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Author(s): Ming-sho Ho

Source: *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (February 2006), pp. 66-89

Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Comparative and International Education Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/498329>

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# The Politics of Preschool Education Vouchers in Taiwan

MING-SHO HO

In the fall of 2000, children who attended approved private kindergartens in Taiwan became eligible for annual vouchers of NT\$10,000 (New Taiwan dollars).<sup>1</sup> By providing public funds for vouchers, Taiwan's government reversed its previous hands-off approach to private preschool education. Previously, most government spending on early childhood education was used to support public kindergartens. In 2000, only 30 percent of preschool-aged children attended public kindergartens. Most attended private kindergartens, which received few public subsidies.<sup>2</sup> By subsidizing private preschool tuition, vouchers were intended to narrow the growing inequalities in education choices between wealthier and poorer families. Government officials justified vouchers on the grounds of "rationalizing the distribution of resources" and "lessening the economic burden on parents."<sup>3</sup> In addition, scholars and private kindergarten entrepreneurs hailed the voucher reform as an integral step in the modernization of preschool education. Vouchers were claimed to enable parental choice and school competition and to improve children's welfare. Preschool vouchers were rapidly integrated into Taiwan's ongoing education reform, which had been initiated in the mid-1990s.

How can we understand the rise in the use of preschool vouchers in Taiwan? The emergence of vouchers seems puzzling because the concept of vouchers did not originate in Taiwan, nor did the more general neoliberal idea of education privatization. Most parents have preferred to send their children to public kindergartens, which charge lower tuition fees and are seen to provide more reliable service. In 2001, an opinion poll showed that nearly 80 percent of interviewees agreed that the government should make it possible for every child to enter public kindergarten.<sup>4</sup> The support for

This study is supported by Taiwan's National Science Council (NSC93-2413-H-343-007-FG). I thank Yu-hui Chen for allowing me to use some of her research materials and David Post and Erik Tollefson for suggestions and editorial help.

<sup>1</sup> In Taiwan, *yuchihiyüan* (translated here as "kindergarten") refers to preprimary schooling for children ages 4 to 5. The term *hsüehchien chiaoyü* (preschool education) is also used to describe this system. In this article, *yuerh chiaoyüchiüan* (early childhood education voucher) is translated as "preschool education voucher."

<sup>2</sup> My calculations use education statistics from Taiwan's Ministry of Education, available at [http://www.edu.tw/EDU\\_WEB/EDU\\_MGT/STATISTICS/EDU7220001/user3/k.htm?open](http://www.edu.tw/EDU_WEB/EDU_MGT/STATISTICS/EDU7220001/user3/k.htm?open).

<sup>3</sup> This is cited from a news release (2001) of the Ministry of Education, available at [http://www.edu.tw/EDU\\_WEB/EDU\\_MGT/SECRETARY/EDU9082001/importance/901120-2.htm?search](http://www.edu.tw/EDU_WEB/EDU_MGT/SECRETARY/EDU9082001/importance/901120-2.htm?search).

<sup>4</sup> Chin-hong Chang, "National Compulsory Education Should Extend to Preschool Level," *United Daily*, November 21, 2001, 8.

*Comparative Education Review*, vol. 50, no. 1.

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0010-4086/2006/5001-0004\$05.00

public preschool education is even more remarkable given the fact this poll was taken after the introduction of the voucher system. If parents had a choice, they would have preferred public kindergartens for their children.

Analyzing the possible reasons for the push for vouchers worldwide, David Plank and Gary Sykes identify four causes. First, the intellectual and ideological current has taken a neoliberal turn, and there are growing criticisms of inefficient, bureaucratically managed public schools. Second, voucher plans are promoted by prestigious transnational institutions, such as the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Third, as the average number children in each family declines, parents care as much about the quality as they do about the quantity of education. Finally, vouchers are a politically viable means to upgrade school performance without spending more money.<sup>5</sup>

During the post-World War II era, Taiwan's educational system was state centered. The government controlled school resources, regulated the education system, and managed a vast public sector. This statist tradition went hand-in-hand with a political authoritarianism that viewed education as a vital instrument for political indoctrination and economic planning. The vouchers directed a portion of taxpayer money into private education tuition and, thus, broke with the statist emphasis on public schooling. Given the fact that vouchers are increasingly advocated to resolve education problems worldwide, the international neoliberal current might be influential for Taiwan's voucher system.<sup>6</sup> Or, to phrase it in the terms of neoinstitutionalist sociology, Taiwan's embrace of vouchers can be seen as part of a global, isomorphic process that homogenizes education systems throughout the world.<sup>7</sup> As part of a wave of political democratization in the 1990s, Taiwan's likelihood of adopting an internationally fashionable policy option increased along with greater exposure by leaders to ideas originating elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> Neoinstitutionalists suggest that there is a secular worldwide convergence of education systems that cannot be explained by any single factor, such as state strength, economic development, or class interest. Rather, mass schooling becomes a worldwide institution because of the prevalence of a nation-state model in which state is crystallized as the guardian of nationhood.<sup>9</sup> Neoinstitutionalists

<sup>5</sup> David N. Plank and Gary Sykes, "Why School Choice?" in *Choosing Choice: School Choice in International Perspective*, ed. David N. Plank and Gary Sykes (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2003), vii–xxi.

<sup>6</sup> Varun Gauri and Ayesha Vawda, "Vouchers for Basic Education in Developing Countries: A Principal Agent Perspective," *World Bank Research Observer* 19, no. 2 (2004): 259–80.

<sup>7</sup> Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (1983): 147–60.

<sup>8</sup> Hung-mao Tien, ed., *Taiwan's Electoral Politics and Democratic Transition: Riding the Third Wave* (New York: Sharpe, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez, and Yasemin Nohugolu Soysal, "World Expansion of Mass Education, 1870–1980," *Sociology Education* 65 (1992): 131–32.

further argue against the “descriptive historicism” that explains individual education development by specific contextual factors.<sup>10</sup>

The evidence presented in this article argues against a neoinstitutionalist isomorphism interpretation of Taiwan’s embrace of vouchers. To anticipate, I find that, despite the persuasive influence of international neoliberal ideology, the origin of Taiwan’s national preschool policy is local. Private kindergarten business interests spearheaded a political campaign. Only because of its success were neoliberal ideas applied to Taiwanese preschools, despite reluctant education officials. Private schools mobilized for vouchers in order to fight the rapid expansion of public kindergartens that came as a policy response to the growing popular demand during the democratic transition. Owners of private kindergartens pushed for vouchers in order to preserve their market share.

Methodologically, one goal of this article is to highlight the need for understanding the causal mechanisms that catalyze policy innovation. A causal analysis of voucher politics focuses on the process rather than the result of the innovation. The political success of private kindergarten business interests derives from their capability to open a space for collective mobilization in Taiwan’s democracy. However, democratization has had different effects for different groups. The fact that Taiwan’s kindergarten teachers continued to be legally barred from unionizing significantly reduced the opposition to voucher policy. Parents are potential advocates for public kindergartens, but their lack of organization deprives them of adequate political weight. If kindergarten teachers and parents had organized, they might have pursued an independent agenda rather than follow the provoucher bandwagon as they did. Thus, a process-centered study underlines the significance of what Barrington Moore Jr. calls “suppressed historical alternatives.”<sup>11</sup>

Rather than assume an immanent logic of isomorphism, in this study I analyze the combination of contextual factors that paved the way for Taiwan’s adoption of preschool vouchers. To illuminate the political process, I consider the bargaining model developed by Paul Burstein.<sup>12</sup> In this model, social groups try to preserve or promote their interests by mobilizing their constituencies to change the current policy. Their ultimate success depends upon the ability to strike a workable alliance with the power elites. Thus, innovation in educational policy is seen as a function of multiorganizational interactions rather than as an automatic adjustment to societal needs. For research reported here, I relied on journalistic reports, unpublished official documents,

<sup>10</sup> Francisco O. Ramirez and John W. Meyer, “Comparative Education: The Social Construction of the Modern World System,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 6 (1980): 394.

