study hence takes a constructionist stance while borrowing a broad lens of the theory of field to understand the professionalisation of higher education administration, but also intends to examine the complex experience by using a more precise theoretical framework (See 2.4 Theoretical framework).

Discussion on professionalisation relies on the first step of defining what a profession is. Between the different theories and approaches that populated the discussion in the sociology of professions, many features of higher education administration fit in, but even those matches cannot always provide a wholesome explanation. The multi-purpose of higher education created complexity for the professionals working within the industry, and its interlinked nature of stakeholders and institutions (such as representativeness and professional institutions) also makes higher education administration an institution that can't be fully applied to the previous discussions on the profession.

Suddaby and Muzio (2015) promoted an ecological approach with the institutionalisation process in mind. In which they address both the professionals and the professional organisations. As professionals were the key agents of their institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), viewing professions as "social institutions that were embedded in an environment of related institutions" (Suddaby & Muzio, 2015, p. 14) helps to better understand the relationship that combines both competition and cooperation between the professionals and the professional organisations that describes the higher education administration well. On one hand, their main goal was to support the higher education institution to grow, on the other hand, they compete with the bureaucratic structure that regulates them as well as the other ecologies within the institution such as the academics and the students. Abbott's (2005) linked ecology theory or Liu's (2018) overlapping ecology theory both mentioned this intertwining nature of ecologies of professions, that oftentimes they can share the "same resources, beneficiary terms", "common actors" (Abbott, 2005, p. 255), and even sometimes being transformed by similar social processes (Liu, 2018, p. 213).

Recent literature also categorises universities as heteronomous professional service firms, which are equipped with a separate managerial system and are not run purely by professionals (Hinings, 2016). However, this perspective has its limitations since viewing an educational institution as a firm overlooks other features of the universities. While it depicts the mutualism relationship between the university and the academics – the professionals in the institutions, it leaves little space for the non-traditional administrators and their professionalisation to be allowed into the discussion. Focusing on the academic professionals also means that its output is concentrated on the functional elements, namely research and teaching, while other elements were excluded from consideration. Its knowledge-exploring feature as an educational institution as well as its responsibility and obligation as a social institution can fail to be noticed.

To better portray the system higher education administration was in, I combined the thought of the ecological-institutional approach with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model theory of human development (1977) to strengthen the professionalisation as a process (illustrated in *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*). The ecological model raised by Bronfenbrenner illustrated the mutual influences in human development between the individual and the living environment. Within the environment, influences come from different factors, from the immediate individuals and institutions, from family to work, to the long-term change of social environment, including social norms or culture. These homocentric systems were layered in four: micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The existing organisational and structural concepts led one to wonder whether this model can be applied further to the development of an institution such as higher education administration. Applications of the ecological model in other disciplines, including public health as an institution (Eriksson et al., 2018) and personal mental health support (Cappella et al., 2008), have shown the model's compatibility with non-individual research subjects. The multi-direction and multi-factor influences between and within systems can appropriately reflect the interactions of different groups within higher education. Focusing on one specialised administration group, the influencing stakeholders and institutions differ. Examining all the influencing factors within one homocentric model simulated how higher education administration within an overall higher education system -- not as an individual institution but

as a connected node in an ecological system, fitting the environment in which higher education administration interacts daily.

I mainly adopted Bronfenbrenner's earlier work and not the later ones with proximal processes and the Process-Person-Context-Time model (Eriksson et al., 2018), since the latter model focused on longitudinal personal development and requires at least two different checking points. However, the concept of proximal process, which focuses on the individuals' development in a changing environment, did contribute to the adoption of this model by adding an examination of the time factor, emphasising the processual development of microsystem (individual level development) and chronosystem (time).

Changing the central agent from an individual to an institution also required an adaptation of how other factors in the system are viewed. As the influencing factors cover people, organisations, and concepts such as social norms and governance, concluding them all as ecologies can unnecessarily broaden the discussion and exaggerate the competition element. Hence this study examines the factors in institutional forms. The definition of "institution" here is a broadened concept from ecological analysis in sociology and ecological model, covering organisations, individuals, and social structures, etc., as long as it stands as a unit that interacts and brings a two-way process in influencing higher education administration. The model originated from human development studies, and the concept of growth aligns with the concept of progress in professionalisation. While examining the development of higher education administration and its professionalisation, the theoretical framework helps place the themes of development into perspectives. By identifying and replacing factors that influence the research or international officers, I replicate the ecological systems they are in and create the socio-ecological model to examine their growth. The following ecological systems are informed by literature, with stakeholders and institutions that influence and shape the profession of research officers (*Figure 1*) and international officers (*Figure 2*) in higher education.

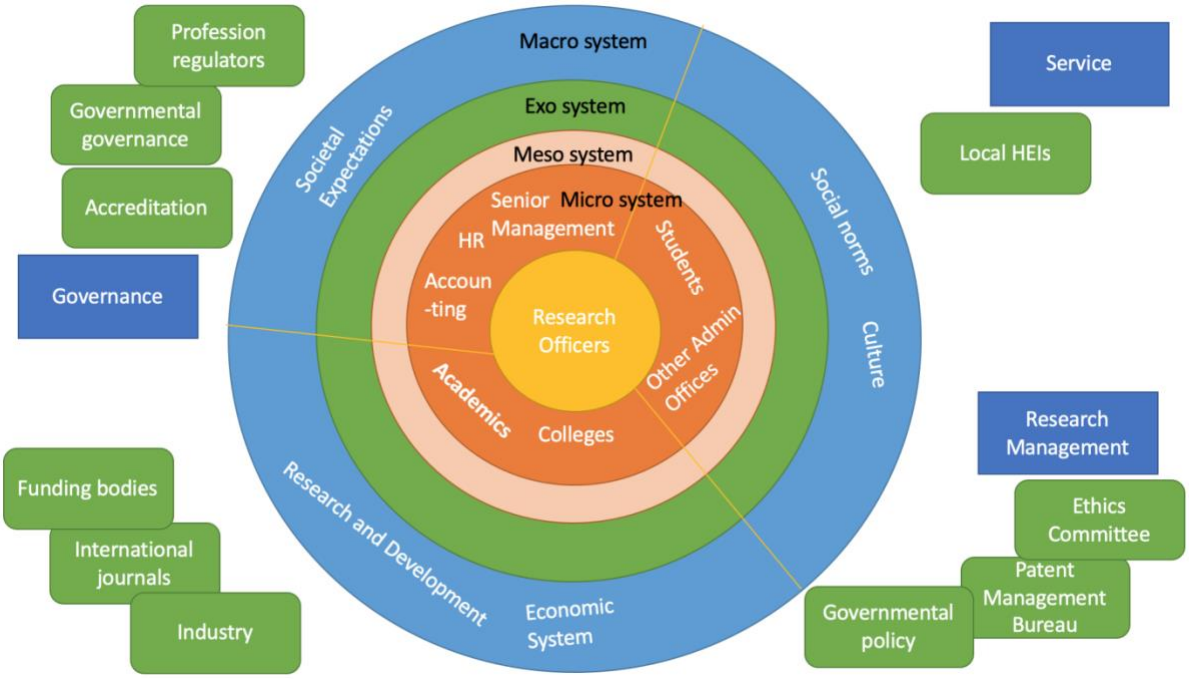


Figure 1 An ecological system model influencing research officers

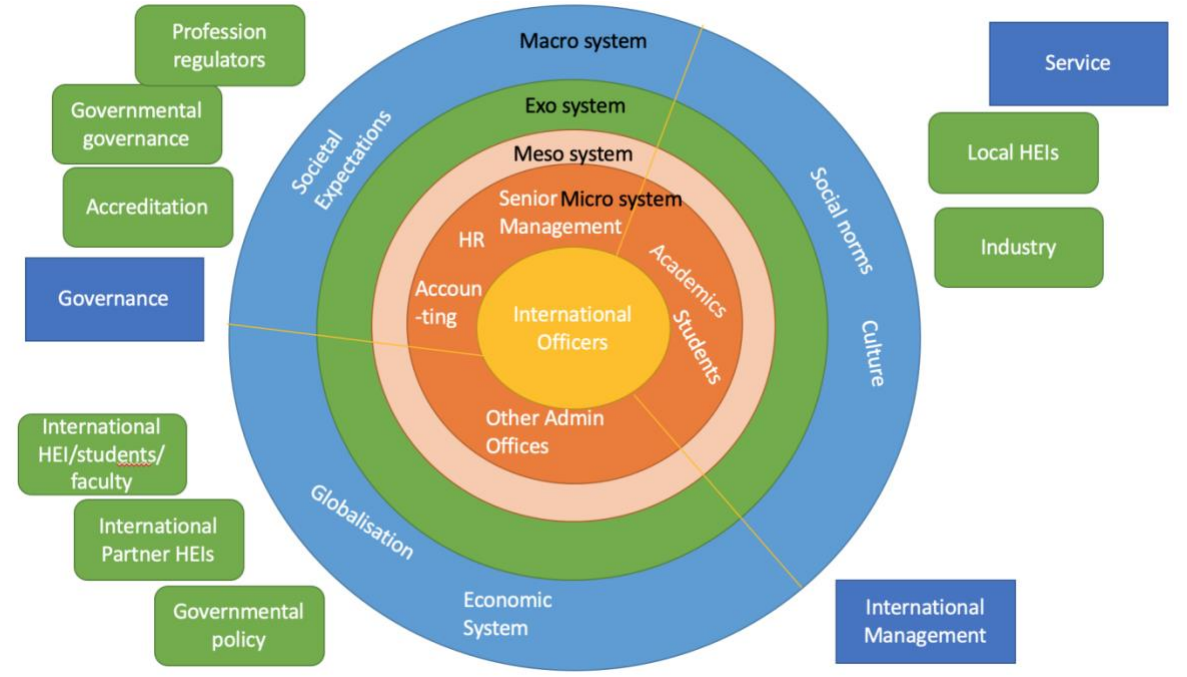


Figure 2 An ecological system model influencing international officers

To view higher education administration as an ecology within an ecological system allows this study to include the influences from all other institutions lining up, and by the frequency of interaction, or an "influential distance", they were located from one another. The ecology influencing research and international officers were examined separately using the literature and job descriptions. Applying Brofenbrenner's model, the microsystem reflects the immediate environment. For both offices, the university forms their immediate environment. The

participating influencing factors include senior management, academics, students, and other academic and administrative units from colleges to accounting offices. The mesosystem focuses on the interrelations between factors in the microsystem, which also fits how the different offices within the university influence one another.

The exosystem looks into social structure and major institutions that do not necessarily involve the examined (Eriksson et al., 2018), and the social institutions identified that influence these two groups of people include the other local higher education institutions, the accreditation units, professional regulators (or professional associations), and the industry. The government influences are separated into governance and policy to reflect the differences in aspects of development and also the source institution in the government. Then, each office is examined separately to identify the social structure or institution that affects them, for research offices, these include the institutions working on patents, copyright, research funding, and ethics; for international offices, these turn to other international higher education institutions and their members, as well as international organisations.

Macrosystem explores the "unprinted rules and norms"(Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 419). For higher education administration in today's world, the factors can extend beyond the local society. However, as the case study is a cross-country comparison, the macrosystem was examined within the national context, or more precisely, the society the discussed administration office is in. Macrosystem factors and Brofenbrenner's model remain similar and point to broader societal institutions, ranging from the economic system, social norms, and culture. The newly added ones were toward the higher education contexts such as the societal expectations. For the research office, there is also the overall research and development theme, and for the international office, globalisation.

The influencing factors can also be grouped under some concepts discussed in the sociology of profession. Higher education administration's interaction with the students, the academics, and all the way to how to influence the culture or social expectations match the context of service, being a provider but also carrying a service-oriented mindset. Another large aspect can be viewed as licensure or access control in the sociology literature, but I picked "governance" to better match the higher education context, and we can see a lot of the influencing factors are related to governance. The third group is related to the ability and specific work realm of these

administrators and thus was categorised as research management and international affairs management. By marking three bigger themes of such a model, it is hoped that this model can help organise topics and directions in a complex and "messy" field, and help keep the research in focus.

Overall, this study therefore views the higher education institution as first, an ecology that owns its actors, locations, and linkages, and second, as an institution acting as the meso-system when the exploration comes to the higher education administration and their formation, regulation, and experience. Within the mesosystem, there were the bureaucratically governed administration offices and the senior management that followed the collegial paradigm co-existing. Together they support different aspects of development within the higher education institutions.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Research questions and design

> How are professional administrative roles in research and international offices of universities being framed, managed, and experienced in higher education in Taiwan and Singapore?

The word choice of professional administrative roles was made with much consideration. The literature that systematically discusses the professionalisation of higher education administration is mainly from Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and European countries such as Germany (Kehm, 2015). The term used in this line of literature to refer to the higher education administration has been gradually centralised to professional service staff. However, this trend is not reflected in the literature from Taiwan and only partially in Singapore, and there is no consistency between the two nations. This study therefore applied a straightforward nomenclature in writing, referring to this profession as higher education administration or university administration interchangeably, and applied the word "professional" when stressing their professionalisation.

Three sub-questions were developed to specify the influences and interactions of the systems with various stakeholders in the ecological system model of higher education administration:

1. How do governmental policies and regulations frame the professions and professionalisation of higher education administration in these two countries?

2. How do higher education organisations define and manage professional roles in research and international affairs?

3. How do individuals working in research and international offices describe their professional identity and career development, and how is their experience of the work?

To tie the multi-level and cross-country comparisons together, this research sought a framework that can both be flexible and facilitate fine-grained exploratory inquiry. A cross-case study approach supplied both, and in such a multiple-layer context it provided the flexibility to address different institutions and groups of people and was thus the research framework established.

3.1.1 Cross-Case Studies

This study aims to provide a portrait of these "invisible workers" (Szekeres, 2004) not only from an institutional, governance, or theoretical angle, but also to at the same time reflect on their professional identity, careers, and recognition. The research methods are built to organise the explanation and reflect the exploration journey.

The framework of the case study was crucial in order to capture the phenomenon's unity in its natural setting (Punch & Oancea, 2014). To illustrate this developing phenomenon in its complex ecology with its many influencers that stretch from stakeholders to social actors, applying the case study framework could concentrate on addressing details and get close to reality (Thomas, 2021). Literature has depicted the ambiguity of the professionalisation of higher education administration (Gornitzka & Larsen, 2004), its undecided nomenclature, and the changing identities. A case study was a research framework that could capture both the explanatory side of the phenomenon and the exploratory side of development and experiences.

The Cross-Case Studies (CCS) approach proposed by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) especially demonstrated a high relevance to this study. Further exploring the topic of higher education administration, some elements appear to be recurring and unable to be ignored. These cover widely the power narrative in a higher education environment, such as governance or policy, and its processual interactions in professionalisation remain relevant. I also found it hard to perfectly "bind" a case study according to the approaches directed by Yin (1994) due to the complexity and deep involvement that higher education administration presented in almost all corners of the higher education sector. The CCS approach stresses its processual exploration around the phenomenon by comparing and contrasting, and the approach values interaction

across different sites, societies, communities, and nations, fitting in the multi-player and multi-site but connected nature of higher education administration.

The CCS approach acted as a framework to investigate a research topic using three axes of comparison: horizontal, which focuses on social productions such as policy and other social phenomena; vertical, which compares from case to case and allows an examination across scales and sites; and transversal, which introduces a tracing over time (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). This approach coincides with the multi-site and multi-stakeholder aspects of higher education administration and accommodates enough attention to examine the broader social actors and their interactions with the higher education administrators.

Carrying constructionism in my philosophical perspective, the case study framework helps incorporate reflexively my own and the participants' personal experiences and understandings, allowing multiple voices to be loyally presented (Simons, 2009, p. 35). The CCS approach draws attention to the context that is "constituted by social interactions, political processes, and economic development across scales and across time" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 13), reflecting also the reality in the complex higher education environment.

Utilising the three axes of comparison pointed out in the CCS approach, I collected governmental and policy documents and conducted document analysis (horizontal axis), tracing the development and experiences of higher education administrators in research and international offices in Taiwan and Singapore (vertical axis), and conducted historical interviews that focus on the changes and transformations of the individual offices (transversal axis). Document and archival analysis were designed to collect official data that were applied to build an understanding of history as well as the modern institutional structure and framework. They also reveal how these organisations construct their interpretations of administration (Silverman, 2014). Therefore, the research stage started with document analysis, which built the foundation of understanding and also acquainted me with the setting before entering the field. To balance the voices from institutions and to capture nuance and hidden power relations, interviews remain the effective methodology to reflect the personal aspect.

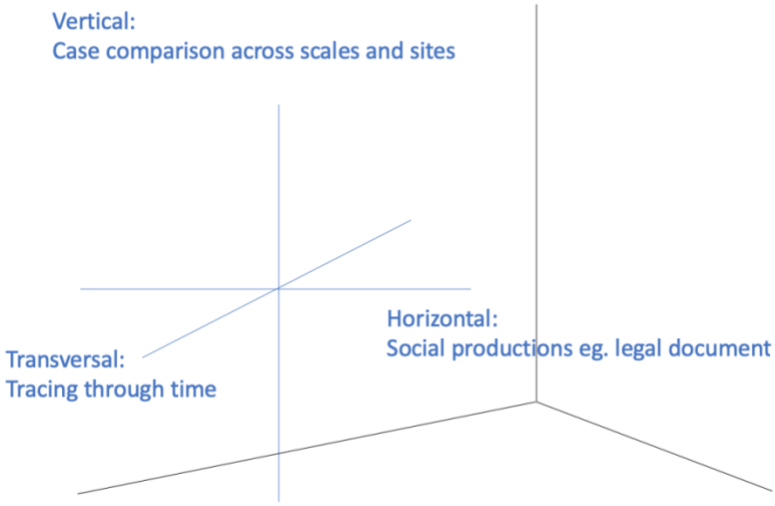


Figure 3 Three axes from the Cross-Case Studies model based on Bartlett & Vavrus (2017)

Utilising the case study approach and its open nature in research methods, the elements in each case can contribute to further analysis and form an understanding of the overall phenomenon of professionalisation of higher education administration. Analysis was examined through an ecological system model, further detailing influences across the nations, universities, and research and international offices. The research methodology was designed to provide a thorough picture of the governmental governance, development focus, institutional guidelines and management, the administrators' personal development, and professional skills.

3.1.2 Research Process

To ensure the case study captures the changing phenomenon and the individual experiences, different research methods were applied to explore aspects of the research questions. This study was thus carried out in three stages:

1. **Document analysis:**

   I started with document analysis, using governmental regulations, higher education institution rules, and other institutional documents. The main purpose of archival analysis is to build an understanding of the institutional perspective, exploring how higher education administration is defined, viewed, and structured. What do their roles cover? What institutional expectations do they need to fulfil? What are their challenges, opportunities, and limitations in the legal regulations? By collecting and browsing through these documents, the information first helped me form an understanding of the field before

starting my fieldwork. They also constructed a reality-based background for me to build questions and select topics that higher education administration might struggle with or be interested in. More importantly, the document analysis contributed to discovering the development trends and existing structure from a legal perspective. The textual evidence provided answers to research sub-question 1 on how higher education administration is framed and regulated.

2. Case studies fieldwork:

In order to investigate the initial thoughts and opinions of the administrators' perspectives, I designed a questionnaire based on the topics from the literature review and my observations from my practitioner experiences, combining initial understandings to explore the phenomenon of professionalisation. The questions were developed to capture the interest areas of the higher education administrators, but this questionnaire was also used as a recruitment method, seeking potential interviewees who are interested in the topic. A section was left to the end for those who were interested to share contact information and join the following interviews. The replies from the questionnaire, therefore, acted as guidance to the crucial topics amongst the higher education administration practitioners, and through questionnaires, eight Taiwanese and three Singaporean participants were self-selected to take part in the interview. Since the data for each university were collected in different sections, I read the replies from the respective universities before the interviews to gain a rough understanding of the office environment.

The data is completed by semi-structured interviews for a profile of the higher education administration in detail. The interviews centred around the topic of professionalisation but also covered many sub-topics derived from the literature, such as identity, training, nomenclature, and so on. The questions from the interview focused on similar topics to the questionnaire but included more personal experiences and career choices. The open-ended questions also allowed more discussions. In each office, participants with longer working experiences were also invited to history interviews, which were designed to understand the development of the administrative offices as public information for development history and background is often scarce. Both interviews started with a personal career description and expanded on relevant topics depending on the participants'

answers. A discussion about the profession and the development of the profession of higher education administration marked the end of the interviews.

3. Cross-case analysis:

By incorporating individual interpretations from the participants, the interviews were analysed to provide an understanding of how higher education administration is experienced. While document analysis helped form the background of how Taiwanese and Singaporean higher education administrators were regulated and defined, individual administrators' perspectives supplemented the findings, providing a realistic touch. The research questions on how the higher education administration is managed and experienced are completed by all data and their various perspectives.

Cross-case analysis is built to explore the research and international offices and their respective development based on the ecological system model (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Different influencing factors in the ecological system of higher education covering institutional to individual levels were identified. The ecological system model framework was developed to examine the profession of higher education administrators from the aspect of time (chronosystem), the societal level (macrosystem), the university level (exosystem), the office level (mesosystem), and the personal level (microsystem).

3.1.3 Development of survey and interview questions

Questions in the survey and interviews generally follow three topics derived from the literature: professionalisation development, identity, and career. To establish the understanding of this study on professionalisation, I turned to the higher education literature that applied a functionalist perspective, identifying elements that mark a profession different from an occupation. Systematic knowledge and licensure were often referred to as a foundation for a profession, and the qualification criteria brought about the relevant training and development topic. The traditionally defined professions usually were equipped with standardised training through education as well as in practice, and sometimes with a final examination for one to be certified (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009). Many papers advocate on enforcing training and advancement programmes (Lewis, 2014; Smith, 2015). They point out it lacks systematic knowledge that can be passed down with step-by-step training programmes, marking the

speciality of the higher education administration when compared to other professions. These prompted this study to dig into the journey of licensure, knowledge, and skills through the topic of training and development.

Another topic of question design followed a well-discussed topic in the recent professionalisation of higher education papers and focused on identity. Identity is socially constructed and keeps being reconfigured and reformed, reflecting the recognition at the moment from the professionals. Identity also includes the idea of "sameness" (Lewis, 2014), and is therefore used to reveal the sense of a group. At the same time, when identity has been in the centre of focus in Australia, the UK, and the U.S., literature from Asia still remains insufficient. Foci on higher education administration in East Asia were usually placed on the governance (Cheung, 2005; Shin, 2018; Welch, 2020) or the policies they implement (Common, 1999; Fu et al., 2020), ignoring the person in the system. This research wishes to investigate a more bottom-up and individualised side of the discussion, and therefore identity becomes an essential and exemplifying topic to explore further and cross-culture. Some topics in the literature that are related to identity include values, beliefs, space, autonomy, and recognition.

The third topic, career, was a combination of many sub-topics explored in the empirical papers researching higher education administration, but crucial in defining a profession. The profession started with a group of people with similar recognition to their work, and the word "career" signified one's endorsement and commitment to an industry. Related issues can also be identified in the literature, including the high turnover rate in the industry (Zheng & Song, 2014), change of task boundary and functions (Punch & Oancea, 2014; Whitchurch, 2008), leadership and governance (Chapman, 1998; Kirkpatrick, 2016; Szekeres, 2004; Tran et al., 2020) and so on. I categorised them into careers, as each issue showed a part of higher education administrators at work and how their career was defined and regulated. I also concentrated on career actions, aiming to capture the more active voice of the administrators by focusing on their actions and choices.

The framework, regulation, and management of higher education administration were all discussed from two perspectives: an institutional one and an individual one. While the first perspective was explored through written records from legal documents to hiring

advertisements, the latter perspective was extracted through the short answer sessions in the survey and interview transcriptions, though both still provide insights into each other's perspectives and the line between the two levels is not clearly divided.

3.1.4 Sampling and recruitment

Taiwanese and Singaporean higher education systems are both highly centralised in management and governance. Therefore, the sampling strategy adopted prioritised higher education policies. Taiwan and Singapore both publish national funding projects to aid and guide higher education development. As a result, many universities concentrated their aspects of development according to the focused areas of the national policy projects. Both states published world-class university-focused policies in the past, with research and publication being central emphases in the sector. Since then, Singaporean policies have moved from building international connections to the cultivation of innovation, while Taiwan continues to aim at internationalisation but with a localisation touch. The national projects have prompted changes in university settings, and new administration offices were established to support these expanding requests. Research and international offices remained two capacity-building facilitating disciplines in administration and both have seen significant growth. Through the policy, funding focus, and other aspects such as the development history and office scale growth, the development of research and international offices highly aligns with the national higher education funding projects and therefore the sampling is based on such projects.

Universities have been selected from the public universities in Singapore and national universities in Taiwan due to their close ties to the government and policy aims. In Taiwan, national universities are considered governmental extensions, as the Ministry of Education reserves major management rights such as the president's appointment and the decision to merge universities. In Singapore, public universities are usually considered a part of public service (Lee & Gopinathan, 2013). These institutions tend to closely follow government regulations and budgetary requirements. Moreover, national universities in Taiwan and public universities in Singapore tend to be more research and internationalisation aligning with government-designed developmental goals, aided by national policy funding. These foci led them to develop more active administration systems.

Examining the universities helps incorporate the institutional perspective and guidelines in the development of higher education administration. Despite the national regulations, universities remain autonomous in their own way, and hence two universities were selected from Taiwan and two from Singapore to explore the multiple institutional discourses. From the list of national universities in Taiwan, a comparison with national higher education policies and its funding list helped develop the contact sequence. The contact started from the two comprehensive universities with more national project funding in each country, then moved down the list according to an integral consideration of national project funding, size and disciplines when a refusal was received. For Singapore, due to the limited number of public universities, I contacted all of them and the participating universities were selected on a first come first serve manner.

To understand higher education administrators and their professionalisation experiences, offices are selected to be the unit of analysis. Like how academics formulate strong identities toward their disciplines, administrators often manifest a stronger identification toward their specific expertise that is developed based on their work. Offices in both Taiwan and Singapore operate as individual units and display autonomous decision-making on individual budgets and office affairs. While universities play the roles of their employer, their manager, and their professional service organisation, communicating directly with the office establishes closer contact with the focused practitioners of this study.

Institution recruitment

Considering the hierarchical nature of higher education in Taiwan and Singapore, permission from the senior management was crucial to conducting research on-site and was considered the most economical approach (Cohen et al., 2018). Emails seeking approval to participate in the research were sent to the heads of the research and international offices. If there was a specific vice president or vice chancellor for research management and international affairs, they were also contacted with the related offices copied in the email.

As the administration offices can be considered a closed environment, setting a gatekeeper can help gain access (Silverman, 2014) and build trust with the other office members as well as the heads of office. The heads were asked to recommend a dedicated contact person to act as the gatekeeper and facilitate communication. The role gatekeepers played was essential in

communication and sampling in this study, as they were the contacts facilitating the communication and were internal colleagues to the participants. Three secretaries volunteered to assist with the communication after the (sometimes verbal) consent from the head and turned into the gatekeepers in Taiwan, and another secretary was assigned the gatekeeper role by the head of office. In Taiwan, secretary roles in the administrative offices are limited to candidates with civil service qualifications. Their full-time roles include assistance with daily operations and internal communication, sometimes between the manager and officers, and sometimes this involves communication with other administrative offices. Singapore has a different management structure, where the heads of offices are often professionals and not academic managers. Singaporean gatekeepers demonstrated a different composition, a team leader and a head of the office self-selected for the communication facilitation.

I established tailored communication strategies for each participating office, with consultation and discussion with individual gatekeepers. As most gatekeepers preferred minimum communication regarding the research to limit the disruption to the office, most communication and follow-ups were through gatekeepers. Only in two out of six offices did the gatekeeper agree for me to send the survey invitation directly to members of the office. In the other four offices, an email with the introduction and aims of the study was sent with the survey link to the gatekeepers, and the gatekeepers then forwarded the email to the office members. Due to gatekeepers' suggestions, the survey duration was made more flexible than the originally designed one month to cover the fieldwork period – the longest reached six months. While gatekeepers participated in the communication and identification of potential interviewees, they had no access to any form of answers from the participants. This was especially made aware in the two offices where the gatekeepers also had management responsibilities, to avoid any influence of unequal power relations.

In total, two Singaporean offices from University C and D, and two volunteers from another office participated in the research, as well as four Taiwanese offices from University A and B. It was more difficult to establish contact with Singaporean offices, and their website also contained less public information and often lacked contact information, with only the office mailbox listed. The head of the office was also not always listed on the office site, making the reaching out process more difficult and more top-down, as the publicly accessible information was those of the vice-chancellors. However, members from some Singaporean research and

international offices have more valid voices in decision-making. In two offices, the invitation email and research information were shared with the office members. One turned down the requests as most members were busy despite the senior management's expressed interest, and two volunteers joined from another office on a personal basis though the office could not accommodate the participation. Singaporean offices were also split into smaller units than Taiwanese ones, and there were fewer members in each individual office. With the original design that was introduced in the email, up to 5 members from each office would be invited to interview, this further increased the difficulty for contact in smaller offices as it stands for a higher percentage of participants.

University A was established in the early 1900s in Taiwan, with more than 16,000 students in 2023, this university provides undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral degree programmes. University A has more than 500 higher education administrators. Regarding international cooperation, international students made up close to 15% of the student body in 2020. University A partners with close to 300 international universities, providing exchange student programmes, visiting faculty programmes, international internship programmes, and joint degree programmes. In 2023, University A received more than 180 million USD in research grants, including governmental grants, industry cooperation, and other funding.

University B is also a university founded in the early 1900s in Taiwan, with more than 20,000 students in 2023. It provides all levels of degree programmes including doctoral education. University B has more than 1,000 higher education administrators. More than 15% of students were international in 2020. University B has established more than 500 cooperation programmes with international universities, covering member exchanges, internships, and joint degree programmes. University B received more than 300 million USD in research grants in 2023.

University C was established as a modern university in the late 1990s, with more than 25,000 students and 1,500 faculty members (excluding research staff) in 2023. It is one of the biggest universities in Singapore. Combining executive and support staff, there are more than 3,000 higher education administrators at University C. More than 30% of students have international backgrounds, University C has extensive international cooperation across research, member

exchanges, and double and joint degree programmes. University C received more than 600 million USD in research grants in 2023.

University D is a younger Singaporean higher education institution, and its size is much smaller compared to the other three participating universities. With a student population that is less than half the size of the others, University D still provides all levels of degree programmes, from bachelor's, master's, and doctoral training. Academic endeavour only started recently at University D, but the university is already demonstrating decent research results and attracting external research funding.

Individual recruitment

Participants in the questionnaire and interviews were recruited on a self-selecting base in the beginning. While the questionnaire was sent to all members of the office, there was no incentive nor mandatory measure for one to take part. There was no target number set for questionnaire replies as the questionnaire acts more as a reference for interview topics and interviewee recruitment. Up to 10 interviewees were expected from each university, including five administrators from the international office and five from the research office. Interviewees were recruited through the questionnaire where they can leave contact information and enrol in the following in-depth interviews. However, as there were insufficient participants and a low number of survey replies initially, I started a discussion with the gatekeepers and asked for a recommended list of members for an invitation, as well as snow-balling. As the self-selecting participants were the first ones to be interviewed, the sampling criteria for the invitation recommendation aimed at increasing diversity.

With survey links disseminated, anyone who was interested in the topic amongst the participating offices could join and further sign up to participate in the interviews. Nine responses were received from two Singaporean universities, and 30 survey responses were received from two universities in Taiwan. There was concern about the sampling of the participants if it would be of influence when they were first approached and "filtered" by the gatekeeper, but as most gatekeepers remained highly interested in the research topic, and in some cases, they were the ones who go through different meetings and reports to have the research access granted by the senior management, the concern of their influences on the individual's opinions was lessened.

After a few weeks, when the number of volunteers stopped changing, I reached out to the gatekeepers of the offices and, according to the existing interviewee profile, asked them to recommend potential participants who could represent an aspect less addressed in the office. For example, when there were more volunteers with extensive work experience, I asked the gatekeeper to recommend someone comparatively new to the office. Other criteria included task teams, age, and gender, in the order described. After confirming the recommendation list from the gatekeepers, either the gatekeeper or I reached out to the candidates and invited them to join this study.

35 interviews were conducted from research or international offices in Taiwan and Singapore (*Table 1*). In Singapore, two offices and two participants joined the study, with seven individual interviews and three office history interviews. In Taiwan, four offices participated in the research, with 18 individual interviews and seven history interviews conducted. Interview time lasted between 45 minutes to 120 minutes, but the majority was around one hour.

University	Nation	Research Office	International Office
University A	Taiwan	7 (including 2 history)	7 (including 2 history)
University B	Taiwan	5 (including 2 history)	6 (including 1 history)
University C	Singapore	3 (including 1 history)	2 (including 1 history)
University D	Singapore	5 (including 1 history)	0

Table 1 Interview number and types by university and office

Table 2 shows participant information including their task teams, experiences in the higher education sector, and gender. Besides the five online interviews, 30 interviews were conducted in person. For anonymity concerns, participants' task teams do not fully reflect their titles. I simplified the research officers into those who work directly with research support (Research Support Manager), such as programme, ethics, and funding management, and those who support wider institutional purposes such as industry cooperation, policy, and office administration (Research Institutional Support Manager). The international officers are categorised into International Affairs Manager and Global Student Affairs Manager, depending on whether their tasks range involve working directly with students or not. The application of "manager" here is a reflection on participants' titles as most of their original work titles are

managers. The choice of words is also an attempt to further emphasise the inconsistent and confusing terminology in this field.

The experience calculated showed participants' accumulated working years in higher education-related roles, including past jobs where relevant. 11 participants have worked in higher education for more than 10 years, and 13 participants joined the sector within the last 5 years. With also nine participants working in related roles for a substantial time, more than 5 years but less than 10 years, this study aims to have evenly attributed participant experiences to examine different opinions from the more junior employees to those who are more experienced. Eight participants have had experiences in other higher education administration posts and transferred offices or institutions to the current positions. Participants included 27 females and six males, 11 of whom have less experience in their current job. Two participants contributed to two interviews, one individual and one history separately.

12 participants joined the study using self-select method from the survey, 10 were invited directly based on the recommendation of the gatekeepers, and 11 were invited directly from the gatekeepers or through snow-balling. Many volunteers joined in the initial stage were more experienced administrators, and therefore when consulting with the gatekeepers regarding further participant recruitment, we prioritise inviting less experienced members in the offices.

A1	Experience (yr)	Gender	A2	Experience (yr)	Gender
Research Institutional Support Manager 1	5+	F	Global Student Affairs Manager 1	5+	F
Research Institutional Support Manager 2	5-	F	International Affairs Manager 1	5+	F
Research Support Manager 1	5-	F	Global Student Affairs Manager 2	10+	F
Research Support Manager 2	5-	F	International Affairs Manager 2	5-	F
Research Support Manager 3 (online)	5-	F	Global Student Affairs Manager 3 (online)	5-	M

Research Support Manager 4	10+	F	International Affairs Manager 3	10+	F
Research Support Manager 5	10+	F	International Affairs Manager 4	10+	F
B1			B2		
Global Student Affairs Manager 1	5+	F	Research Institutional Support Manager 1	10+	M
International Affairs Manager 1	5+	M	Research Support Manager 1	10+	F
International Affairs Manager 2	5-	M	Research Institutional Support Manager 2 (online)	5-	F
International Affairs Manager 3	5-	F	Research Institutional Support Manager 3	10+	F
Global Student Affairs Manager 2	5-	F	Research Support Manager 1	10+	F
Global Student Affairs Manager 3	10+	F			
C1	Experience (yr)	Gender	C2	Experience (yr)	Gender
International Affairs Manager 1	5+	F	Research Support Manager 1 (online)	5+	F
International Affairs Manager 2 (online)	5-	F	Research Support Manager 2	5-	M
			Research Support Manager 2	5-	M
D1					
Research Support Manager 1	10+	M			
Research Support Manager 2	5+	F			

Research Support Manager 3	10+	F
Research Support Manager 4	5+	F
Research Institutional Support Manager 1	5+	F

Table 2 Interviewee basic information by office

3.2 Data collection

The interview period covered between September 2022 to October 2023, with fieldwork taking place in person between October 2022 to January 2023, across three different cities and two nations. The overlap with the ending year of the global pandemic Covid-19 also meant that the preparation for fieldwork had to happen online. Three interviews in Taiwan and one in Singapore were also conducted online due to logistics difficulties, and interview questions were adjusted according to the trail participants' feedbacks. During the fieldwork, I visited all participating offices in person at least once.

There were differences between various communication modes such as offline, online, phone calls, or emails, in how they establish rapport. Compared to online interviews, it is easier to identify topics of interests in offline interviews, and more snowballing occurs in offline situations. For example, one offline participant seemed distant and uninterested to our discussion as they constantly checked their phone, and only started to lean forward when we discussed more management related topics. Noticing the difference, I explored more questions regarding management and governance. Similar observation is more difficult to be picked up in an online interview since the screen is limited in view and often, I could only assume the participants had urgent matters to attend to when their focus shifted. A difference was shown between phone calls and emails. After contacting Singaporean institutions mainly by sending invitation emails and set up online calls to discuss for four months, I recruited only one participant from one office. This number quickly snowballed to three in the same week after I travelled to Singapore and interviewed the first interviewee offline. While I was in Singapore, I also called the offices I contacted previously without replies and established two more contacts. One of them later agreed to participate.

The start of my fieldwork date arrangement post Covid-19 travel restrictions also collided with the overwhelming workload for the administrator to restart internationalisation. In the participating offices, especially the international offices, I was also told that there was an increase in the staff leaving rate during the past few years. All contributed to lengthening the recruitment process as many replied that they were too busy.

3.2.1 Governmental and institutional documents

The first stage of the research lay in document analysis, collecting official documents on higher education administrators. Researchers suggested that to enter research, utilise second-hand information to build an understanding of the space being researched and identify the major power relationships in order first, and not fall into empty words and overinterpretations (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2008). To understand how the higher education administration was viewed and constructed in nations where higher education was more centralised, legal documents, governmental documents, and governmental announcements can help reveal how the job of higher education administrators was framed, portrayed, and regulated.

The prior reaching out and contacting institutions took six months from April 2022. In the six months, I also searched and read through public archives of governmental offices and the legal system to build an initial understanding of the regulation of higher education administration. A second collection of supplementing documents was later conducted between March and October 2023, filling in gaps from knowledge attained from the field and broadening the scope of the original legal documents.

Public information from the governments of Taiwan and Singapore was explored. The document search covered legal orders, policies, and other entries such as procedural documents published by the governmental institutions, and then once the participating universities were confirmed, a search on the institutional website for related guideline documents and announcements was added.

The documents were collected through an online search, not all universities have detailed records on the related information of the administrators such as management, regulations, and hiring conditions, so hiring advertisements were included to ensure a wider coverage of

description. Hiring advertisements provide information including the required qualities, desired skills, and sometimes a glimpse into the working conditions, and is added to supplement the limited public information about administrators' jobs. As they tend to be time-sensitive and few in each university, the advertisements were collected from the two biggest Taiwanese and Singaporean universities instead of the participating universities.

By covering the different layers in the ecology system theory, the study builds a closer depiction of how the system frames, regulates, and manages higher education administrators. Being a group of people less talked about, there lack of more direct descriptions of the environment these professionals work in on a day-to-day base. However, through the legal documents, framework and regulation that define the higher education administration can be discovered. The list of examined documents included can be found in Appendix I.

I visited the Taiwan and Singapore web database of laws and applied the keyword "education", and then selected the relevant ones to higher education, excluding those concerning the student or external organisations. Through the selected documents, I then snowballed through the laws, regulations, and acts mentioned. Websites of the Ministry of Education were another source to capture the main higher education policies, ongoing national projects, and related regulations. Once the universities confirmed the invitation, I visited their website to collect the HR regulations and hiring advertisements.

In Singapore, few related laws and regulations were found. As there was nothing specifically written for higher education administration, the main document this study refers to for context was their national *Employment Act, Education Act*, and the policy of SkillFuture for hiring, the individual university acts and related higher education policies were also included to examine the specific sector. However, beyond the two topics, there was not a lot of detailed information regarding the employment and regulations of higher education administrators.

Taiwan was much different. Besides the main education laws like the *University Act* [大學法, daxue fa] and Act Governing the Appointment of Educators [教育人員任用條例, jiaoyu renyuan renyong tiaoli] that specifically define and regulate people working in a university, since those who work in a national university were considered civil servants and the higher education administrators were no exceptions, the laws, regulations, and acts regarding civil

servants that are relevant were included. These documents provided a picture of the employment path, the hiring criteria, annual review, promotion, transfer to another position, to retirement. Moreover, HR offices in Taiwanese national universities also tended to keep an open section on the legal documents, some separated into those for the faculty members, the administrators, and student assistants. The record also covered details on the different hiring conditions for civil servants, contractors, to part-time workers, and their packages and benefits were all regulated in different documents.

Overall, official documents regulating higher education administrators were collected before sending out the survey, these documents included laws, acts, and regulations at the governmental level concerning higher education administrators, or in the case where such regulations were missing, the general employment laws and regulations that were applied to higher education administrators; and rules, regulations, and hiring advertisements on human resource management at the institutional level. A full document title list was included in Appendix I.

3.2.2 Questionnaire

The survey takes the form of a questionnaire (full list of question see Appendix II), designed to take place before entering the field in order to establish a basic understanding of higher education administration. The measure was instated to minimise the influence of my identity as a past administrator and not to instil my interpretation of the reality and the development onto the higher education administrators. Through the application of a questionnaire, I aimed to first explore and understand the topics by testifying some knowledge gained from the literature, then further align the interview discussions according to the on-ground concerns.

Six offices in four universities accepted the participation request and took part in the survey. The questionnaire was sent in a link to the gatekeeper of the office. Most gatekeepers preferred forwarding the link and invitation email to the office members to not interrupt the offices' daily operation. While it provided the chance for the study to be delivered by an internal colleague, it was also more difficult for me to encourage and chase more participation afterwards.

39 participants handed in their questionnaire replies, including nine from two Singaporean universities and 30 from two Taiwanese universities. The large number difference also reflected the difficulty in research participant recruitment. It was hoped that the questionnaire could be used as an understanding-building step for the participants for the study and self-selecting participants for interviews can be recruited through it, however, only 16 agreed to take part in the interviews through questionnaires.

3.2.3 Interview

The interview was a method agreed to best explore "how individuals perceive, organize, give meaning to, and express their understandings of themselves, their experiences, and their worlds" (Mishler, 1991, p. ix). It presents how the participants' recognitions link social, cultural, and personal contexts, and is also a method widely used in research regarding higher education administrators, their job boundary (Whitchurch, 2009), and their professionalisation (Gornitzka & Larsen, 2004; Rixom, 2011).

Following the feedback from questionnaires initially, the three themes of training and development, career, and professional identity were explored further in the interviews. There were 12 questions in the semi-structured interviews (full question list in Appendix III). The questions started with career actions, exploring the participant's work experiences from the past, and current, to the future professional development. The second part of the interview was on professional identity, exploring their work experiences and nomenclature. Their interactions with other members in the universities were also explored to situate their professional identities in an ecology. Finally, with linking questions examining how closely they identify as a professional, questions investigate how they view, reflect, and experience the role. The interviews took a personal angle, encouraging more sharing as individuals instead of wearing their administrators' hats.

Besides the interviews focusing on individual experiences, "history interviews" also took place. Due to the scarce information on institutional development and unpublicised institutional regulations, interviews with the more senior members in the offices took a slightly different approach. The history interviews start with questions focusing on office development including institutional structure, employee numbers and tasks, and the procedural processes including

recruitment, promotion, and training. Some personal aspects continue in the discussions, exploring their definitions of professionals and career actions.

The study conducted 35 interviews and recruited 32 interviewees from four different universities, with two participants taking part in first an individual interview and a history interview separately. The interview length ranges between 45 minutes to 120 minutes. It was easier to recruit participants in the Taiwanese offices where there were contacts whom I used to work with. These former colleagues were excited about the project and enthusiastic to take part. They also took a more proactive role in snowballing the message, providing feedback on the questions, and exploring the different aspects of the questions with me. Through them, I started to see more layers to my original questions, and that understanding helped me comprehend other interviewees' answers from multiple perspectives and enabled me to explore more of them.

The initial self-selecting participants have had longer experiences in the office. While it was very helpful for the investigation into their responses to the institution and the changes and development of the offices, there is a higher recognition of their professional identities. I then started to become curious about whether such consistency also existed in the administrators with less experience in higher education administration, and included more junior members of the office.

Overall, I applied a friendly and enthusiastic manner during the interviews. In the first few interviews where I used a more polite tone, the responses tended to be shorter and fewer side-topics were explored. Noticing the difference, I tried to step out of a "researcher's perspective" and from time to time made the interviews more conversational. Under the premise of confidentiality being protected, I also shared some of my experiences with the interviewees, which usually sparked more feedback and comparisons of their experiences, further developing the interviews. While conducting the more conversational approach, I was always aware of leading the participants in their answers, however, it was not usually the case. The participants provided consistent answers and thorough details according to their experiences, seldom influenced by my opinions.

The interviews brought me many unexpected views and observations of the higher education administrators outside the traditional research realm that I originally presumed. Knowing my

administrator background, many also asked questions about my choice of career. The way the interactions happened with me and the way interviewees talked about the other members in the interviews both signified an insider dynamic and showed a collective recognition of higher education administrators being a group, as well as a common interest in career development.

3.3 Data analysis

To cover the four aspects listed in the research question, different materials and different levels of stakeholders were investigated. To examine how the administration is framed, regulated, and managed, documents from the government and higher education institutions were collected. Through the laws, regulations, policy documents, institutional HR procedures, and hiring advertisements, I applied a deductive coding measure to examine the depiction and framework they carved to define the higher education administration. Deductive coding is a more top-down method, by examining the data and comparing them to a list of pre-developed provisional codes developed from the literature and supplemented with topics identified from piloting interviews, the codes are then assigned to the documents. Individual perspectives were supplemented to the picture from information derived from in-vivo coding to reflect the original concepts delivered by the individual administrators.

