

# Higher education research in the Asia-Pacific

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It is a time of tremendous growth in higher education in East and Southeast Asia. In the two decades leading up to 2013 the worldwide Gross Tertiary Education Ratio (GTER) moved from 15 to 33 per cent. Nevertheless, the growth of Asia-Pacific regional engagement in higher education was even more impressive. By 2013 the rate of participation in colleges and universities in all East Asian nations except China was at 60 per cent plus (UNESCO, 2016). China is almost certain to exceed the official target of 40 per cent by 2020.

The output of research science is growing with equal rapidity, in China, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia. South Korea is now the world's largest investor in R&D as a proportion of GDP. On present trends, China will pass the United States in total expenditure on R&D and output of published science by 2025. The United States remains by far the largest producer of high citation science, but China is beginning to close the gap in the Physical Sciences, especially Chemistry, Engineering and Computing (NSF, 2014). Japan developed mass higher education and scientific output well ahead of the rest of East Asia. Though its science system is not growing like the rest of the region at present, it is especially strong in domains such as Physics and Mathematics, and a range of technologies. With science output expanding, the number of World-Class Universities in East and Southeast Asia, as measured by position in global ranking systems, is also on the rise.

Table 1 lists nations from across the world in which there was especially rapid growth between 1995 and 2011 in both educational participation and research output. Of the eight nations, six are from Asia and four from the Asia-Pacific countries.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

East and Southeast Asian higher education is flourishing in both the top and middle tiers. As always happens in higher education during periods of rapid growth, there are many challenges. Infrastructure and trained faculty must be found for the burgeoning student populations. A growing number of stakeholders in business, industry and the professions have a close interest in the output of higher education institutions and ways must be found to accommodate them through governance and curriculum development. From time to time graduate unemployment is an issue. Quality assurance carries much of the responsibility for monitoring and trouble-shooting and must be continually retooled. International activities expand continuously. International ranking and benchmarking provide continuous pressures. Managers become more professional and more strategic. Governance models designed for universities of 4000 students need to be rethought when numbers reach 20,000-30,000 and more, while sustaining the autonomous academic cultures on which everything depends.

Like their counterparts in Europe and North America, policy makers and institutional managers in East and Southeast Asia need better data and analysis to inform the development of higher education in the region. University communities, governments and the public also need something more. They need high quality research-informed perspectives and judgments about the sector. As always in higher education (and more generally in human affairs), amid the vast expansion of publish-or-perish output it is the best work—the most original, carefully reasoned and well communicated work—that makes the lasting contributions. The conduct of rigorous longer-term social science research, and scholarship informed by philosophical reasoning, are more important to the healthy development of

higher education than another round of student satisfaction surveys; though the regular student surveys have their place too, as part of a culture of continuous improvement.

Higher education across the Asia-Pacific needs a networked scholarly community of researchers on higher education, capable of both immediately useful applied research when needed, and sustained, reflective and critical work that lifts the conversation on higher education and encourages sharper innovation. The development of higher education studies in the region long lagged behind the explosive growth of educational participation and research science, but recently the higher education scholars have been catching up.

The papers for this Special Issue of *International Journal of Educational Development* evolved from presentations at the third conference of the Higher Education Research Association (HERA) in Taipei, Taiwan, in 21-22 May 2015. The United States has ASHE (Association for Studies in Higher Education), and the United Kingdom has SRHE (Society for Research into Higher Education). Both are fairly large scholarly conferences given that they service a specialist research field such as higher education studies, reflecting the size of the networks in the English-speaking countries and especially the scale of American higher education. Europe has the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER), which is a smaller scholarly conference, with longer time spent on each paper than at ASHE. Of these three regular meetings outside Asia, HERA is probably closest in form to CHER. As at CHER, the papers at HERA reflect a broad range of research interests within the higher education field, and in their methods range from big policy picture making and reflection to closely structured statistically-based analysis and micro interview work.