<sup>11</sup> Barrington Moore Jr., *Injustice: Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (New York: Sharpe, 1978).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Burstein, Rachel L. Einwohner, and Jocelyn A. Hollander, “The Success of Political Movements: A Bargaining Perspective,” in *The Politics of Social Protest*, ed. J. C. Jenkins and B. Klandermans (London: University of London Press, 1995), 275–95; Paul Burstein, “Policy Domain: Organization, Culture, and Policy Outcomes,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991): 327–50, and “Social Movement and Public Policy,” in *How Social Movements Matter*, ed. Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 3–21.

voucher movement brochures, and other publications. To obtain unpublished information, I conducted 20 interviews in 2002–3 with business leaders of private kindergarten and officials in this field. Interview questions concerned the collective action of kindergarten businesses, including mobilizing and bargaining, and officials' attitudes regarding the preschool policy. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

### Top-Down and Bottom-Up Politics of Vouchers

Using vouchers, parents can send their children to private schools with less cost. If parents are fed up with poorly managed public schools, why not ask the government to return their tax money devoted to education in order for them to spend it elsewhere? Implicit in the idea underpinning the case for vouchers is a neoliberal program to denationalize the education sector. Referring to the U.S. context, Milton Friedman, the original framer of the voucher scheme, wrote of the school system as “an island of socialism in a free market sea.”<sup>13</sup> Friedman believed that the free market enabled better allocation of resources because government-financed schooling was inherently inefficient. Unlike other neoliberal attempts to privatize state-owned enterprises and social services, a voucher plan does not attempt a large-scale transfer of ownership or management rights. Rather, vouchers work on the demand side based on the notion of “consumer sovereignty.”<sup>14</sup> Hence, parents are viewed as the consumer of education service, and they are supposed to possess better knowledge of what their children need than do government bureaucrats. As a result, the proposal for vouchers inherently has a potential populist appeal in that a great majority of parents are regarded as victims of the rigid public schooling system that deprives them the luxury of choice.

Nevertheless, in spite of the populist appeal, neoliberal education reform in the United States has tended to be promoted from the top down. In 2001, Terry Moe characterized the U.S. debate as operating mainly on the “elite level.” While the political battle line delineating pros and cons largely overlaps with elites' partisanship, the public is either uninformed or misinformed about the voucher debate.<sup>15</sup> Other voucher reform efforts have also been top-down in nature. In Sweden and New Zealand, conservative parties pushed a step beyond the previous cautious decentralization reform and adopted a

<sup>13</sup> Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 97; Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 154.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Bowe, Stephen Ball, and Sharon Gewirtz, “‘Parental Choice,’ Consumption and Social Theory: The Operation of Micro-Markets in Education,” *British Journal of Education Review* 42 (1994): 38–52; Peter W. Cookson Jr., “The Ideology of Consumerism and the Coming Deregulation of the Public School System,” in *The Choice Controversy*, ed. Peter W. Cookson Jr. (Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press, 1992), 83–99.

<sup>15</sup> Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers and the American Public* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2001), 4.

voucher plan to encourage the “marketization” of education.<sup>16</sup> In Chile, the prochoice policy was a brainchild of University of Chicago–trained economists and the right-wing military junta.<sup>17</sup> The Chilean case was particularly noteworthy in that observers claimed Chile’s plan “approximates a national choice model more closely than any other system in the world”<sup>18</sup> The highly repressive nature of the Pinochet regime facilitated the adaptation of this radical model through the silencing of potential dissenters. To implement the Chilean national voucher plan, schoolteachers’ tenure was revoked, the existing pay scale abolished, and collective bargaining outlawed.<sup>19</sup>

Under what conditions might voucher reforms emerge, in contrast to the previous examples, from the bottom-up rather than from top-down politics? How might voucher reform result from collective demands organized within civil society and pressed upon leaders? Neoliberal proponents often loosely described the international push for vouchers as a “movement.” However, strictly speaking, social movements are “collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities.”<sup>20</sup> As we will see, Taiwan’s voucher reform was unique in that it began as a social movement and ended as a national policy. Taiwan’s democratization first made education officials more sensitive to the need of parents, who gained more political influence as electoral competition heightened. A series of programs to expand public kindergartens were adopted throughout the 1990s, resulting in the reduction of market share for the private sector. Democratization also engendered a new movement for education reform as urban middle-class parents, students, and feminists clamored for better education. Amid the politicization of education, private kindergarten owners began to stage a campaign for vouchers by adopting many successful tactics used in previous movements for education reform. Relying on their organizational strength in the mobilization of a national network and on their political shrewdness to make use of electoral politics, they succeeded in persuading the incumbents into accepting vouchers. During the voucher campaign, other potential advocates (public kindergarten teachers) or beneficiaries (the majority of parents) of public schooling were not or-

<sup>16</sup> Martin Carnoy, “National Voucher Plans in Chile and Sweden: Did Privatization Reforms Make for Better Education?” *Comparative Education Review* 42 (1998): 309–37; Edward B. Fiske and Helen F. Ladd, “School Choice in New Zealand: A Cautionary Tale,” in *Choosing Choice: School Choice in International Perspective*, ed. David N. Plank and Gary Sykes (New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 2003), 45–67.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Carnoy and Patrick J. McEwan, “Does Privatization Improve Education? The Case of Chile’s National Voucher Plan,” in *Choosing Choice: School Choice in International Perspective*, ed. David N. Plank and Gary Sykes (New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 2003), 24–44.

<sup>18</sup> Varun Gauri, *School Choice in Chile: Two Decades of Education Reform* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3–4.

ganized so that they could not resist the successful bargaining of private kindergarten business.

### Taiwan's Democratization and Education Reform in Comparative Perspective

Democratization and educational marketization emerged jointly in Taiwan. As state political authority was challenged and reduced, the government's monopoly in education became less tenable. In this regard, Taiwanese education reforms shared many features with those of newly democratizing South Korea. South Korea and Taiwan shared a common Confucian tradition, ferocious anticommunism, and a concern with technical training for economic development. Both nations embarked on ambitious education reform plans in the 1990s, with emphasis on deregulating the rigidity of the statist control over school admission and curriculum. Yet the decentralizing reforms did not lead to the same changes in school financing. While Taiwan moved closer toward neoliberalism, South Korea's government expanded its educational regulation and investment.

Both Taiwan's and South Korea's Ministries of Education exercised a great degree of control over schooling system. A host of governmental supervision mechanisms were installed to ensure that schooling turned out economically productive, yet politically submissive, citizens during the cold war era. As democratizing wave swept across both countries, education systems were in need of a major overhaul. Amid popular pressure, Taiwan established a cabinet-level Deliberative Committee on Education Reform in 1994, whose four-volume official report in 1996 established the practical guidelines of subsequent education policies. Similarly, South Korea established a Presidential Commission for Education Reform in 1994. Each nation's reform agencies emerged after their political incumbents sought to implement alternatives to those permitted under a statist model. Hence, both national agencies were empowered to formulate reform plans, while Ministries of Education were charged with implementing them.

There were also structural similarities in the two nation's educational reforms. First, a concerted effort was made to scrap the existing uniform control over school management. In place of the former equalization policy, the South Korean government now gave provincial and city boards of education outside of Seoul permission to decide whether to allow high schools to compete for student selection.<sup>21</sup> Colleges located outside of Seoul were given the right to select students freely, and the procedures for private schools became simpler.<sup>22</sup> Higher education institutions were granted the right to

<sup>21</sup> Michael J. Seth, *Education Fever: Society, Politics, and the Pursuit of Schooling in South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 241.

<sup>22</sup> Sungwoon Kim and Ju-ho Lee, "Hierarchy and Market Competition in South Korean Higher Education Sector," available at [http://cepri.kdischool.ac.kr/eng/data/pdf/2003\\_2.pdf](http://cepri.kdischool.ac.kr/eng/data/pdf/2003_2.pdf) (2003), 3.

determine enrollment numbers and to decide the size of their departments.<sup>23</sup> Also, entrance examinations administrated by individual colleges were abolished in 1997 in order to establish a uniform admission system.<sup>24</sup> In Taiwan, similar changes occurred. As the polity was democratized, the style of educational decision making changed from autocracy to consultation. Colleges and universities were given a larger voice in deciding their programs and admission.<sup>25</sup> Deregulation of tuition fees, lowering the threshold for establishing a private college, and increased school autonomy pushed Taiwan's higher education toward marketization.<sup>26</sup> In place of the joint entrance examinations for high schools and colleges, a system of plural admission including a significant portion of student applications was set up. In a word, top-down state control of curriculum, personnel, admission, and organization gave way to pluralism, making possible a great variety of experiments in South Korea and Taiwan.