The experience aspect cannot fit into the deductive coding frame. As experience consists of more than just external events, but also varies with personal and internal perception and cognition, interviews were considered more suitable in the portraying and building of experiences. I applied a different coding strategy with an initial inductive coding in order to present the words and demonstrate the perceptions of the administrators. In-vivo coding was used, capturing the verbatim words from the participants and reflecting a closer interpretation of the experiences of the participants.

A table presenting the pairing of research questions, data sources, and coding methods is below (*Table 3*), portraying how the data are used and analysed to provide an understanding of the questions.

Research questions	Data sources	Coding methods	Focus

Framework	Documents	Deductive coding	Comparison with literature and existing issues
	Interview	In-vivo coding	Identity and recognition
Regulation Management	Documents	Deductive coding	Comparison with literature and existing issues
	Interview	In-vivo coding	Value judgement and interaction with institution in social context
Experience	Survey short answers	In-vivo coding	Reflect the participants' voice
	Interview	In-vivo coding	Reflect the participants' voice

Table 3 Research methods and foci based on research questions

3.3.1 Deductive coding in document analysis

Deductive coding was applied to the governmental documents, generating a framework from a pre-developed list of codes (see *Table 4*)to understand more about what regulates and frames the higher education administration. A list of keywords was derived from relevant literature, including the sociology of profession and higher education administration. Topics that emerged from piloting interviews that were not captured by the literature were also added in to provide a more comprehensive examination of frameworks. The piloting interviews included three past employees from international offices and two current employees from an administration office. The participants' work covered administration, international affairs management, research, teaching, to policy making. These provisional codes were then applied to the documents for an investigation and comparison between the current regulations and focus in Taiwan and Singapore.

After the first round of examination of the documents, I noticed some repeated topics in the legal documents were not captured by the provisional codes. These "bottom-up" topics were turned into codes and added to the list for a second round of examination to ensure a complete representation of the status quo. Another source of the list of codes was therefore from the documents themselves, supplementing from yet another real-world perspective which was more governance-based. By adding in codes from piloting interviews and documents, I try to avoid the bias that could be associated with deductive coding with a predetermined

recognition of the topic, and from my own presuppositions but be inclusive and reflective of what was happening in the practice.

The provisional codes include Licensure, Control, Training, Service, Association, Governance, Identity, Boundary, Academics, Professional service staff, Development, Contractor, Civil servants, Hiring, Skills, Contract, Budget, Manager, Career, Profession, and Professional. More details on each provisional code were as follows:

Source	Topic	Code	Aspect of Research Questions
Functionalist approach in Sociology of Profession	Licensure	Licensure	Regulated(R)
	Control of access (profession)	Control	R
	Systematic Knowledge	Training	Framed (F)
	Service Mindset	Service	F
	Association	Association	R
	Profession	profession	F- Recognition of the profession
		Professional	F- Recognition of skills or attitude
Higher Education Administration Professionalisation Literature	Institution	Governance	Managed (M)
	Individual	Identity	F
	Job coverage	Boundary	F
		Development	F
	Dichotomy	Academics	F
	Role terminology	Professional service staff	F
		Manager	F
Piloting interviews	Role terminology	Contractor	F
		Civil servant	F
	HR regulations and requirements	Hiring	M
		Skills	M

		Contract	R
		Budget	R
	Individual	Career	F
Documents	Role terminology	Educator	F
		Staff	F
	HR regulations and requirements	Budget	R

Table 4 Preliminary list of codes and sources in literature

Two discussions in literature were applied to the codes generation process as they related closer: the functionalist approach in the sociology of profession, and literature on higher education administration professionalisation. Licensure, Control, Training, Service, Profession, Professional, and Association come from the functionalist literature, being the common elements described as criteria of a profession that coincide with the research questions, to find out profession-forming elements. Governance, Identity, Boundary, Academics, Professional service staff, and Development were discussed more frequently in higher education administration professionalisation literature, depicting the institutional interaction, individual foci, and a dichotomy factor that were examined. Contractor, Civil servant, Hiring, Skills, Contract, Manager, and Career were derived from general topics from the piloting interviews, some of the topics overlapped with the nomenclature literature, but others provided me with the industry jargon and points worth further exploration, and were therefore included. Human resource terminology and regulations cover most aspects that were included in the interview, so was listed as one of the main categories.

Besides the provisional codes, topics repeated in the documents and demonstrated importance were added to the list before the second round of coding, to keep the codes close to the reality these documents portray. For example, “Budget” was added as a code as legal documents in Taiwan show a strong division linked with the specific budget used to hire the different administrative roles. In Taiwanese universities, the packages administrators receive also vary according to the project or policy budget they were hired on. With such direct influences, the budget was added in as a code. "Educator" and "Staff" were also added following the topics of HR regulations and requirements to reflect the terminology and descriptions in legal documents from Taiwan.

A first round of coding was done with the pre-developed codes, while new codes emerging from the documents were noted down. After the coding, potential codes were examined to see whether they were crucial across different documents. If they demonstrate importance and relation to higher education administration that were not presented by existing codes, they were added to the coding list. A second sound of coding was then done on the documents to ensure consistency and representativeness. The final list of codes was categorised into framework, regulation, and management according to their relevancy, and analytical memo-writing under each theme was used to produce an analysis to summarise each theme separately before being compared to other data from surveys and/or interviews.

The provisional codes were categorised according to the aspects they answered in the research question. For example, legally bound topics such as governance, licensure, and contracts were related to regulation, the institutional requirement on hiring and skills reveal how the administrators were managed, and topics involving the individuals such as identity, training, and development were related to experiences. Experience will later be supplemented from the answers in interviews to deliver the administrators' voice.

After two rounds of deductive coding, the final document analysis was written up using the analysis memo-writing method, first on the identified topics from coding, then combined into different themes. To weave pieces of evidence across documents and topics together, thematic analysis was applied. Analysis of themes helps "describe the essence" (Morse, 2008, p. 727) of the main topic while "keep[ing] the stories contextualised, and maintaining meaning" (Morse, 2008, p. 727). Reading into the lines and interpreting the data, I gathered the analysis under themes that sometimes combine a few codes and describe them in the local systems formed by legal documents. Thematic analysis relies on the context of the data, and therefore is not as generalisable, which fits the motivation for a case study framework, to dive into the status quo of the institutions but remain in the institutional context.

The final codes were also assigned into themes reflective of their relations to the research question. According to the memos written on each code, themes that form and capture the particular system, procedures, and culture-defining higher education administrators for Taiwan and Singapore were identified and analysed. Three document analyses summarising each

aspect of the research question were recorded based on the coding result and thematic analysis, depicting the institutional perspective.

3.3.2 Inductive coding in interviews

Aiming to provide more "ground-up" knowledge and an honest depiction of the higher education administrators' voices, I applied the induction coding approach to explore interviews of participants' experiences and interpretations. Adapting Braun and Clarke 's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis and the six phases analytic process, I focused on the exploration of experiential and latent meanings. Analysis was not a linear progress following each phase, and I revisited the first two phases of familiarising with the data and generating codes multiple times to retrieve contextual codes embedded in interviews.

To preserve participants' voices, I applied in-vivo coding in the early phase to generate codes. In-vivo coding is a method that helps deliver a personal voice and can reveal issues such as identity (Saldaña, 2021), making it a valuable method for the theme of the framework. In-vivo coding was applied to help narrate the main theme, identity, and life story of the participants in their own words. It was designed to first explore the participant's experience while lessening the interruptions of my interpretation and positionality. In-vivo coding was deemed as a "verbatim principle, using terms and concepts drawn from the words of the participants themselves" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 138), and a good coding method to examine the participants' discourses, cultures, and worldviews. It was applied in this study to capture the administrator's experiences in the research question and provide an answer using the administrators' voices.

I listened to all interview audio recordings at least twice and maintained reflective memos for each participant. These memos were subsequently compared to the field notes I recorded during the interviews, which documented observations of participants' responses, topics they expressed particular interest in, and their immediate reactions. These reflections enabled me to go beyond the participants' answers, allowing for a deeper understanding of their choices and interpretations. During the second review, I noted the emotional responses in the transcripts, which in reading added a more nuanced analysis of the topics and stances that participants considered significant. Following this, I conducted in-vivo coding, integrating what I've noticed

from the audio interviews, transcripts, notes during the interviews, and the reflective memos of each participant's profile.

Sub-themes were developed in English, using more deductive and topical approaches. The in-vivo codes are grouped in the original language of the interview and by each participant and categorised by the topic the codes addressed. When identified topics were repeated among participants, all codes under the same topic were compared together and sub-themes were built using titles within three words. Naeem et al. (2023)'s 6Rs for Keyword selection principle helped inform the selection of words during the development of sub-themes, including assessment based on Realness, Richness, Repetition, Rationale, Repartee, and Regal. While the first three were self-explanatory, "rationale" connected back to theoretical or philosophical ideas in literature, "repartee" reflected stimulating discussion or consideration from data, and "regal" referred to central ideas that can provide new perspectives. sub-themes were then examined and compared with the codes to be organised into themes of influence. Multiple rounds of understanding, interpreting, and categorising sub-themes led to the final theme map, where the top layer of themes was identified as influencing factors and placed into different ecological systems for further examination. To address the aspect of the framework, document analysis was examined along with the in-vivo coded interview analysis, to integrate both perspectives into the final theme map.

Analytical memo-writing (Saldaña, 2021) was applied throughout the coding process to help with analysis. Memos were written to develop sub-themes and to identify themes. In the memos, I put together in-vivo codes across universities, related observations, and potential literature discussions. The memos were not organised and comprehensive writing, but they provided a testing ground to include various perspectives and search for a theme to accommodate discussions. Themes were developed to reflect the experiences and understanding of the administrators, and through careful reflections and observations, they were expected to record a realistic aspect of the administration and their on-ground practices.

3.3.3 Ecological system model: Data integration and comparison

The multi-layered and cross-case studies design coincides with the ecological system model. All different elements within micro, meso, exo, macro, and chronosystems have direct influences on the development of the subject, higher education administration, but each element and

system also interact and shape each other, making it impossible to examine any singular part and ignore the multi-way shaping process. By integrating data from governments, institutes, and individuals, and examining them under topics from aspects of framing, regulating, managing, and experiencing, I selected the main agencies according to their participation in each topic to form observation through this cross-case analysis.

By combining the different social actors, mechanisms, and personal values and interpretations, perspectives from institutional or individual levels are both presented in providing an observation and analysis of the questions. The deductive approach of document analysis drew a boundary of the topic, and the inductive approach enriched the individual perceptions and interpretations. While institutional data draws restrictions to higher education administration, the individual data supplements its implementation in reality and the administrators' reactions to the boundaries. The cross-case analysis helps investigate the research questions on professionalisation in different groups of people by the parameter appropriate to the scale of the questions.

Two rounds of thematic analysis were conducted based on the initial codes through the software Nvivo. Coding and memos were used as methodologies to help connect the dots to lines, and the cross-case analysis was designed to connect the lines to a surface, with the overall analysis linking different agencies involved in the phenomenon, it built a 3-dimensional space instead of a simplified line to observe and understand this complex theme of professionalisation of higher education administration, matching the cross-case studies framework. Applied with the theoretical framework combining the socio-ecological system and the professional service literature, the themes were allocated into different systems based on the level of influence they exerted on the professionalisation of higher education administration. This allowed me to explore different topics within the ecological environment more visually and built the analysis without a set institutional limitation.

Codes were grouped into categories at the individual level and then compared across universities and nations to identify themes. Themes were allocated to different levels in the socio-ecological system according to the level of direct influence they had on the higher education administration, and the initial findings produced by the identified ecological system help establish the outline of this study. A full layout of the themes and their locations in the ecological system model is below as *Figure 4*.

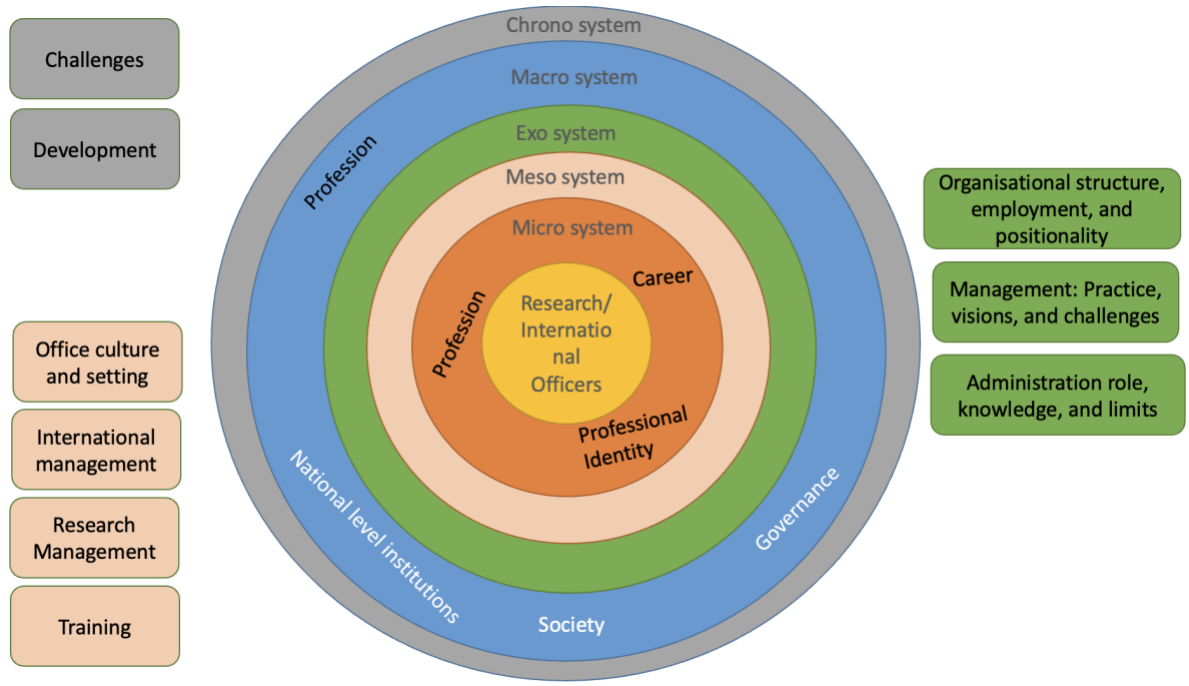


Figure 4 Socio-ecological system model of higher education administration based on coding themes (Appendix V)

Rippling from the research and international officers, this homocentric system model helped lay down the structure of this study. The findings chapter started from the macrosystem, which is included in this document as Chapter 3, and will be Chapter 4 in the final thesis. The macrosystem presents the wider external influencing factor outside of universities, and the two main themes identified in the macrosystem covered social actors (social influences and national-level institutions) and the overall higher education administration profession. While reviewing the influences from social actors such as government, society, or other industrial agencies, macrosystem analysis also reviews the profession of higher education administration, its making, recognition, obstacles, and so on, above individual perception or institutional guidelines. The next part explores one system closer to the research and international officers, the exosystem. It depicts the professional service organisation that regulates and manages the higher education administrators and the university. The exosystem includes influencing themes covering three dimensions: how the university's institutional structure, guidelines, and positions influence the administrators; how the administration is viewed, understood, and limited; and how administrators are managed as well as how they interact with the management. The next system addressed is the mesosystem, the closest organisation to the profession -- their respective office. Chapter 6, mesosystem, brings discussion office setting and culture, training,

and the specific research management and international management, examining whether they are deemed as skills or closer to one's identity.

The microsystem and chronosystem are presented in Chapter 7. The microsystem discusses their personal views and recognition that are the closest to professionalisation, which involves their professional identity, work values, personally recognised skills, and perceptions and actions on their career. Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) designed only one factor in the chronosystem, time. While time presents the transversal axis in the cross-case studies, it has been incorporated into the data and previous analysis, hence the chronosystem focuses instead on the broader issues that occurred across time: the development and challenges of the higher education administration profession. While the microsystem concerns personal development not yet involved with organisations with the sub-topics as professional identity and values, the chronosystem addresses the element of time and discusses development and challenges. Both address changes and development through time, one at a personal level and one at a professional level and therefore are discussed in the same chapter for comparison.

After the cross-case studies, I examine all empirical evidence by revisiting the research question and professionalisation of higher education administrators in Taiwan and Singapore. The discussion started by examining the ecological system of higher education, and answering how the higher education administrators are framed, regulated, managed, and experienced.

The second part of the discussion chapter looks into the sub-questions that mark the comparison and contrasts between research and international affairs offices. Examination on topics such as the role definition, coverage, and professional identity are applied to research management professionals and international affairs management professionals, to understand the unique development path in professionalisation, then together they build more understanding toward the ecological system model for a profession. The adaptation and application of the theoretical model are discussed, with the specific context in higher education and in its usage of examining the development of a profession.

3.4 Multi-language

Both Taiwan and Singapore are multi-lingual nations. In Taiwan, despite that Mandarin remains the official language, a large percentage of the population uses Japanese, Taiwanese (Min-nan), Hakka, as well as many indigenous languages. The national languages in Singapore include English, Mandarin Chinese, Tamil, and Malay. The languages used in this study were only English and Mandarin, considering my language capacity and the overlap between participants.

The main research language is English, however, to understand the local context of Taiwan, usage of Chinese is necessary. As a result, a questionnaire sent to the Taiwanese participants was added with traditional Chinese translation. Being a translator between traditional Chinese and English for more than 10 years, I try my best to ensure the consistency between languages, while acknowledging that there are discrepancies due to contexts and logics between languages. To minimise such discrepancy between languages, Chinese was added alongside the original English questions instead of creating a full Chinese version in order to show the prevailing version and provide reference to the originally designed questions. The same principle was applied throughout the research where possible. English interviews were conducted in Singapore and Chinese interviews with Taiwanese participants, with attention paid especially to gaps between languages due to different cultural or societal contexts. In the cases when the participants were bilingual, I repeated keywords such as "professional" in both languages to cover the possible contexts and reduce the discrepancy between languages.

3.4.1 Language usage in research design

To integrate data from different languages, institutions, and states, a consistent coding principle was applied. While documents from Taiwan are in traditional Chinese and interviews are in Mandarin Chinese mostly, the categorising of coding was always in the same language using English. The language choice toward the categorising stage helped the language logic remain consistent, and English sub-themes provided a second examination of the coding selection for the Chinese in-vivo codes and quotations as well. By making sure that the interpreting language stays unchanged, though the process is challenging, the analysis can be more consistent, and the cross-language context can be processed in the same language with its logic, paradigm, and context.

Analytical memos are also written in English. This is used to further guarantee that the analytics are conducted with a consistent pattern. Writing provides another layer of examination and a consistent narrative to the materials. The cross-language processing is then interpreted into one language with its thinking pattern and rationale.

Interview transcripts remained in their original languages, and I did not seek a full translation. When quoting the interviewee's words in the analysis, the words will be translated into English, with the original language written. All measures are installed to preserve the original language context as much as possible, but at the same time, bridge the gap between languages.

3.4.2 Key terms translation discrepancy

Some key terms lack a direct translation nor is there a consistently applied word choice between the two languages, these include profession, professional, and identity. Profession and professional links to the central concept of this research, professionalisation, but these words do not have a direct and completely matching translation. In Chinese, profession can be translated into two words: 職業(zhiye) and 專業(zhuanye). The first one, 職業 (zhiye) can sometimes be translated into occupation, while 專業(zhuanye) fits the word profession closer in more contexts. However, in the context of sociology of profession, both 職業社會學 (zhiye shehuixue) and 專業社會學(zhuanye shehuixue) are used intermittently, but the second one can also be misinterpreted as an expertise in sociology or emphasising on the academic perspective of sociology. Similar interchanges of the two words also appear in other contexts, in Wu's 2019 historical review of the legal profession, both words were used to describe legal professionals, where the profession was translated into 專門職業(zhuanmen zhiye; Specialised occupation) but legal professionals are 專業人員(zhuanye renyuan, professional personnel). When indicating the professional community, both 專業社群(zhuanye shequn; professional community) and 職業社群 (zhiye shequn; professional community) are used intermittently without contextual differences.

The word identity caused a similar struggle. The most direct translation points to 身份 (shenfen), yet the word can be limited to representing one's occupation hiring path or citizen identity in a society. Identity in this research is closer to 認同 (rentong), which means one's

recognition and understanding toward oneself, in this context specifically toward one's own level of occupation professionalism. The word choice in the end went to 身份認同 (shenfen rentong), combining both to be more specific and inclusive in presenting the professional identity.

The interchangeability of the words caused difficulty in translation. The effort to find the most suitable translation for profession, professional, and professionalisation ended up finding that there were no perfect words carrying the same context. I therefore collected the terms that match the main theme the most. To be more aligned so that in interviews, participants would not be confused by the changing of words, I applied the words chosen consistently. At the same time, I also repeat in English where the participants understand English, in order to align the context across languages. The final terms include 專業(zhuanye, profession), 專業人士 (zhuanye renshi, professional personnel) instead of 專業人員 (zhuanye renyuan, professional personal), the latter can mean technician in Taiwanese governmental documents, and 專業化 (zhuanyehua, professionalisation). They are organised in Appendix IV with detailed explanations of the Chinese context.

The influence of language does not stop at the discrepancy of translation, but the language also largely formulates how its speakers think and how they understand the world(Tektigul et al., 2023; Zlatev & Blomberg, 2015). How the minor differences in translation build the Taiwanese and Singaporean recognitions toward profession and professionalisation, and how the stated conceptualisations of professionalisation, are discussed in the later chapters and concluded in Chapter 8.3.2 Professionalism and language.

3.5 Ethics and Positionality

Consent and data protection were important to this study. In Taiwan and Singapore, where higher education is hierarchical, administration can be viewed as a sensitive sector due to its close ties with the government. Besides, one of the key features of administration was its structural hierarchy, as it was formed to answer to the needs of the organisation. Individual administrators also have a direct employment relationship with the organisation and were not usually considered included in the discussion of academic autonomy, this confines them more rigidly within the organisational hierarchy. Not only were they employees of the universities,

but administrators were also the implementers of policies and representatives of the organisation. The double identity that can sometimes contradict makes the administrators sensitive toward multiple layers of hierarchy that shape their systems from their office, the organisation, to the government. In other words, administrators, even those who work in the higher education sector, were sensitive to hierarchy and the representativeness these organisations provide them.

In a highly hierarchical institution, the most efficient way to seek consent was to start from the senior management (Cohen et al., 2018). Considering the efficiency and the need to address the hierarchy within the institutions, management permission needs to be sought out before research. The initial consent to take part in the research was mostly retrieved from the head of offices via email. Details of the research and consent clauses to join the study were provided on the first page of the online questionnaire, participants provided their consent by clicking on "consent and continue to questionnaire". As for the interviews, consent forms were sent via email before the interviews for signatures after the participants accepted invitations. The consent forms were scanned, encrypted, and saved in the password-protected online database.

Confidentiality undoubtedly was crucial in this study. Despite my focus on the more neutral sub-topics such as career, professional development, and discussion on professionalism, there were potential risks of conflict between the participants' feedback and institutional agendas. The identity of the interviewees will remain strictly confidential, and I have checked thoroughly to avoid recognisability from any particular quotes. There was also concern relating to the consent being from the head of the office and how it might suggest to the administrators that the research might be shared with their managers. To ensure the administrators understand the purpose of this research and view the interviews as a safe space, data protection and the free-to-withdraw policy were brought to their attention, with occasional reassurance during the interviews. Participants can withdraw from the studies anytime by contacting the researcher, and the recognisable data such as interviews will be removed upon request. The pseudonymisation of participant identity was designed to help reduce the risk, and I will ensure best practices on data protection and restrictive access to keep the participants' replies confidential.

Considering the permission and encouragement for this research comes from the senior management, it was important to make sure that office members joined the research voluntarily and that their freedom of participation was ensured. To limit the influence of the administrators and to avoid aligned replies to the institutional agenda, the participants will be pseudonymised, and questionnaire replies will be collected without personal contact information. In the cases where participants were recommended or invited by the gatekeeper, or other fellow participants, confidentiality will be protected by eliminating recognisable personal information in the final thesis. A similar concern toward hierarchy and exploration of a less-impacted administration led to pseudonymisation for the institutions with random alphabet characters.

Another intriguing concern that links up to individual administrators is their representativeness. As administrators were representatives of the organisations they work in, the representative status can at times create a dilemma for any researcher to build trust and reach the more controversial opinions from the administrators when it comes to institutional regulations and policies, affecting the reliability and validity of data. Data access must be protected and limited to only me, as well as the aforementioned issues on consent, withdrawal, and confidentiality. Combining these points, the concerns also address my strategy aligning with suggestions by Marshall and Rossman (2016) to maintain a tone that encourages interviewees to be truthful and "themselves".

Besides the participants and institutions, it was also inevitable to consider myself, the researcher. Researchers can bear multiple identities going into the research field (Silverman, 2014). As a former international officer from a Taiwanese university, I carry with me insider knowledge and an impression of a former practitioner's identity into interviews aside from the identity and ethical awareness as a researcher. The insider identity often helps in starting conversations, bringing out experience sharing, and relating to the positions and situations the participants described. In the cases when the participants stayed quiet and provided only short answers, it proved to be useful if I mentioned a relevant personal experience and used it as an example but also as a comparison to demonstrate my perspective on the questions, and it usually generated more discussions. The insider status also helped bring me and the participants closer. On many occasions, especially when touching upon difficult experiences, the participants cut their sentences before the adjective that describes the experiences and

replaced it with a knowing laugh or ambiguous words like "that", leaving the keywords unsaid and moving to another topic. The untold content was indicated through the insiders' knowledge and trust.

On the other side, the insider identity could also potentially influence the level of openness in interviews, especially when the participants think that there could be a conflict of interest, usually at the institutional level. It can also bring a different power dynamic into the interviews (Kaaristo, 2022). This was mostly avoided as I am no longer affiliated with the Taiwanese institution I worked for. I also emphasised in the interview that my practitioner's experience was gained 10 years ago to clear any doubts. Further, my current institution is based in the United Kingdom and I am not an employee. Both factors lowered the possibility of institutional conflict of interest and potential geopolitical concerns.

I am also aware of how the prior knowledge could be limiting or misdirecting in the interpretation of the participant's responses. In order to reduce such misinterpretation, I adopted a more active interviewing approach. During the semi-structured interviews when the participants described their experiences, I probed for further confirmation or depiction of their feelings and interpretation of the events. By providing an interpretation or comparing them with my own experiences, I also encouraged the participants to dig deeper into their memories and decision-making processes and to provide their own interpretations of the events.

Besides the insider identity, I am also a former colleague, a friend, or a friend's friend to the participants. These connections created more intimate dynamics and increased the openness in the interviews, and the continuous relationship also sometimes provided ongoing discussions post-interview. An effort was made to keep discussions within the framework of research questions, as with more friendly discussions and with a semi-structured interview structure, new foci emerged from time to time and despite that they helped enrich research, every little slightly unrelated idea accumulated can redirect the focus toward another aspect of higher education that overlaps but not directly related.

3.6 Rigours and limitations

Even though the roles of research administrators have been identified in recent literature, the research remains scarce and limited in local contexts. Most administrators specified in one field within higher education administration were not studied as an independent group of professionals. Amongst the neglected administrators, international affairs administrators are included, despite that they have been deeply involved in one of the most well-funded fields in East Asian higher education. A comparison between specific roles of administration also remains uncommon. While the discussion on the sociology of professions develops into an examination of specific roles, it is worth examining the respective administrative roles based on their divisions of expertise and work coverage, as the mentioned help construct professional identities, by projects or tasks. This research hopes to connect, compare, and fill in the details for the literature, and supply new data to capture the developing phenomenon in higher education administration.

There is a lot that cannot be addressed within the research scheme of a doctoral project with a limited timeframe. The chosen methods of questionnaire and interview both involve self-reporting, and they will convey personal interpretations and biases. Due to the time limit, this is not a longitudinal study. With the knowledge I gained from the interviewees, I could only try my best to present what is closer to the participants' opinions, and it might require further communication to restate and confirm the meanings the participants tried to get across.

Under the topic of higher education administration, it will also be limited to addressing them all as administrators and not separating the academic administrators from administrators from research-related administrative roles. Yet since the focus of the research is on a cross-office comparison, the simplification of office members is kept ensuring that the research stays on a viable scale. This is also designed to focus on the comparison based on projects and tasks and to identify the commonalities between the administrators. There are also issues not addressed since I excluded the academic administrators from this study. However, these two groups vary in identities, recognitions, and career progressions. While administrative academics generally hold a stronger academic professional identity over administrative tasks, it does not fit the topic of this research. By focusing on the administrators and viewing administrative academics together in the aspects of governance, I try to capture the influences the academic administrators bring to the administrators while not losing focus on the precarity of the latter.

A further limitation emerged from the cultural gap between the local context in Taiwan and Singapore versus the Anglo-American-based sociology of profession and their discussions in higher education administration since there is not a lot of existing literature to take reference from. The existing observations and theories do not reflect the historical and societal development in Taiwan and Singapore. My understanding of Singaporean culture and societal values is based on literature and news and can be insufficient to identify the nuance. Also, despite my experience in higher education administration, there are sub-rules, norms, and issues that cannot be addressed outside of the organisation. I can only try to capture as abundant details as possible to build an understanding of the higher education administration environment in Taiwan and Singapore, and present what can be found and told.

Higher education administration remains a complex and widely connected topic across multiple disciplines. While I endeavoured to broaden my literature familiarity across multiple keywords and discussions, I could only cover a small amount of understanding centralising in the higher education field. The richness of cultural and societal influences in this study reflects how embedded this research subject is, not only in the higher education sector but the broader society and its development. By recording the details of these essential facilitators that construct and shape the development of higher education, this study provides a different perspective on the concept of professionalism and views on recognition, identity, and values.

Chapter 4 Macrosystem: Societal influences and national governance

The macrosystem in the original model contains influences from the wider society, such as societal expectations, economic systems, and social norms. Examining influences on the societal level for higher education administrators, I identified influencing factors outside their employing institutions. The external macrosystem influences thus mainly come from societal and national organisational aspects. The societal aspect covers more conceptual discussions related to the original societal expectations, for example, gender issues, societal beliefs, and values. And the organisation aspect involved a strong factor: regulatory framework, covering government and the legal system. I reconstruct their influence through administrators' interpretation of societal judgements. Through the macrosystem, a wide picture is formed by social concepts and how they shape the self-recognition of the administration. Through national laws, regulations, and national higher education policies, this chapter explores how administration is defined and refined.

This chapter is divided into two parts, it begins with the broader social factors, exploring how societal values and norms examine and form the different interpretations of the profession of higher education administration, and how the international higher education sector worldwide and their interactions bring development. The second part examines the national influences through 1) governance on the restrictions and institutional structure layout of the administration within universities 2) legal acts on how higher education administration is regulated, and 3) policies on the development and focus of this profession. Through discussing the macrosystem influences on the higher education administration profession, the elements and crucial criteria that constructed higher education administration are revealed.

4.1 Societal expectations

4.1.1 Taiwanese societal perceptions

The semi-structured interviews reveal how the education sector, especially higher education, has a special status in society, and the image of higher education administrators is affected by their employing institutions. Conflicting stereotypes are recorded.

Even though traditional values in Taiwan remain a mix of Confucianism, Taoism, Chinese values, and Japanese values, the examples collected show clear identifiers toward a Confucian culture. On the cultural side, a conflicting view toward the university is noted. University A Global Student Affairs Manager 3 pointed out how, in some regions in Taiwan where the traditional cultural values were strong, the university still enjoyed a high social status due to its connection to education. A cultural explanation lies in Confucianism, where education and academics occupy a special and respected position. In these regions, people tend to respect workers in a university and do not differentiate between academic and administrative staff, viewing them equally as contributors to education.

However, another stereotype linked to the higher education administrators has a more tinted view. People's assumptions about work in educational institutions include perceptions of a lighter workload and slower pace. Similar concepts can also be found in other East Asian societies, such as Hong Kong, toward university administrators or civil service officers, as both higher education institutions and governmental offices share stability that outlast most commercial firms. Another stereotype linked administrative work with general clerical work and had been viewed as a lower-ranked skill or occupation (University A Global Student Affairs Manager 1), so -

> "administration and the supporting roles are jobs that anyone can do."
> (University A International Affairs Manager 1)
>
> 「行政就是一般人都可以做。」

Others apply a mocking tone when bringing up Confucianism. University A International Affairs Manager 2 criticised the obedient nature Confucianism encouraged and how related teaching trained people to maintain social harmony. This view was commonly reflected among Taiwanese workers, as International Affairs Manager 2 described,

> "We inherited 5000 years of Confucianism and maybe that's why we are still training ourselves to be good slaves? Our slave nature is strong."
>
> 「我們就是儒家文化 5000 年，自己把自己當奴嗎？奴性很堅強」

(University A International Affairs Manager 2).

"Slave nature" is a term used in public discussions and media in Taiwan, referring to the obedient and hard-working attitudes of employees, which lead them to endure unreasonable job conditions, long working hours, and lower salaries. Similar references are used to address the hierarchical relationships between the management and administrators.

Criticism of the work environment and work culture from participants went beyond the higher education sector. Some criticism is specifically about negative impact of cultural values. Taiwan was criticised for being a "shallow plate culture (淺盤的文化)" (University B Research Institutional Support Manager 1), where opportunities are rare and limitations abundant. Participants pointed out how universities are disconnected from the commercial and industrial sectors on topics such as institutional structures, management styles, and career paths. Professional communities in the industry in Taiwan and other nations have enjoyed more job opportunities and development possibilities, while these remain limited in the universities. One of the examples included patent applications. In universities, the work concentrates on the preparation stage, which covers gathering paperwork and assisting in writing the patent proposal. Some administrative offices offer an initial evaluation of the application, but only a few universities apply on their own. Meanwhile, in industry, all is done in one specialised firm, creating more complete processes and broadening the scope of tasks and knowledge.

The linked images with civil servants on clerical work and bureaucratic organisational culture, the culturally inflicted obedient culture, and the task range limitations in the universities fed in a slow-paced, responsibility-avoiding, and unprofessional image for higher education administrators. Many participants agreed that such stereotypes have made it difficult for them to change the environment or switch to a job in the industry.

4.1.2 Singaporean societal perceptions

The Singaporean participants took a more positive view regarding their society. The majority of Singaporean administrators expressed willingness to aid national development. It might sound like a tongue twister, but Singaporean administrators pay attention to how "Singapore, by

nature, has no natural resources besides human being[s] and reputation" (D1H). With wordings often aligning policy documents and even scholarly research (eg. Karuppiah & Poon, 2024, p. 958), this societal limitation is trained into the minds of administrators, and it binds the individuals with the institutions. The mindset helps them reiterate the scarcity of national resources and cultivate a wish to contribute to building more jobs or a higher reputation for the institutions they serve, including both universities and the state.

Singapore universities are also more embedded in society from the links participants reported. The "university company" adopts a neo-liberal managerialism that remains consistent with industry practice. The common foci of efficiency and productivity through this managerialism align working mindsets in higher education administration and other sectors. In Singapore, transfer of roles between different sectors is common, and less reported refusal based on their university working experiences. Compared to Taiwan, there is less stigma toward higher education administration and more transferability between a higher education sector role and one in the industry.

With a similar centralised higher education system to many Asian nations, participants also addressed Singapore's tight governance in its legal acts. Singapore can be bureaucratic, and its legal procedures tedious (University C International Affairs Manager 1). However, the aforementioned limitations on natural resources and nation size are also viewed as a reason that justifies tight governance. Since it is such a small country, "there has to be a whole country approach" (University C International Affairs Manager 1) and therefore, the centralisation and the bureaucratic procedure are rationalised. Higher education administrators are also more motivated by this limitation. Some participants want to improve themselves toward the state's further growth and development, addressing themselves from a human resource perspective. This view further defines an individual as a national asset and prompts a proactive and continuing pursuit of improvement, exemplified in D1H's statement: "We must always be ready to upgrade ourselves, be ready to [teach] ourselves and be very sincere and trustworthy."

4.1.3 Navigating expectations with international influences

Broadening the scope from local institutions and societies, in this global age, the comparison between societies and the spread of international practices can also provide different lenses for

the profession to examine itself. The Singaporean administrators appeared to have a more empirical stance, as many reported examples of their encounters with higher education administrators from the United States or Australia. Singapore has been hosting international conferences for research management professionals, mainly with American and Australian professional associations. The opportunities to participate also increased during the pandemic years when conferences were moved online and accessibility eased. Singaporean administrators observed through the conference other professionals' self-positioning, expert knowledge, and approaches in their day-to-day jobs and built their recognition of their jobs and professionalism. University C Research Support Manager 2 stated a reflection after talking to representatives from the United States:

> "They say, you know, don't just tick the boxes, you have to read one step further. But you need to read between the lines and what's the same. But you know, to do that, that comes with experience that comes with intention and the intent. And then there's this tension between that and time, that and efficiency."

Five out of nine administrators in Singapore noted their change after the encounter and how they began to recognise themselves as the professionals that they have always been. Even those who doubted their own profession straightforwardly admitted the professional status of higher education administrators from the U.S. and Australia. This endorsement and confirmation of their daily work with how they align with international standards kindled a positive recognition of their professionalism. Through conferences, international higher education administrators exchange experiences and opinions, and that was where Singaporean research administrators started to develop a professional identity.

Singaporean participants expressed how paying recognition to their international peers helped the administrators put things into perspective. The similar work and professional knowledge they share make the participant consider their positionality of being a professional or not. The professional association of research officers is built in the United States, and there are training programmes, certificate courses, and graduate schools based on systematic knowledge to train the administrators. Moreover, there is the recognition of research administration being professional, both institutionally and individually. The Singaporean administrator participants register the differences and view them as the development that Singapore needs.

Some criteria were identified, such as hosting regular conferences (University B Global Student Affairs Manager 1), keeping a strong culture for the specialised administrators, and having systematic courses and certificates (University D Research Support Manager 1). However, aside from these more institutionalised conditions, it was also mentioned that the U.S. administrators "really see themselves as professionals" (University D Research Support Manager 1) and that they are not afraid to share knowledge (University D Research Support Manager 4). Through sharing information and discussions, the administrators reported exchanging but also integrating experiences and practices they face in their work. It was identified to build not only systematic knowledge but also a strong culture that helps enhance a professional identity.

Two participants shared the experience of attending the conference and how seeing the way other administrators work made them rethink their professionalism. University D Research Support Manager 1 narrated her transition before and after she saw herself as a professional and her interactions with the faculty members:

> "So before I saw myself as a professional, I kind of just feel like yeah, you know, faculty are like so important. So important. [...] you're just supporting them, but after that, it felt like [...] we should really not take that kind of thoughts. We should not take that attitude like we are working professionals. We are colleagues to them, we are not the assistants we are not beneath them."

University D Research Support Manager 1 described how later the attitude became more assertive and the way they addressed faculty members turned to their first names instead of the title of "professor", which is commonly used in Taiwan and Singapore to any academics in universities to show respect. What they described records a self-recognition of professionalism as well as a breakthrough in an originally hierarchical relationship. By referring to the academics as colleagues, the small action helps them see the faculty as equal and reduces the sense of hierarchy.

4.2 Societal Norms

4.2.1 Gender issues in higher education administration

While gender was not an issue this research designed to investigate, the issue stood out in empirical examples. Acker (1990) had long reported that academia is a gendered institution. While attention has been raised to the gender ratio of students and female student numbers have surpassed their male peers in 2022 (IESALC UNESCO & Times Higher Education, 2022), the administration remains an unbalanced ground. Administrators are largely female, yet gender stereotypes and glass ceilings remain common in the administration (S. Acker, 2014). Moreover, as the rank of administrative roles gets higher, the fewer female managers there are (Shepherd, 2017). In 2022, when the interviews took place, there was only one female president out of 49 national universities in Taiwan, and one female president out of five national universities in Singapore.

Participants reported stereotypes toward their work being linked to gender stereotypes such as "girls who run the errands（打雜小妹）" (University B Research Institutional Support Manager 2), and the term also revealed a dismissive attitude higher education administrators face. Some participants noted a gender influence on higher education administration at the office level. In their experiences, as the office is a female-dominant one with female leaders, which, even in today's universities, remained scarce, they observed strong criticism and conflict over a range of different issues when cooperating with other university offices. Their observations also revealed a link to the unbalanced gender relationships. One participant reported that when facing women managers, male subordinates exhibited a higher tendency of disagreement and mistrust, and a tendency to challenge the managers' decisions. "I often think that these old men treat manager M in meetings this way because she's a woman" (University A International Affairs Manager 2). Direct criticism related to gender was also expressed, "Some administrators said that it is because she's not married and doesn't have kids, so she scrutinises the details so much" (University A International Affairs Manager 2).

Connected to the majority of female employees in higher education administration, the family becomes a crucial institution. Women's dual role at work and in the family has been noted in academic literature (Johnsrud, 1995; White & Burkinshaw, 2019) , and related topics such as marriage and family continue to be reflected in the interviews. An incident was mentioned in the interview at University A, where two administrators from different offices got into a conflict. A manager talked to the younger one and asked her to be more considerate of the other administrator, as she was single and the other party "had family and many other issues to deal

with". University A International Affairs Manager 3 further noted that there was a division of married or unmarried staff depending on the content of work in their office, with more younger and unmarried administrators in the sections that require more innovation.

While some stereotypes regarding gender persist, the university, as the employing institution, provides more flexibility toward its employees' family caring duties, which can conflict with the biased images previous statements showed. Family was reported as a heavy influencing element in the participants' choices of work and working environment. Six participants from both Taiwan and Singapore expressed that family was either their main concern when accepting the current university role offer or the reason for moving to the current city, showing how the duty of family plays a decisive motivation in their career planning. While all six participants were female, it revealed societal ties between female and family responsibilities are still prevalent in Taiwan and Singapore. The working culture and institutional structure reflect an imbalanced gender dynamic in higher education administration, even with partial institutional support.

4.2.2 Limitations imposed by role titles

Plenty of participants in Taiwan refer back to the title of their roles in the discussion of the profession. While in chapter 7 I address the influence of job titles of individual administrators, this section explores titles that follow the governance system and are applied nationwide. In national universities, administrators were hired under the official title of "clerk" (幹事, ganshi) in the HR system, no matter their job content. Moreover, a literal translation in Chinese of ganshi is "the one who does things", an implication so overly generic that it diminishes the value of work under the title into merely clerical processing. The English working titles though, are not defined by the system and can be decided by each office. This provides the administrators, especially those who work with an international audience, two titles on the same role which varied greatly most of the time. The title in the system had recently been changed to "specialist" at the time of the interviews, and this change brought positive reactions from the participants. "So I think those titles, it's fairly helpful for us because that kind of shows on our LinkedIn, it helps us to recruit the next people because that's the first question" (University B Global Student Affairs Manager 1).

The titles can limit how one defines oneself and the level of influence from a regulated and bureaucratic design thus becomes clear. During the interviews, participants used different wordings but expressed the same notion that they were "just an administrator". University A International Affairs Manager 2 answered when asked whether they view themselves as a professional, that

> "my title doesn't include professional, I am just a project worker."
>
> 「我的職稱不是專業，我就是一個專案工作人員。」

A member from the research office also expressed that as their working title wasn't compatible with the industry standard and did not reflect his working content.

> "I am not very used to it (the title). They think that's it, then that's it. I do not have any objections. But so I didn't give you my business card."
>
> 「我也是不是很習慣，那他們覺得就是這樣。然後我沒意見。然後所以我沒給你名片。」

A passive denial is observed in the testimony toward their working title. This response further recorded how in the working environment, objections were not shown nor raised for further communication. Despite being confused, misrecognised, and mispresented, higher education administrators in Taiwan tend to accept and internalise the title and de-professionalise themselves.

4.2.3 Influences from the academic profession

Participant accepted the limitation institutionalised through their working title, and further perception of their profession was observed to be through comparison with their closest colleagues, the academics. While the academic-administration dichotomy is often addressed in the literature, scholars focused on how the interactions and cooperation between the two (Croucher & Woelert, 2022; J. Hall, 2022; Veles & Carter, 2016; Whitchurch, 2015).

While the interview responses reflected similar records of low recognition and hierarchical relationships, an observation suggested how the higher education administration also examined their professionalism based on the comparison to the academic profession. Working closely

with one of the most classic professions, the academics, and confidence of the higher education administration can often be diminished in the comparison. "...[T]he job title itself, it's never going to be as fancy as a doctor in your job" (University B Global Student Affairs Manager 1). University C International Affairs Manager 1 also jokingly described the comparison of the more traditionally defined professions with higher education administration as "capital p and small p". The comparison exists outside of people's self-recognition of their own professionalism and is built upon reputations and recognition. While any new potential of professions is inevitably compared to the traditionally defined ones, working alongside a classic profession might construct a more challenging environment for those professions that are developing.

4.2.4 Exploring professionalism within the functionalist approach

Functionalist literature identified some elements that formed a profession, including being able to control access to the profession, systematic knowledge, licensing, professional association, code of ethics, and altruism (Evans, 2008). Cross-comparing the elements to the administrators' criteria, and overlapping elements reveal. Though systematic knowledge has not been built in the context of Taiwan and Singapore, other elements are addressed by the participants in their local contexts. Codes are condensed to their essence, and I see overlaps in the codes and keywords collected from the functionalist's approach in the sociology of profession. This section adds context to each code from participants' experiences, and then compares them to the literature to examine the similarities and differences, especially stressing the local contexts of Taiwan and Singapore.

In the administrator's replies, the absence of licensure and control over the profession proved to be reasons that contributed to their low recognition of their profession. University B International Affairs Manager 1 expressed how the lack of prior proof of knowledge or training in the role makes them not recognise the professionalism of the role.

Their statement revealed a sensitivity around the low entry requirements and a judgement on the lack of recognisable knowledge. There was also an interesting interpretation from some international office participants that regarded fluent English not as a professional skill. The notion contradicted the employment requirements and societal recognition where fluent

English helps one open up more working opportunities, showing an array of different criteria of professionalism even among higher education administration professionals. However, most in Taiwan consider their jobs to require professional skills (including University A Research Support Manager 1, Research Support Manager 3, International Affairs Manager 1, Global Student Affairs Manager 2, University B Global Student Affairs Manager 3, Research Support Manager 4, and Research Support Manager 1), and that with knowledge and experience, one can become a professional.