The 2015 HERA conference in Taipei, and also the 2016 HERA conference in Hong Kong, brought together significant groups of participants from China, Hong Kong SAR, Taiwan, Japan—which has the largest and longest established community of researchers on higher education—and South Korea, as well as scholars from other countries and world regions. Most leading scholars of higher education based in East and Southeast Asia are active in HERA. Researcher-scholars who participate in HERA know that it is a young organisation with much developing to do before its deliberations achieve the quality and range of the longer established conferences in other regions. All the same, a promising start has been made. Ultimately HERA's development will be carried forward by the advances of higher education in the region, the need of all countries for closer cooperation, and the value that participants derive from exchange with each other. Knowledge is always a collaborative process and each of us achieves what we achieve only because of the work of many others.

In his opening paper, developed from a keynote address to HERA 2015, Simon Marginson reflects on the longstanding policy question of the relationship between higher education, social mobility and social equality/inequality. He reviews the extraordinary increase in income inequality in the United States since 1980, concluding that (notwithstanding the assumptions of human capital theory) higher education was not the driver of the trend to inequality. However, the highly stratified and tuition differentiated American higher education sector, where the top institutions have great strengths but the educational quality and labour market power of lower tier institutions appears to be in decline, is compatible with a highly unequal income structure and contributes to the reproduction of social inequality. While expectations that higher education by itself can foster a more equal society have been overstated, under certain circumstances egalitarian reforms in higher education can make a difference. These reforms are more effective when coupled with a progressive taxation system and moderate wage differentials in the workplace, as in the Nordic countries. In fostering a more equal higher education system in which both World-Class Universities (WCUs) and mass higher education institutions are of good quality, it is important to maintain relatively modest differences in status and resources between top tier WCUs and other institutions. However, East Asian countries have two

advantages enabling them to avoid the worst excesses of American inequality—the profound commitment to educational formation in the family, extending to poor as well as middle class families, and the close attention to education policy by East Asian governments.

In their survey-based paper on faculty attitudes to institutional governance in Taiwan, Sheng-Ju Chan and Chia-Yu Yang identify a standardized pattern of governance and reach conclusions that may surprise some—bureaucratic and collegial modes of governance, not corporate forms, are dominant; while bureaucratic and corporate governance is associated with the greatest organisational effectiveness at the institutional level. Nevertheless, as they normally do elsewhere, faculty in Taiwan express a strong commitment to collegial forms.

Dian-Fu and Ni-Jung Lin use innovative analytical and data presentation methods to discuss internationalisation in higher education in Taiwan, presenting the outcomes of a survey of 612 staff and students. They find that there are gaps between the expectations attached to internationalisation and the resources to practice it, expected and actual results, and student and faculty support for internationalisation.

In their survey on strategic planning in universities in China, Juan Hu, Hao Liu, Yingxia Chen and Jiali Qin summarize the findings in relation to awareness of strategic planning, the types of strategic plans used, the coverage of plan text, the within-university groups with the main influence in planning and the approach taken to evaluation of planning. Higher tier higher education institutions (HEIs) tend to be more ambitious in their plans and their plans are more driven by internal constituencies, whereas vocational and private HEIs are to a greater degree influenced by students, alumni, and external specialists. The authors also reflect on the highly stratified higher education system in China.

Huang Futao presents the data on university governance in four-year universities in China and Japan that were generated in a major cross-national academic survey conducted using a common questionnaire in 2011-2012. Both countries have been influenced by entrepreneurialism and the new public management but they do not always replicate the American model. Neither shared governance, corporate/entrepreneurial approaches, nor flexible/learning architectures have dominated the two countries. The two national systems also vary with each other. China is more characterized by a top-down style while Japan is more concerned with a bottom-up one. The evolution of governance of higher education in the two countries cannot be satisfactorily explained in terms of massification, or other generic notions in the research literature. Rather, the specificities of each country, and the differences between them, must be explained in terms of the academic origins, traditions, cultural values, and especially the current political and social systems of China and Japan.