Curriculum reforms also occurred in both nations. After 1995, South Korean high school history textbooks contained less anticommunist rhetoric and greater attention to liberal democracy.<sup>27</sup> In addition, diversification of teaching and learning in school was now encouraged as traditional teacher-centered authoritarian pedagogy was increasingly criticized.<sup>28</sup> Taiwan similarly depoliticized the curriculum, as indoctrination was gradually removed.<sup>29</sup> As a reaction against the Chinese nationalist education during the authoritarian era, a greater emphasis was placed on Taiwanese identity and history. In 2001, a new curriculum was implemented to encourage a more balanced development of students' diverse abilities.

A third parallel concerns the unionization of teachers. After removal of authoritarian control, schoolteachers demanded the right to organize. In 1999, after several years of struggle, Korean teachers won this right and could act openly as a pressure group.<sup>30</sup> Taiwanese teachers began to mobilize for job protection and teaching autonomy in the late 1980s. In 1995, they scored a partial success in the passage of a law allowing teachers' associations to be established both locally and nationally, though without collective bargaining

<sup>23</sup> Namgi Park, "The 31 May 1995 Higher Education Reform," in *Higher Education in Korea*, ed. John C. Weideman and Namgi Park (New York: Falmer, 2000), 164–65.

<sup>24</sup> Young-Hwa Kim, "Recent Developments in Korean School Education," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 10 (1999): 68.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth M. Hawthorne, "Increasing Understanding of Decision Making in Higher Education: The Case of Taiwan," *Quality in Higher Education* 2 (1996): 65–77.

<sup>26</sup> Ka-ho Mok, "From Nationalization to Marketization: Changing Governance in Taiwan's Higher-Education System," *Governance* 15 (2002): 137–59.

<sup>27</sup> Seth, *Education Fever*, 233.

<sup>28</sup> Gwang-Jo Kim, "Education Polices and Reform in South Korea," World Bank paper, n.d., available at [http://www.worldbank.org/afr/seia/SE\\_strat\\_re\\_ch3.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/afr/seia/SE_strat_re_ch3.pdf), 37.

<sup>29</sup> Wing-wah Law, "Fortress State, Cultural Continuities, and Economic Change: Higher Education in Mainland China and Taiwan," *Comparative Education* 32 (1996): 377–93.

<sup>30</sup> Seth, *Education Fever*, 231.



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TABLE 1  
EDUCATION SPENDING AS A PERCENTAGE OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT IN SOUTH KOREA  
AND TAIWAN (1997–2001)

Expenditure	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
South Korea:					
Total	NA	7.03	6.80	7.10	8.20
Public	NA	4.07	4.10	4.30	4.80
Private	NA	2.96	2.70	2.80	3.40
Taiwan:					
Total	6.61	6.29	6.31	5.70	6.20
Public	5.21	4.92	4.92	4.35	4.54
Private	1.40	1.37	1.39	1.35	1.67

SOURCES.—For South Korea data: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Education at a Glance*, an OECD report, available at <http://taddeo.sourceoecd.org.osiyou.cc.columbia.edu:2048/vl=935557/cl=29/nw=1/rpsv/cgi-bin/fulltextew.pl?prpsv=/ij/oecdthemes/99980029/v2003n8/s5/p182.idx>; for Taiwan data: Ministry of Education, Taiwan, [http://www.edu.tw/EDU\\_WEB/EDU\\_MGT/STATISTICS/EDU7220001/user1/index06.htm?open](http://www.edu.tw/EDU_WEB/EDU_MGT/STATISTICS/EDU7220001/user1/index06.htm?open).

power. The struggle for unionization intensified in a 2002 demonstration that brought over a hundred thousand teachers into the street. In sum, educational reforms in Taiwan and South Korea were the outgrowths of broader democratization. State power was restrained to make room for more school management autonomy, pluralism in curriculum, and teachers' organization.

Notwithstanding these parallels, there were also divergences between the two countries in terms of educational finance. In 1995, South Korea planned to increase education spending to 5 percent of gross national product. In reality, the government kept this pledge by accelerating its 2001 commitment to refurbish schools under the Local Education Grant Act. More recently, Korea's government has launched a 7-year investment plan for tertiary education institutions.<sup>31</sup> In sharp contrast, Taiwan's 1996 education reform proposal cited budgetary difficulties and low tuition fees as reasons for its reliance on private financing. Instead of increasing public investment, the neoliberal prescription was applied to the following reforms.<sup>32</sup> In 1997, the government further decided to delete the constitutional provision concerning the lower limit of public education spending in spite of popular protests. As a result, while the public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product in South Korea grew into the late 1990s, the figure in Taiwan declined (see table 1).

Several explanations might be used to explain the divergent paths of school financing. After South Korea joined the OECD, in 1996, it became apparent that its public spending on education was far below the average of industrialized nations. The expenses associated with private tutoring were a burden for Korean working families, and the government's increased edu-

<sup>31</sup> Kim, "Education Policies," 37–38.

<sup>32</sup> Deliberative Committee on Education Reform, *Tiyichi tzeysi aokaoshu* [The first report on education reform advice] (Taipei: Executive Yuan, 1995), 50–52.

cation spending sought to readdress this imbalance.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the Asian financial crisis severely affected South Korea in 1997–98 and raised public concern over equality. Education policies became a litmus test signaling Korea's dedication to the promotion of equal opportunity.<sup>34</sup> Finally, neoliberal economists played a more important role in Taiwan's policy-formulating process, as is evident in its 1996 report.

Concerning preschool education, both countries sought to increase enrollment. Previously, both governments channeled education resources toward primary and secondary levels, resulting in large numbers of private kindergartens. Korea's government, in tandem with its emphasis on public spending, announced a plan to offer universal free preschool education to all 5-year-olds in 2001.<sup>35</sup> In stark contrast, neoliberal policy orientation and private kindergartens mobilization pushed the Taiwanese government to adopt vouchers.

Even a brief comparison of South Korea and Taiwan reveals the indeterminacy of political democratization upon education reforms. Although there were common efforts to decentralize the education system following the end of authoritarian rule, the move toward private financing and vouchers was not inevitable. The distinctive evolution of preschool education in Korea and Taiwan underscores the need to pay greater attention to the roles played by local factors. In each case, democratization permitted education reform by opening a space for political contestation. As a result, education became a competitive arena for diverse social interests, whose successful mobilization and bargaining catalyzed the policy shift.

#### The Taiwanese Market for Kindergartens

To understand why private kindergarten owners mobilized around the adoption of vouchers, it is first necessary to appreciate the policy environment and market structure of preschool education in Taiwan. In contrast to primary and secondary education, preschools have received chronically low government funding. Private institutions predominate today, but in the years after 1949 public kindergartens were more numerous.<sup>36</sup> The original purpose of public kindergartens was to serve the families of public employees. The turning point came in 1961, when private kindergartens began to grow faster than public kindergartens. From that year until the 1970s, public kindergartens underwent an absolute and relative decline. During this critical period, Taiwan experienced

<sup>33</sup> Jisoon Lee, "Education Policy in the Republic of Korea: Building Block or Stumbling Block?" World Bank paper, 2003, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/publications/wbi37164.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Seth, *Education Fever*, 243.

<sup>35</sup> Young-ihm Kwon, "A Comparative Analysis of Preschool Education in Korea and England," *Comparative Education* 39 (2003): 481.

<sup>36</sup> Unless specified, private kindergartens refer only to the registered private ones. Unregistered kindergartens are always private, but, for the sake of brevity, they are referred to as "unregistered" or "underground."