Though higher education administrators participate regularly in international conferences in their fields, there are no current professional associations in both countries. In Singapore, the research support landscape is considered still young and immature, and in Taiwan, as most administrators are connected to the civil service system, government-related agencies such as the Foundation of International Cooperation of Higher Education in Taiwan (FICHET) host training courses and gatherings for the administrators, substituting partial functions of a professional association, but also deprive the administrators of their potential formation of access control outside the governed institutions.

As for the moral criteria such as a code of ethics and altruism, a strong intention to serve was identified in both Taiwanese and Singaporean participants. University B International Affairs Manager 3 identified themselves as the role that assisted everyone and thought the broad focus helped them remain observant from multiple perspectives. University D Research Institutional Support Manager 1 described their work as "bread and butter", smoothing the work for the faculty members and acting as the communication point. Many also clearly missioned themselves to aid the development of the university or to support the growth of students or faculty members. Even though there was no specific code of ethics published, the altruism and the service mindset contributing towards society were clearly stated.

4.3 National level influencers

Deductive coding from document analysis revealed the influences on higher education administration from the national level. The aims and expectations direct the overall development of higher education and its administration, and the regulations and limitations draw boundaries and scopes to their development. Influencing factors identified range from the

government and legal system to national development projects. And these influencing factors shape higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore in the local context.

This section focuses on the institutional perspective, examining how higher education administration is defined in the national systems, how the administrators are regulated and hired, and what regulations are in place. A focus on the documents helps examine how the national regulations and orders define the higher education sector, and also how they confine higher education administration. Section 4.2 begins with a discussion on the relationship between the government and their governance over universities, followed by the main themes of deductive analysis of Taiwanese and Singaporean education-related legal documents. The third part investigates the national policies designed by the government, which aims to drive higher education development but not directly govern it.

4.3.1 Governance from the government

Literature in higher education administration in East Asia often focuses on governance or leadership and less so on administration (Mok & Nelson, 2013). Considering the highly centralised, government-led higher education in East and Southeast Asia (Welch, 2020), a governance-based focus is aligned with literature and in the legal discourse of the government.

Both nations have a clear hierarchy in governance, wherein the central ministry wields direct authority over their public or national universities, yet with divergent approaches. As one delves deeper into the respective legal documents, it becomes increasingly apparent that these governance paradigms are executed with notable distinctions. In Taiwan, a distinct and closely monitored relationship underpins institutional management, reflecting a more centralised governance approach. While in Singapore, the overarching guideline revolves around the primacy of national interest.

Governmental governance of national universities in Taiwan

Taiwan embraces a robust top-down management orientation in its higher education governance. While the nation articulates a commitment and expects universities to contribute

to national development, the legal documentation dedicates a more extensive proportion of texts detailing a specific and strong administrative hierarchy.

Taiwan's higher education has been centrally governed. The Ministry of Education is the Competent Authority of the national universities and preserves some management rights including appointing university presidents as well as to direct merges of universities. Besides the direct governance measures, the Ministry of Education also publishes award-based funding higher education policies (see further discussion in 4.3.3). In these policies, universities fitting the requirements are asked to submit proposals that strengthen the aims and goals of the policy. Those proposals that better match the Ministry's goals were selected, and funding was awarded to the universities. With jurisdiction on the one hand and incentives on the other, the Ministry of Education superintended the development of the higher education sector in Taiwan. Provisions within the *National University Endowment Fund Establishment* (2015) outlined the precise mechanisms through which the Ministry of Education can reprimand universities and stipulate deadlines for improvement when a university's financial stability is at risk. Additionally, when an educator is found to be disqualified due to involvement in criminal activities, the institution is obligated to report the matter to the Ministry for a final decision on their employment status based on the *Act Governing the Appointment of Educator*s (2014). These clauses underscore a hierarchical framework governing higher education institutional management in Taiwan.

The governance structure in national universities is also instituted through its human resources. As national university employees, both the academics and some administrative roles are civil service posts. A set of regulations specifically defines civil service members, their career paths, and their moral characters. Examination of the legal documents further provides a clear set of hierarchical behaviour regulations between civil servants and their managers in the *Civil Servant Service Act*, (2022). Clause 2 states that within the coverage for their responsibilities, civil servants are obligated to obey their manager's orders. If they have any suggestions, they can state them at any time. Clause 4.2 regulates civil servants' speech related to their work, stating that without their manager's permission, not even personal comments should be published, let alone representing the institution. The restrictions on autonomy can weaken the workers' identity and recognition of their work and institutions. And the reinforced hierarchy in ranks further strengthens the manager-based power dynamics in the working environment. As many

administrators in the universities are trained as civil servants, it reinforces the power relationship and hierarchy between the academic administrators in management and the administrators.

Though civil servants are required to follow and execute orders from the government, academic freedom remains independent from governmental intervention even when civil servants make up a considerable portion of Taiwanese university employees. The academics and senior management members stand independent from the governance and are the decision-makers. The clear hierarchy in the civil service system, therefore, demands that higher education administrators obey the academic managers. Taiwanese regulations regarding managers in higher education centred around their hiring and leaving the posts. The aspect of hiring focused on the qualification based on their tenure or hired track, and the aspect of leaving, their handover process as well as documents. Interestingly, for civil servants, the manager keyword can be found in regulations detailing evaluation criteria for candidate selection from their experience, past training, potential, and so on. The lack of a personal qualification in legal documents for higher education institution managers might be an act of academic freedom supporting a collegial system, but at the same time, it also deprives the civil servants in the higher education system of competing for the same position due to a different evaluation method. The discrepancy in recruiting criteria plus the set headcount regulated by the Ministry of Education for each university, when a manager position is legally inclusive of both academic and civil servant candidates, the actual recruitment follows only one path.

The same principle that largely prioritises academics over the administrative workforce is found in the documents regarding higher education and is more distinct in some acts than others. For example, in the *Act Governing the Appointment of Educators (2014)*, most clauses in Chapter 2, the hiring qualifications are contributed to the institution leaders, from presidents in the primary schools to university presidents. There is only one out of the 18 clauses that addresses the administration staff. In the *University Act (2019)*, the legal document that regulates the basic operation of a university, three of 41 clauses address the president, followed by the hiring of academics. Even in the *Civil Servant Association Act (2006)*, which is the guideline for civil servants to take part in an association or union, a considerable number of clauses are used to cover how the committee should be formed, elected and managed.

Interestingly, the promotion criteria for senior management roles in universities are not defined well compared to the criteria listed for civil servants. The promotion of civil servants should be evaluated by giving thorough scoring of their past experiences, performance, training record, reward and punishment record, education background, potential, and so on (Clause 7.1, Civil Servant Promotion Act, 2023). The requirements for university senior management are not as clear. Cross-comparing between the *University Act (2019)*, *the Enforcement Rules of Act Governing the Appointment of Educators (2019)*, and the *MOE Announcements on educational regulations to universities* (n.d.), a few requirements for one to take up a senior management role in a national university can be pieced together, and qualification includes being either a faculty, a professional technician, a researcher, or a civil servant. As a civil servant, one works full-time at the position, but others only take the position as a part-time role. Some positions are limited to faculty members only and cannot be taken up by "staff" (under this context it includes only civil servants) such as the president, vice-president, dean of a college, or chairman of a department or a graduate school. These positions and Director of Student Affairs as well as Director of Academic Affairs are also limited to candidates that own the professor title. From the regulations the requirements are all based on the hired-route and status, leaving gaps for skills and even training that the candidate must hold.

The highly hierarchical governance structure brought tight regulation on the administrators legally in Taiwan, and the cultural relationship with academics created another layer of hierarchy in the universities. The influences from Confucianism prioritise scholarship and seniority (Chan & Yang, 2017), and the hierarchy produced can sometimes interfere with the governance hierarchy when the senior management conflicts. Between the focus on management and the focus on seniority, the administration falls into the gap between hierarchies. They are highly regulated, and are demanded of strict hierarchies, the multiple influences make the environment for the administrators more complex.

While there are diverging opinions on whether university management should be more collegial or professional, the Taiwanese government limited the consisting of management to be largely senior academics, following a "collegial system" of the university. A collegial system is often described as academics leading academics (Clark, 1998). The system has its merits, but with the Ministry of Education of Taiwan occupying the position of final appointment of university senior management positions such as presidents, the governance of higher education

ultimately follows the will of the government, and the degree of influence depends on their implementation. The rigid and semi-governmental management system can alienate the academics who have few experiences in governance.

Governmental governance of public universities in Singapore

Looking above higher education institutions and to the implementors of higher education policies, I find the broader higher education administration positions involve those of the public officers. Higher education policy execution goes through specific agencies that are formed according to the policy documents. The members of the agency are appointed by the Minister but can resign on their own will. They might be transferred from other public offices, but retain all rights from the previous employment. Despite the overlaps of missions, there is a divergence between the higher education policy implementors and higher education administration in the respective higher education institutions, regarding the recognition they receive.

Governance is a clear focus in the legal documents in Singapore for its five public universities. Acts such as *Education Act 1957 (2020)*, *National Servicemen (Employment) Act 1970* (2020), and the various *University (Corporatisation) Acts* (eg. *National University of Singapore (Corporatisation) Act 2005, 2020,* most clauses across universities remain highly similar*)* all regulate governance structure through how the senior management and board members are appointed in an educational institution, often in the beginning chapters.

Singapore demonstrates a strong link toward national development in the policy, evaluation, and management selection of universities. Its legal framework prominently emphasises a clear and centralised focus on the national interest, as evidenced by its regulations governing the registration of educational institutions, personnel management, and policy formulation, all of which are aligned with national objectives. This emphasis on national interest is also reflected in the exceptions indicated in the individual *University (Corporation) Acts*, aligning higher education to the overarching national agenda.

The Minister plays a crucial role in most legal documents, is equipped with direct authority in management lines, and has the power to appoint and remove any person or member of the

university, even a board trustee. In a university, the minister or an authorised person also has the authority to access all accounting and finance records. Between role appointment and access to information, the documents regulate centralised governance of the higher education sector and the individual higher education institutions.

Even after corporatisation, universities in Singapore are still being evaluated by and must comply with the direction of the Minister. Despite that the university is referred to as a "university company" in the legal documents and their management consists of a board of trustees, articles in the university acts require universities to assist in establishing related policies that "the Minister thinks fit" (clause 3B(1)), and "comply with any direction given by the Minister" (clause 3B(2)) when implementing such policies. The relationship between universities and the minister remains hierarchical and direct governance from the government is carried out.

4.3.2 Governance through legislation and regulations

The document analysis highlighted that while both Taiwan and Singapore have governance frameworks in place, their approaches are fundamentally different. The legal documents published by the Taiwanese and Singaporean governments employ different approaches and logic. While both are equipped with a strong central governance focus, Taiwanese documents emphasise requirements for virtues, aims, and detailed actions of individuals or institutions, while Singaporean documents detail procedures, limitations, and financial arrangements. Singapore prioritises pragmatism and national interest, while Taiwan places a stronger emphasis on morality and values-driven governance. These differences in approach are reflected in the legal documents and the overall governance paradigms of the two countries.

Taiwanese documents include additional moralistic descriptions. Many Acts and regulations open by stating the aims of the related institution or individuals, and these aims often have a strong service mindset or moral calling. For example, the first clause of the *University Act* (2019) states that "Universities shall have as their objectives conducting academic research, training and educating highly skilled people, enhancing culture, serving society, and boosting national development." Compared to Singapore's *Education Act 1957* (2020), where the first clause simply states "This Act may be cited as the Education Act" then followed by a

terminology glossary and which schools are not applicable to the act, Taiwanese documents assert a more moral-centred expectation for universities to aid national and societal development.

The moral requirement does not stop at an individual level, but from the legal documents examined, there emerged a trend focusing on virtues and goals for the institutions. Besides the executive details and limitations on roles, there is a strong orientation toward virtues and "higher calls" when setting institutional goals in the *University Act* (2019; see 4.2.2) and candidate qualifications in the *Civil Servant Employment Act* (2023); see 4.2.2.2.3). The moralistic approach is applied to Taiwanese educators, which also includes the administrators working in educational institutions.

Legal documents in Singapore demonstrate a straightforward approach, with clearly defined terminology and limitations. The content of the regulation focuses on operational details instead of moralistic requirements such as how many days it should take for the official offer letter to reach the hired person's registered address by post. Clauses regarding the eligibility of employment are regulated with factual requirements. For example, the requirements of employees of a university involve being a contactable person, owning a Central Provident Fund (CPF) account, having nationality proof, and having their date of birth known to the university.

This distinction can be further embodied by how the functions of universities are described from Taiwanese and Singaporean regulations. In the *National University of Singapore (Corporatisation) Act 2005* (2020) of Singapore, taken as an example, as there is no general Act regarding universities, but each university company is regulated by its own Act. Clauses state

> "[t]he function of the university company is to pursue, within the limits of the financial resources available to it, the objects provided by its constituent documents and, in particular, to confer and award degrees, diplomas and certificates, including honorary degrees and other distinctions."

Compared to the Taiwanese *University Act (2019)*, some emphasis deviated. For one, the title of "university company" indicates that Singapore persists in its narrative on corporatisation, and Taiwan still clings to a strong governance despite the corporatisation of its universities. Secondly, functions for Singaporean universities focus on the constituents of degrees and diplomas, yet for Taiwanese universities, education is to serve society, culture, and nation,

reflecting a much wider and more moralistic demand. Thirdly, the wording in the legal documents further portrays two realities: Singaporean one is straightforward, document-focused, and finance-aware, and Taiwanese reality focuses on the "softer" aspects such as society and culture, but with a higher calling to serve the nation.

Despite similar pre-determined codes standing out during the document analysis such as management, the content of these keywords is vastly different between Taiwan and Singapore. Combining their distinct approaches in legal documents, they constructed two different frameworks for their higher education administration. The next section applies specific textual evidence to detail the differences in the cultivation and understanding of higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore.

4.3.2.1 Regulatory framework in Taiwan

Three themes stood out from the document analysis: hiring routes, nomenclature, and identity. Hiring routes revealed the multiple contract conditions the university administrators are hired on, mixing in civil servants makes the packages and pension even more complex. Nomenclature regarding higher education administration is non-consistent and variable over the documents. From staff to employees to educators, the group of administrators has not yet attained a defined term to reflect their work. Identity here is one shaped by the legal and governmental documents, hidden behind the texts demanding virtues and set nation-serving goals, but is not directly stated as a recognition nor understanding.

Hiring routes

In a national university in Taiwan, even when working a similar coverage of tasks in the same office, people can be hired through different routes. The main three routes for an administrative employee to be hired include civil servants, contractors, and permanent employees. With the complexity of hiring routes, the term "staff" is used here to refer to employees of the universities who have administrative responsibilities and are not hired as an academic.

In national universities, faculty and some staff positions are defined as civil service positions, being employed by extensions of civic institutions that are supervised by the Ministry of Education. Differences in the hiring routes occur between faculty and staff. For faculty, the academic units are the recruiter, publicising the position, screening and selecting the suitable candidate, then the hiring is finalised and approved by the Ministry of Education. Hired by the nation through qualification in national exams and exam-subject-specific training, civil servants have very different hiring routes and employment packages than employees from non-governmental institutions, including universities. The person is granted the status of a civil servant and can be assigned to available posts in the related field across various civic institutions. These civil servants are required to follow a specific set of laws, mostly containing higher moral requirements and stringent obedient behaviours toward the management. In a university, the number of civil servants is set at each office, limiting the total amount across all administrative offices.

Compared to the staff who are civil servants, contractors' employment is more diverse in contracts and limited in rights. Contractors are managed by the university and not the Ministry of Civil Servants. They are not calculated into the regulated number of civil service staff and are not eligible to take up management roles. Their contracting period is usually one year but extendable until being terminated. The number of contractors is not usually publicised, and it is not known whether the number is recorded. National Taiwan University is among the few that publish this record. The university started hiring contractors in 1997, and in 25 years the number of contractors has grown tenfold while the staff number slowly decreased, showing a different composition of manpower in the university.

Finally, a third route beside the contractors and civil servants points to 校聘人員(xiaopin renyuan), which can be directly translated as "school hired". Essentially these are permanently hired employees, working mostly in administration roles. I therefore use the term "Permanent employee" to refer to them and to better reflect their hiring status. Their salary comes from the University Endowment Fund and not national funding projects and the management regulation is set by the university instead of national laws.

There remain some exceptions outside the main hiring routes. For example, in an administrative office, there are also people hired based on particular national or industrial

projects, and these project funding-based personnel can be managed by set-termed contracts and titled "research assistants." Another exception is the personnel (人員, renyuan) responsible for human resources and accounting, as they are regulated by a specialised set of laws that regulate HR and accounting professionals and are excluded from the *Enforcement Rules of Civil Service Employment Act* (2022) and the *Act Governing the Appointment of Educators* (2014). Not to mention there are also janitors and professional technicians, whose employment is again regulated by individual specific laws.

The complex hiring system and the multiple funding sources that can be used to hire the administrators created inconsistency for those who work in even the same higher education institution, sometimes in the same office. The tasks assigned can be similar, but the benefits, career opportunities, and stability of each position can be highly stratified. There is no transferability between different hiring routes. To be a civil servant, one needs to pass a national exam and be assigned to a certain post via the central system. The years working in the same institution cannot be accumulated once a contractor leaves their post. The incompatibility between the systems within the same higher education institution also adds to the challenge of viewing Taiwanese higher education administration as one entity with a consistent career path.

Nomenclature

The nomenclature used to refer to Taiwanese higher education administrators varies, and terms are applied according to different contexts across legal documents. When referring to the members in the universities, 教職員 (jiaozhiyuan; teachers and staff) is the most common term, suggesting the government divides those in the universities based on academic and non-academic logic. The most used term the governmental documents use toward the higher education administration is also a general 職員(zhiyuan; staff). Other specific terms such as civil servants and contractors are used are more contextual and are selected in specific contexts such as when hiring routes and conditions are detailed; administrators are used a few times when discussing the development and funding for administrative systems, and contractors are used when the hiring path is being discussed. One distinction stands out, while papers in the UK and Australia refer to higher education administrators more and more as professional

service staff, there is no usage of the term nor its equivalent translation in Taiwanese documents that contains the professional context.

The general terms such as staff have a wide coverage that varies across documents. Sometimes by using staff, the document points to everyone who is not an academic personnel (Ministry of Education (ROC), 2021). Some are less inclusive and pointed to either the full-time employees like permanent employees and contractors (clause 17.2, Civil Servant Administration Neutrality Act, 2014)) or sometimes the civil servants (clause 14, University Act, 2019; Vice-director in Level 1 Administration Office in University Establishment Standard, 2022). The undefined usage can bring confusion and have to be interpreted by context.

The plenty and non-consistent nomenclature remaining in the governmental documents show not only the complexity of the hiring systems in Taiwan but also the lack of a clear definition and division between higher education administration roles. Combined with the fast-increasing number of administrators after the 2000s, it showed how the original civil servant system was not enough to support university administration after the launch of excellence policies. More temporary and flexible measures and hiring mechanisms are added to recruit the candidates universities needed for the change of focus, but this expansion persists, and 20 years into the national higher education projects, there are more flexible workers than civil servants in the universities.

Besides the hiring system, the broad term "educator (jiaoyu renyuan, 教育人員)" and its application in legal documents adds another layer of complexity for the administrators. In Taiwan, the administration is also enlisted as "educators" in the Act (clause 28, Act Governing the Appointment of Educators, 2014), but it only provides them with limitations, duties, and requirements as extended civil service workers. The benefits, career progression possibilities, and recognitions enjoyed by the civil service system are not applicable to this large part of higher education administration. Under the chaotic terminology and layered hiring identities, higher education administration remains a group with scarce recognition and unclear definitions.

Government-regulated identity

Looking through the Taiwanese governmental laws and policy communication, the term "identity" is nowhere to be found. However, to conclude that identity is not a focus for policy documents might not cover the whole picture. At the beginning of some legal acts, one often finds a definition for certain roles, for example, *Civil Servant Administration Neutrality Act* (2014), *Civil Servant Service Act* (2022), and *Act Governing the Appointment of Educators* (2014), and these definitions include instructions and expectations of a candidate. It includes requests for their physical and mental qualities. Even though there is no mention of one's identity, we might be able to picture from the governmental documents what a good civil servant should look like, as higher education administrators are all regulated by the same set of legal acts regarding civil service members despite their hiring routes.

The civil servant needs to be "honest, incorruptible, cautious, and diligent" (Clause 5, Civil Servant Service Act, 2022). They obey the orders from the managing officers but are not afraid to state back their opinions (Clause 2, Civil Servant Service Act, 2022). They are thorough and practical in implementing their missions (Clause 7, Civil Servant Service Act, 2022) and good at maintaining confidentiality (Clause 4, Civil Servant Service Act, 2022). They do not abuse their power (Clause 5, Civil Servant Service Act, 2022) and follow laws to maintain the administration neutrality without being partial to any individual or parties (Clause 4, Civil Servant Administration Neutrality Act, 2014).

The above depicted an image of an ideal civil service worker defined in the eye of the Taiwanese government, but the description goes beyond their skills and ability to work and into personality traits such as honesty, diligence, and impartiality, which can fall into the realm of identity. Scholars often connect one's behaviours to values and beliefs in the studies of identity (Cavazos Montemayorr et al., 2020; Jowsey et al., 2020). The requirement regulated in governmental documents does regulate certain professional characters from the civil servants, and it presents a highly moral model.

Highly similar wordings are used when describing the requirement for hiring a civil servant and an educator. Article 32 of the *Act Governing the Appointment of Educators* (2014) points out that

> "(t)he appointment of educators should be based on educators' morals and loyalty to the country. Educational background, experience, capability and physique thereof should meet the type and nature of the function that the educator prepares to perform".

In the *Civil Servant Employment Act (*公務人員任用法, 2023; Chinese version) wordings require their morals and loyalty to the country to be examined before their educational background.

4.3.2.2 Regulatory framework in Singapore

Singaporean Acts regulating institutions, including education institutions and policy implementation offices, contain abundant administrative details. The documents tend to provide more details on topics such as governance, finance, and the leaving arrangements for employees when they end the contract on the role. Governance covers the structure of management, stating the selection and appointment process and the responsible personnel. Finance covers from budget expenditure limits to pension schemes. And leaving conditions regulate both managers and employees, providing the condition or the personnel responsible for such decision-making. Certain clauses have a fine attached if broken, such as using the title of "university" when it is not specified by the Minister (clause 4A*, Education Act 1957*, 2020). The document logic remains straightforward, instructive, and regulative.

Practical issues such as senior management of higher education are also included, addressed from a governance angle with clauses regulating the assignment of the senior management roles, the limitations and the responsibilities of these roles, etc. The consistent topics and emphasis on governance indicate strong interest from the government in higher education management and operation.

The documents also demonstrate a consistent theme -- a strong national orientation. The SkillFuture policy document listed that the purpose of the policy includes "to promote a national approach to the provision of adult education and further education..." (clause 5(d)). In the *Education Act 1957* (2020), school registration could be refused if the school could potentially be used for a purpose of instruction "detrimental to the interests of Singapore or of the public" (24(n) and (o)), or if its registration "will be prejudicial to the interests of Singapore or of the public..." (24 (f)). Higher education has often been identified as an engine for national

development, and the regulations in Singaporean legal documents provide substantial governance authority toward it, adding an extra touch to the governance.

After examining and understanding a basic logic of how regulations and acts together built a non-specified professional field for university administrators, I examined a broader surrounding and found influencing factors that were regulated, such as senior management and governance. Comparing the memos made to each code, some themes connected across codes and were identified to be more central for Singapore. They remain recurring themes in the documents and are highly related to the administration in higher education. The themes that reflect the Singaporean features in their legal documents and regulations toward higher education administration include manager, nomenclature and hiring.

Manager

Singaporean legal documents stress heavily on management, especially on the selection criteria, responsibilities, and governance of the managers. In a university, managers cover from senior management to middle management and have more direct working relationships with the administration. More discussion on academic administrators and the influence management has on administration is discussed in Chapter 5. This session addresses how Singaporean management in higher education is regulated, reflecting expectations from a legal framework toward the higher education administration.

The word manager used in the legal acts often refers to not only the singular president or chancellor of an institution but also members of the committee that is involved with the management responsibility *(Education Act 1957, 2020; Education (Grant-in-Aid) Regulations, 2013)*. This addressing in plural form can suggest a more collective and committee-based management mode is planned by the government instead of keeping one singular decision maker, leaving the flexibility of individual differences in the school management structure in each institution.

While all members of the university company need a prior written consent letter from the Minister, the education managers have yet another certification to fulfil, and it is the national registration with approval from the Director General (appointed by the Minister). The refusal of such registration can be due to the person's violation of laws, lack of management skill, or

that "the person is not of good character" (Education Act 1957, 2020). The last condition provided a glimpse of a rare moral requirement among other legal-based clauses, demonstrating requirements on a more personal level toward the individuals bearing management duties.

The responsibilities of education managers in each Act vary. While some are as detailed as that the Manager is required to open a bank account for certain grants *(Education (Grant-in-Aid) Regulations, 2013*), some lack instructions and list only the disqualifying conditions for a manager and the consequences followed (Education Act 1957, 2020). The discrepancy provides institutions flexibility in implementation.

Through exploring the code "manager", I build an indirect observation of how the government and legal framework regulate workers in educational institutions. It mostly coincides with Singaporean's straightforward regulative approach. Once one's registration and responsibilities are established, there are not many else restrictions besides lawful obedience. There exists a light moral requirement for the roles, which can point to either a demand for an educator or someone with management duties, but despite the root requirement, the rare mention of moral-based expectations is worth noting.

A broader description of managers also provides some links with the professional context, which can be found in the *Employment Act 1968* (2020). Not limited to the education sector, managers are "employees with executive and supervisory functions [...]" ('Employment Act: Who It Covers', 2024). They also include professionals with tertiary education and specialised knowledge or skills whose employment terms are like those of managers or executives. For example: "Advocates and solicitors[,] Chartered accountants[, and] Practising doctors and dentists" ('Employment Act: Who It Covers', 2024). By including individuals with specialised knowledge or skills as managers, Singapore's Employment Act confirms a link between the managers and the professionals but draws a grey line between them and the administrators who do not carry management responsibilities.

Nomenclature and hiring

Compared to the multiple choices in the nomenclature of the higher education administrators in literature, Singaporean governmental and legal documents do not record specific terminology used to refer to the higher education administration but contain a few words used to discuss people working in the higher education sector. Despite the procedural, or some might describe as administrative, approach in Singaporean regulations and Acts, there is scarcely any direct addressing toward the higher education administrators in Singaporean governmental documents. The documents examined (see Appendix II) included Acts related to employment, education, national servicemen, and individual universities, as well as higher education policies, and no presence of higher education administrator was found.

The administration is only mentioned as a wider collective under two contexts: as the employees of the universities, and as employees of an institution when it comes to employment-related acts. Most documents use a broad "employee" to refer to any staff in universities without specifying academic or non-academic. For example, in the *Education (Grant-in-Aid) Regulations* (2013), an employee is defined as a "principal, teachers and other salaried persons who are employed in an aided school" (clause 2). The non-specification creates an egalitarian outlook, but as teachers and managers are further regulated in other parts of the *Education Act 1957* (2020) and required national registration, the non-addressing of administrators shows more negligence as the administration is left out in the legal documents.

"Employee", as previously discussed, is widely used, and covers all members from management roles such as principals to general administrators. Across employment-related documents, a neutral "person" is applied when the hiring process or selection criteria are discussed. Administrators are not mentioned in the documents, and even the word "administration" is only used as a function of the policy implementing agency instead of as the collective staff on administrative work or their mission, making the individuals working in this profession invisible in the legal context.

The non-specification in nomenclature echoes what can be observed in the hiring process for higher education administrators. The hiring of university administrators in Singapore is not discussed specifically in the governmental regulations. The legal documents did not single higher education administration out, but all workers are applied to the *Employment Act*. By

addressing all members in the universities equally, details regarding hiring conditions, contracts, and pensions are left to the institutions to decide.

Testimonials from interviews revealed that the recruitment of higher education administration went through governmental and private job portal websites, and headhunting was used in recruiting suitable candidates. The recruitment methods are similar to that of the industry practice, and therefore provide a transferability to professionals with similar skills and experiences whose experience is not necessarily laid in a university environment. The blank in governmental and legal documents leaves spaces for implantation flexibility, and this flexibility creates a more open environment for the wider talent pool.

4.3.3 Higher education policies and their influences

Policy in the higher education sector covers the national funding projects, national initiatives, and short-term programmes the government launched or announced to encourage and cultivate higher education development. Frequently these policies set the goals and point out directions matching national development needs. In the centralised higher education entities, policies can be crucial indicators of higher education administration development due to their high influence on higher education institutions and their foci. The expansion of research and international offices in Taiwan and Singapore is especially evidenced by policy documents and from the office history interviews, and it is highly linked to these national higher education funding.

The policies aiming at higher education excellence started in both countries in the 1990s, and both combined the world university ranking initiative with internationalisation. Singapore announced to build local education institutes into world-class ones in 1996 (National University of Singapore (Corporatisation) Act 2005, 2020), and Taiwan launched the Top University Program in 2003. The high relevance between administration offices establishment and policies was derived from centralised governance of higher education. For example, the International Relations Office at the National University of Singapore was established in 1996 (International Relations Office, 2018). And it is not the only office whose establishment dated close to the policy announcement. In Taiwan, the two participating international offices were established first as centres under Research Offices in the ‘90s, then expanded quickly until they became

independent university-level offices in the late 2000s. Staff numbers grew tenfold in 30 years in one of them. More than office establishment dates, the close bonds also reflect how the particular profession of higher education administration was influenced and shaped by national development needs.

Research excellence is another major theme within the excellence scheme, and the expansion of research offices also aligns with the development of national projects. Establishment date is also not the only thing related to the policy focus Participants in a Singaporean office described how their workload increased after the university intended to transform into a research university. As research and development investment in the higher education sector continues to grow in Taiwan (L. Lee & Liu, 2025) and Singaporean university's research grants are on a general rise (*Research Grants / Revenue*, n.d.; *Trustees' Statement and Consolidated Financial Statements*, 2020; *Trustees' Statement and Consolidated Financial Statements*, 2021; *Trustees' Statement and Consolidated Financial Statements*, 2022; *Trustees' Statement and Consolidated Financial Statements*, 2023), job coverage of research offices in universities expands to include patent management, industry-university collaboration project evaluation, agreement processing, technology transfer, and many more aspects that were originally professional skills from legal firms or patent solicitors.

However, while higher education administration growth is heavily related to the policies, the administration remains invisible in the policies. Development goals are stated, but implementors remain unknown. The only policy that directly addresses higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore is the 2nd phase of Sustained Progress and Rise of Universities in Taiwan (SPROUT), announced in 2023. Higher education administration started to meander toward the spotlight in Taiwanese policies as a development field. In 2nd phase of SPROUT, a sub-section was dedicated to Internationalisation manpower and administration resources. Training for the administrators entered the policy document for the first time, including language skills and knowledge regarding related laws. This is the first time higher education administration cultivation is inaugurated into policy concerns, signalling the demand for quality administration has grown to a noticeable extent in Taiwan.

In the same policy document, three groups of administration are addressed, but in an indirect way without training or talent cultivation purposes. Besides international officers, information

security and indigenous student affairs were appointed focal points in universities. The government required appropriate measures to be incorporated into the institutional policies, training, and systems, This included the recruitment of information security professionals and training for members of universities to be familiarised with basic knowledge in the field. The difference reflected the angle in administration literature, that the administration is addressed indirectly via policy implementation but not directly as a group of employees. Staff in international offices in universities and the special policy focus placed on them is one of the first direct mentions of administrators, but this valuation is still deemed more of an exception. A more general yet specialised attention on higher education administration is still waiting to be formed.

4.4 Discussion

When discussing the university administrators' work or the recognition of their profession, many answers revealed value judgements connected to wider social issues or beliefs. Some show a deeper connection to the same value judgement of the society they are based in, like existing stereotypes toward administrative work. More universal topics are also spotted, such as gender. The values present the local context for the higher education administration and reflect aspects of the society and culture they are in.

Low recognition toward the higher education administration work is reflected from all participating offices, aligning with the general literature (Veles et al., 2023), revealing that the issue remains across different higher education entities and is global. Through the examination of the macrosystem, societal, cultural, and legal influences reflect the limitation and hierarchy that contribute to higher education administration and their professionalism not being recognised.

To the research and international officers in especially Taiwanese universities, many societal and cultural norms collectively form hierarchical rankings that leave them underprivileged in the higher education sector. These administrators are women in a still patriarchal campus. They are involved with the civil service system and therefore associated with the stereotype of bureaucracy. Even within the institution, they are considered young compared to the

established administrative offices, "losing" in seniority to both the academics and the other administrators in Confucian traditions.

This chapter also reveals that, for some, the idea of being a professional can be separated from working in a profession. Participants value the professionalism of their own but hesitate to specify their expertise or extend their professionalism to the whole occupation of higher education administration. The lack of a licensing mechanism, the daily administrative work, and a vague or non-existent definition from the national regulative framework prevent many from calling their roles a profession.

The discrepancy might mark the development of the word "professional", which has become common in various contexts than workers in a profession. If one can be a professional not through working in a profession, then the institutionalised factors such as limited access or license can be overlooked, leaving factors related more toward skills and moral standards. This is a closer depiction of the profession or professional in the participants' reflections in this study.

4.4.1 Underlying cultural influences

The moral-centred clauses and requirements in Taiwanese legal documents often deliver values aligning with the viewpoints from a cultural perspective, and reflect thoughts in the Confucian teaching. The moral requirements involved in Taiwanese legal acts toward its civil servants and educators match principles of the general ancient Chinese values. In this culture, morals or virtues are the most important qualities in a person, followed by their education level. The consistent moral characters between civil servants and educators remind one of ancient China's education system. Many might hold the surface goal of passing the national exam and being assigned as a national officer, but one studies and practices in order to become a Junzi (君子) one who is virtuous and seek ongoing self-improvement (Song & Jiao, 2018). The role of an educator and the role of a state officer is very close to the making of a Junzi and not just to achieve the missions assigned.

The moralistic requirements also expand to institutional missions, tying individuals and their institutions together in the development. Individuals, no matter whether they are civil servants,

administrators, or academics, are expected to bear the bigger picture in mind and contribute to the advancement of society. This mindset is related to another Confucian teaching: "cultivate oneself, harmonise one's family, prosper one's nation, and bring balance to the world (修身齊家治國平天下)". For being a Junzi, the ultimate goal of education is a chain effect of improvement. While education focuses on practising personal virtues to contribute to society, the individual's success is also connected to the societal contribution they make. Similar cultural teaching remains prevalent through Taiwanese legal documents, recorded influences and philosophical principles based on Confucianism.

Singapore has been embracing the developmental state mindset in its national development strategy and national building (Lee & Gopinathan, 2001), and the empirical data, governance, legal Acts, and interviews reveal a continued investment in the mindset. Gopinathan (2007) suggested that the legitimacy of a development state is based on how it promotes and maintains development, and among all development, economic ones are especially emphasised. Education and policies are often the central focus in order to develop human capital (Gopinathan, 2007). Singapore's 2015 policy of SkillFuture demonstrates a return focus on human resources, and the dedicated support from the participants toward national interests as well as the state's development aligns with the developmental state mindset more than other local cultural norms. Further, than personal endorsement, participants also reported a link between their individual professional development and the wider societal development, viewing oneself as a national asset along the lines of a developing human capital. The document analysis and interview revealed a continuous developmental state mindset being weaved into national development, and intertwined in the shaping of higher education administration.

4.4.2 Regulatory frameworks and their influences

Governmental guidelines and legal regulations in Taiwan and Singapore have built different regulatory frameworks for higher education administration. In Taiwan, higher education administrators are taught a moral-heavy narrative, linking one's behaviours to institutional objectives within a layered hierarchy prioritising the academics and their managers. Singapore applies a procedural approach to promote the overall goal of national development, with a

focus on managers and institution registration, the individual administrators remain absent in the legal environment.

The contrasting degrees increase when it comes to the practical implementation of these regulatory frameworks, and the approaches encourage different mindsets and behaviours from higher education administrators. A group of legal regulations layered a complex and strict governance in Taiwan. When procedural protocols and selection criteria are established, even if they encompass a broad spectrum of scenarios and lack specificity, a scope is predefined, within which decision-making must operate. Hence, Taiwanese participants often reflected on the limitations of regulations upon designing new projects. To implement new projects, the legal regulations often need alteration. However, when limitations are on exceptions like in Singaporean legal regulations, it affords a greater degree of flexibility in decision-making. This different approach is reflected in how Singaporean participants discuss the regulatory framework, focusing more on increasing licensure than how it limits administrative daily operations.

Examination of the regulatory framework does not fully reflect the work environment for higher education administrators. Comparing participants in Taiwan and Singapore, Taiwanese administrators demonstrate more agency in generating initiatives and ideas. Singaporean administrators emphasised equally proactive attitudes but aimed at completing missions to their best, but showed no attempt to change or challenge the status quo. (George et al., 2022) observed a struggle toward academic freedom in Singapore. While there is no legally binding nor direct governmental intervention that limits research subject selection, scholars received administrative objections or peer suggestions, combined with considerations for career progression and employment, discouraging them from the 'unsuitable' research subjects or publishing unfavourable research results. Scholars analysed that authoritarian neoliberalism has encouraged priorities toward nation-building over critical research (George et al., 2022). This self-censorship might have had an influence on higher education administration, manifesting in the lack of criticism toward the governance or politics, and conformity toward contributing to national development.

4.4.3 Taiwanese and Singaporean governing approaches

Reviewing the legal documents, the governance approaches appear different between the two centrally governed higher education systems. From the document analysis exemplified in the previous sections, Taiwanese documentation delineates prescriptive guidelines governing how actions and processes are to be executed, while Singaporean regulatory frameworks primarily focus on the actions that are to be avoided and conditions to be ruled out. Taiwanese legal acts not only regulate what is allowed but often publish further Enforcement Rules to include executive details. On the other hand, Singapore's legal acts remain short and focus on the specification of what will be illegal. These regulatory paradigms are disparate in their logic and approach.

Table 5 below shows the different governing approaches between Taiwan and Singapore's legal regulations. The two higher education entities uphold vastly different governing and management styles. Taiwan applies a set of moralistic requirements focusing on higher education administrators' personalities and behaviours, and Singapore simply requires proper registration and legal records. The complex hiring routes mixed with the civil service system in Taiwan established a clear management hierarchy in attitudes and institutional structure. Singapore has a stated management structure in an institution, but does not emphasise the hierarchical rank but a common goal toward national interests. An examination regarding the nomenclature of higher education administration finds a more consistent and neutral "employee" being applied in Singaporean documents, while in Taiwan, the terminology remains plural and overlapping. The terminology in Taiwan also changes in different contexts, with the same term sometimes involving different hiring routes, which further complicates the identities of higher education administrators and confuses the understanding of this particular group of members in universities.

	Taiwan	Singapore
Governing paradigm	Morality and virtues requirements and regulations on actions of individuals or institutions	Procedural, limitation, financial arrangements
Management approach	Moral	Legal
Underlying objectives	Structural hierarchy	National interests

Terminology referring to higher education administrators	Civil servants, contractors, staff, educators...etc.	Employee

Table 5 A comparison between Taiwanese and Singaporean approaches to legal regulations

Chapter 5 Exosystem: University and administration

In Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological system model for human development, the exosystem contains the external environment a person is educated or works. It marks the external layer of an individual's core units where organisational cultures, behaviours, and regulations are involved. To an administration officer, if its core "family" can be compared to the office where members share the same missions and goals and build their recognition based on their shared expertise, the exosystem is simulated to the influencing factors outside of their office.

The relationship between the higher education administrators and their employing institutions becomes a decisive influencer in the adaptation of the ecological system model. The organisational structure, the hierarchy, the management system, and the corporate culture, are all elements that shape the identity and practices of the higher education administrators.

Chapter 5 examines these influences from three dimensions: organisation, management in universities, and through an institutional perspective on the term 'administration', examining its meanings. In the section on organisation, structure and settings are examined to explore how the employing institution institutionalises the profession of higher education administration. A small section comparing the differences between universities and other types of employing organisations is built on participants' experiences and discussions, signifying how universities, being educational institutions, are structured and missioned differently to their members. An examination of the management follows, illustrated by institutional structure and administrators' views. The latter angle helps reflect the influences higher education administrators experience, which often deviate from what guidelines attempt to structure or how the middle and senior managers argue to bring. The third part of this chapter combines findings and discussion to examine the term 'administration' and what it means to the participants. While the discussion involves participants' observations and responses, it largely reflects how institutional structures shape the profession and the professional identity.

5.1 Organisations

The university is the workplace regulating the work content and values of the administrators, as well as where administrators receive their broader education or training. The regulations,

organisational structure, cultures, and even how the hierarchy is laid out can all have significant influences on higher education administrators and shape their understanding of the profession.

Universities have been identified as autonomous professional organisations and demonstrate high similarities to heteronomous professional organisations (Hinings, 2016). As the relationships between professionals and institutions evolve, some relate the management and power of access control of a profession to their professional organisations (Muzio et al., 2013). The concept of a profession is only completed when its organisation is included in the picture. With universities undergoing privatisation, their management and operation styles gradually align closer with corporations. Following the discussion on professional service organisations and to differentiate from the influencing factors, which are viewed as institutions, this section applies "organisation" to refer to the employing institutions. This section reviews the employing organisation's structure, operations, and employment requirements to convey how the changes shape higher education administration.

5.1.1 Working in the public sector, universities, or industries

Employing organisations for participants include more than universities and higher education institutions. The nature and setting of organisations influence their administration in different ways. Multiple participants have administrative experiences in other roles across various types of organisations, and this analysis compares their past experiences and their specific expertise – research and international management separately to understand how different organisational forms shape their professionalisation. This session examines the administrative working experiences and influences of organisational behaviours in civil organisations, higher education institutions, and industrial organisations.

Considering the closed environment of a university administration office, naming the past experience can risk affecting the anonymity of participants. Hence, this section avoids providing direct quotes but turns to descriptions to present the influences different types of organisations pose on their employees. In the cases where direct quotes are included, the sensitive ones will be anonymised.

Participants who have worked in civil organisations in Taiwan and Singapore both reported enjoying more flexibility regarding budget constraints, unlike national or public universities and their budget restrictions. Civil organisations include governmental administration organisations from bureaus, city governments, and governmental agencies to ministry offices. Despite the fiscal autonomy, civil organisations execute public service and face a wider general public audience. The participants detailed heavier responsibilities, the short turnaround time between missions, and negotiation with international governmental partners. Overall, it depicts a highly stressful working environment bearing the duty of national development.

Taiwanese participants equipped with civil service qualifications expressed how working in universities was considered a good and relaxing job among civil servants, as it deviated from an ambitious career in the civil service hierarchy. This was due to the vastly different promotional routes between the university and the civil service system. While one could be promoted to higher level positions across various governmental organisations, the civil servant positions in universities had a set rank and accordingly, the range of salary. To be promoted, one could only seek a higher-rank position. However, the job scopes could often be very different, even when such a position was freed up, it was not necessarily released back into the recruitment pool. All civil service positions in a university are reported back to the university president, and the president holds the right to decide in which office to place these roles and when to start recruitment. A retired civil servant position can remain not filled for a few years and be migrated to a different office. The difference in the career ladder can create a distinct line of work between civil servants who have passed the same subject in national exams.

The main feature of working in a higher education institution is the academic freedom. Outside of research and teaching, the university also enjoys academic freedom and this helps relieve the pressure from governing power and governmental decisions. Taiwanese participants emphasised that higher education institutions had choices to direct their own development path in spite of national development policy directions, and some reported cases where the government updated orders and policies to cater to universities' needs. It demonstrated how within the tight grasp of regulations in Taiwan toward the national higher education institutions, there remained space for ground-up negotiation and innovations. "When there was no precedence, we'll produce a guideline for it", an international officer suggested. Singaporean higher education institutions were also equipped with similar flexibility and the government

encouraged universities for innovation. Participants reflected on a case when administrators proposed a new project, it was soon approved and implemented as soon as the next academic year. Some even believed that university projects are majorly bottom-up initiatives.

However, flexibility depends on comparison. Compared to higher education administrations, industry enterprises were not restricted by the many legal acts and guidelines. In industry, roles remained more authorised as there was a less institutional hierarchy than in universities, and that helps build a trusting working relationship. Though the industry is equipped with a different management system and decisions can be made more efficiently, an emphasis on the firm's fiscal missions is always a priority. To many participants, the pro-profit missions gradually diminished their motivation to work. And often, the long hours conflicted with participants' family duties. Participants shared how the industry was a highly competitive environment while they preferred the cooperation-tended nature of universities.

Compared with private firms, there are no performance reviews, awards, and punishments in universities. Participants suggested that when contribution brought no recognition nor award, and faults did not result in consequences, it was difficult to incentivise employees toward their best performance. Taiwanese participants were further influenced by the annual civil-service-based appraisal system, through which both civil servant and non-civil-servant higher education administrators abode by. Participants across different offices consistently reported a "take-turn" policy, that everyone took turns for the highest and lowest score in the office despite the actual work performance. This misalignment further weakened the administrators' motivation for improvement.

The examination of the different working institutions reveals the higher education sector's special environment to its workers. On values, academic freedom and educational missions provide autonomous space for pro-social causes and encourage meaningful contribution of its administrative workers. However, with governmental restrictions and a rigid management system, the workers are not encouraged to efficiency and high performance. Universities and their structural influences clearly shape their workforce in a very unique way, which the following sections examine closer.

5.1.2 University structure and setting

Higher education institutions including universities have a particular organisational structure than most organisations in other industries, but this structure has been changing over the years along with the privatisation, massification, and neo-liberalism management influences.