Ka Ho Mok and Jin Jiang critically reflect on massification and marketization of higher education in the East Asian region, and the development of graduate labour markets, noting that an increasing enrolment in higher education does not always promote upward social mobility. Often it can intensify inequality in education. The authors supply striking graphs and tables to illustrate problems becoming apparent in many countries of a mismatch between university education and the labour market, as and stagnant social mobility. Again this demonstrates that higher education cannot be expected to be the great equaliser in societies in which the structures of the labour market, rewards to labour, and ever increasing capital flows are fostering growing social stratification.

In a review that captures key features in the recent history of government and policy in higher education in South Korea, Jung Cheol Shin, one of the chief founders of HERA, explains the evolution of the quality assurance system. The system underwent three major changes in 1982, 1994, and 2008. The successive modifications in quality assurance responded to shortfalls in the prior quality assurance system rather than international pressures. Although growing similarities at global level, in quality assurance, have become evident, in Korea the local prism filters the external pressures.

Wen Wen, Die Hu, Jie Hao discuss international student mobility into China, where the nation is positioning itself for a larger global role as a provider of education for students from East and Southeast Asian countries, Africa and around the world. They draw on their own system-level analysis, a nation-wide census of international students, and the Survey of International Students' Experience and Satisfaction, to reflect on the international student experience in China. Challenges for international students include limited English-language resources, inadequate student-faculty interaction on campus, and difficulties in socio-cultural adjustment.

Reiko Yamada provides an overview of changes in Japanese higher education policy since the 1990s, highlighting reductions in government funding and the increase in accountability requirements; and focusing especially on the regulation of private education. At the same time that corporatisation reforms were introduced into the national universities, government control of private universities was increased, as evidenced by the framework for providing financial assistance, which includes competitive finance aimed at improving governance and promoting educational reform. The 2013 survey conducted by The Promotion and Mutual Aid Corporation for Private Schools of Japan highlights inequalities between universities and reveals that private universities' assessments of their financial situations differ depending on size, history, location, and fields of study at the university.

Keiichiro Yoshinaga makes a distinctive contribution to the global literature on mergers in higher education, focusing on departments of veterinary medicine in Japan. The old paradigm of research-related training has given way to a more practical training because of changing social needs. At the same time faculty members have built critical mass by initiating mergers across university boundaries, often against the wishes of university leaders. Professional associations, local communities and the Ministry of Education have all influenced the merger process. International standards have been used as a rationale. The outcome has been a particular kind of merger, that of joint undergraduate degree programs, in which two departments combine with each remaining in its original university. This has partially addressed issues of size and clinical training.

The range of material in this issue of *International Journal of Educational Development* is a sign not only of the diverse scholarship and research on higher education in the region, but on the fertility and range of higher education studies itself as a field of knowledge. Higher education studies is a cross-disciplinary field that draws variously on sociology, policy studies, economics, psychology, anthropology and other social science. It uses quantitative and qualitative analysis, historical synthesis that combines material from a range of sources, and is the platform for much policy advice and formation. It joins practical issues of the running of systems and institutions to larger perspectives on the philosophy and purposes of higher education, the social nature of knowledge, and the place of universities in national and global political economy, societies and cultural relations. It is heterogeneous, but that diversity, when combined with the strong focus on practical institutions and systems that has always been a chief driver of the field, is the source of its intellectual potential and its capacity to contribute to reflexive improvement in higher education.

In short, we can be confident that in future years many more good papers will come from the Higher Education Research Association's proceedings and from the work of scholar-researchers from the Asia-Pacific region. We sincerely thank our authors for their careful work on the revised papers, and the journal editor, Dr. Stephen P. Heyneman, for providing scholars in the region with the opportunity to share these papers with the global scholarly community interested in developments in East and Southeast Asia.

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**Table 1.**

Nations which exceptional growth in both enrolments in tertiary education and the number of published journal papers in science, 1995-2011.

<b>National system</b>	<b>Annual rate of growth in tertiary enrolment</b>	<b>Annual rate of growth in number of journal papers</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Iran	9.9	23.5
China	11.8	15.4
Tunisia	8.2	13.0
Thailand	4.8	12.7
Malaysia	10.5	11.5
Turkey	7.7	10.4
Singapore	6.7	9.0
Brazil	8.8	8.7

Source: UNESCO, 2016; NSF, 2014