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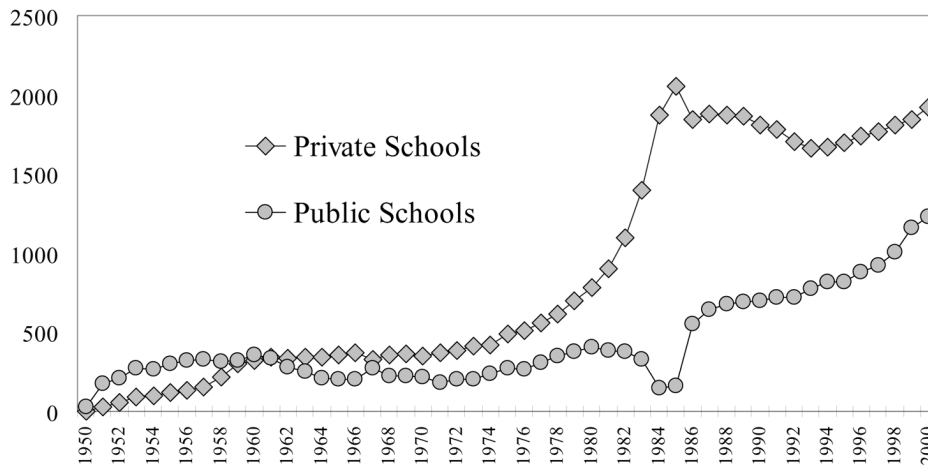


FIG. 1.—Number of kindergartens in Taiwan, 1995–2000. Source: [http://www.edu.tw/EDU\\_WEB/EDU\\_MGT/STATISTICS/EDU7220001/service/sts4-3.htm?TYPE=1&UNITID=93CATEGORYID=0&FILEID=11283](http://www.edu.tw/EDU_WEB/EDU_MGT/STATISTICS/EDU7220001/service/sts4-3.htm?TYPE=1&UNITID=93CATEGORYID=0&FILEID=11283).

phenomenal economic growth through its export-oriented industrialization. As this increased the proportion of urban residents, nuclear families, and working mothers, the demand for preschool education and day care surged. Because the government had neglected early childhood education facilities, the number and popularity of private kindergartens grew tremendously. From 1961 to 1981, the number of public kindergartens grew only by 10.7 percent, while private kindergartens increased by 265.6 percent.<sup>37</sup> In 1981 more than 70 percent of the 1,285 registered kindergartens were private (see fig. 1). Over the next 2 decades there was sustained growth in public kindergartens, but already by the early 1980s a market in which private kindergarten predominated had been firmly established, as can be appreciated in figure 1.

Prior to the implementation of the voucher policy, almost every penny of the government's budget for preschool education was spent on public kindergartens. Without that subsidy, the entire cost of private kindergartens was paid by parents. Consequently, by 1999, parents sending their children to private kindergartens paid on average 221.1 percent more in tuition (see table 1).<sup>38</sup> By the 1990s, the tuition fee for private kindergarten exceeded the tuition charged by public universities, and it was only slightly lower than

<sup>37</sup> My calculations are based on data from the Ministry of Education, *Education Statistics* (Taipei: Ministry of Education, 2001), 4–6.

<sup>38</sup> My calculations are based on data from the Ministry of Education, "Chuankuo yuer chiaoyu pucha chihua" [A national survey of preschool education] (unpublished paper, Ministry of Education, Taipei, 2002), 251.

TABLE 2  
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE KINDERGARTENS COMPARED

	Public	Private
Annual tuition fee (NT\$)	24,157	77,577
Monthly pay for teacher (NT\$)	38,000	27,948
Indoor area per person (square meters)	30.30	8.20
Outdoor area per person (square meters)	43.00	13.55
Conducting English course (percentage)	9.00	24.00

SOURCE.—Data are based on Ministry of Education, "Chuankuo yuer chiaoyu pucha chihua" [A national survey of preschool education] (unpublished paper, Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 2002).

NOTE.—I calculated and arranged the figures. Annual tuition fee is defined as the sum of two semester fees, two miscellaneous fees, and 10 monthly fees.

that for private universities.<sup>39</sup> It is little wonder that most parents preferred public kindergartens.

Educational quality was another reason for the popularity of public kindergartens. In some instances private kindergartens deliberately violated safety regulations to lower overhead costs. In addition, private kindergartens were noticeably more crowded. Average indoor and outdoor area per person was far below that of public kindergartens. Staff at private kindergartens tended to be underpaid, with a total income of less than three-quarters of that paid to staff in public kindergartens (see table 2).

However, notwithstanding their problems, private kindergartens offered several attractive features. Free of bureaucratic red tape, their school schedules and curricula were more innovative and flexible. Public kindergartens had longer vacations and fewer hours of learning and were less convenient for working parents. Indeed, since parents could not pick up their children until 5:00 p.m., some chose to pay more for private kindergartens. Private kindergartens introduced novel teaching techniques and English courses.<sup>40</sup>

Legally, all kindergartens needed to apply for an operating license and abide by such regulations as those concerning minimum space, zoning, and teacher qualifications. Because private kindergartens were profit-making organizations, they were obliged to pay business taxes and higher utility rates. Some private kindergartens compensated by enrolling more students than educational regulations permitted. In 2000, private kindergartens lobbied to raise the upper limits on their enrollments.<sup>41</sup> Another strategy of private kindergartens was to go underground and to not register with the government. Underground kindergartens, by avoiding legal regulations, enjoyed a

<sup>39</sup> In 1999, the annual tuition for liberal arts college in public university was NT\$39,260 (the average of National Taiwan University and National Taiwan Normal University), while that in private university was NT\$84,270 (the average of Tunghai University and Soochow University). My calculations are based on data available at <http://www.edu.tw/statistics/index.htm>. On the other hand, the average tuition fee for private kindergartens costs NT\$77,577.

<sup>40</sup> Yu-shang Sheng, "Quality of Early Childhood Education under Test," *Economic Daily*, May 4, 1993, 28.

<sup>41</sup> Chin-hong Chang, "Over-enrollment Disqualifies Subsidy," *United Daily*, February 19, 2000, 6.

cost advantage. The Deliberative Committee on Education Reform estimated that there were around 2,500 unregistered kindergartens (as compared with 2,484 registered schools).<sup>42</sup> However, the government never moved to close down unregistered private kindergartens because the schools had absorbed so many children that closing them would create a big problem for officials.

#### Democratization and the Crisis of Private Kindergartens

In 1987, the Kuomintang (KMT) government lifted 38 years of martial law. The first round of full elections in the Legislative Yuan was held in 1992. Opposition politics organized into the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). As many commentators pointed out, democratization in Taiwan was “election-driven,” in which the KMT’s and the DPP’s contending for votes pushed the dynamics of transition.<sup>43</sup> As electoral politics became more competitive, getting peoples’ votes began to increase in importance. In this situation, voters might decide to reward those who were able to provide cheap public education service and punish those who upheld the current status quo.<sup>44</sup> As political democracy came into reality, the issue of kindergarten education could not avoid becoming politicized.

Since the late 1980s, opposition politicians had been instrumental in championing issues of education reform. They worked closely with civil groups, by joining public demonstrations, supporting proreform legislation in the Legislative Yuan, and experimenting with new reforms in local governments. First, the 1994 Teacher Law legalized teachers’ associations.<sup>45</sup> Then, the 1995 Teacher Education Law broke the monopoly of conservative normal colleges.<sup>46</sup> Both were products of education reform advocates and DPP legislators. In the mid-1990s, the KMT began to incorporate many reform issues into their policy. Since then, education reform has benefited from bipartisan consensus until the regime shift in 2000. In this context, the voucher campaign in the late 1990s obtained political support across the ideological spectrum. Concretely, democratization empowered the citizens and consumers of preschool education service in two ways. First, government officials became

<sup>42</sup> Deliberative Committee on Education Reform, *Tisanchi tzei aokaoshu* [The third report on education reform advice] (Taipei: Executive Yuan: 1996), 24–25.