University structure often aligns with the government's developmental initiatives in centralised higher education systems. In Taiwan, with higher education policies further incentivising universities with funding, university units including administrative offices and research centres were established paralleling governmental goals. The excellence initiative occupied the policy aims in the 1990s and 2000s, and besides one Taiwanese office that reported its establishment in the 1990s, the other three became offices in the university structure between 2006 and 2007, aligning with the policy development timeframe. Many also described the expansion of office divisions and tasks being aligned with policy changes. Offices of International Affairs were smaller units under the Offices of Research until the internationalisation of higher education became a major policy focus in 2006. Other expansions of university functions and responsibilities also changed the administrative office structure. For example, centres of innovation and industry-university cooperation grew under offices of research since the 90s, and Chinese students were included in the responsibilities of Taiwanese Offices of International Affairs after the 2010s. With policy foci, funding, and university missions steering university structure, the offices' responsibilities inevitably followed the designed development of universities and their changes, and this top-down influence also affected individual skills and career orientation.

Despite the emphasis on policy and funding, university culture does not favour newcomers to higher education administration. Participants often reflected on how cross-office communication with the other offices in their universities had been consistently difficult due to research or international offices being newly established and found to be unfit in the existing guidelines. University B International Affairs Manager 1 further expressed the difficulty of working in an organisation with complex structure such as a university,

"[T]here are many people, many offices, many cases waiting to the solved, and a complex hierarchy, so a lot of times one has no idea of where and who to look for to be responsible. Our tasks are highly divided, so the only thing we know is our own job."

「人多，然後組織多、事情多、架構多，很多時候，你甚至不知道不要去哪裡找誰是負責這件事情的人。因為他已經分得太細了，然後每個人都只知道自己的事情。」

The unfamiliarity of how responsibility and expanding expertise were divided is an occurring theme in many universities, and this gap disrupts cooperation of higher education administration. Not only has the recent establishment of the research and international offices aroused structural turbulence, but their sets of skills and expertise remain new and uncoordinated. The unfamiliarity, boundaries between offices, and the changing responsibility division all created confusion and sometimes conflicts between offices. Taiwanese participants working in international affairs especially faced the difficulty of being "othered", and lacking cooperation from other offices made the international office more independent. Being the rare English speakers in the universities, international officers reported being responsible for all matters related to international interactions, from university delegations to faculty members and to students. Their functions often extend from international student recruitment to covering registrar, accounting, student club activities, and even counselling services. Experiences were shared detailing how other administrative offices would refuse to take up new responsibilities. Testimonials from the research offices also reflected similar unequal responsibilities division in Taiwanese universities.

Participating offices in Singapore recorded better coordination across offices than Taiwanese ones. From the testimonials, Singaporean policies aimed at the broader higher education environment instead of concentrating on individual university development. Governmental funding agencies were often included in the discussion of research management, diluting the presence of the government and their stronghold of governance. The limited number of universities also decreases the intensity of internal competition. Unlike discussions with Taiwanese participants, where specific policy titles have often been named as references, Singaporean participants did not "namedrop" governmental initiatives but concentrated more

on institutional and personal development. Sometimes, these discussions specialised to their respective expertise.

Singaporean participants also portrayed better internal coordination in the universities. Take the recruitment process for example, in Singapore, the office recruiting informs the HR office of the requirements for the post. The job division then has the HR office managing the procedural recruitment including announcement and advertising job descriptions, and the recruiting office is involved in candidate interviews. Both offices keep each other updated through the process until they find a suitable candidate. In Taiwan, the cooperation is not as consistent. There were cases where different offices took up responsibility for the complete recruitment process when the budget used to pay for the recruiting role differed. Even management of personnel such as reporting wages and recording annual leaves could be sometimes assigned to another office than HR. There were also cases of rejection when one office asked another office to support new projects when it came to the Taiwanese higher education administration. However, while Singaporean offices reported working together to maintain a clearly defined HR procedure, discussions involving other administrative offices remain infrequent. While this demonstrates a clear division of tasks and independent work, it also indicates a highly divided higher education administration profession in Singapore.

5.1.3 University employment requirements

The topic of recruitment provided another angle to examine the university's expectations of its administration. Employment regulations and requirements reveal the organisational expectations toward the administrators. By examining the university's recruitment requests, details illustrate an "ideal" higher education administrator. While not all university regulations are public information, testimonials from the participants and recruitment advertisements supplement grounded information. 20 advertisements were collected from the university recruitment sites from research and international offices in two Taiwanese universities and 16 from two Singaporean public universities in April 2024. Examining the recruitment criteria and responsibilities, documents are written with notable differences.

Similarities in required skills across the recruitment documents include communication and a high standard of language. 32 occurrences of communication were captured across 36

recruitment advertisements from Taiwan and Singapore, across research and international offices. International offices tend to list a higher requirement for language command than research offices. In Taiwan, recent advertisements showed that recruitment requires candidates for both research and international offices to be bilingual in Chinese and English.

Communication proves to be a crucial skill for higher education administrators, covering from interpersonal communication, coordination communication, cross-office and project communication, to more stakeholder-based ones such as student communication, as well as specific fields like social media communication, marketing communication, to communication of research information. The wide range of communication types provided a glimpse into the expanding tasks that are now included in the higher education administration responsibilities, and how the expanded tasks have been further specialised.

From analysing the recruitment requirements, a preference for administrative experience repeatedly occurred. Both Taiwanese and Singaporean recruitment advertisements stated that internal or higher education related administrative experience is valued, endorsing higher education administration knowledge. The roles in administrative offices in universities were often deemed non-specialised in tasks, and their employable baselines were marked at any university degree. The preference of higher education administration experiences demonstrated that the knowledge and prior experiences gained from the profession were less replicable from other positions.

An interesting division was noted at the end of the job descriptions. In Taiwan, the last item was often listed as “any affairs assigned by the management (其他主管交辦事項)”, and Singaporeans used the term ad-hoc initiative and in two out of three occurrences it was specified to be by the office. The difference in terminology reflected the respective hierarchy in the office and how missions were created and assigned. The wording in the recruitment advertisements demonstrated a top-town mindset in Taiwanese university offices and a heavy hierarchical relationship in centralised management. In Singapore, the offices maintained a certain level of autonomy and agency. The difference evidenced an office-centred mindset in decision-making and operation and echoed the neoliberal management style Singapore adopts.

Some other differences in recruitment requirements in Taiwan and Singapore reflected their local culture. In Taiwan, the moral-valued principle identified in legal documents also occurred in five of the recruitment advertisements, requesting "virtuous" and "hard-working and diligent" candidates. Four other occurrences requested "enthusiasm in service". The similarity in preference of moral characters from legal documents was reflected in the recruitment documents, enforcing the connection between university administration and virtuous characteristics at the university level. It was also worth noting that many Taiwanese advertisements listed specific national policies that funded the recruiting roles, further establishing governance links and specified project priorities.

Singaporean recruitment sought different capabilities in the administrators, and there was a higher specification in the requested diploma, skills, and experiences. Compared to "any bachelor's degree" in Taiwanese documents, Singaporean documents listed the requested disciplines of the candidates' degrees. The advertisements stressed relevant experiences and sometimes requested a minimum of five to eight years. The roles often were equipped with a wider range of skills as well, even a highly technical job could also require commercial skills such as marketing and management.

Taiwanese administrator recruitment and the intertwined civil service system

Due to the overlap of the civil service system, the salary of higher education administrators in Taiwanese universities follows the standard of the Ministry of Science and Technology. The set rate of salary with no bonus nor civil servant exclusive benefit packages is lower than the average wage in the city where University B is located.

In 1995, the Taiwanese government published the *National University Endowment Fund Establishment Act*, requiring universities to build their own funds to support the organisational operations. Most universities delegated this responsibility to individual administrative and academic units. However, the guidelines for utilising and distributing the funds raised varied significantly by individual offices and colleges. In some cases, offices that generated the income had the freedom to allocate these funds to their members and/or projects. In other cases, the income must be collected by the university, with budgets then being centrally distributed.

Participants stressed the importance of financial incentives and fiscal flexibility in daily operations and their relations to agencies of higher education administrators.

Taiwanese universities' multi-track hiring routes from the legal systems directly caused differences among the administrators working in the same office. One administrator described their experience transferring from a permanent position to a contractor. The HR office at the university did not understand the administrator's decision as they deemed the permanent position a safer career choice and more beneficial. However, the differences between working as a permanent worker and as a contractor are minimal, as their day-to-day tasks remained the same, but a 20% raise in salary occurred when the administrator switched to the route of a contractor. Another participant reported how contractors have an 'extra bonus' without specifying whether it was financial or else. The observations revealed an unequal wage in universities based on employees' hired status and recorded conflicting conditions between the rigid civil service system and individual organisation's guidelines.

5.1.4 University in the higher education ecosystem

University is in essence an educational institution, and interview responses reflect how many administrators bear an awareness of such social responsibilities. University B International Affairs Manager 1 explored what the core mission of a university is, quoting Confucius, "Junzi must seek the foundation, once the foundation is established, the rightful path will accordingly emerge (君子務本，本立而道生)". However, in reality, the foundation was not the only thing universities pursue. They shared ideas in vivid language on how the university was expected to bear responsibilities in recent times:

> "But it's not just that simple to the others. Why is that species of bird facing extinction? It is university's business. Why are the roads paved unevenly? It is also university's business. Right? [...] Then why are there homeless people on the street? It is also an issue the universities need to come up with a solution for."
> (University B International Affairs Manager 1)

「但是這對其他人來講並不是這樣子，那邊那個鳥滅絕也是大學的事情，那邊那個馬路不平也是大學的事情，對不對？那這邊為什麼有人會流浪在街頭？也是大學的事情。」

The participant's observation matched the observation of university mission expansion and resulted in an expansion of administrative responsibilities. University's unique positionality also cultivates its members to identify with social responsibilities.

Higher education administrators are also bound by moral and social contribution demands in Singapore, just being members of education institutions. A similar mindset that viewed individuals as connected to the wider society out of a collective sense of development was recorded in University D Research Institutional Support Manager 1's replies:

> "And [...] things like that primarily is, I will say, machinery for all the grant information. And it's a link to your finance system. The[n] link to the publication [...]. So it's a complex system. And we think it'd be useful for the community." (University D Research Institutional Support Manager 1)

The statement illustrated how administrators position themselves as facilitators in the bigger society, connecting education to other sectors such as financial and commercial ones. Many responses reflected the same mindset, aspiring to contribute to the community.

University was viewed as a driving force or engine of knowledge production to the ecosystem in higher education if not the society, and many administrators recognised the weight and responsibility that came with it. University C International Affairs Manager 1 considered that the "ecosystem needs universities to properly function." The positionality encouraged many administrators in Taiwan and Singapore to demonstrate altruism-based values toward their roles. When discussing motivating mechanisms at work, University B Research Institutional Support Manager 1 commented on the university's new initiative of an awarding system that provided bonuses for the administrators, indicating that the administrators tended to look for long-term changes, and it might be driven by a higher call than financial rewards.

> "Money is only motivating for short-term goals and goals on the surface."
> (University B Research Institutional Support Manager 1)
>
> 「錢可以驅動的部分 其實只是比較短期、比較表面的。」
>
> "I know I prefer jobs in a university because I don't like to earn money for others."
> (University A Global Student Affairs Manager 1)
>
> 「我知道我自己都比較喜歡做這種學校的工作，是因為我不喜歡幫人家賺錢。」

The discussion away from money seems irrelevant at first glance. But with knowledge of Confucianism literature, Junzi's virtues also encourage one to pursue righteousness and not monetary support (eg. Don't bow down for a small wage; 不為五斗米折腰). Out of the respected occupation ranking, businessmen, a representative of capitalism, are also ranked as the last in all occupations while scholars are ranked at the top. Confucianism judges the pursuit of money as distasteful and superficial next to personality building and moral pursuits. While this value remains prevalent in the higher education sector, the administrators also inherited similar value judgments following this principle to prioritise contribution and not money. As how University D Research Support Manager 1 expressed, "[W]e all just take pride in our work."

The career of a Singaporean university administrator is also not limited to the university. Third-party funding agencies provide job opportunities outside of higher education institutions but within the field of research management, broadening the choices for administrators and researchers. A similar altruism to the Taiwanese administrators to contribute to the development was found in the interviews with Singaporean participants, but while Taiwanese participants stressed university development, Singaporeans focused on wider themes such as national research capability or national development. The role of a university was just one of the employers with acceptable employing terms to the Singaporean participants.

Besides the aspect of social contribution and purposeful value, the university is also unique in its multi-stakeholder environment. Internally, there are teachers, researchers, students, and employees; externally, there are government, non-governmental agencies, industrial partners, and other academic partner institutions at home or abroad. University B Research Support Manager 1 pointed out the dilemma university administration has always kept in mind:

> "The teachers only take their research and teaching into concern, students care about what they learned, but the university also needs to consider its own development. What should I do?"
> (University B Research Support Manager 1)
>
> 「老師只管他的研究跟教學，學生只管他的學習，那我到底？那學校還要考慮他自己的發展。」

5.2 Management

Higher education administration literature often overlaps with governance and leadership (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Cheung, 2005; Mok, 2002; Welch, 2020), examining administration with a top-down approach. Considering the inconsistency in career ladders, employment terms, and professional development, this study excluded academic administrators. Nonetheless, management remains a crucial topic that emerged from the responses of the participants. This section, therefore, collects the relevant discussion on management in universities but focuses on the influences of higher education administrators from the management structure, management style, and even the operation hours of the management.

The section begins with a discussion on the middle management in the universities. Middle management literature centres around academic middle management, and still lacks discussions involving the administrative middle managers (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). The term can be ambiguous but is largely used to describe those who are not in senior management roles but bear management responsibilities in an administrative office. Only nine participants (with different levels of management responsibilities) in the research fit the description, and to keep anonymity, quotes in the following session are not specified of the speaker. A mixture of personal and institutional guideline-informed perspectives is captured in the discussions, providing different angles to view and evaluate the professionalism of higher education administration.

The influences on higher education administration from senior management are further separated into two aspects: structural and visionary. Structural influences discuss the different recruitment terms and conditions senior management adopts, and how these regulations such as working hours, academic background, and trainings impact the administrators. Visionary influences refer to the management styles of senior managers. Participants also provided more details on how the attitude, visions, and authorisation level of individual senior managers affected the development of higher education.

5.2.1 Middle management and their experiences

Definitions of middle management positions are different between Taiwan and Singapore. In Taiwan, as the heads of offices are assigned to the academic managers, middle management refers to team leaders between frontline administrators and the office heads. Only civil servants are eligible for these middle management roles. This regulation consequently limit the candidates to only academics (as they are included in the civil service system) and the few civil service members, while the majority of university administrators are excluded. In Singapore, senior management roles only include the presidents and vice presidents, excluding office heads, which are often assigned to people with administration or professional backgrounds. Despite a few exceptions, a trend of drawing the division between senior management and middle management between academics and non-academics persists.

During the discussion, it was noted that the "professional background" of the middle managers in Singapore appeared across interviews. The usage of "professional" here deviated from the topic of professionalisation in this research, and is used as a substituting term for industry or non-university in the context. While it exemplified the confusion caused by the "messy" terminologies again, it also demonstrates the possibility of a transferrable experience and generalisation from higher education administration to outside the higher education environment in Singapore.

The participants in middle management roles do not share the same career ladders or promotional opportunities with the academic administrators. Singaporean middle management participants were recruited due to their specific skill set. Many described that the institution was in need of trained personnel with a combination of multiple specialisations and matching candidates remain rare. In Taiwan, many middle manager participants began their careers as entry-level administrators and were promoted due to experiences and trust from the office heads. It is worth noting that while bearing management responsibilities, most of these participants do not own a title in the university system to reflect their management responsibilities. There are a few reasons behind the phenomenon: The civil servant system is the first barrier, limiting non-civil-servants to be promoted and civil servants to change roles easily. Moreover, the quota of civil servants in the new offices such as research offices and international offices remains scarce. With the low number of civil servant employees, research and international offices rely on contractors to take up management responsibilities but again, are unable to provide official titles or salaries to reflect the responsibilities of their work.

The segregating recruitment routes create difficulty in the development of middle managers in administration, since in both Taiwan and Singapore, non-academic employees are not eligible for promotion past middle management positions. The division between them and the academics also contributes to why no middle management participants interviewed showed expectation to be promoted further. One participant described the experience of being offered a higher-ranked job title but refused it:

> "It (the higher title) is too scary [...] I told them I don't want it. If I bore that title, faculty members will give me evil eyes."
>
> 「太嚇人了[...] 我說我也不要，那個我拿出去會被老師瞪。」

The response demonstrated that outside of the institutional structure, there remain cultural limitations. The academics showed disapproval for administrative members promoting into management roles that were exclusive to academics in the past, further reflecting low-recognition of higher education administration's professionalism and an academic-administrator hierarchy where the academics maintain the higher ground.

Another Singaporean participant quoted from the university regulations that the highest position they can work their way up to is director, as anything above the level of director is reserved for academics. The exceptions are only the vice- or deputy-president of administration. While this role is open to professional candidates without an academic background, it is almost exclusively assigned to candidates with financial management backgrounds and often with experience in both the public and private sectors, not limiting to university administration. Most middle management roles in universities, even in places with professional development possibilities like Singapore, still have an unbreakable ceiling.

Occupying a position between academic decision-makers and administrative frontline implementers, participants in middle management tend to perceive themselves primarily as supportive roles. One described their main tasks as a "seeding process", and another one dedicated themselves to employee development and "[being] able to create this environment that people feel not bad. Can stay." A Taiwanese participant in a middle management role shared their belief about the management responsibilities assigned:

"I found the biggest reason to be here as a manager is to assist our colleagues and rid them of administrative *suffer*[ing]. We need to spend more time on communicating and sharing how we overcome possible administrative bottlenecks that may arise."	「我覺得當到這個主管最大的原因，是我們必須要協助下面的同仁去免於行政的suffer，我們要花比較多時間，去溝通分享我們要怎麼去解決這中間可能會遇到的行政瓶頸。」

The statement interestingly revealed a negative connotation of administrative work being a "suffering" and creating "bottlenecks", but laying the responsibilities on middle management roles to solve these administrative difficulties. While the statement demonstrates the mindset of a facilitator instead of a manager, it clarifies that a large amount of work for the middle managers is entangled in the administration system and coordinating administrative tasks, which can be a deficient spot for academic managers.

From examining middle management in research and international offices, it is visible that these university administration offices are flat organisations. While the middle management roles lack authorisation and concentrate more on their supportive functions instead of decision-making it brings a limited contribution to improve the efficiency of the office. The flat structure also restricts career advancement and development opportunities for higher education administrators at all levels.

5.2.2 Challenges in leadership and their impact on institutional sustainability

While academics consist of the majority of senior management in both Taiwanese and Singaporean universities, their recruitment paths remain different. In Taiwan, the senior management team centres around the president. The presidential election opens to self-selected candidates. A mission-based committee is formed to evaluate the qualifications and suitability of the candidates. Eligible candidates are submitted to the University Council to determine the finalists. The finalists undergo interviews with the president selection committee, and a final voting round from the committee selects the new president. For Singapore, a mission-based committee is also at the centre of the selection process, while an external HR agency is used to generate a list of suitable candidates. The list is submitted to the committee for the interviews and selection process. The election process reflects the governing style

differences in Taiwan and Singapore, while the former is more collegial and the latter more managerialism-centred.

The senior management team in Taiwan is invited and nominated by the president. This senior management cabinet includes positions from vice presidents, registrar, dean of student affairs, dean of research, and dean of international affairs, etc., and hence following the terms of the president, and is usually renewed after a 4-year term of office unless the president is again elected. This term can be shortened by any manager's personal career plan, but the changing terms of senior managers create instability for the administrative offices. According to an anonymous administrator:

> "[W]e spend a lot of time adapting to the managers. You mentioned four years? Four years is the longest term, many left after two or three years. The shortest manager I had left after three months."
>
> 「我們常常在適應老闆，你說他們待 4 年，待 4 年是最長了，兩年、3 年就走了，一年就走了，還有最短 3 個月就走。」

From the testimonial, the term of office was often cut short by the academic managers. Administrators spend time adapting to the management style and catering to expectations, but the adaptation needs constant alteration and adjustment. When another academic manager arrives, the process restarts.

In Taiwan, due to the civil service qualification limit, middle and senior management positions are mostly assigned to academics. Their working hours and location remain flexible in order to accommodate other responsibilities including teaching and research. Positions below the rank of vice president like registrar, head of student affairs office, college dean, department chairman, and the team leaders in each administrative office, are all part-time roles added alongside their academic responsibilities. The time away from the office can also result in a distant management style and an "absent management" for the daily decision-making. Administrators reflected feelings of being left out, misunderstood, and some reflected a lack of administrative knowledge from the inactive managers:

> "[The managers] are part-time responsibilities for professors, they are not managing you, so you are by yourself."
> (Anonymous quote)
>
> 「就是教授兼任，他沒有在管你啊，所以就一個人。」

“When there are conflicts, the managers have to resolve them. But everyone knows that our managers are working part-time, so we can only count on ourselves.” (Anonymous quote)	「起衝突老闆就要出來處理。因為大家都說我們那個主管都是兼的嘛？大家自己都要自立自強。」
“Unless you report to them (part-time managers) proactively, or you need to ask specific questions, otherwise they do not really know what you are working on.” (Anonymous quote)	「他就是除非你主動跟他回報，或是你要問他什麼問題，但是他也不知道你們在幹什麼。」

While the first statement described a neglectful manager and how that prompted an independent working style, the wording they used for ‘they are not managing you’ could also be translated as ‘they do not care about you’. The indication further expressed a lack of attention to the employees from the managers. The second quotation reflected an interesting incident which involved cross-office conflict, they brought up the norm that managers were expected to solve a conflict. Yet with a part-time manager who is short of knowledge of such a norm, the expected solution would not arrive and the administrators seek alternatives on their own. The “everyone” and “us” in the statement also referred to administrative offices with a longer history and civil servant managers who are more familiar with the administration system and the hidden relationships. The third testimonial revealed disconnected communication, emphasising both a lack of attention and administrative knowledge of the office member. All descriptions reflected a manager who is unfamiliar with office culture and responsibilities, and distant to office members and tasks.

The daily absence, coupled with the inconsistency between the terms aligned to the presidency, makes it difficult for the managers to integrate into the office. Development strategy, missions, and goals of the administrative offices also alter with the managers. The inconsistency of managers directly impacts the development of the office and the institution. Administration registers this fact, and from the responses, an emphasis on continuity and development emerged to be their main concern facing the changing management candidates.

"Our managers won't be here for long, they always leave after a short while, so there is no continuity. However, the university must consider its own development. Sometimes they have to rely on these people [administrators] to sustain it"
(University B International Affairs Manager 1)

「我們的主管是不會待久的，一陣子、一陣子就走了，所以沒有什麼東西是延續性的，那可是學校必需要考慮發展，所以有時候必須要仰賴這些人去撐住這件事情。」

"But while I am planning for the best for the office, I also need to plan for myself. After all, you [managers] will leave, but I am the one who has to stay."
(University A Global Student Affairs Manager 2)

「可是因為我在為辦公室好的同時，我也需要考量我自己，因為畢竟你是會走的人，我是不會走的人啊。」

Administrators express a struggle toward maintaining sustainability and development for their office and universities, and at the same time a personal need for career development. Both testimonials reveal administrators' concerns and a discrepancy between the management role's term of office and long-term planning.

Most administrators remain empathetic to the scholars' multiple responsibilities in teaching and research but identify the difficulties of the part-time role design. The absence causes delays in communication and confusing responsibility distribution:

"When you need to discuss the matter with a manager, you just cannot find one."
(University A Research Institutional Support Manager 2)

「你今天要找一個主管討論一個事情，就是找不到人。」

"I am not a manager. You should consult your manager. Why is everyone seeking my advice in all sorts of matters? But no one can find their managers."
(University A Research Institutional Support Manager 2)

「我又不是主管，你應該去找你的主管，怎麼有什麼事都來問我？但是大家都沒有找到主管啊。」

From the participants' words, the absent managers caused a void in communication. This was further fortified by a lack of authorisation, where decision-making was concentrated in the highest-ranked academic manager. Without their guidance, the more experienced employees in the office were often required to substitute in consulting roles, bringing another ambiguity in responsibilities and line management.

The nature of academic administration also means that most managers have no administrative knowledge, and most participating universities do not provide relevant training to academic administrators. Incidents reported include insufficient manpower for the office due to the manager's misunderstanding of hiring contracts and quotas, miscommunication with other offices due to the manager's lack of understanding of the organisational structure, and extra administrative work due to unfamiliarity with the digital communication platform of the university.

Administrators from both Taiwan and Singapore commented on the difficulty when the managers are not "grounded". "Senior management, they don't do the day-to-day, so they won't know the limitations" (University C Research Support Manager 1). University B Research Institutional Support Manager 2 also agreed:

> "For the higher ranked senior managers, we feel like they are generally supportive, but they possibly do not have that much understanding of details."
>
> 「我說最越上層的長官，我們感受到的其實都是支持的，但是他們可能也不見得，對細節有那麼多了解。」

The continuity issue is not emphasised in Singaporean offices, however, with a different structure of senior management and middle management, higher education administrators in Singapore operate daily with consistent middle managers and have fewer chances of working with senior managers. The distance to the university leadership and ample authorisation minimise administrators' interactions with senior managers. Singapore also has more bottom-up initiatives from the offices. For example, University D Research Support Manager 2 described an experience when they proposed a project to broaden interdisciplinary interactions of faculty members, where not only the event proposal was approved, but their original plan was tripled and implemented across the university as the senior management endorsed the proposal.

Despite the incompatibilities, academic administrators are considered necessary in the university administration. Supporting arguments surround their capability in academic communication and that their academic analytic skills contribute to visionary planning for long-term development. Some participants recognised the effectiveness of academic administrators' communication with other academics, including the president, with a similar thinking path and logic. University A Research Institutional Support Manager 2 further emphasised their understanding of the academic culture:

> "They know better what fields are in the university, which ones are more visionary, and from which professors they can require actions."
>
> 「他比較知道學校有哪些領域，比較有一些前瞻性，或者是說哪些老師他叫得動。」

Besides the academic knowledge in discipline categorisation and scientific development, the later part of the testimonial also reveals a hierarchy existed between academics and administrators. The term "jiaodedong 叫得動; translated as "require actions", indicates a more powerful position from the subject to the object, but the power is not absolute like a command. The subject and object can have an equivalent position or ranking, but there remains an endorsement and respect from the object to the subject, which can be rare from the academics to the administrators in a university.

5.2.3 Senior management visions and influences on administrators

One of the main foci involving senior management is their vision toward university development and participants' voices with support. However, lacking grounded knowledge and administrative experience, conflicts between visions and reality occur. A few incompatibilities between senior managers' visions and implementations were reported:

> "Maybe the president's thoughts do not match the traditional climate in the university. People from other [administrative] teams will deem it not their business."
>
> 「可能校長的想法是跟校內那種傳統的氣息是不符合的，然後其他組的人，他會覺得這不是我的業務。」

(University A International Affairs Manager 2)

University A International Affairs Manager 2 reported a conflict between senior management values and administrative office priorities. The statement revealed two levels of conflicting values, one between the president and the administration, but another one between their office and other administrative offices that are more traditional. It also revealed a conflicting higher education administration with offices upholding various values and working ethics.

> "The managers have something they want to realise, so they *push* the administrators onto that path. They have their thoughts, but every team in the administrative offices has their own planned direction and their own paths. When the visions conflict, we administrators then have two missions to accomplish."
>
> 「他會想要他有他想要做的事情，所以他就會 push 你往他的方向走，那他有他的想法，但是每個組其實都有自己的方向、有自己的路要走，那他有他的方向的話，就變成說，我們會有兩個、兩條線要去做。」

University A International Affairs Manager 1 also reported tension between the manager's strategy and the administrator's implementation. The same incompatibility was addressed in the last section regarding the constantly changing managers. The statement reflected a struggle between short-term and long-term development, as well as between visions from individual academic managers and the administrative unit.

Another participant shared their experience working at universities in the United States and Taiwan, who promptly responded that the primary difference was hierarchy. Indirect descriptions indicated that Taiwanese offices exhibited more hierarchical relationships, even when the communication style allowed for bottom-up interactions. Comments ranged from attempts to adapt to superiors, to fears of transitioning to new leadership. One participant observed:

> "Because there are too many 'manager assigned affairs'. Whatever they (managers) want, we have to *deliver."*
> (anonymous quote).
>
> 「因為太多是交辦事項，會變成他們想要什麼東西，我們就要 deliver。」

The short statement again addressed the issue pointed out in 5.1.3, where 'any affairs assigned by the management' in the recruitment advertisement remain plentiful in daily operations. With the demand and a hierarchical manager-managed relationship, administrators can spend the majority of their work delivering what management requests.

The influences individual managers bring to an office are prevalent amongst Taiwanese administrators, to the point that they affect administrators' choices to remain at the job. Two participants directly connected their motivations for staying at the office with their current manager. Six other occurrences reflected a frequent alteration for office managers with disapproval and indicated that the manager candidates affect one's decision whether to remain in the role. A participant suggested:

> "If we fought for changes for three years, then the manager left and everything went back to the way they were before. Those three years were but a ripple."
>
> 「假設好我們搏鬥了 3 年，然後現在換一個老闆，他又回去原本的樣子，那其實這 3 年只是小波動。」

The statement again addressed the constant change of managers but also revealed how strategy and policy alter with the managers and their personal values. The statement also revealed how such alteration is frequent. While the administration has no influence on management candidate selection, there is a passive tone for one to accept the new candidates.

From the previous quotes, it was observed that managers and their management styles largely impact administrators' daily work. A participant pointed out that the attitude of the managers can often increase uncertainty in daily work. Others defined the alteration more positively, even when there were difficult managers, they only stayed for a set period of time:

> "This is an advantage. In a set period of time, like 4 or 8 years, the leaders change. How we administrators solve problems can also keep altering in methods."
>
> 「這是一個好處，就是一定的時間 4 年、8 年會換領導者，那他會有不同的風格，那我們的行政人員的方式，處理事情的方式就會，就是可以可以一直不斷的自己做調整。」

Fewer occurrences of senior management and their vision were brought up by Singaporean respondents. Compared to Taiwanese participants, the consistency in office managers in Singapore creates a more stable environment for higher education administrators. The level of strategy creation is initiated at the office head in Singapore, and their comparatively grounded administrative experience combined with bottom-up initiatives from the office increases the likelihood of developing a more aligned vision with the frontline administrators. The continuous terms of office from the office heads in Singapore, which are more independent from the terms of office of senior management, also contribute to the sustainability of administrative office operation. However, the participating offices in Singapore are considerably smaller than the Taiwanese ones, which can result in a flatter structure with less hierarchy and easier communication.

5.3 Defining administration in higher education

In 39 questionnaire responses across Taiwan and Singapore, all but one participant selected "administrative skills" as an essential skill to their work. However, even with the recognition of the administrative elements in their work, interviews revealed a range of understandings and definitions of words such as "administrator" and "administrative skills" across offices. Participants used "administrative" to describe events, work content, or a person, and the usages indicated the interpretations of administration varied from an institutional perspective to an administrator's angle.

The nomenclature choices from the administrators (*Table 6*) might provide a glimpse into the difference. The questionnaire included two questions on nomenclature, one on which title best reflects one's position and another on which title other members of the university deem most accurate for their roles. The five options provided include administrator, manager, professional staff, general staff, and non-academic staff. "Administrator" was selected as the most accurate description of their roles to the Taiwanese participants, no matter from their own eyes or other internal members of the university. A division occurred in Singaporean views, while Singaporean participants' self-recognition leaned toward "professional staff", they believed that other members of the university saw them as "administrators". Singaporean participants also reported that in other's perceptions, "professional staff" was the least appropriate term for their jobs, and the report matched Taiwanese administrators' views. Taiwanese administrators least

recognised themselves as "professional staff", while Singaporean administrators thought "general staff" least described them. The discrepancy showed different connotations of the term "administrator" and how in some contexts it was considered more negative than others.

	Taiwanese self-recognition	Taiwanese others' views	Singaporean self-recognition	Singaporean others' views
Most accurate	Administrator	Administrator	Professional Staff	Administrator
Least accurate	Professional Staff	Professional Staff	General Staff	Professional staff

Table 6 Nomenclature from higher education administration and external views in Taiwan and Singapore

This section continues to cross-examine how others perceive administrators and administrators' self-understandings. Through stereotypes and work priorities the administrators in order to understand the essence of the term administration and its most valued quality. Repeated elements appear in the testimonials including "administrative knowledge", "human factor", assistance to the academics, and their roles as the connecting nodes. Together this section organises narratives of the day-to-day operation of the higher education administration and collects grounded understandings of the profession from the practitioners.

5.3.1 Perceptions and stereotypes

From participants' descriptions, negative stereotypes and misunderstandings surround their daily work. Despite no direct interference, the social gaze and judgement influence administrators' perceptions toward their own profession. The stereotypes installed from societal views influence higher education administrators in two ways: one to the external audience, and one to the administrators themselves. To the external audience, stereotypes impact the setting and structures surrounding higher education administrators, and to the administrators, these stereotypes affect how they define themselves and their work, resulting in their daily choices and behaviours.

An image of administrators depicted by participants is that of a generalist— an individual who undertakes a variety of tasks without specific missions or specialised skill sets. The low threshold for entry requirements to higher education administration roles was underscored in

discussions regarding the criteria that constitute a profession and played a significant role in characterising the administrative position as a generalist. "You can be a general generalist, then you just do the general job", said University D Research Institutional Support Manager 1 illustrated the limitation on improvement if one defined themselves by the stereotypes of a generalist. The broad range of responsibilities, combined with minimal requirements for specialised skills, did not foster a sense of professionalism among the participants. Instead, it reinforced the perception of administration as a generalist occupation.

Behind Taiwanese participants' unified self- and external recognition of "administrator", the interpretations, usages, and depictions of the term are not as singular. When one mentions "administrative work", there is frequently an association of clerical or repetitive work content, such as running errands or paperwork. Examples included the following testimonials:

> "They don't think administration is a job, not at all, it's just running errands." (B1-H).
>
> 「那他們就覺得行政根本，就是根本就不是一個工作，是雜事。」
>
> "do the endless administrative tasks [...]." (University A Research Support Manager 1).
>
> 「比較無盡地做一些[...]行政作業。」

Besides the link between the term administration and clerical work, there were also contexts that suggested a highly obedient nature of the administrative roles:

> "All in all, to me administration makes people think of someone who receive orders and produce output accordingly, nothing more." (University A International Affairs Manager 2)
>
> 「總之我覺得行政會讓人家覺得有一種接收指令做事，就是這樣子而已。」

In University A International Affairs Manager 2's statement, administrative work remained hierarchical and agreeable. Administrators were workers who received orders and instructions and then implemented them accordingly. Both stereotypes remained common in Singaporean participants' statements, demonstrating a connection of administration being clerical, repetitive, hierarchical, and without decision-making power.

Another repetitive theme is unique to Taiwanese higher education administration, interlinking with the impressions long existed in the civil service industry:

"Normally, the societal impression toward this occupation is that it is stable. Stable and something that is only second best to the permanent job of a civil servant's. This is how I depict the impression from the public's opinion. Under this premise, it is difficult for people to identify what professional skills are there in this profession."
(University A Global Student Affairs Manager 3)

「一般社會對這個職業的印象就是穩定，穩定，然後有點類似、僅次於公務員的鐵飯碗的那種感覺。這是我理解的一般大眾的印象就是這樣子，那在這樣的前提下他會很難去看得到它中間會是有什麼專業的技能。」

As civil service is considered a stable yet stagnant job, related stereotypes include a slow work pace, a bureaucratic structure, and a passive attitude that avoids tasks. Similar stereotypes are sometimes linked to the university administration.

Singaporean participants indicated similar negative stereotypes toward the word administrator, in spite of the term's general and technical usage in Singaporean laws. Responses from participants addressed future development fighting such a negative context. When professionalism was addressed in the discussion, University C Research Support Manager 2 expressed that:

> "[w]e should change or rebrand or rethink how we see administrators are, we just see administrators for who they are." (University C Research Support Manager 2).

These stereotypes associated with the profession could sometimes also become a self-prophecy and attract candidates with matching values to the stereotypes. Participants reported the term "agenda administrator", depicting those candidates who are shaped by this culture and only follow the agenda assigned. The agenda administrators were described as lacking motivation to improve the quality of results. "Agenda administrator in my mind will never do it. Because they will just, you asked me to submit, then submit." (University D Research Institutional Support Manager 1)

The investigation into what administration stands for also revealed the tension between academics and administrators. Many administrators reported disrespectful behaviours from the faculty members. Words such as "throw" the tasks to, "treated like trash", "disposable", or "treated like nobody (不是人)" occurred during the interviews. While many do not consider

administration valued by the academics and others feel disregarded, still some reported holding more understanding perspectives toward these behaviours:

> "After all, administrative units are essentially like this. Faculty members sometimes spot where you did not do well, so they sometimes complain, right? We'll just listen to the complaints." (University A Research Support Manager 5).
>
> 「反正行政單位本來就是這樣，老師有時候看你做不好，有時候會抱怨啊。對不對？就聽吧。」

Some other answers also showed how the academic profession perceptions influence higher education administration. Many used a more academic standard to explain why they are or are not professional. University B Global Student Affairs Manager 3 pointed out that there are graduate schools in the US for higher education administration, therefore making it a profession. Others differentiated the specific areas in higher education administration and think only higher education administration remained a profession and not research or international management because there were papers published on the topic of higher education administration (University A Research Support Manager 3). Still others (i.e. University C Research Support Manager 2) focused on the separated career path and explained the in-transferability that blocked administrators from being developed into senior management (academic leadership) to be a factor in why higher education administration is not a profession.

The broken link between administration and profession could be found from multiple aspects within societal influences, governance systems, and now evidently from relationships with external or internal members of the universities. Higher education administrators were persuaded of a clerical nature that is attached to the term administration, and the hierarchical relationships with the academics, the managers, and the governing institutions further reinforce this negative image, furthering the distance between higher education and professionals.

5.3.2 Administrator priorities

Besides the examination of word definitions and usages, finding out the priority of an administrator's work also provides clues in identifying the core function of the administration. Some repeated recognitions were collected from participants, for example, seven testimonials displayed strong intentions from the participants to view administrative tasks as a connecting

node between different stakeholders and sometimes between multiple institutions, ranging from governmental policy to evaluation committees of research grants.

While complaints on campus regarding excessive administrative processes are familiar topics, administrators expect themselves to facilitate progress rather than hinder it. An administrator described the occasion when a faculty member lacked knowledge of the university's "standpoint" in a negotiation with their industrial partner. The administrator had to reach an understanding with the faculty member before moving forward with the cooperation, turning originally two-party cooperation into a three-way communication. University C Research Support Manager 1's response highlighted the purpose of reaching beyond guidelines and rules, fostering a mutual understanding that motivates stakeholders to move forward with similar expectations. The statement stressed how rather than merely adhering to rules, demonstrating a proactive mindset to think one step ahead was more important to the administrators, while they sought improvement:

> "We don't only enforce, but we also have to create understanding so that people put [it] into practice based on understanding rather than follow along."

The relationship with academics again emerged as a significant theme. Despite a complex working relationship and testimonials of disrespectful behaviours toward the administrators, participants overall exhibited high respect toward academics. Administrators tended to position themselves as the facilitators and supporters.

> "Our unit focuses on *planning*, we explore and establish strategies to help the academics, to raise their research and development capacity."
> (University B Research Support Manager 1)
>
> 「我們那個單位就是比較做 planning。然後要做一些什麼樣的策略，然後去幫助老師提升他們的研發能量。」

Administrators commonly prioritise faculty development as one of their priorities across Taiwan and Singapore. Many suggested that with the heavy workload between teaching, research, and occasional administration on the faculty members, administrators can be more understanding of the emotional responses and work toward sharing their burden.

5.4 Discussion

5.4.1 An embedded cultural influence in positionality

Universities influence administrators as their employing institution, and evidence of such influence examined previously leaned toward value and identity formation. However, examining the positionality universities adopt in Taiwanese higher education, and it resonates with the moral and pro-social influences from Confucianism. In Taiwan, the governance and institutions constantly resonate cultural influences on higher education administration from daily operational tasks, value judgement, to the formation of multiple professional identities and beliefs. The teaching that contains Confucian thoughts combined with the emphasis Confucianism places on education formed an organisational culture that encourages altruism in oneself and social impact in society. Universities thus have long demonstrated a cultural positionality beyond teaching and research, but a role that is more embedded in society like what section 5.1.4 discussed. Higher education administration is highly influenced by this positionality, being the supporting service provider.

One of the core practices in Confucianism is for one to be a "Junzi". A Junzi continuously pursues knowledge (eg. xueer budai 學而不殆), practices a high moral standard (eg. xiushen 修身), and contributes to one's communities, such as family, nation, and society (eg. qijia zhiguo ping tianxia 齊家治國平天下). This constant moral request broadens education as Junzi's image overlaps with scholars and educators. The education sector in a Confucianism-influenced society like Taiwan has always been demanded of high moral standards and contributions to the society. Even in contemporary Taiwan, moral requests continue to be embedded in legal acts that regulate people who work in the education sector (see Chapter 4.2 for previous discussion).

Aspiration and dedication to contribute to society is identified in higher education administration. Discussing the reasons behind higher education administrators' altruistic aspiration to social impacts, and related Confucian teachings often emerged. With a strong institutional structure regulated by governmental policies, the university's embedded positionality, and the cultural teachings that shaped higher education in Taiwan, these elements together constructed altruistic roots for the higher education administrators.

The cultural influences further manifested in national policies. Compagnucci and Spigarelli (2020) examined the Third Mission of universities and observed that the changing societal expectations toward universities have added responsibilities for universities to provide contributions to the wider public. While such a concept might have a longer history in Taiwan with traits and influences from Confucian thoughts, the government officially established policies connecting education and society. In the new Taiwanese higher education policy, SPROUT, published in 2018, a university connected and aiding the local communities was included as one of the main foci. The governmental policy advocated for university social responsibilities and urged the institution to develop awareness of local issues and connect with local communities (Ministry of Education (ROC), 2018). The national focus revealed a value that aligns with the Third Mission concept and Confucianism, both requiring universities to a more grounded and pro-social in practice and adding another layer of influence to higher education administrators.

5.4.2 Hierarchy in management

With the university's status evolving in society, the institutional structure adapts to growing missions and demands globally. New functions and offices were added to the university, resulting in disparities in history, funding, and responsibilities and forming a hierarchy between offices. The hierarchy makes cross-office communication a consistent challenge across universities in Taiwan. While both higher education entities continue to apply a centralised approach in university governance, the deviation in background and knowledge between senior management and higher education administration are also identified as challenges for better internal coordination.

University management sees a variance in the degree of authorisation between middle management and senior management. Middle management often has an administrative background and positions itself as a facilitator for the growth of individual administrators as well as the institution. In contrast, senior management is equipped with an academic background and reserves the decision-making power. In Taiwan, these part-time managers lack responsiveness and grounded knowledge of office operations, and their visions can deviate from office priorities and extend beyond their own terms of office. In Singapore, senior

management is more distanced, but efficiency-based management and occasional bottom-up initiatives lead to an overall smooth operation for Singaporean administration.

Literature from management recorded how management styles influence job satisfaction (Maheshwari & Kha, 2023; Mwesigwa et al., 2020) and organisation culture (Khan et al., 2020). As leadership is not included in this study, the discussion focuses its influences on the administrative members. Looking at the university level, Taiwanese and Singaporean leadership styles diverge. Taiwanese office managers were reported to be more absent, in office hours and in related knowledge. Administrator's professional development is barely noted and reflected, and no specific awarding and punishment systems are in place. The leadership style leans toward 'Laissez-faire leader" in literature (Maheshwari & Kha, 2023), and this inactive style is found to reduce employees' job satisfaction and their will to remain in their roles. Singapore, on the other hand, did not record many interactions with the senior management or middle management, but also there were no negative comments toward a lack of evaluation system. Managers with professional backgrounds reported a higher frequency of one-on-one meetings and development plans to encourage employee training and professional development, which aligns with corporate management traits.

While certain aspects of the university's organisation culture in Taiwan transcend beyond its leadership and institution guidelines (see previous discussion in 5.1.4 University in the higher education ecosystem), it no longer acts as the mediator between the management and the administrators in the universities like what the literature suggested (Khan et al., 2020). The organisation culture that encourages for altruism has surpassed managers' styles and behaviours, and is connected with the broader cultural beliefs. Meanwhile, in Singapore, middle managers see themselves as a facilitator of both institutional values and employees' professional development. This motif cultivates a culture of aiding and communication, and Singaporean administrators demonstrated better coordination between offices and fewer negative reports regarding management.

5.4.3 What is administrative knowledge?

To understand the concept of "administrative knowledge", this chapter adopts a few angles from stereotypes, administrators' discussions, and work priorities, but also takes in from

findings in Chapter 4 to supplement from legal and governmental perspectives. Administrative knowledge assembled from the testimonials included clerical knowledge of institutional and governmental procedures, legal knowledge of national and international laws and regulations, and "soft" knowledge, such as an understanding of the hierarchy and politics internal and external of their institutions. Administrative knowledge is often considered non-systematic and highly experience-related, and participants often emphasised the "people" aspect in higher education. Compared to the institutionalism angles adopted in literature (Fu et al., 2021; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Muzio et al., 2013), participants place more emphasis on the relationships and interactions of people in higher education administration.

Participants identified a discrepancy between faculty members and their operational knowledge. Many reflected how the faculty members lack knowledge of legal and university regulations, and some even lack related "administrative" knowledge like grant application criteria. Even academic administrators such as college deans can lack understanding of administration requirements, some of which are mandated by governmental institutions. Although "administration" is not explicitly mentioned in these testimonials, the context suggests these tasks fall under "administrative knowledge" and encompass both rules, such as regulations and guidelines, and soft skills related to institutional values, missions, and positionality.

It is challenging to define a range of higher education administration due to multiple identities and various specialised skill sets. To many participants, this is a generalist's job. Others focus on the specialisation and flexible capacity of administrative roles. There is a similarity in participants' descriptions of generalist and agenda administrator. Both follow instructions and orders, and both do not have irreplaceable domain expertise. This impression demonstrates the differentiation between administrative knowledge and more specialised domain knowledge, specifically research management and international management.

