

**ASIAN HIGHER
EDUCATION**

**An International Handbook
and Reference Guide**

Edited by
GERARD A. POSTIGLIONE
and
GRACE C. L. MAK

Asian Higher Education

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Foreword by Philip G. Altbach

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FOREWORD

Philip G. Altbach

Asia, home to a majority of the world's population as well as most of the fastest-growing academic systems, is centrally important in higher education.

Asian Higher Education provides up-to-date information and useful analyses of Asia's academic systems. It is, I think, difficult to generalize about the universities in as vast a region as covered in this book. Yet there seem to be a few common elements. The following trends can be seen in the region.

Expansion. Asia has perhaps the world's highest rate of growth in higher education. Academic systems continue, in much of the region, to expand. The proportion of the world's students in the Asian region continues to grow. In a few countries, such as Japan, expansion has ceased, and it has slowed in a number of other countries, such as India. But, in general, growth is more of the pattern in Asia than in other parts of the world.

Asian higher education is becoming more research-oriented. Countries that just a decade ago had to send students abroad for advanced study are now able to offer doctoral study at home. Many Asian nations, especially those with rapidly expanding economies, have started to invest heavily in research and development, and universities have been a central part of this expansion of research. There is a growing amount of scientific publication in Asia, and the past two decades have seen the establishment of journals and publishers in many scientific fields. Asia, with the exception of Japan, remains a peripheral part of the world's knowledge production system, but it is growing in importance. This importance is magnified by trends in Europe and North America to "disinvest" in higher education. The world balance of research production is slowly shifting toward Asia, but in most countries research continues to be well below world standards in terms of both quality and quantity.

Asia produces a significant portion of the world's scientists and engineers.

With some exceptions, its academic systems are more focused on science and engineering than are those of most Western countries. The better-developed Asian countries, such as China, India, and Japan, as well as the “tigers” (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan) produce a large number of graduates in these fields.

Private higher education. More than any other region in the world, Asia has relied on private initiative to build and maintain higher education and to provide access to expanding populations. A large majority of students in such countries as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines attend private institutions. Private higher education is growing in Indonesia, Malaysia, and elsewhere. In China and Vietnam, private institutions are being established, and state-run universities are being privatized. Reliance on private initiative has meant that higher education has received less government funding. It has also meant that research has not been greatly emphasized. In some Asian countries, private higher education institutions operate as profit-making companies.

Export of students and highly educated personnel. Asia is the largest exporter of students. The majority of the world’s foreign students are from Asian countries, and they generally study in North America or Europe. There is also a significant amount of intra-Asian flow of students, with significant numbers studying in Japan, the Philippines, and India. Related to the flow of students is the fact that there is a significant flow of highly educated personnel from many Asian countries. India and China are large exporters of talent. Significant numbers also come from the Philippines, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. There is some flow to other Asian countries, with Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia as destinations, but the majority go to North America, Europe, and Australia, with smaller numbers going to the Middle East.

The world academic system. Asian universities are increasingly part of the world academic system, participating in flows of faculty and students, producing and consuming research, and in general operating in the mainstream of world knowledge. Asian countries remain somewhat peripheral in this system, depending on knowledge, research, and intellectual trends from outside the region. English is increasingly used as the regional medium of communication, and is of growing importance in higher education. Some countries, such as Singapore, use English exclusively in teaching and research. Others, including India, the other South Asian countries, and Malaysia, have a tradition of using English in higher education. Even Japan receives more knowledge from abroad than it exports. The situation is changing, but the trend nonetheless remains.

All academic systems in Asia are based on Western models. Even in countries such as China, India, Vietnam, and Japan, which have long intellectual traditions and distinguished traditional academic histories, contemporary higher education has utilized Western models. Formerly colonized areas, such as South Asia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and others, have inherited the institutional pattern of the former colonial power, although significant changes have been made since independence. Even Japan and Thailand, which never experienced colonial rule,

chose Western models. China, semicolonized, had a variety of Western institutional models prior to 1949. The communist government turned to the Russian model, which remains largely in place today. The American academic model has, especially in the past two decades, become highly influential.