<sup>43</sup> Peter R. Moody Jr., *Political Change in Taiwan* (New York: Praeger, 1992); Shelley Rigger, *Taiwan’s Democratic Progressive Party* (Boulder, CO: Rienner, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Regarding the issue of old age pension, for example, scholars have found that the electoral competition led to welfare expansion. See Li-yeh Fu, “Laojen nienchin chengtang chingcheng yu hsuan-chu” [Old-age pension, party competition, and election], in *Taiwan te shehui fuli yuntung* [Taiwan’s social welfare movements], ed. Hsin-huang Hsiao and Kou-ming Lin (Taipei: Chuliu, 2000), 230–56.

<sup>45</sup> Li-ju Chen, “Taiwan chiaoshih jench’uan yüntung te hsingch’i yü chengch’e yinghsiang” [The rise and policy impact of Taiwan’s schoolteachers movement] (MA diss., Nanhua University, Chiayi, Taiwan, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Ray-May Hsung and Chin-Shan Chi, “Shiitzup’eyüfa hsingch’eng te chengch’e fanch’ou yinghsiangli chichih” [The influence mechanism of policy domain in the teacher education law], *Taiwanese Sociology* 4 (2002): 199–246.

more sensitive to the popular demands of parents. Second, liberalized environment enabled these demands to be organized into a powerful social force to affect policy change.

After decades of neglect, government officials began to show visible interest in preschool education. In 1988, the Sixth National Education Conference reached the conclusion to extend compulsory education downward by 1 year.<sup>47</sup> One year later, the Council for Economic Planning and Development formally approved the extension of elementary education.<sup>48</sup> The result was to reverse the relatively slower growth of public kindergartens. The number of public kindergartens grew annually by 7.7 percent in the 1990, while the private sector grew by only 0.6 percent (see fig. 1).<sup>49</sup> For private kindergartens, the 1990s was a lost decade.

How can we explain this reversal? It is likely that education officials responded to a solid popular demand that increasingly gained political leverage. In day care centers, a similar dynamic was visible. After welfare officials noticed the shortage of day care service in 1991, the Ministry of the Interior planned to build “exemplary” day care centers in every county and city. Because the ministry also subsidized 515 units of community day care, private service providers were edged out of the market.<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, the fading of authoritarianism offered new opportunities to mobilize for policy change. Since education and child care traditionally were women’s responsibility, feminist groups lent their support to government day care service. As early as 1987, feminists had argued for the socializing of the duty of child care by employers and the state in order to lessen women’s burden and facilitate their working.<sup>51</sup> Some grassroots women’s organizations were discontented with commercial institutions and staged a campaign to build their own community kindergartens and day care centers.<sup>52</sup> In 1997, a cabinet-level Commission of Women’s Rights Promotion was formed to provide more publicly funded day care services.<sup>53</sup> Thus, women’s voices helped to promote the public preschool sector in the 1990s.

Most important, in the late 1980s there was a coalition of college students, professors, and parents pushing for education reform, the Alliance for Ed-

<sup>47</sup> “Extension of Compulsory Education Found Necessary,” *United Daily*, February 5, 1988, 2.

<sup>48</sup> “CEPD Proposes to Include Early Childhood Education in Compulsory Education,” *Minsheng Daily*, July 6, 1989, 1.

<sup>49</sup> My calculation is based on data from the Ministry of Education, “Statistical Analyses of Educational Development in the Recent Decade” (unpublished paper, Ministry of Education, Taipei, 2003), 28.

<sup>50</sup> Shi-lung Huang, “Difficulties to Promote Social Welfare Nationally and Locally,” *United Daily*, November 4, 1991, 13.

<sup>51</sup> Ying-ming Chu, “Conclusions of Women’s National Affairs Conference,” *United Daily*, March 10, 1997, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Mei-chuang Tsai, “New Themes of Women’s Movement,” *United Daily*, January 15, 1995, 41.

<sup>53</sup> Hsin Chi, *Nüjen yü chengchih: chinlingnientai funüts’ancheng yüntung* [Women and politics: Women’s rights movement in the 1990s] (Taipei: Nüshuwenhua, 2000), 248–51.

ucation Reform. The government responded to this group by forming the Deliberative Committee on Education Reform at the end of that year. With more assertive government initiatives in preschool education, private kindergartens faced increased competition, and owners claimed that they were unduly harmed by the new policy.

In response to the increasing difficulty faced by private kindergartens, in 1997 the National Union of Preschool Education (hereafter “the Union”) was formed. The Union is a national federation of private kindergarten owners whose primary objective is to fight against “expansion of public kindergartens and exemplary day care centers which squeezed the survival space.”<sup>54</sup> The formation of the Union reflected a new strategy by private kindergarten businesses. In the past, the industry acted as an undisguised special interest group proposing overtly self-serving proposals, such as lower taxes, breaks in water and electricity rates, relaxed regulations regarding space and urban planning, and exemptions for their employees regarding the labor law. However, in 1997, the Union followed the spirit of education reform and appropriated the symbols, slogans, and tactics of the April 10 Alliance of Education Reform.

#### **From Proposal to Policy**

Prior to the voucher initiative, the Ministry of Education had preferred to build public kindergartens in order to increase preschool enrollments. In the words of a former vice-minister of education, “The fundamental solution consists in the universal availability of public kindergartens. Businesspersons want to make money. How can we expect them to improve the teaching quality of private kindergartens?”<sup>55</sup> In 1999, the Ministry of Education adopted a plan to develop preschool education through four methods: (1) promoting the building of private kindergartens, (2) promoting kindergartens affiliated with enterprises, (3) experimenting with public ownership and private management, and (4) promoting kindergartens affiliated with primary schools.<sup>56</sup> Although this plan was friendlier for the private sector, the government lacked the resources to support private schools, and the plan did not address the issue of vouchers. The ministry’s top administrators did not foresee the policy turn that was soon to be initiated by elected officials.

The subsequent initiative originated not from the central government but from reform-oriented scholars who experimented with voucher schemes in the cities of Taipei and Kaohsiung. Even though the April 10 Alliance of

<sup>54</sup> Cited from National Union of Preschool Education, “Wei yuer chiaoyu ertsou” [October 18 March for Preschool Education] (unpublished paper, 2000), 6.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Chao-hsien Lin, former vice-minister of education, March 17, 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Education, “Fachan yu kaichin yuer chiaoyu chungcheng chihua” [Mid-range plan of preschool education development and improvement] (unpublished paper, Ministry of Education, Taipei, 1999), 9.

Education Reform advocated wide-ranging reforms, preschool education was never on their agenda. The silence was notable, since one of the Alliance's slogans called for the further establishment of public universities and senior high schools. Why not mention public kindergartens as well? Huang Wu-shiung of National Taiwan University, the former chairperson of the Alliance, explained that they were unable to reach a consensus at that time.<sup>57</sup>

Despite their initial indecisiveness, the scholars of the Alliance adopted a clear policy on preschool education in 1996. Private kindergartens were praised for their contributions in diversity and vitality, but the Alliance opposed a plan to establish more public kindergartens within the premises of primary schools, fearing that state control could lead to rigidity and would overcrowd the school campuses. As an alternative, a voucher plan for preschool education was seen as the best option to ensure parental freedom of choice and beneficial competition.<sup>58</sup> This neoliberal turn by the Alliance made possible the cooperation between scholars and business. At the same time, the Deliberative Committee on Education Reform proposed that the government should intervene in undersupplied and remote areas and for aboriginal and handicapped children. Regarding the issue of vouchers, they suggested further "planning and investigation."<sup>59</sup>

At this time the Union published a "white book," with advocacy essays by scholars and business leaders. Taiwan's first vouchers were issued soon after this, in 1998, by the Taipei Municipal Government under Chen Shui-bian (1995–98). During the mayoral campaign of 1994, Chen had developed relations with women's and education reform groups.<sup>60</sup> Being the first DPP mayor in the nation's capital, Chen was sensitive to popular demands for low-priced day care and preschool education services.<sup>61</sup> Once Chen assumed office, his director of the Education Bureau vowed to universalize public kindergartens and considered giving an "allowance" for preschool education.<sup>62</sup> Soon afterward, the municipal government decided to subsidize private kindergartens

<sup>57</sup> Wu-hsiung Huang, "Yuer chiaoyu tzeyuhua yu chiaoyuchuan" [Liberalization of preschool education and education voucher], in National Union of Preschool Education, "Wei yuer chiaoyu ertsou" [March for Preschool Education] (unpublished pamphlet, 1988), 12.