The participants' usage of the term "administration" collectively portrays the profession in a manner distinct from external perceptions. Administrators agree that the administration is a generalist's job, and often indicate the wide and unspecific coverage and repetitive paperwork when they use words such as administrative or administration. With a mixture of testimonials either placing administrators as generalists or expecting them to be more proactive and not be a

generalist, these comments demonstrated the capacity and potential for an administrative role. Within the same position, one can either fulfil the basic requirement or proactively expand the coverage and impact of the same role, thereby redefining the definition of "administrator". The discrepancy describes both expectations of administrative knowledge, to be a good generalist, one has to be equipped with knowledge from multiple projects, but the administrators cannot only be a generalist, and are expected to specialise in certain skills at the same time.

Other administrators viewed administrative roles with clear specialisation possibilities. While they acknowledge the commonalities of administrative roles, such as their repetitiveness or procedural nature, they believe that further distinctions exist that help to specialise in higher education administration roles. Participants differentiate between general administrative tasks, such as procurement, assessment, and data reporting, and more specialised missions like research ethics, international admissions, and industry-university cooperation contracting. Amidst these distinctions, a sense of self-recognition in identity emerged from those recognised with more specialised skill sets, such as partnership building, research ethics, and international programme management. Though the evidence is subtle, Taiwanese and Singaporean participants have shown traits endorsing a specified identity other than higher education administrators that better position their professional service disciplines.

Chapter 6 Mesosystem: Office environment and professional development

The mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1977) theory captures the interaction of the core institutions that influence the development of the individual. Applying this to the development of a profession, the microsystem examines more inward-facing aspects, including the values, skills, and identity of higher education administration practitioners, as well as their career planning. The mesosystem thus explores the institution where these elements are enacted and interact, focusing on the office where the participants work.

Offices not only influence higher education administration practitioners as their daily working environment but also shape them with their unique tasks, missions, and their positions and interactions with other units in institutional structures. The literature recorded that scholars develop stronger identification with their disciplines than with their institutions (Rixom, 2011). Translated into higher education administration fields, the disciplines resemble their

specialised fields, including research management and international affairs management. The offices become the specialised space where the administrators advance skills, establish recognition, and build identification. In this chapter, aspects explored in the mesosystem include three dimensions at the office level, observing the institutional environment and culture in offices, training for professional development, and how practitioners' expertise shapes research and international professionals within their respective offices.

6.1 Office environment

This section focuses on the research and international administrators within the office environment. Across varied teams in research and international offices, participants reported commonalities in office environments, such as fast-paced work, collaborative projects, and a high turnover rate. With a close examination, distinctions emerged on a spectrum of member compositions, and participants reported various positionalities of their offices within the broader institutional structure.

The discussion revealed the importance of addressing higher education administrators at a personal level. Participants identified office atmosphere and a sense of responsibility as motivational factors that contribute to office sustainability, linking individual endeavours to institutional operations. The exploration of office practices then shifts to office missions and values. In a fast-changing environment, participants shared an alignment in values and beliefs toward office development goals. This alignment encouraged proactive behaviours that translate into daily practices. The chapter explores the interactions and collaboration within the mesosystem and observes a two-way shaping process between the professional and their professional organisations.

6.1.1. A changing office and structural conflicts

Offices function as independent sub-units within universities, but with their responsibilities expanding and employees changing, research and international offices are more challenged in the institution structure. Multiple participants report that their offices are understaffed compared to the number of employees they were designed to accommodate. In extreme cases, a participant mentioned seeing up to 10 employees leave within the first month of the

participant's on-board date. Additionally, participants reported a fast working pace combined with a heavy workload. University B International Affairs Manager 3 reflected on the fast pace working in their office:

> "[t]he speed of this place is so fast that you don't have time to adjust your own mood."
>
> 「這個地方的速度快到它沒有辦法讓你調適自己的心情。」

The statement revealed employees' mental health concerns and signified the importance of addressing individuals' adaptation beyond the issue of workload.

Composition of office members demonstrated how the missions and tasks of each role showed a certain correspondence with the appointed personnel's age, experience, and hiring route profiles. Participants in Taiwan observed a generally younger age in these two offices, particularly among teams managing student-related affairs, with many members being single. While this example provided context in gender in discussion 4.2.1, there remained other angles in viewing this statement. Participants noted that teams executing more repetitive, procedural tasks tended to consist of more mature and married employees. This observation reflected the range of different tasks and skill sets required in research and international offices. While age itself did not correlate directly with job performance, participants reported that these offices demand high levels of innovation and involve heavy workloads, often requiring longer working hours. This can conflict with family responsibilities, as exemplified by multiple research and international managers who expressed a desire to devote more time to new projects once their children were older, highlighting the difficulty of balancing office work with family life.

The high turnover rate resulted in a considerable portion of under-experienced employees in the participating offices. While that inconsistency was usually taken with a pinch of salt, others viewed it as beneficial. The changing employees brought fresh ideas and fostered adaptation to modern thinking. Participants believed that new hires often demonstrated more passion and energy at the office, but agreed that in order to balance the discontinuity of institutional knowledge with the need for energised employees, the importance of experienced and senior staff in each team was not to be missed. These individuals acted as anchors, stabilising the fast-changing administrative office environment and ensuring seamless office operations.

With Taiwan's distinct multiple hiring routes system, civil service roles undoubtedly affect the composition of a higher education administrative office. The hiring of civil servants is also managed not directly by the university but by the Ministry of the Interior, often adding another layer of complexity to the hiring process. Moreover, as newly established offices, the participating offices were assigned fewer civil servant positions. Research and international management also require more specialised skills, such as academic expertise and language proficiency, which many civil servant candidates lack. Despite the incompatibilities, civil servants answer to the need for stable and long-term employees due to their national hiring system, which qualifies them for middle management roles. They maintain longer tenures because of their nationwide career path, and are often seen as stabilising forces in the office. With the limited number of civil service seats allowed in research and international offices, they face further challenge to balance the new hires and long-term employees.

Besides a fast-paced, heavy workload office, the participating offices also reported an expansion of tasks and missions over the years. The literature has documented the expansion of higher education administrative work coverage (Szekeres, 2004), and history interviews in this study recorded how most participating offices were only established within the last twenty years, and their areas of responsibility have expanded multiple times. For instance, Office B2 has broadened its student care services to include new student groups, Office D1 has initiated new projects to further facilitate cross-disciplinary research, and Office B1 has established multiple new centres to accommodate an increasing number of focus areas. While no new projects were added to Office A2 recently, the scope of existing projects grew tenfold over the past 15 years.

One Taiwanese participant described the most recent expansion in task coverage, where their office took on student care responsibilities from the Office of Student Affairs. A new employee was hired specifically to implement this project, and this role involved working in both the participating office and the Office of Student Affairs. Their task included acquiring relevant knowledge and methodology, as well as developing new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to integrate the new responsibilities into the participating office procedures. This example illustrates how higher education administration roles continue to evolve and expand to meet the changing needs of the sector. The unprecedented example also revealed how institutional structure has turned more flexible and accommodating to today's universities, blurring institutional boundaries.

Literature noted that more administration work in the UK has shifted toward a project-based approach (Whitchurch, 2006). Though a similar approach was not identified in Taiwan and Singapore, task expansion has occurred in another form. Interviewees reported collaboration across multiple offices, with ambiguity in the distribution of responsibilities that may sometimes overlap with other administrative offices. For example, one Taiwanese research management contractor reported being assigned human resource management responsibilities for project-based contractors. This led to multiple institutions within the same university being responsible for employment and management, causing misalignment in the management structure. Allocated externally to the human resource team, the research management contractor lacked human resource training, which increased the risk of errors and varied interpretations of guidelines. Similarly, a Singaporean participant with management responsibilities reflected the discrepancy between the formal office structure and actual practice. While they were not the direct line manager of their team, employees continued to report to them and seek consultation due to established trust, aligned experiences, and reliability. In both cases, informal office norms overruled formal office structures, as the existing frameworks failed to support efficient and practical operations. The misalignment between practice and formal structures evidenced how administrative changes have outpaced existing institutional design, though flexibility remains to continue daily operations.

6.1.2. Building a team through office culture

When discussing their office environment, many participants described a positive 'office atmosphere' and expressed gratitude for their colleagues. An International Affairs manager from University A illustrated this by recounting their onboarding experience, focusing on an office culture that is more supportive than competitive, characterised by supportive behaviours and kind colleagues:

> "Even when I don't fully understand the tasks, they'll help give me a gentle push. And they are all kind people. Yes, it is very important." (University A Manager 2, International Affairs)
>
> 「即使我就算不是那麼懂，他們也會推你一把，而且他們都是善良的人，對，這個很重要。」

Adjectives used to describe office members included "kind" and "companions in battles". 10 participants from both Taiwan and Singapore characterised their office and, in some cases, the

broader university environment as amiable, helpful, and straightforward. Singaporean participants endorsed this supportive culture, noting that their colleagues were people who "won't backstab you" (University D Research Support Manager 1). Overall, friendly and benevolent office cultures were reported by participants consistently as one of the most appreciated features of their jobs.

Beyond a friendly office, participants often addressed their team and the teamwork, showing gratitude, both within their offices and across other internal administrative offices. University C International Affairs Manager 2 used a simile to describe the dynamic between the academics and the administration to describe their form of collaboration, but also other members of the university:

> "Pilots cannot function without the flight attendants. [...] So it's like a co, like a co-partnership kind of thing. [...] Each and every one of us ha[s] our own role. And you cannot just miss one."

The description delivered an expectation toward high collaboration, forming a team in which no one is excluded, and stressed the inclusion across the different stakeholder groups of universities and their involvement. The strong sense of a team also was repeated by others, including how one cannot achieve the goal without their team, and how one was not worried about taking up new projects as one has a stable team. A Global Student Affairs Manager emphasised a collective effort with shared goals of the university, putting the sense of teamwork in words.

> "The feeling after negotiation and adjustment for more than a decade is true. [...] Now when we are handling something, the *concept* is that we will handle it together."
> (University B Manager 3, Global Student Affairs)
>
> 「我們這十幾年來磨合下來的感覺就是真，[...]現在我們處理這件事情，我們大家的 concept 是我們一起來處理。」

At University A, four Taiwanese participants independently used the same verb in Chinese when addressing their team, "chuancheng (傳承)". Chuancheng is often translated into "inherit", but this translation only captures half of the action. Chuancheng has the context of passing down what one inherits. It is learning, absorbing, and receiving something, often abstract, such as spirit, history, or traditions, and then passing it down or teaching it to the next generation.

As administrative knowledge is often detail-oriented and fragmented, individual efforts to share experiences and knowledge are crucial for fostering stability and sustainability. This can range from operational knowledge sharing to partner relationship management and technical know-how. Even though the importance of experience and knowledge transfer was emphasised, participants also hinted at some mistrust toward institutional practices for maintaining continuity. Their sense of responsibility grew from an awareness of such inconsistency within higher education administration. Some participants prioritised training new employees to ensure that work coverage would be sustained, particularly since management positions were part-time and the managers lacked operational knowledge. University A Research Support Manager 5 stressed the continuity of knowledge:

> "No institution is going to break down because you left, right? So I think it's best if you can pass (your experience) to the others. That way they can minimise the processing time"
> (University A Manager 5, Research Support)

> 「沒有一個地方會因你走掉而倒下，對不對？所以我覺得就是能夠把你的傳出去給人家是最好，他可以花最少的時間來處理。」

In their use of "chuancheng", the four participants described an office culture of active learning and teaching. They collectively looked up to a sense of responsibility to thoroughly train new employees, ensuring sustainable operations and the continuation of office culture. For some, this aspiration to promote sustainability was derived from personal experiences. When Research Support Manager 5 from University A was transferred to their current office, a senior member provided one-on-one training, resembling a master- apprentice relationship. The senior member was highly involved in their projects, offering know-how and step-by-step guidance. The Research Support Manager from University A expressed deep gratitude and commented:

> "I now wish that I can be a person like that, chuancheng to new members who joined after me."
> (University A Manager 5, Research Support)

> 「我現在也很希望我能夠是這樣一個人，傳承我後面的人。」

The statement revealed a collectivist worldview, deeming the institution and its continuity more important than individuals and their careers. In this mindset, a priority toward the sustainability of the institution, knowledge, and efficiency is often related.

6.1.3. Motivating administrators toward office missions

Although participants expressed different motivations for embracing the concept of "chuancheng" ranging from personal fulfilment to mentorship, the ultimate goal remained consistent. The collective efforts reflect a call for sustainable practices in higher education administration. The participants' responses demonstrated how office culture and individual motivations aimed to contribute to long-term office sustainability.

Overall, participants expressed positive reactions to the expansion of responsibilities, with many endorsing the university's development as a result. Across Taiwan and Singapore, participants consistently viewed their offices as a central driving force to the missions and development goals of their universities, as well as the national policies. The responses recorded a sense of purpose built on a connection between the tasks for the administrators and the institutional mission goals. It suggested that some participants interpreted their daily higher education administration operation to be more meaningful with its connection to a grander goal. Under this premise, higher education administrators developed a sense of mission toward a higher call to assist their university, the wider higher education, or even their nation to achieve development. In practice, this resulted in a proactive attitude and building a professional identity toward work.

This sense of mission also incentivised administrators' foci on faculty support and increases their emotional investment in the university's development. A side effect of such purposes was how it required an alignment with the mission goal to the participants' beliefs. Participants demonstrated frustration when the mission goals remained unclear or kept changing:

> "If I don't know the logic behind a mission assigned, I feel like it is more difficult for me to accept it, and it is hard for me to execute the mission."
> (University A Manager 2, International Affairs)

> 「如果我不知道一件任務它背後的一個邏輯的話，我會覺得我比較難接受，然後很難去執行。」

> "It could take to a completely different direction with different goals, you know, and that can be admonished, it'd be frustrating for administrator." (University B Manager 1, Research Institutional Support)

Both statements demonstrated a direct connection between the mission goal, mission logic, and implementors' motivations. This deviated from stereotypes that participants reported toward higher education administrators and how they were viewed as merely rule-obeying implementers. The pro-social aspects of their daily missions motivated administrators' professional altruism but also led them to question the deeper logic and motif of the missions.

Emotional experiences is another element captured to be associated with motivation. If left unaddressed, it can negatively impact administrative offices. Participants recalled disruptions not only from the turnover but also when a new employee took over a role, there often was a lack of a proper handover process. Besides absent onboarding programmes and incomplete handover process, participants observed the insufficient knowledge transfer during this stage was often connected to the emotional responses of those leaving the position:

> "Everyone left because they were angry, so of course, no one wants to handover properly."
>
> 「就因為大家都是生氣離開，沒有人想要好好交接啊。」

The quotes revealed a direct connection between emotional reactions and handover failure, which was further related to office sustainability and stability. A negative experience of an employee does not remain at the individual level, but its effect ripples broader, influencing other employees, office culture, and institution sustainability. However, emotion is not often captured or addressed in administrative offices, and even sometimes oppressed by the management or institutional procedures. The observations underscore the problems of neglecting individual factors in higher education administration.

6.2 Training and professional development

The literature continuously notes insufficient training and support mechanisms for professional service staff (Coomber, 2019; Lin, 2016; Tomkinson, 1997), even at the management level, where learning often occurs on the job (Tran et al., 2020). In the sociology of professions, training and professional development are recognised as important components of a profession. Acquiring systematic knowledge, therefore, is considered crucial for being regarded

as a professional. The research findings align with previous studies, showing that training for higher education administrators in Taiwan and Singapore lacked a comprehensive design.

Participants from Taiwan and Singapore report limited onboarding training. For most, learning is acquired from senior colleagues, on-the-job experiences, and self-directed studies. Middle managers expressed awareness of the training gap while acknowledging the importance of long-term professional development for individuals. This analysis examines existing training provided by institutions, including universities and their offices, and identifies obstacles to establishing comprehensive and tailored training programmes. A strong motivation for self-learning is evident among participants, prompting a theme exploring further in a subsequent section, addressing different learning approaches among higher education administrators.

6.2.1 Institutional training

University

Institutional training programmes are designed for a broad administrative workforce and often deviate from the specialised skills required in research and international management professionals. For example, the only consistent training offered by Taiwanese institutions is a course on governmental document writing. This training addresses the particular writing style demanded for written communication internal and external of the university. It consists of specific formats that comply with the governmental guidelines. Other university-wide programmes, including finance report system guides and first-aid training, are not mandatory in Taiwanese universities. Still, there remain training programmes cooperating with continuing education courses, ranging from foreign languages, computer skills, to recent additions such as wellness activities. However, Taiwanese participants report an incompatible work schedule with these voluntary-based training programmes. With high-volume workloads and tight project timelines, participants commented how many training sessions were irrelevant to their current missions and unhelpful to their skill development.

While Taiwanese participating offices generally lack structured skill development programmes, Singaporean offices demonstrated a greater awareness of talent cultivation. Singaporean middle managers reflected how institutions prioritised the need for training to "keep the workforce up to date" (University D Research Support Manager 1). Despite the awareness, practical

alignment with institutional goals remains a challenge. Participants' responses indicated that while their institutions invest in opportunities such as conference participation, specialised training programmes, and events with external trainers, Singaporean participants found relevant skill training still insufficient. Even when there was relevant training, participants did not consistently have easy access to it. A discrepancy persists between the intended outcomes of the institutional training and employees' experiences of these programmes.

Office

Onboarding training was another topic of attention. Among the seven participating offices, only one was equipped with a detailed institutional induction training package. This onboarding training included an overview of office members and their responsibilities, daily one-on-one check-in meetings, and a final assessment meeting. The induction programme was also tailored to each new employee's role and rank, addressing specific mindsets and relevant knowledge.

In Taiwanese offices, compared to a focus on knowledge training, relationship-focused training prevailed. All four Taiwanese offices adopted a mentor-apprentice training model in which new employees learned directly from shadowing the current project leaders or colleagues with similar responsibilities. One office also provided a greeting tour, with a senior employee introducing the new employee to relevant work contacts around the university.
This mentor-apprentice model has proven to be beneficial and relevant to the higher education administration. In an administration environment, knowledge is often fragmented and part of it relationship-based. With a relationship-focused training approach, new employees inherit not only operational knowledge but also relational connections. This model also provides experiential learning, filling gaps between procedural and practical knowledge.

However, two risks were reported in this model. One occurred when the prior project leader had left the position. University B International Affairs Manager 1 shared an experience from their first day at work. As the predecessor had left the office, there was no one to hand over projects to them, and no induction training was provided. They were left with only a stack of historical project documents, including one with an immediate deadline within the same week. Due to the variety of administrative tasks, other employees may lack sufficient knowledge of the same project, leading to gaps in institutional knowledge. The other risk involved resistance to innovation and adaptation, as the mentor-apprentice relationship could build a strong

preference for "how things were done before", potentially creating clashes between new objectives and traditional approaches.

6.2.2 Challenges to systematic training in Taiwan

A difficulty in establishing systematic training lies in the high variability of administrative tasks that are categorised as higher education administration. Training for specific skills may be feasible in smaller teams, where members work on similar projects and cover each other's tasks. However, this proves difficult in the development of a university administrative office. Limited resources restrict staffing levels in the initial stages, then when the offices expand, projects tend to become more specialised. This specialisation within the same office limits team members' understanding of others' expertise, widening the scope of skills and knowledge needed. A Research Institutional Support Manager discussed how this variance hindered the creation of a comprehensive, systematic training programme at the institutional level:

> "The differences are too wide within the university, so they can't organise specific training just for you."
> (University A Manager 2, Research Institutional Support)

> 「學校的差異性太大了，所以他也沒辦法特別針對你去辦一個什麼樣子的一個訓練。」

While the statement pointed out the lack of resources to address more tailored personal training, on an individual level, many participants also reported difficulty in identifying the training they need. While they recognised that systematic training was insufficient, they also agreed that much of the administrative knowledge could not be standardised and systemised.

> "For example, in the Office of International Affairs, there are new things happening every day, so you wouldn't know how to provide trainings for them (to prepare). The same applies to colleagues in the Office of Research."
> (University A Manager 1, Global Student Affairs)

> 「像國際處那種每一天，都有新的事情要發生，那你真的也不曉得你要怎麼給他們訓練，然後還有可能就是研發處的同事。」

The Global Student Affairs Manager addressed the high changeability in their working environment. While international affairs and research remain resource-focused and developing areas in higher education, innovation and international practices diversify administrators' work.

As missions are altered and practices adjusted to different stakeholders' and projects' needs, it is difficult to identify a mutual skill or standardised pattern to consist of training.

Participants also noted how the training schedules did not align with any individual employee's development timeline. For instance, one participant shared how university-provided training on governmental document writing was in high demand when they initially joined the office. Six months later, when they were allocated a spot in the training, they had already attained the writing style through daily practice. Additionally, participants reported that new employees were expected to take on project responsibilities almost immediately upon arrival, leaving no time for training programmes:

> "Actually, in our office, we are too busy for this kind of training. It results in a situation where new hires must hurry to pick up work. It is already challenging to keep up with our own progress." (University B Manager 2, Global Student Affairs)
>
> 「其實我們處就是，太忙忙到沒有這樣的訓練，導致大家進來的時候，其實新人現在都很趕著要，要趕上自己的業務已經很難了。」

> "Due to insufficient human resources, we hope that new team members can join my team very quickly and answer to the front line. This creates a little insufficiency in early training." (University A Manager 3, International Affairs)
>
> 「就是說因為人力不足，那我們會希望進來的同仁可以很快的進入我的團隊，進入到第一戰線去，所以就變成前面的訓練會稍微的不足。」

While both statements addressed the short turnaround period once the new recruit was onboard, Global Student Affairs Manager 2's statement revealed the heavy workload, and International Affairs Manager 3 further pointed out the insufficient workforce at the office. Both conditions resulted in a deprivation of administrators' initial training and high pressure on immediate onboarding despite training and experiences.

Another recurring difficulty reported across all Taiwanese offices was the misaligned effort for increasing further internal training:

> "Even when I suggest that we conduct training internally, others turn a cold face. Everyone was... quite cold. No one responded." (University B Manager 1, Research Institutional Support)
>
> 「甚至我建議說我們內部要自己做教育訓練，其他人都很冷漠，大家都...很冷漠，大家都不講話。」

> "Maybe it's because everyone has their own projects, and you want to find a time when everyone has (time)... I think that might be one of the key issues." (University A Manager 1, Research Institutional Support)

> 「可能是大家都業務在辦，然後你要找到一個時間，是全部的人要……我覺得這可能是一個關鍵」

The statements repeated the observation of heavy workload and low capacity of training time, echoing other participating offices. However, both statements also revealed an indifference from many higher education administrators toward more specialised training. The observation suggested that professional development was not the majority's priority especially when compared with work.

Both research and international offices are relatively new, and their work involves innovative and norm-breaking projects. While these creative and unprecedented elements blur traditional work boundaries within higher education institutions, they also create ambiguity in identifying necessary skills and training requirements. Moreover, being the units at the centre of policy focus causes an intense working environment for the officers. Four participants from University A separately used the word "battlefield" to refer to their work environment. The simile depicts a busy, high-pressure, and chaotic daily operation, and reflects a precarious environment for administrator professional development.

These responses collectively reflected a fast-paced office environment with high workloads and Taiwanese higher education administrators' priority prioritising completing the tasks over their personal development, where Singaporean participants at times felt a lack of line managers' support. Both matched Coomber (2019)'s observations on challenges that prevent administrators from actively engaging in professional development, but different from the article, administrators from Taiwan and Singapore rarely connect their low motivation to the lack of career progression opportunities. Reaching a consensus on training needs internally is challenging, and equally, it is a struggle to coordinate schedules for a common training time, as well as the topic. Specific reasons might vary, but job coverage and variety, compact project timelines, and an overwhelming working environment all lead to a lower prioritisation of skill advancement across Taiwanese offices compared to Singaporean ones.

6.2.3 Self-learning experience

Due to the lack of systematic and precise training, learning has become a central theme in the development of higher education administrators, often requiring substantial personal motivation to initiate effective self-learning. Participants reported abundant learning experiences, including learning on the job, learning from colleagues, and self-directed study. This section discusses the styles, motivations, and resources associated with these learning experiences as they relate to acquiring professional skills and knowledge when institutionalised training is absent.

Based on interviews with participants, it is evident that self-learning plays a crucial role in the development of higher education administrators. With limited training on formal procedures, systematic knowledge, and practical daily operation, participants must actively retrieve experiential, relational, or practice-based knowledge to complete daily tasks. Research participants demonstrated a strong motivation to search for, explore, and apply knowledge, and this motivation built an active learning culture. There is an observable sharing culture in the participating offices that prioritises sustainable institution knowledge from the less experienced participants to the more experienced ones alike. Although the fragmented and highly relational nature of administrative knowledge complicates systematisation, participants continue to advocate for formal and consistent training to support the development of their expertise, even though such advocates focus on skill development instead of career development.

"Learning on the job" is the most common approach described by participants from both Taiwan and Singapore when discussing training experiences. Singaporean participants observed that formal training and professional development opportunities are not plentiful, making experiential learning necessary. They often acquire knowledge through direct project execution, reading online sources, reviewing relevant legal acts, or accessing institutional archives. Participants from both countries reflected on the limited and complex nature of self-learning resources, particularly those related to international management, research methodology, and academic terminology. For example, University D Research Support Manager 1 recalled, "I tried to read, even the internet doesn't have a lot of information." University A Research Support Manager 1 also agreed, remembering feeling lost amongst

jargon across academic disciplines and an academic lexicon that lacks clear and publicly accessible explanations.

While offices D1, B1, and C1 provided Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) documents for training, participants from other offices described more experiential or relationship-based training approaches. Without access to standardised and document-based training, many relied on consultations with senior colleagues. As discussed previously in 6.2.1, some offices implemented mentor-apprentice training models, yet these approaches often lacked the institutional support needed to formalise knowledge transfer. Being an informal training method, this provides inconsistent access, but also step-by-step procedural guidance, relational context, and the existing best practices. Many Taiwanese participants continued to report a partial dependency on senior colleagues when they first joined the office, finding their guidance and experience essential to consistent and sustainable institutional knowledge.

Learning from colleagues also depends on the goodwill and availability of others. Taiwanese participants reported arriving at offices without predecessors due to the institutional recruiting procedures sequence or the expanding project coverage.

> "Basically, all my work is that... there was not even a person to hand over work to me. It might be that I simply received a *handover note*, and I followed the information given. But 90% of the job was not covered in that note. You can only try and error yourself, or use your own logic to understand how to shape the process.
> (University A Manager 1, Global Student Affairs)

> 「我基本上每一份工作就是，也甚至沒有人可以交接，可能就是我收到的就這是一份 handover note 我就跟著做，然後裡面你要做的東西 9 成都是沒有的，你只能自己去摸索，或是用自己之前的邏輯去理解這個事情到底是怎麼凹。」

These participants had to seek resources internally and externally to fulfil their own tasks or just utilise their own logic to complete a mission, assembling relevant training for themselves. The statement demonstrates how daily administrative operations rely heavily on an aligned understanding and "logic" across the office to maintain a consistent standard, as one processes unprecedented projects. This "messy" adaptation that cannot be standardised again reflects the difficulty of systematising administrative knowledge, handover, training, and administrators' struggle toward the fast-expanding profession.

Even for those with access to formal training, evidence revealed that office operations often deviate from standardised procedures. A research ethics manager described their onboarding experience following the successful completion of a national exam and certificate in research ethics project management:

> "Theory and practice are immensely different. No matter how many courses you've completed, when you actually are assigned a case... When I first started processing cases, actually, it was very... almost every single case, I had to take them to consult our senior project managers." (University B Manager 2, Research Institutional Support)

> 「然後理論跟實務真的是兩碼子事，就是你上再多的課，然後跟你實際接到案子，所以剛接案的時候其實會有、非常、幾乎每個案子，我都要問資深的專案經理。」

The statement addressed both the difficulty for standardised knowledge to align with reality and the importance of experiential knowledge in the higher education administration field. Even in the sub-field where the knowledge is more systemised, for example, institutional research, procedure standardised, and qualification institutionalised, there remains ambiguity in its misalignment with administration reality that can only be fulfilled by experiential knowledge.

Between theories and reality, systematic and experiential knowledge, current workload and professional development, higher education administrator and their training face obstacles and competing needs. In this study, I observe an overloaded and undertrained workforce whose development is not institutionally recognised or supported. The development and sustainability of higher education administration depend heavily on positive emotional exchanges and peer support, but such aspects are at the same time oppressed and ignored by institutions down the management lines. Conflicting training needs and work priorities need to be addressed if higher education administration training is to be included in future professional development design.

6.3. Comparison between research and international offices

The research and international office participants reported similarities in their work environment and culture. Both offices have only come into focus within the university development comparatively recently, and common themes such as flexibility and creativity have

emerged repeatedly in the daily responsibilities of employees. Despite the distinct and often specialised skill requirements in each office, this shared environment has fostered a cohesive set of values and beliefs across research and international offices in universities.

Participants from both offices observed significant deviations from the job descriptions listed in their recruitment. Examples included that University A International Affairs Manager 2 estimated a mere 20-30% of their daily tasks aligned with their original job description, and other participants emphasised how most projects and missions were approached on a "case-by-case" basis. Many of these projects were new and with no precedence, requiring extensive interdisciplinary knowledge, familiarity with relevant legal and funding regulations, and an innovative mindset. Situated in such a changing environment, the skills befitting employees in the research and international offices were constantly updated and redefined. Unable to capture an essential skill list, many participants instead resorted to mindset and values as crucial qualities for being professional in their offices.

Flexibility emerged as another recurring theme. The changing environment requires the employees to be flexible in day-to-day operations, and many participants expressed excitement about the changing nature of their work. This enthusiasm was especially prevalent when they compared their roles to other more "repetitive", "routine", or "administrative" tasks or positions in higher education administration. Participants noted the restrictions by extensive SOPs, complex legal regulations, and procedural responsibilities in their roles. This deviated from the stereotypes existing in Taiwan and Hong Kong, as pointed out by participants who worked in both places, that depict higher education administrators as workers favouring stable and repetitive tasks (see discussion in Chapter 5).

University C International Affairs Manager 1 reflected a common belief across the two offices that supported their extending mission boundaries and fostering an innovative mindset:

> "But it is more than doing an administrative job. In other words, it's becoming engaged in the subject matter. It's more than say, to you, something that you just say, it's more than just completing the task. It's considering how that task fits in with the bigger picture be that within your institution, within the collaboration."

Participants from both research and international offices commonly described the same recognition of a "bigger picture". This broader perspective served as a motivating factor, driving research and international professionals to pursue self-learning, explore new missions, and

initiate additional projects. Participants from both offices regarded their roles as contributors to the university's broader development. This perspective aligned with the participants' motivation to adapt to a changing environment and expand their skill set for "the higher call" and evolving institutional needs, and not for themselves.

While the research and international offices share commonalities, they each retain distinct skills and values. The following section analyses statements from participants in the research and international offices separately, exploring the essential qualities that characterise each office.

6.3.1. Research office: legal mindset, faculty communication, and call for licensure

Participants from the research office predominantly adopt a regulation-oriented perspective when examining their work. Participants reported their responsibilities spanning from research ethics, national funding project management, patent management, and industry-university cooperation. Each of these tasks required knowledge of national laws, ethical guidelines, or contractual terms. An awareness of legal regulations was thus observed among research office participants, marking a clear distinction from other higher education administrators. Despite this awareness, legal training was reported to be lacking in Taiwanese university offices, so participants acquire related knowledge from experience and self-study. Participants in both Taiwan and Singapore reflected the considerable extra time spent reading research papers to supplement academic knowledge, which indirectly aided in research management but was deemed essential.

Singapore participants described administrators who meet only minimum requirements as "agenda administrators". These administrators focused primarily on meeting the minimum standards set by research funding agencies or government bodies, and their work concentrated on simply ticking boxes on requirement lists. Participants considered it essential to understand academic methods and research rigours further, in order to assist faculty members in locating research findings and connecting them with relevant industry collaborations. To them, research management goes beyond ensuring a piece of research meets funding requirements, as it is also connected to the broader society.

Faculty communication was identified as a crucial skill given the close cooperation with faculty members in research management. Research administrators focus on facilitating faculty members in patent and research grant applications, and consultations on research ethics. Participants shared experiences of working with faculty members to align applications with requirements and ensured their research fit within the scope of available grants. This level of involvement requires "soft" knowledge, as administrators must balance the needs of faculty with the legal and regulatory demands of various governments, scientific associations, and funding bodies. Participants also reported a personal intention to acquire further knowledge to provide better suggestions to the faculty members. Taiwanese participants especially emphasised support for faculty and university development, sometimes over their own professional development.

Compared to international office participants, a larger portion of research administrators' knowledge can be standardised and systemised due to the overlaps with legal regulations, patents or governmental guidelines, and funding body requirements, especially in areas such as patent laws and Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures. With standardised regulations and guidelines to follow, research professionals gain not only knowledge but also a stronger sense of scope toward their own professionalism. In countries like the U.S. and Australia, formal training courses and certificates are established and one can be certified as an IRB professional. The institutionalisation strengthened the status of a profession and the participants' recognition of their professionalism. While Taiwan and Singapore lack certified training programs, participants viewed these international standards as potential models that could encourage greater professionalisation within their roles. Research management professionals thus expressed a vision for long-term national development that aligned with international licensure standards and suggested that introducing certified training programs could offer a valuable path forward for higher education administration in their regions.

6.3.2. International office: language, innovation, and "suyang"

Participants from international offices reported managing more unprecedented projects that required innovation and negotiation, sometimes beyond existing regulations and frameworks, providing them with different perspectives from research office participants regarding legal regulations or regulatory compliance. While it is difficult to determine specific skills and

knowledge, some common skills international officers repeatedly identified as useful included language, communication, negotiation, and a mixture of knowledge from international relations, cultural differences, and international etiquette. Participants from international offices in Taiwan and Singapore tend to demonstrate a "thinking outside of the box" mindset, more so than their research office counterparts. These participants also tend to be enthusiastic to create something new and untraditional or break the norms.

A fundamental difference between international offices in Taiwan and Singapore lies in language. While English remains an important skill emphasised by the recruitment advertisement for both Taiwanese and Singaporean international offices, the representation of languages is much different in the two nations. In Singapore, English is the main language for daily communication. International office recruitment, therefore, demands a higher proficiency, specifying in speaking and writing, to specify their requirements. With Mandarin being Taiwan's official language, English is not just a daily communication tool. English proficiency in Taiwan enhances one's employability and increases access to higher-paying jobs, especially with international firms. The requirement of high language skills and transferrable project management abilities together create further challenges for recruitment and retention in international offices, especially under conditions where salary schemes and career progression are limited and cannot be compared to those offered at international firms.

Many Taiwanese participants described the international office as a "university within a university". Their work coverage spans wide, from international student affairs, international partnerships, cross-country or cross-sector collaboration, registration, and welfare support, to international internship programmes. Due to limited English proficiency in other administrative offices, most tasks involving English are assigned to the international office, expanding their responsibilities from international activities to anything or any activities that need to be processed in English. One participant described a separation in registration between local students and international students, as the Office of Academic Affairs lacked English-speaking administrators to assist with student registration, the Office of International Affairs had to shoulder the responsibilities of international student registration instead.

The link between language skills and internationalisation generates difficult dynamics for international offices in their interactions with other university units. Participants' responses

collectively depicted how other administrative offices viewed the international office as a "trouble-maker" due to its initiation in international student recruitment, innovative projects in international activities, and often norm-breaking requirements. The difference in language creates a degree of separation, as international office staff operate under a unique, often English-centred framework, the unfamiliarity is further incorporated with different values and worldviews, broadening the discrepancy between international officers and other higher education administrators. Not to mention that with the university development centralising on the internationalisation of higher education, the rich resources allocated to international offices widen this gap. A trend of "de-internationalisation" was observed by the Japanese international management professionals, where responsibilities were expected to be returned to relevant offices even when the process needed to be completed in English. The first change is recruitment requirements, requesting that all administrative offices include employees who attain a working proficiency in English.

In addition to language skills, international officers require knowledge of cultural differences, international communication, and etiquette suitable for various national practices. University A International Affairs Manager 3 used the term "素養" (Suyang) to describe the overall skill needed for an international affairs professional. *Suyang* is defined as "daily self-cultivation" in the dictionary published by the Taiwanese Ministry of Education. Translating into English, *suyang* conveys comprehensive knowledge and values practised and demonstrated through behaviours, generally with positive connotations. This International Affairs Manager believed that international affairs administrators needed a professional *suyang*, which includes being equipped with internalised knowledge to execute projects under appropriate context and with cultural sensitivity.

> "You can't train someone (of *suyang*) by providing them documents to read and cultivate them through reading. No. And *suyang* is also highly related to personal traits. How so? It is actually needed similarly in areas like student affairs, but in international affairs, projects are even more complicated."
> (University B Manager 2, Research Institutional Support)

> 「其實這個部分沒有辦法你給他文件，他就可以培養，不行，而且那個跟個人的特質也很相關，對啊，哪一點？如果說像其實在學務方面也是一樣的，但是國際又更複雜。」

Suyang may capture the complex mix of hard and soft skills necessary for international affairs professionals, encompassing qualities that are difficult to cultivate through standardised training. Participants' comments reflected the challenge of systemising training for the required qualities. This combination of experience, adaptability, and self-refinement aligns with the demands of international office work, where diverse interactions require a level of expertise that goes beyond procedural knowledge.

6.4 Discussion

6.4.1 Underlying neglect in institutions

The examination within the mesosystem highlights significant misalignments between institutional structures and employee needs in office settings and training practices. The support from the management and personal intention have been identified as crucial incentives toward professional development (Coomber, 2019; Gornall, 1999; Holmes, 2020), yet both remain only partially supportive in Taiwan and Singapore. In Taiwan, managerial support toward training needs is absent and personal intention varies. Though the support from line managers is more consistent, systematic training can still be limited in Singapore. Both Taiwan and Singapore also lack career progression opportunities, which are crucial motivations for higher education administrators to seek personal or professional development (Coomber, 2019).

The analysis further reveals less-discussed dimensions, such as the impact of employee emotions toward administrative practices. This study noted how emotion can heavily impact staff retention and challenge sustainable practices, including maintaining consistent institutional knowledge and fostering an innovative work culture. Emotional responses influence how much information employees are willing to share, and this exchange of complex, relational knowledge is crucial for effective administration. Negative emotions toward work, however, hinder employees' ability to find purpose in contributing to higher education, an important motivational factor for self-directed learning and professional recognition. Consequently, emotions play a key role in the professionalisation for higher education administration especially within the tightly governed institutional structure that lacks career progression in Taiwan, affecting individual development as well as institutional sustainability.

Beyond skills and knowledge, there remains a lack of clarity around responsibilities among research, international, and other administrative offices within universities. Tomkinson (1997) proposed a model for staff development, addressing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. While later literature shifted to focus on specialised skills and systemised knowledge, attitude was removed from the centre of the discussion (eg. Caldwell, 2024; Whitchurch, 2009). However, the element of attitude emerged from empirical data in Taiwan and Singapore, marking its essentialness in the complex and demanding higher education administration environment. Addressing professionalisation in higher education administration requires not only training in skills and knowledge but also the development of comprehensive abilities to adapt, identify, and resolve problems, and soft skills such as attitude or "a right logic" are identified as assisting factors. And the "right attitude" is often a combination of these soft skills and a standard of judgement that can only be cultivated and not systematically categorised.

In Taiwan, managerial systems are reported to lack understanding of the administrative environment, and managers demonstrated low interest in planning administrators' professional development, furthering the institutional neglect. The middle management system, when limited to only civil servants and academic candidates, also lacks candidates who understand the specific skills and challenges of these newly established offices. Some participants reported a higher awareness and intention to facilitate sustainable practices as well as consistent institutional values than their colleagues and managers, but without a top-down initiative, their efforts were often dimmed or neglected. Beyond the lack of training, there appears to be an institutional neglect of the professional development of administrators, further hindering their professionalisation and potential to assist organisation sustainability. Addressing the root cause of inadequate training—namely, the lack of recognition of higher education administration as a professional field—may be essential to fostering sustainable practices in higher education.

6.4.2 Cross-boundary Third Space professionals

Participants revealed how, with expanded responsibilities, administrators were required of skills beyond the border of their office design. The observation aligns with Whitchurch's (2015) descriptions of "blurry boundaries" in professional service roles in Australian and British higher education. Taiwanese participants provided examples of increasing responsibilities related to student affairs, internationalisation, and research management skills across offices,

while Singaporean participants observed additional services in marketing and international awareness from a research office perspective. However, compared to the literature where collaboration had become more project-based and therefore moved away from the traditional work boundary, Taiwan and Singapore still see borders lining the office division in institutional structure, prolonging further ambiguity and undefined territory in higher education administration.

The cross-office work and collaborative hiring processes from the participants align with Whitchurch's (2015) concept of cross-boundary "Third Space" professionals. Taiwanese national universities have historically enforced strict boundaries between offices in institutional regulations, institutional structure, and responsibility division. While many participants reported challenges in cross-office communication, there was evidence that these rigid boundaries were shifting to accommodate new projects. However, a lack of institutional support for flexible boundary adaptation persists, which limits the ability of administrators to address evolving tasks, prevented by regulations and a misunderstanding of the administrative system by their line managers.

Both Taiwanese and Singaporean institutions maintain similar boundaries between administrative offices, despite the occasional overlapping responsibilities across units. This mismatch between tasks and structural borders creates ambiguity in areas such as task allocation, responsibility ownership, and administrative identity, often leading to cross-office conflicts due to unclear expectations and overstepping boundaries.

The shifting boundary in higher education prompted the development of the blended professionals, who exhibit greater agency in interpreting and crossing boundaries (Whitchurch, 2009, 2015). Many participants demonstrated proactive mindsets to promote cross-office collaboration and communication facing overlapping and ambiguous responsibilities, aligning with the development of blended professionals Whitchurch observed. More discussion on the concept of Third Space and its comparison to Taiwanese and Singaporean participants continue in 8.1.3.

A strong tendency to view all members as a team further emphasises the collaborative nature and collectivist philosophy in higher education. This perspective differs from the literature on

professional service staff in Australia, the US, and the UK. In contrast, Taiwanese and Singaporean higher education administrators demonstrated less focus on individual agencies and a stronger aspiration to contribute collectively to institutional development. This was also shown in their discussions, while they advocated for more training to improve professional skills and knowledge, the concept of training was rarely connected to furthering one's career or leading to personal promotion. They showed a clear recognition of their supporting roles, aiming not for personal success but for the success of faculty members and the broader higher education.

Chapter 7 Microsystem and Chronosystem: Individual development

In the ecological systems model, the microsystem and chronosystem are two distinct layers. Yet in the highly interactive higher education environment, all systems influence one another. The microsystem in the ecological systems model stands for an individual's immediate environment such as family, school, and work. I adopted a different interpretation leaning toward the virtual influence, and examined the internal concepts like identity, value, and beliefs, of a person, that influence their professional growth. Themes of professional identity and career actions emerged, both closely tied to the values and priorities of individuals focused on their work. The chronosystem, representing the element of time in the ecological systems model, is applied in this research to explore long-term challenges and support that shape the development of the higher education administration profession(s). As the plentiful facets higher education administration has demonstrated, it may provide more accuracy to recognise that there are multiple professions within the sector.

Combining the microsystem and chronosystem, this chapter provides an overview of the profession's long-term development while preserving a personal perspective. This framework sheds light on individual professional identities, their impact on career decisions, and the obstacles and support that shaped professional development in higher education administration.

The chapter begins with a discussion on professional identity, drawing participants' perspectives on their roles and from other members of the university. I adopt a more value-based approach in the microsystem to explore administrators' beliefs and how they manifest in their career decisions. Personal values and views toward work significantly influenced administrators' identities, attracting many driven individuals who aligned intrinsically with the values and mission of higher education institutions. The second part explores their career trajectories and examines how administrators with varied definitions and expectations progress. This part follows a chronological sequence, from the rationales for entering the profession to considerations of whether to remain or transition to new roles. By examining identity and career path together, the professionalisation of higher education administration is narrated as a continuous process with an exploration of what is professional, and its development and challenges in the chronosystem. This chapter underscores the importance of both the

microsystem and chronosystem in shaping individuals' development within higher education administration.

7.1 Professional Identity

In this study, identity appears across multiple levels. While the identity in the macrosystem is a reflection of the strictly defined legal framework, and organisational identity made an appearance in the discussion in the exosystem, the professional identity in the microsystem analysis demonstrated a more personal interpretation of the topic. Across systems, a different proportion of identification, self-understanding, and groupness (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) mixed in to form the professional identities of the higher education administrators. Unable to separate the discussion, I still apply "professional identity" to cover related aspects together in this section. To focus on the topic of professionalisation, this discussion focuses on the alignment and potential conflicts between personal values and work expectations instead identity formation or the complexities of pluralistic identities.

7.1.1 Personal values manifestation

Describing the identity development progress, Chickering (1969) highlighted overlapping features that overlap with the characteristics of a profession. Amongst the features, autonomy is a mutual topic, connecting a sense of control and decision-making power to a shared group identity. The purpose is another element identified. While Chickering suggested that people identify with the group more when owning a mutual purpose, people in the same profession can be linked together sharing a sense of service.

From participants' responses, an alignment between personal values and professional identity emerged as an important theme. Although autonomy was not always present, a shared sense of purpose recurred throughout the interviews. Participants' value statements ranged from what they deemed "right", what is important in life, to those that remained inherent to their personality traits. This alignment between values and job responsibilities strengthened their professional identities in higher education administration and reflected the various ways participants interpreted their roles in research and international offices.

One of the alignments was the impact of a role in higher education administration. Participant University B International Affairs Manager 1 described how administrators, when executing a new project, felt a collective responsibility that they "needed to create this", suggesting an urgency and commitment to service and innovation that emerged repeatedly in the interview data. University D Research Support Manager 2 reiterated this value alignment between their work and personal belief in science more directly:

> "I've always believed that science is actually something that is quite fascinating. I always like to be at the forefront of science."