There are, of course, many important variations among Asian academic systems. This is not surprising in a region that has many variations in economic and human resources, historical development, and policy frameworks. Furthermore, despite the international nature of science and scholarship, universities remain national institutions, rooted in national traditions and realities, and shaped by local political, cultural, and economic circumstances. The tremendous variations in the region are often forgotten. In several countries, political circumstances have hindered the development of higher education, or have even damaged or destroyed what existed. Cambodia, Afghanistan, and Myanmar are tragic examples. Other academic systems remain underdeveloped and cannot compete internationally. Bangladesh and Pakistan illustrate this trend. The struggle between national circumstances and the growing internationalism of science and scholarship will help shape the Asian university of the twenty-first century. *Asian Higher Education* permits us to look carefully at circumstances and trends in key Asian countries.

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PREFACE

Asian higher education is expanding rapidly at a time when many Asian societies are experiencing great economic as well as sociopolitical transition. The purpose of this reference book is to provide a sense of the situation and changes taking place in twenty Asian societies. The attempt is modest in that the volume seeks to provide an introduction to the problem of how Asian higher education systems react to internal societal demands as well as the demand of participation in the global economy. Nevertheless, the volume is representative of some of the major trends in Asian higher education, especially in East and South Asia. In the case of almost all chapters, the writer is a native of that country or society, and therefore, the perspective is more indigenous than one would find in most other volumes of this type. Moreover, a balanced gender perspective is promoted in that almost half the chapters have a woman contributor. We provided this reference for students and scholars of Asian higher education in the hope that it will be useful in gaining a better understanding of the complexities facing higher education in Asia.

Producing a handbook of Asian higher education is an enormous endeavor. Many academic book editors have become dependent on electronic mail to communicate with their volume contributors. While some of our contributors had access to the Internet, most did not. In fact, given the vast gap in development among Asian societies, it is not surprising that some of our contributors did not have access to a fax machine and so communication by mail was essential. Nevertheless, we have succeeded in bringing together many indigenous Asian scholars of higher education in one volume. Therefore, we thank our contributors for their hard work and patience. The special qualities of each contributor are evident in each chapter.

We would like to acknowledge Philip Altbach, whose experience in editing

volumes on higher education is unsurpassed. We thank him for his insights in this project, as well as for a few excellent suggestions regarding contributors. Susan Semel's encouragement and consultation were extremely valuable.

The Comparative and International Education Society provided a forum for a panel that contributed to this volume, and through the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong we were able to make contact with many Asian contributors to the volume. Finally, we thank Patrick Lam for his skillful assistance in the final stages of preparing the manuscript for production.

INTRODUCTION

Gerard A. Postiglione

GROWTH, DIVERSITY, AND CHANGE

The pace of change in Asian higher education is as much a function of rapid economic development as it is of sociopolitical transition. Asian economic growth, the fastest in the world, was 8.6 percent in 1994 (International Monetary Fund, 1995). Much of the population of Asia is experiencing a transition in emphasis from marxism to markets. The preference of many Asian nations for stability has not hindered major changes in higher education. Aside from expansion of enrollments, the relationship between universities and the state is changing, with increased calls for institutional autonomy, financial diversification, and quality control in higher education. Meanwhile, more traditional concerns—demands of different social groups for access, and of the state for positioning in the world economy—have also contributed to the transformation.

Asian higher education will continue to be distinguished by its size and diversity. Four Asian countries—Japan, South Korea, China (including Taiwan and Hong Kong), and India—represent close to 45 percent of the world's population and over 77 percent of the population of the whole of Asia. Their universities produced more than twice as many natural science and engineering bachelor's degrees as the United States in 1990 (Johnson, 1993). Asia has over thirty other countries, most with expanding higher education systems.

Marked diversity makes it virtually impossible to offer a concise overview of Asian higher education. Long entrenched but differing cultural traditions interweave with colonial heritage, multiethnic and religious states, socialist regimes and divided states, as well as some genuinely democratic systems. The giants of China and India have struggled to maintain their unique intellectual traditions in the face of Western intervention. Higher education in Hong Kong, Malaysia,

and Singapore has preserved aspects of its British colonial heritage, as the Philippine universities have preserved American styles. Indonesian universities have completely shed Dutch colonial influence, as Korean universities have shed the Japanese colonial influence. Thailand and Japan have never been colonized; the latter has borrowed many innovations in higher education from Germany and the United States (Altbach and Selvaratnam, 1989).