<sup>58</sup> April 10 Alliance of Education Reform, *Minchien chiaoyu kaitso lantu* [A nongovernmental blueprint for education reform] (Taipei: Shihpao, 1996), 268–83; Huang, "Yuer chiaoyu," 15.

<sup>59</sup> Deliberative Committee on Education Reform, *Tisanchi*, 29.

<sup>60</sup> Before the DPP came into power in 2000, many of its elite members had developed good connections with social movement organizations. Some movements became nearly dependent on the DPP for resources, though the education reform movement, at least for the April 10 Alliance of Education Reform, was more autonomous and nominally more nonpartisan. See Ming-sho Ho, "The Politics of Anti-nuclear Protest in Taiwan: A Case of Party-Dependent Movement (1980–2000)," *Modern Asian Studies* 37 (2003): 683–708.

<sup>61</sup> Shu-ying Wang and Ying-kun Chang, "Tuoyuan wenhua yu tuoyu fuwu" [Pluralism and daycare service], in Hsiao and Lin, *Taiwan te shehui fuli yuntung*, 319–20.

<sup>62</sup> Li-hsüeh Lin, "Yin-chang Wu: I Will Create More Public Kindergartens," *Minsheng Daily*, February 17, 1995, 22.



for purchasing new equipment.<sup>63</sup> This move was itself unprecedented in that officials previously had not supported private kindergartens. Then, in 1998, the Taipei municipal government issued vouchers of NT\$10,000 to parents with 5-year-old children in private kindergartens.<sup>64</sup>

### The Bargain for Vouchers

Though vouchers were not a direct subsidy for private kindergartens, they narrowed the gap between public and private kindergartens, and the policy also eliminated competition from underground kindergartens. Implicit in the state's promise to increase funding for private education was the understanding that there would be less money for building public kindergartens. As we have seen, private kindergarten owners stumbled upon the idea of vouchers relatively late but finally embraced it for instrumental reasons. As one Union leader stated, "It is useless for us to ask the government for tax cuts and other benefits. So, we use children and parents for vouchers."<sup>65</sup> To bargain with officials, private kindergarten business owners needed substantial political capital. In order to influence the process, the Union undertook three types of action: strategic framing, mobilizing, and political exchange.

### Strategic Framing

Few politicians would have sympathized had private kindergarten business owners staged a political campaign solely to reverse their falling profitability. In order to present their claims in a socially acceptable way, the Union needed a way to frame the issue strategically. Strategic framing is the conscious effort to fashion a shared understanding and image that can legitimate their collective action.<sup>66</sup> Stated a different way, strategic framing is a symbolic struggle in which justice, fairness, and other positive values are instrumentally appropriated to reach a goal. In their campaign for vouchers, the Union sought to frame itself as the advocate of education reform. Owing to the collective efforts of the April 10 Alliance of Education Reform and the official Deliberative Committee on Education Reform, education reform had reached a national consensus by the mid-1990s. The first step of strategic framing was

<sup>63</sup> Shu-yi Chu, "Conditional Subsidies for Private Kindergartens," *United Evening Post*, February 23, 1995, 12.

<sup>64</sup> Mei-kuei Lu and Mei-huey Hsieh, "Taipeishih yuer chiaoyuchuan chengtse shihshih fenhsi" [A study of the evaluation of implementing of preschool education voucher policy in Taipei city], *Journal of Taipei Municipal Teachers' College* 32 (2001): 430.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Ren-yi Huang, a Union leader, March 10, 2003.

<sup>66</sup> David Snow, E. Burke Rochford Jr., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benforde, "Frame Alignment Process, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 464–81; Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, "Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory," *Sociological Forum* 14 (1999): 45–51. See also Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, "Introduction," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6.

to portray the Union as belonging to the same cause. To achieve this point, the Union argued that most money had been spent on colleges and high schools and that official attention was seldom on kindergarten.<sup>67</sup> Thus “education reform should embrace preschool education.”<sup>68</sup>

The Union argued that public schools were costly and inefficient.<sup>69</sup> It also sought to revive the old image of public kindergartens, which were exclusively enjoyed by soldiers, public servants, and schoolteachers. Implicitly, the Union suggested that its customers were working people, much more underprivileged than soldiers, public servants, and schoolteachers, and, therefore, private kindergartens and their working parents should also deserve their share.<sup>70</sup> In sum, the private kindergarten business owners presented a populist frame in which they became the champion of the working families.

Since the April 10 Alliance framed education reform as a “structural transformation toward social justice,” the Union found it convenient to appropriate this framing for their own use. The Union effectively argued that public kindergartens were irresponsible spenders of public resources. Those who sent their children to private kindergartens were doubly victimized because taxpayers’ money was spent on the privileged few. The voucher, from this perspective, redressed class inequality and promoted social justice.

The Union sought to keep from view the fact that private kindergartens are a profitable industry and, instead, emphasized their altruism. For example, one Union leader argued, “With popular demand for preschool education and nursery in the past forty years, it is private kindergartens that took up the responsibility for children on the behalf of government.”<sup>71</sup> Another leader commented that, “because private kindergartens in Taiwan actively take *charge* of preschool education and nursery, all parents can go to work with assurance. It is an undeniable that private kindergartens contributed a lot to industrial advancement, economic progress and social prosperity.”<sup>72</sup>

Here, the “responsibility” and the “charge” were not exaggerated euphemisms. Rather, they were integral components of the overall strategic framing purpose. Private kindergartens presented themselves not as profit-making businesses, but as bona fide reform advocates, similar to the April 10 Alliance. In October of 1998, the Union staged a “March for Preschool Education” to publicize the voucher and other related issues. The organizers presented their case as a sequel to the march of April 1994. Again, kinder-

<sup>67</sup> Jung-li Pan, “Chengfu yingkai futan yuer chiaoyu hsuehfei” [Government should pay for preschool education], *Taiwan Times*, May 15, 1995.

<sup>68</sup> Jung-li Pan, “Chiaoyu kaike ying chuchi hsuehchien chiaoyu” [Education reform should reach for preschool education], *Minjung Daily*, October 9, 1998, 12.

<sup>69</sup> National Union of Preschool Education, “Wei yuer chiaoyu ertsou” (1988), 8.

<sup>70</sup> National Union of Preschool Education, “Wei yuer chiaoyu ertsou” (2000), 27.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>72</sup> Jung-li Pan, “Yuer chiaoyu tzeyuan ying kungping heli fenpei” [Resources for preschool education should be distributed equally and fairly], *Taiwan Times*, September 9, 1994; my emphasis.

garten children and parents marched on the frontlines. Women, although underrepresented in the Union leadership structure, were conspicuously visible in the 1998 March.

### Mobilization

Mobilization requires the gathering of movement resources, including human resources. The success of the April 10 Alliance of Education Reform depended on the intensive participation of college professors, who possessed access to policy makers. Similarly, in order for the Union to gain credibility it was important to obtain endorsements from scholars who lent their names to the Union's strategic framing. At first, the Union found it difficult to win the backing of academics. Private kindergartens were notorious for their poor working conditions, including long hours without overtime. Preschool education professors found that their students had no intention of staying in private kindergartens. One Union leader recalled the unpleasant task of courting college professors who used to accuse them of "exploiting their labor."<sup>73</sup> Another leader pointed out that, while some scholars favored greater budgets for preschool education, they also insisted on improved working conditions for teachers. For them, subsidy for the tuition fee in no way guaranteed better quality of education.<sup>74</sup>

Ultimately, the Union won the support of two important scholars who were members of the April 10 Alliance, Huang Wu-hsiung and Chang Ching-hsi, and their papers were included in the Union's policy proposal. Huang was a mathematician who supported private kindergartens because he felt that they were more innovative and pluralistic. Chang was a neoliberal economist who had previously criticized the KMT government's monopoly. He advocated preschool vouchers because he thought that private institutions were more efficient.