Similarly, University B International Affairs Manager 2 emphasised the belief in making an impact:

> "I feel like most of my achievements came from how I brought something different for everyone, or maybe *impact*."
> (University B International Affairs Manager 2)
>
> 「我就覺得好像我大部分的成就，是來自於如何帶給大家一些不同的東西，或者是 impact。」

These value alignments often extend to educational background and personality traits. Participants University B International Affairs Manager 2 has a background in business studies, and his response highlighted the aspect of higher education administration that aligned with his background, describing their role as a marketing team.

> "We are like a marketing [team]. We don't bring concrete income for the university, we have been building an image that others see as *tangible*. And it feels like you don't need to be very capable. This is serious."
> (University B International Affairs Manager 2)
>
> 「我們就是像一個行銷，我們沒有為學校帶來很實質的收入，我們就一直在建立一種人家認為很 tangible 的形象，然後感覺你好像也不太需要太多的能力，這很嚴重。」

This perspective helped shape University B International Affairs Manager 2's professional identity, applying educated expertise to shape work. Although the statement also reflected challenges by differing valuations of contributions within higher education, the flexibility and wide coverage of higher education administration work supported vastly different valuations. The challenges also demonstrated how the alignment between professional identity and the

institution's mission solidified administrators' commitment to their role even without concrete rewards.

Another participant, University B International Affairs Manager 3, also connected their personality to the qualities needed for the role, endorsing the adaptability required in a fast-changing environment:

> "I feel like one of my personality traits is that I love absorbing new knowledge. My friends used to describe that as short-of- information phobia. If I don't receive all angles and sorts of information, I get anxious."
> (University B International Affairs Manager 3)

> 「我覺得我的個性也是很喜歡一直吸收新的東西，那這就是我以前朋友說的是，那種有資訊密集恐懼症，就是如果我沒有收到方方面面的資訊，我會焦慮的人。」

These examples highlighted the alignment between the skills needed for administrative roles and the qualities participants recognised in themselves. It demonstrated that besides the required skill and knowledge, value alignment in individuals also contributed to the recognition of higher education administration.

Additionally, participants across Taiwan and Singapore described themselves as "black sheep" within the university and emphasised their "rebellious" personalities. This self-image revealed the strong emphasis on participants' personal beliefs and how their value judgement preceded the institution's. A quote from University B Research Institutional Support Manager 1 articulated this self-image:

> "If they hired me just to follow whatever the professors ordered to be done and I can't express any opinions, they should actually hire the new graduates from universities. They might do a better job than I do."
> (University B Research Institutional Support Manager 1)

> 「那如果說找我來的話，就是只是要我聽從教授的命令行事的話，不能有任何意見的話，其實找個大學剛畢業的人來做我的事情，可能會做得比我還好。」

The statement again exemplified the importance of administrative work to align with personal beliefs while also illustrating the openness and capacity of bottom-up initiatives in these higher education environments. Connecting back to the discussion regarding an expanded academic

freedom in mission selections in 5.1.1 compared to working in other organisations, this statement demonstrated a similar autonomy in mission execution. In Taiwanese and Singaporean universities, between the organisation- and culture-instituted hierarchy, there remained space for discussion between the academics and administrators, and sometimes between universities and the government.

An emphasis on the importance of continuous self-improvement appeared in University D Research Institutional Support Manager 1's response, again highlighting the individual aspect in higher education administration roles: "We must always be ready to upgrade ourselves, be ready to teach ourselves and be very sincere and trustworthy." The broad coverage and flexibility of these roles exemplified a malleable space for administrators to interpret and explore, shaping their professional identities in line with personal beliefs and values.

Participants in this study endorsed different values in their roles and their institutions and demonstrated professional identities that align with personal educational background, personality, and value judgement. Among more experienced administrators, this alignment between professional identity and personal endorsed qualities was strong.

7.1.2 Endorsement of educational missions

Learning emerged as a recurring theme across the participating offices (see discussion in 6.2.3 Self-learning experience). With a strong emphasis on continuous learning expressed directly by eight participants, this section examines deeper into the motivations and personal beliefs. For example, University D Research Support Manager 2 shared a preference toward learning straightforwardly, "I feel more energised, learning new stuff", and similar comments appeared throughout other interviews. Another participant, University C Research Support Manager 2, commented on the discrepancy between their job description and the actual tasks they conducted: "I pick up an administration job and all I do was reading paper." This reflects a gap between the stereotype of an "administration job", which idly processes clerical and repetitive tasks assigned, and "reading paper", which indicates a proactive academic pursuit and entails a learning-oriented aspect. The participant, University C Research Support Manager 2, further noted that while reading research papers is not required for the role, it aided in understanding and managing research projects more effectively, and often their reading took place outside

office hours. This proactive attitude toward "learning more" was similarly echoed by Taiwanese participants, including University B International Affairs Manager 3, who in the previous quote described their "short-of-information phobia".

Participants underscore how the university's nature as an educational institute fosters a strong intention to learn among administrators. As University D Research Support Manager 2 reflects:

> "This university is a pretty good environment for you to learn and to grow from your colleagues and to really get all these new skills, because if you have the environment and the bosses support you in terms of doing all these things."

Evidence recorded how the pro-learning environment a university provides could act as a significant factor attracting and retaining its administrative staff. To facilitate participants and their desire for continuous learning, a work environment that provides resources and managerial encouragement can not only accommodate but promote this growth. Thus, the role of a higher education institution extends beyond an employer, but a learning environment that appeals to individuals with a continuous-learning mindset, or sometimes, those who are amidst their higher education pursuits. This applies not just to students or scholars but also to members of its administrative team.

This proactiveness in professional identities among participants extends beyond learning but helps form a strong sense of responsibility. Several participants describe a dedication to achieving the best outcome of their work. For instance, University A Global Student Affairs Manager 1 shared how going to the office on a weekend morning allowed them to finish work without distraction from phone calls and emails, and having completed tasks made them more relaxed:

> "To finish the work. It might only take you half a day, and you'll feel more comfortable. It is true. Though you've worked half a day, you still feel like you have had a break." (University A Global Student Affairs Manager 1)

「你做完，可能做了半天好了，你就覺得很舒服，就真的，雖然你是工作了半天，可是你還是有放到假的感覺。」

In the discussion of professionalism, participants revealed a driven mindset and a strong alignment with their university's educational mission. Their responses also depicted active self-reflections on the purpose of their work, adding depth to their professional identities.

University B Global Student Affairs Manager 1's comment connected this driven mindset, emphasis of purpose, and an active self-reflection:

> "So when I get a project, first of all, you have to slow down and look at what am I doing. Why am I doing this? You know, I think being a professional is... it's very, it's very intrinsic."

Although some participants reported a more passive mindset, balancing workload with their salary (as discussed in the following section 7.1.3), the majority of participants in Taiwan and Singapore demonstrated a driven professional identity aligned with aspirations for continuous learning and self-improvement. This alignment reflected their expectations of the university to uphold its educational role. As discussed in 5.1.4, this social expectation motivated both universities and the participants, who further extended the value of education beyond personal achievements. Their sense of responsibility and proactive working attitude connected personal beliefs with the broader impact of their work, highlighting a meaningful integration between professional identity and the university's educational mission.

7.1.3 Response to legal framework and institutional support

Six Taiwanese participants commented on how restrictive laws and regulations hinder their work and the professional recognition of higher education administration. University A Global Student Affairs Manager 1 connected the regulated legal status with the challenges higher education administrators face in establishing a sense of professionalism:

> "The administrators are viewed in this way in legal regulations, and that makes it difficult for them to... Even if the administrators want to view their occupation as a profession, it seems hard for them to develop professionalism. That's because they are questioned like this every day."
> (University A Global Student Affairs Manager 1)
>
> 「其實你法規都已經這樣看這些行政人員了，那就變成行政人員好像也，就算他們想要把它變成一個專業，好像也很難發揮，因為就是每天都被這樣質疑。」

In Taiwan, government regulations have conflicting definitions for higher education administrators. Higher education administrators are regulated as educators and civil servants (see previous discussion in 4.3.2.1 Regulatory framework in Taiwan), with moral expectations and regulations to ensure neutrality in project execution. This legal framework design generates

a sense of mistrust. University A Research Institutional Support Manager 2's observation emphasised how such mistrust limits the professionalisation of higher education administration. Another Taiwanese participant agreed with this observation and further compared it with their past work in Hong Kong, where administrative roles were less challenged by regulations.

Adjusting expectations in response to this restrictive framework and a lack of institutional support, some Taiwanese participants referred to their work as "a contract job for a lot of people" and described a focus on meeting basic requirements rather than providing the best outcome. This passive approach frequently links to environmental factors and work conditions. Examples include setting expectations for a business trip only to safely complete the work and not broadening partnerships. One participant suggested having lowered their perfectionism in daily operations to accept a 70% result due to high overtime hours and low pay. Yet another expressed disappointment on how the university environment does not encourage innovation, where members' hesitation to increase additional work prevented others from pursuing improvements.

In contrast, Singapore's legal system places no specific restrictions on higher education administration beyond the *Employment Act*, which covers all industries. The regulative environment connecting to the industry also allows workers to transfer between the higher education sector and industry, building a more flexible professional identity. Singaporean participants' responses often reflected a workplace mindset encouraging change. University C International Affairs Manager 1 recalled their hiring experience, where they were asked by the management: "The request was, please be disruptive somewhere that was useful", revealing an institutional openness to innovation and less restrictive role definitions. Despite personal interpretations of professional endeavours, which were not always agreed on, participants tend to recognise their own professional status.

7.2 Career actions

University B's International Affairs Manager 1 stated:

> "No matter whether this is a *profession* or not, it can be a *career*. It only depends on to what level everyone defines *career* for themselves."
>
> 「但不管他是不是 profession，他都可以是一個 career，只是取決於每個人

對於 career 的定義到哪裡的問題而已。」

The statement directly distinguished profession and career, but also indirectly suggested the participant had dedicated to viewing their role in higher education administration as a career. In the discussion regarding differences between a profession and a career, the International Affairs Manager nominated being irreplaceable and equipping with complex and comprehensive knowledge for one to be professional, but only named progression opportunities for a career. While these two concepts remain connected yet different, this study incorporated specific interview questions related to career actions to explore the values and beliefs participants exhibited that influenced their career planning and decisions.

From the interview data, participants' reflections and their views on career planning and choices were closely tied to their past and current roles. To provide a structured analysis, this study adopted Jeong and Leblebici's (2019) view in illustrating the three major sequential stages in order to "focus on the totality of a career" (p.301). Adjusted to higher education administrator's career paths, career actions thus were categorised into three stages chronologically: entry, continuation, and exiting of roles. While the focus is on the profession of higher education administration, my analysis naturally interweaves these stages. For example, discussions on entering a current role often involve decisions made about leaving previous roles, and considerations around exiting the current role frequently encompass plans for transitioning into new opportunities.

7.2.1 Career entry

Lewis (2014) described professional service roles in universities as an accidental job, where many professionals entered these positions not as a preference but rather as a temporary solution or a stepping-stone, then remained in the role long-term. Taiwanese and Singaporean participants reported similar experiences to this "accident". Participants entered the field looking for short-term positions while preparing for other opportunities, such as studying abroad or answering the recruitment news based on friends' encouragement. Others were attracted by the administrative prospect and thought the position could be a starting

employment opportunity before they learnt what they wanted for a career. For many, administrative roles initially offered entry-level work with limited plans for career continuity.

Others selected roles in higher education administration more intentionally, choosing positions aligned with their skillsets. Participants with backgrounds in international trade or English were attracted to international offices, while those who valued science and research continued their careers in research offices. In Singapore, many participants with experience in funding agencies saw university roles as a natural continuation of their work assessing research projects and supporting research development. Despite the similarity in skillsets and responsibilities, universities offered more stable environments, especially for those with family caring duties. Familiarity with colleagues also influenced decisions to join the specific unit, demonstrating the influence of relational knowledge in higher education administration.

Another group of participants reported having transferred from other internal university offices or external universities but continued the path of higher education administration. Recruitment advertisements have proved an institutional valuation on experiences in higher education administration, but some participants chose their roles based on different concerns. Singaporean participants who continued in new university roles were influenced by similar skill requirements, familiar environments, and career development potentials. Taiwanese contractors, while sharing these motivations, showed similarities to Singaporean employees.

However, for Taiwanese civil servant participants, the emphasis on skills was secondary to positional availability. These participants often moved between roles due to the institution's management decisions rather than personal choices, as long as the new internal positions matched their civil service categories. Civil servants who passed the "general administration" exam therefore are eligible for most university administration positions. Consequently, Taiwanese participants had a mixture of experiences in other higher education administration professions, such as library, IT service, and academic affairs offices.

7.2.2 Career continuation

Participants in higher education administration reported various reasons for remaining in their roles, yet clear patterns could be observed. According to the motivations, themes identified

included accidental continuation, stability, difficulty in transitioning to other fields, and matching the finding in 7.1.1, an alignment between personal values and their work.

Similar to those who initially entered the job unintentionally, participants remained due to a lack of active job searching. Some participants across Taiwan and Singapore expressed how they were "taking a break" by working in the role and were planning to look for other jobs. One participant wished to utilise the free time to prepare for the civil service national exam but became absorbed in their daily work and gradually drifted away from the original plan. It was observed that many participants entered the job considering it a "stepping-stone job", but the demands of the job led the administrators to disengage from their original plan, remaining longer than anticipated.

Stability is a primary motivation for many participants. Interviewed between 2022 and 2023, several participants across Taiwan and Singapore noted how stability in higher education roles offered job security in the post-pandemic periods. A Singaporean participant reflected that even during economic crises, the role provided essential stability (University C International Affairs Manager 2). Connecting the stableness and their choice to remain in the role, six participants across Taiwan and Singapore expressed appreciation for the stableness since it enhanced compatibility with other life aspects, especially family. Participants selected the role based on the location in the city where their family is based. University D Research Support Manager 2 provided examples of how family-oriented the institution is, such as unpaid leave for temporary relocation overseas and childcare accommodations. Given the perception that jobs outside of universities would entail demanding overtime hours, many found universities more compatible with their family commitments.

Others described barriers to transitioning out of higher education administration to other industries. In Taiwan, job mobility across universities appears limited, while in Singapore, horizontal transitions within the sector are more common. Moving to other industries presented challenges, with reported stereotypes around university administration roles as bureaucratic or slow-paced, making industry switches more difficult. Participants recall applying for jobs in other industries with compatible skill sets but received no replies. One participant with prior experience in a Hong Kong university perceived similarity in difficult transitions,

reinforcing the limited cross-industry mobility for higher education administration in the East Asian region.

A few participants identified matches with their personal profile, such as timeline, location, or personality, as motivation for remaining in the roles. One participant hoped to demonstrate career consistency by staying in one role for at least five years, while another described how their previous studies attracted them to move to the city of their current institution. Participants such as University A Research Institutional Support Manager 1 found their skillsets, like language proficiency and interest in international affairs, aligned well with their administrative positions. University B International Affairs Manager 1 valued the office culture and flexibility, which promoted innovation and encouraged their long-term commitment.

> "I am willing to stay here for such a long time because there have always been new things I can try. Also, the office management does not stop me from trying something new" (University B International Affairs Manager 1)
>
> 「我願意待這麼久，就是一直有新的事情可以試，那再來是，它不會阻止我去做新的事情。」

Though few, some participants highlighted how personal values and professional environment could align, challenging stereotypes around university roles as purely institutional or bureaucratic. From the responses, university environments tend to demonstrate more compatibility and stability for the employees, while flexibility and innovation practices fluctuate between offices. The findings emphasise both the practical and personal factors that influence retention within higher education administration.

Still other participants continued their roles but showed reluctance in recognising it as a career, illustrating an interesting and seemingly conflicting view. A Taiwanese participant pointed out how institutional guidelines caused unequal practices, reducing their willingness to build a career, another one, also from Taiwan, described a lack of passion in pursuing further opportunities, making their current roles not careers.

> "[...A]nd then employees with the same workload but different wages, this is another thing that will not see a change. There is certainly a resistance of making this into a *career.*"
>
> 「然後跟同工不同酬，這個事情也是另外一個就沒有辦法，在這邊真的有一個 career 的阻力啊。」

(Anonymous quote)

"If this is a career, there should be something aspiring about it. I think one needs to aspire something from the bottom of one's heart, that will count as you are pursue it as a career. But for myself, I don't feel that way.
(Anonymous quote)

「如果是一個 career 的話，應該是有嚮往性，我覺得這樣發自內心的嚮往性，才算是你可以把它當作一個 career 去追尋，但我覺得我個人，比較沒有」

The above statement revealed frustration among higher education administrators facing inconsistent institutional regulations, aligning with previous discussions on the multiple hiring routes 4.3.2.1, which brought unequal terms and conditions for higher education administrators. The statement involved a pursuit and a passion for one to look forward to, showing the difference when the elements of improvement and progression are lost, a worker can continue their job without viewing it as one's career.

7.2.3 Career exit

A high turnover rate was reported in five of the six participating offices, with interview data indicating that a major obstacle to employee retention is the lack of a clear career vision in higher education administration jobs.

Taiwanese participants reported rigid institutional restrictions as a significant factor, extending from findings in 7.1.3. Current regulations create a flat administrative structure within university offices, with opportunities for lateral and upward mobility limited. Participants noted a lack of recognition and promotional prospects for those who performed well in their roles. While some attempted to change offices within the university to find advancement, others sought opportunities elsewhere to secure better career prospects.

"The tasks continuously increase, so what can we do? There must be some administrative workforce to remain and support the normality. If one keeps putting in effort and still sees no future of the job, they'll leave. So they naturally need to think of a

「事情就是越來越多，怎麼辦？勢必要有一些常態性的行政人力在這邊撐著，那你撐著撐著如果還沒有前景，他就會

solution for the question: how do I retain employees?"
(University B International Affairs Manager 1)

逃走，所以他們自然就得想辦法說，那我怎麼把人留下來？」

University B International Affairs Manager 1's response captured a broader concern about the role's future, reflecting the importance of career development and personal growth. While the statement indicated a lack of long-term development, it also revealed how individuals may interpret career vision and solutions differently.

Other participants, both Taiwanese and Singaporean, viewed career visions and advancements differently -- as opportunities for skill enhancement and intellectual growth. University B Manager 1, Global Student Affairs, summarised a sense of stagnant when unable to pursue such growth: "I think the turnover come sometimes just they're bored, and they don't want to move forward, or they don't feel like they don't see themselves advancing"

Interviews revealed that participants often had an implicit career timeline. Some expected to remain in one role for a set number of years to cater to positive social perceptions, and others referred to personal approaches such as family plans. Nonetheless, others referred to a more abstract "timing", acting as a comprehensive personal consideration like career progression, workload, and relationship with colleagues. For instance, University B Global Student Affairs Manager 2 remarked:

"When time is up, people would want to leave."

「就是時間到了之後，大家也會想要離開。」

The "time" that is addressed in the statement summarises multiple factors in participants' concern, it is a lack of progression after a certain time period, it is the end of a manager's terms of office, and it is also a more personal timeline catering to familial duty timings.

7.3 The professionalisation through administrators' eyes

Exploring the national level, institutional level, and personal level of professionalisation for higher education administrators, individual influencing factors emerged, overlapped, and intertwined. The discussion on chronosystem aims to add the factor of time to the finding,

exploring how professionalisation has been interpreted and changed through time. While earlier chapters (4-6) highlighted key challenges such as low recognition and rigid hiring systems, some issues extend beyond universities into societal and cultural contexts. In this section, I investigate individual interpretations of professionalisation, building a combined notion of what a professional is like for the participants. While understandings vary, this section analyses social and cultural factors underpinning these responses, illustrating how participants experienced professionalisation.

The study then turned from the pursuit of a definition to examining the phenomenon and its development, the support, and the obstacles. Institutional differences in support for higher education administration were evident, as participants offered varied observations on professionalisation. This section synthesises narratives on long-term development and obstacles based on perspectives accommodating individual differences.

7.3.1 Defining profession by higher education administrators' views

The notion of what makes a profession spread out throughout the interviews, and I collected all replies that indicated a value judgement on what one considers to be professional, instead of only the direct answers to the questions on the profession. Participants' replies on how they define professions lead to a variety of elements, and not all of them are quantifiable. Compared to the literature, a lot of the elements that the higher education administration deems to make a profession or make someone professional are non-quantifiable ideas such as attitude and experience (see discussion of administrative knowledge in 5.4.3). The analysis provides some common criteria that are valued by university administrators from Taiwan and Singapore.

Profession by experience

Experience is a repeatedly mentioned topic for higher education administrators when speaking of someone "professional", often accompanied by how the training is not sufficient and much administration knowledge remains hidden. But while many participants mentioned how rich experiences make their colleagues professional, the time spent on the job is not the only criterion.

"Without special experiences, the job remains only administrational and is just for girls who run the errands. There is not much professionalism." (University B Research Institutional Support Manager 2).

「沒有什麼特別的經歷，就是一些行政事務、打雜小妹，比較這樣子的，所以沒有什麼專業性可言。」

What the "special experiences" in the statement often entailed was more complex and non-repetitive cases, examples included initiating a project, handling multi-party negotiations which often involved legal or governmental regulations, or hosting large international events. The statement clearly divided experiences gained from daily work and noted that there remains a large part of the higher education administration role that can be with low agency, such as running errands.

Others also agreed that it is not just the years spent managing certain affairs that familiarise a person with their work. University C Research Support Manager 2 emphasised, "That comes with experience, that comes with intention and the intent", demonstrating how proactiveness and intention to improve oneself in the role with experience are needed. Some participants focused on the unique ability cultivated from experiences that build one capability to oversee something others can't solve. Specific examples included that with the experiences, one has better judgement and understanding of where the university's advantages lay (University A International Affairs Manager 3). Others considered the suggestions one can provide for the faculty members (University B Research Support Manager 1) and understanding the nuances. Still others endorsed being able to find solutions on matters legal regulations haven't addressed (University A Global Student Affairs Manager 1) and promoted specific cooperation such as on research or student recruitment (University A International Affairs Manager 3).

Profession by recognition

In the interview testimonials, participants' recognitions of themselves being professionals and their work being a profession are separated. University A International Affairs Manager 2's words marked the division:

"I consider myself professional, but I do not know what my expertise is."

「但是我覺得我是專業的，雖然我不知道我的專業是什麼？」

The statement demonstrated again a low recognition of the professionalism of the profession, despite a self-endorsement on one's working ability and attitude. University A International Affairs Manager 2 expressed confusion many hold facing the wide range of tasks involved in the higher education administration work.

Despite disagreements on whether higher education administration is a profession or not, most participants considered themselves professional. However, digging deeper, the positioning varies. Some self-defined to be professionals and considered themselves equipped with sufficient professional skills despite the roles (i.e. University A International Affairs Manager 2, University A Research Support Manager 1, and A2H). Others like University D Research Institutional Support Manager 1 and University A Research Support Manager 3 considered higher education administration as a profession, and therefore themselves professional. Still, others believed that one needs to start seeing themselves as professional for this role to be considered professional (i.e. University A Research Support Manager 3, University B Global Student Affairs Manager 1), or to a more proactive mindset toward building the profession, aligning with what University D Research Support Manager 1 expressed "You just make it [the role] professional!"

The other side of the voices were less optimistic. When asked whether they consider themselves to be professional, some think they "are not yet" (University A Global Student Affairs Manager 3) and sometimes this links back to the lack of experience, but sometimes it demonstrated a low recognition towards the role as purely administrative. University B Research Institutional Support Manager 1 pointed out that in the industry, they would have been considered professionals, but not in the universities. University D Research Institutional Support Manager 1 commented how higher education administrators "see this as a kind of professional job that many people may not recognise. They [Those people] feel that oh, just anybody can do it." University A Research Institutional Support Manager 1 reported another perspective facing constant low recognition, "No matter what your expertise is, they only register that you are an administrator", further adding how the non-stereotypical professions are not considered professions by the public. A low recognition towards higher education administration persists, and it influences the administrator's self-recognition and identification with their profession.

Profession by working attitude

Attitude is another recurring theme when it comes to defining the profession, and it is especially stressed by Taiwanese participants. Many considered a proactive attitude toward their work being the line that divided what is a profession and what is not.

"Something that makes a difference which embodies in your *profession* is whether you have an attitude to pursue improvement."
(University A Global Student Affairs Manager 3)

「能夠體現你的 profession 的其中一個差別，就是在於說你會不會有那種去追求改善的態度。」

"You can complete the tasks administratively, but you can also develop some profound elaborations."
(University A Research Support Manager 1)

「你可以把它做得很行政，但是你也可以有一些你也可以深度的發揮。」

"If you are one who put your mind to work, it can be a profession, but if you are not, it is merely a title."
(University A International Affairs Manager 2)

「如果你是認真做事的人，他是一個專業，但是如果你不是認真做事的人就是一個掛名而已。」

From the statements, the proactiveness also unfolded in different aspects, ranging from actively pursuing improvements, having one's judgement and thoughts, or how much effort and thoughts one devotes to their work.

Attitude is also often included in the discussion alongside necessary skills for higher education administrative roles, but without a definition, the term can sometimes create confusion. Among the participants, there was a belief that a higher education administrator is expected to be equipped with the contextual knowledge and accumulation of experiences prior to establishing one's own working style and attitude. It demonstrates how the expectation of attitude is not simply amiability or diligence, but a complex emotional reaction that aids task operation. Therefore, the attitude comes with ample knowledge and practice and demonstrates a further wish to develop professionalism, no matter whether it is for the individual or the profession.

Profession by integration and connection

Many participants viewed and endorsed their status as the connecting node in the university, and the discussion on professionalism is often directed toward connectivity. University B Global Student Affairs Manager 1 suggested that,

> "Being a professional is, to me [it] is how you work together as a team, not just within your own division, but as [the office], or as the whole university."

This statement also demonstrated how the participant upholds a more collective identity than an individual one. Instead of endorsing an individual's skill and ability as professional, the respect is paid to employees who facilitate the development of the whole institution, on the level of team, office, and the university.

While this view of professionalism lies in how one can connect with the broader institution, others expect further integrations. University B Research Institutional Support Manager 2 described professionalism to be how deep one can explore and understand the bigger picture from a single event, and by capturing this understanding, one can further cover the width and integrate subject disciplines, stakeholders, and projects. University B International Affairs Manager 3 summarised the multi-ability a professional administrator should be equipped with in a short sentence:

> "One needs to have a wholesome coverage on their radar chart."
> (University B International Affairs Manager 3)
>
> 「就是你的雷達圖是滿的。」

By integrated abilities and wide coverage, administrators expected their professionalism to support an integrated connectedness and capabilities, instead of working on one single project or managing one department.

Challenges to the higher education administration include social stereotypes of repetitive and clerical work, this opinion has brought many low self-recognitions. A close work relationship with the academics also prompted the administrators to follow a set of more classic definitions of a profession including systematic knowledge and academic degrees.

Administrators' interpretation towards the profession involved a high sense of proactive working mindset. The few elements named necessary in forming a profession: experience,

working attitude, and a willingness and ability to connect and integrate all carry a certain level of proactiveness. This in a way challenged the limited access that remains fundamental to a profession. While in the literature, for one to enter a profession, knowledge and morality standards must be met, this concept of how one can become a professional through equipping with a proactive mindset and continuous improvement at work deviates from the previous recognition.

7.3.2 Developments supporting professionalisation

Despite a lack of endorsement of individual professionalism, participants generally acknowledge progress in support of the development of higher education administration in increased recognition, regulatory environment changes, and institutional support.

Participants from Universities B, C, and D reported growing acknowledgement of administrative contributions. Faculty members increasingly recognised the importance of administrative work and how it facilitated institutional growth. Participant University B International Affairs Manager 3 noticed an increasing understanding of individual differences, too.

> "So these [efforts] actually slowly raised people's attention, recognising how everyone brought different value to their work, and hence their salary should reflect the differences."
> (University B International Affairs Manager 3)

> 「所以這些其實有慢慢的、重視到說，每個人的，為工作帶來的價值不同，好像應該要有不一樣的薪水。」

Loosening regulations and updating hiring systems have also made a significant impact. In Taiwan, one major obstacle has been the lack of performance-based differentiation in salary and opportunities. This institutional stagnation discouraged proactive efforts. Recent changes, though limited to the institutional level and not nationwide, initiated some variance rewarding greater responsibility and initiative among administrators, marking a step toward professionalisation.

All Taiwanese participating offices have reported changes to their hiring procedures. Examples include: University A has transitioned contractors into permanent employee status, providing the higher education administration workforce with more job security. At University B,

recognition has evolved from abstract endorsement to concrete policy changes, leading to a revision of titles and ranks, addressing the flat structure to better align responsibilities with job titles.

On the national policy side, the second phase of Sustained Progress and Rise of Universities in Taiwan (SPROUT) has also played a role in cultivating administrative talent, providing funding and resources to support development. The details of the policy have been addressed in 4.2.3 Higher education policies and their influences. With Taiwan's centralised higher education governance, the increasing visibility in the policy realm for administrators signifies a focus on government support. However, the policy only focuses on international affairs management, IT, and aboriginal student affairs personnel, reflecting the partial emphasis on national development. Though this initiative remains limited, Taiwanese participants expressed optimism about the future development of the wider higher education administration.

The professionalisation efforts in Singapore are even more grounded in institutional initiatives than governmental policy. Participants described managerial encouragement to innovate and challenge norms. Previous examples included a participant from University C being asked to "be disruptive" in their work, and another participant from University D shared:

> "The support on that we['ve] seen so far is that they, they tried to, you know, relax the rules a little and give us more flexibility."

The flexibility mentioned prioritises a positive environment for growth and innovation over institutional regulation. From the responses, Singaporean institutions also demonstrated a better authorisation to administrators to implement changes, and this authorisation further promoted professional advancement.

Besides institutional changes, participants also expressed strong individual motivation to embrace changes and enhance professionalism.

> "So it keeps changing and changing, which does not make me feel difficult or else. Yes. Because then you feel like it is constant... new things motivate us." (University A Research Support Manager 4)

「所以他變變變，那個其實不會讓我覺得很艱難，或者是怎麼樣，對啊。

因為你就覺得一直，有新的東西還是讓我們有動力。」

"The reason for me to take up the job here was clear, I want to break some boundaries."

「我來這邊的定義很清楚我要，衝破一些事情」

(University B International Affairs Manager 2)

Most participants expressed a strong preference for roles with a pro-social impact, which motivated their pursuit of professionalism in higher education. Participant University B International Affairs Manager 2 shared experiences of declining job offers in other industries, emphasising that their current position provided greater flexibility and opportunities to adopt multiple roles in promoting educational outcomes. University B Manager 1, Global Student Affairs and University D Research Support Manager 2 strongly endorsed advancements in education and science, highlighting their commitment to these fields. Similarly, participants University C International Affairs Manager 2 and University C Research Support Manager 2 exhibited professionalism across all aspects of their roles, contributing to the expansion of autonomy and the professional standards of the field. Proactive participants not only demonstrated a higher level of commitment to their professional identities but also expressed stronger aspirations for and critiques of the current state of professionalisation.

With various practices and efforts at different levels between Taiwan and Singapore, a progression of higher education administration profession(s) is evident. On the national level, policies like SPROUT allocated resources for administrative development. On the institutional level, both countries demonstrate efforts to modernise the administrative workforce, with Singapore emphasising flexibility and innovation and Taiwan addressing its managerial structure. On the individual level, many participants expressed enthusiasm for ongoing changes, citing them as motivating factors for staying in their roles.

7.3.3 Challenges toward professionalisation

Aside from societal stereotypes, national legal acts, and institutional systems, participants identified additional challenges to the overall development of higher education administration.

Two international management participants in the study, who had experience working in both Anglo-European cultural contexts and broader Chinese value-influenced settings, highlighted hierarchy as a significant obstacle.

One participant described how their recruitment was motivated by senior management's desire to address hidden hierarchical issues within the institution. Leveraging their experience and previous training, they were able to express needs and raise topics that might otherwise be difficult to discuss with the academics. However, they remarked, "You can do that. Yeah. But you can't do that so easily", summarising the social interaction nuance within hierarchical structures. The participant also observed that such hierarchical behaviours were more prevalent among Asian scholars. Another participant noted a misalignment between scholars' research expertise and management training. The system of part-time academic managers in administrative offices perpetuated a focus on the scholars' disciplines, which, when combined with the high social status of scholars, often fostered mistrust toward administrators and a desire to retain managerial control. They observed, "They're not really hearing what the administrator had to say, they're too busy." This comment revealed an imbalance in the relationship between scholars and administrators, with different priorities preventing two-way communication. These factors collectively contributed to hierarchical practices that discourage the professionalisation of higher education administration.

Participants also noted differences in hierarchical institutional practices between Taiwan and Singapore. In Taiwan, respondents from research and international offices described how politics influenced higher education development, institutional operations, daily operations, and daily administrative tasks. All Taiwanese participants referenced national higher education development policies, including discussions on funding, tasks, or sometimes they are used as a time indicator. Three participants specifically mentioned how changing political leadership resulted in shifting policy priorities and altered their operational procedures or priorities. For example, they discussed how the definition of "overseas Chinese students" and their eligibility for degree programmes were affected. Literature also recorded the political influences in the Taiwanese higher education administration environment when students from China struggled to return to Taiwan during the global pandemic (Lin, 2022).

In Singapore, participants identified a different power dynamic within universities for higher education administrators. Participant University C Research Support Manager 2 observed,

> "In Singapore, that if you want to go big in a university, doing pure research, and pure teaching is not sufficient, you need at some point to be to have an administrative position."

The usage of "administrative position" again demonstrated the overlapping terminology as Research Support Manager 2 is referring to academic managers, specifically senior management positions. The statement highlighted a different social status of highly ranked academic administrators in Singapore and clearly separated them from the academics and the administrators, reflecting how divided the career paths are. From the statement, senior management positioned with their administrative power seemed to be equipped with a special political influence in the universities.

This perspective also contradicted the figured world of higher education documented by Caldwell (2024), in which an interviewee described academic positions focused on research and not teaching is the "pinnacle" (p.8). Though evidence remained limited, this difference offers a glimpse into British and Singaporean academia. In one, research is regarded as a central indicator of quality, while in the other, decision-making power or political status is seen to be the aspiration.

7.4 Chapter discussion and conclusion

Microsystem examinations delve into the values, beliefs, and identity of higher education administration participants, and chronosystem examines the concept of professionalism and its long-term changes. Themes included in these two systems intrinsically connect with wider societal, cultural, and historical constructions, filling this chapter with more discussions than straightforward reporting from the empirical examples. Hence after a discussion on the concept of career derived from the previous findings on career actions, this section aims to bring the observations and discussions together, revisiting the higher education administration and its professionalisation from the most personal perspective.

7.4.1 Career and professionalisation in Taiwan and Singapore

Career is a cross-disciplinary topic that also has its roots in professionalisation literature. While related discussion proved to be scarce in the specific higher education administration field, scholars have highlighted the lack of structured career paths for university administrators (Coomber, 2019). Without distracting too much into the career literature, related definitions of career when discussing within professionalisation have a few common key concepts, including agency, work experience, and sequence. A career is often described as a sequence, constructed by attitude, experiences, and/or behaviours, that remains related to work experience (Gander et al., 2019; Jeong & Leblebici, 2019). Garbe and Duberley (2021) suggested to examine career as a connection between the individual and organisation, pointing out the essential actors involved is not singular. However, empirical data on this issue remains limited.

Regan and Graham (2018) examines the entering and continuing reasons for professional service staff in Australia and the UK, and finds the common factor is that university is "a positive environment" (p.7), with professional service staff deeming higher education as an inherent good or public good. This viewpoint is reflected in Taiwanese and Singaporean higher education administrators. But while the pro-social aspect remains similar, Taiwanese participants demonstrated a deeper Confucianist influence to contribute to education, sometimes despite their personal career progression. On the other hand, Singaporean participants who reported similar pro-social mindset had more specific targets they'd concentrate their contribution to, for example, the development of science or academia.

Agency and the relationship between institution/organisation and person remain highly relevant sub-topics within the career discussions. Jeong and Leblebici (2019) associate professionalisation level with high institutionalisation, and summarise career models based on organisational diversity and professional expectations (for example, employment practices and access control). Taiwanese and Singaporean higher education administrators lack institutionalisation from formal structure to licensure, and matched the descriptions of low professionalisation models. However, Singapore shows a higher diversity in organisational diversity, conflicting with the literature. This was not reflected in the number, sizes, and ages of organisations like how Jeong and Leblebici (2019) suggested, but a more mingled occupational domain in Singapore. The discrepancy suggests that institutionalisation level is not the only indicator for professionalisation for higher education administration.

In Taiwan, the cross-university movement for higher education administrators emerged only recently, while Singaporean occupational domain includes other employing organisations than universities, showing more transferrable skills and allowing high individual agency in career construction. However, even with the integrated organisational domain across industries, there is a lack of professional norms that direct the career construction of higher education administrators. Higher education marks a unique occupational domain compared to other sectors, and the transferability and un-transferability are not only based on hiring organisations or professionalisation as institutionalisation, but involve discussions regarding broader societal recognition.

7.4.2 Chapter Conclusion

Interviewees in both Taiwan and Singapore reported a high alignment between professional identity and personal beliefs in educational values. Among Taiwanese participants, a trend emerged to prioritise the educational impact of their work over personal professional development. This aligns with Confucian thoughts emphasising the greater good over personal comfort. Participants with longer experience in higher education administration particularly demonstrated a strong sense of purpose as a motivating factor for choosing and remaining in the profession. Those who stayed in administrative roles for longer periods valued educational principles more than the specific content of their tasks.

Institutional frameworks and governance styles influence the professional identities of higher education administrators. For instance, Taiwanese participants emphasised educational values and collective good, while Singaporean participants focused on personal professionalism, reflecting a stronger professional identity. The latter also exhibited greater confidence in discussing their roles and showed more initiative in new projects, influenced by more openness and governance with more authorisation. In Taiwan, only a few offices discussed professionalism. Participants from these offices reported more institutional support and flexibility in institutional regulatory frameworks, highlighting the relations between professional awareness and institutional governance.

Higher education administration in both Taiwan and Singapore aligns with the “accidental occupation” described in the literature (Lewis, 2014; see discussion 7.2.1). Many participants

did not actively choose or plan a career in this field, reflecting its recognition as a formal profession. However, those who chose to stay noted how the accommodating environment for family responsibilities and personal pursuits outside of work, as well as the stability of the roles, are key factors. Compared to private industries, the higher education sector provided more support for personal development and family life. Participants also valued the space the university provides for innovation. These positive aspects underscore the appeal of a flexible, open-minded work environment with adequate autonomy for proactive workers, extending beyond academics to include administrators.

For those leaving higher education administration, the primary reason was the inability to build a career path. Many participants addressed the lack of advancement opportunities within their offices or institutions. Singaporean participants specifically mentioned how repetitive tasks hindered their professional growth. The perceived stability that encourages retention of the roles can also limit opportunities for skill development or promotion and result in one's choice to exit the role, proving to be a double-edged sword.

Professionalism in higher education administration is not only categorised by levels of skills, extensive knowledge, or codes of ethics. In the complex administrative environment where tasks and responsibilities blur and are hard to define, participants look up to fluency in experiences, recognition from external influencers from academics to society, a comprehensive attitude, and an ability to connect and integrate.

When discussing professionalisation, participants from both Taiwan and Singapore highlighted recent changes. Taiwan is beginning to see horizontal career mobility, sometimes across institutions, this allowed administrators to develop their roles into careers. In Singapore, institutional investment in professional development was reported. However, barriers remained. In Taiwan, layered legal requirements and overlaps with the civil service system constrained higher education administrators, while Singaporeans reported an "invisible ceiling" that prevents them from reaching senior management positions. Hierarchical structures and politics were identified as challenges in both countries, often interfering with the educational values upheld by participants and creating obstacles in daily operations and professional identity alignment.

Chapter 8 Discussion and Conclusion

Empirical data has shown distinctions in concepts of professionalism within the sociology literature, the varied development of higher education administration compared to professional service staff, and the intrinsic cultural and societal influences shaping these processes. Adopting an ecological-institutional perspective, I compared the ecological system model initially constructed from the higher education administration literature with the final adaptation of that model informed by empirical research. These differences and local contextual factors offer a new lens through which to analyse key concepts such as professionalism and Third Space. Investigating higher education administrators' interpretations of space, boundaries, and agency, this chapter deepens our understanding of the core research question: **How are professional administrative roles in research and international offices of universities being framed, managed, and experienced in higher education in Taiwan and Singapore?**

The original research question was derived from personal experiences and a review of the literature, reflecting observed precarity and passive positionalities administrators demonstrated facing the institutional limitations enforced by regulatory framework and employing institutions' structures. With the rigid frameworks, tight governance, and cultural doctrines regulating higher education administration, the data revealed a consistent pattern, that administrators predominantly remain passive recipients of policies and regulations in a centralised higher education. As a result, the original research question was retained to document these "invisible workers"(Szekeres, 2004) and their experiences.

8.1 Discussion

8.1.1 From human development to professionalisation: adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system model

Previous analysis has identified key influencing factors across higher education ecological systems and their impact on higher education administrators. These factors range from personal beliefs and values, institutional regulations, and broader societal and cultural concepts, to chronological influences. I combine individual and institutional perspectives to provide a

comprehensive exploration of the professionalisation of the higher education administration in its evolving environment.

Existing theoretical approaches pose methodological challenges. While the ecological-institutional lens offers valuable theoretical insights, it lacks practical guidelines for empirical application. Similarly, the Cross-Case Studies (CCS) approach is still developing its methodological framework, posing difficulties in applying it consistently across case studies. To address these gaps, this research applies Bronfenbrenner's ecological system model to provide a structured analytical lens for examining professionalisation in higher education administration.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) suggested examining development in an ecological perspective, essentially broken down to "a fit between the organism and its environment" (p.439). While both the organism and its environment continue to change, the interactions further shape them over time. The dynamic process mirrors the reality of higher education administration, where the professionals and professional service firms adapt and shape each other (Suddaby & Muzio, 2015).

In this study, I substituted the central organism with the higher education administration profession. This adaptation enabled an examination of professionalisation within higher education institutions from a sociological perspective (*Figure 1* and *2*). Although the influencing factors identified from the empirical data in the present study differ from those affecting human development, the analysis found compatibility in each system. The influencing factors were reclassified based on their proximity and impact to form the adapted model (*Figure 4*).

While certain influencing factors such as societal expectations and government policies demonstrated overlaps with existing literature, some elements derived from the initial document analysis did not show the importance the literature has asserted. These included other internal administrative offices, professional associations and regulatory bodies, other professional firms within the higher education sector or related industries, and the economic system.

The absence of other internal offices and professional firms suggests that horizontal collaboration across the higher education ecology is minimal, with more prevalent lateral influences through top-down governance. This aligns with the centralised governance feature in Taiwanese and Singaporean higher education, which are characterised by state intervention (Welch, 2020) and state-led development (Marginson, 2011).

Moreover, insufficient connections with professional associations, regulatory bodies, and auditors indicate a lack of profession-specific support and development mechanisms. This deviates from the existing literature that emphasises autonomous professional firms and self-regulation (Empson et al., 2015; Suddaby & Muzio, 2015). This key difference has emerged: higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore remains more shaped by state governance and institutional hierarchies than by professional ecology or consistent professional autonomy.