CHALLENGES WITHIN CONTEXT

Despite much diversity, growth, and change, systems of higher education in Asia face strikingly similar challenges. All have budgets to balance, standards to maintain, faculties to satisfy, and demands from the public to meet. However, the contexts within which such challenges are faced differ greatly, and inevitably influence the way in which these common problems are addressed.

There is little argument in Asia over the role that higher education must play in economic development. However, that priority is compromised to a greater or lesser extent by social, political, and cultural contexts. Malaysia seeks to balance economic development with ethnic equity in higher education. Iran is hesitant to diminish the priority given by its universities to the religious goals of the revolution. China's universities have set a high priority on promoting economic development, but are not permitted to challenge the authority of the Communist Party. The new states of Central Asia born out of the collapse of the Soviet Union view higher education as a way of strengthening national identities. Leaders of Kabul University are content to merely resume classes, and have yet to work toward aiding a war-torn Afghan economy. Transition societies such as Laos and Cambodia aspire to having a few major universities as indicators to international investors of their potential for technological progress. In the Philippines, university leaders get well-deserved credit for having achieved great progress in giving women access to higher education, yet must continue to be sensitive to issues of access by ethnic groups and social classes. Japanese universities have long been viewed as a model for supporting economic development, but the impending crisis caused by a shrinking student age group has pushed it to consider broadening access to women and older students.

As literacy rates continue to increase and basic education becomes universal, expanding populations will inflate university enrollments, inevitably making Asia the largest higher education system in the world. Participation rates of the relevant age cohort in higher education are still generally low, but will not remain so for long. With the exception of Japan, the four tigers (Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore), and the Philippines, most participation rates are under 10 percent. This will change, however, as economies continue to prosper in other Asian countries. China, with its massive population, has already decided to increase the percentage of the relevant age group in higher education from 3 percent to 8 percent between 1994 and 2000.

Nevertheless, even as these rates increase, Asia will continue to depend on North America and Europe for advanced degrees for some time to come; this in turn will further global academic integration and internationalization of the academic profession. In some specializations Asia might even take the lead, as professors of Asian origin in Western universities are attracted back to Asia by high salaries (Nash, 1994; Webster, 1994).

FINANCING THE EXPANSION

This rapid and massive expansion in participation rates will not be accompanied by proportionally increased budgets. Most Asian governments will only support a small group of national universities, leaving the rest to the private sector. Even national universities are increasingly expected to raise more of their own funds. Asian governments are notorious for their conservative levels of funding for educational institutions.

The achievement of Asian education becomes all the more remarkable when levels of government spending on education are compared across regions. Expressed as a percentage of GNP, governments in Asia spend less on education than governments in all other regions. This apparent paradox—high coverage despite relatively little financial effort—gives a first indication that as a determinant of education development, public policies in the sector are at least as important as the size of public spending. (Tan and Mingat, 1992:11)

In a 1990 sample of low- and middle-income countries in six world regions (plus the OECD countries), the World Bank noted that the two Asian regions, South Asia and East Asia and the Pacific, had the lowest percentages of public recurrent expenditures on higher education (14.8 percent and 13.9 percent, respectively) compared to 18.4 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 19.7 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 20.6 percent in the OECD countries. Between 1980 and 1990, public recurrent expenditures on higher education in the sampled low- and middle-income countries of South Asia actually dropped by over 10 percent. East Asia had only a nominal increase, and its public spending per student in higher education from 1980 to 1990 as a multiple of primary education declined from 30.8 percent to 14.1 percent.

The above figures highlight the importance of viewing the challenges facing higher education in Asia according to levels of national income. For example, the governments of Singapore and Hong Kong spent 31 percent and 25 percent, respectively, of their education budgets on higher education in 1985, while Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia spent only 15 percent, 12 percent, and 9 percent, respectively. This is so despite the fact that the proportion of the relevant age group in university places in 1985 in Hong Kong and Singapore was below 10 percent and private universities were prohibited from conferring degrees.