To rally support for vouchers, the Union used a different strategy than that of the organizers of the April 10 march. The Union used an alternative way of transforming supporters into participants and a different "mobilizing infrastructure."<sup>75</sup> The April 10 Alliance was a coalition composed of more than 200 civic groups.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the Alliance spent a great deal of time on its internal coordination. Each member organization was assigned a quota of people to bring to the march. The Alliance nationally promoted a video documentary on education reform.<sup>77</sup> To boost participation, the Alliance

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Jung-li Pan, a Union leader, December 10, 2002.

<sup>74</sup> Interview Yu-yen Liu, a private kindergarten director, February 13, 2003.

<sup>75</sup> Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy, *Social Movement in an Organizational Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1988), 49–66.

<sup>76</sup> Hsiao-hua Hsueh, *Taiwan minchien chiaoyu kaike yuntung* [Education reform movement in Taiwan] (Taipei: Chienwei, 1995), 268.

<sup>77</sup> April 10 Alliance of Education Reform, *Minchien*, 436.

further employed the media and distributed flyers on street corners. These mobilizing strategies are typical of social movement organizations, since the Alliance and its member organizations did not possess mass membership. By contrast, the Union was a national organization with local branches. During the planning stage, each branch was assigned a specific quota of people to bring to Taipei.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, since the Union was a business organization composed of all private kindergartens, it proved easier to mobilize workers, teachers, pupils, and parents without relying on external channels. From the account of the preparatory meetings,<sup>79</sup> it never occurred to the Union to mobilize outside participation. For kindergarten teachers, taking part in the march was less a voluntary act than a work assignment. Although the organizers of the March for Preschool Education copied elements of the April 10 march, they were more businesslike and lacked the passion of the April Alliance.

### Political Exchange

Strategic framing helped to justify vouchers, and mobilization displayed movement solidarity to the public. Nevertheless, without political exchange, the Union would have been unable to persuade politicians to endorse vouchers. The Union urged citizens to vote for vouchers in the parliamentary election in 1998 and the presidential election in 2000. As one Union leader commented, “Children don’t have votes. But their mothers, fathers and grandparents make up 1.4 million votes. They certainly will use their votes to protest against the inequality suffered by their children and grandchildren.”<sup>80</sup>

The first step in the political exchange was to gather as many parents’ signatures as possible. The Union argued that parents had been careless to let “their well deserved rights slumber away.” As a champion of parental rights, the Union vowed to reward sympathetic politicians who supported their position. Since the Union had an extensive network of private kindergartens, it was not difficult for them to stage an extensive signature-gathering campaign. In the end, the Union produced a petition with 181,978 signatures.<sup>81</sup> With the weight of these signatures, the Union obtained the endorsement of 98 legislators out of the 164 parliamentary seats at that time.<sup>82</sup>

In the legislative election in December 1998, the Union published a list of candidates who were friendly to the voucher initiative. The Union distributed the list both through kindergarten networks and newspaper advertisements. For example, the private kindergarten associations in Chaiyi City and

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Mr. Pan, a Union leader, December 10, 2002.

<sup>79</sup> National Union of Preschool Education, “Wei yuer chiaoyu ertsou” (2000), 50–59.

<sup>80</sup> National Union of Preschool Education, “Wei yuer chiaoyu ertsou” (1988), 16.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 70–71.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

County announced their support for three candidates in a newspaper advertisement.<sup>83</sup> How could the Union successfully attract the candidates' attention? Through a simple political exchange, candidates were entitled to a compact disc of signatures in their district if they supported vouchers. The list of parents benefited candidates who would not otherwise have been able to target specific groups in their electoral campaigns.

The first phrase of the "vote for voucher" campaign was only partially successful. Although the Union won overwhelming support in the legislative branch, it was unable to persuade the executive branch seriously to consider the voucher plan. After the March for Preschool Education in 1998, officials of the Ministry of Education still opposed the voucher initiative because of the difficulty in financing it.<sup>84</sup> Up to that point, the Union's campaign was largely nonpartisan; the Union solicited support from politicians regardless of their party membership. Legislators from both political parties (KMT and DPP) were found on the Union's recommendation list. However, in the presidential election in March 2000, the Union adopted another tactic and targeted the ruling KMT party. The Union took a valuable opportunity when a high-ranking KMT official approached them for vote mobilization. The Union raised the issue of voucher as a condition of exchange. Even prior to a formal announcement by education officials, the Union learned of this concession from the KMT campaign office.<sup>85</sup> In December 1999, just 3 months before election day, the Ministry of Education announced that a voucher plan would be launched the first semester of 2001.<sup>86</sup> The Union, however, was dissatisfied with this long-term promise. A poor showing in opinion polls sparked the KMT to quicker action. Thus, 2 months before the election, the KMT presidential candidate, Lien Chan, announced that voucher plan would be moved up and would become effective in September 2000 if he were elected.<sup>87</sup>

After Lien Chan made this promise, the Union reciprocated. During the election, the Union canvassed votes for the KMT, while the KMT campaign allocated NT\$1 million for the Union to publish pro-KMT advertisements. This money was channeled through private bank accounts to avoid public attention.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the Union organized a series of national parent-child activities in February 2000, in which KMT officials consulted, urging support for Lien Chan. These activities were called "Tsanpaopao," with double meanings of "good baby" or "baby Chan." "Tsanpaopao" events were nominally

<sup>83</sup> *China Times*, December 3, 1998, 30.

<sup>84</sup> "Ministry of Education Not Affirmative on Preschool Voucher," *Minsheng*, November 8, 1998, 20.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Chia-hsin Hsu, a Union leader, December 18, 2002.

<sup>86</sup> Hsüeh-mei Wang, "Executive Yuan Agrees on Voucher Outside Taipei and Kaohsiung" *United Daily*, December 17, 1999, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Chen-chung Ho, "Lien Chan Proposes Ten Education Reforms," *United Daily*, January 1, 2000, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Chia-hsin Hsu, a Union leader, December 18, 2002.

sponsored by the Union, but they originally were to have been funded by the Ministry of Education. After receiving criticism by the rival party, the KMT decided to foot the bill itself.<sup>89</sup> To avoid public censure, one KMT spokesperson claimed that the activities were initiated by private institutions, “which strongly supported Lien Chan’s policy proposal on preschool education.”<sup>90</sup>

Few social movements realize their goals without compromise. The Union lobbied for an annual voucher of NT\$30,000, greatly reducing the gap between public and private kindergarten tuition cost. In its negotiations with the KMT officials, the Union traded earlier implementation for a voucher of lesser value. Focusing on the issue of vouchers, the Union acted as an “issue entrepreneur” who defines the nature of the grievance and devises collective action.<sup>91</sup> Through strategic framing, vouchers were seen as the solution to parents’ grievances. The Union was able to mobilize parental support because it was the sole owner of the recruiting network of kindergartens, while the other potential mobilizing agents, the parents, lacked a mobilizing infrastructure.

#### **Conclusion: Global Isomorphism or Local Politics?**

A domestic account of Taiwan’s preschool voucher policy is not the only possible explanation for this reform. Neoinstitutionalism provides an alternative explanation of how the education system changes.<sup>92</sup> In explaining the dynamic of diffusion, neoinstitutionalists stress the contagiousness of the ideational elements of education. These elements could include ideas about reform. John W. Meyer wrote of education as “a myth in modern society” and suggested that the powers of myth “inhere, not in the fact that individuals believe them, but in the fact that they ‘know’ everyone else does.”<sup>93</sup> From this perspective, acceptance of common norms, values, and technical lore may lead to similar institutional design across organizational fields. Conform-

<sup>89</sup> Interview with a Tainan County kindergarten businessperson, a Union leader, March 26, 2003.

<sup>90</sup> Fu-chi Huang and Yen-po Chen, “Pro-Soong Legislators Blaming Ministry of Education,” *United Evening Post*, February 18, 2000, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Clay A. Schonfeld, Robert F. Meier, and Robert J. Griffin, “Constructing a Social Problem: The Press and the Environment,” *Social Problems* 27 (1979): 38–61; Graig J. Jenkins, “Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 9 (1983): 531.