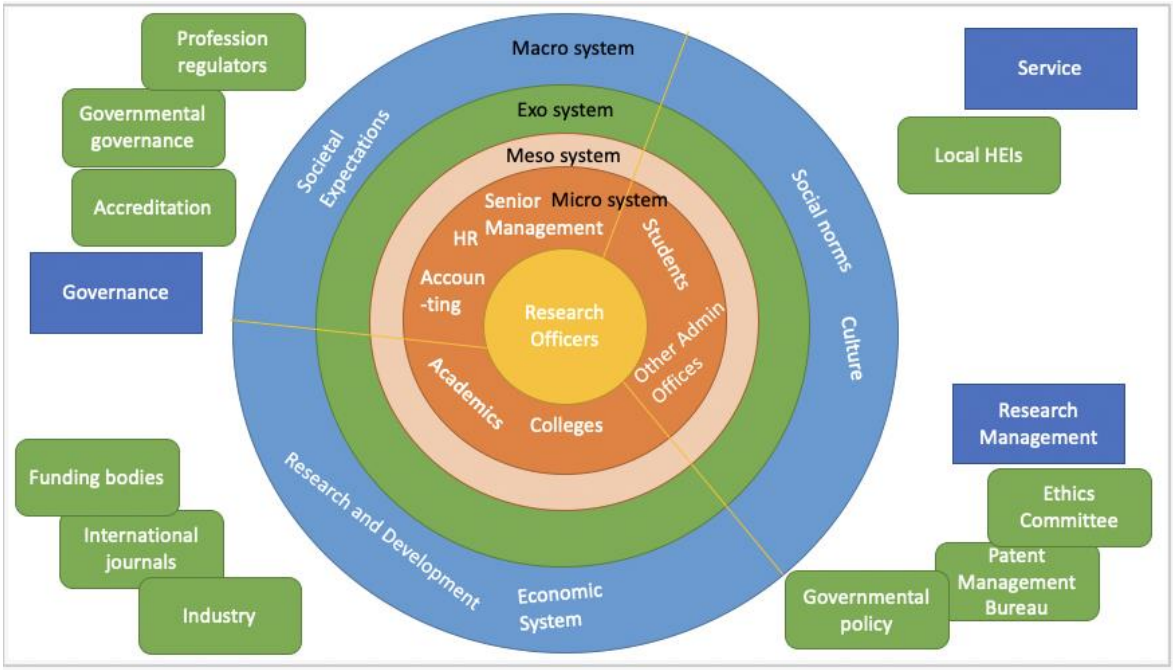


Figure 1 An ecological system model influencing research officers

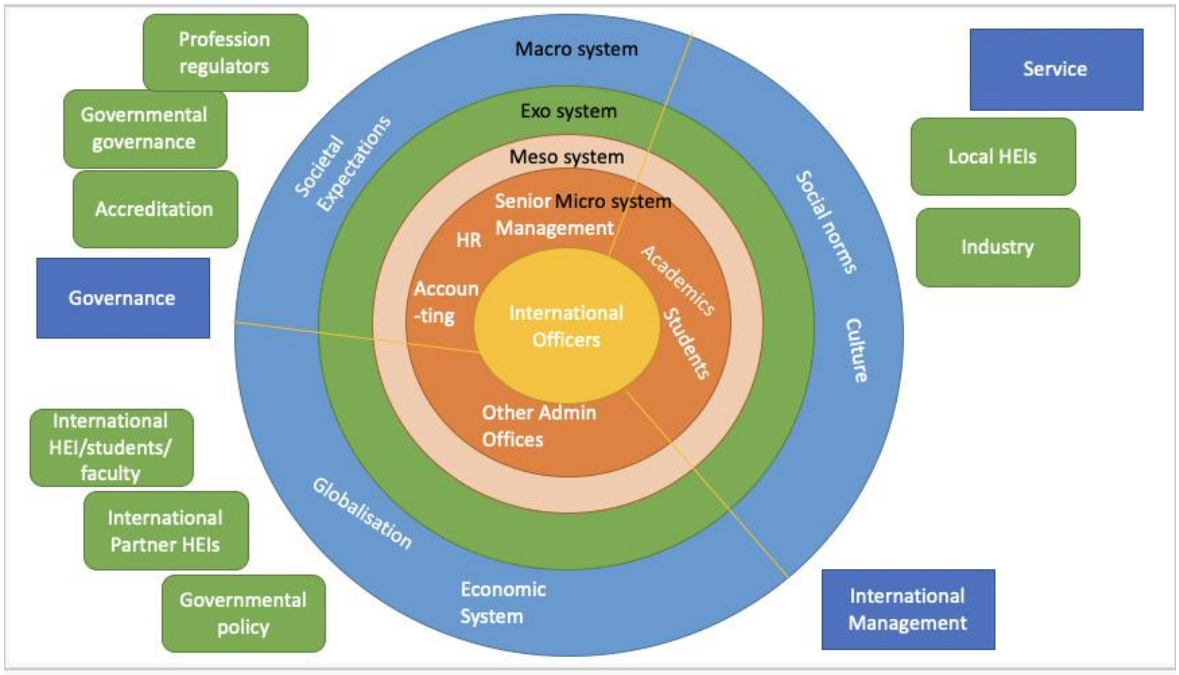


Figure 2 An ecological system model influencing international officers

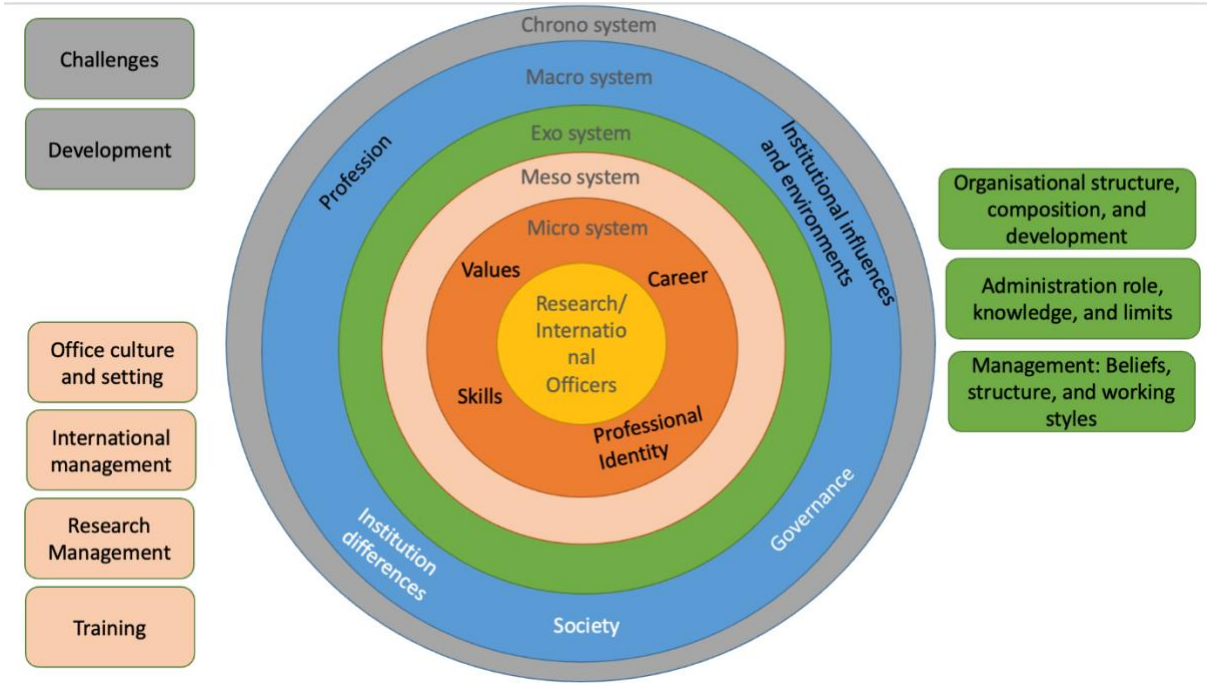


Figure 4 Adapted ecological system model for research and international officers

Macrosystem

The expected macrosystems initially included societal expectations, economic systems, and culture as key influences, as well as the development themes that match higher education administrators' specialities, like globalisation, and research and development. However, empirical inquiry led to an adaptation of this framework. While a direct influence of the economic system was not apparent, legal regulations and policies played crucial roles in shaping higher education administration. The governments often directed policy funding and developmental goals of higher education. In Taiwan, the legal regulations further defined higher education administration roles and regulated career paths, creating a direct impact.

The anticipated impacts on research and international officer roles were broadened into a discussion on professionalism. While globalisation and research development were frequently referenced in participants' work, their influences went no further than requirements for professional skills. Instead, the discussion focused on the recognition and understanding of the professionalism to the participants. The interpretation of professionalism helped participants to define their roles and career goals and further formed a professional identity within their professional disciplines. Identifying the influence of professionalism at the macrosystem level showed that participants valued their professional identities and careers beyond a university and that their development was shaped by other external institutions such as government and legal regulations.

Exosystem

The original expectation was that multiple institutions would shape higher education administration at the exosystem level. However, the findings revealed that the employing institution was the dominant influence on research and international officers. This can be attributed to the lack of local professional associations in both Taiwan and Singapore. Although participants attended international conferences and training programmes, international professional associations did not provide the same level of support as localised knowledge for professional development. Moreover, professional development opportunities in Taiwan and Singapore were often facilitated by governmental agencies. In Taiwan, these hosted training programmes, and in Singapore, they provided alternative career pathways. The institutions' connections to the government required alignment with national policies, and thus their influences remained dependent on macrosystem-level governance. In Taiwan, higher education

administrators were restricted from forming unions unless their universities permit, further limiting their ability to advocate their professional development. These constraints reinforced the dominant role of their employing institutions, the most influential actors within the exosystem.

While external stakeholders, such as higher education institutions, industry partners, and funding bodies, were expected to engage in higher education administration practices, the empirical data emphasised internal practices such as management and operations. The structural flexibility that higher education institutions gained through autonomy widened the gap between institutional practices and, as a result, made higher education administrators more reliant on their current employers. Even in Singapore, where universities and industry remain more connected in terms of employment, university administrators continued to perceive industry partners and governmental agencies as external entities rather than integral to their career trajectories. These interpretations further reinforced the governing power of the employing institution.

Mesosystem

In Bronfenbrenner's model, the mesosystem originally focused on the interactions between microsystem influences. However, applying the CCS approach revealed that these influences extend beyond the institution to encompass the individual level, such as professional identity and personal values. The discussion of professional identities interconnected the horizontal axis of cultural and societal factors and the vertical axis of influences like governance and policy and showed intrinsic connections to the individual's values and beliefs, marking an inevitable presence in the discussion. The system thus was re-designed to accommodate the internal influences of the professionals in the microsystem, and the mesosystem was defined as the higher education administrators' immediate professional environment – their offices.

The office, being the most immersive working environment where administrators develop their professional skills and build their professional recognition, formed an environment similar to what a family provides for a person. From the empirical data, many participants also demonstrated emotional reactions, such as a feeling of protection when they described their offices and other administrative offices in their universities. Administrators showed a distinct

recognition of the main expertise performed in the particular field of the office, specifically mentioning relevant skills and mission-led values. The emotional factors and professionalism recognition combined to build professional identities based on the operations of research and international management. While many disagreed that higher education administration constituted a profession, most of the participants had firm beliefs that research and international management were professions.

Higher education administration professionalisation in Taiwan and Singapore was shaped by an interconnected governance structure. Due to centralised policymaking and institutional regulations, government, universities, and administrative offices operated under overlapping constraints. This multi-layered governance structure influenced professionalisation by regulating career pathways, professional legitimacy, and autonomy, potentially hindering the independent development of higher education administration as a profession.

Microsystem and Chronosystem

Examining the two systems together allows for a processual analysis of individual development regarding more internal recognitions like professionalism. While Bronfenbrenner's model was designed to examine the development of an individual, the subject of this study, profession, is a collective. To address this discrepancy, the microsystem was adapted to explore the individuals who form this collective narrative. Using the themes of professional identity and career actions, the combined analysis of microsystem and chronosystem reveals the development, recognition, and variety in participants' understanding of their profession. The chapter focuses on individual positioning in their profession, exemplified by concepts such as professional identities, values, and beliefs.

These explorations of values and identities, combined with the examination of the time factor (transversal axis) in the chronosystem, help this research in its overall exploration of professionalisation. The combination of the two systems facilitates the examination of the processual development, in an individual, of the self-perception that contributed to professional identities, and how these identities urged them to take corresponding actions to develop their career, enabling the administrator's voice within a heavily governed ecological system. The chronosystem further identified the development of and challenges to professionalisation of

higher education administration, aligning the changes and obstacles to individuals' identity formation.

Ecological system model in higher education administration professionalisation

Overall, the application of the ecological systems model highlights the complex environment of higher education administration and the varied influences of multiple stakeholders. The findings indicate that some predicted actors—such as professional associations, funding bodies, and accreditation institutions—did not exert as much influence as expected. Instead, as noted, direct governing institutions, including universities and government agencies, played a more decisive role in shaping career pathways and professionalisation processes. This aligns with empirical findings showing that higher education professionals in Taiwan and Singapore rely more on their employing institutions than on broader professional networks.

This analysis reinforces the utility of the adapted ecological systems model in reflecting the interactions between institutional governance, policy constraints, and professional identity formation. These findings demonstrate that Bronfenbrenner's model is not only applicable in psychology and human development, but also a valuable theoretical and methodological tool for studying institutionalised professions and governance structures. By capturing cross-system influences on professionalisation, the model provides a robust framework for future research on professional development in regulated environments.

8.1.2 Discussion on ecological-institutional lens

Suddaby and Muzio (2015) argue that the structuralist view on professions emphasises commensalism while intentionally overlooking the symbiotic relationship, and they suggest exploring the relationships not only between the profession and the professional firm but also with other institutions in the environment, to address the scarcity of research on "linked ecologies"(Abbott, 2005; Suddaby & Muzio, 2015). The design of the present study contributes to a more comprehensive exploration of the ecological system. The analysis reveals interactions between various institutions, demonstrating that not all relationships are competitive, as traditionally depicted in sociological discussions on ecology (Abbott, 2005), nor are they strictly categorised into commensalism and mutualism (Suddaby & Muzio, 2015). Focusing on

research and international officers, their relationships with their “professional firms” (universities) and “professional management” (academic managers) exhibit predominantly mutualistic tendencies, though they can also be competitive or commensal occasionally.

Suddaby and Muzio (2015) propose several directions for examining professions and their development within an ecological system, including commensalism and symbiosis, stasis or entropy, and natural selection or human development. The findings of the present study suggest that the higher education ecological system presents more complex dynamics than those derived from natural ecologies. From the ecological system model developed in this research, two key influencing factors emerge: strong cultural influence and nation-state governance. These artificial factors disrupt the ecological system of higher education, steering the professionalisation of higher education administration away from Suddaby and Muzio’s suggestion of ecology within professional service firms.

In the context of global competition, national governments shape development in alignment with their own priorities and goals, often diverging from the needs of universities, academics, and administrators. As external stakeholders and resource providers, governments create a "human-made" ecology, reducing the competition element among internal members of the universities. However, as autonomous institutions protected by academic freedom, universities also occasionally counterbalance the dominance of national governance. Given this nation-state-led development, the higher education ecological system does not move toward equilibrium or disequilibrium but instead undergoes continuous adaptation at local, national, and global levels toward shorter-term goals.

Therefore, professions within the field are often not in direct competition with one another, as they serve distinct objectives. Participants reflected on how a strong higher education administration ethos is dedicated to supporting the advancement of science, education, and academic development. Thus, the dynamics between government, professional firms, and multiple professional groups cannot be fully explained using the sociological ecology framework proposed by Suddaby and Muzio. Moreover, the higher education sectors in Taiwan and Singapore demonstrate less inclination toward assimilating into commercial firms than sustaining their original semi-governmental organisation culture.

The reduced emphasis on competition further highlights a key distinction in the professionalisation of higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore: hierarchy, rather than competition, played a dominant role. Lee (2023) identifies a similar controversy in the arts sector, where arts administrators were often viewed as change agents despite being heavily subjected to managerial directives. This paradox is also evident in the higher education sector, where the knowledge and experience gap between administrative staff and managers exacerbates disconnections. Institutional decision-making power is concentrated in senior management, which consists primarily of academic managers. This power asymmetry creates disadvantages for administrators and limits their agency. In Taiwan, in the present study, cultural values and social hierarchies further reinforced the elevated status of academic managers. Participant feedback indicated a strong hierarchical relationship between senior management and administrators in Singaporean higher education. However, due to limited data, further investigation into potential cultural or societal explanations was not possible.

The existing literature on professions suggests that professionals remain reflexive in relation to their institutional environments and actively introduce changes into institutional practices (Muzio et al., 2013). While Taiwanese and Singaporean administrators exercised a similar demonstration of agency, the challenges they encountered went beyond the institutional level. The evidence of limited agency and significant influence from rigid governance and hierarchical leadership highlight substantial local differences in the higher education systems of Taiwan and Singapore. Whilst in Taiwan, the governance continues to be influenced by a moral-based, Confucianist hierarchy, Singaporean governance pictures a grander goal of national development to encourage a priority in collectivism. The ecological-institutional lens needs to be supplemented with more local context on governance and hierarchy to capture the essence of discussions.

Taiwan: An unconscious professionalisation of higher education administration

After examining the data through an ecological-institutionalism lens, I argue that Taiwanese national universities do not function as professional service firms for their administrative members. While research and international officers develop their skills and professionalism within universities, the institutions themselves do not actively support such development, nor do they cultivate or financially benefit from these professionals. The roles, hierarchy, and

relationships within Taiwanese university ecologies also deviate from the structure of a professional firm. In modern professional firms, professionals are assigned management responsibilities, creating "professional-management" roles. However, administrative members in Taiwanese universities are not eligible for such positions. Moreover, professional autonomy and development are constrained both internally and externally by monitoring and governance from the Ministry of Education.

The findings of the present study suggest that the professionalisation of higher education administration in Taiwan is limited in three ways. First, the hierarchical cultural relationship between administrators and academics serves as a barrier. Competing with a classical profession is not advantageous for an emerging profession, especially given the high social status academics hold due to cultural beliefs. Second, government regulations define higher education administrators as neither educators nor civil servants, restricting their career progression and access to relevant cultivation programs. Third, as higher education institutions do not function as professional service firms, they lack development opportunities and resources for higher education administrators, who are also subject to changes and directives from academic managers. Their positions remain ambiguous: to academic members, they are part of the bureaucratic administration (Mok & Nelson, 2013), to decision-makers, they are merely employees rather than colleagues. These three limitations result in ambiguous and conflicting professional identities, further complicating the professionalisation process due to misaligned recognitions.

Higher education administrators' professional projects have been largely unconscious yet have quietly transformed the Taiwanese higher education environment. For example, while the development of international officers initially aligned with policy objectives, the expansion of international partnerships and participation led the government to establish training programs and exchange workshops to support the professional development of these personnel. In 2024, higher education policy further prioritised the cultivation of higher education officers as part of a national funding initiative, expanding policy coverage beyond scholars, senior management, and students to include university administrative members.

Singapore: a hybrid administration with professional elements

Higher education administration in Singapore, when examined through the same lens, presents a different trajectory. With neoliberal management methods and middle-management roles occupied by professionals from diverse backgrounds, the institutional structure aligns more closely with professional service firms. Although a hierarchical relationship remains, the presence of middle management has mitigated the academic-administrative dichotomy. Bottom-up initiatives led by administrative staff contribute to institutional change, fostering collaborative relationships with academics that resemble commensalism rather than competition. Institutions recognise higher education administrators as change agents, building upon the outcomes and contributions of the administrative sector. In some policy design, the Singaporean government integrates university administration, industry, and government agencies into an ecological system that supports its innovation policy objectives. This policy framework expands opportunities for research management, allowing career progression beyond university settings.

Personal professionalism or legitimacy?

Despite being structurally constrained by hierarchical leadership and power dynamics, many higher education administrators exhibit strong agency and enthusiasm in developing their professionalism. Bottom-up initiatives were reported across various offices, leading to transformations in current practices, expanded project scopes, and enhanced office functions. In Taiwan, professionals have sometimes demonstrated a greater commitment to institutional sustainability than individual managers. However, whether these initiatives are successfully implemented depends heavily on individual line managers and their willingness to approve changes, ultimately limiting the realisation of such agency.

The relationship between higher education administration and management remains underexplored yet crucial for institutional sustainability. In both Taiwanese and Singaporean universities, the bureaucratic system is embodied by "professional-management" roles, which remain distinct from both academics and administrative staff. As the concept of profession becomes less exclusive and elite, professionals and bureaucratic systems do not necessarily have to maintain a dichotomous relationship, but they can be more adaptive (Muzio et al., 2013). However, in Taiwan and Singapore, complex hierarchies and imbalanced power dynamics reinforce a three-way dichotomy between (1) academics and administrative staff, (2)

academics and professional managers, and (3) professional managers and administrative staff. These hierarchical divisions suggest that higher education administration professionalisation aligns more closely with bureaucratic system development rather than the professional autonomy described in Anglo-European literature.

A deviation in legitimacy also emerges from the findings in contrast to existing literature. While Anglo-European perspectives argue that legitimacy stems from the profession's ability to persuade the public and authorities (Larson, 2018), Taiwanese and Singaporean higher education administration continues to rely on governing power for its legitimacy. However, despite their limited decision-making power and access to resources, Taiwanese and Singaporean higher education administrators exhibit strong agency, a commitment to driving institutional change, a focus on educational and scientific impact, and an altruistic dedication to serving society. In cases where management is supportive, these professionals contribute not only to individual career development but also to institutional and national advancements. This professionalisation process highlights efforts to navigate a tightly governed system, addressing power imbalances and deeply embedded cultural hierarchies. Such findings may offer insights for broader professionalisation efforts within centralised higher education systems.

8.1.3 Is there Third Space in Taiwanese and Singaporean higher education administration?

The concept of Third Space professionals has gained attention in global higher education literature (J. Hall, 2022; Thorpe & Partridge, 2024; Veles & Carter, 2016; Whitchurch, 2015, 2023), with many scholars noting that professional service staff have increasingly taken on tasks that blend academic and administrative responsibilities (Lewis, 2014; Thorpe & Partridge, 2024; Whitchurch, 2015). The boundaries of their roles, often defined by such as functions or job descriptions have become more flexible, with more project-based work adapting to the changing nature of universities (Whitchurch, 2008),. In this context, Third Space serves as an alternative to the traditional academic-administrative dichotomy, where professionals exercise agency independent of the formal institutional structure, focusing on their professional development and career path.

Some participants from Taiwan and Singapore demonstrate agency and mindset blending and crossing over functional boundaries. While they fit the general description of Third Space professionals, this concept does not entirely align with the current state of higher education

administration in either country. Third Space represents a space outside traditional academic or administrative domains, allowing for collaboration and integration. However, Taiwanese higher education administration, influenced by the legal framework and societal culture, demonstrates limited collaboration between academic and administrative domains. The strong cultural boundaries between these domains, shaped by the elevated status of scholars, restrict the emergence of Third Space professionals in Taiwan. These entrenched boundaries limit equal opportunities for collaboration, reinforcing a rigid academic-administrative divide.

A broader trend in universities worldwide, including in Taiwan, sees administrative tasks increasingly relayed to non-tenure-track or "academic" roles (e.g., in Japan, China, and the UK), further reducing the regularity and professional development in teaching careers (Takagi, 2018). At the same time, more senior management positions have been added at institutions like National Taiwan University (NTU), where three new vice presidents were appointed in the past decade. In Singapore, the role of academic administration was largely seen as part of the broader category of administration, with academics still considered the core "administrators." This shift suggests a trend toward the professionalisation of academics or leadership roles but not the broader field of administration, further disrupting the professionalisation discussion of higher education administration.

Third Space remains less achievable in centralised higher education systems, such as the ones in Asia, with institutional structures and governance guidelines instituting further boundaries than functional ones. Between a legal division between academic and administrative roles in recruiting, management eligibility, and career progression routes, both cases of Taiwan and Singapore demonstrate strict institutional boundaries. Another challenge for Third Space is largely due to societal power dynamics that support imbalanced relationships between academics and other university staff, creating a hierarchical structure that hinders collaboration. This is particularly evident in Taiwan, where legal regulations limit the assignment of middle management responsibilities to scholars or civil servants, further rooting academics in decision-making roles within administrative offices. These cultural and institutional boundaries have significant influences on the development of higher education administration, and should be addressed in discussions concerning centralised higher education systems.

However, the Third Space concept still resonates in some ways with the development of higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore. Whitchurch (2015) categorises Third Space professionals' space as integrated, independent, or semi-autonomous, noting that the degree of agency can fluctuate depending on their influences and the situation. Agency, as observed in this research, is often exemplified by proactive attitudes. Taiwanese and Singaporean participants value proactivity, emphasising the importance of constant improvement and optimisation of their daily work, transcending the existing norms, and sometimes legal limits. They demonstrate agency through their commitment to making an impact and developing professionalism in their roles. In Singapore, participants also reported a sense of agency through bottom-up initiatives and active efforts toward self-development. Both groups reflect that individual motivation and the pursuit of professional development are key drivers of their agency. But aligning with the literature, this demonstration of agency does not guarantee results, but it depends largely on the space the administrators are in, like how Taiwanese and Singaporean participants' initiatives remain reliant to the approval or support of their managers.

Furthermore, both Taiwanese and Singaporean participants demonstrated traits similar to blended professionals—not only crossing the boundaries between academia and administration but also expanding on the sense of "belonging" and "not belonging". Higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore also broaden their learning partnerships, crossing boundaries and sectors, connecting multiple realities and stakeholders to accomplish goals. Different from Whitchurch's description of academic credential pursuit from administrators (2009), Taiwanese and Singaporean professionals do not attempt to join academic discourses to expand relationships nor require academic credentials to gain legitimacies. They demonstrate increasing endorsement of their respective professional skills and connections to the industry, society, and international collaborations. Even though administrators apply similar standards academics have to evaluate whether their roles are a profession or not, they do not view alignments with academics as the development direction.

When examining the institutional positioning of Third Space professionals—such as career paths, rewards, and incentives—participants from both Taiwan and Singapore exhibit limited agency. In Taiwan, the legal framework and its overlap with the civil service system heavily restrict the agency of higher education administrators. Many participants noted these

restrictions, but some institutions have taken steps to accommodate rewards and incentives for administrative staff. In contrast, Singaporean higher education administrators do not face the same legal restrictions, but their roles often lack institutional support in terms of career progression or rewards, suggesting even lower levels of agency than some of their Taiwanese counterparts.

A common form of agency observed in both Taiwan and Singapore lies in the administrators' dedication on institutional development. Many participants expressed a strong commitment to the development of faculty members, their universities, or even their nations, demonstrating motivation to contribute to broader institutional or societal progress. This focus on collective advancement contrasts with the more individualistic approach to professional development commonly seen in other regions. Taiwanese participants tend to apply their agency to impact their work outcomes, but less on altering institutional structures or management. Singaporean administrators, while encouraged to act as "change agents," similarly lack agency when it comes to altering institutional frameworks. This situation fits the notion of hindered change agency described by Clegg (2009), where power dynamics within the institution limit the ability to enact structural changes.

8.2 Research questions

8.2.1 How is the higher education administration framed?

While the governance of higher education administrators remains tight in both Taiwan and Singapore, legal regulations in Taiwan provide more detailed frameworks. These regulations encompass recruitment, training, promotion, and moral character requirements for higher education administrators.

Universities must compete with other employing institutions, but rigid legal and financial constraints disadvantage universities in attracting top talent. This study highlights that universities in Taiwan still exhibit discrepancies in recognising their administrative staff, with some failing to establish the flexibility needed to recruit and retain their administrative workforce. It is suggested that universities consider their unique needs and adopt incentivising approaches to retain proactive administrative teams.

Literature has identified the many positions and roles administrators bear in their institutions, as well as multiple identities being "in-between" the stakeholders (Mori et al., 2024). Taiwanese higher education administrators are similarly framed with multiple organisational identities in the governing systems of government and their institutions. Traditionally, national university administration is framed as part of the civil service, requiring members to have high moral character and loyalty to the nation. Civil servants employed within universities remain primarily accountable to the government, and their recruitment or termination rests with the Ministry of the Interior rather than individual institutions. This framing enforces universal standards for salaries, benefits, and pensions, and further causes confusion in governing responsibilities between the universities and government ministries. This structure ties the education sector closer to national development, with governmental governance exerted through its operational centres – the administration. Due to the confusion imposed by the discrepancy between systems, the framing of higher education administration remains inconsistent, yet tightly monitored by different stakeholders.

Modern regulations have altered recruitment systems and introduced short-term contractors to address the lack of skills traditionally fulfilled by civil servants, such as language proficiency and research management expertise. The increasing number of contractors and permanent university employees hired directly by universities without civil servant qualifications has brought a new dynamic to university operations. These new administrators often seek career advancement and self-actualisation through work in their professional domains and not employing institutions, matching the depictions of "profile professionals" suggested by (Whitchurch, 2015).

Taiwanese legal documents further define higher education administrators as educators. However, while administrators are required to uphold moral character and ethical responsibilities, they lack the autonomy, benefits, and prestigious social status afforded to other educators. Rooted in Confucian values, education is deemed an essential and highly respected sector, and this cultural emphasis extends to higher education administrators. By grouping administrators with scholars as educators, legal regulations insert an identity that prioritises educational values and responsibilities. This framing further connects higher education

institutions, academics, and administrators in their sense of responsibility for education development.

Government regulations are not the only elements shaping the higher education administration profession, societal beliefs and cultural norms also play crucial roles. In contrast to multicultural Singapore, which adopts more registration- and finance-based managerialism through its legal regulations, Taiwan remains influenced by Chinese traditions and Confucianism. In Confucian literature, education holds special status, as the core values are cultivated and disseminated through the sector. The ancient Chinese idiom "Scholars, farmers, workers, and businessmen" (士農工商) also reflects how scholars have been amongst the most valued professions since the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BCE).

Chan and Yang (2017) observed that in Taiwanese universities, Confucian values such as respect for seniority and teachers remain highly relevant and continue to influence decision-making processes and internal governance. These values are also evident in administrative practices in this study. In Taiwan, higher education administrators are regulated under laws governing educators, and salary increases largely depend on seniority.

The educator identity assigned to Taiwanese higher education administrators, shaped by legal documents and cultural beliefs, reflects a Confucian-focused institutional identity (Chan & Yang, 2017). This identity has both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, higher education administrators develop a sense of mission toward education and personal values endorsing its importance, which drives greater motivation in their roles. On the negative side, administrators are confined by an identity imposed on their profession, without the social status or respect afforded to other "educators," and face higher moral requirements. These conflicting realities weaken administrators' positionality in the academic-administrative dichotomy, resulting in low self-endorsement of their roles and reinforcing hierarchical relationships, not only between different members of the university but also between management and administrators.

In contrast, Singaporean legal documents lack detailed descriptions and regulations for its higher education administration, resulting in a less specific and clear framing. By not differentiating administrators from employees in other industries, Singapore defines its

university companies as hiring institutions and not place special focus on their educational missions, aligning with its managerial narratives. However, empirical evidence demonstrates how higher education administrators remain distinct from other employees. For example, hiring an administrator requires ministry approval, and recruitment often begins with advertisements on governmental websites, illustrating the additional assessment and connections required for education-related personnel in practice.

Singaporean legal documents also lack detailed descriptions and regulations of its higher education administration, resulting in a less specific and clear framing. By not differentiating administrators from employees in other industries, Singapore defines its university companies as typical hiring institutions, aligning with its managerial narratives. However, empirical evidence demonstrated how higher education administrators remain different from other employees. For example, hiring an administrator requires ministry approval, and recruitment often begins with advertisements on governmental websites, illustrating the additional assessment and connections required for education-related personnel in practice. Though governmental framing is limited, institutional-level frameworks still distinguish administrators, such as separating eligibility between middle and senior management roles, similar to systems across Asian higher education. The exclusion of higher education administrators limits their career progression opportunities and perpetuates the hierarchy between the two professions.

Despite their differences and cultural influences, Taiwan and Singapore share commonalities in framing higher education administration. Extra expectations, whether related to moral character, suitable background, or governmental connections, are placed on university administrators, highlighting the unique cultural and professional intersection of this role. Through legal documents and licensing legitimacy, the government plays a crucial role in the professionalisation of higher education administration. While Taiwan's government has tied up its higher education administration in complex hiring systems and legal clauses, the Singaporean government lacks a specific framework for higher education administration development and recognition. But both institute tight governance through layered hierarchy in institutional structures. These gaps present significant challenges to institutional sustainability and the broader development of higher education systems in both contexts.

8.2.2 How is higher education administration managed?

Institutional frameworks continue to distinguish administrators from management within higher education systems, particularly in Asia. In many countries, including Taiwan and Singapore, administrators are often excluded from senior management, and sometimes middle management roles. This exclusion limits their career advancement opportunities and perpetuates the divide between administrators and academic management.

In Taiwan, administrative offices are managed by academic managers, from team leaders to directors, which significantly influences office dynamics. Confucian cultural influences have embedded a strong respect for scholars in Taiwan, resulting in a hierarchical structure that creates imbalanced relationships between academics and administrators. This hierarchy, combined with the power in decision-making, provides academic administrators with an advantage in directing university and office development, strategy, and mission. However, controversies arise from the academic administrators' limited experience and part-time office hours, as they may lack the administrative knowledge required in a higher education environment. Empirical evidence from this study demonstrated that academic administrators, lacking relational knowledge and an understanding of hierarchical dynamics, often missed critical opportunities and failed to facilitate effective communication. This hierarchical status and scholarly focus can jeopardise the acquisition of relevant knowledge and hinder bottom-up initiatives.

Administrative offices in Singapore are managed by professionals with industry experience, though not necessarily within higher education administration. This approach reflects Singapore's developmental state and its economic focus (Loke et al., 2017), applying enterprise managerialism to the higher education sector. This mindset is evident in the empirical data, where administrators are viewed as "human resources" and professional development is seen as necessary to facilitate institutional growth. With this emphasis, higher education administrators in Singapore enjoy greater opportunities to grow professionally and develop new skills, although career progression remains limited.

Singapore's professional managers and clear institutional strategies align with a neoliberal emphasis on efficiency and performance. This approach contrasts with Taiwan's focus on

personal visions and moral characters in management. Singaporean management also places importance on the development of its administrative workforce, providing resources for professional growth, such as comprehensive onboarding training programmes and continuous opportunities for international conference participation. Though not all programmes align with administrators' specific professional development needs, and they are not connected to career progression opportunities, participants in Singapore reported that these opportunities enhanced their professional recognition.

An interesting discrepancy between the institutional structures in Taiwan and Singapore lies in the categorisation of middle management. The head of administrative office positions are taken up by academic administrators, and the same positions in Singaporean universities seek professional candidates. While these positions are considered part of the senior management in Taiwan, the same positions are categorised at the middle management level in Singapore. This revealed a hidden line between the academic and professional in the university management system.

The difference between academic and professional management extends beyond capacity building to the perception of professionalism. In Taiwan, where management is exclusive to academics, the academic-administrative hierarchy is more pronounced. Participants reported dismissive attitudes toward administrators' skills, knowledge, and professionalism, not only from scholars but also from administrators themselves, who evaluated their roles unfavourably using academic standards.

Taiwan's academic management not only reinforces traditional hierarchies but also hinders professionalism outside the academic domain. Modern universities are considered autonomous professional organisations (Hinings, 2016), where professionals share responsibilities with institutional management. In Taiwan, the combination of academic and managerial roles, enhanced by cultural endorsement, creates a dominant narrative of professionalism, positioning academics as the only professionals. Empirical data often echoed this narrative, with participants stressing the discrepancy between their roles and the academic profession, frequently evaluating their roles using academic standards.

Existing literature has recorded that leadership styles significantly affect office atmospheres (Khan et al., 2020). Research data demonstrated a strong influence of office leaders on the values, priorities, and daily operations of the offices. While both Taiwanese and Singaporean offices reflected this trend, the ways managers influence their offices differ. Taiwanese participants reported the abandonment of long-term projects following new management decisions, shifts in work priorities, and frequently altered approaches, indicating a lack of concern for institutional sustainability and inconsistent strategies heavily reliant on individual managers. Such inconsistency was not reported in Singapore, where participants also noted greater development advice, training, and support from their managers.

The institutional structure, leadership identities, and relationships between managers and administrators all play a crucial role in shaping the identities of higher education administrators. In Singapore, a management system that accommodates bottom-up initiatives and focuses on professionalisation helps foster continued development within higher education administration. In contrast, Taiwanese higher education administrators still relied largely on the goodwill and flexibility of institutional management to ensure mission continuity, with limited focus on professional development. The data also revealed Taiwanese administrators' concerns about institutional sustainability, given the part-time nature of their managers' roles and the frequent turnover of senior management.

8.2.3 How is higher education administration experienced?

The "accidental occupation" experience described by Lewis (2014) remains true to higher education administration in research and international offices across Taiwan and Singapore, where this career path has rarely been the first choice for participants. There continues to be a lack of endorsement of the administration profession, structured licensing, and recognition from both internal and external members of higher education, reifying how higher education administration is not recognised as a profession. Consequently, the roles lack the specificity needed to attract employees who are dedicated to this area of expertise. From the interviews, participants demonstrated a tendency to align their roles with their personal values, identities, and beliefs, and these alignments incentivise them to commit to their roles.

The imbalanced relationship between academics and administrators also shapes administrators' experiences of this profession. Many participants reported disrespect and mistrust from academics, which influenced their self-positioning as facilitators focused on academic and university development rather than their own professional development. Different approaches are observed in Taiwan and Singapore. Taiwanese administrators often adopt an understanding attitude, sometimes rationalising faculty behaviours, while Singaporean administrators reported increasingly equal and discussion-based interactions, even though their suggestions are not always accepted. These approaches reflect the positionality of higher education administration in universities. In Taiwan, influenced by cultural norms that highly respect faculty members, administrators often rank themselves as less important than academics. This low self-recognition confines higher education administrators in Taiwan to mere "errand processors," resulting in low agency and uncertain acknowledgement of their professionalism.

A few factors emerged from this research that explain why administration remains difficult to systematise, including the diversity of administration, individual-based training, fragmented and relational knowledge, and emotional factors. Under its current design, higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore lacks career progression, and professional development remains insufficient. Emotional responses, such as positive influences from kind colleagues or a promise to the manager, encourage administrators to stay in their roles and inspire them to contribute to institutional sustainability.

In addition to the challenges of societal endorsement and personal recognition, the evolving environment and tasks of higher education administration have caused confusion among participants. Data indicated an increase in task coverage and scope for most participants compared to when they first began their roles, with many responsibilities deviating from the original job descriptions. These broadening responsibilities have diversified higher education administrators' expertise, complicating systematic training and resulting in a lack of specific identification in their fields—such as research management and international management. Although participants reported insufficient confidence in recognising higher education administration as a profession, they generally endorsed the professionalism of their colleagues within these specific areas. Singaporean research management participants further called for the establishment of national licensure and training schemes to systematically cultivate existing talents, supporting not only university development but also national research capacity.

The change in boundaries aligns with Whitchurch's concept of Third Space professionals but remains distinct in the local contexts of Taiwan and Singapore. Third Space professionals, who combine academic and administrative responsibilities, are less prevalent in research and international offices in these regions. While there is an overlap in tasks between the two fields, the seclusion of management responsibilities exclusively to academics prevents recognition or credit for the overlapping tasks performed by administrators. This limitation constrains the space for Third Space professionals to grow. Institutional structures further reinforce boundaries by dividing higher education administrators into separate offices with distinct management, budgets, and skill sets. While Singaporean participants reported occasional cross-office collaborations, Taiwanese participants struggled with cross-office communication and the limited transferability of skills to other sectors, whether for job mobility or cooperation opportunities. These divisions between administrative roles, their responsibilities, and the academic-administrative dichotomy create rigid barriers, with little merging or collaboration observed.

Administrators rely heavily on their flexibility and adaptability to navigate the higher education environment and hierarchy, fulfilling missions and creating impact. Though flexibility within institutional structures exists, the autonomy reported in higher education administration tasks is inconsistent. Participants described how the diversity and openness to discussion within the higher education environment allow administrators flexibility in task choices and interpretations of policies. Supportive office environments and management occasionally encourage innovation. For example, bottom-up initiatives for cross-disciplinary interactions were supported by senior management in Singapore. This support enables administrators to shape their roles with a personal touch, emphasising activities they find impactful or meaningful. Such benign relationships improve administrative efficiency and reduce incompatibilities between administrators and their institutions. However, administrative changes have outpaced existing institutional designs, as projects often require multiple skills and collaborations across offices. This inconsistency underscores a lack of systematic support, depriving higher education administration of a defined career trajectory.

8.2.4 Professionalisation in research and international offices

Due to limited data on international office participants in Singapore, the comparison focuses on research office participants in both Taiwan and Singapore, as well as international office participants in Taiwan.

The development of research and international offices in this study was accelerated by national interest, driven by national higher education policies from the governments of both countries. The policy focuses on research excellence and internationalisation facilitated the growth of these two administrative offices in universities, and this special interest influenced the administrators' work in many different ways. Starting with the recruitment criteria, candidates for research and international offices are required to possess a wide range of skills. In Taiwan's case, these skills are new and cannot be fulfilled by the traditional civil service workforce.

Research offices and international offices are regulated as a part of higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore, following a similar regulatory environment. However, interview data revealed how the identities of research and international management professionals deviated from other higher education administrators. The term "administration" is often related to negative stereotypes like clerical and repetitive work, and administrators are simulated to generalists "agenda administrators", whose skills can be replaceable and working attitude is only there to check boxes. Most participants identify their works to be more specialised and more innovative. In such deviated identities and office development, commonalities are identified, and these include policy focus, innovative work, and flexibility under institutional structure.

Despite the similar regulatory environment for research and international offices under higher education administration, the two offices demonstrated differences in their interpretation of professionalism beyond their different skills and values. Participants from research and international offices reported an expanding range of tasks and responsibilities to facilitate institutional development, sometimes exceeding the current legal environment. These innovations distinguished research and international participants from the repetitive and bureaucratic image of administration and shaped this workforce. Participants from research and international offices appreciate the innovative nature of their work and the flexibility afforded to them in terms of institutional structure, regulatory environment, and sometimes salary, to support innovation.

Many tasks in both research and international offices operate within the regulated sphere of laws and acts. While changes due to international standards and trends create flexibility for international management missions, the boundary remains more solid for research management professionals. This hard boundary not only affects how research management professionals handle their daily work, but it also impacts their values and ways of thinking. Participants in research offices referenced the guidelines and regulations, expressed a willingness to follow them, and sought flexibility within the legal framework. This legal mindset also leads professionalisation discussions to focus on national authorisation, including state-level licenses and training courses to verify one's status as a professional.

Participants in this study work on projects facilitating the development of their institutions, and university development is further connected to national development through the knowledge economy and higher education policies. Responses from participants revealed their recognition and endorsement of their contributions to this "bigger picture," and a strong sense of responsibility was observed in both research and international management professionals. This sense of responsibility and endorsement toward societal development also serves as an attraction to careers in research and international management in universities. Many participants specifically expressed their personal beliefs in education or science, and the alignment between these personal beliefs and institutional mission goals inspired stronger professional identities that may lead participants to view their jobs as a "vocation" and work toward a pro-social cause.

Research management professionals demonstrated their transferability and compatibility with a wider job market. Participants in research offices compared themselves to similar roles in other industries, governmental agencies, and even to professionals from other nationalities. For some, this comparison and alignment provided an opportunity to realise their own professionalism, while for others, the alignment in skills and knowledge further emphasised the distinctive management system and the university administration's lack of career progression. In this observation, the boundary between the higher education sector and other employment sectors is blurrier for research management professionals. The two different manifestations of boundary combined and visualised in research management professionals a stronger belief in their personal professionalism, but less recognition of the professional status of their work.

This mindset does not connect to self-recognition for international management professionals. Most responses agreed that international management skills are multiple and complex, but they found it difficult to identify these skills, as many are considered "soft skills." Operating on missions crucial to national development and receiving little recognition for their professionalism, the conflicting mindset revealed partial reasons for the high turnover rate at international offices.

8.2.5 Socio-Cultural Influences

In both Taiwan and Singapore, socio-cultural influences on higher education administrators' professional identities can be observed. Taiwanese participants reported a professionalism that prioritises the development of Taiwanese universities and education over their own personal professional growth. In traditional Confucian concepts, there is no clear division between public and private, but rather between xiaowo (small I, the private self, 小我) and dawo (big I, the public self, 大我) (Yang, 2022). Yang further explained how this concept is applied: dawo, which is linked to broader societal, educational, or national development, should prevail over xiaowo, meaning an individual's self should be sacrificed for the common good.

Yang (2022) argues that the connected concepts of xiaowo and dawo demonstrate how public and private spheres are not separated in Chinese philosophy. Evidence shows that while Confucianism encourages a connection between private and public domains, other Chinese philosophical schools, such as Taoism, argue for separating these domains to reduce interference from the public and bring individuals closer to the Tao (Whitman, 1985). Legalism also advocates for rulers to separate public from private emotions and virtues, emphasising laws as public standards to ensure justice. Despite differences, these philosophical teachings all reflect a worldview of collectivism, which connects individuals to society. The encouragement of prioritising the public good exemplifies this collectivist mindset, where individuals see themselves as integral parts of a larger social fabric, linked to pro-social missions at familial, institutional, or national levels. Contributing to greater social needs is considered virtuous, while prioritising personal needs may be viewed as selfish.

This concept aligns with Taiwanese higher education administrators' professional identities, where their contributions to educational impact take precedence over personal career progression. This cultural teaching is especially prominent in the field of education, where sacrifice for the greater good is often viewed as more important than career advancement, a reasonable salary, or professional recognition.

Singaporean participants demonstrated a different mindset, one that is more individualistic. Singaporean administrators reported higher confidence in their professionalism and more plans for both professional development and career progression. However, many also described themselves as resources for the nation's development, aligning their roles with the government's agenda, which emphasises that the state lacks natural resources. This aligns with the "development state" narrative (Loke et al., 2017), which values performance legitimacy and supports globalisation and innovation toward the development of a knowledge-based society. The dual notions of individualism and collectivism contribute to the Singaporean higher education administration's professional identities, demonstrating the hybridity of neo-liberalism-based management and cultural collectivism that supports broader societal development.

8.3 Examining professionalism in the Taiwanese and Singaporean context

Higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore has experienced notable developments in professionalisation in skill and work coverage expansion, aligning with global trends regarding expanded task coverage and the increasing skills required for administrative roles. However, administrators in both countries still lack formal career progression opportunities and professional recognition. In Taiwan, for example, most administrators' job titles do not accurately reflect their roles, and their salaries are rigidly determined by national legal acts. This contributes to a diminished understanding and recognition of their professional contributions, both internally and externally.

Some institutions, however, provide more robust support for administrators' professional development. These practices include hiring external speakers, funding participation in international conferences, offering financial subsidies that reflect administrators' workloads, and providing flexibility to encourage innovative initiatives. Although these supportive practices

remain exceptions to prevailing legal regulations and operational norms, the findings indicate a positive shift in the relationship between administrators and their institutions. This improved relationship manifests in lower turnover rates, more proactive administrators, and initiatives that support organisational change.

Additionally, lateral movement between different higher education institutions has been observed in both Taiwan and Singapore, reflecting a broader recognition of the professionalism of higher education administrators. Many administrators seek career advancement by transitioning to different institutions or industries, indicating that the skills and expertise of higher education administrators are valued on a wider scale.

However, the data reveals a distinction between professionalism and professionalisation among participants in both countries. While administrators express a general passion for improving professionalism at personal, institutional, and occupational levels, professionalisation is often viewed as an aspiration rather than a reality for many. Some participants even perceive the professionalisation of higher education administration as unattainable, reflecting a low recognition of the social status and specialised knowledge associated with their roles. This discrepancy has prompted discussions focused more on professionalism than on professionalisation. These discussions are situated within three domains: professionalism and society, professionalism and institutions, and personal professionalism.

8.3.1 Professionalism and Society

Scholars generally agree that the concept of professionalism has evolved across various occupations. Evetts (2014) suggests that distinguishing between professions and other occupations has become less important, while Larson (2018) further notes that bureaucracy and professionalism are no longer mutually exclusive, with professional management now playing a role in knowledge-based institutions. These shifts in the relationship between the public and traditional professions, alongside a dilution of professional roles into expert occupations, have created more complex professional identities and autonomy.

The development of higher education administration in both Taiwan and Singapore follows trends observed globally. In interviews, university administrators consistently view their

profession as being closely integrated with society. Taiwanese participants, in particular, emphasise contributing positively to educational or societal development, while Singaporean participants see themselves as resources for the state. Both perspectives align the individual's professional identity with the broader social context, highlighting the potential impact of their work. However, the discussion does not frame these impacts within the context of professionalisation. Instead, it reflects a focus on skills, professionalism, and career development, without distinguishing their occupation from other professions.