Higher education in South Korea received only 10 percent of the government education budget at that time even though it was heading toward mass higher education. The more higher education costs are financed by student fees, the greater the overall coverage of the education system (World Bank, 1995:71). East Asian countries have taken note. Taiwan and Korea have relied heavily on private higher education for their expansions.

Many Asian governments are placing more responsibility on leaders of institutions of higher education by providing policy frameworks that permit more autonomy from the state. In exchange, university leaders in Asia as in other parts of the world must begin to generate more of their own funds, justifying themselves on the basis of the quality of their programs and the quantity of the human resources they produce to support national development. However, as responsibilities shift from government to the institution, the autonomy of institutional leadership becomes more complex. Culpability for poor performance rests more with institutional leaders than before. Nevertheless, while some Asian systems are moving in this direction, others still cling to old ways despite inefficiencies.

SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES: A MARKET OF DEMANDS

Institutions of higher education in Asia are responding to a variety of demands. There are demands of individuals for high-level scientific and professional skills; demands of social groups for status and prestige, including elites, social classes, ethnic groups, and women; and demands of the state for social order as well as legitimacy in the global order. The three types of demands *change often and overlap within specific contexts and operate much like a market that shapes the form and content of higher education in Asian societies.*

In the functionalist view, enrollment increase is cited as evidence of development and is correlated with economic productivity and per capita GNP. In short, higher education expands to meet the increasing need for science and technology, which contributes to economic development. This view has been influential in Japan and the four tigers, where it appeared to work. However, *using research that includes Asian data, Ramirez and Lee (1995:33) have cast doubt on the functionalist view: "There is apparently a considerable degree of loose coupling between both what takes place within the science sector of tertiary education and scientific and infrastructural formation and between the latter and economic development."*

The conflict perspective sees access to higher education as part of a mechanism of domination and social class reproduction. While this perspective has much relevance, its focus on economic struggle causes it to pay less attention to cultural aspects. For example, despite high underemployment rates among university graduates in the Philippines, the demand of the population for university credentials has not decreased, as higher education is still a key resource for status group competition.

Without a full consideration of the role of the state, these perspectives provide an incomplete picture. Universities play an indirect role in maintaining social order through support of state ideology, preparation of civil servants, and recognition of the legitimacy of the state and the credentials it confers (Carnoy and Levin, 1985; Collins, 1979). The state in China and Singapore is still very important in this respect, and while Hong Kong is considered a *laissez-faire* system, it joins Singapore and China in giving the state a virtual monopoly over higher education.

The future challenges facing higher education in Asia are many and not easily generalized. On the whole, the main challenges are tied to the expansion of student enrollments, including financial viability, support for economic development, and the social integration of an increasingly diverse population (women, minorities, rural and adult students, and the expanding middle class). Moreover, there are increasing demands placed on institutional leaders by academic staff, who have a crucial role to play in a context of rapid change (Altbach, 1996). Cultural traditions will continue to play an important role within higher education as part of status group competition, but they will also be essential tools of academic staff in helping their institutions cope with rapid change. In fact, it could be argued that change is occurring faster in Asia than anywhere else, and that as a result, a crisis in Asian higher education should not be unexpected. Wang Gungwu (1992), a former vice chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, places a heavy emphasis on the role of cultural tradition as the solution to such a crisis: "Where [Asian universities] have failed most notably has been their inability to provide this area of their work with the vitality to cope with the conditions of rapid change." The next section further examines forces that are contributing to the transformation of Asian higher education and the challenges they provide for institutions of higher education.

EAST ASIA

The East Asian region is the most dynamic area both economically and sociopolitically, and this is reflected in its rates of enrollment in higher education. If we put aside reformist Mongolia and isolationist North Korea, we find that Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (with close post-World War II ties to the United States) all have established systems of mass higher education. Singapore and Hong Kong, which have colonial ties to the United Kingdom, moved more slowly but rapidly expanded enrollments in the early 1990s. In Singapore, Hong Kong, and China, only government-sponsored institutions can award university degrees. Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea support a number of high-prestige national institutions, but most students attend private institutions. The challenges facing each also differ. Japan's mass higher education system is experiencing demographic challenges, while Taiwan and South Korea are struggling to financially support their greatly expanded systems and at the same time incorporate the sociopolitical changes into their institutions of higher education to meet the