<sup>92</sup> John W. Meyer, “The Effects of Education as an Institution,” *American Journal of Sociology* 83 (1977): 55–76; John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez, Richard Rubinson, and John Boli-Bennett, “The World Education Revolution, 1950–1970,” *Sociology of Education* 50 (1977): 242–58; Francisco O. Ramirez and John Boli, “The Political Construction of Mass Schooling: European Origins and Worldwide Institutionalization,” *Sociology of Education* 60 (1987): 2–17; Francisco O. Ramirez and Marc J. Ventresca, “Building the Institution of Mass Schooling: Isomorphism in the Modern World,” in *The Political Construction of Education*, ed. Bruce Fuller and Richard Rubinson (New York: Praeger, 1992), 47–59; David John Frank, Suk-ying Wong, John W. Meyer, and Francisco O. Ramirez, “What Counts as History: A Cross-National and Longitudinal Study of University Curricula,” *Comparative Education Review* 44 (2000): 29–53. David H. Kamens, John W. Meyer, and Aaron Benavot, “Worldwide Pattern in Academic Secondary Curricula,” *Comparative Education Review* 40 (1996): 116–58.

<sup>93</sup> Meyer, “The Effects of Education as an Institution,” 75.

ity with the prevalent myth of organizational form is rewarded with external legitimacy even when it is carried out in a purely ceremonial way, without real improvement in efficiency.<sup>94</sup> Once a common myth becomes established, a universal process of innovation, diffusion, and stabilization can be expected.<sup>95</sup> Neoinstitutionalists are less interested in detailed causal explanations of educational change because the effort to uncover local factors distracts us from the isomorphic effect of global myths.<sup>96</sup>

How well can neoinstitutionalism account for change in Taiwan? Daniel Lynch argues that Taiwan's democratization and nationalism should be seen as successfully learning the global culture of nation-state.<sup>97</sup> As a developing country, Taiwan's education system was constantly influenced by foreign models. In keeping with international neoliberal trends, Taiwanese economists have advocated a more market-oriented policy for education reforms, including pluralizing curriculum, removing restrictions on private schools, and deregulating college tuition.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps Taiwan's voucher reform actually conforms, in this case, to a worldwide, isomorphic process.

In accounting for Taiwanese vouchers, however, there are insights but also problems with a neoinstitutionalist perspective. Neoinstitutionalists rightly observe the international similarity in educational ideals, basic structure, content, and instruction. And yet, beneath their externally similar veneer, local cultures and meanings continue to play an important role.<sup>99</sup> Taiwan's parents continue to prefer to send their children to public kindergartens even when they are entitled to receive a voucher. With this persistent support for the public preschool sector and the limited value of voucher, it is doubtful that vouchers enable parental choice, as claimed by the official justification. Thus, while one can argue that preschool policy in Taiwan took a significant neoliberal turn with the introduction of vouchers, the actual effect did not follow the scenario propounded by the neoliberal advocates.

A further limit to a neoinstitutionalist perspective is that it does not

<sup>94</sup> John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony," *American Journal of Sociology* 83 (1977): 340–63.

<sup>95</sup> Brian Rowan, "Organized Structure and Institutional Environment: The Case of Public Schools," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 27 (1982): 259–79.

<sup>96</sup> The tendency to dismiss contextual variables is particularly clear in John Boli's comments on mass schooling in nineteenth-century Sweden: "The Swedish schooling experience was not a product of local historical and cultural processes alone. Rather, schooling happened in Sweden because it happened in Western civilization. The same can be said of any other Euro-American country in this period: Schooling happened there because it happened elsewhere" (John Boli, "Institutions, Citizenship, and Schooling in Sweden," in *The Political Construction of Education*, ed. Bruce Fuller and Richard Rubinson [New York: Praeger, 1992], 73).

<sup>97</sup> Daniel Lynch, "Taiwan's Democratization and the Rise of Taiwanese Nationalism as Socialization of Global Culture," *Pacific Affairs* 75 (2002): 557–74.

<sup>98</sup> Ching-yi Chu and Hua Tai, *Chiaoyü sungpang* [Deregulation of education] (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1996).

<sup>99</sup> Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt, "Introduction: A World Culture of Schooling," in *Local Meanings, Global Schooling: Anthropology and World Culture Theory*, ed. Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 1–26.

explain the unevenness of neoliberalism in Taiwan's education reform. Why was the voucher policy adopted for preschool education before other educational levels? The introduction of vouchers at the preschool level has a political explanation. Beginning in the mid-1990s, college students protested against possible increases in tuition. Students at private colleges in Taiwan felt that it was unfair for them to pay higher tuition while receiving a lower-quality education. However, despite many numerous protests, college students lacked the political power and visibility to win attention from government officials. They had fewer resources than did private kindergarten owners. A purely isomorphic account might overlook the tortuous trajectory of voucher politics in Taiwan, where vouchers were first promoted at the kindergarten level.

This article offers a causal explanation for the preschool education voucher policy in Taiwan. Rather than view this policy as the necessary outcome of globalization or liberalization, I prefer to locate the agency for change in the Union of private kindergarten owners. Endangered by the state's renewed interests in preschool education, owners of private kindergartens were pressured to devise a new kind of collective action. For the Union, vouchers were a strategy for survival in the face of price-cutting competition and encroachment by underground kindergartens. In the end, Taiwan's national voucher policy can be explained only by the invigorating sponsorship of the Union, which struck a successful bargain with the political elites.

In many ways, the Union's collective action is atypical of social movements generally. While the April 10 Alliance of Education Reform was resource poor and organized at the grassroots level, the Union was exactly the opposite. Most analysts have seen social movements as the "weapon of the powerless," of those who have been marginalized in the distribution of political power.<sup>100</sup> The unavailability of "proper channels" is among the defining features of a social movement.<sup>101</sup> But Taiwan's Union-led movement for vouchers only dimly resembles this picture. Though the private kindergartens are not so influential and established as one of the "polity members,"<sup>102</sup> the Union was composed of respectable businesspersons who possessed many resources. The truly powerless were the parents and teachers in private kindergartens. Being unorganized by themselves, they could not help but be coerced or cajoled into joining the voucher bandwagon.

To some extent, the voucher movement resembled a countermovement,

<sup>100</sup> James Q. Wilson, "The Strategy of Protest: Problems of Negro Civic Action," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 5 (1961): 291–303; Michael Lipsky, "Protest as Political Resource," *American Political Science Review* 62 (1969): 1144–58; William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey, 1975).

<sup>101</sup> Gary T. Marx and Douglas McAdam, *Collective Behavior and Social Movements: Process and Structure* (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994), 110.

<sup>102</sup> Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 52.



one that was organized to offset a progressive reform.<sup>103</sup> As democratization increased elites' attention to popular demands, public kindergartens expanded rapidly. The crisis of private kindergartens prompted the Union to advocate for vouchers to acquire a "fair" competitive edge. Thus, the voucher movement was in one sense a means to halt expansion of the public sector. At the same time, the need to implement vouchers linked the Union to the proreform camp, with the borrowed rhetoric of universalism, equality, and justice.

The peculiarity of Taiwan's voucher movement inheres in the circumstances that prompted the kindergarten business to adopt an innovative strategy. The problem of circumstances brings us back to the relation between social change and educational institutions. Too often, analysts assume a direct causal link between these two factors. But the voucher policy in Taiwan cannot be explained simply as the combined effects of democratization and globalization. Rather than assuming an overdetermined process, this article reveals the need for a detailed causal analysis of the circumstances leading to preschool vouchers.

<sup>103</sup> Tahi L. Mottl, "The Analysis of Countermovements," *Social Problems* 27 (1980): 620–35; Bert Useem and Mayer N. Zald, "From Pressure Group to Social Movement: Organizational Dilemma of the Effort to Promote Nuclear Power," *Social Problems* 30 (1982): 144–56; David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg, "Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity," *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (1996): 1628–60.