In both Taiwan and Singapore, higher education administrators do not claim the social status of experts nor seek to compete with other professions for power or societal trust. Although comparisons with academics are frequent in interviews, they are not framed as a goal to achieve. Participants positioned themselves primarily as facilitators who supported academic success. This positioning provides administrators with a perspective that critically assesses their own roles in relation to academic standards. Many administrators did not recognise their profession as distinct due to the lack of systematic training and the absence of exclusive disciplinary knowledge, like those of the scholars'.

These observations align with Evetts's (2014) discussion of professionalisation in various occupations, where professionalism is rooted in personal values and altruistic goals rather than meritocratic access control or societal power. Higher education administration in both Taiwan and Singapore, thus, reflects a model of professionalisation that values skill development, stakeholder relationships, and individual impact, rather than the establishment of a profession with direct societal influence.

8.3.2 Professionalism and languages

Two concepts emerged in the interviews conducted in Chinese, including *chuancheng* (傳承) and *suyang* (素養). The emergence of concepts in the local language that do not have direct English translations, along with limited references in English literature, highlights the importance of addressing the influences of local and linguistic factors to incorporate multicultural perceptions.

Chuancheng means to inherit and pass on to the next generation in Chinese. In the context of higher education administration, it is typically used to refer to abstract ideas such as traditions, values, and kindness. Participants from University A exhibited a strong tendency to advocate for this concept, emphasising the importance of guarding and maintaining the traditions they considered valuable in the office.

Suyang, on the other hand, represents a comprehensive capability that blends one's skills, abilities, and attitudes. Moreover, this term often appears together with morals or ethics in Taiwanese media, showing an implied connection to moral character. Many administrators agreed that their roles require candidates to possess a high level of *suyang*, and they used the concept to explain why the training of higher education administrative talent is challenging to systematise. These concepts underscore how administration is deeply contextual and shaped by local culture. To ensure sustainability, local practices and concerns should be integrated into the development of higher education administration. These ideas further highlight the importance of research that incorporates local languages and cultural influences in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of global higher education administration.

Language provides a framework that reflects particular philosophical traditions and societal values. The two concepts discussed above exemplify how societal beliefs shape participants' views on professionalism. Taiwanese participants often include "attitude" in their definitions of professionalism. Several participants described how tasks can be completed to varying levels of quality, emphasising that only with a proactive attitude and a strong determination to deliver the best results can an administrator truly be considered professional. *Suyang* reflects this by combining knowledge, attitude, and soft skills, highlighting how Taiwanese higher education administrators tend to view professionalism as motivated by personal commitment and intrinsic values.

Chuancheng again illustrates the strong sense of responsibility felt by Taiwanese participants, positioning them as individuals who not only accumulate and apply knowledge but also bear responsibility for sustaining the institution. While *suyang* represents a moral concern, *chuancheng* reflects a pro-social perspective that extends a historical responsibility to the individual. Both concepts align with ideas and themes rooted in Confucianism and the broader philosophy that influences Taiwanese society.

Aside from specific terms, languages also cultivate multiple perspectives and further influence identities. For example, a distinct manifestation of professionalism is observed in international management professionals in Taiwan. With a different working language than most higher education administrators, many shared experiences of being viewed as "trouble-makers." This othering, and the special focus national policy placed on these professionals through the national development emphasis on internationalisation, attracted professionals who value innovative thinking and flexibility in their work. Compared to the research office participants, participants from international offices reported a higher volume of mindset to challenge or break through outdated regulations.

8.3.3 Professionalism and Institutions

Institutions, or professional service firms, play a crucial role in shaping modern professions. Suddaby and Muzio (2015) examined the symbiotic relationship between professionals and professional service firms, noting that professionals' access to career development is facilitated by these organisations. Universities influence the development of higher education administration through their missions, structures, and policies. As such, institutions should not be viewed merely as passive sites but as active actors in shaping the higher education environment (Muzio et al., 2013).

However, discrepancies exist in the relationship between higher education administrators and their "professional service firms" in Taiwan and Singapore. Although universities offer some resources and training for professionalisation, interviews reveal that many institutions still lack comprehensive training programs and career progression opportunities for administrators. A noticeable gap exists between different administrative units in both countries. For instance, research and international offices in Taiwan and Singapore report significant differentiation from other administrative offices, with Taiwanese participants, in particular, feeling "othered" and facing challenges in cooperation. This incompatibility underscores the importance of specialisation within higher education administration to provide administrators with the necessary training and development opportunities.

Another discrepancy exists between administrators and institutional management. In Singapore, where office managers are typically professionals rather than academics, some participants criticised these managers for being "ungrounded" in the academic context. In Taiwan, the multiple recruitment pathways for administrators complicate career progression, further widening the gap between civil servants, academics, and other administrative staff. This division limits mutual understanding and hinders professionalisation, restricting the development of a cohesive administrative profession.

In highly regulated environments like Taiwan and Singapore, the role of institutional structures is particularly significant. Legal documents from Taiwan show that administrators often rely on institutional "exceptions" to secure competitive salary schemes and career progression opportunities. In Singapore, the extent of professional development and resources available to administrators depends largely on institutional support. These findings suggest that institutional structures, policies, and management practices significantly limit the professionalisation of higher education administration, indicating a need for reform to improve career pathways and recognition.

8.3.4 Personal Professionalism

Taiwanese higher education administrators consistently emphasise attitude in professionalism, which focuses on the individual's approach to their work. Many administrators stress the importance of how tasks are accomplished, rather than external recognition or promotion, as a measure of professionalism. This focus on individual integrity and commitment resonates with Confucian values, where self-cultivation, family regulation, and societal contribution form a continuous cycle of moral development. This philosophical framework connects the small I (the individual) to the big I (society), suggesting that personal professionalism is both foundational and essential.

Singaporean participants also emphasise personal development, focusing on skills and competencies to improve job performance. Although this focus on personal professionalism seems similar to that of Taiwanese participants, it is rooted in a different set of beliefs. While Taiwanese participants' personal endeavours are motivated by broader societal contributions, Singaporean participants' self-development aligns more closely with human capital theory,

where enhancing personal skills is seen as a means to achieve greater efficiency and better results.

Some Singaporean participants expressed interest in pursuing advanced degrees, such as PhDs, viewing doctoral training as a means of acquiring systematic training and credentials. Some consider it the only path to progress their careers. Taiwanese participants, on the other hand, expressed a desire to deepen their knowledge and theorise their experiences, reflecting the Confucian values of constant learning and self-improvement. Despite this, most Taiwanese participants demonstrate a lower intention to pursue professional careers, positioning themselves as facilitators of institutional or individual development rather than as professionals in their own right.

Not seeking to be the leaders or decision makers, the higher education administrators in Taiwan and Singapore happily position themselves as the facilitator of a broader impact on science, university, or national development. The societal status of universities and the flexibility accompanying academic freedom make the role more attractive to them outside of the monetary reward. The academic freedom in universities creates flexibility in administrators' choices on missions and allows them inconsistent perspectives than their institutions. Many reported that the university environment accommodates their personal values, and having academics as managers provided them with substantial learning at the job not necessarily related to their projects or missions, such learning satisfied their pursuit of improvement.

8.3.5 Professionalisation of administrators in Taiwanese and Singaporean universities

Two primary factors contribute to the retention of higher education administrators in Taiwan and Singapore. The first is the university's support for its members' familial needs. Many administrators cited the stability of administrative roles—characterised by stable working hours and a lower risk of institutional closure—as key reasons for choosing these positions. Additionally, universities offer family-friendly policies and access to educational resources, which further enhance the attractiveness of these roles. The second factor is the alignment between administrators' personal values and the educational missions of universities. These administrators often express a strong sense of responsibility, viewing themselves not as leaders or decision-makers, but as facilitators of broader societal, scientific, and national development.

These motivations show that for many administrators, the societal prestige associated with universities and the flexibility provided by academic freedom are significant motivators, beyond financial rewards. Academic freedom allows administrators to shape their roles and missions with a level of autonomy, often fostering perspectives that may differ from those of the institution itself. Many administrators reported that the university environment supports their personal values, and working under academic managers provides ample opportunities for personal growth, often in areas unrelated to their core responsibilities. Such learning opportunities are seen as fulfilling their ongoing pursuit of personal and professional improvement.

Regarding the professionalisation of higher education administration, this research suggests that such a process is not yet evident. Currently, there is no clear indication of growth in occupational recognition, social status, or public trust for administrators in these roles. Many administrators viewed themselves as subsidiaries of the broader institutional framework, often defining their work in relation to other members or divisions within the university. Furthermore, the field of higher education administration is highly diverse, encompassing a wide range of skills and responsibilities that span the developmental needs of universities and the expectations of nation-states. This diversity complicates any attempt to consolidate it into a single profession.

However, while professionalisation remains limited, there are significant developments in the area of professionalism. Administrators are increasingly recognising and developing their own professional skills and identities. This recognition is often influenced by interactions with international peers and by the expanding scope of their roles, which require a growing set of competencies. In Singapore, universities are investing more resources into the professional development of administrative staff. In Taiwan, some institutions have started to adjust their recruitment systems and salary structures to better reward skills, experience, and efficiency, signalling a step toward more formalised professional development.

8.4. Limitations of the study

Several factors have constrained this research in terms of its scope and coverage. Only a small number of participants responded to interview requests in Singapore, limiting the study's understanding of the higher education administration environment in the country, particularly within international offices. This limitation is especially notable given that Singapore is one of the most internationalised higher education entities in Asia. Furthermore, two-thirds of the participants had been in their current positions for more than five years, which led them to provide more stable and experienced perspectives. However, this also meant that the study captured fewer critical reflections on the system or challenges to the status quo.

The timing of the research also introduced disruptive elements. The preparation phase and a delayed fieldwork period occurred between late 2021 and early 2022, a post-COVID phase when international higher education was gradually returning to "normal." The COVID-19 pandemic halted international mobility for higher education members, disrupted research activities, and, in some cases, even suspended campus operations. Higher education administration was among the most heavily affected sectors, with high turnover rates. Many participants noted changes in mission priorities, office composition, and collaborations. Budget allocations also shifted, and funds could be used to support higher education administrators in attending international conferences, but on the other hand, the long-term sustainability of these changes remains uncertain. It is unclear whether institutions will revert to their previous procedures. While this research may have captured a unique transitional period for higher education administration, it is difficult to determine whether these developments will persist.

Despite careful research design, including considerations of researcher positionality and sampling methods, the study inevitably captured glimpses of an institutional voice. Administrators, as implementers of institutional policies, inherently reflect their institutions' perspectives, which can pose challenges in exploring their lived realities and professional identities, particularly in highly hierarchical environments. Despite the research design and efforts to mitigate bias, some responses still reflected official institutional narratives. These included discussions on professional development and management styles that did not align with responses from other participants. While institutional hierarchies and underlying political dynamics were acknowledged, there were few direct quotations from participants addressing these topics, limiting deeper exploration. Additionally, to ensure access to the fieldwork and

protect participants, the study prioritised a relatively neutral topic—professionalisation—which may have diverted attention from more contentious issues.

During data collection, archival research was conducted to identify relevant laws. However, interviews later revealed the presence of unofficial government directives or office-level interpretations of policies that were not publicly announced. While archival research could cover primary regulations, it could not account for these nuanced implementation details. The issue of transparency was even more pronounced in Singapore, where institutional guidelines on administration were largely inaccessible to external researchers, and the government delegated administrative management responsibilities to individual institutions. This lack of transparency posed challenges in retrieving operational details and obtaining information on management structures and career progression from an institutional perspective, leaving the study reliant on participants' accounts to construct an understanding.

8.5 Policy Recommendations

8.5.1 Taiwan

Greater specificity is needed to better define the roles of research and international officers within Taiwan's higher education sector. The current institutional hiring pathways and job titles remain disconnected from actual job responsibilities, leading to confusion and ambiguity in administrators' professional identities. Implementing clearer role distinctions can enhance professional recognition and identity formation. One key recommendation is to separate professional service roles from administrative ones. The existing system conflates these roles, resulting in training programs that only address a limited and overlapping subset of skills. Establishing a clear distinction would allow for more targeted skill development, training, and career progression, as well as more precisely defined missions and objectives. This differentiation would benefit both internal institutional structures and external professional recognition.

It is also crucial for Taiwan's higher education system to address the constraints imposed by the outdated civil service system, particularly regarding management responsibilities. Allowing contractors to assume managerial roles would help bridge the gap between administrators and

their leadership, creating a more coherent career progression pathway. Management by professional administrators, rather than purely academic managers, would reduce misunderstandings and foster better professional development initiatives. This shift would also expand the talent pool for managerial positions, and a well-defined career trajectory could help lower turnover rates while promoting more pragmatic and sustainable administrative practices.

Another policy recommendation is to establish clear guidelines for performance evaluation and rewards in research and international management work. The current system, which remains entangled with civil service regulations, makes it impractical to assess employees' performance due to the lack of relevant training, incentives, or disciplinary mechanisms. While a full legal separation from the civil service system may be challenging, introducing standardised assessment criteria and regular evaluation would be a feasible first step, particularly for the growing number of permanent staff. A structured evaluation process, combined with subsequent support and training, would not only improve performance but also encourage continued professional development. With the recent policy extending emphasis to the cultivation and development of higher education administrative professionals, further training or licensure can be built on this legal foundation, taking in existing international practices as reference.

8.5.2 Singapore

Due to extensive international engagement and benchmarking, Singapore's higher education administration maintains strong connections with global professional communities. This exposure has contributed to a well-defined professional identity, and both institutions that participated in this research demonstrated support for employees' personal needs, such as family life. Institutional support for professionalisation exists but primarily focuses on skills development.

To further advance the field of research management, more systematic training and certification programs are needed. Many participants suggested that the Singaporean government establish training modules or certification schemes modelled after international best practices. Implementing a national licensing system could enhance the recognition and credibility of research management as a profession.

However, international management professionals in Singapore face the challenge of operating within a knowledge base that is difficult to standardise or systematically evaluate. To support their professional growth, it is essential to address the persistent stereotypes that reduce university administrative work to clerical tasks and undervalue its complexity. Building a stronger professional identity requires both institutional understanding and broader social recognition. Adopting and endorsing the term "professional services" could serve as an initial step toward improving self-recognition among administrators. Once a standardised nomenclature is established, institutions can further refine specialised training and professional support structures. Additionally, by fostering stronger connections between higher education administration and other industries, professionals in this field can gain career mobility beyond the university setting, mirroring the career trajectories of research management professionals in other sectors.

8.6 Contributions of the study

This study addresses a gap in the higher education administration literature by investigating the professionalisation and development of university administrators in Taiwan and Singapore, two centrally governed higher education systems. The findings challenge the Western-centric notion of professionalisation as competition-based and self-regulating. Instead, Taiwanese and Singaporean higher education administration professionalisation remains more inclusive of state-driven missions and institutional governance. Despite legal or structural constraints, the professionals demonstrate strong agency, drive institutional change, and contribute to national education policies. This suggests a need to rethink how legitimacy is constructed in highly regulated professions, particularly in non-Western contexts. The professionalisation of higher education administration in Taiwan and Singapore offers valuable insights into how professions evolve under state governance and cultural hierarchy. While features such as state-led development, centralised governance, and hierarchical culture are present in many higher education entities, this study lays a foundation for further exploration in similarly governed contexts.

The findings reveal societal and cultural influences that shape higher education administrators' identities and understandings of their professionalism, which were not widely discussed in the

literature on the professionalisation of professional service staff. In Taiwan, Confucianism cultivates a prioritisation of educational missions over individual career progressions. On the contrary, Singapore's societal narrative toward a developmental state has encouraged a collective national progress through individual development. In both cases, higher education administrators demonstrate an alignment between personal identities and organisational identities in shared values and beliefs.

A theoretical contribution of this study is its adaptation of Brofenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Applying the ecological systems model in the analysis to the development of a profession instead of a person, this study adopted a cross-case studies approach and thematic analysis to identify the influencing factors that shape the development of the higher education administration profession. With a comparison detailing the original design and its adapted model for professionalisation, this study tested and demonstrated the model's applicability to non-human subjects. It provides a methodological guide for examining, adapting, and analysing processual phenomena using the adapted ecological systems model. This approach can support professionalisation studies in achieving an ecological-institutional perspective by accommodating multiple layers of influence and illustrating the complex, multidirectional a profession experiences in its surrounding environment. It is particularly well-suited in the multi-level and multi-stakeholder professional contexts.

8.7 Future research directions

This research began an exploration of administrators' voices and experiences, and identified how institutional procedures and guidelines influenced its administrative members. The lack of transparency and the discrepancy between regulations and implementations in real life created challenges to the professionalisation of higher education administration. With increasing literature on the sociology of profession pointing out how institution plays an embedded role in today's professional environment (Evans, 2008; Larson, 2018), it is important that researchers consider influences of the institutional operation, from institutional type, structure, regulations, and missions, to management systems. This research observed high relevancy between the institutional settings to its professional members but could not generalise the research due to the number of participating institutions. More qualitative research on a widened scale that includes more institutions in one or more countries could help better portray the working

environment higher education administration is in, and further the interactions and influences between professional organisations and modern professionals.

The data suggest that higher education administration development in Taiwan and Singapore is shaped more by hierarchical structures than by professional competition. Future research could further investigate how hierarchical governance impacts professional development in the field. Reassessing the role of competition in professionalisation outside traditional elite professions could lead to an understanding of societal changes and the modern development of professions. Additionally, as the administrative functions expand, higher education administration has been diversified and professionalism between different offices can vary. It is important to widen the scope of the investigation and address administrators in their specialities.

As this study did not have the capacity to explore leadership and management thoroughly, suggestions for future research directions include examining Singaporean senior and middle management interactions, responsibility division, cultivation and training, to understand their impact on the higher education administration more thoroughly.

Individual agency in professionalisation remains crucial to higher education administration development, especially in a highly governed system. As the centralised higher education system is not exclusive to Taiwan and Singapore, future research can apply this study as a foundation to examine higher education entities and explore how higher education administration professionals strategise within hierarchical constraints. Can informal mechanisms other than amiable academic managers enable administrators to develop their roles despite limited institutional support with the recorded bottom-up initiatives in this study? Future research can also examine alternative legitimacy frameworks that do not merely rely on self-regulation or market-driven logic.

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Appendix I Governmental document list

Singapore

	Title
1	Amendments to the Employment Act
2	Education Act 2009
3	Employment Act (Female Workmen) Regulations
4	Employment Act 1968
5	Employment Act: who it covers
6	Employment of Foreign Manpower (Amendment) Act 2012 (Commencement) Notification 2012
7	Employment of Foreign Manpower (Work Pass Exemptions — Specified Activities) Notification
8	Employment, Parental Leave and Other Measures Act 2013 (Commencement) Notification 2015
9	Nanyang Technological University (Corporatisation) act 2005
10	Nanyang Technological University Students' Union and Constituent Bodies (Exemption) Order
11	National Servicemen (Employment) Act 1970
12	National Servicemen (Employment) Rules
13	National University of Singapore (Corporatisation) (Dissolution Date) Notification 2008
14	National University of Singapore (Corporatisation) Act 2005
15	National University of Singapore (Initial Appointments and Other Transitional Provisions) Rules
16	National University of Singapore Academic Staff Provident Fund Scheme Rules
17	National University of Singapore Students' Union and Constituent Bodies (Exemption) Order
18	Retirement and Re-employment (Amendment) Act 2021 (Commencement) Notification 2022
19	Singapore Management University (Amendment) Act (Commencement) Notification 2006
20	Singapore Management University (Students' Association and Constituent Bodies) (Exemption) Order
21	Singapore Management University Act 2000
22	Singapore University of Social Sciences Act 2017
23	Singapore University of Social Sciences Act 2017
24	Singapore University of Technology and Design (Students' Association and Constituent Bodies — Exemption) Order 2021
25	Singapore University of Technology and Design Act 2011

26	SKILLSFUTURE Singapore Agency Act 2016
27	the Education (Grant-in-Aid) Regulations
28	the Education Endowment and Savings Schemes (Post-Secondary Education Scheme) Regulations
29	the Employment (Administrative Penalties) Regulations 2016
30	the Employment (Amendment) Act 2018 (Commencement) Notification 2019
31	the Employment (Retrenchment Reporting) Notification 2019
32	University Endowments Rules
33	University of Malaya (Staff Transfer) Rules
34	University of Singapore Academic Staff Provident Fund (Merger) Rules

Taiwan

	Title (Ch)	Title (Eng)
1	專門職業及技術人員轉任公務人員條例	(T)Act Governing Professionals and Technicians transfer to Civil Servants
2	教育人員任用條例	Act Governing the Appointment of Educators
3	公務人員行政中立法	(T)Civil Servant Administration Neutrality Act
4	公務人員協會法	Civil Servant Association Act
5	公務人員任用法	(T)Civil servant employment act
6	公務人員陞遷法	(T)Civil Servant Promotion Act
7	公務人員服務法	(T)Civil Servant Service Act
8	公務人員考試及格人員分發辦法	(T)Civil Service Exam Qualified Personnel Distrubution
9	國立大學校務基金進用教學人員研究人員及工作人員實施原則	(T)Enforcement Principles of Hiring Teaching Personnel, Research Personnel, and Working Staff Using National University Endowment Fund
10	教育部及所屬機關（構）學校公務人員交代條例施行細則	(T)Enforcement Rules
11	教育人員任用條例施行細則	Enforcement Rules of Act Governing the Appointment of Educators
12	公務人員行政中立法施行細則	(T)Enforcement Rules of Civil Servant Administration Neutrality Act
13	公務人員陞遷法施行細則	(T)Enforcement Rules of Civil Servant Promotion Act
14	公務人員任用法施行細則	(T)Enforcement Rules of Civil service employment act

15	勞動基準法施行細則	Enforcement Rules of the Labor Standards Act
16	大學法實行細則	Enforcement Rules of the university Act Article 17-1_
17	外國人從事就業服務法第四十六條第一項第一款至第六款工作資格及審查標準	(T)Foreigners' Employment Services Act: Work Qualifications and Examination Standards, Article 46, Paragraph 1, Paragraph 1 to Paragraph 6.
18	國立大專校院行政人力契僱化實施原則	(T)Implementation Principles of Contract-based Employment of Administrative Manpower in National Universities and Colleges
19	教育部補助大學提升校務專業管理能力計畫審查作業要點	(T)Key points for review of the Ministry of Education's plan to subsidize universities to improve their professional management capabilities in school affairs
20	行政院及所屬各機關學校臨時人員進用及運用要點	(T)Key points for the recruitment and use of temporary personnel in schools of the Executive Yuan and its affiliated agencies
21	勞動基準法	Labor Standards Act
22	國立大學校院務基金管理及監督辦法	(T)Management and Supervision of National University Institutional Funds
23	大學教育法令釋例	(T)MOE Announcements on educational regulations to universities
24	高等教育深耕計畫簡報	(T)MOE Presentation for SPROUT Project
25	大學校務基金設置辦法	National University Endowment Fund Establishment
26	國立大學校院校務基金設置條例	National University Endowment Fund Establishment Act
27	公立學校退休教職員一次退休金及養老給付優惠存款辦法	(T)Preferential deposits for pensions and pension benefits for retired teachers and staff of public schools
28	各機關學校聘僱人員離職給與辦法	(T)Severance compensation for employees of agencies and schools
29	大專校院高等教育深耕計畫經費使用原則	(T)SPROUT Funding Expense Principles for Higher Education Institutions
30	高等教育深耕計畫	(T)Sprout Project plan
31	高等教育深耕計畫第二期(112-116 年)	(T)Sprout Project Plan II (2023-2027)
32	大學法	University Act

33	大學系統組織及運作辦法	(T)University System Structure and Operation
34	大學一級行政單位設置副主管認定基準	(T)Vice-director in Level 1 Administration Office in University Establishment Standard
35	大專校院高等教育深耕計畫經費使用原則修正規定	(T)Appendix to SPROUT Funding Expense Principles for Higher Education Institutions
36	公務人員考績法	Public Functionaries Merit Evaluation Act

*University names and the year of publication are anonymised.

**(T): The title is translated by the author, the document is in Chinese only.

Appendix II Questionnaire

高等教育行政專業化研究 Higher Education Administration and Professionalisation

Page 1: Page 1

This study investigates higher education administration and professionalisation in Singapore and Taiwan and focuses on the non-traditional roles including research offices and international offices. Through taking a closer look at these emerging administration roles, this study explores higher education administration and professionalisation via governmental policies, institutional regulations, and personal experiences. Case studies are built through questionnaires and interviews in selected national universities. This study will compare how these emerging higher education administration roles are framed, regulated, managed, and experienced.

本研究檢視新加坡及臺灣大學之行政人員專業化，著重國際處與研發處兩處非傳統式行政人員，盼綜合政府、機構（大學）、及個人三層面向討論，以更全面地剖析高等教育行政專業化。研究方法將經由問卷及訪談建構個案研究，呈現兩地國立大學之發展。本研究欲探討高等教育行政如何被規範及管理、如何發展，以及產業中之個體經驗。

This study has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: CIA-22HT-025). Data collected through this study will be pseudonymised, including personal information and university name. Data will be stored safely following the regulations of University of Oxford. The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights

本研究已通過牛津大學倫理委員會審查（研究編號：CIA-22HT-025）。本研究蒐集之資料將以匿名處理，大學名稱及參與者名字皆會以代碼代稱，研究資料將會依照牛津大學規範儲存，牛津大學主責資料之控管，並監管研究如何使用您的個人資料。若欲了解更多個人資料如何被儲存、處理，及保護的細節，歡迎參考以下網址：https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights

You are free to withdraw from this study anytime by written notice to the researcher directly. If you have any concern about this study, please contact Julie Lin at julie.lin@education.ox.ac.uk

您可以隨時以書面通知研究人員以退出此研究，若您對本研究有任何問題或建議，歡迎聯絡林佳儀 julie.lin@education.ox.ac.uk

1. By pressing “consent and continue” you will be providing your consent to participate in this study. There are 26 questions in this questionnaire, and it will take around 15-30 minutes to complete. The questions centre around career actions, skill and trainings, professional identity, as well as organisational relationships. A one-hour in-depth interview will follow the questionnaire, if you are interested in participating in the research, please leave your contact information at the end of the questionnaire. 勾選「同意並繼續」將代表您同意參與本研究。問卷共有26題，約需15-30分鐘完成，主題包含職涯選擇、技能培訓、專業認同、及組織關係。若您有興趣進一步參與研究，請在問卷後留下您的聯絡資訊，參加研究下一階段之深入訪談，訪談時間約需一小時。 *Required

- Consent and continue 同意並繼續

Page 2: Background Information

以下問題為個人及職務相關之資訊

To start with, please provide some information on your role.

2. I have been working in a) Research Office b) International Office c) Both offices for a total of _____ year(s) _____ month(s) 我已在a)研究發展處 b)國際事務處 c) 兩者皆是 任職___年___個月。(請以逗點分格，依個人經驗填入 ex. a, 3, 4) ✱ *Required*

2.a. I manage a team of ___ members in this office (please fill in 0 if you are not in a management role). 我的工作包含管理職責，管理____ 人團隊（若您的工作不含管理職，請填入0） ✱ *Required*

2.b. Gender 性別 ✱ *Required*

- 男性 Male
- 女性 Female
- 非二元 Non-binary
- 偏好不回答 Prefer not to tell

2.c. 年齡 Age ✱ *Required*

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

2.d. Education background 教育背景 ✱ *Required*

- Bachelor's 學士
- Master's 碩士
- PhD 博士
- Other 其他

2.d.i. If you selected Other, please specify:

2.e. [Research office] My main responsibilities at work cover (Multiple Choices) [研究發展處] 我的職務涵蓋範圍包含（多選題） *Optional*

- ☐ Administration行政
- ☐ Faculty support教職/研究人員支援
- ☐ Governmental projects application and management政府計畫申請及管理
- ☐ Industry – university collaboration產學合作
- ☐ Innovation and entrepreneurship創新創業
- ☐ Patent, copyright and intellectual property right專利、版權或智慧財產權相關
- ☐ Public relations and outreach公共關係或合作
- ☐ Research ethics研究道德倫理
- ☐ Research funds and resources研究預算及資源
- ☐ Research management研究管理
- ☐ Research personnel recruitment研究人員徵募
- ☐ Strategy策略規劃
- ☐ Other其他（請說明）
- ☐ Legal (agreement)法務及合約相關

2.e.i. If you selected Other, please specify 請說明:

2.f. [International Office] My main responsibilities at work cover (Multiple Choices) [國際事務處] 我的職責包括

- ☐ Accreditation
- ☐ Administration
- ☐ Courses and curriculum
- ☐ Degree programmes
- ☐ Legal (agreement)
- ☐ Faculty support
- ☐ International collaboration
- ☐ International guest
- ☐ Public relations
- ☐ Scholarship
- ☐ Strategy
- ☐ Student exchange
- ☐ Student support
- ☐ Student recruitment
- ☐ Other

2.f.i. If you selected Other, please specify:

2.g. Please rank the five titles below from most accurate to least accurate according to how you describe your role 請依1（最合適）至5（最不合適）排序以下描述您職務之稱呼: ✱ *Required*

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select between 1 and 5 answers.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) in any single column.

	1	2	3	4	5
Administrator 行政人員	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Manager 幹事/專員	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Professional staff 專業人士	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
General staff 一般職員	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Non-academic staff 非學術職員	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2.h. Please rank the five titles below from most accurate to least accurate according to how others in the university describe your role 請依1（最合適）至5（最不合適）排序校內他人描述您職務之稱呼: ✱ *Required*

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select between 1 and 5 answers.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) in any single column.

	1	2	3	4	5
Administrator 行政人員	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Manager 幹事/專員	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Professional staff 專業人士	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
General staff 一般職員	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Non-academic staff 非學術職員	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Page 3: Professionalisation Questionnaire

3. What are the motivations for you to remain at your current position? (up to 5 choices) /請選擇讓您持續留在此份工作的動機（最多可選擇5項）： *Optional*

- ☐ Good salary 薪資
- ☐ Good benefits (eg. Bonus, annual leave) 福利（如分紅、年假）
- ☐ Stability 穩定性
- ☐ Challenging 有挑戰性
- ☐ The ability to contribute to university development 能夠貢獻於大學發展
- ☐ The ability to contribute to knowledge production 能夠貢獻於知識創造
- ☐ The ability to contribute to the society 能夠貢獻於社會
- ☐ The ability to improve education 能夠協助改善教育
- ☐ The ability to promote research 能夠協助推廣研究
- ☐ Good work environment, culture and ethos 良好的工作環境及文化
- ☐ Clear pathway for career progression 晉升管道明確
- ☐ Other 其他

3.a. If you selected Other, please specify 請說明:

4. What are the reasons for you to choose your current position? (multiple choice) 請勾選您當初選擇目前工作的原因（多選）： *Optional*

- ☐ This job can support my career development 符合我的職涯規畫
- ☐ This job suits my life plan 符合我的生涯規畫
- ☐ This is a temporary job and I wish to continue academic study later 這是暫時的工作，我希望之後繼續唸書
- ☐ This is a temporary job and I wish to move to other job positions later 這是暫時的工作，我希望之後轉職
- ☐ The role provides trainings of skills I want to learn 這工作提供技能之訓練
- ☐ This job is highly related to my passions 符合我的夢想
- ☐ This job is a good fit for my talents
- ☐ Salary, compensation, and benefits 薪資福利誘人
- ☐ Other 其他

4.a. Please specify 請說明:

5. What types of positions will you prefer for your future career in the next 5 years? 請選擇未來五年內您希望從事的工作 *Optional*

More info

- Same position in the current office 在目前的單位從事同等職級之工作
- Senior-level position in the current office 在目前的單位從事較高職級的工作
- Position in higher education administration management, in other offices or institutions 在其他學校或單位從事高等教育行政管理相關之工作
- Researcher 研究工作
- Academic faculty staff 擔任學術人員
- Government Officer 政府相關工作
- Positions in other sectors, please clarify 不同產業之工作，請說明:

5.a. Please specify 請說明:

6. What types of positions will you prefer for your future career after 5 years? 未來五年

- Same position in the current office 在目前的單位從事同等職級之工作
- Senior-level position in the current office 在目前的單位從事較高職級的工作
- Position in higher education administration management, in other offices or institutions 在其他學校或單位從事高等教育行政管理相關之工作
- Researche r研究工作
- Academic faculty staff 擔任學術人員
- Government Officer 政府相關工作
- Positions in other sectors 不同產業之工作

6.a. Please clarify 請說明：

7. What skills do you think are essential to your work? (multiple choices) 請選擇從事您目前職務必要之技能（多選題） *Optional*

- Administrative skills 行政技能
- Language 語言
- Negotiation 談判
- International communication 跨國溝通
- Strategical planning 策略規劃
- Knowledge on patent and copyright 專利及版權知識
- Legal knowledge 法律知識
- Knowledge on governmental regulations and projects 政府法規及政策知識
- Cultural knowledge 文化知識
- Specialised academic knowledge on a subject 特定學科之學術知識
- Management skills 管理技能
- Public relations 公共關係
- Project management 專案管理

- [ ] Internal communication 內部溝通
- [ ] Other 其他

7.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

8. Do the skills required at work match the recruitment job description? 從事目前工作所需的技能與當初之徵募要求所述是否相同？ *Optional*

- ( ) Yes 是
- ( ) No 否

8.a. Please specify what are the skills you find necessary at work but wasn't listed in the job description 請說明您在日常工作中所需，但未被列入徵募公告之技能：

9. What skills have you learned since starting this role? 請選擇您於從事此份工作後學習到之技能（多選題） *Optional*

- [ ] Administrative skills 行政技能
- [ ] Language 語言
- [ ] Negotiation 談判
- [ ] International communication 跨國溝通
- [ ] Strategical planning 策略規劃
- [ ] Knowledge on patent and copyright 專利及版權知識
- [ ] Legal knowledge 法律知識
- [ ] Knowledge on governmental regulations and projects 政府法規及政策知識
- [ ] Cultural knowledge 文化知識
- [ ] Specialised academic knowledge on a subject 特定學科之學術知識
- [ ] Management skills 管理技能
- [ ] Public relations 公共關係
- [ ] Project management 專案管理
- [ ] Internal communication 內部溝通
- [ ] Other 其他

9.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

10. Have the skills required for the work changed since when you first joined? 從事此工作所需之技能在您開始工作後是否有所變動？ *Optional*

- Yes 是
- No 否

10.a. If yes, what are the ones that's added within the last 12 months? What prompted the changes? 若是，過去12個月中增加了什麼需要技能？簡述為何有此變動？

11. Do you think the on-job training provided is enough for you to do your job well? 您覺得此份工作是否就工作所需技能提供足夠之在職訓練？ *Optional*

- Yes 是
- No 否
- Not sure 不確定

11.a. If you selected Not sure, please specify 請說明:

12. Have you sought other training outside your institution? 您是否在任職學校外上過與工作技能相關之課程或訓練？ *Optional*

- Yes 是
- No 否

12.a. If you selected Yes, please specify 請說明:

13. Do you see yourself as a professional? 您是否認為自己為專業人士？ ✱ *Required*

- Yes 是
- No 否

14. Is higher education administration a profession? 高等教育行政是否為一專業？ ✱ *Required*

- Yes 是

- No 否

14.a. Why or why not? 請簡述原因

15. Is international affair/research management a profession? 國際化管理/研究管理是否為一專業？ * Required

- Yes 是
- No 否

15.a. Why or why not? 請簡述原因

16. Are you a member of professional associations that are related to your position? 您是否有參加與目前職務有關的專業協會？ Optional

- Yes 是
- No 否

16.a. If you selected Yes, please specify the associations 若有，請提供專業協會名稱：

17. Do you think there are new knowledge being created to suffice the missions assigned to your office? 為完成發展目標及交辦任務，您的單位是否需創造新知識以達標？ Optional

- Yes 是
- No 否

17.a. If you selected Yes, please specify 若有相關情形，請簡述範例：

18. On a scale of one (strongly disagree) to ten (strongly agree), how much do you agree or disagree to the following statements? 請以1（完全不同意）至10（完全同意）評分以下敘述是否為真：

	1（完全不同意）至10（完全同意） ✱ Required									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I have sufficient authorisation for the best practice of my job. 我具有足夠授權，能將工作做到最好	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
There are opportunities and positions for me to advance my career within the university. 大學組織規劃提供我足夠的機會及適合的職位以發展我的職涯	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am supported to develop and grow in my job. 我具有足夠的支援，以在我的職位上成長與發展	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The university provides enough support (eg. Training, external courses, mentoring…) to administrators. 我任職之大學為行政人員提供足夠資源（例如：訓練、外部課程、生涯導師…等）	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The university provides enough recognition (eg. Rewards, promotion opportunities…) to administrators. 我任職之大學對行政人員具足夠認同（例如：獎勵、升遷機會…等）	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

19. What do you think are the benefits of this role? 您覺得目前任職職位有何優點？

20. What do you think are the limitations of this role? 您覺得目前任職職位有何限制？

Page 4: Participation in interview

If you'd like to take part in the following interview and discuss the professionalisation further, please fill in the contact information below. 請問您是否願意參加訪談，更深入地討論高教行政專業化之問題？若願意，請提供以下聯絡資訊：

＊若不參加，請按繼續至下一頁送出問卷。＊

The interview can be in person or online, and will last about 60 mins. 訪談可線上或當面進行，預估時間為一小時。

21. Name 姓名

22. Email

Page 5: Final page

Thank you very much for your participation and sharing! If you'd like to get in touch, please contact: julie.lin@education.ox.ac.uk

誠摯感謝您參與此份問卷研究，若您需要更多資訊，歡迎與我聯絡：julie.lin@education.ox.ac.uk

Appendix III Interview questions

Individual

1. Have you had jobs outside higher education administration?
a. Why did you choose the current role?
2. What is your career plan? Is it in higher education administration?
a. If it is not, is it related to higher education?
3. How do you see opportunities to build a career in higher education administration?

你覺得是否有機會將高等教育行政視為生涯規劃的職業？

4. What kind of trainings and development programmes are provided for administrators?
5. What type of training and/or development programmes were provided for you within three months when you first started this role?
6. What trainings and development programmes do you think are currently lacking?
7. Referring back to Questionnaire question no. 8. You view your role as/not as professional.
a. Why or why not?
b. Has the perception changed?
c. Can you provide examples/experiences that helped form your recognition?
8. Referring back to Questionnaire question no. 9, who view your role as/ not as professional?
a. Why or why not?
b. Has the perception changed?
c. Can you provide examples/experiences that helped form your recognition?
9. What qualities do you think is required and expected of your role?

10. What do you think have been supportive higher education administration?
a. At the university?
b. In Singapore/Taiwan?
c. Internationally?

11. What do you think can be improved in higher education administration?
a. At the university?

b. In Singapore/Taiwan?

c. Internationally?

12. What are the limitations for higher education administration to improve?

a. At the university?

b. In Singapore/Taiwan?

c. Internationally?

History

1. When was the office established? Can you talk about its development history until now?
2. How many people were employed when you joined the office?
    a. What are their job division?
    b. How many people are employed now?
    c. What are their job division?
3. Why did you join the office? What was the motivation?
4. How was the hiring procedure?
5. What are the criteria for promotion?
    a. Have you been promoted? Under what circumstances?
6. Has the mission of the office changed? What were the changes?

Appendix IV Bilingual Glossary

Page	Chinese	Pinyin	English translation	Discussion
p.73, 74, 139	職業	zhiye	Occupation	Can sometimes be translated into occupation, but also are applied intermittently as profession. In context such as sociology of profession, this word is sometimes used as the translation for profession, too.
p.73, 74, 88,139, 178,186, 187,188, 265	專業	zhuanye	Profession, professional	Profession related, but can also mean special skill or expertise.
p.73	職業社會學	zhiye shehuixue	Sociology of profession	Can have more of an indication of profession as a professionalised occupation. Used intermittently with Zhuanye Shehuixue.
p.73	專業社會學	zhuanye shehuixue	Sociology of profession	Used intermittently with Zhiye Shehuixue, but can also be misinterpreted as an expertise in sociology or emphasising on the academic perspective of sociology
p.73, 264	專門職業	zhuanmen zhiye	Specialised occupation	Probably the closer and clearer translation of profession, as it is specialised or professionalised occupation. However, in a shorten form of 專職 (zhuanzhi) the meaning turned to full-time worker or a worker's major job aim, but not a profession.
p.73, 74	專業人員	zhuanye renyuan	professional personnel	With a connotation that means closer to technicians. Taiwanese government listed the recognised 專業(zhuanye, professional skills), and it includes aerodynamics, hydrodynamics and other more scientific knowledge. Has an implication of workers with professional skills.

p.74	專業人士	zhuanye renshi	professional personnel	Is used more in commercial context to refer to the business professionals, can be broadened to refer to general professionals.
p.74	專業社群	zhuanye shequn	professional community	Community consisted of professionals.
p.74	職業社群	zhiye shequn	professional community	Community consisted of people from the same occupation.
p.74	專業化	zhuanyehua	professionalisation	To become a profession/ Make a personal a professional.
p.74	身份	shenfen	Identity	the word can be limited to representing one's occupation hiring path or citizen identity in a society
p.74	認同	rentong	Recognition	One's recognition and understanding toward oneself, in this study specifically toward one's own level of occupation professionalism.
p.74	身份認同	shenfen rentong	Identity Recognition	Combining the two words above to be more specific and inclusive in presenting the professional identity.
p.152, 153, 228	傳承	Chuancheng	Inherit	Chuancheng has the context of passing down what one inherits. It is learning, absorbing, and receiving something, often abstract, such as spirit, history, or traditions, and then passing it down or teaching it to the next generation.
p.168, 228	素養	Suyang	Cultivation; attainment	Suyang conveys comprehensive knowledge and values practised and demonstrated through behaviours, generally with positive connotations. The word also include attitude and moral characters in expectations.

Appendix V Thematic coding map

Micro			Meso			Exo			Macro			Chrono	
Professional identity	Ways to do work	Rejecting assigned tasks	Office	Office setting	Office environment	Organisation structure, composition, and development	University as an institution	University characteristics	Institutional influences and environments	governance	Government interventions	Development	Positive impact
		Disrespect in academia			Member numbers and compositions			Organisation structure			Government support		Continuous growth
		What one believes in			Cross-Office communication			University development			Governance		Changing brings motivation
		Giving up perfectionism			Resource distribution			University responsibility			Laws and influence		Personal breakthrough
		Constant growth			Heavy workload		University operation	Internal division			Specific policy influences		Pushing boundary
		Thinking one step further			Employee differences			Funding porjects and usages		Society: environment, value, and perceptions	imbalanced gender power relations		Flexibility
		External recognition			Office history			Staff support			Expectations related to family		Supportive environment
		Finish what's assigned		Office culture	Passing down 傳承		Recruitment and employment	Human resource guidelines			Cultural conflict		Increasing recognition
		Useful for the community						Role requirements			Societal norm limitations	Challenges	Authorisation
		Ambiguity at work			Office atmosphere			Hiring route			People-oriented		KPI chasing
		Faculty relationships			A driven mindset			Civil service			Reputation building		Bureaucracy
		Experience brings depth			Mission motivated			Roles division			Research landscape		Change
		Stability in changing			Sharing responsibilities			Recruitment difficulty		Employing institution differences	Working in public sector		Choiceless
		Neutrality toward work			representation			Other monetary support			Working in University		Competition
	Challenging status quo	Blackhorse			Open minded			Salary			Working in industry		Overwhelmed
		Credentialism			A team together	Management: Beliefs, structure, and working styles	Middle management	Budget distribution		Being a professional	By contribution		Compromise
		Lack of support		Task	Assisting faculty			Authorisation and valuation			By experience		Dichotomy
		Kick up a fuss			Crisis management			Senior management centred decion-making			By expertise		Budget limit
		How title influences			Institution expansion			Proactive management			By recognition		Human factor
	Personal values	Prioritising family			Task expansion			Hierarchical relationships			By institutionalise		Low career transfer aspect
		Aligned characteristics			Meeting multiple expectations			Supporting bottom Up initiative			By comparison		Hierarchy
		Seeing myself as a professional			Starting something new			Two-way communication			By working attitude		Politics
		self-doubt on professionalism			Bureaucratic and repeating tasks			Changing management			By integration		Power dynamics in institutions
		Doing "the right thing"			Task devision		Senior management	Enterprise style management			By work content		Low Recognition

Micro		
		sense of purpose 使命感
	Driven	Improvement driven
		Eager to learn
		Seek for answer
		Service mindset
Building a career	Future expectations	
	Career definition	
	Entering a role	Family related decision
		Accidental
		Allocation
		Personal principle
	Continuation on the role	Stability
		Environment and human factors
		Career professionalisation
		Promotion
		Lack of vision
		Job content
		Transition
		Discrepancy on job
		Flexibility
		difficulty to move
		Environment
	Exit of role	Another cause
		Timing
		Career angle changes
		Lack of vision

Meso		
		Skill expansion
		Confusing work coverage
Professional development	Training	Talent cultivation
		Need for training
		Postgraduate knowledge
	Self-learning	Learn from job
		Learn from colleagues
		Learn by oneself
	Institution training	On-boarding
		Office training
		University training
	Challenges	Hard to systemise
		Going immediately to battlefield
		Too specialised skills
Office-based skills	Research skills	Patent
		Research ethics
		Research Management
		Protocol knowledge
		Research project
	International skills	Negotiation
		Internationalisation
		Integrating information quickly
		Language quality
		Open mindedness
	Other skills	Statistics
		Collaboration
		Communication
		Innovation
		Strategy
		Experiential
		Data processing
		Research
		Writing

Exo		
		Lack of administration knowledge
		Not-grounded
		Multitasking part-time managers
		Management influence on team atmosphere
		Management vision
		Governance/Supervision
		Politics in management
		Academic communication
		Management promotion structures
Administration role, knowledge, and limits	Admin limit	
	Views toward administration	
	Administrator category	
	Administrator v.s. professional	
		Disrespected
		Administrative knowledge
		Personal factor in admin
		As connecting nodes
		Working with academics
		Faculty-admin relationships

Macro		
Expected to have	Proficiency	
		Service mindset
		Unique expertise
		Quality (素養)
		Systematic knowledge